

Faith and Resilience in Women During the Partition of Punjab

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Abstract: Drawing upon Sikh philosophy and socio-cultural transformation as a lens, coupled with the violence of Partition in the Punjab region, this paper addresses the different aspects of women's experiences in pre-Partition Punjab. It seeks to redirect the narrative from a Sikh victimization approach to the masculinity of Punjabi—and Sikh—women's agency and their active participation on different timelines in history. In autobiographies, primary sources and secondary literature, the research looks for the origins of woman empowerment and Sikhism. It discusses the fundamentals of equality from Guru Nanak through Mata Sundri Ji and subsequent leaders and also looks at the contribution of Mai Bhago. The research explores women's agency in religious, political, and cultural life with Langar and Phulkari, and social reform movements and subsequently the freedom struggle. Even at the time of Partition, Sikh women emerged as survivors of trauma and mobilisers since they protected horrible violence. The paper attempted to portray the intersection of Sikh women's religion and community to illuminate how these women created new Sikh identities while strengthening traditions in the context of modernity. These women's histories, in their efforts to reclaim them, made a notable contribution to Sikh women's history and emphasize the changes in Punjab's socio-political context that occurred in the pre-Partition and post-Partition period. Their narrative, excluded from the mainstream histories, along with those of other Sikh women makes one reconstruct them as rooted and empowered social historical persons whose spirit and cultural identity set fire to society.

Keywords: partition, politics, resilience, sikh and women.

I. Methodologies and Objectives

In order to rebuild the socio-cultural past of pre-partition Punjab, we need to comprehend and visualize what Punjab in its true sense was. Whenever we refer to partition, we assign negative feelings like pain, sorrow, and loss to it. It is undoubtedly that these were a part of the process, yet the focus of this research paper is to see beyond these traditional feelings and bring out the very essence of culture, oneness, and traditional living that did exist, primarily among women, prior to the partition of Punjab. It also seeks to examine what role Sikhism, as a religion, had in shaping the ideology of women of Punjab. For this research paper, primarily the secondary and tertiary sources have been consulted, primarily comprising autobiographies and memoirs, research papers and journals, and online archival readings.

II. Introduction

Punjab has always been a place of vital significance in the history of the Indian subcontinent. As a land molded by waves of civilization after civilization—from the Indus Valley and Vedic Aryans to the Mauryan Empire, Delhi Sultanate, Mughal Empire, and British imperialism—it has been a melting pot of cultural and political changes. These changes had a profound impact on the social structure, especially the status and position of women. One of the most formative moments of modern Punjab was the Partition of 1947—a devastation characterized by bloodshed, displacement, and profound trauma. Scholar Paulomi Chakraborty identifies two approaches to interpreting partition: “one highlights the violent, traumatic break of Partition; the other romantically remembers pre-Partition peace. However, both have the experiences and testimony of women relegated to the periphery.”¹ This essay puts the voices at the center, “the voice of much of society, women who experienced Partition themselves, and were left unheard.”² contending that Punjabi women were not just passive victims but active agents in the unfolding of Partition. Through religion, resilience, and agency, they constructed their communities and made significant contributions to survival, memory, and reconstruction—entitled to much greater recognition in histories than they have previously received.

Section - I - Pre-Partition Punjab

Pre-partition Punjab partition was an elaborate tapestry of various religions, cultures, and communities, with women hailing from different family and social backgrounds. While popular narratives tend to illustrate a stark divide in responsibilities, with men actively engaging in public debates, political movements, and rallies while women remained inside their home, this is not the complete truth. Although women were mostly situated indoors, occupied with weaving, singing community folk songs, cooking, or working in communal kitchens, and made no notable contributions, they were not passive in any means. The tangible intersection of these domestic roles was marked by the unexpressed bonds of solidarity, quiet resistance, and circulation of emotions. It was inside these spaces that a special form of womanhood emerged—one that identes transcended religious identities. Irrespective of whether one was Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim, the common denominator of caretakers, nurturers, and silent supporters provided a backdrop to forming a collective consciousness. This ‘being inside’ was not isolation; it was interconnection.

It was this bond that connected women, whether caregivers or participants in Freedom

¹Chakraborty P. (2014). Gender, Women, and Partition: Literary Representations, Refugee Women, and Partition Studies. Routledge eBooks.

²Butalia, U. (2001). The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India. *Duke University Press*.

movements, across family or faith lines, and led to the cultivation of enduring quiet feminist spirit that cut across religious boundaries.

This idea did not manifest all at once. It was influenced by centuries of struggle through deep teaching of spirituality and concepts of equality and brotherhood. To truly appreciate the solidarity and strength these women portrayed, one has to examine the pivoting changes that shaped their 'role,' "identity," and culture" through time. The emergence of Sikhism in the 15th century stands as one of the most significant turning points in this voyage as it provided the ideological framework for equal rights of women. This social order not only defused patriarchal attempts but also opened a window for women to participate fully in the spiritual, social and communal life. This incremental progress gradually built the foundation for women to rise in Punjab, forming unparalleled bonds of unity.

Historical Background of Punjab and the Status of women Before Partition (15th to 18th Century):

The rise of Sikhism in the 15th century, which "rejected caste and class hierarchy, and wiped out most of the customary practices and laws concerning women as Sikhism grew"³. Baba Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, clearly laid down that 'they who are men, and they who are women, are dignified in the eyes of God. This fighting posture was found in the Sikh religious conduct, Social and public activities, Its women were enthusiastic to participate. Sikh women were noticed to be much active in administration. Moreover, such horrible practices as female infanticide and sati were strongly discouraged within the community. Guru Nanak Ji presented a profoundly comprehensive and libertarian worldview in a time when females were broadly persecuted and kept to subservient parts. Baba Nanak unequivocally rejected the caste framework and the idea of male predominance. His lessons advanced the thought that all human creatures, notwithstanding their sexual orientation, are even within the eyes of God. A key instruction from Baba Nanak's compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib (the heavenly sacred writing Sikhism) embodies this principle:

"ਨਾਰੀ ਗਰਬੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਕਰੇਤਿ ॥

ਪੁਰਨ ਜੀਵਨ ਲੀਵੈ ਕੇਤਰ ॥" |

³Mann, G.S. (2006). Sikhism and Women: History, Texts, and Experience. Oxford University Press.

"The woman who conceives and brings forth life is equally capable of greatness as the male. She is to be honoured and respected."

"From lady, man is born; inside lady, man is conceived; to lady he is locked in and hitched. Lady gets to be his companion; through Lady, the future eras come. When his lady passes on, he looks for another lady; to the lady, he is bound. So why call her terrible? From her, lords are born. From lady, lady is born; without lady, there would be no one at all."

(Guru Granth Sahib, 473)

This section clearly highlighted the importance of women and their role in creative work and social production. In so doing, he hoped to question centuries-old misogyny and social norms that subjected women to lower levels. Sikhism's emphasis on gender equality proved to be transformative for women in Punjab, whether within Sikh communities or more generally across the region. Although there were patriarchal norms in the society and agrarian social orders were in existence, but the logic of Sikhi was a system to make progress in the social and political status of women. On the religious side, this progressive theology was the very atmosphere in which a liberated future woman could move, especially in religious and communal matters.

On to the political front, Sikhism was introducing a new set of thoughts. With regards to the Sikh culture and religion, the stress on gender relationship meant that women were not excluded from leadership roles within the faith community. Sikh women have been the integral part of the religious and political firmament. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, **Mata Sundri Ji (c. 1667 – 1747)** managed the Sikh community from Delhi and issued **Hukamnamas** and letters to the Khalsa to lead them amidst severe Mughal oppression. She became the de facto head of the Sikh community and her leadership helped maintain unity and direction, offering political stability through spiritual authority in a time of crisis.

Mata Sahib Kaur Ji (c. 1681 – 1747), honored as the "Spiritual Mother of the Khalsa," consolidated the spiritual authority that bound the Khalsa Panth together. She maintained correspondence with Sikh leaders and was involved in safeguarding sacred manuscripts and relics. Though not on the battlefield or throne, her presence and counsel had a stabilizing effect on the fractured Sikh leadership of the time. She helped anchor Sikh identity, which in turn influenced the political solidarity of the Sikh community. In the 18th century, **Mata Bhag Kaur (Mai Bhago)** "was noted in Sikh history due to her active participation in the Sikh resistance."⁴ "She marched with the 40 'dastard' soldiers and was actively involved during the Muktsar battle."⁵ This assisted in improving the already existing beliefs regarding the fighting spirits within the sikhs, alongside wrecking a strong political statement depicting the enduring defiance towards Mughal rule. Her guidance helped divide the devotion of the people towards their religion coupled with the political realm as she portrayed the saint-soldier serving the Khalsa. "When **Rani Sahib Kaur** began ruling in Patiala, she surged as a robust female politician in the late 1700s as she started consolidating power for the Sikh principalities."⁶

Grewal's work denotes her with smart diplomacy over commanding soldiers and defending her state. "Sikh women's military and administrative control showcased an increasing political power during this time."⁷



Although these shifts in politics marked the military and civic leadership of Sikh women, the cultivation of their empowerment was equally present in the socio-cultural context. Far from being a passive domain, the private sphere of the home became a form of intense cultural production and symbolic defiance. Women had the power to influence through customs, tales, decorum, and manual labor; implanting their values, aspirations, and ideologies into practical life. As is one of many profound forms of artistic expression that combines feminine ingenuity and identity

On the socio-cultural front, the PHULKARI stands as a pivotal cultural artifact for Punjab as well as Sikhism. The term Phulkari merges "phool" which means flower and "aakari" which means pattern or design. Traditional tapestries featured flower collections that symbolized life and were placed within multiple geometric designs and patterns. The arrival of a daughter into a Sikh family brings blessings and represents a positive event. Thus, Family women would start making a Phulkari tapestry for new daughters as they represented the origin of future generations and thus embodied both flower and life symbolism.

⁴Singh, K. (1999). A History of the Sikhs, Volume 1: 1469-1839. Oxford University Press.

⁵Grewal, J. S. (1998). The Sikhs of the Punjab (Vol. 2). Cambridge University Press.

⁶Grewal, J. S. (1998). The Sikhs of the Punjab (Vol. 2). Cambridge University Press.

⁷Sharma, A. (2002). Women in Indian Society: A Historical Survey. Pointer Publishers.



Fig. 1.1: Photograph of a Punjabi woman in Phulkari (c. 1900)



Fig. 1.2: 20th-century Phulkari from Punjab (India)

Phulkari further symbolized craftsmanship and implied expression.”⁸ Women were aware of the events in the larger social sphere despite what patriarchal texts claimed. Many women found in Phulkari a form of personal freedom within their patriarchal society. Through craftsmanship shapes women acquired organizational skills alongside their freedom. The activity enabled them to unite for a shared mission and provided opportunities to converse and brainstorm ideas together. Through locking in their participation they disrupted their social foundations yet they achieved personal fulfillment. Through this medium women were able to communicate their presence and influence within their communities. While frequently marginalised in popular accounts of history, women in pre-partition Punjab were not silent or invisible. They were deeply rooted in the social and cultural life of their communities. Far from being mere spectator girls, women actively created domestic conventions, participated in religious beliefs and practices, and contributed to the moral and emotional infrastructure of society. By doing things like weaving Phulkari, working in langar seva, or handling family matters under political tensions, women nurtured sites of subdued opposition and power.

⁸Maskiell, M. (1999). “Embroidering the Past: Phulkari Textiles and Gendered Work as ‘Tradition’ and ‘Heritage’ in Colonial and Contemporary Punjab”. *The Journal of Asian Studies*.

Women of Punjab manifested their strength from within by such Phulkari and were interweaving the fabric of women's advancement for Punjab women. This delicate stitchwork—frequently commissioned for weddings, births, and important rites of passage—wasn't merely craft; it was storytelling, self-expression, and legacy. Each stitch and pattern bore memory, feeling, and identity—particularly for women who were otherwise denied political voice.

Most mainstream histories of Partition present women first as victims—truncated to numbers of rape, forced migration, and abductions. While such atrocities cannot ever be dismissed, too strict an angle may also overlook the numerous instances in which women were exerting strength, resistance, and leadership. Sikh women, for instance, in Amritsar and Ludhiana started community kitchens called langars to feed displaced families during Partition. In camps for refugees, women created ad hoc classrooms, and children—particularly girls—could continue learning in the midst of upheaval. Subhadra Joshi organized the Shanti Dal to encourage peace and safeguard communities, and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur not only arranged rescue expeditions for abducted women but also later influenced India's public health infrastructures. These courageous, compassionate, and coordinated acts are a testament to a profoundly active female presence—femininity one that problematizes and enhances our narrative of Partition history.

When we try to understand the various aspects of the contributions of Punjabi women, we begin to see that pre-partition, these women were intricate characters in the Partition history of Punjab. Their resilience was not just about their strength but about their ability to be able to adapt, plan, execute and most importantly remain connected to their cultural roots even in times of distress. They were political activists, emotional anchors, and spiritual leaders. The Phulkari that displayed aspirational dreams or the langars that looked after the community, almost all of their decisions and acts had been governed by tradition and resulted in progressive events, forming the basis of the feminist ideals in Punjab, thus empowering generations. It also makes readers today look past the single-minded victimhood and take up the vision of the extraordinary agency women represented both before and during one of the most destructive and tumultuous periods in history. Although the early centuries of Sikh history built a firm religious and cultural platform for gender equality, the 19th century introduced new dilemmas and challenges. When colonial armies transformed the socio-political scene of Punjab, women's roles also began to change—torn between traditional heritage and new Western ideas. But very far from passive spectators, Sikh women accommodated these transformations with resilience and initiative, still active in public life, religious reform, and new modes of education.

Colonial Punjab: Rise of Reformist Ideologies and Evolving Roles of Women in Society and Culture (19th Century):

Since the 19th century, Punjabi women have started asserting themselves in political and public lives. Their presence was not only felt at the time of the turbulent Partition of India in 1947 but also in the struggle for freedom towards the same. The socio-religious and education reform movements of the 19th century lent a strong foundation to women's empowerment in Punjab. These reforms helped to eliminate oppressive customs such as purdah, child marriage, widowhood, and female infanticide. They also encouraged women to seek education and participate in public life. Organizations like the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya in Ferozepur, founded by Bibi Harnam Kaur in 1894, and journals like Punjabi Bhain, founded in 1907, provided useful platforms for raising awareness about women's issues and activism. During the latter half of the 19th century and the earlier half of the 20th century, Punjab saw the rise of various social reform movements that had the aim of further raising the status of Punjabi women and strengthening their positions.

Reformers across different religious groups made attempts to address issues such as child marriage, dowry, and female illiteracy. The Singh Sabha movement in the late 19th century attempted to reclaim Sikh traditions and push for social reform among Sikhs. Gender equality was underscored, as well as engaging women in religious and social activity. The Singh Sabha movement pushed for education of women and even tackled problems of female infanticide and dowry. The arrival of British colonial power in the 19th century, again introduced significant changes to Punjab's political landscape. The time also witnessed the emergence of women-led organizations who again desired to solve problems addressing the women of Punjab. These organizations, such as the All-India Women's Conference and the Punjab Women's Welfare Association, began functioning in the areas of promotion of women's education, their role in politics, and their health. They also assisted in fighting the battle that women had fought, for legal change which would thereby impact and thus improve the status of women in society. The dynamism set in the 19th century reform movements paved the way for even more active political and social participation during the early 20th century.

“As nationalist sentiment increased and India moved closer to independence, Sikh women increasingly found themselves in leadership roles”⁹—not only within their religious community but also in wider political spheres. Their work during this period involved a synthesis of traditional Sikh values and modern feminist energies. Such religious-social reforms, rooted traditionally in Sikhism's egalitarian ideals, did more than improve the social standing of women—these furnished an ideological ground upon which to take political consciousness.

⁹Mann, G.S. (2006). *Sikhism and Women: History, Texts, and Experience*. Oxford University Press.

Those very values which Sikhism advocated—justice, equality, and courage—started finding expression not merely within the religious arena but within the domain of public life as well, especially as calls for independence strengthened.

Nationalism and Resistance: Women's Participation in Punjab's Political Awakening and the Fight for Independence (Early 20th Century):

The role of Punjabi women in the struggle for freedom was both politically and personally significant. Their actions reflected not just a determination to secure national independence, but also to create social change and advance gender equality. While much of their lives remains yet to be documented, their efforts were critical in shaping the path to India's independence and the making of modern Punjab. The 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre marked a turning point in the lives of Punjabi women, forcing them to become increasingly active in political protest. Satyawati Devi, Bhag Devi, Pushpa Gujral, and Guran Devi joined the protests, prayer meetings, and hunger strikes. In the next Non-Cooperation Movement, women in cities and towns took part in processions, picketed shops selling foreign liquors and foreign commodities, and went to prison voluntarily—exhibiting great commitment to the cause of liberty. The new developments of the patriot kind towards the beginning of the 20th century introduced ladies as political activists.

Women played central roles in the making of Indian independence, taking part in challenges, boycotts, and political parties. “Punjabi women such as Sushila Nayyar and Amrita Pritam emerged as leading players in the struggle for freedom.”¹⁰ The British offered legal and regulatory environments, which influenced the women's status. The enactment of the Widow's Remarriage Act, 1856, Age of Consent Act, 1891, Government of India Act, 1935, and Right to Property Act, 1937, provided women with some laws, i.e., to vote, right to legally marry again and determine consent. All these achievements gained during the early 20th century were instantly followed by the ruinous rupture of Partition.

¹⁰Sharma, A. (2002). *Women in Indian Society: A Historical Survey*. Pointer Publishers.

The violence and displacement of 1947 was a traumatic experience for millions, among them many Sikh women. Even in the midst of trauma, however, their stories still spoke of dignity, resistance, and resilience—testifying that empowerment is not obliterated by disaster, but remolded and reasserted by it. Whereas Sikh women had traditionally drawn strength from their faith and community to face social and political upheaval, the Partition of 1947 brought a crisis of a new magnitude. The same women who had previously staged protests, supported reform, and preserved families in the face of colonization were now confronted with levels of violence and displacement that were unprecedented. Their early empowerment then protected and burdened them—as they were forced to uphold family honor amidst communal chaos. The resilience that had been built up over generations was now tested in intensely personal and disastrous ways. In order to appreciate the full implications of Partition from the perspective of Sikh women, it is vital to discuss both their acts of resilience and horrific traumas at which they arrived.

Section - II - Partition of Punjab

Survival, and Agency: The Gendered Impact of Punjab's Partition on Women (1947):

With Indian independence on the horizon, a new set of challenges faced women. “The Partition of Punjab during 1947 let loose huge violence, displacement en masse, and profound trauma, in which women suffered worst.”¹¹ Butalia's study identifies the sheer level of violence the women endured around Partition. Historians estimate 75,000 to 100,000 women were abducted and raped throughout these years. In Punjab alone, between 40,000 to 45,000 women were abducted, Muslim women making up about two-thirds of this total. One gruesome example provided in the book is the one at Thoa Khalsa, a village in Rawalpindi district, where about 90 Sikh women allegedly jumped into a well and committed suicide to escape capture and dishonor. These acts were also perceived as martyrdom in their societies. Butalia also touches upon the practice of “honor killings”, in which men, under the compulsion of society and the idea of honor, murdered their own female kin to avert possible rape or conversion. This horrific dimension underscores the deeply entrenched patriarchal frameworks that governed choices in the turmoil of Partition.

¹¹Butalia, U. (2001). *The other side of silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Duke University Press.

While some suffered from communal violence and forced displacement, they also emerged as resilient symbols of resistance and resilience. Subhadra Joshi was among some women who willingly took part in peace initiatives and relief efforts—she established the Shanti Dal to challenge communal disturbances and provide relief to refugees coming in from Pakistan. In the midst of Punjab's Partition chaos in 1947, with the threat of an unimaginable crisis, thousands of women showed extraordinary strength, courage, and a profound commitment to their communities. Far from being passive victims, they assumed active and critical roles—leading groups of refugees, protecting their families, managing relief efforts, and maintaining cultural traditions in the midst of one of the most catastrophic times in the region's history. There was Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a born royal turned devoted freedom fighter. When Partition began, she took the forefront of sending out rescue teams to fetch kidnapped women and uprooted persons. And

after, when she sat on the Constituent Assembly as India's first Health Minister, "she spearheaded establishing health facilities for the refugees—primarily working among women and children."¹² Her efforts facilitated access to sanitation, maternity care, and medical facilities in congested camps. Amrit Kaur was also a votary of gender rights and a votary of rehabilitation programs for the country's reconstruction.

"In Ludhiana and Amritsar cities, Sikh women established large-scale community kitchens, termed langars, to feed the increasing number of displaced families."¹³ These women, most times working in hostile surroundings, extended food, consolation, and hope. Some placed their own safety at risk by accompanying convoys of refugees from West Punjab into Indian-held lands, providing support and protection to those most in danger. Smt. Pushpa Gujral, for example, were renowned for their tireless work, setting up shelters and supporting women in reclaiming their lives after displacement. Some Sikh women even became combatants in protecting their communities. In border constituencies such as Gurdaspur and Ferozepur, they raised unofficial militias, trained young women in rudimentary defense strategies, and guarded refugee camps to drive away danger. When male members of their family were absent or lost, the women stepped into the role of guardianship, maintaining security, offering leadership, and keeping spirits up during perilously unstable periods.

¹²Kaur, D. (2021). "Role of Punjab's Women in the Indian Freedom Struggle". International Journal of All Research Education and Scientific Methods (IJARESM).

¹³Kaur, D. (2021). "Role of Punjab's Women in the Indian Freedom Struggle". International Journal of All Research Education and Scientific Methods (IJARESM).

Teachers and educators among them set up impromptu schools within camps in order to provide ongoing learning opportunities—especially to girls—under the mayhem. These makeshift classrooms provided not just learning but also emotional recovery and a sense of normalcy to war-torn children and migrant children. Several Sikh women were directly involved in the Central Recovery Operation, not just as abductees themselves but as volunteers who were dedicated to assisting others. They worked with government officials and civil society organizations to find missing women, aid in recovery, and advocate for social acceptance upon return—breaking the silence and stigma associated with violence against women at the time of Partition.

Just as important was how Sikh women protected the cultural heritage of their community. In telling stories, religious rituals, and continued practicing of Sikh custom in the camps, they had a clear sense of who they were and shared spiritual comfort. Their roles in preserving memory and culture kept their people rooted amidst an age of extreme uncertainty. Finally, Sikh women at Partition were so much more than survivors—they were the glue of broken societies. They emerged as organizers, caretakers, protectors, and teachers, reinventing the social fabric anew. Their bravery and work not only enabled their communities to survive but established a foundation of resilience that echoes even now.

III. Conclusion

The condition of women in pre-Partition Punjab was characterized by a multifaceted confluence of patriarchal tradition, restricted access to formal schooling, and limited representation in the political sphere. And within this confining social order, the emergence of Sikhism and the energy unleashed by reform movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries provided the basis for a different narrative—one that placed women not as passive objects but as protagonists in the public domain. Sikhism, founded on its principles of gender equality, justice, and bravery, was a formative force in shaping the identities and actions of Punjabi women, especially during periods of crisis.

The Sikh Gurus' teachings focused on the inherent equality of women and men, pushing against centuries-old patriarchal values and imbuing Sikh women with a sense of self-worth and agency. Guru Nanak's statement, "Why call her bad? From her, kings are born," not merely overturned misogynistic dogma but also created a spiritual and social arena in which women could see themselves as equal players in the private sphere of family and home life and in the public arena of politics and war. Guru Gobind Singh's initiation of women into the Khalsa and the conferment of the title "Kaur" further guaranteed the sovereignty, fearlessness, and independence.

These ideals were not just ideological but became lived experiences during the Partition of Punjab in 1947. As stereotypical historical accounts usually portray women as victims of abduction, violence, and trauma, this research discovers more than that. Women like Mai Bhago, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and Subhadra Joshi bucked the victimhood trend and came out as icons of resistance, resilience, and leadership. Whether coordinating rescue operations, delivering medical care in refugee camps, operating community kitchens, or protecting their communities, these women represented the Khalsa ideal of the saint-soldier. Their efforts during Partition were not individual acts of courage but expressions of an entrenched tradition that had long been promoting female engagement in socio-political and religious life.

In truth, Sikhism did more than encourage spiritual equality—it promoted courage, encouraged purpose, and equipped women to face injustice and adversity directly. The Partition, though horrific, was a time of historic awakening that brought this empowerment into the light. Sikh women, fueled by their own spiritual heritage, did not become mute victims but became voices of change, reminding us that religion, when rooted in justice and equality, can be a powerful agent of social change.

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