Introduction
Communal or ethnic violence has become a part of plural societies specially in the South Asian region. Since the 1980's, the South Asian region has been witnessing a tremendous escalation of communal/ethnic violence, accompanied by the emergence and growth of religious fundamentalisms.

This general communalisation of society leading to erection of barriers of hatred and vengeance among communities, destruction of life and resources and the failure of the state to work out a satisfactory framework for a solution of communal and ethnic tensions and conflicts reflects a deep rooted crises of the nation-state in South Asia. Even though ethnic and communal conflicts affect the society and economy in fundamental ways, it is the more depressed sections of the society that are most deeply affected by these developments.

Communal/ethnic violence and religious fundamentalism have very specific implications for women in particular. They are not just victims but are also seen as symbols of communal identities and relations between men and women: the proper role for women in society has become the terrain on which broader issues of differences in economic, political and social power are being fought.

Many analysts of communal/ethnic conflicts have noted that discourses of ethnic distinctiveness, “race” and nation all call upon metaphors of blood, kith and kin, heritage and sexuality. For example, a particular nationalism may construct the nation as having mythic origins and it may invoke dreams of historical destinies through vision of ‘racial purity’, the ethnicities of the dominant and subordinate groups may now come to be represented as constituting immutable hierarchical boundaries. Indeed, it is precisely such imagery and its fusions that can give these types of discourses a special
power on the popular imagination. And, concern about 'racial contamination' may stir patriarchal fears about women's sexuality. It is no coincidence, therefore, that women occupy a central place in the processes of signification embedded in racism and nationalism (see Davis and Anthias, 1989; Anthias and Yuval Davis, 1992).

These and other studies demonstrate how women are crucial to the construction and reproduction of nationalist ideologies. (Sangari, 1993)

Women may serve as the symbolic figuration of a nation. They are also seen as embodiments of male honour and as such become a site of contestation for this honour. Hence, the defence of women and children becomes a rallying slogan of men going to war, as women from opposing factions fall victim to rape and other sexual atrocities when represented as guardians of the 'race' and nation.

Women not only signify and demarcate juridical, political, cultural and psychic boundaries of a national collectivity, but they inscribe these boundaries in and through a myriad of cultural practices, their assumption of particular feminized subject positions, their relationship to the upbringing of children and involvement in religions and other ritualistic practices that construct and reproduce particular notions of tradition. In racialized contexts these processes are inscribed through racism positioning different groups of racialized women differently with respect to constructions of a national collectivity (Avtar Brah, 1993).

It is women who are the icons and bearers of cultures. It is women's work which both ensures that the world and, indeed, the human race continues; and images of women, whatever they may be, signify the extent of respect accorded by any society towards the women in its population. And, yet, in periods of change and uncertainty women come to be marked as the symbols of national identity and as the reproducers of universal values.
Women's chastity considered an index of the community's honour is under attack in social conflicts. Women are vulnerable to rape, the act of rape is openly used as a weapon against community identity, especially where ethnic or religious purity is at stake. Sexual violence and rape has been a feature of war. Violence against women takes specifically sexual forms: oral evidence collected in situations of violent conflict has identified that a number of women witnessed women's breasts being cut off and the disembowelling of pregnant women (Benneet, Beaky, Warnock, 1995: 13). Defiling women is a way of violating and demoralising men; rape is often performed in full view of family and community. In this sense it is an attack on everyone. This type of suffering can leave deep psychological wounds which may remain hidden but can severely undermine the capacity of both women and their communities to recover. Although it is the women who suffer physically and bear the burden of shame and social ostracism.

Sexual violence, generally seen as "spoils of war", is the consequences of suspension of normal behaviour during a conflict. In conflict women suffer as an Icon of their community but in post-violence phase women who had been victimized by the men of the outer community are revictimized at the hands of their own male relatives. Rejection or devaluation of their families and wider community is one of the most far-reaching consequences for women of sexual abuse in times of conflict.

Even where the community acknowledges that they were victims of conflict and feels pity, they are seen afterwards as "damaged goods" or discarded as "used goods", condemned by both their own family and other community. Thus, women become permanent victims of violence.

The other side of the picture is that women are very important for the reconstruction of the community. It is true that they witness the killing of their male members: their kith and kin are wiped out and the entire fabric of their socio-cultural existence is torn asunder. Women are left companionless and
shelterless and thrown into an alien environment. However, since they hold multiple roles, they are mothers and wives, and are entrusted with the responsibility to rear children and care for the family. Under riot-torn conditions, when women's emotional and material world is destroyed, they are left with additional burdens. Thus, violence and social conflict not only affect women physically but also increases their responsibilities. As the scale of ethnic and social-conflict casualties has risen, both women's suffering and their responsibilities have increased.

Women hold families and communities together. Often playing a key role in providing food and caring for the children, the elderly and the sick. In communities which have experienced riots and where male members are massacred, it is women who become the head of the family and with this they have to step out of the four walls of their homes to provide bread to her children who are left without father. This becomes very difficult for women who had never stepped out of their house. After the riots this new role of the breadwinner when the victim has to interact with the outer world adds to her agony because survival in public domain is very difficult for women.

**WOMEN AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE**

Women bear multiple identities and these identities are defined and redefined in context of nation, race, gender, community and ethnicity. It is a well recognised fact that women suffer in social-conflict on account of their gender and on account of their religion. Women are not only victims of violence (Kapoor and Cosman, 1993). They also suffer during the post-violence phase. Women's exploitation in the post-violence phase results from the inbuilt violence in the structure of patriarchy. For instance, while stories of war and violence are punctuated by the voices of women, their mourning and lamentation, they have suffered as Amba, Sita and Drupadi suffered at the hands of their dear ones (Devi, 1996:4).
Women are considered a property and her sexuality is the most priced possession of the patriarch (Boulding, 1985). She suffers during the violence due to her sexuality and in the aftermath on account of her gender. During the times of collective-violence, ethnic-conflict and civil war, women become target of attack not as women but as the property of the Patriarch or as the icon of community honour. Women’s sexuality is here attacked so as to teach a men of the community a lesson that, as the natural guardians of women, they are not able to protect their women and must suffer the loss of their social property. Rape or sexual violence is used as a weapon to inflict defeat to the enemy community by way of destroying and deconstructing the culture of community as women are considered the carriers of bloodline and bearers of culture (Stiefert, 1996). It dramatises the powerlessness of the attacked community and assails its social honour. The logic behind this action is to defile the cultural purity of the community. As in Bosnia, where more than 60,000 Muslim women have been raped by Serbs, women are not only raped but are forced to give birth to children who are result of sexual violence. This can be seen as an act of ethnic cleansing: women’s reproduction agency is captured and forced to bear the children who are of mixed breed in order to dilute the community as it has to live with such children will lead to loss of identity.

Oral evidence affirms a similar pattern for violence in Surat. The Surat riots in the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya saw Muslim women being sexually attacked indiscriminately and on mass scale. Muslim men were massacred and Muslim women were first brutally tortured and then raped and in many cases burnt to death. There are not many instances of women being the target of direct attack in communal riots during the post-partition period. Though, analyses of communal violence show that many riots were generally triggered off by the rumours of women being sexually harassed or by incidents of elopement of women with the men of the other community. This was the first time when women were directly targeted for attack during violence.
Even though rumours of rape, elopement and sexual harassment have been the reasons for many Hindu Muslim riots after Independence, the trend towards women being actually sexually assaulted has to be seen as the result of the change in the nature of riots and the extremely heightened communal consciousness which crystallised at the time of the Ayodhya imbroglio projecting Muslims as the oppressors upon whom vengeance had to be wreaked. Until the 1980s episodes of communal strife fell under the category of 'riot', but after 1984 communal-violence came to be organised violence of one community (majority) against the other community (minority). What happened at Malliana in Meerut, at Bhiwandi, and in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots was that members of the majority community came down upon a minority community which was either seen as a threat or as a trouble-shooter and violence was inflicted to teach the victimised community a lesson. In all these three riots, the state maintained a non-interventionist attitude with the police siding with the majority community either by being passive or itself inflicting violence on the minority community. This is the contemporary nature of collective violence. It is no longer a sporadic clash between two communities which can be termed a “riot”. What emerged in the December 1992 riots after demolition of Babri Masjid in Surat, Ahmedabad, Bhopal, Bombay and many parts of North India was that women were now picked on as special targets, whereas in earlier riots women were exempted from attack. They were allowed to run away with children and old members of the family.

With the changing nature of violence women have become more vulnerable. They not only have to worry about the security of their life and honour, but have to negotiate and plead with hostile mobs for the security of their men. Women are, in fact, caught up in contradictory pulls of conflict. On the one hand, her own security is very important to protect the honour of her family. On the other hand, she can not leave her husband or sons who become helpless and defenceless in such situation of organised attack. Women in such situations have to act as buffers between their men and the
rioters or the police. In the process they not only suffer physical injuries but have been mishandled by mobs and police, who not only physically assault them but make obscene gestures and also abuse them verbally.

Many women had suffered severe blows while shielding the male members of their families. Some have been known to have suffered the worst casualties. Women from all communities have been used as, or became, willing martyrs in the aid of the community, defying traditional norms and roles. In the anti-Sikh riots women became shields for their husbands and sons, who were the special targets of the rioters, thus acting as buffers between their men on the one hand and the rioters and the police on other hand. In many bustis in Bombay, while men went into hiding, the women braved the bullets to fend for the children with a great sense of pride and honour. It is again women who stand in long queues to claim relief and lodge complaints.

On the other side, the Shivsena was able to mobilise a large section of women to block traffic and hold demonstrations outside police stations to protest against the detention of community youth, even at midnight. Women slept on the roads to prevent army trucks from entering the area to rescue Muslim hostages or put out the blazing fires (Agnes, Flavia. 1993). The slogans which the left groups had used to strengthen collective actions were now used to whip up communal frenzy among violent mobs. For instance, the slogan - "Hum se jo takarayega, Mitti me woh mil jayega" (Those who confront us will be destroyed or in other words might is right) rent the air.

Women also participated in the riots. They threw stones at Muslim men while they were being set on fire in the middle of the road. Not only did women participate in attacking, they were always active in helping their men store stones and sticks and making torches, acid bulbs and bottle bombs. There were incidents women of the Hindu community throwing boiled water on Muslim men in Surat (Choudary: 1996). While this strategy is used both as
a means of offence as well as defence, in some places in Delhi Sikh women used water mixed with red chilly powder to scare away the mobs. This helped them to run away and save their lives, but in retaliation their property was looted and destroyed. Women had been in Ahmedabad and Surat active in looting shops. Of special attraction to them were garment, shoes and jewellery showrooms. There are reports that in Surat middle class women actually participated in looting. For instance, Chandra writes: Women in Maruti cars, on two wheelers and on foot were seen looting in almost all over the city where Muslim shops were attacked, burnt and looted. Report say that women, though small in number, were pecking up sarees, melting blouse pieces, clothes and petticoats. They were also seen selecting pairs of expensive shoes and sandals of their size.

Women as perpetrators or participants of violence in riots is an emerging negative trend. Normally, the social space which is denied to women in times of peace was now being offered to them on a platter in the face of grave adversity.

Women have been active in defence and helping many of their neighbours. There are innumerable examples where women have sheltered their endangered neighbours of the other community at the risk of their own lives and that of their families. Muslim women of Katar Gaon Masjid Mohalla disclosed that "Hindu Sisters" had kept many of them for over 24 hours and given them sarees and bindis and mangalsutras so that they could escape. There are similar scattered accounts from victims of Vijay Nagar who were given shelter and clothes and escorted to camps to and from Muslim Mohalla. Ganchi caste women protected and helped their 'Muslim sisters'. Similarly, we have many accounts from women victims of anti-Sikh riots where they were helped and were able to save their honour due to the protection given by the women of Hindu households. Many women had to face the wrath of their male members for rescuing or providing shelter to women of the targeted community as it could have jeopardised their own safety.
Women are not only custodian of patriarchal honour, but they are equally important for the reconstruction and rebuilding the community after violence. In fact, post-violence phase is crucial for a woman as she faces revictimization at the hands of her own community where she is completely marginalised. Women who have been victims of sexual violence have to lead life of anonymity and dejection. As observed in Surat, all the raped girls were married off hurriedly and they landed up being second or third wives or many were married to spouses who were too old to be their fathers. Many are leading solitary lives in ashrams or hostels. Women who are widowed are confronted with different set of problems. There is increase in their suffering as well as increase in their responsibilities. They have to be both fathers and mothers of their children and many women are compelled to step out of the four-walls of their house into the wider world, and to find jobs for themselves. Worst affected are the women belonging to the middle class who are uneducated and are governed by societal norms. When such women have to look for a job to sustain themselves and their families, but are unwilling or unable to opt for jobs which are below their status. After the November 1984 riots widows of Labhana and Siglikar caste, who are lower castes, accepted jobs of fourth class employees which were offered to them by the Government. However, middle class women had to go in for traditional jobs of stitching or knitting which they can engage in sitting at home. Worst effected are women self employed as vegetable vendors, export house labourers, kiosk owners. Their tools and material are destroyed during riots. (SEWA : 19) Reported from Ahmedabad that most of the workers, material was burnt and their sewing machines were destroyed.

The post-violence phase leads to crises in the lives of women. They are pressurised from all the sides. Prospect of compensation being paid creates family feuds which only lead to frustration and severing of social ties with near relatives. The rule of levirate marriages among some communities to control the sexuality and property of women makes women's lives miserable.
in most cases. Women who are bold enough to resist such pressures are subjected to other kinds of traumas as question regarding their fidelity are raised, making them vulnerable to oppression at the hands of male relatives of the family.

Women who experienced collective violence always live under psychological fear of being attacked again. They are never able to overcome the emotional trauma which is caused by the pain of being left companionless, dislocated and displaced. Many a times women have to live with impaired members of family who are brutally assaulted physically during violence but escape death. To live with physically and mentally impaired children or husband becomes source of permanent grief for such victims.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The object of this study is to study the location of women at the point of intersection between patriarchy and communalism. Women are vulnerable in times of communal violence, when each of one of their identities that of gender, community, and nationality-are set up one against the other and contested. At such moments, the woman as a victim becomes insignificant. Her womanhood becomes symbolic of her community's honour and she becomes the glorified bearer of its exalted traditions. Women are, therefore, used symbolically and directly as victims to incite passions at two levels.

On the one end, women are victims of collective violence. On the other hand, they emerge as saviours helping their neighbours saving their lives, making and collecting donations, clothings and food for riot victims. Woman, thus, emerge as victims, as agents and as perpetrators of violence.
The other important aspect of the study is this situation of women in the post-violence phase, as women are required to engage in reconstruction and rebuilding and are faced with new set of problems which increase the agony of their experience of aggression.

It is with these kinds of questions that we have undertaken this study. Our expectation is not to find answers to question, but rather to make an effort to explore how social violence affects the trajectories of the lives of women survivors of such violence. It is basically an attempt to understand how collective violence, which is a man-made disaster, is perceived, responded to and adjusted to through an insight into the inner world of the survivors. In this sense, the study is exploratory rather than explanatory. This is more so the case because in the vast and voluminous literature on communal/ethnic violence women and the risks and traumas to which they are exposed has received little serious attention.

The present study has been undertaken with four objectives in mind. The first object of the study is to understand the phenomenon of communal/ethnic violence through the perception of women survivors. Since women have been relatively invisible, if not entirely missing, in the enormous body of recent and contemporary writing on communalism and communal/ethnic violence, it appeared almost natural that their perceptions and responses to violent situations should be seriously studied.

Communalism is a complex phenomenon. When communal conflicts are studied from the perspective of women this complexity is bound to increase manifold. It is well known that woman is the most vulnerable victims of collective-violence. The ongoing phase of violence not only threatens her dignity and life but she is witness to brutal killing of her male kith and kin along with destruction of her dwelling. Woman's life undergoes complete transformation after violence. It not only increases her suffering but adds many more responsibilities to her bag along with control on her mobility and desires in post-violence phase by norms of partially.
Specifically the study is concerned with an exploration of:

The phase of ongoing violence and its impact on women

Violence as routine in the Post-violence phase

Women's perception of communal-violence and how they see violence as having affected them

**METHODS AND TECHNIQUES**

The present study is focused on the women riot victims of the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots at Delhi and the women victims of the 1992 post-Babri Masjid demolition riots at Surat. The empirical data was collected through extensive and intensive testimonies of women victims of riots. In Delhi 40 case studies of Sikh women were taken and in Surat 20 case studies of Muslim women were taken. Interviews with women across communities were also been conducted to incorporate the view of women of the majority community. Interviews with Relief workers, social workers, intellectuals and government officials, also formed part of fieldwork.

The selection makes no claim to be representative. It is a collection of narratives from 60 women belonging to both Sikh and Muslim community (over a total of 80 were gathered). The women interviewed are from varied backgrounds and experienced conflict in different ways. The sample includes victims, non victims, relief workers, and officials in order to understand the problem from various dimensions.

**METHODS**

The present study is exploratory designed to gain an insight into the survivor world. Exploratory studies are not intended to establish hypotheses. In fact, the purpose of exploration is to move towards a clear understanding through
description of events and patterns and unstructured exploration by getting close to the case studies. Rapport building is very essential in this kind of study as informal discussion and longer spread of detailed discussions are used to achieve the objectives of the study. This serves to provide various unexplored facts of lives.

An exploratory study by definition involves flexible procedures in research as it allows the researcher scope to shift from one line of inquiry to another and to adopt new points as observation as the study progresses. Infact, the direction of study is decided depending on many more new, previously unknown insights being discovered.

Exploration studies employ the use of a wide range of research strategies: observation, interview, life histories, study of official and personal documents and producing detailed description of area. The detailed descriptive exploratory research helps conceptual theorising and provides answers to many theoretical questions.

**THE PROBLEM OF COLLECTING DATA**

Fieldwork was carried out in Delhi at Tilak Vihar and other residential colonies of West Delhi: Rajouri Garden, Anand Vihar, Fateh Nagar, Shiv Nagar and Janakpuri.

In Surat, it was very difficult to locate victims as no subsequent record with the relief workers and others who had worked with riot victims were available. It was through the help of local people that we were able to trace around 20 victims in Surat as most have scattered into different localities dominated by their respective communities. None of the families in Surat are staying in their old homes, where they had experienced violence. Victims have shifted into the localities, where their community is dominating.
The collection of data was very difficult due to the extreme degree of sensitivity and touchiness to the problem. The women did have an affective and emotional life during the conflict, it brings back memories that open up wounds that they would prefer to erase or keep to themselves. What an account of women involved in conflict situations in South and West Asia states has equal relevance here: (Moghadam, 1994: 9) “We know the psychic pain involved for each of us as we work with these issues. The survivors of these holocaust relive their experiences in the telling—women who are able to do so are willing, recall these events in an effort to make known these atrocities although they suffer anew by speaking of them”.

The major problem was to locate victims of rape. Since this is the most talked of crime during communal violence, but least mentioned afterwards. The problem about sexual violence is that one can talk about it only with shame, humiliation and stigma attached. Society generally wants to maintain silence on such issues as it becomes difficult for women and the community to bear dishonour. Therefore, in Surat only four women shared their experiences of sexual violence. A few cases of sexual violence were reported in Delhi and in the course of interviews informants alluded to distant cousins and relations or women known to them as having been victims of sexual violence. However, during field work we did not encounter a single case of sexual exploitation in Delhi.

The limitations in making an exploration study are many. Experience itself is not an unproblematic given. Nor is memory the tool that we by and large work with. Experience is mediated through historical understanding, just as memory is subject to selection and mediation. People choose to remember certain things depending on who they are, how they are placed, their class, their economic and political circumstances, their gender and indeed the position of interviewer who might act as a catalyst for such memories.
TECHNIQUE OF DATA COLLECTION

Our approach consisted of listening to women's accounts of their experience of violence and the ordeal of their survival. The method used was non-directed discussion consisting of one or more themes around which subject was invited to talk freely.

The aim was to contribute to the process of helping individual women speak for themselves, to gather anecdotes and personal experiences to communicate perceptions as well as "facts" and so to complement academic study. Thus, an effort is not to analyse a particular aspect of women's experience or advance a particular argument, but simply to record the individual voices.

Questions were not planned or structured. All of them are spontaneous and we consider this an important aspect of the responses of our interviewees. The emphasis was on flexibility so that the interviewee could follow her own track of thought. The subject matter involved memories and experiences which were extremely painful. Our emphasis was, however, less on cataloguing events, more on documenting women's perceptions and understanding of their experiences.

The time used by the subjects was not chronological time. In fact the oral discourses are far from following a before, a during and an after sequence. On the contrary, the interviewees tend to mix the times, they speak of today and then talk of the violence or events related to before the episode and we ourselves often moved back and forth in time in the questions that we asked, where we sought the interviewees, recollections and experiences of important events. Both we and our interviewees were interweaving historical time with biographical time. Therefore, it was necessary to reorganize their answers according to selected themes to make them more coherent.
Practical difficulties included the fact that transcribing is time-consuming and tiring work and that the English translation often falls to reflect the rich language of the originals. Moreover, the testimonies presented in this study are a small proportion of those collection. Extracts were chosen on the basis of their individual interest, and in order to best illustrate the range of themes and experiences.

The value of oral testimony in the context of the episodes of violence as a moment in the history of a people is to present the experiences and perceptions of ordinary people and through these individual perceptions explore the manner in which collective perception of a community is built up. The experience of narrators, even if it is of a single event, is not an isolated act of reconstructing just that specific moment in time but an evocation of feelings and perceptions about every thing that has gone into placing that event within the totality of the experience of the narrator. When that moment is not an ordinary humdrum event but represents a crisis both for the individual and the community and this crisis leads to other crisis moments in lives of women victims.

What was most revealing about our interviews was valuable insight provided by interviewees recounting their own lives thus unexpectedly revealing unknown facts and they often cast new light on the unexplored side of the daily lives of the survivors.

Above all, these testimonies reflect great diversity of women's experiences and reactions from deepened prejudice to hard won understanding from faith in future to cynicism of despair, from a growing belief in one's abilities or powers of survival to a heightened sense of vulnerability.
The interviews were recorded on tape, transcribed manually word for word to maintain the real flavour of the experiences as described by the interviewees, whereas the choice of words the reformations and even the pauses and silences are important in conveying what the women felt. They are the signs which can be decoded and so we left the interviews as they were. The translations are therefore awkward but we could think of no other way of being as close to the original as possible. The whole effort was laborious and not trouble free as it required considerable skill to record verbatim.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Truly speaking, so far only some fiction seems to have tried to assess the impact of communal violence on women through stories of Partition. Partition has been vividly described in Hindi and Urdu literature which came during the post-partition phase. The agony of being dislocated, displaced and severing of ties, and the orgy of violence has been captured by Urdu and Hindu novelists. Bhishm Sahni’s Tamas, Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan, and the short stories of Manto have vividly recorded brutality of Partition, the eternal divide it created between the communities. Alok Bhalla’s three-volume collection of stories of Partition is insightful collection of works which provide comprehensive narration of the event, the accounts of women and the plight of orphaned children.

The plight of women during and after partition has been best captured by Saadat Hasan Manto, Perhaps Manto’s best known story is Khol Do (Open It). It is written as a narrative with a clear sequence of events. It opens with a train journey and the apparently innocent statement, ‘The special train started from Amritsar at two o’clock and after eight hours it reached Mugalpura’. Travelling by this train was an old man Sarajud-din and his daughter Sakina. In Mugalpura, after a loss of memory for a few hours,
Sarajud-din 'remembers' that the train was attacked by a crowd and his daughter was missing. He asks the young Muslim social workers, who are moving near the border to restore lost persons, to help him find Sakina. The boys find her in a jungle and using her father's name to establish their trustworthiness they take her in a jeep, supposedly to restore her to the old man. Sakina is shy, but she is reassured when one of them gives her a coat to cover herself.

The next episode describes a corpse-like body being taken into the doctor's office. Sarajud-din follows and recognises his daughter. The doctor comes in and the old man explains that he is the girl's father: the doctor switches on the light and feeling somewhat claustrophobic he orders 'khidki khol do~ open the window. There is a movement in the corpse; her hand reaches the tape of her salwar (trousers) and she opens it in response to the command; she obviously being more familiar with 'open', the 'other command', Old Sarajud-din shouts with joy: 'My daughter is alive'. The doctor is drenched with sweat from head to toe.

The second story Khuda ki kasam ha a narrative embedded within a narrative. The author appears as the first narrator, then hands over the story to an impersonal voice - strange stories were heard those days. The final narrator is the liaison officer who has the courage to deliver a death-blow to an old woman by swearing falsely on the name of god. The old woman lost her daughter during the partition but she still believes that her daughter is alive. Her whole life becomes a search for this lost daughter. The liaison officer asks her how she could be so sure that her daughter was not dead. The woman says that her daughter, Bhagbhari (full of good fortune), is so beautiful that no one would have the heart to even slap her. The liaison officer reflects: I thought, was her daughter really so beautiful? In the eyes of every parent, the child has the glow of the sun and the beauty of the moon. But what is the kind of beauty that has remained unsullied from the rough
hands of man? He repeatedly tries to persuade the old woman that her
daughter is dead, that he has seen her die. But she seems to have rock-like
faith that he is lying. One day in the market-place he witnesses the final
encounter between mother and daughter.

Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* (The River Churning) is
one of the rare examples of a Partition novel in Bengali written by a woman. It
focuses on violence and possibly the rape of a Hindu girl in East Bengal and
her subsequent marginalisation by her own community. Jyotirmoyee presents
the physical trauma of the young, adolescent girl. Her sexuality is the great
"unspoken" in the novel, yet it remains the stake in the sinister game in
which the community teams up with nationhood in order to keep alive the
caste-class intents of the hegemonic group.

Several recent books published by Kali for Women deal with women's
multiple identities and how community identity is reinforced on women by
revivalism of communalism and fundamentalism. These texts deal with the
conceptual context of gender and communalism, The central argument
running through these publications is that with rising ethnic conflicts and
fundamentalism in South Asia women have been pushed further to darkness.
Women's movements too have been compelled to rethink a secular agenda
as the movements had neglected religion as a vehicle of oppression.
Women are religious, but during conflict they are affected by their religious
identity.

These texts are insightful where understanding the location of gender
and community is concerned. One significant work of Bennett, Bexley,
Warnock, (ed. 1996) deals with increased oppression and responsibilities of
women in the post-violence phase where it leads to reduplication of her pain
at the hands of patriarchy: she is doubly victimised first by the patriarchy of
the opposite community and in the post-violence phase systematic
humiliation is dished out to her at the hands of her own family member.
Urvashi Butalia (1993), Ritu Memon and Kamla Bhasin (1993, 1996) have tried to retrieve the oral history of partition in the voice of women survivors. Their works provide detailed account of the aggression against women during the vivisection of India into India and Pakistan. They deal critically with how women's personhood becomes insignificant during the process of violence. Women's will becomes inconsequential right from abduction to recovery, her actions are controlled by the patriarchies of the communities. In fact, women become pawns in battles of nationalities.

Many new insights are emerging from works published after the Ayodhya episode on women as agents of violence. Tanika Sarkar (1993), Ratna Kapoor, (1993), and Pola Bachetta (1994) have dealt with the question of women as perpetrators of violence, which has added new dimensions to the study of women and social conflict showing that women are not only victims. They can be agents of violence as well.

Little academic work has so far been done to understand the victimization and traumatization of women under situations of social conflict. The first work to emerge in India after the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 is that of Nandita Haskar and Uma Chakarvarty (1988). It presents detailed narratives of victims of violence, their perceptions about their changed individual status and as a collectivity. But this insightful work has dealt only with the aspects of victim's lives during the process of violence. Veena Das (1992) has talked about the plight of a woman victim but she deals with the processes of violence and the guilt felt by the mother who is not able to save her son.

No insight has been offered on the post-violence phase. Gender and social-violence in both during the violent and post-violence phases is a fertile area for exploration and with recent episode of violence we are confronted with many unanswered questions which need an exploration. Our study is a modest contribution towards this end.
PEREFACE


10. SEWA : 1986 ‘Why this slow murder : A sewa report on the effects of communal violence on women” *Manushi* No. 33


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