

GENDERED PERSECUTION IN *WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS* AND *ICE CANDY MAN*

PRIYANKA GUPTA

RESEARCH SCHOLAR

SMVDU, KATRA, INDIA.

Abstract

The literature of these days focuses on the contemporary issues and more on the world literature. The women have been in the spotlight since time immemorial. The literature has been the witness of so many traumatic histories and cataclysmic turmoil. The paper will highlight the gendered perspectives in the selected partition novels. Both these novels, converse about the women suppression and their role in the society during the days of partition. Shauna Singh in her novel, What the Body Remembers argued about the women dual suppression during the days of the partition and the marital issues. Bapsi Sidhwa in her novel, Ice Candy Man much discussed about the violence against women in the novel. Both novels exemplify the negligence of women during the separation of the continent. The paper will endeavor about the concealed sides of the partition aspects, from gendered perspective. The women were forced into changed identity and moreover, they were forced to spend their entire life in brothels as prostitutes. The women were mostly used as weapon during those days. Thus, my paper would emphasize the empowerment of women and to provide them their status and their roles which they missed out from the time of partition days. I would also like that my paper would bring some change of the mindset of the people and I hope I will be able in establishing this mission. The partition of India sees a black mark on the part of women sex. The paper is an attempt to delineate the facts and records from the time of partition.

Keywords: Women victimization, gendered partition, double suppression.

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Freedom is an important aspect for the country and for the individuals. Freedom is important for the dignity and honor of the country. It is important for the country to show that the country is self sustained and dependent, if the country is free from the colonial rule. And moreover, it has the ability to bargain to become independent. In case of Indian context, it has become a dream to achieve freedom and to survive as free nation which was earlier under the clutches of British rule. Though freedom can be hard to achieve, Indian history shows that the Indian people wanted freedom persistently. This action can be analyzed through the political action that the Indian people engaged in, including Gandhi and his non-violent movement known as 'swadeshi' or 'satyagraha'.

The dawn of freedom from colonial rule in the subcontinent has forever been marked by the agony of Partition. The bloodshed, sweat of terror and the tears of helplessness made the Partition of India and the creation of Pakistan simultaneously the most signifying and the most traumatic moment in South Asia's history. What has often been forgotten, however, is the price paid by women and children. The women are always treated as the weaker sex and every time they have to remind for their ubiquitous presence. The women were treated as the weaker sex and they were dominated by males in the society.

In addition to widespread killing, the partition riots are also the story of the rape, abduction and widowhood of thousands of women on both sides of the newly formed borders. Incomplete and unreliable data make it hard to come up with the exact number of women and girls abducted during the Partition riots. The official estimate of the number of

abducted women was placed at 50,000 Muslim women in India and 33,000 Hindu and Sikh women in Pakistan. The feminist's theories have been an important landmark in the literature. Moreover the concern of the feminists is to make evident the facts and figures of women sufferings whether in society and at public. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) was an important section on the portrayal of women in the novels and other works. According to de Beauvoir, two factors explain the evolution of women's condition: participation in production and freedom from reproductive slavery. Beauvoir says men oppress women when they seek to perpetuate the family and keep patrimony intact.

The proposed paper focuses mainly on the victimization of women in the backdrop of partition. During partition time, the whole country was facing the chaotic scenario. The country has been changed to the battleground where only bloodshed was there. The Hindu-Muslim-Sikh riots transform the brotherhood of the communities and moreover, all the communities treat women as the medium of revenge. As they abduct the women of opposite community and molest them and harassed them physically and mentally. There were many facts and figures noted regarding the women's victimization.

The partition of the sub-continent was not an easy separation. Partition of the country becomes a reality for whole communities. The two nations, India and Pakistan, were engulfed by the most massive migration in human history. From one end of the Punjab to other, a terrified people were fleeing their homes with whatever possessions they could carry. India and Pakistan were at the moment of their birth like 'a pair of Siamese Twins' linked by a cancerous tumor, Punjab. Cyril Radcliff's scalpel had severed the tumor, but it had not been able to carve out the cancerous cells infecting each other.

The partition of the country results into the mass exodus of people from their countries to find a safer place. The partition was accompanied by the migration of nearly ten million people between the newly defined borders of India and Pakistan. Women always play an important role in the society and that is why they were always humiliated. Women have to show their presence themselves. And in order to show their place women have to fight for their place in the society since time immemorial.

The partition literature confers about the separation of the country and moreover the feminists studied the reasons of women sacrificial acts. The women were the worst sufferer of the separation. In the months, immediately preceding and following the creation of “free” nation states, untold numbers of murders, kidnappings, rapes and arson were committed by ordinary citizens of the country to take revenge from the opposite groups. The communal violence was there but along with that, the violence against women was more prevalent. The women always were raped, mutilated and killed. The atrocities against the women sex were very much gruesome. Urvashi Butalia says;

Mass scale migration, death, destruction, loss- no matter how inevitable partition seemed no one could have foreseen the scale and ferocity of bloodshed and enmity it unleashed. Still less could anyone have foreseen that women would become so significant, so central and indeed so problematic. (188)

The present paper will discuss about the gendered perception in the selected two partition novels, *What the Body Remembers* and *Ice Candy Man* respectively. The selected novels were pondering the issue of women subjugation in the earlier days. The two novels were written by women novelists; by Shauna Singh Baldwin and Bapsi Sidhwa respectively. Both the novelists have focused on the women subjugated role and the women negligence during the days of partition. It is not mandatory that women will always rule and dominant. The patriarchal system dominates the female sex and also, sometimes the violence was spontaneous. The two novelists have written the novels with a purpose.

Both the novels discuss about the story of partition. The unleash saga of the partition of the sub-continent recklessly divided the nation and the souls of the people. The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 is an “originary trauma” in which the former British India is arbitrarily and forcefully divided. Many writers of South Asian descent are constantly looking backward at this traumatic experience to explore the relationship between violence and the myth of nation-building.

How do we know Partition except through the many ways in which it is transmitted to us, in its many representations: political, social, historical, testimonial, literary, documentary, and even communal. We know it through national and family mythologies, through collective and individual memory. Partition, almost uniquely, is the one event in our recent history in which familial recall and its encoding are a significant factor in any general reconstruction of it. In a sense, it is the collective memory of thousands of displaced families on both sides of the border that have imbued a rather innocent word—partition—with its dreadful meaning: a people violently displaced, a country divided. Partition: a metaphor for irreparable loss. Ritu Menon, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*

Jinnah's speech officially marked the beginning of what Gyanendra Pandey terms the first partition of the subcontinent, which was followed by the second partition when the Indian National Congress countered with a call for "a total partition" (31), and the third and actual partition of the land in 1947 (42). In the partition of 1947, "[t]he Muslim majority regions of Punjab and Bengal were divided, with west Punjab and east Bengal forming West and East Pakistan and India sandwiched in the middle" (Kabir 178).

A gendered history of partition would thus need to focus attention on the centrality of women in changes in community and family, in the making of a 'national' identity, in the communalism that so deeply marked this particular event and in many other aspects. Women are essential and irreplaceable; they cannot be exploited in the same way as other social groups can. They are fundamental to the human condition exploited in the same way as other social group can. They are fundamental to the human condition, yet in their economic, social and political roles, they are marginal. Like woman herself, the family appears as a natural object, but it is actually a cultural creation. There is nothing inevitable about the form or role of the family any more than there is about the character or role of women. It is the function of ideology to present these given social types as aspects of nature itself.

The proposed paper aims to comprehend the past politics and also the gaffe that occurred at the time of partition which leads to the massive killing and exodus of people. The literature of that time unfolds the historic facts and figures about the rapes, abduction of the women. Many writers and critics posed the pathetic condition of women in their

works which shows the insanity of men at that time. The communal violence and all the riots of Hindu- Muslim-Sikhs result into the torment of human values. The humans totally changed into the demons of communal hatred and to satisfy their communal success they used the women's of the other community. The suffering left by partition remains a major concern of Indian Literature after independence.

Shauna Singh Baldwin gives voice to an unspoken Indian history. Character of Roop as a victim in the hands of patriarchal set up. Roop is searching for her family who is dislocated in the riots and Rampage, she thinks, "we are each alone ...always each woman is alone." The writer portrays the threat of violence on women with immense sensitivity. The separation of these women is symbolic of the division of the country. Roop heard several news and stories of raped daughters, naked Sikh women forced by Muslims to dance before mosques or naked Muslim women forced by Sikhs to dance in the compound of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. In a state of unknown stupor Roop discarded all her clothes for everyone to see a woman's body without shame. She wanted to scream,

See me, I am human, though I am only a woman. See me I did what women are for. See me not as a vessel, a play thing, a fantasy, a maid servant, an ornament, but as Vaheguru made me... If a man does not lay claim to my body, the country will send someone to do so. (436)

What the Body Remembers begins with the first meeting between Roop and Satya, and Satya decides that Roop is going to be a child-bearer for her. Then the novel goes back to Roop's early life and takes you all the way through her wedding, follows Roop as her children are given to Satya. Then comes 1947 and with independence from the British, the partition of India into India, West Pakistan, and East Pakistan. It's 1937, and with her father in debt, motherless sixteen-year-old Roop learns she is to become the second wife of Sardarji, a wealthy Sikh landowner whose first wife, Satya, has failed to bear him a child. Roop believes that the strong-willed Satya will treat her as a sister, but their relationship swiftly becomes ominous and complicated.

What the Body Remembers is also Satya's story. Mortified when Sardarji marries Roop, Satya resorts to desperate measures to maintain her place in society and her husband's heart. Sardarji himself struggles as the India he knows begins to change when

separatist tensions between Hindus and Muslims trap the Sikhs in a horrifying middle ground and the departing British prepare to divide the land into India and Pakistan. The story by Baldwin in the novel argues about the role of women and moreover the story revolves around the two women, Roop and Satya. It is 1938 in the Indian Punjab and Sikh couple Satya and Sardarji has been childless for many years. So, although Satya is still beautiful at 42, her well-born husband has taken another younger wife, Roop.

What the Body Remembers follows the evolving relationships between the three: the older woman's intense jealousy of and ultimate cruelties towards the younger (who innocently believes she has found her salvation through this marriage); the fears and vulnerabilities of the newcomer as she desperately tries to please; the expediency of the man. The tension intensifies as the two women find very different ways of coping with their predicament. These central relationships cast shadows on other characters who crowd onto the page, giving the novel color and vibrant life. The men--particularly Sardarji--sometimes seem two-dimensional but they too are trapped by the expectations made of them.

The next novel in the paper studies was by Bapsi Sidhwa *Ice Candy Man* (1988). Sidhwa in her novel pose all the violence against the women with the help of vivid characters. The women novelist have a different view and more sympathetic towards the women category. Though Sidhwa in her novels portrayed the partition clashes more intensely and also she has successfully depicted the cataclysmic events during the time of separation. The abduction, rapes and arson were the common practices during that time. The people of both communities have resulted into the fragmented relationships and however, the representation of the pre partition days was really pathetic.

The character of Ayah was the most pitiable character who suffers at the hands of destiny and men. The history of India and Pakistan was a black mark on the entire world. It would be appropriate in this context to add the opinion of Gerda Lerner that says that women have been left out of history because we have considered history only in male centered forms. History would have been different if it would have been viewed from the perspective of women. That time was a tough time for both the nations and the freedom fighters in agitated mood took women as the form of revenge. Like Lenny, the child

narrator of the Ice-Candy-Man, Bapsi Sidhwa at the time of Partition was an eight-year-old girl living in Lahore. Recalling the nightmarish experience of those days, Sidhwa tells Feroza Jussawalla:

When I was a child living in Lahore at the time of Partition, my maiden name was Bhandara, which sounded like a Hindu name. After most of the riots were over, a gang of looters came in carts into our house thinking it's an abandoned house. They were quite shocked to see us and my mother and everybody there. At that time our 100Muslim cook came out and said, 'What do you damn people think you're doing? This is a Parsi household,' and they said, 'we thought it was a Hindu household,' and they went away. I decided to write a story about Partition because this scene was vivid in my mind. (Singh 37)

Sidhwa associates partition with evil and destruction. She chooses Lenny, a Parsee girl of eight, as the narrator of the cataclysmic drama. Character of Ayah as doubly traumatized, poor and ultimately abducted by the The character 'Ayah' is a Hindu and abducted, gang-raped and at last settled as a prostitute in Hira Mandi. Women's suffering is both the brutality of their abductors and the ostracization they experience when they recovered. Ayah is surrounded by many admirers and one of them ultimately abducts her in the light of Muslim mob. There was no clue of that ayah who was abducted. It was said she was in brothel in Lahore. Some said she became Muslim woman namely Mumtaz. The novel has been adapted into movie named *Earth 1947*. The novel realistically represents the exploitation and suppression of women. Men using their masculine powers fulfill the desires and brutally assault the women. Sidhwa as a novelist talks about the power and skills of women.

Sidhwa chooses the title *Ice Candy Man* as ice candy man is the binding force and a type of messenger who reports the horror, the atrocities, and the massacre to the garden people. He is an Iago type of complex villain who murders the Masseur, abducts Ayah, rapes her and finally marries her. Partition was also result of the policy failure of the politicians. It also became an opportunity for revenge, as in the case of Masseur murdered by the ice candy man. The trauma of Partition continues. Women as 'site of memory' and 'site of violence' repeatedly serve as the primary target of any communal violence in the Indian subcontinent Women's token status in the communal riots is an attack on the opponent

through an elaborate inscription of women as the embodiment of the nation and sacred space.

Although there are so many historical inaccuracies in *Ice-Candy-Man*, it stands apart in its rendering of the theme of Partition. Such inaccuracies are, however, fictionally justified as these events are imaginatively used to impart an easy continuity and flow to the narrative and communicate the author's point of view successfully. *Ice-Candy-Man* presents a fictional account of Partition from three perspectives—Parsi, Pakistani and feminist and therein lays the uniqueness of this novel. Though it is a piece of fiction which conveys the human suffering of partition far more effectively than a dozen history books, the novel poignantly describes the mindless Partition violence and focuses on its socio-historical consequences upon women. The tragic events combine with the witty freshness characterizing the narrator's attitude of a distanced watcher.

Thus, in the above two novels, the women victimization is very much prominent and moreover, the women atrocities were also highlighted. The two novels, made an explicit study of the women sufferings in the novels. Literature is a powerful tool in the hands of creative writers to modulate and change the societal framework, and Sidhwa through her extremely absorbing and interesting work seeks to contribute to the process of change that has already started all over the world, involving a reconsideration of women's rights and status, and a radical restructuring of social thought.

Sidhwa and Baldwin belongs to that group of women creative writers who have started to depict "determined women for whom the traditional role is inadequate, women who wish to affirm their independence and autonomy and are perfectly capable of assuming new roles and responsibilities." These writers wish to build a world which is free of dominance and hierarchy, a world that rests on the principles of justice and equality and is truly human. The two women novelists, therefore, work on the women empowerment. I hope my paper will enlighten the society with new ideas and they will treat women with equal respect and admiration.

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