

**From “Pain” to “Silence”: A Study of Trauma in Selected Partition
Narratives**

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Abstract:

Though there have been many works written on the Partition but it would be interesting to explore those memories in order to understand not only how people dealt with their traumatic experiences of the Partition, but also how further people had been able to articulate their pain. This study mainly focuses on how further people successfully triumphed over their trauma or were they at all triumph over it and to what extent specially women were able to break their silence about their experience of this event.

Key words: Partition narratives – pain – silence – “silent supplicant” – “hopelessness” – “hidden histories” – “martyrdom”.

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The Partition of India was actually the partition of British Indian Empire which led to the formation of the sovereign states of the Dominion of Pakistan on 14 August 1947 (that was further divided into Pakistan and Bangladesh) and the Union of India on 15 August 1947 (later the Republic of India). The term “Partition” refers not only the division of the province of British India into East Pakistan and West Bengal (India), and the similar Partition of the Punjab Province into West Pakistan and East Punjab (now Punjab), but also to the respective divisions of other assets, including the British Indian Army, the Indian Civil Service and other administrative services, the railways, and the central treasury.

Many creative minds of India and Pakistan were inspired by the Partition of India and the associated bloody events to create both literary and cinematic depictions of this event. The Partition generated brutal violence which was both unexpected and unprecedented. The relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims were always under suspicion and distrust. The conflict between these two groups developed into such vicious hatred that they repeatedly attacked, abducted, raped and murdered the opposed religious group. The Partition shattered the development of a nation in which the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs etc had once defined their

individual identity and lived in harmonious communities. The trauma left by the Partition remains a major concern of both literature and cinematic depictions. Even now the sixty nine years after the Partition, films, novels, short stories, poems etc are produced which relate to the events of the Partition. Some artists portrayed the barbaric massacres during the refugee migration, while others focused on the aftermath of the Partition and the difficulties faced by the refugees on both sides of the border. If one compares the Western Partition with the Eastern Partition, the only difference that can be found is that in the case of Eastern Partition, the riots went for the longer time than that of the Western partition. The literature portraying the Eastern Partition include Sunil Gangopadhyay's famous narrative *Purbo-Paschim*, Jotirmoyee Devi's novel *Epar Ganga, Opar Ganga*, Ritwik Ghatak's unforgettable films *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Subarnarekha* (1965) etc. On the other hand, the literature dealing with the Western Partition include Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1998), Jamil Dehlavi's film named *Jinnah* (1998), Saadat Hassan Manto's short story "Toba Tek Singh" (1955), Bhisham Sahni's Sahitya Akademi Award winning book, *Tamas* (1987), etc. Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Purbo-Paschim* deals with a particular family that had to migrate from East Pakistan to West Bengal and their struggle for survival. Though the films by Ritwik Ghatak do not explicitly mention the Partition, they take for their setting the life of refugees who had crossed over to West Bengal and deal with the impoverished genteel Hindu *bhadralok* family and the problems they faced because of the Partition. On the other hand, Dehlavi's film *Jinnah* depicts Jinnah's life, specially the Partition violence and Jinnah's reaction to these events. Instead of depicting the Partition in terms of only the political events surrounding it, Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* digs deep

into the local problems and tensions resulting from the division, providing a human dimension which brings to the event a sense of reality, horror, and credibility.

A Study of “silent supplicant” and “hopelessness” in selected short stories

The first story this study attempts to explore is “Riot”, which is taken from the anthology edited by Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta with Subhasri Ghosh. This story was written by Ishaq Chakhari (1992-2009) and translated into English by Kalyani Chaudhuri, a renowned writer. In this short story, one finds the story of a woman named Lakshmi who was at first verbally abused, then raped, and finally murdered during the Partition riots. The story starts with the protagonist, Lakshmi recounting her story when she was forced to take shelter with some unknown men when curfew was imposed in the day. Memory plays an important role here, revealing different aspects of her life as she underwent a change from a happy housewife to the status of a beggar. Lakshmi was a happily-married woman who belonged to a lower class family. Her husband hawked sweets which she used to make happily at home. This act confirms Kate Millet’s observation that it is considered natural for women to work in patriarchal societies without economic rewards (Millet, 33). The actual problem starts when Lakshmi’s husband suddenly becomes paralyzed. Therefore, she had no other option except to beg to support her husband and little child. In this story the readers did not find ever Lakshmi to articulate her pain and suffering even though her own husband and all of her benefactors misbehaved with her harshly. In this story, she is represented as the “silent supplicant”. Her being silent indicates she is losing her medium of expression i.e. language because of her unbearable mental pain. This story also shows that not only has her paralyzed husband objectifies her but all of her benefactors do the same thing. At home her “expanded belly” drew her husband’s “fixed attention” and on the other hand, on street she was scrutinized “as fresh and tender as the sprouting shoot of a gourd plant” (3) by her male benefactors, and her female benefactors verbally abuse her. So one can say that Lakshmi’s body was under collective social surveillances as she was a desiring object for the male and on the other hand she was an object of jealousy and hate for her female benefactors. But because of acute poverty soon her body turned into skeleton “Lakshmi’s body was reduced to nothing, like the water on a dried canal bed” (4). Therefore it is clear that her

poverty became the reason for her physical pain too. Now no benefactor turned to look at her even once or called her a “wench” or girl.” Now they called her a “woman or female.” Robert J. Stoller comments on the differentiation between sex and gender. He states that dictionaries stress that the major connotation of the word “sex” is a biological one i.e. male or female sex and the word “sexual” is related to anatomy and physiology. Therefore, according to Stoller, one can talk about the male or female sex and not necessarily imply anything about anatomy or physiology (Millet, 112). Here in Lakshmi’s case one can see the hypocrisy of patriarchal society as she is being generalized into a female sex depending on the norms of patriarchy. Next one finds a scene on curfew-day when Lakshmi had to come out because she knew that without daily alms her family would starve. So as usual she came out of her house but soon realized “it was not possible to think of return” (6). She took shelter with some unknown men and from that place she could hear them saying “burn them, kill the bastards” (7). But that shelter was failed to protect her as those unknown men at first abused her, and then they dragged her out of the shelter into an empty room behind it where she was raped and at last was killed by them. Patriarchal force may rely on a form of violence particularly of a sexual nature which is realized most completely in the act of rape. The woman is almost defenseless both in terms of her physical and emotional states during rape. In rape, the emotions of aggression, hatred, contempt, and the desire to break or violate personality are prominent features which confirm the passive trauma of women in society (Millet 44). In this story, one finds that Lakshmi was terrified to death when she was raped. She was continuously referred as “slut”, “bitch” and so on which exhibit the patriarchal sexualized stereotypification of women. In this story, it was her pain which silenced her mode of expression i.e. language as she never protested for once throughout the whole story and in the end she was killed.

The second story is “The Woman Who Sold Wares” from the same anthology. This story is written by Samaresh Basu (1924-88) and translated into English by Sudeshna Chakravarti. In this story a young woman named Pushpabala’s experience is being portrayed as a female hawker by bringing out her inner thoughts. Here the narrator has shown that the hawkers at the station

are not hawkers by birth rather it is the business they were forced to take up. Each hawker including Pushpabala has his/her own story which was silenced by the Partition. The Partition generates pain and pain generates trauma which silences the human voice. In this story one finds all the male hawkers sharing their own stories. When they share their stories they are tapping into their painful memories. When one person hears about another person's physical pain, the events happening within "the interior of that person's body", seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact that belongs to an invisible geography which has no reality in other person's physical domain because it has not manifested itself in the same way on the visible surface of the earth (Scarry 4). In this story each hawker has a different past from the other, for example "Chanachurdar" used to be a "zamindar", and Haren was a freedom fighter. As "Chanachurdar" did not experience the same past as Haren or vice versa, their experiences are different from each other. But they are all part of the same greater pain caused by Partition and therefore each suffering individual is part of the larger suffering body, namely nation. Patriarchy dictates certain roles for each gender and according to patriarchy aggression, intelligence, force etc should be part of men and on the other hand ignorance, docility, virtue etc should be part of women (Millet 26). Hawking or selling wares on trains is thought to be a male profession according to patriarchal norms. That is why Pushpabala was hesitant to adopt that profession. But as she tries to remember her past it literally haunts her and a sense of "hopelessness" becomes the part of her character. On the one hand her past memory of being a daughter of a respected school teacher of Dhaka district taunts her when she takes up a vending profession and on the other hand the faces of her widowed mother and starved brothers and sisters force her to say "I can do it"(36). That is how acute poverty forced her to shed off the patriarchal given role and she becomes a female hawker. But soon she was arrested because of vending without license. But in the end of the story, when she was released, other hawkers accepted her as one of them and they addressed her as "Mother of dolls" (41). But by calling her a mother of all ragged dolls patriarchy taunts her as if she is a big ragged, starved doll who produces other ragged and starving dolls.

"Hidden histories" and the theme of "martyrdom" in two selected chapters of the Chronicle

The first chapter, this study attempts to explore is “women” from the Chronicle written by Urbashi Butalia. In this chapter Butalia has recorded a social worker, Damyanti Sahgal’s interview. Damyanti was able to rescue some of the abducted women during Punjab Pakistan Partition. In this chapter Damyanti has shared with the reader both her own experience as an abducted woman and other abducted women’s experiences. This chapter is divided into two sub-sections the “Hidden Histories” and “History is a Woman’s Body”. These two sub sections of this chapter demonstrates that women were the worst sufferers of the Partition riots as thousand of them were subjected to brutal forms of sexual violence on the both sides of the border. In the first sub-section Damyanti has described that she was rejected by her own family because she was abducted by the people of the other religion. By tapping into both her own and other women’s painful memories she is trying to give a voice to those silenced voices. Later Damyanti was pulled into social work by her aunt, Premvati Thapar. In this sub section Butalia has estimated the range from anywhere between 29, 00 to 50, 00 Muslim and 15, 00 to 35, 00 Hindu and Sikh women were abducted, raped and forced into other religion. In the second sub- section she has described the necessity for the clinical rehabilitation in both mental and physical states of those abducted women. Here Damyanti acts like a cartographer of memory as she herself was an eye witness of other people’s pain. She was a member of the Central Recovery Operation which had managed to rescue about 1500 women. The government wanted to rehabilitate those abducted women by putting them in Hoshiarpur Rehabilitation Camp. The government tried to make forget their personal sorrows by giving them economic independence. They were given jobs at industrial sectors. But Damyanti claims that forgetting painful past and arranging new life for them were not very easy. Soon the falsity in economic rehabilitation was discovered which forced Damyanti to have sleepless nights as she herself was in charge of that camp. Apart from giving them economic freedom, they try to educate them which were quite successful as Damyanti believed that education is a way to tackle with mental pain. Therefore Damyanti’s rehabilitation programme was partially successful.

In conclusion it may be reiterated that this paper tries to explore how patriarchal underpinning was responsible for silencing female voices and to what extent women were able to triumph over their traumatic past memories. Unbearable trauma destroys the medium of

expression i.e. language. In Butalia's chronicle people not only share their own experiences but other's experiences too. Therefore, this paper also is an effort to demonstrate to what extent Urbashi Butalia was successful to give voice to silenced voices. In this paper both the Eastern and the Western Partition stories have been those traumatized selected in order to create a comparative study and also to discuss the trauma and the acceptance of the Partition represented in the lives and characters portrayed in the stories. But it is impossible to give importance to the traumatic Partition of one part of the country over that of the other except to recognize the fact that the Eastern Partition went on for a longer period than the Western Partition. Here the stories try to represent how the characters remember their past experiences. Therefore, they are all involved in tapping into their uncomfortable memories. Memory plays an important role in their lives and it is those traumatic memories which help the readers to understand how both consciously and unconsciously they dealt with the Partition. There are some other extraordinary works based on Partition. For instance, Ritwik Ghatak's film, *Komal Gandhar* (1961), where the protagonist suffers from the anguish caused by the separation from their home, on the other side of the border; Amrita Pritam's famous novel *Pinjar*. The film is based on the novel which was released in 2003. M.S.Sathyu's famous movie on the Partition named *Garam Hawa* (1973), Kamal Hassan's *Hey Ram* (2000), Anil Sharma's film, *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (2001) are significant Partition movies. Apart from the movies, novels, short stories, there are a lot of poems had been written which has enriched the Partition literature as a whole.

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