

Recalling the Feminine and Juvenile Voice From the India-Pakistan Partition: With Reference to the Other Side of Silence

Lavanya S, Parvathy Krishna, Devi K

Abstract Literature reflects the society as it mirrors the various socio-political and historically relevant issues. The India-Pakistan Partition of 1947 is one such incident which is a grotesque episode in the history of India. The nation took a new turn with the Partition of India. War memories are gruesome and painful and Urvashi Butalia in her non-fictional work The Other Side of Silence brings out the voice of the silenced. Butalia also stirs the memories of the victims of that insecure and hazardous period in the history of India. This paper focuses on the experience of women and children who are the major victims and survivors of Partition as rendered in Butalia's work.

Key Words: Partition, Memory, Identity, Violence

I. INTRODUCTION

The India-Pakistan Partition of 1947 is not just a by-product of the British imperial rule. Rather, it is the result of the age-old conflict between Hindus and Muslims and the fight for Hindustan and Pakistan. Gandhiji's vision of India was shattered with the idea for two separate nations. In the shadow of freedom struggle he had to witness the division of India which resulted in one of the largest migrations in the world history. Around twelve million people were relocated and a million people lost their lives. The latter group consisted of people who were murdered or who died due to malnutrition and infectious diseases. Women and children are the most affected people during any war and there are many instances such as the Holocaust to validate this point. The situation is the same even during the time of Partition and even the present day records do not explain the right number of women and children who lost their lives or are abducted.

II. OBJECTIVE

Women and children were subjected to violence and suffering during Partition and its consequences shaped their lives. Historians who dealt with Partition and related problems were seldom concerned about the trauma of women and children and very often history is conveyed and retold by men about men. Urvashi Butalia in her book *The Other Side Of Silence* mainly focuses on the stories of women and children.

Revised Manuscript Received on May 28, 2019.

Lavanya S, Post-Graduate Student Integrated M.A English Language and Literature Amrita School of Arts and Sciences Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham India

Parvathy Krishna, Post-Graduate Student Integrated M.A English Language and Literature Amrita School of Arts and Sciences Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham India

Devi K, Assistant Professor Department of English and Languages Amrita School of Arts and Sciences Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham India

This paper also tries to remove the veil of silence thereby bringing into light the much darker side of Partition. Butalia's work is mainly based on the perspective of the silenced living beings i.e, women and children. This paper unravels how haunting memory is for these muted beings and also their search for identity in a disintegrating nation like India.

III. HYPOTHESIS

3.1 Honour and Purity

Honour and purity were two key factors taken into regard by the religious groups for mass killings. Women and children were killed by men in their families before they shifted to safer places. The former was killed out of the fear of getting raped or abducted, whereas the latter was killed in fear of getting converted. These men didn't want their blood to be converted into another religion. When Hindu women were recovered their community was not ready to accept them because they believed that these women were impure and this questioned their identity and belongingness. The main problem with the Partition era is that both the victims as well as the perpetrators either belonged to the same community or the village. There were widespread attacks especially against the women and children which was unjust and unpardonable. However, these women and children were ready to shed their lives for protecting their honour. In many villages the women jumped into the wells along with their children in order to avoid getting raped or abducted. These women are considered martyrs as they killed themselves in order to protect their honour. Women of one religion were not just raped by men of other religions but also by men of their own religion. When we look back at the history, it is nothing but a history of grief and shame. In the name of purity these women were discarded even from their families. The situation of women with children after abduction is different. Many families were only ready to receive the mother alone and not the child. Such women had only two options- either to keep the child with them and stay away from the family or to give up their children. Bringing these women and children back into normal life was a big liability. They had to mentally prepare in order to forget the past which itself was the most difficult task. Children as Subjects of History Butalia says that "as subjects of history children are difficult to deal with" (Butalia p. 249). A woman could be brought back into life through repurification, but for a child born from a father and mother of two different religions it is difficult to weave his/her disintegrated life. There is the question of identity and belongingness here. Many children who lived during



the partition era faced severe psychological problems and it was difficult for them to move on in their life. One such child is Kulwant Singh who was around sixty when Butalia met him. As a child he had to witness the cold blooded murder of his father who was cut into a hundred pieces. Kulwant Singh was thrown into the fire by his mother but somehow he was rescued and he had to spend more than a year in a hospital. When he partially recovered from the trauma he was taken into his relative's house but it was extremely difficult for him to settle down there. He was admitted in a hospital by his relatives claiming that he was "full of grief, unhappy"(Butalia p. 255). However, Kulwant Singh was lucky enough to receive the state's welfare policies whereas there are children like Murad who did not even know his age during partition. Bir Bahadur Singh who was fourteen years old in 1947 still lives with the haunting memories of that time when noone gave a helping hand. Singh tells in an interview to Butalia that people were still concerned about religion and caste even in a stage where they neither had a house nor anything to eat and drink. He recollects several incidents in which they rejected the lending hands of Muslims. He says, "If we had been willing to drink from the same cups, we would have remained united, we would not have these differences, thousands of lives would not have been lost, and there would have been no Partition"(Butalia p. 230). The governments of India and Pakistan took decisions regarding women and children without taking into account the mental state of them. Women and children who found a secure environment in the hands of their abductors were forced to leave them due to The Abducted Persons Recovery and Restoration Act of 1949. Another problem was with the children yet to be born. Either they were separated from their mothers after birth or the women underwent abortion during the early stages of pregnancy. Thus the harmless unborn child became a victim of partition. Most of the children who were left behind by their mothers were girls who then became "permanent liabilities" of the State (U. Bhaskar Rao: The story of Rehabilitation, p. 77.) However, it is not clear even now if the government was able to enhance and improve the problems these children faced. Most of the children who were killed, left behind, or deserted are girls. As they grew up they turned into professions such as prostitution and domestic work. These children reached a stage where they lost all hope and considered themselves as unwanted people. They lived all their life with this mental state. Their memories are much darker and they were in a state where they could not expose their identity.

3.2 The Unheard Voice of Women

By abducting women, their voice was silenced. They were exchanged from one hand to another and finally ended up as someone's wife or servant in unknown households. Since these women underwent a traumatic life after abduction, when they were rescued they were only mute and emotionless living bodies. Women were also used as instruments of peace and in villages where negotiations for peace took place they were often used for making compromises. Bir Bahadur who was one of the victims of partition once narrated an incident where the Muslims in his village asked for a particular woman of the other religion as

one of their men had some sort of relationship with her. The villagers who thought that the girl was anyway "bad" finally decided to give her as a symbol of maintaining peace. In return to this they were promised that the Muslims of the village will be sent away from the village. People in the course of these peace talks never bothered about the opinion of women. Price tags are attached to these women who are merely considered as a physical entity without any voice. The society was much bothered about the honour of the village rather than that of these women. But one has to notice the power of women who were ready to sacrifice their lives in the name of honour thereby saving the lives of other people.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Partition created a barrier not just between the two countries but also between two different religions, mainly Hindus and Muslims (Sikhs were also affected). As discussed in Urvashi Butalia's book *The Other Side of Silence* the voice of women and children is muted. The traumatic experience of Partition and the displacement from their motherland created an astounded fright in them which led to the destruction of their identity. According to the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, trauma creates bodily wounds affecting the mind. The critic Cathy Caruth who was inspired by Freud's writings also considers trauma as a "bodily wound." For Caruth, survival also is a by product of trauma apart from isolation. The psychological and physical problems due to trauma and displacement developed mainly during the World Wars. The survivors of the two World Wars and mainly the Jews who came out of the concentration camps in Germany were the main victims of trauma and displacement and the resulting identity crisis. Displacement is another major issue faced by the people during Partition. All people had to meet some kind of loss due to their displacement, be it the loss of their family or the loss of their properties. Migration of people led to the problem of identity formation as well as identity crisis. For example, a child born to a Hindu father and a Muslim mother faced the problem of identity crisis. If he/she is abducted from a Hindu family and shifted into a Muslim family he/she then became a muslim which becomes his/her identity from then on. Hybridity is a crucial problem the immigrants had to face. Forced migration led to problems such as adaptation and displacement. Many women and children were abducted by men of other religions as well as from their religion. As a result of this they are relocated into an entirely different society where they are exchanged from one hand to another. This forced dislocation also led to physical and mental problems as well as difficulty in cultural adaptation. Hunger, pain, and illness—both mental as well as physical—became common in people, and children were negligently affected by these issues. Unlike the women it is difficult for children to express their trauma as they had to witness more than what they could bear to witness in that tender age. It is with great difficulty that they constructed an identity for themselves after their relocation. However, the psychological problems that they faced was really



difficult to cope up with and as a result of this they led a secluded and lonely life in the remaining years.

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is during the 1984 Sikh riots in India that Butalia came in touch with the people who were the children of Partition. Butalia through her book *The Other Side Of Silence* reveals that the effects of partition can be seen even now in the multi lingual, multi cultural country like India. Nobody has taken any initiative before in recording the personal interviews of the victims of Partition and this work of Butalia has in turn become an influential oral history record and a prudent move into the future. This non-fictional work of Butalia however contains the personal interviews of about seventy people who had to witness the traumatic Partition era. But Butalia here deals with the partition in the Punjab province and she has not included the partition in the East Pakistan. The author deals with the personal lives of people who were perturbed by Partition which resulted in their segregation. Often Partition works deals with collective memory where people recall the incidents during that time as they had first hand experience of it. Butalia however gives preferenceto private memory of the people where the actual survivors of Partition recounts their traumatic and painful experiences. Even though the focus of Butalia is small she includes the unheard voices from that period which was excluded from the mainstream history. This book clearly points out that Partition will clearly affect the relation between India and Pakistan in the future years. Butalia reminds that noone can escape from the reality of partition. Butalia writes that, "I am more than ever convinced that it is necessary, and important, to explore Partition memories, I am also convinced that this is not a search that can be taken on without the researcher constantly being faced with questions of its ethicality. It is search on which the researcher must impose her own boundaries, her own silences but, in the end, it is a search that allows us access to a wealth of information and a different kind of knowledge"(Butalia p. 366). *The Other Side of Silence* is considered as a break away in the area of Partition studies.

VI. ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

According to the statistics, around 75,000 women were raped during Partition. Women were not just raped but were also tortured in many other ways. They were tattooed with the signs of the other religion, made to walk naked through the streets, many women were forced to have sex with men from other religions and produce their children. After giving birth thesebabies were taken away from them. As a result of all these hardships, these women aquired the strength to face any obstacles in the future. The case of older women was different- women in their fifties and sixties were abducted for their property. Women were categorised and attached with a price tag. Butalia included an interview of Ahis Kidwai, who worked with the muslim refugees. She says, "In all of this sometimes a girl would be killed or she would be wounded. The "good stuff", would be shared among the police and army, the "second rate stuff", would go to everyone else. And then these girls would go from one hand to another and then another and after several would turn up

in hotels to grace their décor, or they would be handed over to police officers, in some places to please them"(Butalia pp. 148-149). But for an abducted women or child her rescuer was like a god, who unlike the god of her religion showed some mercy on her. "...there were some women who were born into poor homes and had not seen anything other than poverty. A half full stomach and rags on your body. And now they had fallen into the hands of men who bought them silken salwars and net dupattas, who taught them the pleasures of cold ice cream and hot coffee, who took them to the cinema. Why should they leave such men and go back to covering their bodies with rags and slaving in the hot sun in the fields? If she leaves this smart, uniformed man, she will probably end up with a peasant in rags, in the filth, with a danda on his shoulder. And so they are happy to forget the frightening past, or the equally uncertain and fearful future, and live only for the present"(Butalia 150). It is analysed that the torturers were not impenitent of their actions. In Gujarat there was a Nawab who used to sit on his throne and watch the abducted girls being paraded. He used to enjoy them and categorise these girls into numbers based on their beauty. Children too had to face similar conditions. Two Hindu boys whose parents were killed during the riots were kept by a Muslim family. When they were asked to return the boys, the family who already had three boys replied negatively. When the family was asked for a reason the lady said that, "... there is a method behind this. We don't just simply pick up somebody, we don't just take the garbage. We choose who we take. Now these boys, they are studying alongside my boys, they have tuitions and both of them and my children they are all studying and then I will send them to England because I have money. These children are so intelligent that they will influence my boys, and when they marry, these two boys, their children will be vey intelligent, and we have only one regret about the Hindus having gone away, that lovehas gone to the other side of the border, we want to bring that in here and multiply it. The children of these children ... they are being brought up as good Muslims ..."(Butalia pp. 156-157). Many parents were in search of their lost children even after the recovery operations were ceased. Some of them whose parents were either killed or couldn't find them remained in ashrams and orphanages. Those children who remained in such places couldn't unfold basic details such as their age or their residence. These women and children was denied with their rights and their voice was suppressed. Studies prove that the number of Muslim women abducted was more than the abduction of Hindu and Sikh women. According to Leonard Mosley around 100,000 girls were abducted on all sides. The following table gives the number of abducted and recovered women:

Abducted		Recovered (Between Dec 1947-Dec 1949)	
Muslims	HINDUs and Sikhs	From Pakistan	From India



50,000	33,0000	6000	12,000
--------	---------	------	--------

VII. CONCLUSION

After understanding the experience of women and children during Partition all that one can conclude is that what is revealed to the outside world is limited and scanted. We need to understand and perceive that the problems that is thought to be settled was actually not settled but has only become more tragic and complex. Women and children recall incidents from a disorienting bygone past. One can find a complex and bizarre situation in which the women and children had to face identity crisis and such issues were revealed by Butalia in her book. The dark memories of Partition will remain forever and the three Indo-Pak wars already witnessed by the two countries is a reminder of it. The tragic experience of the women and children during the Partition even now is unbelievable. Even though the aim of partition was to end the antagonism between India and Pakistan one has to doubt if this goal has been achieved.

REFERENCE

1. Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. 2nd edition, Penguin Books India, 2017.
2. Ganpat, K P. "Review of Literature." 2013, https://shodhgangotri.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/1765/3/03_review%20of%20literature.pdf
3. <http://www.india-seminar.com/2001/497/497%20urvashi%20butalia.html>
4. Singh, Amardeep. "Urvashi Butalia: Partition Violence, 1984, and Public Memorialization." MONDAY, APRIL 19, 2004, <https://www.lehigh.edu/~amsp/2004/04/urvashi-butalia-partition-violence.html>.
5. Singh, Hardeep. "70 years on: the traumatic legacy of India's partition." *The Spectator*, 15 August 2017, <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/08/70-years-on-why-the-trauma-of-indias-partition-lives-on/>.
6. Singh, Sukhbir and Singh, Manmohan. "Social and Psychological Trauma of the Displaced: A Study of Partition of India." *Research Gate*, July 2018, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264844492_Social_and_Psychological_Trauma_of_the_Displaced_A_Study_of_Partition_of_India
7. Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*. University of Michigan Libraries, 1920.
8. Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. 2nd edition, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.