Chapter Two
Gender and Nationalism

The treatment of women in the novels of Partition provides an interesting insight into the psyche of the writer. The men in the novel may be revolutionary and treat their women with respect but the writer’s gaze always reduces the woman to a ‘piece of property’, something to be guarded and protected lest it falls into the hands of the enemy. It showed the reality in all its nakedness. Whether it is Manto (Saadat Hasan Manto, Pakistani writer, 1912-1955, wrote in Urdu) with his stark portraits like ‘Khol Do’ (Open it) or Yashpal (Hindi novelist, 1903-1976) with his bold portrayals of naked women parading through the streets in ‘Jhootha Sach’, (False Truth) no writer is free of his own conservative subjectivity as far as the women are concerned.

Here the woman writer stands apart because of the difference in treatment of women characters, she looks not at the stark reality of the ‘body’ but the emotional drama of the mind, the mental dilemma of the woman who in Amrita Pritam’s (Punjabi writer, 1919-2006) ‘Pinjar’ (The Skeleton) cannot bring herself to forgive her husband because he is a Muslim and who in Attia Hosain’s (Indian woman novelist, 1913-1998, wrote in English) ‘Sunlight on a broken column’ is repelled by the vehemence of her cousins who suddenly claim to be Pakistanis. Even a Mumtaz Shah Nawaz (Pakistani woman writer, 1912-1948, wrote in Urdu) is real in her portrayal of this dilemma and brings out the conflict in the minds of her characters vividly. On the one hand, we
have women characters of Manto and Yashpal who are seen more as victims in
the chaos prevailing around them and who are seen as more in conflict with the
changing world around them. The women writers bring out the psychological
dilemma of being a woman more vividly in their central characters and their
male counterparts, despite their stark portrayals of their physical anguish are
lacking in dealing with the conflict in the women's minds.

Women have been amongst the harshest critics of the dominant
nationalisms that hold up a community and/or the nation state, for they have
had to engage with the fact of their difference within the nation: their
difference from men as citizens, as well as members of ethnic, religious, class
and caste groups whose affiliation they have to symbolically bear.

As Cynthia Enloe puts it:

Nationalist movements have rarely taken women's
experiences as the starting points for an understanding of
how a people becomes colonized, or how it throws off the
shackles of that material and psychological domination.
Rather, Nationalism has sprung from masculinized
memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized
hope. Anger at being emasculated...has been presumed to
be the natural fuel for igniting a nationalist movement.¹

Women in the Partition fiction represent the various voices of struggle
and its modalities and reaffirm that women's struggles must be seen and
analyzed in terms of their multiplicity and hybridism. The Partition period
brackets and frames their particular encounters with colonialism, nationalism
and postcoloniality. Each life represents a struggle to grapple with the
contradictions created by these broader historical transitions. What is common
is that in each of these women, we see strands of self-definition, self-exploration and survival. More work needs to be undertaken on women’s autobiographies, diaries, journals and fiction i.e. all those works that deal with the private subjective realm.

What is illuminating here is the difference between men and women’s formulations of gender. Men wrote from the perspective of mobilizing national resources in order to combat foreign intervention; women wrote of their lived experiences. Men’s writing informed public debates that of women have yet to be fully explicated and revealed. The delegitimization of women’s voices and experience needs to be challenged directly, because it is precisely their experience of the ‘private’ that demarcates the primary realm of women’s oppression and exploitation. My attempt therefore is to look at these two discourses of gender and nation formation and their representation in the writings of both men and women pertaining to Partition and to redefine certain areas of interest.

The history of Nationalism in India and the emergence of a Nationalist discourse incorporated within itself the issues of gender. I discuss the emergence of Nationalism and the gendered view of the nation it brought along, and then show how these are dealt with and represented in some of the Partition fiction of Hindi, Urdu and English language writers.

Nationalism and its discourse in the context of the Indian National movement must take us to Gandhi and Nehru. Gandhi’s Nationalism represented the emerging nation. Though expressed in religious language, it
was not bound to any single religion. For him India was to be a secular state where all religions will be respected equally at a social level but none of them will be the claimant to guide the state. While at political level, morality has to reign supreme, “in India whose fashioning I have worked all my life, every man enjoys equality of status whatever his religion is. The State is bound to be wholly secular”\(^2\) and “religion is a personal affair of each individual, it must not be mixed up with politics or National affairs.”\(^3\) These and other multiple sources gave birth to the ideas, which were to lead to the formation of the Indian Nation.

We should note here that Gandhi was and is called the Father of the Nation because of his towering role in the Indian National movement. It was his leadership, which brought in ‘mass politics’, a politics that could make a dent in the so far impregnable resistance of the British Empire to the freedom of India. It was his method and ideas, which made people, respond to him irrespective of their religion and region, caste and gender, for striving towards free India.

Nehru’s views on Nationalism are different from Gandhi’s. In one of his numerous speeches on the British rule in India, he says: “by transforming British India into a single unitary state it has engendered amongst Indians a sense of political unity and thus fostered the first beginnings of Nationalism.”\(^4\)

According to Nehru, the outstanding feature of British rule was their concentration on everything that went to strengthen their political and economic hold on the country. Everything else was incidental. He says “They
gave us political unity and that was a desirable thing but whether we had this unity or not, Indian Nationalism would have grown and demanded that unity... I feel convinced that there is abundant good material in India and it could be available within a fairly short period if proper steps were taken. But that means a complete change in our governmental and social outlook. It means a new state...”

M.A.Jinnah gave a totally divergent view on Nationalism of an emerging nation in his Presidential address at the All India Muslim League Annual meeting, Lahore, 1940:

The problem in India is not of an intercommunal but manifestly of a National character and it must be treated as such...If the British govt. are really in earnest and sincere to secure the peace and happiness of the people of this subcontinent, the only course open to us all is to allow the major nations separate homelands, by dividing India into ‘autonomous national states’...It is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims ever evolve a common nationality and this misconception of one Indian Nation has gone far beyond the limits, and is the cause of most of our troubles and will lead India to destruction, if we fail to revise our notions in time.  

The inherent conflict and contradiction lying in these three concepts of Nationalism led to the tragic event of Partition. Nehru wanted the peace with the British; Gandhi believed in the ‘secular’ state of the nation and refused to agree with the division of the country and Jinnah’s extreme stand was totally uncompromising as far as creation of the new state of Pakistan was concerned.

However, the seeds of this conflict were sown in the 19th century with the growth of Nationalism that was definitely a Hindu one. An avowedly Hindu
Nationalism can be traced back to the cow protection movement of the later 19th century. In 1915, it took institutional shape with the founding of the Hindu Mahasabha. A loose alliance of Hindu enthusiasts, largely in the UP and Punjab, the Mahasabha worked on behalf of cow protection and the Hindi language, together with educational and social welfare activities among Hindus more generally. Its goals and even its membership were often parallel with Congress, for men like Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya were active in both. The Mahasabha was perhaps most visibly set off from the Congress by its propagation of sanskritized Hindi written in Devnagari script. Gandhi, by contrast, anxious to create a language that would bring people together, advocated the use of the shared north Indian vernacular called Hindustani, written in both Nagri and Indo-persian script.

Most voluble among the early proponents of what he named ‘Hindutva’ was V.D. Savarkar [1883-1966] and along with Tilak and Gokhale, represented the militant and more aggressive face of the Hindu Mahasabha. In the aftermath of Gandhi’s assassination, for Nathuram Godse was an RSS supporter and follower of Savarkar, not surprisingly, Hindu Nationalism fell into deep disfavour. The RSS itself was for some years outlawed and revulsion against such violence inhibited the formation of other parties devoted to advocacy of a Hindu India. By 1950, India had survived an extraordinary decade and the Congress party as the embodiment of Indian Nationalism was strengthened.
The Gender discourse, which is inextricable from Nationalism, came out as a result of the reform movements of the 19th century, which gave a central place to teachings related to women, seen as a particularly potent symbol of the proper moral order. The issues at stake included female literacy, the age of marriage, the widow remarriage and in case of Muslims, the practice of polygamy. These concerns cut across religions and engaged Hindus as well as Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis and Indian Christians.

Among Muslims, the case of the Deobandis⁷ is suggestive of how a new concern for female behavior extended beyond the western educated and those familiar with English. The influential volume *Bihishti Zewar*, written in Urdu by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, a Deobandi reformer illustrates how a thinker both worked within a separate Muslim tradition and yet was shaped by the colonial context. Intended as a guide for young girls, the primer aims the female reader to become of ‘a middling alim’ [religious scholar], and models of virtuous behavior. It includes suggestions for how widows could generate income sufficient to maintain their independence, advice on how to handle new challenges like rail travel and instructions on household management. Women were meant to be literate and educated but within precise limits and they were meant to be primarily in their homes and under their husbands’ control. As Partha Chatterji has told us⁸, a new ideal of female domesticity, across religious lines also took shape during the decades at the turn of the century. In that ideal, women were meant to be educated and ‘respectable’ according to the models of behavior set out by govt., but also to be upholders of their sacred religious
tradi\(\text{\textbf{tions}}\). For women, the ne\(\text{w}\) domesticity offered new skills and new learning even while it provided new constraints. There was thus, \"a mapping of the image of the woman on to the image of the community.\"\textsuperscript{9} The woman was made to represent at once language [the goddess Tamiltai in Tamilnadu, the Hindi queen 'Nagri' (Devnagari, the Hindi script) in contrast to the strumpet Begam Urdu], region [Bengal as Mother] and India itself as the Mother Goddess [Bharat Mata]. Always imagining the community entailed imagining an excluded other.\textsuperscript{10}

In this way, 'woman' came to be seen in terms of 'Motherland' whose sanctity had to be protected at all costs. In the celebrated novel \textit{'Anandamath'}, (The Temple of happiness) Bankim (Bengali poet, 1838-1894) imagined the land as the divine mother, whose freedom from Muslim oppression would be secured by the militancy of her sons. The song \textit{Vande Mataram} became the informal anthem of the Nationalist movement after 1905:

\begin{verbatim}
Vande Mataram, Vande Mataram
Sujalam, Sufalam, Malayaja Shitalam,
Shasya Shyamlam, mataram
Vande mataram
Shubhra jyotsna, pulkit yaminim,
Phulla, kusumita, droomadal shobhinim
Suhasinim, sumadhur bhashinim...
\end{verbatim}

[Mother, I bow to thee!
Rich with thy hurrying streams
Bright with thy orchard gleams
Cool with thy winds of delight,
Dark fields waving, mother of might Mother free...]\textsuperscript{11}
By the late 19th century, the image of the woman, mythic and literary had come to stand as the most important embodiment of traditional ‘Indian’ values and sentiments. In all its representations, nationalist discourse set up the Indian woman as the main repository of the highly prized notions of Indian culture and Indian tradition. Repeatedly, these ideas were invoked in the images of the chaste Hindu woman [the combined embodiments of wife, daughter and mother], centering on the metaphor of a sacred, innermost, private space that had to be preserved from violation and western intrusion. Therefore, the woman as metaphor for this sacred nation-state became vulnerable when Partition occurred.

In late 1947, the Indian and Pakistani governments set to work locating abducted women so that they could be returned to the nation to which they were ‘properly’ meant to belong. The effort put into the task testifies, not only to the horror with which these abductions were greeted, but also to the power of the communal logic by which in practice the two new states defined themselves. Muslim women were meant to be in Pakistan, Hindu and Sikh in India. A proper moral order demanded the restoration of these women, if not to their own families, at least to their ‘national’ homes. For Hindus, especially, used to conceiving of the nation in gendered terms, as a land in which women represented the ‘purity’ of the mother, such abductions evoked a powerful sense of outrage. Such logic took little account of the wishes of the women themselves. For the Indian and Pakistani governments; however, the wishes of
the women did not matter. Not until 1954, was forcible repatriation abandoned as official policy.

Women’s bodies are subjected to a gendered form of communal hostility when we look at a vast body of literature dealing with Partition and the communal riots that preceded and followed it. The locus of the trauma in research studies has been the loss of homeland, migration, dispossession and refugee dilemmas. Till recent times, most of the theoretical positions were male defined and only when women took up the task of reviewing the past, an attempt was made to balance the lopsided views and then people came to know the other side of the story.¹²

As Julia Kristeva in her essay, ‘Women’s time’¹³ has pointed out, cultural history is not simply a psychoanalysis and semiotics but is a powerful critique and redefinition of the nation as a space for the emergence of feminist politics. The nation as a symbolic denominator is according to Kristeva, a powerful repository of cultural knowledge that erases the rationalist and progressive logics of the ‘canonical’ nation. Some of these partition narratives have presented exemplary tales of courage, strength and tenacity and thus given space to the hitherto invisible woman in nation-construction, creating a piece of profound complexity that has shaped the narratives of dislocation. Some of these writings address the ellipses of history, and especially women’s histories that are inextricable from the histories of nation formation but which have been until recently only a few glosses in the margins, if not wholly omitted.
As Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid point out in their introduction to *Recasting Women*:

The process of the formation of the private sphere as an indigenist alternative to western materialism is in a sense, instituted at the beginning of the 19th century and sets out to establish a series of oppositions between male vs. female, inner vs. outer, public vs. private, material vs. spiritual... the repositioning of cultural forms, then is implicated in the formation of a predominantly middle class public sphere in a desired version of Indian culture and in desired versions of ideal women. It is also at the same time implicated in a new formation of the home as the insulated private sphere, which is to be free from even temporary challenges to male authority...

Through a peculiar sort of analogical reasoning, cultural nationalists around the turn of the century mapped the symbolic purity associated with the inner or private domain onto the actual bodies of women. Interpreting the chaste woman’s body as the bearer of an essential Indian/Hindu identity, the period witnessed her transformation into an icon of the honor of the nation, the religious community and the untainted household.

The Partition riots of 1946-47 and the destabilization of community alliances that they entailed treated women’s bodies as a site for the location of identity. According to the same patriarchal logic that resulted in the mass rape of women from the ‘other’ religious community [Muslim], the ‘purity’ of Hindu and Sikh women became a political prerequisite for their belonging in the new nation in the communal violence surrounding partition, Hindu and Sikh women sometimes committed suicide or were murdered by kinsmen and these acts—designed to thwart the enemy’s aims to dishonor the nation by
violating its women—were lauded as self sacrifice. The Hindus in India viewed Partition as the loss of territory of ‘Ancient Bharat.’

The Nationalists\textsuperscript{15} pointed out, time and again that the ‘bahir’ (Outside) or the material world may have been adversely affected by the western onslaught but the world of ‘ghar’ (home) remained pure and uncorrupted. No encroachments by the colonizer must be allowed in that inner sanctum.

Formal education became not only acceptable but in fact a requirement for the new woman when it was demonstrated that it was possible for a woman to acquire the cultural refinements afforded by modern education without jeopardizing her place at home, that is, without becoming a memsahib (a Lady). In Chatterji’s words:

\begin{quote}
The Nationalist construct of the new woman derived its ideological strength from making the goal of cultural refinement through education a personal challenge for every woman, thus opening up a domain where woman was an autonomous subject.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

In her essay \textit{Gender and Nation: Some reflections from India}, Urvashi Butalia tells us that:

\begin{quote}
The nation is a male construct, women are generally left out of the process of nation making and that their relationship to such a process or indeed to the nation itself is a nebulous one...there are times when women might choose to stay out of the process of nation making or their priorities might simply be different. But there are times when they may wish to be involved and find it difficult to do so. It is also true that women are often complicit in giving strength and legitimacy to patriarchal constructs of the nation.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}
At the purely physical level, women’s bodies are markers of the vulnerability of borders; in other words, women are the ‘border’ because they are “signifiers of ethnic or national difference” [Menon and Bhasin]. Mass rapes in civil wars point to the same fact. According to the patriarchal consensus, the women of a particular community should be defended as borders, or the women of the other community should be violated as the other’s borders. In a way communal violence against women is seen as violence against the males belonging to the other community and this becomes a part of the group-identity building. “In many villages—writes Urvashi Butalia—where negotiations had taken place, often women were traded for freedom.”

What I’d like to present here is an analysis of some of the Partition writings as representative texts of women’s experience of social hostility following their violation and their rejection at home and in their communities. The raped woman lost or was at least threatened with the loss of her personhood through the violent event as abducted women were uniformly rejected across differentials of caste and religion—Partition writings measure the costs of that ideology.

The first novel that I’d like to focus on is Bapsi Sidhwa’s (Parsi writer of Indian origin) Ice Candy man [1988] which examines the inexorable logic of Partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by hardening communal attitudes. What distinguishes it from the other Partition narratives is the prism of Parsi sensitivity through which the cataclysmic event is depicted. Bapsi Sidhwa’s narrator is a precocious Parsi girl Lenny, who is only eight years old
and narrates the story of her changing world with sophistication and wonder. The device of the child narrator enables Sidhwa to treat a historical moment as horrific as Partition without morbidity, pedanticism or censure. The nation in Sidhwa’s novel is symbolized by the ‘Hindu’ ayah (Governess) of Lenny; whose multi-religious throng of admirers represents the ‘marauders’ ready to attack her at any point.

The Ayah is indiscriminating towards all and it is in this that she becomes a symbol of the composite culture that India is. As the events roll ahead with a relentless speed, the group of Ayah’s admirers begins to dwindle. With the imminence of Partition, the park presents a picture of different religious groups keeping away from one another’s company. The passions run high even when men of different religious communities talk and chat with one another. A reference to Gandhi, Nehru and Patel’s influence in London evokes a retort from the Masseur who feels that in ousting Vavell, they have got a ‘fair man’ sacked. The Ice candy man goes a step further:

With all due respect malijee, says Ice candyman, surveying the gardener through a blue mist of exhaled smoke, but aren’t you Hindus expert at just this kind of thing? Twisting tails behind the scene...and getting someone else to slaughter your goats. [90-91]

When the govt. house gardener tries to cool the passions by imputing the difference between the Hindus and the Muslims to the English, the butcher with his “dead pan way of speaking” remarks:

Just the English”, asks Butcher, “Haven’t the Hindus connived with the Angrez to ignore the Muslim league and support a party that didn’t win a single seat in the
Punjab? Its just the kind of thing we fear. They manipulate one or two Muslims against the interests of the larger community. [92]

Thus the novelist shows the gradual emergence of the pattern of communal discord in urban India. In Lenny's words,

One day everybody is themselves—and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah—she is also a token. A Hindu. [93]

What follows partition is the unbridled ventilation of the pent up rancour between the two communities on both sides of the border. While the marauding gangs of the Akalis subject the Muslims of Pir Pindo (A village in Punjab) that fell on the Indian side of the border to mass slaughter from the surrounding Sikh villages, the Hindus and Sikhs of Lahore undergo similar harrowing experience. Their fate gets blighted when a trainload of corpses from across the border reaches Lahore. Ice Candyman’s relations lie dead in the heap of carcasses in the ill-fated train. Imamdin’s entire family has been wiped out in Pir Pindo. Ranna alone has survived to tell the gruesome tale. While all these brutalities goad Ice Candyman to join the marauding hooligans out to kill and destroy the vestiges of the Hindu and Sikh presence in Lahore, Imamdin remains calm in the face of all calamities. The distinction between the two becomes marked when a gang of Muslim hooligans comes to abduct Ayah. Imamdin tells a lie, “Allah ki kasam, she’s gone”. In contrast Ice Candyman not only abducts her and throws her to the wolves of passion in a Kotha (Public house) but also kills out of jealousy his co-religionist Masseur.
The frail and helpless figure of ‘ayah’ being abducted by the marauders is a poignant one—she is symbolic of a nation being destroyed—a woman whose ‘body’ is her betrayal. In claiming her body, the marauders claim the ‘Hindu’ nation. In the words of Meredith Turshen

The unpredictability of rape serves to terrorize the community and warn all people of the futility of resistance—those targeted as victims as well as those who might wish to protect the intended targets. Behind the cultural significance of raping ‘enemy’ women lies the institutionalization of attitudes and practices that regard and treat women as property.20

However, though Sidhwa emphasizes the vulnerability of women, like almost all who write on the partition; Sidhwa is different in her refusal to make women only victims. Ayah has survived and is rescued by the Godmother. What is important is that Sidhwa anticipates by several years the demand of world feminists to recognize rape as a war crime. Sidhwa recognizes the inhumanity that accompanies communal violence but also suggests the need to ask for forgiveness and to give it.

Amrita Pritam’s novel Pinjar is another novel dealing with this idea of the woman as nation. Published as a re-print in 1997, Pinjar is the story of Puro, a young Hindu girl full of bright dreams of her future with her betrothed Ram Chander. However she is abducted by Rashid, belonging to the Muslim community, due to some animosity nursed between the two families for generations. Puro’s life turns upside down and she is forced to marry Rashid and becomes Hamida (A Muslim name).
Puro is a victim of abduction but Pritam redeems her hero and Rashid is acceptable to Puro by the end of the novel. Puro’s portrayal is that of a woman who has crossed the boundaries of a Hindu household and takes on a Muslim identity. In this process of transformation, she is portrayed as a resilient being, one who has the courage to defy the world around her and adopt the child of ‘pagli’ (A mad woman) who is an abandoned woman. Being a Hindu, Pagli’s child cannot be with Puro, but she is the only one who is ready to accept the child and bring him up as her own.

Later in the novel, we see Puro’s rescuing of Lajo, her brother’s wife, who had been abducted by the Muslims in the riots. Rashid joins her in this mission and is absolved of the guilt that he had always felt after marrying Puro. At the end of the novel, Puro does get the opportunity to leave for India for good but she realizes that Rashid’s world is now her own world. That she cannot now betray the ‘home’ she has found with Rashid. Puro is representative of all those women who were abducted and married to their abductors, they found their homes and were not ready to get uprooted again. This also disproves the notion that religion defines your identity. Amrita Pritam is questioning the validity of ‘nationhood’ and ‘nationality’ by giving us a woman who defies the borders and boundaries that have been set up for her and retains her inner strength.

In the violence that formed the partitioning of India, it is now known that more than 75000 women were abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own and sometimes by men of their own religion. After
the partition, the two states were made aware of the problem of missing women
[through reports filed by their communities], they swung into action and set up
search committees made up of social workers, whose task it was to go into
each other’s countries to find, ‘rescue’ and ‘recover’ abducted women.

On the Indian side, the operation to recover abducted women was
known as the Central Recovery Operation and it lasted for nearly nine years.
When it was fully operational, the main cause for concern was that some of the
women who were being recovered were unwilling to return. For the women,
forcible recovery was equivalent to another dislocation and another traumatic
experience. They had found roots again and did not want to go back to families
who might not accept them. The law that was promulgated [The abducted
persons recovery and restoration ordinance] to recover women did not allow
women a choice. It was propagated that their return was to their natural
‘homeland’—defined as the country of their religion.

Thus, we see how woman becomes, at partition, the sign of the nation,
her body the nation’s own and its violation, a violation of the nation’s body.
Baldev Singh’s Punjabi story, ‘Jaandi vaar Diyaan Haakaan’ [Her last
cries ‘trans. by Tara Sekhri, compiled in Time out: Stories from Punjab, ed. By
Jasjit Man Singh, New Delhi: Srishti, 2002] is a fine example of such a
woman, Bhagwan Kaur who is revealed as a Muslim when she is about to die.
She was born Mirium, daughter of Bashir of Nava Pind (A village in Punjab)
and was abducted by Tegha Singh during the riots. A kind sikh adopts her as
his daughter and later gets his son to marry her. In this strange turn of events,
Miriam becomes Bhagwan Kaur and spends an entire lifetime—in her new identity. It is only in her death that she screams:

"Abba, the bear has caught me...the bears are dragging me away...I'm drowning." The story ends with the lines:

"I saw that people had reached the gates of the cremation ground with the bier of Jathedarni Bhagwan Kaur." [137-139]

In this way, Partition also led to thousands of women who led double lives, who ended up as fractured women. Abducted women who were recovered did not have the right to refuse being recovered. The State, the Patriarchal Nationalist State took that decision for them, denying them their rights as full and free citizens of the new nation.

Yashpal's *Jhootha Sach* [1958-60] written in two volumes called *Vatan aur Desh* (Motherland and Nation) and *Desh ka Bhavishya*, (Future of the Nation) is another example of a fine portrayal of women during the partition years. Keeping women above such categories and considerations as Hindu-Muslim, rich-poor, literate-illiterate, the author has successfully brought out the predicaments of these women. The novel is full of instances of heartless treatment meted out to the rescued Hindu women. Nobody is willing to accept these ill-fated women, neither their in-laws nor their own parents. Chinti who had come to the refugee camp has been refused shelter by her parents on the pretext that they had married her off and therefore it is up to the in-laws to accept or reject her.
One of the rescued women Banto leaves for India from Lahore with the sole purpose of finding her missing infant son. Finally she finds him in Delhi and implores her in-laws to accept her but to no avail. Completely heartbroken, Banto beats her head against the threshold of the house and puts an end to her life. Tara too, never considers it necessary to find her relatives because she is convinced that they will not accept her.

A common destiny of women as members of a community in the national context is that while being held responsible for the continuance of the nation, they are also always suspect. They symbolize a nation’s purity but are always vulnerable to contamination. They embody the nation but are the ‘other’. That is her predicament—that her place i.e. home/ nation sometimes threaten fear of exclusion. She has to conform or be excluded.

As Ritu Menon puts it:

‘Belonging’ for women is also—and uniquely linked to sexuality, honor, chastity, family, community and country must agree on both their acceptability and legitimacy, and their membership within the fold.21

According to the same patriarchal ideology that had caused the mass rape of women from the other religious community [Muslim], the purity of Hindu and Sikh women became a political prerequisite for their belonging in the new nation [in the communal violence surrounding Partition, Hindu and Sikh women sometimes committed suicide or were murdered by kinsmen and these acts of suicide and murder were designed to defeat the enemy’s aims to dishonor the nation by violating its women—were praised as self sacrifice.]
The violence on the part of the State during the recovery mission often led to uprooting women’s settled lives in their new homes. This was called benevolence while women’s rights to self determination regarding their future homes were nullified. The process of repatriation objectified them as only bodies marked by religious affiliation and placed these bodies under the protection of the state.

Analysts like Andrew Parker and Mary Russo have noted that:

Women have been subsumed only symbolically into the national body politic, because no nationalism in the world has ever granted women and men the same privileged access to the resources of the nation-state...Nationalism had a special affinity for male society and together with the concept of respectability, legitimized the dominance of men over women.22

The passionate brotherhood of “deep comradeship” that Benedict Anderson talks about is an essentially male fraternity in which women are worshipped as the Mother and the trope of nation-as-woman “further secures male-male arrangements and an all male history.”23 For India, a country shaken by Partition trauma and painfully reconciling itself to its altered status, reclaiming what was by right its ‘own’ became mandatory in order to establish itself as a responsible and civilized state- one that fulfilled its duty towards its citizens both in getting back what was due to them and playing the role of the protector. Organizations like the RSS and Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Mahasabha were demanding the return of Hindu women and the Hindu Mahasabha even included the recovery of women in its Election manifesto in 1951.
As Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin put it:

Free choice, freely exercised is what neither state nor community could allow abducted women in post-partition India, so much so that it was legislated out. In its desire to restore normalcy and to assert itself as their protector, the Indian state itself became an abductor by forcibly removing adult women from their homes and transporting them out of their country. It became in effect and in a supreme irony, its hated Other.24

In Ice Candyman, these raped and rejected women occupy the house next door to Lenny’s, recently abandoned by the Hindu doctor and his wife. Shankar’s house has been converted to a “camp for fallen women”[226] tho’ to Lenny it resembles a jail that confine anonymous women who “keep to themselves, unobtrusively conducting their lives, lurking like night animals in the twilight interiors of their lairs, still afraid of being evicted from property they have somehow managed to occupy.”[227]

The raped woman lost or was at least threatened with the loss of her personhood through the violent event and the subsequent social death that followed as abducted women were uniformly rejected across differentials of caste and religion. Manto’s story ‘Khol Do’ [trans. as ‘The Return’] is a horrific picture of rape during partition. A young girl has been recovered from India and brought to Lahore by Muslim volunteers lies on a bed in a hospital. She is comatose and has been raped so brutally by men from both sides that when the doctor brings her distraught father in to see if she is the abducted daughter he has been looking for, she undoes the string which holds her salwar in place as she hears the words ‘khol do’. She pulls the garment down and
opens her thighs. It was only the window in the room that the doctor wanted opened. Her father does not notice but screams with joy ‘she is alive, my daughter is alive’.  

In the words of Sukeshi Kamra, the story comments on the artificiality of nationalism... and also on the culture of violence and misogyny...it offers a critique of the cultural insistence on the ‘purity’ of women by offering the image of a father less concerned with his daughter’s chastity than with her survival. Finally, it offers Partition as a psychic space that gave play to all of these cultural tropes and repressions.

The irony is what is Manto’s forte and it comes right across like a slap on the cheek. What is more shameful? The innocent father’s joy at the discovery that his daughter is alive or the doctor’s shameful discovery that she is obeying his orders as a rape victim and is too traumatized to react in any other way. Partition is visible here in its most sordid form. In another story ‘The Dutiful Daughter’ by Manto, an old and distraught woman looks in vain for her daughter who has been abducted. The girl has, since married the man, a Sikh, who had abducted her. When she sees her mother, she refuses to recognize her.

In the words of Urvashi Butalia:

Sakina’s story [Khol Do] was not uncommon at the time of Partition. But all too often, because women have found it difficult to give voice to such experiences, they have remained outside the pale of history. Historical silence is compounded by familial silence: these are things that cannot be talked about; tales of heroism can find a place in
collective memory but abduction and rape must remain at the margins.27

All these stories are examples of attempts at a gendered reading of Partition through the experiences of women. The predominant memory of these women is of confusion, of the severing of roots as they were forced to deal with their freedom. They have a huge loss of place and property, of a settled community and of a 'normal' identity.

Family, Community and State emerge as the three powerful forces, which determined the fate of women at an individual and a collective level. Their religious identity and sexuality were also important in determining their citizenship and secularity. Partition caused such a major upheaval that it disrupted all normal relationships with the state that was as infinitive as that with family and community and as patriarchal. A quote from Ismat Chughtai (Indian Muslim woman writer, 1915-1991, wrote primarily in Urdu) comes to mind:

Own country? Of what feather is that bird? And tell me, good people, where does one find it? The place one is born in, that soil which has nurtured us, if that is not our country, can an abode of a few days hope to be it? And then who knows, we could be pushed out of there too, and told to find a new home, a new country. I'm at the end of my life. One last flutter and there'll be no more quarreling about countries. And then, all this uprooting and resettling doesn't even amuse anymore...now you want to pick up and start again. Is it a country or an uncomfortable shoe? If it pinches, exchange it for another!28
Notes

1 Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist sense of International Politics*; (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) pg.45

2 Gandhi and Communal Harmony, CSSS, 1994, pg.87

3 Gandhi, pg.90


5 Nehru, pg.279


9 Chatterji, pg.172

10 Metcaf, pg.152

11 Metcaf, pg.155

12 Official Histories of Partition were the only records available till the publication of seminal works by Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin.


14 Sangari, pg.248

15 The Nationalist Press included newspapers like *The Leader*, edited by Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya and *National Herald* founded by Nehru in 1938
16 Sangari, pp.128-129

17 Urvashi Butalia, 'Gender and Nation: Some reflections from India' in Rada Ivekovic and Julie Mostov eds. From Gender to Nation (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2002) pg.109

18 Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, Borders and Boundaries (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), pg.89

19 Urvashi Butalia, The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 1998) pg.133

20 Meredith Turshen, 'The Political economy of Rape' Victims, Perpetrators or Actors: Gender, Armed conflict and Political violence, Eds. Caroline O.N. Moser & Fiona C.Clark (New Delhi: Kali, 2001) pg.59

21 Menon and Bhasin, pg.167


24 Menon and Bhasin, pg.125


27 Urvashi Butalia, 'Community, State and Gender' Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India, ed. Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: OUP, 2000) pg.204

28 Ismat Chughtai's 'Roots' taken from the collection 'Chhui Mui' quoted in Ivekovic and Mostov, pg.43