

Confusion and Trauma suffered by Women during Partition: A Study of selected Short Stories

¹Syed Shaker Hussain; ²Bilal Ahmad Dar & ³Dr. Charu Chitra

¹Ph. D Research Scholar, Department of English, Jiwaji University, Gwalior (India)

²Ph. D Research Scholar, Department of English, Jiwaji University, Gwalior (India)

³Associate Professor, Department of English, Government KRG College, Gwalior (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 07 August 2018

Keywords

Woman, Partition, violence, Abduction, Migration, Community, Riots

*Corresponding Author

Email: scholarimtiyaz[at]gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In partition literature, the paradigm of “woman as a victim” has been used as an important device in the depiction of violence. This paper tries to explore the plight of confusion and trauma of women during partition. This paper focuses on the feminine psyche and experiences as Women suffered the most in the tragedy of the partition. The Partition was an aftermath of colonization and women were victimized during the Partition. The women of a nation are symbols of the motherland. They also represent the primordial connection to the nation as they are agents of reproduction. During the communal riots in India, before and during the 1947 Partition, one community's power over the other could not be shown completely unless the women of the community were overtaken and reduced to objects of abuse. A woman's individuality was erased; their identities as mothers were prioritized, and they were treated as objects to successfully break the motherland.

Women suffered the most in the tragedy of the partition. Women, who were considered to be the honour of their community or nation, were the main targets of inflicting violence/humiliation on the other community. Apart from thousands of women who were killed in the holocaust, more than 75,000 women were abducted and subjected to sexual savagery. These women survived, but were violated sexually by men of the other community and sometimes by men of their own community. Some of them were forcibly married and some others were stripped and paraded. Still some others were passed from hand to hand and sold openly. Some women were mutilated and disfigured. Limbs like breasts of women were branded with triumphal slogans or amputated. Wombs of some women were ripped open and fetuses killed. Women suffered inhuman cruelty for sheer survival. The Governments' Scheme of Recovery of Abducted Women proved to be their second dislocation in most cases. Somehow the abducted women had been used to their fate and lot. And their lives were again ruptured by the forcible recovery. Many of the recovered women were not accepted by their families. Such women were placed in camps and ashrams. Some of them had small children and some others were pregnant. Life was full of torture for them forever Women, who had male relatives like fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, etc., were, somehow, able to resettle their lives with the gradual passage of time. But those women who had lost their close male relatives ended up as prostitutes. The children who lost their parents/guardians in the tragedy immediately became orphans and suffered a great deal. The children who were born of abductions and rapes were a great problem. Deciding the nationality to which they would belong posed great difficulties. People wanted to adopt only male children. Girl children were adopted with the intention of getting maids for domestic work. Having lost parents/guardians and their love and affection, such children suffered greatly.

It was women who suffered most. Yet it was they who picked up all the available tools to rebuild the home and life of

their families. Despite the suffering, a radical recasting of women's identities was made possible by the partition. Forced by the pressure of the circumstances, women made a great psychological shift. The upheaval of migration uprooted them from their domesticity and they moved to the outside world, wanting to work and once again reconstruct their homes. The seeds of equality of women with men were sown at the time of partition. The partition resulted in nothing other than division, difficulties, distress, dislocation, dispossession, destruction, grief, sorrow, and suffering. This immeasurable human suffering of the survivors (and of course, of the victims/sacrificed) finds no expression in history. It is only the history (i.e., the story of leaders, rich, high flown people at the high levels of the society and politics behind the partition) and not the low-story (i.e., the story of the vast majority of the common people at low levels of the society) of the people. The need to construct a glorious biography of the nation (both India and Pakistan) made it necessary that such a biography should remain unsullied by the memory of the tragedy of the partition. To glorify the triumph of nationalism, the tragic face of the freedom struggle required to be rendered invisible. In history, partition could be remembered only as apolitical and constitutional negotiation. History deliberately neglected the division, destruction, survival, and suffering caused by the partition. But literature has given expression to all the sufferings of the survivors. Short stories about the partition picture all the human survival and suffering in all detail, immensity, and intensity.

Mulk Raj Anand's “The Parrot in the Cage” brings out the survival and suffering of an old servant woman. She is an orphan without any relatives of her own, except the parrot in the cage, which she has been looking after as her own son. Though she is an orphan, she has been living independently by earning her living as a maid, cleaning utensils in the big houses in the lane in Lahore. The partition riots and violence begin. The Hindu-Muslim (communal) hatred/vengeance is so strong

that even the old orphan Hindu woman has to escape disguised as a Muslim woman in a burqa. The escape had to take place in such urgency that she could not even tie the rupees, she has earned, in a knot on her dupatta. She reaches Amritsar with her caged parrot. She waits for the Deputy Commissioner to beg him for some money to buy food. The heat of hunger inside and the cracking flames of the hot sun outside assail her. When the Deputy Commissioner arrives in a car, creating a cloud of dust behind, she shoots herself forward to beg him. But she cannot elbow her way in the midst of the rushing storm of refugees. They are all hungry and eager to get help from the Deputy Commissioner. When the crowd of refugees turns uncontrollable, the policemen charge them with lathis. The refugees run helter-skelter in panic. The old woman is brushed aside and she falls on the ground. The keeper of the gram-stall nearby, who has been observing this old woman, fears that she is dead, comes near her and finding her still alive, lifts her up. He makes her sit under the shade of the tree and gives some gram to the parrot. The parrot has been mechanically asking the old woman where she is and what she is doing. She now answers it by saying that she does not know where she is and does not know what to do. The Partition uprooted, dispossessed, and displaced millions of people, turned them into refugees overnight, and reduced them to a state of confusion, panic, and anguish. They did not know where to live and what to do for livelihood. Suffering and suffering alone was in store for them. It was a hell of torture for the refugees before getting into the refugee camps set up on both the sides of the border by the governments.

In Rajinder Singh Bedi's "Lajwanti", the abducted woman, unlike Hashmi's protagonist in "Exile", comes back to her husband, Sunderlal, who rehabilitates her and treats her as a Devi and not as a wife. Sunderlal zealously works for the rehabilitation of abducted and recovered women. He arranges processions for the cause of rehabilitation. His wife had been abducted and he longs to see her again and rehabilitate her. The incident makes him introspect his own attitude towards his wife. He realizes how cruel he had been to her and decides to honour her and treat her well if he finds her again. He pleads with people for abducted women. '... The women who were abducted are innocent. They are victims of the brutality and the rapacity of the rioters... A society which refuses to accept them back, which does not rehabilitate them... is a rotten, a foul society, which should be destroyed...' (p. 57). He implores people to take such women back into their homes, to respect them, and treat them kindly without reminding them of the humiliations they have suffered either by word or gesture. He argues with Narain Baba and his followers and rejects the traditional idea of a Ram Rajya: '...I believe that in Ram Rajya, a man cannot commit a crime against his own self. To inflict pain on oneself is as unjust as it is to hurt someone else... Even today, Lord Ram has thrown Sita out of his home because she was forced to live with Ravana... Did Sita commit any sin? Wasn't she, like our mothers and sisters today, a victim of violence and deceit? ... Is it a question of Sita's truthfulness, faithfulness or is it a question of Ravana's wickedness? ... Once again, our innocent Sitas have been thrown out of their homes...' (p. 60).

Sunderlal is genuine in his concern for abducted women and his feelings for his Lajo. The sight of his genuine personal suffering at the loss of Lajwanti always silences the morally self-righteous and the priest-beguiled critics of the committee. His concern and gentle regard for these women, whom the others refuse to acknowledge, is not hypocritical. Many people refuse to take back their abducted and recovered women on the ground that they are dishonoured. They wish that those women should have taken poison or jumped into wells and died to preserve their virtue and honour like those thousands of women who killed themselves to preserve their chastity during the partition. These recovered women are considered to be cowards, clinging to life. The people have not understood that it needs greater courage to live amidst such suffering than to commit suicide.

When Lajo arrives, Sunderlal sets an example for others by taking her back and giving her a place in his home and heart. Many people appreciate his precept and practice. He treats her with much gentleness and love and calls her Devi instead of Lajo. Lajwanti longs to tell him everything about her blackdays of suffering "so that she could feel clean again" (p. 65). But Sunderlal does not want to listen to her story. He silences all her efforts to tell him by saying, "Let us forget the past! You didn't do anything sinful, did you? Our society is guilty because it refuses to honour women like you as goddesses. It ought to be ashamed of itself. You shouldn't feel dishonoured." (p. 65). Her sorrow remains locked up in her breast. Suspicion and apprehension replace her initial happiness, "not because Sunderlal had begun to mistreat her once again, but because he continued to treat her with excessive kindness" (p. 66). She wants to quarrel with him for silly reason and be his "Lajo" again, but Sunderlal fails to understand her feelings. "She had returned home, but she had lost everything... Sunderlal had neither eyes to see her tears nor the ears to hear her sobs..." (p. 66). "...Just as his earlier violence had denied Lajwanti the right to a life of kindness, his new solicitude fails to satisfy her desire for affectionate regard. He begins to regard her as a "devi". She, on the other hand, longs to cease lamenting for the past, to be accepted as a victim of historical circumstances, to be treated as a human being with flesh and blood who has endured a lot but will not wither when touched, and above all to be embraced as a woman who is physically alive and longs for the generosity of love.

Though Lajwanti returns home and is received and rehabilitated by her husband, she is never given a chance to become her old self, though she yearns to become so. After the abduction, she loses her old identity and never gets it back. Her identity has transformed into the personality of a Devi, venerated by her husband. She suffers quietly. She suffers a tremendous alienation from her husband, but cannot even think of a separation. She suffers because she can never have an association with her husband. She cannot become Lajo, but remains Lajwanti, the touch-me-not, whom her husband does not touch.

Suraiya Qasim's "Where Did She Belong" is a story about the identity of a woman in the context of the partition that means nothing to her. Munnai Bai does not know about her

parents or her community. Her guardian Ma, who runs a brothel, tells her that she was found crying and lying on the road equidistant from a mosque and a temple and that she has called her by the name, Munni Bai, used by both the Hindus and the Muslims, and that she has to do what she does to eat during the day what she earns at night. Of course, parentage and community do not matter in her profession in which only looks and youth are important. And she has both. She is a ravishing beauty at seventeen. She has been famous in Lahore. Every customer prefers her and her only. She is the chief source of income to Ma. Ma and her companions celebrate all the Hindu and the Muslim festivals in their brothel which is open to all the communities. So the identity does not matter to Munni Bai.

Deep inside her heart, Munni Bai does not want to do what she has been doing. But there is no other alternative for her. In the privacy of a closed room, she is totally at the mercy of the master of the moment. Some deal with her brutally which she suffers in silence. With the passage of time, she gets used to every kind of treatment. But her soul suffers deep inside her.

During daytime, she thinks of two customers in particular—Raj Kamal, a Hindu and Jafar Khan, a Muslim. Each claims her to belong to his community, for such a bewitching beauty cannot belong to the other community. Each professes this love to her, promises to stand by her in times of difficulties, and even to marry her “Then began those memorable months of disgrace by the end of which the Hindus had won, the Muslims had won, but humanity had lost” (p.115, emphasis added). Ma and her wards leave Lahore well in time and reach a refugee camp in Delhi without any suffering. Though they are grieved to see countless refugees mourning for the death of their kinsmen, they have no kinsmen but only clients. Jafar Khan and Raj Kamal do not turn up to see Munni Bai either in Pakistan or in India. Clients haunt the brothel of Ma, which she opens in G.B. Road after a few days. She hires the house left vacant by salma, the famous prostitute, who has now gone to Hira Mandi in Lahore. It is a perfect exchange, of people that the governments of both the countries agree to. Munni Bai immediately becomes famous in Delhi also. Rich Rajas and Nawabs repeatedly visit the brothel for her and spend lavishly for the fleshly pleasure, which she gives them.

Despite the enormous destruction of property, the Rajas and Nawabs have enough money to spend on nightly and fleshly passions. Munni Bai wonders “Who lost and who died in the partition?” (p. 117). Partition does not result in any change for her. She cannot understand that the partition mainly resulted in the loss of the subsistence of the common people, uprooting, displacement, and suffering.

Kartar Singh Duggal's “Pakistan Zindabad” is a story about the forcible rehabilitation of a woman called Rakhi. Her real name was Ram Rakhi, but now she is called Allah Rakhi. This shows that she survives the partition riots and killing in which all the Hindus and the Sikhs of the village are killed. Some of the villagers escape. She converts to Islam and marries Sher Baz Khan, who wants to kill her, but lets her go because of the interference of his mother and sister. She adjusts herself to the house and the village in such a way that

she becomes the darling of her husband and is appreciated by the other members of her family and all the people in the village. She loves her village, the farms, the trees, and the waters of the village so much that she wonders how her parents and the other refugees can live away from it. She has a deep sense of association with the village, its people, and even their religion. Except that her parents and her brother have been separated from her, she has not experienced dislocation and uprooting. She is happy and spends many months in bliss.

Then one day, suddenly her brother appears and she is forced to leave the village for India. She now experiences pangs of pain and separation more than she did when she was separated from her parents and her brother. She begs her husband to save her. She is prepared to sacrifice a hundred brothers to be with her husband. She even suggests that they should run away. But her husband is not in a position to do anything. All the conversions that took place during the partition riots are null and void. Rakhi should be sent to India to get back an abducted Muslim woman in exchange. It is the order of the government. No one can do anything to save Rakhi. Her husband falls unconscious being incapable of bearing the grief. Rakhi is in the grip of severe grief of separation. Added to this, she is pregnant now. Yet she must be sacrificed, for the government says no sacrifice is too big for Pakistan. She falls down in her room.

But after some time, she comes out dressed in a rich bridal suit. Sher Baz Khan brings her trunk of clothes and other articles. He also gives her the hand-fan on which Rakhi herself has embroidered “Pakistan Zindabad” and she leaves for India. She had escaped the dislocation during the riots, but she cannot escape it during the rehabilitation.

In Bhisham Sahni's “Pali”, we find yet another displaced child, Pali, who gets separated from his parents, falls into the hands of a childless Muslim couple and finally gets restored to his parents. Circumstances beyond human control and communal and religious fanaticism play their own part in adding to the suffering of both the child and his parents. The story begins with the following lines:

Life goes on and on. Its ends never meet. Neither in the mundane world of realities nor in fiction. We drag on drearily in the hope that someday these ends would meet. And sometimes we have the illusion that the ends have really met. (p. 120).

Manoharlal's family joins the streams of people who get into the Lorries, stationed one by one in front of a refugee camp in a small town on the other side of the newly created borders. It is a wholesale uprooting enforced on the unfortunate minorities. Pali, a boy of four years, the son of Manoharlal gets separated from pitaji. Manoharlal frantically searches for his lost child, in vain. The lorry cannot wait, for the people want to cross the borderline before nightfall for safety and survival. “The hearts of the refugees had dried of all sentiments. The same Pali had once got lost and the whole mohalla had gone out in search of him” (p. 121). But now they cannot wait for Pali. Their safety and survival are more important than the life

of one child. Manoharlal and his wife are left with no other alternative but to start their journey for sheer survival.

Kaushalya, Manoharlal's wife, weeps continuously for her lost son. His words of hope and consolation do not have any effect on her. Though he hopes to find the boy again, he pessimistically resigns to his fate: "What can we do if we don't find him? God has been benign enough to spare a child for us. We must be thankful to him for that. You know Lekhraj 's three children were killed before his very eyes. It is God's will. We must resign ourselves to it." (p. 122). But the motherly heart of Kaushalya still suffers for her son. She cannot resign herself to God's will, which has still something else in store for them. On the way, though many other Lorries pass safely, some marauder with swords and spears attack their lorry. The baby in the lap of Kaushalya is forcibly snatched and killed. Manoharlal and Kaushalya have left their home and property. They lose their son. They are robbed of their possessions by the marauders and their baby is killed. What a suffering for survival.

The pessimistic attitude does not mitigate the unbound pain and suffering of Manohar and Kaushalya. Manohar silently resolves to go back to his old town in Pakistan to locate his child and bring him back. At the other side, Pali reaches the home of Shakur Ahmad and Zenab, a childless Muslim couple, who happily decide to adopt him and bring him up, if he is not claimed by anyone. Pali weeps for his parents for two days and finally forgets his sorrow by taking protection and consolation on Zenab's bosom.

A woman's bosom is the greatest shield against man's afflictions and the greatest source of love and affection. Zenab had, it seemed, made a citadel of love for the child. For the first time in her life, Zenab was overwhelmed by a sense of job, which only a woman bereft of a child can experience. A tiny delicate body was clinging to her as if the child was specially made to fit into the contours of her body.(p. 123).

None comes to claim him. Shakur and Zenab feel happy. Pali also becomes a little communicative on the third day. At the insistence of the Maulvi—and not the Muslim couple—he is circumcised and converted to Islam. He is renamed as Altaf Hussain, who gradually adjusts himself to the new ways of life. The irony is that while Altaf Hussain fills the life of the Muslim couple with happiness and joy, he, as Pali, has filled the life of his Hindu parents with sorrow and suffering.

Being unable to bear his sorrow and stand his wife's distressed distraction, Manoharlal repeatedly appeals to the government's establishment to trace his lost child and himself makes many trips with the government search party to the old town in Pakistan. After many abortive attempts, he, finally, traces his son after two years. But the issue of returning the child takes on a religious slant, with a Hindu-Muslim question. The Maulvi, the police constables, and others think that "by not sending away the child they were doing a service to religion—something which was considered to be a pious act"(p. 132).

The Muslim couple tries to avoid the search party for many months. At last, the magistrate conducts a trial in which Manoharlal has to give proofs. Manoharlal undergoes torturous suffering when Altaf does not recognize him. Finally, he is relieved when the boy recognizes him and his wife as pitaji and mataji in an old photograph. But he also recognizes Shakur and Zenab as abbaji and ammi in another photograph. Manoharlal's venture is about to fail. But his request to Zenab—"Bahen, I'm not begging you for my child. I'm begging you for my wife's life. She has lost both her children. She misses Pali very much. His absence is driving her insane. Day and night she keeps thinking of him. Please have pity on her"(p. 137)—yields fruit. Zenab understands the mother's pain and sends Altaf with Manoharlal. She is both humane and human. What religions cannot solve is solved by human compassion. "Her final heroic action—giving up her adopted son for the sake of the grieving Hindu mother—only serves to darken her life for all times to come". But she never minds her bleak future. She only hopes to see him once every year at the time of "Id", as Manoharlal promises to send him to her.

The boy Altaf has, again, to undergo suffering in readjusting himself to the Hindu way of life. The process begins as soon as he crosses the border. The social worker whisks off his rumi cap and throws out of the jeep. At home, the Maulvi's Hindu counterpart, the Pundit, performs the boy's mundan with a havan. And the boy's head is shaved and a tuft is left. Pali is first converted to Islam and then purified into Hinduism. "The image of Pali, a little innocent boy, first shorn of his foreskin, then of his hair by carping zealots, is infinitely moving"(107). In this clash of religions and communities, Pali, his Hindu parents, and adoptive Muslim parents undergo indescribable suffering. The separation, conversion, and purification torture Pali who becomes a puppet in the hands of religious and communal fanatics

The survivors of the partition feel doomed because they cannot forget the happy past in the cruel present. Even if they have settled down in new homelands and thrived well, there has always been the memory of the past, pinching them deep inside their hearts and minds; and the intense nostalgia, tearing them with yearning for the lost homeland of happiness and harmony. There is no end to the pinching memory and the painful nostalgia till death. So the survivors have to suffer till their death. Suffering is a part of the lives of the survivors. There are many other short stories that depict the same theme of confusion and trauma of the victims of the greatest tragedy in the recent history of South Asia. Their survival, after the loss of all the property, home, hearth, native place, motherland, nation, culture, and tradition filled their lives with agony, pain, and suffering. The analysis of the short stories proves the fact that the survivors faced innumerable difficulties and immeasurable pains. Disintegration of the established social patterns and structures and, as a result, the ruptured social relationships and lives resulted in indescribable and incomparable human suffering. Communal and fanatic feelings rose high in the process of the struggle for independence that turned out to be the communal struggle for political security and power.

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