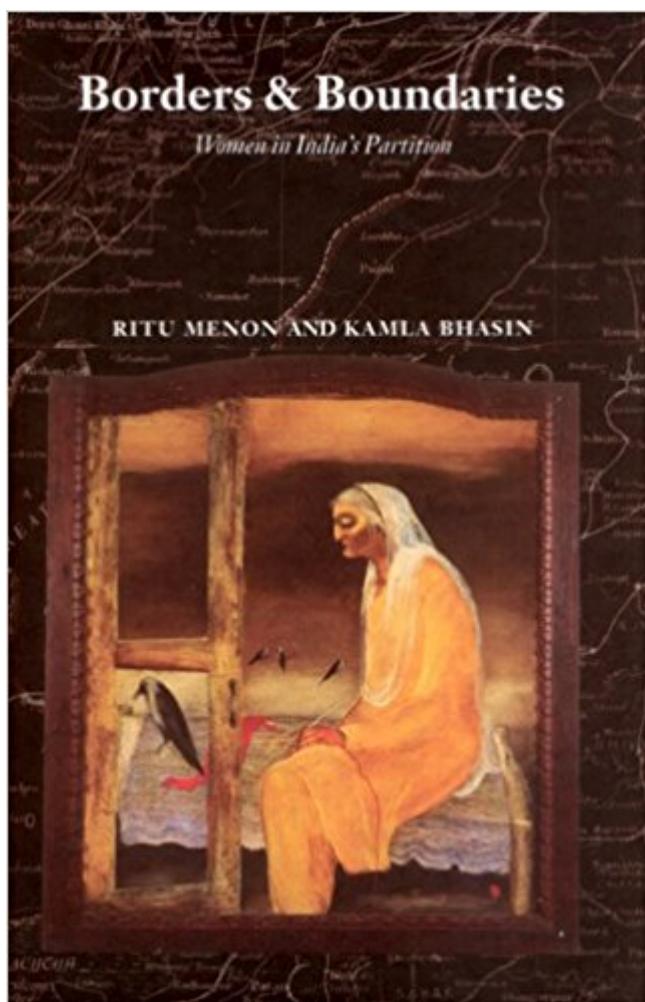


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Borders And Boundaries: How Women Experienced The Partition Of India



Synopsis

As an event of shattering consequence, the Partition of India remains significant today. While Partition sounds smooth on paper, the reality was horrific. More than eight million people migrated and one million died in the process. The forced migration, violence between Hindus and Muslims, and mass widowhood were unprecedented and well-documented. What was less obvious but equally real was that millions of people had to realign their identities, uncertain about who they thought they were. The rending of the social and emotional fabric that took place in 1947 is still far from mended. While there are plenty of official accounts of Partition, there are few social histories and no feminist histories. Borders and Boundaries changes that, providing first-hand accounts and memoirs, juxtaposed alongside official government accounts. The authors make women not only visible but central. They explore what country, nation, and religious identity meant for women, and they address the question of the nation-state and the gendering of citizenship. In the largest ever peace-time mass migration of people, violence against women became the norm. Thousands of women committed suicide or were done to death by their own kinsmen. Nearly 100,000 women were "abducted" during the migration. A young woman might have been separated from her family when a convoy was ambushed, abducted by people of another religion, forced to convert, and forced into marriage or cohabitation. After bearing a child, she would be offered the opportunity to return only if she left her child behind and if she could face shame in her natal community. These stories do not paint their subjects as victims. Theirs are the stories of battles over gender, the body, sexuality, and nationalism-stories of women fighting for identity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a good attempt at telling the story of women during partition. Though it is thin with regard to statistics, it does provide oral histories that bring to life the suffering of women who were both cast as prostitute (when they belonged to Other communities) and symbols of national honor (when belonging to "our" community). The only problem that this book suffers from is a serious bias against Pakistan. Being neither Indian nor Pakistani, it is obvious to me that the writers either share some of the "nationalistic" sentiments that they quote and describe or they do an inadequate job of interpreting and analyzing these positions. By taking such a stilted pro-India approach, they play into the very kinds of communal thinking that they purport to challenge. Following on this, there isn't much on Muslim women despite the fact that the official numbers suggest far more Muslim women were abducted than the other way around. I would suggest this book as an initial foray, but with the caveat that it has its own "national" bias (e.g., blaming Muslims alone for the very partition of India which is a gross simplification of history). I hope that someone will take it upon themselves to provide a more even-handed approach.

This is an excellent research and is a must for history students looking for issues around partition of India. India was partitioned when Muslims started rioting in February 1947 in favour of partition (a country for Muslims of India). Most Hindus and Sikhs only defended their families (and had no idea that they will have to either convert to Islam or leave the area which later became Pakistan) while Muslims were the aggressors and almost always started the riots. Though!! Hindus and Sikhs who had lost their families in Pakistan took revenge on the innocent Muslims living in "India"

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