

## RECOUNTING FEMININE ANGST IN THE INDO-ANGLIAN PARTITION LITERATURE

**Dr. Renuka L. Roy**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2714-160X>

Associate Professor of English

S.K.Porwal College, Kamptee

Affiliated to Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj

Nagpur University,

Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

[royrenuka80@gmail.com](mailto:royrenuka80@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT:** *The partition literature in India made every effort to lay bare the brutality, inhumanity and genocide of worst type that took place at the time of partition. The literature of both the lands recounts the account of the occurrences and aftermaths of partition covering social, psychological and communal aspects of the event on the people from both the countries. Khushwant Singh in his novel Train to Pakistan (1956), The Rape (1974) by Raj Gill, Manohar Malgaonkar in A Bend in the Ganges (1964), H.G.Gill, The Ashes and Petals (1978), The Shadow Lines (1988) by Amitav Ghosh, The Azadi (1975) by Chaman Nahal and Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man (1988) describe the monstrosity of the events with such artistic quality that the tragedy comes to life. The partition narratives are testimony to the fact that the women of Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims were among —the greatest victims of religious and cultural persecution. The women who were tarnished in the hands of the men of rival communities, if not dead, faced social deaths. The literature of the land has time and again depicted the chauvinistic attitude of the society where the power thirsty men had to subjugate the body of women in order to prove themselves vanquishers*

**Keywords:** Partition literature, psychological trauma, social death, chauvinism.

British East India Company ruled the Indian Subcontinent for around three centuries. India got freedom on 15th August, 1947 which was followed by the hollow cost of partition of Akhand Bharat into India and Pakistan. This historical event is significant in the world history not only as a political occurrence which gave birth to two nations but as the most treacherous occasion for thousands of men who lost their lives, hundreds of women who were treated most ruthlessly and for countless number of children who found themselves orphaned and forced to live the life of beggars. The fatal incident in the history of India left a permanent mark on the psyche of every Indian as well as Pakistani and as they were victimised owing to dreadful act of partition. Literature of both the lands recounts the account of the occurrences and aftermaths of partition covering social, psychological and communal aspects of the event on the people from both the countries. Indian writers have vividly explored the shocking occurrences during partition riots in their literature, thus used the incident as the subject of their creative writing

especially novels. The partition literature in India made every effort to lay bare the brutality, inhumanity and genocide of the worst type that took place at the time of partition. The foremost attempt in this direction is taken by Khushwant Singh in his novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956) depicted the trauma of the victims of partition. The novel is written from the perspective of Mano Majra, a fictional border village. In the Novel, Singh gives a realistic depiction of political events surrounding the event of partition. Khushwant Singh digs into a deep local focus, providing a human dimension which brings to the event a sense of reality, horror, and make it believable. The book carries a touching introduction by Arthur Lall. Lall writes:

It is a place, Khushwant Singh goes on to tell us at the beginning of this classic novel, where Sikhs and Muslims have lived together in peace for hundreds of years. Then one day, at the end of the summer, the “ghost train” arrives, a silent, incredible funeral train loaded with the bodies of thousands of refugees, bringing the village its first taste of the horrors of the civil war. *Train to Pakistan* is the story of this isolated village that is plunged into the abyss of religious hate. It is also the story of a Sikh boy and a Muslim girl whose love endured and transcends the ravages of war. (Lall)

*The Rape* (1974) by Raj Gill holds political leadership responsible for the overall drama of partition and its devastating effects. Gill has portrayed the scenes of brutal violence on Indo-Pak border yet maintained objectivity in his depiction of the incidents. He maintains that people from both the communities are responsible as they couldn't control the intolerance and hatred for each other. In the novel, he gives a vivid description of loads of corpses on both the sides of the border and vividly paints the plight of the Sikhs and Hindus in Pakistan. Humiliating treatment meted out to the Muslims on the Indian soils also does not escape his vigilant eyes. He objectively describes the holocaust with utmost sincerity and exposes the fatal effect of the incident. Manohar Malgaonkar in *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) portrays an altogether different version of the story from a new perspective. The novel covers a span of two decades starting from the civil disobedience movement to the partition riot in Punjab. He brings in the limelight the conspiracy of the British in inciting the religious hostilities between Hindus and Muslims. His stress is on the core British policy of 'Divide and Rule' in fostering the colonial design and leading India to the bloodshed of partition. Much later, around 1978, a novel by H.G.Gill, *The Ashes and Petals* throws light on the aftermaths of partition which shook not only India but the neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh. The presents the aspects of life of the people from India and Pakistan following the historical event of partition. The novel gives a graphic description of the trauma of train massacre and the woeful plight of the refugees in India. The novel is full of didacticism and hope and at the same time it depicts the clear political framework and intentions behind this historic decision. The novel exposes the utter failure of then government in controlling the anarchy ensued in the cities like Meerat and Punjab that witnessed ruthless looting of the innocent people and merciless killings. People's religious sensibility and the rampant resentment against the followers from other religious faith were being exploited by the politicians for their vested interest. *The Shadow Lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh focuses more on the repercussion of this fateful destiny of India, its victims, its ugliness and its brutality more than anything else. *The Azadi* by Chaman Nahal has been eulogised for its realistic as well as comprehensive portrayal of the tragedy of the partition. Bapsi Sidhwa's

*Ice Candy Man* (1988) describe the monstrosity of the events with such artistic quality that the tragedy comes to life.

Mattie Katherine Pennebaker writes about the event of partition in the following manner. She states: “The partition narratives are testimony to the fact that the women of Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims were among —the greatest victims of religious and cultural persecution.” (Pennebaker, p.01) Once the inevitable partition was decided and announced, it created a mental shock among the Hindus and the Sikhs who began to worry about their future safety and peace. But the news of separate country created a lot of jubilation among the Muslim population. Both the Hindus on one hand and the Muslims on the other hand suddenly became aware of their separate identity. The individual identities merged with the identity of the community and soon the society was divided on communal lines. The people having good relations began to drift apart because of the communal hatred aggravated by the partition of the country. Political border between India and Pakistan were fixed with the help of the Boundary Commission. Manju Kapoor describes the event of partition with the choicest words and takes utmost care to give vision of the treacherous game of ‘Divide and Rule’ that British Government played before they quit India,

“But we were forced to accept partition and suffering along with Independence as a package deal. They were always Muslim-lovers, those British. The River Ravi was the natural boundary. Lahore was the seat of Raja Ranjit Singh and we all expect the Sikh holy place to come to us. But no, they had to cleave us with their pencils, their tapes and their measurements.” (Kapur, p.248).

Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* (1998) is set around the time of Partition. It is written with absorbing intelligence and sympathy. *Difficult Daughters* is the story of a woman torn between her family duty, the desire for education, and illicit love. Virmati, a young woman who is born into a high-minded household, falls in love with a neighbour, the Professor - a man who is already married. The Professor eventually marries Virmati, installs her in his home alongside his furious first wife. However, he helps her with her studies which is atleast a consolation to her jeopardised existence in the scandalised family of the professor. The story of Virmati in the novel runs parallel with the history Indian history and partition. Like mother India, Virmati, too, finds the battle for her own independence has created irrevocable lines of partition and pain around her.

Manju Kapur vividly portrays the multiple effects of this historical event on the consciousness of women. Although both men and women suffered the trauma of uprooting from their native place, yet the psychological impact of the event on women differs in degree from that on the men of the country. It is extremely significant to note women’s experience of nostalgia, trauma and agony that provide a renewed viewpoint in looking into Partition history. Both men and women have been affected and traumatized by the Partition holocaust and realities but the violation of women’s sexuality distinctly connects the mind and the body in a most obvious manner. Nowhere is this link between the physical and psychological trauma so apparent than in the experiences of the female victims of the Partition riots. Therefore, the female experience of the violence, and their dislocation and trauma present a new dimension

to the event. The women who were tarnished in the hands of the men of rival communities, if not dead, faced social deaths, they were not accepted back by their own family members. Many of them were compelled to stay at rehabilitation camps, many perished, some were sold off, while some others found their ways to brothels or if fortunate enough, got married to their abductors and settled in a new country, severing all ties with their natal families.

Kapur describes in her novel, how after the boundary lines decided, the pent-up anger and hatred was vented out vehemently and shamelessly everywhere. The communal unrest began to disturb the peace and happiness of the people staying near the border. Looting houses, shops and raping women from opposite community became the regular feature. Swarnalata in *Difficult Daughters* describes, "And those cries: Allah-o-Akbar/Har, Har Mahadev/Bolo So Nihal/Those cries became the cries of the battle rather than religion." (Kapur, 249)

From both the sides of the newly created border, women were kidnapped, abducted, raped and brutally killed. Defilement of a woman's body was considered to be the greatest dishonour that a family had to endure. And the violence inflicted upon women was equivalent to a sacrilege against one's religion, country, and family. The Nature has created the man and the woman. Both of them have their own significance and interdependences. The man and woman proved as the part and parcel of the human society. With the development of the human civilization the men started maintaining their monopoly over the women due to their greater bodily strengths. This attitude gave rise to the origin of inequality between two genders, the man and the woman. The fact is that, overall, the woman is considered as a subsidiary. In different communities of the world men have always considered women as an object to give vent to their pent-up anger and frustration. On studying partition literature, we come across many such instances where women from opposite communities were targeted by the enraged male member to avenge themselves. Through this paper an effort is made to draw attention of the readers to the sufferings of the womenfolk during partition. Bapsi Sidwa, too, gives the moving accounts of the sufferings of women folk at the time of partition in her novel *Cracking India* alias *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988). Jay Wilder in his chapter "Bapsi Sidhwa" noted the horrible effect of partition on women from both the sides of border as truthfully delineated by Sidhwa. He writes:

"Along with political ineffectiveness, Sidhwa draws out the most damaging effect of the Partition, the symbolic desecration [of] women on both sides of the conflict. Sidhwa recalls the chilling shrieks and moans of recovered women at the time. She asked herself, 'Why do they cry like that? Because they are delivering unwanted babies, I'm told, or reliving hideous memories. Thousands of women were kidnapped' Elsewhere, she continues, 'Victory is celebrated on a woman's body, vengeance is taken on a woman's body. That's very much the way things are, particularly in my part of the world.'" (Wilder)

The most abhorring scene in the novel *Ice candy Man* is the abduction of Ayah. Muslim mobs show up at Lenny's house in search of the Hindu Ayah. Ayah is kidnapped by Ice Candy Man



and the mob. She is forced to prostitute her body and coerced into having sex with Ice Candy Man. Ice Candy Man successfully strips Ayah of her identity as a woman and as a Hindu. Whatever love he has for Ayah is smothered by his wish to subjugate her completely. He keeps her in the *kotha* (brothel) even after marrying her. Although Ayah escapes her abductor, but even with her family in Amritsar, she is marked by her defilement during partition. Thus, she forever suffers the psychological and emotional trauma. We learn about the ghost trains carrying the dead bodies also carry sacks of women's breasts in the same novel. The amputation of breasts of women is one of the most gruesome injuries faced by the women. This shameful act also finds expression in *Train to Pakistan* (1959). In *Ice Candy Man*, we come across the gruesome description: "A train from Gurdaspur has just come in, he announces, panting. 'Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslims. There were no young women among the dead. Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts.'" (Sidhwa, p. 135) In *Train to Pakistan* (1956), we read about the mutilated breasts of the bodies arriving from Pakistan. This description is followed by the vow of determination and convincing the Sikh brethren to take revenge of the Muslims. The Sikh leader in Mano Majra invokes the sense of pride among the Sikh brethren by making them aware of the dishonour and defilement of women from his community had faced at the hands of Muslim. In the novel, Kushwant Singh gives a forceful depiction of communal unrest and resentment in the following manner:

"I'll tell you what to do. He paused, looked around and started again. He spoke slowly, emphasising each sentence by stabbing the air with his forefinger, —for each Hindu and Sikh they kill, kill two *Mussulmans*. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two...For each trainload of dead, send across two... That will stop the killing on the other side. It will teach them that we can also play this game of killing and looting. (Singh, 162)

It is after these instigations; the Sikhs conspire to derail a train heading to Pakistan and scheming revenge upon the Muslims. The blind avengers completely forgot that they were inflicting pain and torture on those who are mothers, sisters and wives of their fellow brethren with whom they shared many fond memories of co-existence.

*The Rape* (1974) by Raj Gill holds political leadership responsible for the overall drama of partition and its devastating effects. He does not limit himself only up to the political consequences but also demoralising and inhuman impacts of this most lethal occasion. Here rape of Leila a muslim girl by the father of her lover (Dalipjit) is an example of most monstrous and unethical consequence of displacement and bitterness caused by partition. But a ray of hope is shown by the depiction of humanity of Dalipjit which ultimately prevails in the novel. Chaman Nahal in his novel *Azadi* (1975) given ample suggestions related to the atrocities against women from both sides of the border. In his narration he tries to strike balance between the delineation of Hindu atrocities and Muslim atrocities in the two parts of the nation. The description of the people of Amritsar "taking out a procession of Muslim women through bazaar." (Nahal p.323), is equally gruesome as the description of terribly depressed atmosphere at the refugee camp where everyone was physically and psychologically shattered, "The women that were discovered were led away silently by their families. None shows joy at

reunion; some seemed sorry the girls had come back at all, soiled and dishonoured.” (Nahal, p.316)

The literature on partition recounts many stories of women who died trying to avoid sexual violation. For them preserving their chastity was more valuable for them than their life. In face of adversity, they always preferred death to life, as this act had protected their religious and family honour. The instances had been noted where women had set themselves ablaze and at some places the womenfolk in family had been reported to have committed mass suicide. The irony lies in the fact that the country which boasts to have the ancient civilization and the legacy of worshipping the womenfolk as goddesses, should see such horrible episode in its history. The atrocities faced by women from both the sides of border will always be remembered as the most shameful chapter in the civilization. The literature of the land has time and again depicted the chauvinistic attitude of the society where the power thirsty men had to subjugate the body of women in order to prove themselves vanquishers. The partition literature contained ample example that testify this truth and honestly illustrates in many memorable works of art.

#### Works Cited :

- Kapur, Manju. *Difficult Daughters*. 1st ed., London, Faber & Faber Ltd., 1998.
- Lall, Arthur. “Introduction: Train to Pakistan.” *Scribe*, Normanby Press, 06 November 2015, <https://www.scribd.com/book/293578482/Train-To-Pakistan>. Accessed 24 01 2022.
- Nahal, Chaman. *Azadi*. 1st ed., London, Penguin Books, 1975.
- Pennebaker, Mattie Katherine. “The Will of men; Victimization of Women during India's partition.” *Agora*, vol. 01, no. 01, 2000, p. 01. *Researchgate*, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328233884\\_Women\\_and\\_Partition\\_in\\_India\\_victimization\\_of\\_women](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328233884_Women_and_Partition_in_India_victimization_of_women). Accessed 31 01 2022.
- Sidhwa, Bapsi. *Ice-candy-man A Penguin Book: Fiction*. New Delhi, India, Penguin Books India, 1989.
- Singh, Kushwant. *Train to Pakistan*. London, Chatto & Windus, 1956.
- Wilder, Jay. “Bapsi Sidhwa.” Dissertation. *Postcolonial Studies at Emory*, 2002. *Emory Education*, English Dept., Emory University, <https://web.cocc.edu/cagatucci/classes/hum210/coursepack/crackingindia.htm#Wilder>. Accessed 31 01 2022.