

Impact of Partition on Women

Introduction: The independence of India in August 1947 had dual implication. On the one hand it meant the exit of the British; on the other hand, it meant division of India as – Hindu dominated India and Muslim dominated Pakistan. The result was disastrous. It created disharmony among the people by defining communities based on religious identities. In the human history Partition is one of the greatest migrations wherein Muslims moved to newly formulated Pakistan while the Hindus and Sikhs moved to India. According to records, more than 15 million people were uprooted and nearly 2 million were massacred in the massive communal violence. Partition was not only a division of political territory but a division of the people as they were separated from their homes, livelihood, family and friends. The harrowing and spine-chilling events of 1947 had shaken the faith of the people in the innate human beings.

Impact of Partition on Women: Most part of the recorded history of India's Partition has stories of suffering of men, women, children, of how the event shook the lives of all those who lived through it. No account of Partition is complete without the numbing details of violence against women. Significantly, Partition did affect women differently than it affected men. Violence was almost instigated by man and it was painful at the most for women from both the sides of border they suffered humiliation. They were separated or disowned from family, auctioned, faced sexual violence, walked naked in processions at streets and at religious places, sold into prostitution, etc. Over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were abducted, raped, and mutilated. They were forced to commit suicide in order to protect the family honour. Furthermore, their children, born out of rapes were deprived of basic rights as they were considered illegal and wrong. Thus, women became the site to prove religious supremacy over the other. The history of Partition is full of such incidences. Partition, thus, certainly created a generation of widows, unwed mothers, mad women, abandoned women, thousands of abandoned children, etc. The violence clearly reveals that women were not treated as humans but rather as markers of national and communal pride. Hence, in Bapsi Sidhwa's words women were the "spoils of war, whether they were Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs." (Defend Yourself Against Me). The traumatic violence meted out to the numberless women demolished their sense of self. If they did not die a physical death but they died many psychological deaths. They dealt with trauma either of these two ways – they preoccupied themselves with rehabilitating themselves materially and began a new life; or they remained stuck in the past by ignoring the present and thereby denied themselves future.

Portrayal of Violence in Partition Literature: Feminist studies on women in Partition state that no significant written record exists about the women victims who were abducted, raped or murdered. Their narratives are absent under the cover of "larger narratives" in the "written history" of India. However, the havoc the Partition played in women's lives is intensely recorded in literatures of India. The writers across the nation like Chaman Nahal, Khushwant Sing, Manohar Malgaonkar, Bapsi Sidhwa, Manto, Bhishm Sahani. etc. as well as poets like Amruta Pritam, Ahmad Faiz, etc. have tried to express, memorise and lament the legacy of Partition in their writing. Through their writing, they have

given voice to the horrific untold stories of women. Examination of the fictional account or personal Partition narrative of women protagonists, help us understand the victimization of women at psychological, social, political, economic and familial level.

In *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Sing fictionalises the reality through many incidences and situations that show women were made victim of the communal hatred and were abused for revenge. For example, the ghost train arrives at Mano Majra with women and children huddled in a corner. Their eyes dilated with horror and their open mouths show the intensity of violence. Sundari, the young newly married daughter of Hukum Chand's servant faces tragic end of her love when their bus is attacked. The mob cuts her husband's penis, gives it to her and finally rapes her. Breasts of women were cut off to intensify the furore of revenge; the veils of women were taken off, they were stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped. Some jumped into the well or burned themselves rather than fall into the hands of Men to protect their purity. Those who could not commit suicide were paraded naked in the streets, raped in public and then murdered. These events show how women were used as a tool to take revenge on the opponent community which has done the same heinous killing of their women. The novel also projects male attitude towards women when they are shown easily and casually talking about raping mothers, sisters and daughters if anyone raises his eyebrows at Others' women. Women became commodity for the army officers as well when they listed women with property and goods as land, house, etc. Men were instigated for revenge and were challenged to abduct two women from opponent community if their one woman is abducted or raped. The appeal and the instigation reveal the way woman's sexuality was manipulated. Nooran goes to Jugga's house with the hope that he or his mother will help her stay in Mano Majra but because she is a Muslim, she has to migrate to Pakistan even if she is carrying Jugga's, a Hindu's child in her stomach. This event reveals women's helplessness and inability in deciding their future.

The short stories under study too highlight the horrible treatment meted out to women during Partition. Its impact was horrendous and shameful to the entire humanity. Their silenced history comes to light through these narratives. Some stories also portray women who underwent remarkable process of rebuilding their identity by burying past and establishing their new selves.

Monto's *Toba Tek Singh* subtly mentions Bishen Singh's daughter, Roop Kaur was raped or abducted when his family was migrating to India. In Manik Bandopadhyay's *The Final Solution*, Pramatha cheats on women on the pretext of helping their family to survive in an unknown nation. Instead of feeling sympathised with the migrated families, particularly helpless women even if they are from his own community, he tries to tempt them into prostitution. The writer has poignantly portrayed the horrific and humiliating experiences the women had to go through in the hands of heartless, selfish and shameless people in the guise of social workers during Partition. The story also shows that in order to help their families to survive in the unknown nation, some of the women had to accept prostitution.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Defend Yourself Against Me* shows how the humanity was debased due to hatred among people who were once friends and neighbours. Ammiji's past clearly reveals how children, men and women meted different fates. In the communal riots men and children were massacred while young girls and women were sexually violated and humiliated. Those who could not kill themselves were raped and sold in auction as vegetables

or fish are sold. Pregnant women were paraded naked in the procession and had to bear the lewd comments and nasty gestures of the men watching them. Their stomachs were slashed and the babies were dashed against walls. Some women went mad and tried to end their life. However, women like Ammiji, came out of the trauma and could survive only when they forgave the wrong doers. *A Leaf in the Storm* by Lalithambika Antharjanam tells the story of an unmarried girl, Jyoti who represents the girls who were unfortunate victims of multiple rapes. They remained pregnant and had to carry the burden of the hatred and crime all through their life. However, some like Jyoti got support from the strength of maternal instincts. They found a reason for survival in the child.

Partition, a national catastrophe / disaster created havoc in the lives of every section of people in both the newly born nations – India and Pakistan. Everyone suffered its burnt. However, for women, the burnt was different. Her body was the site to ‘dishonour’ and ‘vengeance’ for the other community – be that was Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. The Partition fiction poignantly reveals the disturbing nature and impact of violence on them.
