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Abstract: *The negotiation between memory and silence is a pivotal point of discussion in any scholarly discourse concerning the history of Partition. However, as Urvashi Butalia argues, in 'traditional' sources of history, "there is an immediate clamouring of 'voices' that demand to be 'heard'. These 'voices', according to her, speak about the histories of individuals who have been condemned to occupy a 'peripheral' space and have been glossed over by the larger canon of history. Thus, to successfully negotiate the politics of memory, it is perhaps essential to focus one's vision on the lived experiences of the otherized. In a 2022 Stanford Report article on Tom Mullaney's (Professor of History, Stanford University) approach in incorporating graphic novels to teach world history, Melissa De Witte writes that these narratives are "exceptionally good" at portraying "mundane moments" that present "powerful opportunities for inquiry," holding a mirror to the truly horrifying experiences. This paper would thus attempt to examine how graphic narratives on Partition could serve as etchings that are well-suited to illuminate the conscious reader about the lived trauma of marginalised voices and their quest to resist the methodical epistemic violence that they have been subjected to by popular history.*

Keywords: Margins, Graphic Narratives, Partition, Lived Experience, Trauma

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There Were Etchings on the Wall: Exploring Margins Through Embodied Experiences of Lived Trauma in Graphic Narratives on Partition

Ritam Ghosh

Introduction

> "'Chhotus' form a very undervalued backbone of India. They work with us, take care of us and feed us. And we, due to their considered replaceable nature, have reduced their existence to the nickname of 'little one'. They are everywhere. Yet seemingly invisible. And thus nowhere." –(Introductory lines to the 2019 graphic novel *Chhotu: A Tale of Partition and Love*, by Varud Gupta and Ayushi Rastogi).

These lines from Chhotu talk of a figure who is simultaneously ubiquitous and invisible - "Chhotu," or the "little one" whose labor sustains everyday life yet whose subjectivity has been systematically denied. In the Indian context, the nickname "Chhotu" functions as a signifier of servitude and otherization, indexing a body that is expected to comply and serve, but remain unheard. The figure of Chhotu thus alludes to a broader pattern in the history of Partition, where entire communities have been ignored. This essay considers the epigraph as a conceptual pivot, reading such figures as emblems of the silenced margins whose lived experiences have been inscribed in the panels of contemporary graphic narratives on Partition.

Historically, the ramifications of partition stretched far beyond the immediate incidents in and around 1947. The blitzkrieg of violence stemming from long-drawn communal dissensions had already generated a feeling of mistrust among the two majority communities – the Hindus and the Muslims – to an extent that the formation of a new nation was not only anticipated by some, but had become prophecy. As tensions between the Congress and the Muslim League began to take the shape of a countrywide political deadlock, the drawing of the Radcliffe Line seemed inevitable, and finally manifested into reality on 17 August, 1947. Soon after – as observed by Kanti B. Pakrasi in *The Uprooted* – "a determined campaign to drive out population of minority communities was evident all over the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province" (14*).* Mayhem ensued, with millions losing their homes and hopes of a steady future; and a thirst for retribution against the other swept across the nation where communal tensions had already been elevated to widespread rioting and killing. American photojournalist, Margaret Bourke-White had chronicled the exodus through her photographs - available at *LIFE Archive* - as visual testament of a time that was known to all as a behemoth without a corporeal form. Her photographs which were, for the most part, titled by journalist, Lee Eitington, provide a visual frame for understanding horrors that the mapmakers' markers entailed on the population of the subcontinent and generations to come. A few of her most distinguished photographs taken while enroute to Lahore, are titled "Transport", that shows two men carrying an elderly woman in a piece of cloth tied to a stick; a "Family" of six, stranded on the side of the road, showing a dying man, a woman and four children; "Faces" and the photographs of Purano Qila fortress where

thousands of Muslim refugees took shelter after the violent riots in Delhi drove them out of their homes, among others.

On the other hand, Bengal had already been exposed to a series of riots and massacres, long before Partition was even conceived as a reality. Despite the scale of the tragedy that ensued in the wake of the event, dominant historical discourses on the history of Partition have often glossed over the voices of those who have been otherized by society, or as Urvashi Butalia states in *The Other Side of Silence*, "In its almost exclusive focus on Hindus and Sikhs and Muslims, Partition history has worked to render many others invisible." (241*)* In her seminal chapter, "Margins", Butalia argues how the treatment of Dalits or Harijans in popular historical accounts have been barbaric, banishing them to the realm of the other. (241) These people, who are considered to perform "menial" tasks have been "relegated to the fringes" (243) both literally and figuratively, hence subjecting them to methodical epistemic violence. A similar observation is made by Gargi Chakravartty in her book, *Coming Out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal*, wherein she comprehensively examines the gendered dimensions of the event, providing valuable insight into the sufferings, sacrifices and revolutions of the women of Bengal. She delineates through her account, the plight of abducted and unhomed women, whose distress would be further exacerbated by the Government's policies to rehabilitate them. She provides a nuanced exploration of the complexities of providing aid to these women, most of whom had been married to the men who had abducted them and had just begun to adapt to their new lives; therefore, to forcibly rehabilitate them under such circumstances would mean denying their agency and unhoming them twice.

Structure and Phenomenology

This paper seeks to address the problem of silencing of marginalised voices within dominant narratives of the Indian Partition. It will explore how contemporary graphic narratives, as a hybrid 'word-and-image form' (Chute 108), can function as counter-narratives to delineate embodied experiences of trauma and displacement. Methodologically, the paper will use a combination of close readings of specific graphic narratives with a phenomenological approach to embodiment. Drawing on Edmund Husserl's notion of the lived experience and 'Lebenswelt' (106), as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on perception as a bodily, situated process, the analysis intends to treat graphic panels, gutter spaces, and visual images as sites where embodied memory is articulated and shared. Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" further illuminates how trauma is transmitted from one generation to the next through mediated forms of remembrance (Hirsch).

The primary corpus comprises of three graphic narratives from the anthology *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* (Ghosh): Vishwajyoti Ghosh's "A Good Education" (149–61), Maria M. Litwa's "Welcome to Geneva Camp" (249–57), and Nina Sabnani's "Know Directions Home?" (99–111), read alongside the graphic novel *Chhotu: A Tale of Partition and Love* (Gupta and Rastogi). These texts will be examined under the lens of theoretical frameworks proposed by writers and theorists like Urvashi Butalia, Gargi Chakravartty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Marianne Hirsch to demonstrate how these graphic narratives may operate as 'etchings' on the walls of history, highlighting the lived, embodied, and often intergenerational trauma of those marginalised on the basis of

caste, gender, and language. By mobilizing the specific affordances of the comics form - fragmentation, juxtaposition, and the interplay between word and image - these works resist epistemic violence and demand a revised historiographical methodology that incorporates graphic and oral narratives into its conception of legitimate historical testimony.

Historical Background

In order to examine the relevance of these graphic narratives, it is necessary to outline the broader historical context of the Partition and its aftermath. The division of India into two new entities resulted in one of the largest and most violent mass migrations in modern history, involving the displacement of an estimated ten to twelve million people and the deaths of hundreds of thousands (Chatterji; Butalia). While Punjab and Bengal are the most frequently referenced regions in Partition historiography, the social, political, and cultural ramifications of Partition extended far beyond the initial moment of division.

In Punjab, as Pakrasi observes, a "determined campaign" to expel minority populations unfolded in tandem with state formation (Pakrasi 14). In Bengal, Partition intersected with a longer history of communal violence and economic precarity, producing layered experiences of loss, migration, and resettlement (Chatterji; Bagchi and Dasgupta). Refugee camps became sites of convergence between humanitarian intervention, propaganda and bureaucratic neglect, as state agencies grappled with the logistical and ideological challenges of rehabilitation.

The violence of Partition did not ebb with the formal drawing of borders. Subsequent conflicts such as the 1971 Liberation War that led to the creation of Bangladesh, generated new margins – those drawn on the basis of language and identity – especially the Urdu-speaking community in East Pakistan/Bangladesh who were cast out as "Biharis" and "traitors" (Zakaria). Many of these communities, such as those in Geneva Camp in Dhaka, remain in precarious conditions decades after 1947 and 1971, caught in a protracted limbo with contested or denied citizenship (Zakaria). Within this extended historical frame, Partition appears not as a discrete event but as an ongoing process whose effects have been inscribed on bodies, landscapes, and social relations. It is precisely this extended temporality and embodied dimension of Partition that contemporary graphic narratives seek to capture and make legible.

Epistemic Violence and the Margins

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of epistemic violence is central to understanding how subaltern voices are excluded from dominant knowledge systems. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak argues that colonial and postcolonial discourses often present the subaltern as an object of knowledge while foreclosing the possibility of genuine subaltern speech (Spivak 66–111). Epistemic violence (76) as devised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, refers to the systematic exclusion and silencing of subaltern voices within dominant discourses. In the context of Partition, it manifests in the form of erasure or trivialisation of the experiences of marginalised communities in popular historiography. It is, therefore, imperative to consider the narratives that these voices want to present, through close examination of literary forms that can register the affective textures, embodied memories, and quotidian details of lives that have been relegated to the margins, in order to offer resistance to the hegemonic trivialisation of their experiences and assimilate the

repercussions of this catastrophic event. Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* extends this perception to Partition historiography by showing how Dalits, women, and other marginalised groups have been rendered invisible in dominant narratives focused primarily on political and communal propaganda (Butalia 241–43). Gargi Chakravartty's work on refugee women in Bengal, similarly, converses with the voices that have been largely ignored in official historical accounts (Chakravartty). Together, these authors have provided a framework for reading graphic narratives as attempts to counter epistemic violence by centering experiences that dominant archives have neglected.

Embodiment, and Lived Experience

Phenomenology offers a method for attending to the lived, embodied dimensions of experience that are often neglected in conventional historiography. Edmund Husserl's investigations into embodiment emphasize that consciousness is always situated in and through a living body that perceives, suffers, and remembers (Behnke; Husserl, *Ideas*). Husserl's notion of the "Lebenswelt", or "lifeworld," refers to the pre-theoretical, lived world of everyday experience that underlies all scientific and historical abstractions (Husserl, *Crisis*). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, further argues that perception is not a passive reception of data but a dynamic, bodily engagement with the world. From this perspective, trauma is not only a remembered event but an ongoing bodily disposition that shapes how subjects inhabit space, relate to others, and experience time.

Referring to Edmund Husserl's "Phenomenology of Embodiment" (Behnke) in understanding the experiential dimensions of those whose lives have been etched in the panels, one may argue that studying their personal and social accounts (or, "lifeworld"/*Lebenswelt* (106) as Husserl terms it in his *Ideas 2*), during or after Partition is an essential step to resist the relegation of their voices to a realm of sub-importance, perhaps undoing the methodical epistemic violence that they have been subjected to by the dominant historical discourses - which have treated them as material data on a spreadsheet - providing a counter-discourse of intersubjectivity and embodied experience. Thus, the subject of the panel would serve as the locus from which the event may be gauged.

In *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty states that 'perception' is not a static receiving of data, but a dynamic, embodied experience, dependent on the body's interactions with its environment. Thus, in order to surmise the true ramifications of an event as catastrophic as the Indian Partition, one must take into consideration, the individual and community-based accounts of those who have either lived through the event or have embodied the trauma of it but haven't been given much space in traditional historical discourse, other than as data. Graphic narratives as etchings of trauma, therefore, serve the pivotal purpose of inscribing these voices on the walls of history.

Postmemory and Generational Transmission

Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" becomes crucial for understanding how trauma is transmitted across generations. In "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory," Hirsch defines postmemory as the relationship of the "generation after" to the experiences of those who came before, experiences they "remember" only through stories, images, and behaviors (Hirsch 3–29). For Hirsch, works like Art

Spiegelman's *Maus* show how visual narratives can mediate inherited trauma and shape the identities of those who did not directly live through the events they recount.

In the context of Partition, postmemory is evident in how younger generations internalize the experiences of the earlier generations through oral narrations, photographs, and, perhaps, graphic narratives. The case studies discussed below—especially "A Good Education" and "Know Directions Home?"—actively stage this intergenerational transmission by juxtaposing the perceptions of older and younger generations within the same visual field.

Graphic Narratives as a Medium

As Hillary Chute argues, the term 'graphic novel,' "is often a misnomer," since many works in this form are not fiction at all but "rich works of nonfiction" (Chute, "Comics as Literature?" 453). Chute proposes "graphic narrative" as a more inclusive term that can encompass memoir, journalism, and other non-fictional modes (453). As observed before, traditional historical accounts of Partition tend to be centered predominantly on political accounts, border negotiations, and religious and/or communal violence, often 'silencing' the voices of marginalised groups. Graphic narratives, as a medium, can, in this respect, be considered an essential tool to address these gaps, since the form of the graphic narrative, according to Hillary Chute in *Comics Form and Narrating Lives* "is a word-and-image form in which words and images create unsynthesized narrative tracks; that is to say, it is not an illustrative form in which each is redundant of the other" (108). This non-redundancy is crucial for representing trauma, since fragmentation, ellipsis, and visual metaphor can convey aspects of experience that can resist erasure. With the use of visual art, dialogue, satire and elements of non-linear storytelling, these narratives may be able to situate the reader into the fragmentary spaces of emotions related to the catastrophe, particularly the plight of marginalised groups. Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza*, for instance, reconstructs scenes of massacre through painstaking visual detail, producing a sort of illustrative archive of oral histories. Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, similarly, uses animal metaphors and visual repetition to explore the legacies intertwined with the Holocaust.

In the context of Partition, *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* assembles contributions from artists and writers from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh to document oral histories, memories, and speculative reconstructions of the aftermath of Partition (Ghosh, *This Side*). The anthology explicitly challenges the tendency to treat Partition as a singular, monolithic event through visual strategies such as cramped panel layouts, heavy usage of black ink, or disrupted gutter spaces, that can formally capture the claustrophobia, precariousness, and fragmentation experienced by the ones who have been marginalised. This paper will thus attempt to explore how graphic narratives could serve as etchings on the wall, a medium, uniquely suited to illuminate the lived experiences of these groups, emphasising their role in providing counter narratives to resist 'epistemic violence' (Spivak 76) and foster a more nuanced assimilation of history.

Research Gap and Intervention

While there is growing recognition of the pedagogical potential of graphic novels for teaching history, as noted by De Witte in her discussion of Professor Tom Mullaney's approach, there is comparatively little sustained analysis of how graphic narratives on Partition mobilize phenomenological notions of

embodiment and postmemory to contest epistemic violence. Scholarship on graphic narratives often focuses on canonical Western texts such as *Maus* or *Persepolis*, leaving South Asian graphic narratives under-theorized in global comics studies (Chute, "Comics as Literature?").

This paper will attempt to intervene in this gap by bringing phenomenology, postcolonial critique, and comics theory into conversation through close readings of South Asian graphic narratives on Partition. It will also demonstrate how these works do not merely "illustrate" historical events but actively reconfigure the terms on which Partition is perceived and remembered, particularly from the perspective of marginalised subjects.

Methodology

The methodological approach followed in this paper is threefold. First, it will employ close visual and textual analyses of selected graphic narratives, paying attention to panel composition, use of colour and contrast, gutter spaces, and the interplay of image and text. Second, it adopts a phenomenological lens, drawing on Husserl and Merleau-Ponty to interpret how these formal features convey embodied experiences of trauma, displacement, and survival. Third, it attempts to situate these narratives within the broader discourse of Partition Studies and theories of epistemic violence, using the theories of Spivak, Butalia, Chakravartty, and Hirsch as critical interlocutors.

The three primary narratives examined from *This Side, That Side* are: Vishwajyoti Ghosh's "A Good Education," which addresses refugee camps and educational policies; Maria M. Litwa's "Welcome to Geneva Camp," which portrays the lives of the Urdu-speaking "Bihari" community in Dhaka; and Nina Sabnani's "Know Directions Home?," which interweaves textile art and documentary style narration to examine the displacement of the Maru Meghwals (Ghosh, *This Side* 99–111, 149–61, 249–57). These are read alongside *Chhotu: A Tale of Partition and Love*, which offers a picture of Partition-era Delhi, centered around a schoolboy named Chhotu (Gupta and Rastogi).

Case Studies of Embodied Trauma in Graphic Narratives

"A Good Education": Life in Refugee Camps and Dilemmas of Motherhood

In the context of the Indian Partition, *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* (2013), curated by Vishwajyoti Ghosh, is one such collection of graphic narratives that brings together writers, artists and storytellers from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, in order to amalgamate the fragments of memory that remained unheard of even after decades of discourses regarding the monolith of Partition. This anthology sets off on a course to challenge that very idea, the comprehension of the event as a single monolithic occurrence - Gyanendra Pandey criticizes the pernicious tendency to view Partition as merely a consequence of Independence and redirects his focus from the quest to locate the 'causes' of the event in the annals of history, to "the meaning of Partition for those who lived through it, the trauma it produced and the transformation it wrought." (188-221) - documenting through the 'word-and-image form' (Chute 108), the oral histories of several overlooked voices, to study the complex negotiations of memory and silence intertwined with their narratives.

In this respect, the graphic narrative, "A Good Education" (149-161), illustrated by Vishwajyoti Ghosh - based on a few accounts from Amiya Sen's *Aranyalipi* (*The Forest Chronicles*) – comes to mind.

It deals with the complexities of life within the resettlement camp, told in two distinct layers, the illustrator seems to have drawn himself into the narrative (following Joe Sacco's model of the author-character in *Footnotes in Gaza*), situating himself in the form of a possible "there", to the narrative experiment involving his grandmother's accounts of the camp. The stark divide that existed between the lived experiences of the refugees and a common middle-class family, have been pragmatically narrativized by the robust usage of ink to convey a limited array of emotions – grief and despair – also evident in the lack of well-defined boundaries between the panels (the "gutter space"). Blank faces etched with black ink and overwhelmed eyes that have lost all their tears. According to Amiya Sen's records, she was tasked with convincing the mothers at Mana Camp to send their children to Kasturba Niketan rehabilitation home for



Fig. 1. Panels from "A Good Education". 2013.
(Ghosh 150, 152, 159)

Partition refugees in New Delhi, for a good education, which was a plan sanctioned by the Government. As the Assistant Superintendent and Matron at Kasturba Niketan, she was faced with a dilemma, that if the mothers did agree to send their children to Delhi, they would not return home for fifteen to twenty years, and by the time they did, the camp would perhaps not even exist anymore. The government's plan was focused on education and hence no attempt was made to rehabilitate the entire family to Delhi. These were people who had been ostracized on both sides of the Radcliffe Line, they had been subjected to innumerable atrocities, but the worst of all, their voices were never heard, over the public announcements of government policies or rehabilitation programs. In a series of illustrations, Amiya Sen is shown voicing her fears, as most of the mothers reluctantly agreed to send off their children, trusting her maternal voice. Even as she warned them that they may not see their children for fifteen years, the mothers agreed. The panel shifts focus on the face of a mother with a child, illustrating the anguish on her face but perhaps with a sense of hope in her eyes, as she hands over her children, saying "Take them with you. We don't wish to see them. Let them stand on their own feet; that's all we want." Thus, etching the trauma in the reader's mind.

Here, the graphic narrative performs a phenomenological rendering of embodied trauma. The mothers' decisions are not presented as abstract policy outcomes but as lived experiences, felt through

expressions, gesture, and spatial arrangement. The black ink saturates the image, visually inscribing the enormity of the sacrifice (as seen the images). The panels capture the weight of letting go, the tension between maternal attachment and the desire for a "good education," and the haunting uncertainty of whether the children will ever return.

From the perspective of epistemic violence, "A Good Education" foregrounds those voices that might otherwise be reduced to mere statistical data on a spreadsheet. By placing Amiya Sen's account and the refugees' experiences at the center, the narrative resists their relegation to the periphery, instead treating them as subjects whose embodied dilemmas deserve close attention.

"Welcome to Geneva Camp": Language, Confinement and Life in Limbo

"Welcome to Geneva Camp" (Ghosh 249-257) by Maria M. Litwa, which has been adapted from the original multimedia story *Inside Geneva Camp,* which chronicles the narratives of three women who live in the largest 'ghetto' for the 'Biharis' – the Urdu-speaking community of Bangladesh – located in Dhaka. According to Anam Zakaria in her "Preface" to *1971: A People's History from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India* (2019) - "…the term 'Bihari' does not refer to the people of Bihar alone but is used for a variety of Urdu-speaking people who migrated to East Pakistan at the time of Partition. It should also be noted that the term 'Bengali' is often used synonymously with Bangladeshi/East Pakistani…" (VI) The Geneva Camp as it is known, houses close to 25,000 people who, after the 1971 Liberation War, were trapped in a state of limbo and still remain to be a neglected minority. The Biharis were the victims of communal ostracization at the hands of the Bengali majority, who considered them to be 'traitors' on account of their language and were never allowed to share the 'Bangladeshi' identity, but their problems did not end there. They were again refused by Pakistan, who never accepted them due to their population and in contrast with the Bengalis, they shared little else historically or culturally, except for their language. As observed by Zakaria, the social stigma against Urdu-speakers in Bangladesh runs deep within the collective and individual memories of the people, to an extent that "Pakistan is replaced by 'you'. 'In 1971, you killed our men and raped our women, you tortured us . . . you always treated us like second-class citizens, like Hindus . . . and in 1971 you killed us.' I want to remind him that I was born seventeen years after the war, but it holds no relevance. As a professor would later say to me, 'We have nothing but hatred for you.' I am, therefore, Pakistan; I am the Pakistan Army; I am Punjabi hegemony." (44-45)

Rina, who is fourteen and already a housewife, does not speak Urdu, but has been married into Geneva Camp, into a family of sixteen. She has been prevented from attending school with other children since her husband does not approve. She has been a resident at Geneva Camp for three months, and her life has been depicted in a series of photographs from her new home, clumped together, in no specific order, on a black sheet of paper, documenting different aspects of her daily life. She feels lonely in a family of sixteen, with no friendly interactions to lift her spirits. Shabnam, 20, is a student who dreams of one day, move out of the settlement camp after finishing her studies, away from the noise, the dirt and the lack of privacy. Putul is twenty-four-year-old teacher, at the camp's preschool, who has not received her salary in four months, since the funding for the school project has halted. She fears for the future of the camp's children, who might never receive any education if the teachers refused to come to school. All three

narratives, although unique on their own, share a common feature, that all the images in all three narratives have been arranged or rather dis-arranged in a claustrophobic collage of revelations, and the 'gutter spaces' are pitch-black, conveying a sense of confinement and uncertainty with every frame, be it Rina's family, or Shabnam's home, or Putul's children.

From a phenomenological standpoint, the narrative emphasizes how trauma is embedded in the textures of everyday life rather than just being confined to moments of violence. The women's gestures - Rina's posture as she sits alone in a crowded home, Shabnam's gaze towards a future beyond the camp, Putul's anxious expression as she contemplates the school's closure - embody the temporal and spatial stagnancy of life in the Camp.

The marginal status of the camp residents is linked to language. Being Urdu-speakers in a Bengali-majority nation marked them as outsiders, even decades after 1971 (Zakaria 44–45). The narrative thus depicts a form of post-Partition marginalisation that is often overlooked in accounts focused solely on 1947, expanding the temporal and spatial scope of what the trauma of Partition might truly mean.

"Know Directions Home?": Reclaiming History Through Embroidery

Trauma, particularly that which is associated with displacement or migration, may not only exist in the memory of the unhomed, but is also associated with tactile sensation, felt through the body. Considering Husserl's notion of the "lived experience" (6), one can argue that trauma is not just an event of the past but an ongoing, bodily experience that continues to shape the consciousness of those who have survived. In "Know Directions Home?" (99-111), Sabnani conveys this embodied trauma not just through narrative elements but through the very form of the artwork. The narrative being a reimagining of her 2010 short animation *Tanko Bole Chhe* (or *The Stitches Speak*), which is a documentary about the artisans of Kutchh, associated with the NGO "Kala Raksha", and their art of embroidery. Sabnani vividly documents the unique style of storytelling that these artisans have adopted, stitching together the past and the present in fabric. The film while being narrated by four artisans, encapsulates the traumatic history of the entire community (the Maru Meghwals), from them having to leave their homes in Aadigam (presently in Pakistan), in 1972, during the violent altercations between the Indian and the Pakistani Armies, and their subsequent exodus into the Kutchh-area in India, with no assurance of refuge anywhere. "Know Directions Home?" brings out a few pages of that history - narrated by Raniben, one of the chief artisans in Sabnani's documentary – into focus. The feminization of the art of sewing or embroidery has, in most cases, resulted in the reinforcement of feminine stereotypes and thus, the art has been tried as a symbol of patriarchal oppression, or as Lilith Haig emphasizes, in her "Introduction" to *Reaping What They Sewed: Embroidery in Politics, Feminism and Art*,

Needlework has been used to reinforce patriarchal standards and codes of women's behavior, aptitudes, and conduct. Textile work reinforces a patriarchal oppression of women to the domestic sphere by teaching them to stay in the home, be quiet, and follow a pattern. (1)

Artisans like Raniben and Megiben (another artisan featured in the narration of *Tanko Bole Chhe*) successfully deconstruct these stereotypes by using the very medium that has long been considered a symbol of male hegemony to tell the story of their redemption and rehabilitation, perceiving and stitching

together colourful panels of their lived experiences and creating embroidered etchings of their history. The tactile quality of embroidery - its textures, colors, and rhythms - translates into a visual language of embodied memory. The reader is encouraged to imagine the feel of thread passing through fabric, the repetitive motions of the needle, and the time required to complete each panel, all of which reflect trauma as a slow, ongoing process of stitching past and present together. The embroidered panels function as repositories of history that are not static, but living archives which can facilitate generational transmission of knowledge and memory, as is evident from the following images:



Fig. 2. Panels from Nina Sabnani's "Know Directions Home?" (Ghosh 101, 105, 107) and stills from *Tanko Bole Chhe* (*The Stitches Speak*).

The embroidered figures in the fabric of Sabnani's graphic narrative resemble lived histories where every stitch represents a trace of memory, a scar that reminds of a traumatic past that seeks to be excavated. Similarly, "A Good Education" is a witty narrative where memory and trauma are not treated as mere historical facts but are phenomenologically constituted within the consciousness of both the narrator and his grandmother. It also explores how trauma is embodied and transmitted across generations, influencing

individual identity, perception, and understanding of the past. A fact that is evident in the way the narrator internalizes his grandmother's experiences. Therefore, the past does not solely belong to the ones who lived it, but echoes in the consciousness of later generations, shaping their identity and perception.

Chhotu and the Critique of Media Representation

Chhotu: A Tale of Partition and Love (2019), is one such narrative that explores the city-scape of a Partition-era Delhi, through the lived experiences of a school-boy named Chhotu. The name itself is carefully premeditated as a symbol of otherization. In the Indian context, "Chhotu", can be comprehended as a totem of servitude - as a signifier of the ever-compliant other, who is not expected to have an agency – or voice - of their own. The graphic format allows *Chhotu* to transcend textual boundaries, using illustrations to capture the fragmented and visceral nature of memories surrounding Partition. The interplay of text and visuals enables a multidimensional portrayal of violence, dislocation, and resilience. For instance, the depiction of the 1947 Delhi Riots in the novel, which is believed to have claimed thousands of Muslim lives, and had unhomed even more, forcing some to migrate to West Punjab on foot, and others, less fortunate, to seek refuge at the Purano Qila fortress - as can be observed in Margaret Bourke-White's photographs - are visceral and chaotic, conveying the emotional and psychological fragmentation in ways that are often lost in the descriptive analyses of non-fiction writings. This visual language serves to "locate the reader in space and for this reason is able to spatialize memory" (108), according to Hillary Chute in *Comics Form and Narrating Lives.*

One of the most distinguishable aspects of *Chhotu* is its scathing critique of media in the Partition era. Through the use of satire, the novel interrogates the use of propagandist rhetoric and sensationalist reporting in journalism, highlighting how the narratives propounded by media can have tremendous impact on human tragedies. Representation, therefore, becomes an important issue in this context, where media plays the role of perpetuating hegemonic ideologies. According to Stuart Hall, often, there will not be a true representation of people, places, history or events within a media text, and that people with influence or social privilege may always try and embed their own version of ideology within media text thus ensuring how the message in decoded by the audience. One such instance can be observed when, in the novel, during ongoing shortage of food, Chhotu is hoodwinked into following a known crook, Chumpak, into a temple in Chandni Chowk, in an attempt to confront him about his stealing habit – unaware of the fact that he was working for Shekhar Singhania - better known as "Shere" - a powerful mob boss, who had tasked him with instigating communal violence - and accidentally fires his weapon at him in the melee of a riot, aggravating the violence. On the next day, Bol Gappa, a radio host at the fictional All India FM, and a loyal satellite of Shere, reported that violence at Chandni Chowk was propagated by a group of revolutionaries who were "caught smuggling chhole into 'Jain mandir'". Which is significant as in a previous instance, Bol had reported how, during a shortage of potatoes, a huge amount was found hoarded within Jama Masjid, "causing many to question those they once considered neighbours". This points to the attempt of certain political and communal forces to divert attention from the more pressing issues at hand to prioritize dramatic headlines which would in turn aggravate the already thriving flames of communal hatred, thus reducing a complex human tragedy into mere binaries of us versus the other.

Synthesis: Etchings on the Wall and the Phenomenology of Margins

Considered together, "A Good Education," "Welcome to Geneva Camp," "Know Directions Home?," and *Chhotu* demonstrate how graphic narratives can function as "etchings on the wall" of history. They tell of experiences that dominant historiography has relegated to the margins, using the functionality of the comics form to convey embodied and transgenerational dimensions of trauma.

"A Good Education" depicts life in a refugee camp, making visible the emotional and ethical complexities behind seemingly benevolent state policies (Ghosh, "A Good Education"). "Welcome to Geneva Camp" extends the temporal horizon of Partition related trauma to include communities trapped in a post-1971 limbo, emphasizing confinement and liminality as ongoing conditions (Ghosh, *This Side*; Zakaria). "Know Directions Home?" reclaims embroidery as a medium of political storytelling, materializing memory through tactile labor (Sabnani, "Know Directions Home?"; Haig). *Chhotu* critiques media representation and shows how propaganda contributes to communal violence, juxtaposing mediated narratives with lived experience (Gupta and Rastogi).

Phenomenologically, these works attend to the ways trauma is carried in bodies, inscribed in spaces, and transmitted through gestures, art, and domestic negotiations, and not merely through official documents or data. They invite readers to inhabit the lifeworlds of refugees, artisans, women, and children whose voices are often heard only obliquely in textual archives. In doing so, they challenge traditional methods of archiving historical evidence.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that contemporary graphic narratives on Partition - particularly those collected in *This Side, That Side* and the graphic novel *Chhotu* - create powerful "etchings on the wall" that inscribe the embodied experiences of the marginalised. By combining close visual analysis with theoretical frameworks drawn from Spivak, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Hirsch, this paper has demonstrated how these works are uniquely capable of resisting epistemic violence by centering voices and bodies that dominant historiography has rendered peripheral.

Collectively, these narratives call for a reorientation of historiographical method. They suggest that to fully apprehend the traumascapes of Partition, scholars and educators must adopt a more inclusive curriculum that would encourage learners to study graphic, oral and other unconventional forms of storytelling which could, in fact, help cultivate an ethical attentiveness to marginalised voices and embodied memories. Such an approach would acknowledge that history is lived through bodies and spaces, and not merely through documents and propagandist narratives. Incorporating graphic narratives into formal curricula on Partition and postcolonial history - an approach already advocated by scholars like Mullaney and discussed by De Witte - can facilitate critical engagement with complex historical events by foregrounding the "mundane moments" in which structural violence is experienced (De Witte). The etched lines of these narratives - whether drawn in ink or stitched in by thread - demarcate not only the scars of a violent past but also the persistence of the communities who have refused to be relegated to the margins of history.

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