



DEPICTION OF PARTITION BY WOMEN NARRATORS: ATTIA HOSAIN AND BAPSI SIDWA

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ABSTARCT:

Partition remains inerasable in the minds of the people of the Sub-continent due to its adverse effects on them. The love for the Nation and the struggle for the freedom gradually taken a shape of communal fury destroying innocent people and marginalized class of the society. Women and children were the worst sufferers of the tragedy. Shops and houses were looted and burnt and made millions of people refugees.

Partition of the Sub-continent whirled many young writers' minds for penning down their experiences and in explaining the prevalent situation of the country. Writers chose brave characters in their writings to express their agony and pain. They tried to show that there were no winners in the communal holocausts of Partition.

Keywords: *Communal fury, Psychological trauma, dislocation, revenge, fights for freedom, misconceptions, agitations, religious identities, refugees.*

DEPICTION OF PARTITION BY WOMEN NARRATORS

Six decades had passed and partition remains unrequited in the historical experience of the sub-continent. Partition of India created at least ten million refugees, and resulted in at least one million deaths.

The violence of partition occurred because a single nation was torn into separate nations under the grounds of religion, self-interest, blood lust and greed. The fight against the British rule was converted to fight among them. Neighbours killed their neighbours and friends killed their friends. Reprisals were wide spread. If a hundred men were killed by one community, the other community made sure that they doubled the score. Millions of people from both sides had to flee, leaving everything behind, even their dead and dying near and dear ones.

The partition of India remains as one of the human tragedies of the century which cannot be wiped out off the memory of the people of both India and Pakistan so easily and so soon. The sudden, rude shock of the partition unnerved men, destroyed their human attributes, transformed them into wild beasts, who perpetrated extremely barbaric cruelties against their fellow human beings. They looted and burnt shops and houses, killed small children and made millions of people refugees.

Women became a special target of communal fury. They were indeed the worst suffers in the crisis ridden days. Men suffered physical, mental and material suffering. But, women were abducted, raped, and paraded naked in the streets with shaven heads. For them the suffering was not a temporary one, they continued to bear its burden ever after the partition.

In Indian English literature, the impact of the partition is so intense that it has stirred the creative imagination and the urge of many writers. The stories dealing with the partition reveal the psychological trauma, the mental torture that the people have undergone. Many Female writers emerged to express the agony experienced by the inmates of the Sub-Continent. Among them



Attia Hosain , a writer, feminist and a broad caster, born in 1913 in Lucknow in a taluqdar family stands as the first female Muslim writer to depict the partition and her novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is the only novel written by a Muslim Woman on the theme of partition. The novel expresses a feeling of guilt and sorrow because the original impulse for the partition came from the Muslims in fact. Attia Hosain offers an impartial study of the whole situation. The Hindus were praised for saving the Muslims from the cruel violence. The novel portrays the impact of the partition on the members of a family living safely and quietly in a nest like house “Ashiana”, at Lucknow far away from the main streams of bloodshed and cruelty.

Bapsi Sidwa a Parsee living in Pakistan during partition depicts partition and the communal war in her novel *Ice-Candy-Man* through the eyes of an eight year old Parsi girl Lenny. While Attia Hosain records the trauma of Muslims at Lucknow, Bapsi Sidwa tries to show the dreadful condition at Lahore, they give us a clear picture of women's struggle during the adverse political historical conditions prevailing in the country.

Yet, surprisingly both Attia Hosain and Bapsi Sidwa depict girl characters who are the victims of the socio-political turmoil but instinctively rebel against the prevailing fundamentalism of the times. In both the cases the girl-child is the narrator of the novel. However there is an age difference between the two girl narrators. While dealing with the partition problems there seems to be a common ground between them. In *Ice-Candy-Man*, the narrator Lenny a precocious Parsi girl, just eight years old with a handicapped foot narrates the story of the changing world with wonder and sophistication and in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* the narrator Laila describes the socio-political condition of the Nation at 15 years of age. The novel is a guiding light for a clearer observation and understanding of the real motives which brought about communal violence and hatred. It shows how in colonial India the politicization of religion by both Hindu and Muslim communalist proved disastrous. Both the protagonists have expressed their desire to strengthen personal ties and front a sort of pain when they were broken. They believed that India had a harmonious and composite culture in which Men and Women of all religions lived together peacefully. Large upheavals caused fissures in such a culture making women's lives miserable. Both realize there are no easy solutions to communal holocausts except intense struggle against dogmatism. Laila's concerted attempts at breaking from traditional customs, the negation of despair and recognition of struggle are upheld by Attia Hosain. Her narrator-heroine does not lapse into a glorification of the past or take refuge in mysticism, similarly Bapsi Sidhwa shows there are no winners in the communal holocausts of Partition. Sidhwa's novel written at a period of history when communal and ethnic violence threaten disintegration of the subcontinent is an apt warning of the dangers of communal frenzy.

Attia Hosain in her novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961)* deals with India's struggle for Independence and proceeds to present the ironic reward of the struggle to individuals. It depicts the ugly acts of communal violence, shows how the fight of the Indians against the British rule turned into the fight among themselves and tries to diagnose the pain of the partition and its indescribable consequences. The novel consisting of four parts covers a period of twenty years. Life after the partition is described vividly, through reminiscences and memories of Laila.



As Laila grows up she finds people of both communities participating in the national struggle for Independence under the leadership of Gandhi in the thirties. In the true veins of nationalism, Hindus and Muslims came out together on the streets, in parades and processions, shouting slogans of freedom. Innumerable young men and women participated in these agitations whole-heartedly. Asad, a member of the family believes wholly in Gandhian principals and dedicates himself completely to the cause of freedom. But then, unfortunately, the united struggle degenerated into a communal one. Asad, the spokesperson, sees through the sinister game of the alien rulers and make their latent motives and intentions clear. He explicitly states that the British had given us the message: "Hate each other-love us". (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* .56)When Zahid expresses his fears that there may be a riot during Muharram, Asad remarks:

May be because there haven't been any for too long, not even Hindu-Muslim ones. Something must be done to prove that the British are here to enforce law and order, and stop us killing each other. (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* .56)

These words of Asad make Laila sleepless and panic.

The Indian freedom movement suffered a setback as the religion bigotry entered politics. Envy, hatred and violence became dominant and the traditional Lucknow courtesy is completely lost:

No one seemed to talk any more, everyone argued, and not in the graceful tradition of our city where conversation was treated as fine art, words were loud as mediums of artistic expression and verbal battles were enjoyed as much as any delicate scintillating, sparkling display of pyrotechnic skill. It was as if someone had sneaked in live ammunition among the fireworks. In the trust and party there was a desire to inflict wounds. (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* .230)

When Saleem expresses his fears that in free India the Hindu majority will acquire part and use it to take revenge for the deep grudges they harbor against the Muslims, Aunt Saira remarks:

Oh dear, there is no question, it would be better to have the British stay on than the Hindu ruling. (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* .234)

Saleem's brother, Kemel, opposes to his brother's views and expresses surprise at his changed attitude:

How you've changed! You used to say the British encouraged Hindu-Muslim quarrels and drove them apart in order to divide and rule. (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* .255)

Laila adds sarcastically:

And now I wonder how far apart we will drive each other ourselves. (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* .255)

Hamid's attempts to keep his family united fails and he sees crumbling of all his dreams and ambitions. The communal violence leads not just to the partition of the country but to that families and individuals. Saleem opts to go to Pakistan while Kemel decides to stay in India, he laments to the split of the family.

A devoted follower of Mahatma Gandhi, Asad practices non-violence and works hard in the eastern riot-hit areas in 1946. Even after his brother, Zahid was killed in brutal communal



violence; Asad continues to render his service, thus, bringing forth the message of love, non-violence and tolerance.

Laila happens to know about the acts of violence, murder, rape and mutilation which were invariably seen on both parts of the border. She criticized the Muslims who vomited hate against the Hindus. She praises the Hindus for protecting the Muslims. She accuses the Muslim leaders for fanning hatred and violence and then running away to safer side of the border. She says:

Where were you, Zahra, when I sat up through the nights, watching village after village set on fire, each day nearer and nearer? Sleeping in comfortable house, guarded by policeman, and sentries? Do you know who saved me and my child? Sita, who took us to her house, inspite of putting her own life in danger with ours. And Ranjit, who came from his village, because he had heard of what was happening in the foothills and was afraid for us. He drove us back, pretending we were his family, risking discovery and death. What were you doing then? Getting your picture in the papers, distributing sweets to orphans whose fathers had been murdered and mothers raped. (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* .304)

She adds:

Do you know who saved all the others who had no Sitas and Ranjits? Where were all their leaders? Safely across the border. The only people left to save them were those very Hindus against whom they had ranted. Do you know what 'responsibility' and 'duty' meant? To stop the murderous mob at any cost, even if it meant shooting people of their own religion. (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* .304)

Similarly Bapsi Sidhwa in her novel *Ice-Candy-Man*(1988)narrates the brutality of communal frenzy through the child narrator Lenny:

The Muslims shouting: 'So? We'll play Holi-with-their-blood!! Ho-o-o-li with their blo-o-o-d festival!!(*Ice-Candy-Man*.134)

And instead the skyline of the old walled city blaze, and people splattering each other with blood!!(*Ice-Candy-Man*.134)

Lenny says:

The whole world is burning. The air on my face is so hot I think my flesh and clothes will catch fire. (*Ice-Candy-Man*.137)

Bare facts present the horror of the greatest communal divide in history. Bapsi Sidhwa aptly shows the inexorable logic of Partition which moves on relentlessly leaving even sane people and friends helpless and ineffective. Partition is shown as a series of images and events depicting human loss and agony.

"Within three months seven million Muslims and five million Hindus and Sikhs are uprooted in the largest and most terrible exchange of population known to history". (*Ice-Candy-Man*.159)

The dislocation of settled life is aptly revealed by Lenny's understanding of the demographic change in Lahore. In awe she observes, "Lahore is suddenly emptied of yet another



hoary dimension: there are no Brahmins with caste-marks—or Hindus in dhotis with bodhis. Only hordes of Muslim refugees.” (*Ice-Candy-Man*.175)

The child-narrator senses the difference and pain caused by the huge exchange of populations. Bapsi Sidhwa shows that during communal strife, sanity, human feelings and past friendships are forgotten. At the Queens Park in Lahore, friends and colleagues had argued endlessly about the impossibility of violence against each other and of fleeing from their homeland. Yet ironically, whilst the elders— Masseur, Butcher, Ice-Candy-Man, Sher Singh and Ayah—gossip about national politics the child-narrator senses the change in the days before Partition.

The admirers of Ayah, in the pursuit of love temporarily sidetrack communal feelings and Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsi are as always, unified around her. The others without such motivations are deliberately sitting with members of their own community, huddled together preserving cultural and religious identities. The Brahmins form their own circle of exclusivity. Burkha-clad Muslim women and children have their own group. The saddest fact as observed by Lenny is that even the children do not mix whilst playing. The author implies that the events at Queen’s Garden are a reflection of a crystallization of feelings at a larger scale in Lahore and other cities of India.

Ayah’s admirers who maintained a facade of unity by cracking ribald jokes on community characteristics also become vicious—and prey to communal frenzy in the near future.

Bapsi Sidhwa also subtly delineates the psychological impact of the horrors of Partition on the lives of people. The communal frenzy has a distorting effect on people—and lead to feelings of suspicion, distrust and susceptibility to rumours. The author shows how rumour preys upon the frenzied minds of men vitiated by communal hatred: The news on radio about the trouble at Gurdaspur, which the Ice-Candy-Man and his friends at once interpret as there is uncontrollable butchering going on in Gurdaspur, rumours of a train full of dead bodies coming to Lahore from Gurdaspur and Ice-Candy-Man describing atrocities on women and stating that the dead are all Muslims.

The acquaintances of Queen’s Garden believe these rumours and harbour revenge against Sikhs. They look with hatred on longstanding friend Sher Singh, compelling the latter to flee from Lahore.

In the vitiated communal atmosphere, insanity prevails as ordinary men lose their rationality. Such degradation is best exemplified in the rage of Ice-Candy-Man who says:

I’ll tell you to your face—I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur . . . that night I went mad, I tell you!! I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I’d known all my life! I hated their guts.(*Ice-Candy-Man*.156)

Revenge becomes the major motivation for the Ice-Candy-Man and his friends. The role of rumour and the consequent pattern of violence as depicted by Bapsi Sidhwa is compact and realistic. Even the passion of love becomes powerless against religious bigotry. The Ice-Candy-Man becomes part of the frenzied mob which abdicates Ayah and keeps her in the brothels. Later



in the novel, the Ice-Candy-Man attempts to make amends, he marries Ayah, changes her name to Mumtaz, and recites love poetry to her. But even here love is shown as powerless. Ayah has revulsion for her newly acquired Muslim identity. With the help of Lenny's godmother she was taken to a Recovered Women's Camp and then sent to her family in Amritsar. The Ice-Candy-Man, now a "deflated poet, a collapsed pedlar" follows her to Amritsar in vain. Their relationship is serrated forever, one more victim of communal frenzy and Partition. Indeed, these two novels are very powerful novels that make the readers feel the great tragedy of the partition emotionally and psychologically.

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