

The Dislocated Women: A Study Identifying and Analysing the Voices of Women in Partition Literature

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Abstract

The biggest migration British India hadwitnessed was the partition of 1947 followed by the independence from British rule. Drawing borders in the name of religion came at a cost of the most horrifying massacre seen by the Indians and the people of the newly created nation of Pakistan. The impact was shared by every person belonging to every community, caste or creed; but it is women who suffered silently in the process and whose stories were silenced and marginalised from the history. This study deals with these marginalised women who witnessed the unfortunate events of partition. Women whose senses of belonging have always been linked to the patriarch of the house did not identify with any border other than the borders of her house. Subjected to an insecure present within the borders of the household and an uncertain future with the new political and national borders drawn, they shared a bond among themselves of collective trauma and shared grief. This study analyses the stories of Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, Bhisham Sahni and Amrita Pritam with a focus on the women characters living on both sides of the dividing line to bring forth their share of trauma. The study also speaks about the contradiction women faced between the concept of belonging and the concept of the nation as a religious state that was newly introduced to them. As their honour was closely linked with the honour of the family, the period of Partition saw murders of women glorified as martyrdom. But those who were abducted and later came back were branded as a disgrace. In the end, they never belonged anywhere. Amidst the chaos, they struggled to find a “country” of their

own which they found in the stories of these writers who gave them voices which were never heard otherwise.

Keywords: Partition Literature, Women, Sense of Belonging, Trauma.

Introduction

Ye daagh daagh ujala ye shab-gazida sahar

Vo intezaar tha jis ka ye voh sahar to nahin

(Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Subh-e-Azadi)

This light, smeared and spotted, this night-bitten dawn

This isn't surely the dawn we waited for so eagerly

(Translated by Baran Farooqi)

The dawn of independence brought with it the horrors of partition. In the above lines, Faiz Ahmed Faiz portrays the disillusionment that came with the independence of the Indian subcontinent from British rule. The turmoil associated with partition and the violence that followed tainted the occasion with horror. The subcontinent encountered one of the greatest migrations the world ever witnessed. The divide gave rise to communal dilemmas that came with the religious tensions, genocide, abductions, sexual violence, and forced conversions. Urvashi Butalia writes, "Never before or since have had so many people exchanged their homes and countries so quickly" (Butalia 17:3). And she describes the atrocities of this migration by quoting the number of deaths, "Estimates of the dead vary from 200,000 to two million ...about 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own (and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion)" (Butalia 17:3).

The integral question here remains, why is it still relevant to read and analyse partition narratives? This can be answered by looking at the political history of the country following the partition. The communal divide it propagated lasts till date,

and it is evident in the post-independence events, be it the Sikh riots of 1984, the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 and its aftermath or the present-day Delhi riots, which happened in the frenzy of the debate around the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The memory of partition becomes alive through these recurring events, as Urvashi Butalia mentions:

In each of these instances, Partition stories and memories were used selectively by the aggressors: militant Hindus were mobilized using the one-sided argument that Muslims had killed Hindus at Partition, they had raped Hindu women, and so they must in turn be killed, and their women subjected to rape (Butalia 17:7).

This historical event of partition and its consequent communal violence has been represented through historical records, memoirs, testimonies etc. Literature as Jill Didur calls it “offering an alternative ‘record’ of the period” (Didur 2006:4) was widely read in post-independence India. The representations in historical accounts of the period can be problematised as their approach was to record statistical representation of the experience of violence and often such approach neglected the ‘everyday’ experience. Hence, the representations can be scrutinised for universalising the experience which is in contrast with the ‘pluralising’ literary narrative. Didur highlights the same:

...early commentary on partition literature characterised it as ‘documenting’ rather than re-presenting the violence, and thus the interpretive function of reading and writing about the partition, the discursive construction of subjectivity, agency, nationalism, and history that are involved in its narrativization, is not considered (Didur 2006:5).

The literary representations of the everyday experience thus deconstruct and reconstruct the hegemonic narrative of

partition. This very reconstruction of the narrative also involves a gendered perspective which questions the historiography of partition. Didur notes, “A gendered understanding of the partition necessitates a shift in the scholar’s attention from the public to the private, from the high political story to the local, everyday account” (Didur 2006:7). The rewriting and re-examining is thus radicalised as it has an underlying discursive dimension to it. In this context Didur further says,

...reading and writing about literature representing women’s lives involves straddling both these spheres, making visible the binary construction of the public and private implicated in nationalist discourse, patriarchal power relations, and the way in which women’s bodies were singled out as privileged sites of violence at the time of partition (Didur 2006:7).

One part of the catastrophe was violence against women. The memoirs and stories around partition help trace instances of women being raped, forcefully converted, married, and their bodies mutilated and tattooed with symbols of other religions. These atrocious acts of violence can be comprehended as objectifying women as targets for physical as well as discursive violence. The image of a woman during the time of independence was identified symbolically with that of the nation. The juxtaposition of this image of a woman with that of a nation (widely propagated image of ‘Bharat mata’) makes her an object which needs to be protected by the ‘self’ and can be defiled by the ‘other’. This became a part of popular nationalist discourse during the time of partition. Patriarchy became an agency in not just objectifying women but also governing their experiences in the partition narrative which makes Butalia question, “How does ‘history’ look when seen through the eyes of women?” (Butalia 2017:21). This could be

further understood by what Hélène Cixous defines as a “phallogocentric tradition” of writing history as she explains, “It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallogocentrism” (Cixous et al. 76:879). Therefore, the literary accounts about women’s experiences destabilise the totalising accounts of partition and also questions the “self-admiring” nationalist discourse.

The absence of women from the grand narratives of partition history has often been contested by writers. In this context, Butalia argues, “The men seldom spoke about women. Women almost never spoke about themselves; indeed they denied they had anything ‘worthwhile’ to say, a stance that was often corroborated by their men” (Butalia 2017:126). However, this silence was challenged by counter-narratives offered by prominent radical writers in their stories representing and recovering the personal experiences of trauma, disillusionment and violation of the body. These counter-narratives do not hand over a mere historical record to the readers but rather represent and politicise the local and private experiences of women in the form of radicalism against the conventional hegemonic structures of historical narratives of partition. The very idea of literary radicalism in India was also upheld by the aspect of gender and its prominent role in constructing the radical discourse. Therefore, this “regendered history” provides a vast space for the experiences of women not just articulated by the women writers but also in male writers’ works. Arguing on the same lines, Priyamvada Gopal in her book, *Literary Radicalism in India* defines the “regendered history” as, “Such a history also needs to look at the ways in which male writers dealt with questions of gender, not only in their treatment of such things as ‘the woman question’, but in relation to their own subjectivity as men in a patriarchal context...” (Gopal 2005:11).

The paper posits that the search for women's voices can be efficiently undertaken in literary works instead of the hegemonic and patriarchal historical records. The choice of the fictional literary works has been made as they depict representations which are radicalised by the concerned writers. These representations have been analysed and studied in the works of Saadat Hasan Manto, Amrita Pritam, Jyotirmoyee Devi and Rajinder Singh Bedi. These writers were part of the Progressive Writers Association which ventured out to problematise the nationalist discourse with the dynamic process of self-critique. As part of the same process, they gave prominence to gender by politicising and radicalising it in the formation of the cultural discourse around it and thereby providing another reason behind theoretical consideration of reexaminations of their literary works. The argument in the paper highlights the underlying concept of honour associated with women. This juxtaposes the public and the private realms governed by the politics of patriarchy; the disillusionment experienced by women in terms of altered and lost identities; and lastly the trauma experienced by the women who were subjected to violence, not just physical but discursive too. These issues will be examined through the texts: Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*, Rajinder Singh Bedi's *Lajwanti*, Saadat Hasan Manto's *The Return*, and Jyotirmoyee Devi's *The River Churning*.

Women and Honour

The metanarrative of partition has been homogenising, as discussed in the previous section, placing women in the periphery of the partition narrative, but what is important to understand is that women as a category also became discursive for the 'idea of nationalism' propagated in the upheaval. The nationalist movement created a strong image of strength to awaken the nationalist spirits and mobilise the people. The

image was of a 'mother' who was glorified as a nurturer and was used as a metaphor for the nation. This discursive image was associated with women of the nation and hence women's 'honour' was juxtaposed with the 'honour' of the nation. The patriarchal notion of honour has been woven around women's sexual purity and chastity and this very notion makes women symbolic in the nationalist movement. As a consequence of the same, women became the central site of violence during the catastrophe and describing it, Paulomi Chakraborty writes, "... how the family, the community, the nation and the state collude in fixing "woman" as a symbol of honour and therefore, as a location of violence" (Chakraborty 2014:42). Further, Butalia also argues,

If the severing of the body of the country recalled the violation of the body of the nation-as-mother, the abduction and rape of its women, their forcible removal from the fold of their families, communities and country, represented a violation of their bodies as real — not metaphorical — mothers (Butalia 2017:188).

Butalia describing the brutality women underwent, writes, "Many were paraded naked in the streets, several had their breast cut off, their bodies were tattooed with marks of the 'other' religion; in a bid to defile the so-called 'purity' of the race, women were forced to have sex with men of the other religion, many were impregnated" (Butalia 2017:132). These acts of tremendous violence depict the idea of women being symbolic of land in terms of a nation that can be conquered or defiled by violating a woman's symbolic body.

The atrocities women had to undergo because of the association of the concept of honour were not limited to the sectarian strife preceding partition but also continued in the post-partition period. Women from almost all the communities were abducted, converted, or impregnated by their abductors.

To restore the defiled ‘honour’ of the communities, the recovery of these women became an integral ‘duty’ of the ‘dominant’ citizen of the patriarchal nation-state. Hence, the Central Recovery Operation was employed to recover the abducted women and Didur explains it as an operation “mounted by the Indian government in 1948 to ‘recover’ women ‘abducted’ during the migrations and restore them to their ‘original’ extended families and communities” (Didur 2006:44). These abductions destabilise the hegemonic patriarchal construction of the nation-state. Hence, it was crucial to ‘restore’ them to their ‘original’ domestic sphere. But the question is, what happens to the accounts of the ‘everyday’ experience of the abducted women? As mentioned in the previous section, the metanarrative subsidises these personal experiences. There is absolute silence as far as these experiences are concerned and such silence creates a gap in the historical narrative. Hence, literary works can be used to fill the silenced accounts of abducted women and offer alternative perspectives to the state’s historical archives. The idea of ‘honour’ in the association of women and its consequences in the accounts of abducted women is analysed using three literary works, Rajinder Singh Bedi’s *Lajwanti*, Jyotirmoyee Devi’s *The River Churning* and Amrita Pritam’s *Pinjar*.

Rajinder Singh Bedi’s short story *Lajwanti* published in 1951 in Urdu narrates the plight of a woman of the same name who was abducted during the sectarian strife and on her return; she is surprised to get a new identity assigned by her husband, Sunder Lal. Through this story, Bedi brings forth the stigma associated with abducted women and the families or communities’ reluctance in ‘taking them back’. As Didur mentions “...Bedi’s narrative as a critique of the power relations that inflected the sociopolitical practices surrounding the Recovery Operation.” (Didur 2006:57) Bedi questions the patriarchal norms about women’s chastity and disrupts the

binary of private and public spaces. The eagerness to 'recover' his wife and the reluctance in 'accepting' her, politicised Sunder Lal's position, as Bedi juxtaposed his 'private' choice with that of the nation's quest to 'recover' the abducted women. Bedi tries to give a voice to a common man's response to a woman's plight in this context. He says, "We will not take these sluts, left over by the Muslims" (Bedi 2014). Sunder Lal's 'acceptance' of his wife can be scrutinised on the basis of his reluctance and his lack of interest in listening to Lajwanti's account of abduction. He silences her 'experience' during the turmoil which reinstates the politically dominant patriarchal narrative of the divide which created no room for women's accounts. It is because the voices of the 'dishonoured' women were tarnishing the political image of an 'honourable' nation or community.

Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel *The River Churning* (*Epar Ganga, Opar Ganga*) initially titled *Itihasey Stree Parva* meaning the woman chapter in history, was first published in 1967. Devi, through the initial title, critiqued the absence of the woman's chapter from history. The novel is a coming-of-age story of Sutara, who was orphaned during the partition riots in Bengal at a very young age. She was taken care of by a Muslim family who was her neighbour. They found her in an unconscious state with a bruised body. She, on returning to her extended family witnesses the reluctance in accepting her into the family. Devi has constructed a silence around the supposed sexual assault of Sutara; "She wanted to reach the mother and began to run, but stumbled and fell. Then everything went blank." (Devi 1995:8) By doing so, Devi critiqued the cultural concept of honour associated with women. Didur argues, "...by leaving the details of Sutara's supposed sexual assault unverifiable to both Sutara and her relatives, *The River Churning* critiques the patriarchal logic of a 'cultural system that dictates that rape signifies a woman's shame and the

dishonour of her male protectors”’. (Didur 2006:126) When she is ‘restored’ to her extended family, the reluctance to rehabilitate her into the family depicts the ‘modern’ Hindu nationalist state’s failure and testifies to the woman’s status as a commodity.

Sutara on her return also becomes an object, an object that was ‘defiled’ and ‘demeaned’ and hence became a sight of spectacle for others who were in a ‘chaste’ and ‘superior’ position. “Sutara became an object of curiosity to the other family members, some of whom came out of their rooms to have a good look at her; others peered at her from within.” (Devi 1995:31). Throughout the novel, Sutara has been looked down upon as a ‘dishonoured’ object, despite having no clarity about her supposed sexual assault. Her brother’s mother-in-law disapproves of her as she considers her as ‘polluted’ and expresses her conservative Hindu patriarchal mindset by saying,

Have you taken leave of your senses? She has spent so many days in a Muslim household, six long months. What is left of her caste, you tell me! It was good of you to bring her over, that is alright. But keep her away from household work as you would a low caste *hadi* or Bagdi. Look at what she is doing, polluting everything. Who knows what she has done, the kind of food she has eaten there! (Devi 1995:36).

Didur describes it as “The novel depicts how Sutara is forced to endure the scorn of her community by becoming a scapegoat whose stigmatization sustains a patriarchal view of Indian nationalism” (Didur 2006:128).

The reflections of the discursive concept of honour can also be witnessed in the novel *Pinjar* by Amrita Pritam published in 1950 in Punjabi. The protagonist of the story *Pinjar*, Pooro is abducted before her wedding as revenge for a family rivalry

between the Sahukars and the Shaikhs. Her abductor, Rashida takes her as his wife and gives her a new name, Hamida. Poro in the initial days of her abduction tries to escape from Rashida and on returning to her father's house was asked to go back to Rashida as she is now considered impure. Her abduction has defiled the honour of her family and therefore, her father denies her rights over her house saying, "Who will marry you now? You have lost your religion and your birthright. If we dare to help you, we will be wiped out without a trace of blood left behind to tell of our fate" (Pritam 2015:22). Similar discourse is also seen when Poro pleads Rashida to take her back, and in reply, he says, "...you have no place in that family anymore! If they let you in even once, not one of their Hindu friends and relatives will take a drop of water in their house. And you have been with me for fifteen days." (Pritam 2015:18-19). This again can be seen as politicising Poro as a site of honour for her family and her abduction is taken as defiling the honour of the family. The works discussed above not only state the position of women during the time of partition but also analyse the politics of honour associated with women, nation and community. In doing so, the position of a woman was politicised as an object which needs to be protected by the men and if the honour was defiled, the woman was to be disowned by the family and community.

Dislocation and the Sense of Disillusionment

Another aspect of this violence against women is that it was followed by dislocation and uprooting. This created a sense of disillusionment among these women whose identities were destructed. The identities attributed to the displaced and dislocated women became a key aspect of discourse in the partition narrative. In the context of partition, patriarchy has been defining these identities for women in their association with the patriarch of the house, be it her husband, father,

brother or her abductor. Chakraborty tracing this association of women with the patriarch of the house quotes Gyanendra Pandey, "... for she 'belongs' to someone else, and therefore to his caste, nationality and religion" (Chakraborty 2014:45).

During the partition, when women were abducted, assaulted, and forcefully converted by the abductors, how did they react to this displacement? And if they were recovered, what was the disillusionment they faced? There were numerous reasons for their disillusionment, and one major reason was a disrupted sense of belonging. They were 'uprooted' forcefully and 'placed' in a new domestic sphere to which they could not relate. In most cases, they were forced to live with the abductor with whom they were unable to build a sense of belongingness. The others who were 'recovered' were not properly rehabilitated into the family and community, and were labelled as 'impure'. This created a sense of disillusionment. To end their life-long sorrows and overcome disillusionment many of these women committed suicide. The issue of disillusionment has been critically studied by examining the three texts: *Pinjar*, *Lajwanti* and *The River Churning*.

In Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* Rashida after abducting Pooro takes her as his wife and gives her a new name, Hamida. The name assigned, enforces upon her a new faith and individuality. The disillusionment she faced due to her dislocation from her father's house to her husband's house was not resolved, and she was given a new identity with which she could not identify herself. Describing this disillusionment, Pritam writes,

In her dreams, when she met her old friends and played in her parents' homes, everyone still called her Pooro. At other times she was Hamida. It was a double life; Hamida by day, Pooro by night. In reality, she was just a skeleton, without a shape or a name (Pritam 2015:25).

Further, Pritam describes her loss of identity and disconnection with her husband, Rashida by stating, “Hamida realised that she belonged to the people whose year’s harvest had been reduced to ashes. How could she identify herself with one who was the perpetrator of the crime?” (Pritam 2015:83).

A similar crisis has been portrayed by Bedi in *Lajwanti*. Sunder Lal’s wife Lajwanti, was abducted by a Muslim. She had spent time in the Muslim household and on her return her husband found her to be healthier than before. In this context, the abductor seems to be less brutal than her husband, yet she identifies herself solely with her husband when she says, “No...he never said anything to me. He did not beat me, but I was terrified of him. You beat me but I was never afraid of you...” (Bedi 2014). This brings the reader to a juncture where the functioning of violence against women in a patriarchal structure can be witnessed in both the private and public sphere which is explained by Chakraborty as, “... how the extraordinary violence of partition, if different in degree, is contiguous to the violence that constitutes the “everyday world” of women, perpetrated by patriarchy that structures both the familial and the national” (Chakraborty 2014:42). Hence, the violence witnessed by Lajwanti resonates with the domestic violence she underwent ‘every day’ from her husband. The latter has been normalised as being confined in the private space of her household and the former being defied and silenced as bringing shame to her family. Furthermore, Lajwanti has been given a new identity by her husband on her return. He no more beats her and treats her like a fragile being, calling her a “devi”. The disillusionment she underwent was because of the new life given to her by her own husband on her recovery from the abductor describing the same Bedi writes, “And in the end, she could no longer recognise the Lajo she had known. She had been rehabilitated but not accepted” (Bedi 2014).

A similar account of disillusionment can be examined in Jyotirmoyee Devi's *The River Churning*. Sutara, the protagonist, is reunited with her family but she struggles and suffers from the 'sense of belonging' as her family fails to accept her. She realises she felt more affection towards her Muslim neighbours, who took care of her for six months, but still, she could not 'belong' there because of the communal differences. On the other hand, she feels disconnected from her own family and community who label her as 'polluted'. The question, where she belongs to?, becomes the reason for her disillusionment. At last, she could relate only with the orphaned girls at the hostel in Delhi, who were also victims of the riots. Devi describes this disillusionment as a state where the survivors, "...had forgotten which tradition they belonged to" (Devi 1995:52). Another aspect that becomes crucial in the disillusionment of Sutara is the lack of truth about the happenings of the night the attack on her house took place. Throughout the novel, Sutara fails to recall what happened to her on the night of the attack; likewise, she does not remember her mother and sister's fate. She assumes them to be dead. She gets to hear a snippet of the fatal night from Moinu who tells her, "You were lying half-dead. Aziz bhai and the others lifted you on their shoulders and brought you here. Fakir told us that they had beaten you so badly" (Devi 1995:17). Similarly, the silence around Lajwanti's experience in Bedi's *Lajwanti* also becomes another reason for her disillusionment. Sunder Lal could not listen to his wife's account of her abduction as it is in this very ignorance; he has managed to accept her back. She wanted to tell him everything but Sunder Lal stopped her saying, "Lets forget the past; you did not commit any sin. What is evil is the social system which refuses to give an honoured place to virtuous women like you. That doesn't harm you, it only harms the society."(Bedi 2014). Her personal account of her abduction remains only to herself and as Bedi

mentions, “Lajwanti’s secret remained locked in her breast. She looked at her own body which had, since the partition, become the body of a goddess. It no longer belonged to her.” (Ibid)

Didur in one of her arguments discusses the failure to rehabilitate these women and their subsequent disillusionment. She writes, “The survival and return of these women to the community cast aspersions on their virtue and honour (as it is defined by patriarchal codes) and challenges expectations concerning women’s sexual passivity outside the domestic sphere of the extended family” (Didur 2006:61). Hence, patriarchy becomes an agency functioning in the process of disillusionment of these women.

Experience of Trauma

Amidst the crisis, what was universally experienced was the trauma faced by people who witnessed the partition of the sub-continent. Devi in *The River Churning* writes, “Of all this false talk, cacophony and much useless sprinkling of scented water, was reborn a divided, truncated, blood-stained Bharat.” (Devi 1995:17). Women were doubly victimised in this transaction. In the layers of silence of women victims, hid the trauma they received as their share in the divide. Although the struggle for independence was fruitful, women suffered extreme violence, both physical and mental during the period. These accounts of trauma represented in various works form the ‘memory’ of partition narrative; memories of inhumane and disdainful actions which testify to the ugly reality of partition that made women central to the sectarian violence.

The trauma experienced by women can be witnessed in the character of Puroo (Hamida), who, on the birth of her son from her abductor and husband Rashida, could not accept him as her own. Hamida’s trauma is described by Pritam as, “... this boy... this boy’s father... all mankind... all men... men who

gnaw a woman's body like a dog gnawing a bone and like a dog consuming it" (Pritam 2015:35). The traumatic experience she had, with Rashida, who converted her and impregnated her without her consent, had left her with no affection for her son. She took him as "...planted inside her by force" (Pritam 2015:35). Through the act of reluctantly accepting the son as her own, Pritam brings out the magnitude of trauma experienced by Hamida. This trauma was a result of being completely denied any will over her own life, which was initially governed by her father and later by her husband who apparently was her abductor.

Although Pooro, Lajwanti and Sutara shared the partition trauma through their loss of identities, it is in the character of Sakina in Saadaat Hasan Manto's *The Return*, that one finds the utmost horrors of partition. In this work, he represents the ugly reality of partition. Sakina is the daughter of Sirajuddin, who was separated from her father on the way from Amritsar to Lahore during the riots. Sirajuddin sends a search party to rescue his daughter. The father is filled with joy on his daughter's return. He is unaware of the fact that the rescuers he sent for his daughter became her assaulters. This also brings into light the beastly spirit which took over the entire human race during those times.

As mentioned above, it was not just the men of one religious community who were assaulting the women of the other community. It is rather difficult to draw a distinction as to who were the perpetrators of the crime. Manto recreates the trauma experienced by Sakina through his intense description of the scene where Sakina starts opening her salwar and spreading her legs to be raped again on hearing the phrase "open it". It brings forth the incomprehensible state of the women who went through such traumatising violence. He further describes this as "... her hands groped for the cord which kept her

shalwar tied around her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs” (Manto 2007:53). Although Manto has just given voice to the father, Sirajuddin, the silence of Sakina and this very act of her speaks volumes about the trauma she underwent.

Another dimension that *The Return* presents through the character of Sirajuddin is that the trauma of the victimised women is at times the trauma shared by the men associated with these women. They were their fathers, brothers, husbands, sons and lovers. Throughout the text, Manto describes the trauma Sirajuddin was facing due to the death of his wife and the disappearance of his daughter during the riots.

Towards the end of the text, on seeing his daughter undressed, Manto describes Sirajuddin as being unaware of the reality that her daughter had been raped multiple times and he writes, ““She is alive. My daughter is alive,’ Sirajuddin shouted with joy” (Manto 2007:53). This reaction of Sirajuddin brings forth the intensity of his trauma caused by the atrocities his wife and daughter had to undergo.

The accounts of trauma examined in the chosen literary texts bring forth the dilemma about who was responsible for such traumatic experiences? In the story of Pooro, whether her trauma and disillusionment were caused solely by her abductor, Rashida who took her forcefully and later married her out of affection or by her parents’ refusal to accept her back?, can also be scrutinised in the same extent. In both cases, it was the agency of patriarchal cultural conventions which led to the ‘fate’ of Pooro.

Similarly, in *The Return*, Sirajuddin, worried about the violence his daughter might undergo at the hands of the Hindu men, sends men of his community to ‘rescue’ her. It was the men of her own community who assaulted Sakina. The same dilemma looms here as well; the communal divide propagated

the sectarian violence central to women, but in many cases, the violence was not sectarian but rather can be described as a beastly spirit being unleashed in the riots which saw a woman's body as an object.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted to understand the partition narrative and the question of women's absence in it by problematising the meta-narrative hegemonically controlled by the patriarchal nationalist agency. These absences have been filled with the representations of the accounts of women's 'everyday experience' in the partition of the Indian subcontinent. It has attempted to analyse the women's narrative through the spaces provided to them in the texts, articulating their stories.

The analysis of and the tracing of the dislocation of women during the partition of the Indian subcontinent presents a multidimensional understanding of the lives of dislocated women. The stories analysed, unveil different facets associated with women, like honour and identity. Furthermore, the consequences of the violence against women have been analysed as disillusionment and trauma.

The paper has attempted to bring forth these narratives as articulating women's accounts during the partition and also depicts how their accounts were functioning in the patriarchal framework of the society. Despite the years gone by since its occurrence, partition still remains an integral part of the lives of the people of both the nations and continues to echo in the recurring communal tensions and inhumane atrocities in the present times; the question of violence, women, honour and identity still looms. Hence, the paper invites further re-examinations of the partition narrative, wherein the search for women's voices within the multiple layers of partition history becomes crucial.

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