CHAPTER–V
WOMEN AMIDST THE PARTITION

In any upheaval when sectarian passions are aroused or violence reigns supreme whether it is caste or communal violence or inter-state wars, women often become the worst victims of rival groups.1 In a situation of civil war, where nearly every man is a soldier fighting for his homeland women come to be seen as a ‘territory’ to be occupied.2 The increasing incidents of abductions and attacks on the women during the 1946-47, undoubtedly, reflected the attempts to expose the most protected aspects of ‘other’s’ honour and self-identity. Like other gender aspects of the partition, the experience of women as both victims and survivors of violence is absent from standard historical accounts.3 Urvashi Butalia has rightly observed that historians have paid little attention to the experience of women during the partition.4 A resounding silence surrounds the question of women during and after the partition. It may seem a truism to say this, but it bears remembering that at least half of the millions who were dislocated, killed or uprooted were women. A substantial portion of the task of reconstruction and rebuilding fell on women.5 Recent feminist historiography emphasizes that “representative history can only be written if the experience and status of one half of the mankind is an integral part of the story”.6

3 Ian Talbot, “Literature and Human Drama of the 1947 Partition”, D.A. Low and Howard Brasted(eds.), Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence, p. 43.
As is so often the case in civil wars that are driven by ethnic or religious hatred and fear - it was women who were frequently singled out for especially humiliating treatment at the hands of men of the rival community: molestation, rape, mutilation, abduction, forcible conversion, marriage and death.\(^7\) The orgies of violence, abduction and rape, the mutilation and disfigurement of living and dead, the forcible recovery of women all this ripped apart the very fabric of society.\(^8\) The story of the partition, the uprooting and dislocation of people was accompanied by the story of the rape, abduction and widowhood of thousands of women on both sides of newly formed borders. While men belonging to the other community were killed, women were not let off in a show of compassion; instead, they were abducted. Thus, only the form which the violence took differed.\(^9\)

The mass movement of the people on foot, by bus, train, and car left women, children, the aged and infirm, the disabled, particularly vulnerable’.\(^{10}\) During the 1947 partition of India, an estimated 75,000 to 100,000 women were abducted by the members of other religious communities to be raped and murdered, sold into prostitution, or forced into marriage.\(^{11}\) Many a woman were abducted, they were mercilessly treated with inhuman activities i.e. either raped or forcibly married. Women were forced to accept new religion. If someone refused, she was either molested or treated badly on both the sides of the Radcliffe Line.\(^{12}\) Women were distributed in the same way that baskets of oranges or grapes are sold or gifted’.\(^{13}\)

\(^7\) Andrew J. Major, “The Chief Sufferers”, p. 57.
\(^13\) Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, Borders and Boundaries, p. 76.
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Some were sold in the market places for Rupees 10 or 20 a piece, others were sent as gifts to friends and acquaintances. Many of them suffered daily physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their abductors. The traumatic violence meted out to numberless women at the time of partition demolished all sense of self, existential or social, granted to them by established patriarchal system. If they did not die a physical death, they died a psychological death. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin have rightly observed that material, symbolic and political significance of the abduction of women was not lost either on the women themselves and their families and their communities or leaders and governments. As a retaliatory measure, it was humiliation of the rival community through the appropriation of its women. As vessels of the honour of the whole community, the shame and horror fell on everybody associated with the girls: these were not individual tragedies. Leonard Mosley estimated that about 100,000 young girls were kidnapped by both sides, forcibly converted or sold on the auction blocks. According to another estimate around 75,000 women were abducted or raped on the both sides of the border. Zia-ul-Islam states that in Eastern Punjab nearly 55,000 Muslim women were abducted. Gopala Swami Ayyangar later called these ‘rather wild figures’. The abduction, molestation and rape of women were weapons to humiliate the men as being unable to protect the community honour. The use of rape in military

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14 Bede Scott, “Partitioning Bodies: Literature, Abduction and the State”, p. 36.
18 Urvashi Butalia, The Other Side of the Silence: The Voices for the Partition of India, Viking, New Delhi, p. 132.
campaigns to demoralize the enemy is not a new feature.\textsuperscript{21} Given that violence towards women during the partition was an assault not only on her body, but on her family, her culture and her nation, a display of the wounded, an admission of violation, were tantamount to an admission of public defeat for the community whose women had been violated.\textsuperscript{22} The murders, brutality, ill treatment of women and small children in evacuee trains had exceeded all bestialities created by the warped Nazi mind.\textsuperscript{23} These riots brought to the surface both at the level of action and imagination, certain primitive fantasies of bodily violence, prominent among these were those relating to sexual mutilation – the cutting of male genitals, and the sadistic fury directed against female breasts which were hit repeatedly by iron rods, stabbed with knives, lopped off by scythes and swords.\textsuperscript{24} The widespread collapse of law and order in 1947 was attended by a collapse of moral values, or perhaps in some cases an intensified expression of normal, immoral behaviour, so that large number of men lost their sense of humanity and deliberately trampled on the virtues of women whose only crime was that they belonged to a different religious community.\textsuperscript{25} Thus, one of the signatures of the violence of 1947 was the large scale abduction and rape of women.\textsuperscript{26} Women’s bodies were made the passive witnesses to the disorder of the partition. The bodies of women were the surfaces on which texts were to be written and read - icons of the new nations. But women converted this passivity into agency by using metaphors of pregnancy-hiding pain, giving it


\textsuperscript{24} The mutilation of breast may be derived from the upsurge of a pervasive infantile fantasy - the fantasy of violent revenge on a bad, withholding breast, a part of the mother whose absence gives rise to feelings of disintegration and murderous rage: Sudhir Kakkar, \textit{Colours of Violence}, Penguin, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 37-38.

\textsuperscript{25} Andrew J. Major, “The Chief Sufferers”, p. 67.

home just as a child is given a home in woman’s body.\textsuperscript{27} There were various methods of humiliation such as breasts and noses were cut off, their bodies branded or tattooed with signs and symbols of ‘other religion’, pregnant were forcibly aborted and often women were made to strip naked and paraded through the streets in towns and cities.\textsuperscript{28} Between December 6, 1947 and April 27, 1948 nearly 3,912 non-Muslim women from West Punjab were recovered and 7425 Muslim women were recovered from East Punjab. By September 20, 1957, the number of abducted women and children recovered from Pakistan stood at 10,007 and from India at 25,856.\textsuperscript{29} The young women were bartered and sold like a cheap chattel. Murders, abductions, rapes and conversions became a common scare. No community lagged behind and criminalization of human instinct assumed the prominence.\textsuperscript{30} Women were sites upon which communal politics was played. Conversion, kidnapping, rape and killing got communal colouring.\textsuperscript{31} As the law enforcing agencies collapsed, self defense became the only alternative. Tens of thousands of girls and women were seized from refugee columns, from crowded trains, from isolated villages in most wide scale kidnapping of modern times.\textsuperscript{32} A section of people became more aggressive, ruthless and careless about moral values and in such situation women became the worst victims.\textsuperscript{33} The Ajit in April 1947, in a printed pamphlet narrated

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\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 84-85. \\
\textsuperscript{28} Urvashi Butalia, “Community State and Gender: On Women’s Agency During the Partition”, \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, Vol. XXVIII, No. 17, April 24,1993, p. WS.15. \\
\textsuperscript{29} Andrew J. Major, “The Chief Sufferers”, p. 65. \\
\textsuperscript{32} Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, \textit{Freedom at Midnight}, Vikas, New Delhi, 1976, p. 336. \\
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the plight of women rather pathetically: “hundreds of women have been abducted, women jumped into the wells and sacrificed their lives to preserve their honour.”

In response to this tumultuous period, a body of fictional exploration has arisen, attempting to define the inner turmoil and social complexes, plaguing the subcontinent. The fictions were written as an urgent and immediate response to the trauma of violence and dislocation that attended the event. This testimonial literature of the partition resounds with the exigency of being summoned by the contemporeniety of its present context and attests to the impossibility to standing outside an all pervasive violence by bearing witness to the very contagion of such trauma. Examining the partition from a literary perspective provides keener insight into the vacillating personal experiences and national histories. For the historian and researcher who wishes to excavate the experiences of ordinary people, of women, children, the marginalized and poor, official documents and government records have little to offer. Creative writers reveal the other face of the freedom, the freedom drenched in blood and gore. They bring to light, in a way official chronicles do not, the woes of divided families, the trauma of raped and abducted women. Numerous texts, some having been analyzed with much scholarly rigour in recent years, retrieve from silence the many untold stories of women that have died unspoken on the lips of their hapless protagonists.

Historians talk in aggregates. Statistics fail to impart even a fraction of enormity of the tragedy that was the partition. Cold statistics fail to hint at the trauma of husbands and wives, sons and mothers separated by the Radcliffe Line. A sense of individual and collective guilt and shame has led to suppression and denial.

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37 Nadia Ahmad, “Cracking India”, p. 6.
of memories of the partition. This seems almost clearly with respect to the stigma attached to rape and abduction.\textsuperscript{40} Women had memories of the events of 1947 that they were forced to suppress, stifle or store away but the literature can somehow liberate these stories from hiding. Given the overwhelming stigma still attached to women who were perceived to have been sexually contaminated by men of ‘other’ community during the sectarian violence that accompanied the partition, it was unlikely that they would ever testify about their experience. In the face of this silence it may well be the task of literary historiography to unveil, uncover, liberate from silence and oblivion, these women’s stories.\textsuperscript{41}

Bapsi Sidhwa has rightly observed that women were the ‘living objects on whose soft bodies victors and losers alike vent their wrath and enact fantastic vendettas, and celebrate victories.\textsuperscript{42} The events of violence, brutal rape and abduction of women and painful inscriptions of nationalist slogans on the bodies of women made sudden appearances.\textsuperscript{43} The ravaged bodies of the women became ‘envelopes to carry the message of conquest from one group of men to another.’\textsuperscript{44} Murders, looting, abductions and sexual assault appear to have been frighteningly common place occurrences as displaced individuals and communities responded with violence to the threat to their lives, security of their property and cultural continuity.\textsuperscript{45} It was the time when ‘communal passions swept the whole Punjab community clean of all decency, morality and sense of human values.’ \textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{40} Ian Talbot, “Partition, Memory and Trauma: Voices of Punjabi Refugee Migrants in Lahore and Amritsar”, \textit{Sikh Formations}, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2006, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{43} Veena Das, “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain”, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{44} Deepika Bahri, “Telling Tales: Women and Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa’s \textit{Cracking India}”, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{46} Andrew J. Major, “The Chief Sufferers”, p. 57.
The women were helpless. The untold brutalities were committed on women. ‘Hindustan’ and Pakistan was inscribed on their thighs and breasts. Hindu-Sikh women on that side and Muslim women on this side of the border were hapless. Young and beautiful women were in more trouble. They had to satisfy the lust of the whole country. Sixty and seventy years old men fulfilled their lust with young women - no one was considered as daughter or sister. Sometimes it was a routine that first the women was molested, raped and then killed. The blood soaked body of the woman would be lying on the ground… This happened in the country of Guru and Kabir. Who did this? Their own followers.

Mohammad Sahib said that it was wrong to raise a hand on the women and children. But his own followers killed the woman and children with glory and raised the slogans. Where is Mohammad Sahib? His followers have overrun him. Not only Mohammad Sahib, there are so many great men. But who cares for their words?

Jesus, Mahatma Budha, Guru Nanak, Hazrat Mohammad all of them said that all human beings are one. Women are great. All should bow their heads before them. But nobody follows their sermons only they are worshipped.”

Much of terror and violence fell on the womenfolk in Hindu, Sikh and Muslim families. Women became target of communal violence as early as March 1947 when a number of Sikh villages like Thamali, Thoa Khalsa, Doberan, Kallar, and others in the Rawalpindi district witnessed many cases of abduction and rape.

During the partition mayhem, this phenomenon reached unimaginable proportions. The women bore the children often only to have taken them away forcibly. Sometimes families traded in their own women in exchange for freedom. Thousands of women were rejected by their husbands and families and they had no option but to live their lives in ashrams and brothels. During and in the aftermath, the patriarchal character determined the fate of the women. Abducted women were recovered and restored despite their reluctance in certain cases.

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47 Santokh Singh Dhir, Oh Din, Aarsi Publication, Delhi, 2004 (First Published, 1973), pp. 52-53.
49 Urvashi Butalia, The Other Side of Silence, p. 132.
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One can say with some degree of confidence that never could men in their aloneness have been capable of contemplating the styles of violent homicide, rape and mutilation of human bodies as when they experienced themselves encapsulated within a collectivity. Violence at the height of the crisis became the subject, the object, the instrument and the purpose of the action. The damaged bodies and psyche of women who became the sites of worst violence at the time of the partition serve as living, if muted and distorted testimonial to their token status in the war over contending factions. For women, the trauma of rape, molestation and abduction was so grave, and made even worse in many cases because of the cultural taboos surrounding it. Anthropologist Veena Das writes that woman’s body became as a sign through which men communicated with each other and the political programme of creating two nations of India and Pakistan was inscribed upon the bodies of women. When the question of ethnic or communal identity comes to the fore, women are often the first to be targeted: the regulation of their sexuality is critical to establish difference and claiming distinction. Then the question of where women belong, of whether they emerge as full-fledged citizens or remain ‘wards of their immediate communities, is contingent upon how the politics of identity are played out, and how their resolution takes place between community and state.

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53 Continuing patterns of violence in the history of the sub-continent in the aftermath of the partition speak of enduring trauma, betraying a wound that has never quite healed. The fetishized status of women as metonymic totem of national, cultural, religio-communal being and the emphasis on her purity are very elements in this gynocentered assault on the enemy: Deepika Bahri, “Telling Tales: Women and Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa’s Cracking India”, p. 222.


55 Gyanesh Kudaisya and Tai Yong Tan, The Afternath of the Partition in South Asia, p. 22.

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Women were the chief sufferers of chaos created by the Partition. Facts and figures speak merely about the number of women who were abducted, raped, molested forcibly converted or killed in the process. In the literary imagination in India, the violence of the partition was about inscribing desire on the bodies of women in a manner that we have not yet understood. In the mythic imagination of India, victory or defeat in war was ultimately inscribed on the bodies of women.57 Literary narratives are read as important social documents that approximate the reality of their contemporary contexts. The prolific fiction written as an immediate response to this founding trauma of sub-continental nationalism becomes an eloquent witness, and perhaps the only witness, to an unspeakable and inarticulatable history.58 The partition fiction has been a far richer resource both because it provides popular and astringent commentary on the politics of the partition and because, here and there, we find women’s voices, speaking for themselves.59 In the absence of direct testimony, fictionalized and second hand accounts have attempted to capture the elusive experiences of women during this turbulent time.60 To understand the process by which the proximity turns to communal hatred, violence and rape, to something so incomprehensible that it was only through literature, rather than history, that stories of partition could be recounted and the pain expressed.61 The transaction between body and language lead to an articulation of whole world in which the strangeness of the world revealed by death, by its non-inhabitability can be transformed into a world in which one can dwell again, in full awareness of life that has to be lived in loss. Moreover, some realities need to be fictionalized before they can be apprehended.62

59 Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, Borders and Boundaries, pp. 11-12.
60 Deepika Bahri, “Telling Tales: Women and Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa’s Cracking India”, p. 218.
The destruction of families through murder, suicide, broken women and kidnappings caused grievous post-partition trauma. The purpose of partition literature can be seen as steps in conflict resolution because accusations, threats, insecurities and fears are prevalent among those that were and continue to be traumatized by the events surrounding the independence movement. The thorough shake up of the society caused by the partition disturbed many steadfast notions about religious harmony. The communalized outburst of violence indicated the need to question such beliefs and faith in religion that could provoke barbarism:

“The young women were taken to Gurdwaras and temples and there the worshippers were dishonored in front of their gods’ idols. The mothers were molested before the eyes of the daughters and daughters were dishonoured before the eyes of the mothers.”

The partition meant mass migrations but the women reacted from the depths of their being at the idea of leaving home. Many literary narratives bring out this anguish. The women, in the patriarchal system of India, were always confined to domesticity and it perhaps symbolized their world of living and the outer world was prohibited for them. That was why women reacted sharply to the idea of leaving home. In the normative structure of society, a woman is complexly identified with the home and woman fixes her identity securely within the framework of her family confined to the four walls of house. If displaced from such a format of existence, she is shorn of the basic marker of her identity and with that she dies an unnatural psychic death. Women were certainly affected by the partition though their

63 Nadia Ahmad, “Cracking India: Cultural and Religious Representation in Indo-Anglian Literature (1947 to Present)”, p. 4.
64 Ibid., p. 5.
65 Kartar Singh Duggal, Nau Te Maas, Attar Chand Kapur & Sons, Delhi, 1951, pp. 369-70.
66 The question, do women have a country? Is often followed by are the full fledged citizens of their countries? Recent feminist research has demonstrated how ‘citizen’ and ‘state subject’ are gendered categories by examining how men and women are treated unequally by most states but especially post-colonial states - despite constitutional guarantees of equality. The integration of women into modern ‘nationhood’ epitomized by citizenship in a sovereign nation-state some how follows a different trajectory from that of men: Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, “Belonging”, pp. 190-191.

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experiences varied. Amidst forced migration, violence, abduction, recovery and readjustments, most of them lost their identities, which were subsumed by identities like community, religion and nationality. In their memory, the predominant picture is one of confusion, dislocation and severing of roots, as they were forced to reckon with the implication of Independence, which to them meant partition.⁶⁷

“Amma’s trunk, however, remained immobile. ‘Amma has become senile. She is not quite sane’.
Time passed on, but Amma stayed steadfast in her position like a banyan tree that stands upright in storms and blizzards. But when the caravan consisting of her sons and daughters, sons-in-law, daughters-in law and grandchildren passed through the big gate and got onto the lorries under police supervision, her heart fluttered….
Having surrendered all the assets of her life to the mercy of the god, Amma stood on the desolate courtyard. Her heart sank and she got scared like a small child as though ghosts would pounce on her from all sides. As she turned to the room in the front, her heart came to her mouth. It was here that the ghoonghat was lifted from the moonlike face of the young and timorous bride who had surrendered her life to her husband. In room on the other side her oldest daughter was born whose remembrance pierced through her heart like lightening…. In fact all her children had their umbilical cord buried there. The room lay desolate and she returned terror stricken”.⁶⁸

When the partition was announced, to most women (as to men) it meant something very vague - something which happened at the level of high politics. They did not have an idea of what would comprise Pakistan and what would be retained in Hindustan. However, soon panic followed. Many innocently believed it to be a temporary feature. As communal frenzy engulfed the Punjab, people were forced to abandon their homelands to move into strange, alien places across the border..⁶⁹ The women reacted sharply to the idea of migrating as it was torturous even to think of. Salma in Jadon Sawer Hoi declares, “I would prefer to die over

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⁶⁹ Ajnali Bhardwaj, “Partition of India and Women’s Experiences”, p. 85.
here rather than leaving my home”. Nooran in Train to Pakistan says, “This is our village. Who will throw us out”. In Azadi, Mukanda’s mother who is even partly mad totally rejects the idea of leaving her home brings into question the sanity of those who were leaving their native land. The loss of old world is experienced by woman as a simultaneous violation of their bodies, their interior existence, and their everyday lives. The new world, in which self became largely fragmented, is consternated as an implicit contract of silence which, however, the body breaks through the development of symptoms. Shahni, the protagonist of Krishna Sobti’s story “New Regime” resists the uprootment from her haveli. The author poignantly captures the torment of an elderly woman who in pushed into migration when her very identity is based on the confines of her house. To her, discarding her home means discarding the self

“Shahni was shattered but unable to express her feelings. Daud Khan repeated, ‘Shahni you must carry some cash’. ‘No child, I don’t love money more than this house. The money belongs to this place, I will stay here’..... Shahni was startled. Getting late? In her own house? She had been the queen of this house dating back to her ancestors. How could they be so audacious to as to pounce upon her own victuals...

With her head covered, she cast a final look at her haveli through her tear dimmed eyes. The heritage she had preserved after Shshji’s death was slipping out of her hands. Oh what a betrayal? She joined her hands. This was her last darshan, her last salutation. She could have wanted to see every nook and corner of the house but was feeling so dwarfed. As she receded from the vestibule, tears dwelled up in her eyes and fell on the ground.”

70 Niranjan Singh Tasneem, Jadon Sawer Hoi, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1999 (First Published 1977), p.124.
71 Khushwant Singh, Train to Pakistan, Ravi Dayal Publishers, New Delhi, 2001(First Published 1956), p. 150.
It was surprising for women to discover that borders created upon the partition were to be permanent borders. In different styles, they would state that they had assumed that they were fleeing to meet a temporary emergency but would one day return to their homes. Their earlier stock of experience had taught them that temporary migrations were a means of ensuring survival but no one abandons the home forever. The partition of India with its permanent division between two sovereign states was a new concept of territory for them, and consequent to this, the migration to a new world with no possibility of return was totally new in their experience.  

The partition was a pathegyony of the male lust for power. It was typical male construct where women were made the site of macabre treatment. Abduction of women had become very much prevalent in the turmoil of 1947 and so their worthlessness. Even ordinary men did not lag behind to get their share. Women become ‘plunderer’s paradise’ as it is clear from the following dialogue of the two characters in *Train to Pakistan*:

> “Bholeya, I hear a lot of women are being abducted and sold cheap. You could find a wife for yourself. ’
> Why Sardara, if you can find a Mussalmani without paying for her, am I impotent that I should have to buy an abducted girl”, replied Bhola”.

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77 Khushwant Singh, *Train To Pakistan*, p. 85. Andrew J. Major asserts: “It would seem to be quite wrong to regard the rape and abduction of Punjabi women in 1947 as a product merely of the anomic of the times, as an abnormal occurrence in a society undergoing severe temporary dislocation, for that would be to ignore the fact that violence against women is embedded in everyday relationships in this society. Recent studies have shown that ‘power-rape’ - the raping of women in order to demoralize and defeat rival men in a patriarchal society- is particularly common in northern India. Abduction is also conspicuous in the history of inter-clan rivalry in the Punjab. Thefts, decoities, murders and abductions have always constituted the normal spare time activity of the inhabitants: “Andrew J. Major”, *The Chief Sufferers*, p. 59. On a more sociological level, the chief reason for the preponderance of specially sexual violence in the partition riots in the northern India is that, as compared to other parts of the country, the undivided Punjab was ( and continues to be) a rather violent society. Its high murder rate is only one
As normal and daily activities were abruptly terminated, women who had been allocated private spheres of homes were suddenly and literally thrown into open. This emotional and physical threat of brutal violence is manifested in the fiction. The partition fiction exposes the devilish instinct and brutality with which women were handled.  

“They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet that want to move backwards are forced forward instead. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like the dead child’s scream less mouth. Her violet sari slips off her shoulders, and her breasts strain at her sari-blouse stretching the cloth so that white stitching at the seams shows. A sleeve tears under her arm. The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, left her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimesces".

Amrita Pritam’s novel “Pinjar” is a classic novel on this aspect. The story revolves around the protagonist Pooro (later on Hamida) who is abducted by a Muslim named Rashida just out of old rivalry between their families. Although, the major part of the plot of the novel takes place in the pre-partition period, yet the novel bares the women’s travails during the partition. The novel melts the frozen indication of a cultural endorsement of the use of physical force to attain socially approved ends such as the defence of one’s land or of personal and family honour. There is now empirical evidence to suggest that the greater the legitimation of violence in some approved areas of life, the more is likelihood that force will also be used other spheres where it may not be approved. It is then quite understandable that sexual violence during the partition riots could reach the levels of brutality which had rarely been approached in subsequent riots in other parts of the country: Sudhir Kakkar, Colours of Violence, p.38.


Bapsi Sidhwa, Ice-Candy Man, Penguin, New Delhi, 1988, p. 183. After searching the city for her, Lenny’s Grandmother traces Ayah to the backstreets of Hira Mandi of Lahore. There she and Lenny find a woman with vacant eyes and a hoarse voice as if someone ‘had mutilated her vocal cords’. She had suffered multiple rapes and been forced into prostitution by her husband and ‘protector’, Ice Candy Man. It is also clear that she has been subjected to what Foucault might call ‘a project of docility’ – to ‘a policy of coercions that act upon body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour: Bede Scott, “Partitioning Bodies: Literature, Abduction and the State”, p. 39.
moments of the partition in which women were abducted, raped or kept just in the name of warring religion.

“Pooro was now Hamida, but still everybody in her dreams would call her Pooro. In the day light Pooro was Hamida, but in the darkness of night she was Pooro. She thought she was neither Pooro not Hamida, she was just a skeleton. She was just a Pinjar (skeleton), which had no shape, no name”.  

Migration further simplified the task of abductors. It was easy to take the women away while the convoys were on the move because the chances of resistance were less. Women could do nothing but wail only. Literature depicts dramatically the psychological wounds of women being separated from their families who were already uprooted. Men were not able to save them. These emotions of impotence seem to be have been internalized and were manifested in the helplessness of the people on the move.

“The agonizing cry of a young girl rent the air Hai Waheguru save me. She cried out in panic. Santa Singh was startled. For the first time, the full meaning of the scream hit him. The cry was far away, probably at the other end of the train, and yet so close that he dared not look in the direction of his own fourteen year old Baljeet”.

Women were made destitute in one way or another by the event, as forced migrations led to an extreme disruption of life at all levels and exposed them to a kind of upheaval that could only proclaim the dark side of freedom In their recall, the predominant memory is of confusion, dislocation and severing of roots as they were forced to reckon with the twin aspects of ‘Azadi’: bewildering loss of place and property, no doubt, but more significantly, of community, of a network of more or less stable relationships and of a coherent identity. The apparently fixed and defining characteristic of identity like community, religion, nationality impinged on

81  Ritu Menon (ed.), *No Women’s Land*, Women Unlimited, New Delhi, 2004, p.75.
women’s body. For hundreds or thousands of women to travel fearfully often meant never to arrive, venturing out could entail being ambushed, injured, abducted, raped, killed, converted and forcibly married.

“A lone Muslim dragged a woman away and kept her for his own exclusive use. The rest were subjected to mass rape at times in public places and in the presence of large gatherings. The rape was followed by other atrocities, chopping of breasts and even death. Many of pregnant women had their wombs torn open. The survivors were retained for repeated rapes and humiliations.”

Rape was the worst form of women sufferings during the partition. The increasing incidents of rape and molestation reflected the psyche to expose the most protected aspect of ‘other’ community’s honour and self-respect. Rape was used to kill the ‘other’ morally. Women were too much unfortunate to conceal ‘their selves’. The hunting eyes were in search of the beauty to be devastated.

“She had been married four days ago and both her arms were covered with red lacquer bangles and the henna on her palms was still a deep vermilion. The mob made lover to her. She did not have to take off any one of her bangles. They were all smashed as she lay in the road being taken away by one man and another and another”.

Literary memory becomes almost a mandatory source for the subtle revelations of some deeply ingrained attitudes operating behind so much of the action during the days of partition. The communalism made visible the dark side by making the bodies of women the surfaces on which the text of nation was written. It is well known how control over women’s sexuality perpetrates through male protection of the community’s honour. But that protection was not there.

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84 Ritu Menon (ed.), No Women’s Land, p.76.
85 Chaman Nahal, Azadi, p.293.
86 Khushwant Singh, Train to Pakistan, pp. 202,203.
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“He heard Sunanda again. ‘Let go off me, you brute’. It seemed someone’s hand was on her mouth, for her words come out in muffled gasps... She was lying on the ground on an improvised bed of hey, in the far corner. Her head was away from Arun and he saw her legs. Between her legs and on the top of her, was lying a man... She was still weeping softly and tamely. Her breath was choked with convulsion.”

The orgiastic rape, dismemberment of female breasts and private parts are supported by historical and eye-witness accounts which corroborate lurid tales of how individual and group sexual assault on women and their public degeneration was cheered by groups of people who regarded them as acts of retribution and redressal for their injuries, factual or imaginary. Marking the breasts and genitalia with symbols like the crescent moon or trident makes permanent the sexual appropriation of the woman, and symbolically extends this violation to future generations who are thus metaphorically stigmatized. Amputating her breasts at once desexualizes a woman and negates her as a wife and mother, no longer a nurturer, she remains a permanently inauspicious figure, almost as undesirable as a barren woman.

“The procession arrived. There were forty women, marching two abreast. Their ages varied from sixteen to thirty, although, to add to the grotesqueness of the display, there were two women, marching right at the end of the column, who must have been over sixty. They were all stack naked. Their heads were completely shaven; so were their armpits. So were their pubic regions. Shorn of their body hair and clothes, they looked like baby girls, or like the bold embryos, one sees preserved in methylated spirit. Only the breasts and hips gave away the age. The women walked awkwardly, looking only at the ground. They were all crying. Their eyes shed no tears... the bruises on their bodies showed they had been beaten and manhandled. The procession moved through the bazzar and

90 Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, Borders and Boundaries, p.44.
along with procession moved a river of obscenities foul abuses, crude personal gestures, spurts of sputum, odd articles like small coins, faded flowers, cigarette butts and bidis that were thrown at the women. As soon as the women came near, that section of crowd became hysterical. ‘Rape them’. ‘Put it inside of them’. ‘The filthy Hindu bitches’. ‘The kafir women’. Some said even worse things’.

Gender identities and women’s bodies become symbolic and spatial boundaries of the nation. Women’s bodies serve as symbols of fecundity of the nation and vessels for its reproduction, as well as territorial markers. Mothers, wives and daughters designate the space of the nation and were at the same time, the property of the nation.

There, when their veils were removed, two beautiful young girls emerged who had been gagged, and had their hands tied in the back. One of them swooned right there; the other looked at the other women in the waiting room through eyes dazzled by light and asked for water.

Then the two girls told their woeful tale. They were from a zamindar - land owning family in Ferozepur. One evening there were rumours of trouble brewing. At night, shouts of ‘Sat Sri Akal’ were heard. Swords and daggers were brandished. There was noise of fighting. Their father and brothers were killed. These two girls became the booty. After that Sikhs had been dragging them from city to city, all over the place.

Detached from whole bodies, the sexed body parts were powerful testimony to the dehumanization of women and their reduction to ghastly currency in an exchange determined by the rules of men.

“He announces pantingly, ‘A train from Gurdaspur has just arrived. Everyone in it is dead, butchered. They are all

\[91\] Chaman Nahal,\textit{ Azadi}, pp. 296-297.


Muslims. There are no young women among the dead. Only two gunny bags full of women’s breasts’….”

The rape and the molestation to which women were subjected was a sordid chapter in the history of human civilization. The partition literature speaks about thousands of women who suffered irreparable loss and were totally incapacitated both physically and psychologically. Manto’s short story ‘Khol Do’ (Open It) is a chilling story how a woman became totally insensate after undergoing the multiple rapes. She has inwardly resigned herself to become a robotic object. She is brought to the hospital in an unconscious stage. The doctor asks to open the window but she is so prone to the command (Khol Do) that she simply undoes her trousers and opens her legs:

A light was switched on. It was a young woman with a mole on her left cheek. ‘Sakina”, Sirajudin screamed. The doctor, who had switched on the light, stared at Sirajudin. ‘I am her father’, he stammered. The doctor looked at the prostrate body and felt the pulse. Then he said to the old man: ‘Open the window’. The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord which kept her salwar tied round her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs. ‘She is alive. My daughter is alive’, Sirajudin shouted with joy. The doctor broke into cold sweat.”

In another story “Thanda Ghosht” (Cold Meat) a young girl is raped even after she is dead. The event has such a chilling effect on the rapist that he becomes impotent. The story vividly depicts man’s descent into savagery and underscores the fact that even in those dark days it was still possible for men to die an honorable death at the hands of his enemies but not for women. They had to be debouched

95 Bapsi Sidhwa, Ice-Candy Man, p. 149.
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before they were done to death.\footnote{M. Asaduddin, “Literary Narratives and Retrieval of History”, p. 174.} In short story \textit{“Allah Wale”} the protagonist Sawinder exposes her travails in the form of abduction, escaping and jumping into the river, then finally being captured, recovery and restoration to her parents.\footnote{Gurmukh Singh Musafir, “Allah Wale”, \textit{Jaswant Deed (ed.) Desh Wand Diyan Kahanian}, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 97-102.}

A large body of the partition literature deals with the violence and inhumanity against the women during the partition riots. \textit{Chammo Di Baithak}, a short story by Surinder Singh Narula narrates that even the brothels were not spared. The prostitutes were forced to announce their religious affiliations. The rioters wrote slogans like ‘Only for Hindu Boys’, ‘only for Sangh Boys’ and ‘Only for Pakistanis’. The rioters attacked the place of Chammo, the most famous dancer of Amritsar and the irony of the situations is that Chammo was born as Hindu, brought up a Muslim but again pushed into the profession by a Hindu. But the mob was abusing her for being a Muslim, The story is a verdict that marauders were more degenerated even than those universally condemned women (prostitutes).\footnote{Surinder Singh Narula, “Chammo Di Baithak”, \textit{Jaswant Deed (ed.), Desh Vand Diyan Kahanian} pp. 47-55.}

Kartar Singh Duggal’s short story \textit{Kulsum} depicts the story of a young girl who is confined by an old man to offer her as a gift to the young school master. The schoolmaster felt that the gift was fit to be swallowed. When she poses resistance, she is first raped by the old man and then handed over to the school master.\footnote{Kartal Singh Duggal, “Kulsum”, \textit{Orphans of the Storm}, pp.94-97.} Thus, it puts a big question mark even on the wisdom of (wise) men. Jaswant Singh Kanwal’s \textit{Sarhde Jakham} is a lamentation over the fate of women who have been hurt, oppressed and violated by the men for centuries, irrespective of their religion. The story narrates that how the brute desires were fulfilled in the name of religion and under the shadow of freedom. The protagonist revolts that women were not responsible for communal propaganda and they were not leaders but whatever had been done with them that could not be answered by a living god. She further

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laments that they were in the clutches of wolf of lust and it is not for the first time. This is going for centuries. M.S. Sarna’s story “Hira Mirg” narrates that how a dog (Moti) died while defending the honour of daughter of his mistress. Thus, story is witness to the dwindling humanity among the human beings during the partition. Moreover, the story is a verdict on the surging humanity of a beast when the human beings went berserk in the name of religion and defeated even the beastliness of the beasts. The women, although non-players in the politics of the partition and subsequent communal frenzy, were the chief objects of revenge:

“With his own hands he had built the funeral pyre for the body of his daughter. The fire god soon devoured that delicate body-devoured Janki with her innocence, her wounds, and her humiliation.

The flames of the funeral pyre had at last dried down. But not the fire of revenge that they had set ablaze in the mind and heart of Hari Das. That fire could never be extinguished… At least not until he was able to take revenge by stabbing a Muslim girl in her naked breasts. It was only for that he was living.

Revenge!

Retaliation!”

Qudrat Ullah Shahab’s short story “Ya Khudha” is a tale of Muslim girl Dilshad who suffers first at the hands of non-Muslims where she is sexually abused. Then she migrates to Pakistan with new hopes but all her hopes are shattered when she discovers that even her co-religionists looked upon her as an object of sexual

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102 Jaswant Singh Kanwal, “Sarhde Jakham”, Jaswant Deed (ed.) Desh Vand Diyan Kananiyan, pp. 155-163. Urvashi Butalia quotes the following words from a pamphlet: “Violence is almost always instigated by men, but its greatest impact is felt by women. In violent conflict, it is women who are raped, women who are widowed, women whose children and husbands are sacrificed in the name of national integrity and unity. And for every fire that is lit, it is women whose job it is to painfully build future from the ashes. Those who see their manhood in taking up arms can be protectors of none and nothing”: Urvashi Butalia, “Community, State and Gender”, p. WS-13.


pleasure. But there were some who kept alive the humanity. They struggled hard to save the honour of the women of the ‘other’. Even sometimes they had to lose their lives even. Hari Singh Dilbar’s short story ‘Bajre Di Dandi Te’ is woven around such a theme. Gurmukh Singh Musafir’s ‘Allah Wale’ also portrays the same situation in which Allah Baksh was trying to locate and recover the Sikh girl Sawinder to be handed over to his parents.

There was a violence that was horrifying in its intensity and one which knew no boundaries; for many women, it was not only ‘miscreants’, ‘outsiders’ or ‘marauding mobs’ that they needed to fear - husbands, fathers, brothers and even sons, could turn killers. They claimed that they did honour killings. Their claims were to protect the purity and sanctity of their religion. Death was inflicted upon

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106 The protagonist of the story, Bholu was not swept away by the communal frenzy where others had been. The people had captured the property of the Muslims who had left the area. But Bholu had not claimed even the cattles of the Muslims, which were roaming around his field. One evening Bholu discovered, Mehran, the friend of her daughter. She was brutally assaulted and Bholu took her to his home. He was warned by his co-religionist but he did not pay any heed to their words. Next day, when he was going to escort the girl to the camp, he was assaulted on the way… And Bholu, who grew food for others, who fenced and defended, the fields from stray cattle had died there today for saving the ‘others’ honour. His flowing blood was feeding the plants of maze: Hari Singh Dilbar, “Bajre Di Dandi Te”, Jaswant Deed (ed.), Desh Wand Diyan Kahaniyan, pp. 83-86.


109 Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, Borders and Boundaries, pp. 49-50. The partition violence was not merely the murder and pillage of others; it also involved massive violence directed towards the self. The mass suicide at Thoa Khalsa was not an isolated instance: stories of this kind of mass suicide, or of women being killed by their own families are legion: Ashish Nandy, “The Invisible Holocaust and Journey as an Exodus: The Poisoned Village and the Stranger City, Postcolonial Studies, Vol.2, No.3, 1999, pp. 314-315. See the following observation by Mahatma Gandhi: “I have heard that many women did not want to lose their honour and chose to die. Many men killed their own wives. I think it is really great because I know that such things make India brave. After all, life and death is a transitory game. Whoever might have died and are dead and gone; but at least they have gone with courage. They have not sold away their honour. Not that their lives were not dear to them, but they felt it was better to die with courage rather than be forcibly converted to Islam by Muslims and allow them to assault their bodies. And so
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instances of martyrdom have received some scholarly attention following the recent renewal of interest in the recent history and historiography of the partition. Perhaps the best known case is the collective suicide of 90 or more women. Women had these women died. They were not just a handful, but quite a few. When I hear all these things, I dance with joy that there are such brave women in India: quoted in Jill Didur, *Unsettling Partition*, p.3.

110 H.S. Gill, *Ashes and Petals*, p.9. The fear of abduction, or a falling into the hands of the enemy compelled hundreds of women to take their own lives, equal numbers to be killed by their own families and literally thousands of others to carry packets of poison in their persons in the eventuality that they might be captured. And many committed suicide after they were released by their captors for having been thus used and polluted: Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, “Recovery, Rupture, Resistance”, p. WS-3.

111 The celebration of this indomitable spirit, the victory of honour over the fears of the flesh, the sacrifice of individual life in the greater interest of the *panth*, therefore, runs through these accounts. In July 1947, leaflets distributed among the Sikhs of Delhi were celebrating the martyrdom and sacrifices of the women of Thoa Khalsa and other brave Sikh women and men. The leaflet read: “The memory of the heroes of Jaito and Nankana has been enlivened once again by sisters of spinning wheel. The death defying sisters of Rawalpindi - the pride of Pothohar, those braved daughters of Guru Arjan who preferred
been forced to die at the hands of men in their own families, or by their own hands. Poisoned, strangled or burnt to death, put to sword, drowned. ...It was made abundantly clear to them that death was preferable to ‘dishonour’ that in the absence of their men the only choice available to them was to take their own lives.112

“There was a upheaval in the village. Nobody was able to foresee what to do. The young women were helpless on seeing the plight of their parents. They had no place to hide themselves. Someone said that she would jump into the well, someone said that she would jump from the rooftop, someone discovered opium, someone poison. Some implored their brothers, husbands to kill them by their own hands.”113

Feminists in all the post-colonial nation-states have questioned this particular context of constructing womanhood which makes her a mute victim of sexual aggression by enemies or a victim of her own community, who tries to preserve its honour by pre-empting her defilement by killing herself.114

“Young girls were raped in front of their parents, and some were abducted in the presence of the brothers and husbands…. Thousands save their honour of womanhood by jumping into the wells, consuming poison or jumping into the fire”.115

The partition in the western part of India, which was achieved more or less with one stroke, witnessed many such occurrences, but except in fictional writings such events were never considered part of history. It is a kind of horror which our social ambience was never prepared to face, hence it was consigned to oblivion.116

Forceful marriages during the partition upheaval were another dimension of the women sufferings. The women were forced to live with a person whom they

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112 Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, Borders and Boundaries, p. 45.
113 Kartar Singh Duggal, Nau Te Maas, p.46.
115 Nanak Singh, Khoon De Sohle, Lok Sahit Parkashan, Amritsar, 2001 (First Published, 1948).p.201.
were not ready to accept. In certain cases, after being raped or molested, women had to accept their ravishers as their husbands.\textsuperscript{117}

“Affected atleast by Grandmother’s stony silence, Ice-Candy Man lowers his eyes. His voice divested to oratory, he says, ‘I am her slave, Baijee. I worship her. She can come to no harm with me’.

‘No harm?’ God mother asks in a deceptively cool voice and arching her back like a scorpion its tail. She closes in for kill.

‘You permitted her to be raped by butchers, dunks and goondas and say she has come to no harm?’

‘Is that why you had lifted her off - let hundred of eyes probe her so that you could marry her?’ … ‘You have permitted your wife to be disgraced! Destroyed her modesty! Lived off her women-hood?

‘I-saved her’. He stammers. They would have killed her… I married her”\textsuperscript{118}

So entrenched was the notion of protection of ‘honour’ of their women in each of the communities, that women were forced either to commit suicide to pre-empt the humiliation of getting sexually assaulted and dishonoured, or they were actually murdered. It was the women who were seen to have upheld, by offering themselves up for death, and more particularly ‘heroic’ death and the ‘honour’ of the community.\textsuperscript{119} The partition literature exposes the hypocrisy and callousness of the world of men who denied their women a normal life.

“There were some amongst these abducted women whom their husbands, parents, brothers and sisters refused to recognize. On the contrary, they would curse them.

Why did they not die? Why did not they take poison to save their chastity? Why did not they jump into a well to save their honour?

They were cowards who basely and desperately clung to life”\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{117} Jasbir Singh, “Women, Violence and the Partition”, p. 68.

\textsuperscript{118} Bapsi Sidhwa, \textit{Ice-Candy Man}, pp. 248-49.

\textsuperscript{119} Urvashi Butalia, “Community, State and Gender: On Women’s Agency during the Partition”, pp. 14-15.

Jawaharlal Nehru appealed the people to take the girls and women back and give them every help as they required tender and loving care. The literature exposes how the abducted women longed for a reunion with their families but when that moment came, the parents and families refused to accept them. Pooro in *Pinjar* also faces the similar kind of fate.

Pooro’s father says, “My daughter this is your fate. Where we will keep you, who will marry you. You have lost your religion………nobody stopped her.

Pooro kept on moving. While coming she was full of life, of a desire to live, of a will to meet her parents. Now going back she was going to meet her nemesis.

Another aspect of the partition relating to the women was the recovery operation. On September 3, 1947 leaders and representatives of India and Pakistan met and resolved that steps be taken to recover and restore abducted persons. During the Constituent Assembly Debates, one of the Member of Parliament made the point that it is absolutely the right of every women to go back to her original home, while another spoke of the importance of returning ‘those persons who have been virtually under confinement for over two years …to their families’. One M.P said in the Parliament: “If there is any sore point or distressful fact, it is the question of abduction and non-restoration of Hindu women. We all know our history of what happened in the time of Sri Ram when Sita was abducted. Here, where thousands of girls are concerned, we can forget every other thing but this cannot be forgotten. As

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122 Amrita Pritam, *Pinjar*, pp. 28-29. A woman raped and speaking of her shame must accept that she can no longer occupy any available and acceptable social space; she were, in fact, better dead. Afterwards they belong to any known categories of virgin, wife, or widow and are thus effectively erased from the social register: Deepika Bahri, “Telling Tales: Women and Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*”, p.220.

123 Both the Governments entered into an Inter Dominion Agreement. On December 6, 1947 on Inter-Dominion Conference was held at Lahore for the implementation of recovery and restoration : Narinder Iqbal, *Communal Violence in the Punjab (1947)*, p. 231.

descendants of Ram we have to bring back every Sita that is alive”. Jawahar Lal Nehru, stressing the question of rescuing women who had been abducted or forcibly converted, wrote to Sir Evans Jenkins, the Governor of the Punjab, “nothing adds to popular passions more than stories of abduction of women and so long as these women are not rescued, trouble will simmer and might blaze out”. Women, who had been taken away by the ‘other’ community, had to be brought back to their own community, their ‘own’ homeland: both concepts that were defined for women by the men of respective countries. They did not have a choice.

By September 30, 1957 the number of abducted women and children recovered from Pakistan stood at 10,007 and from India at 25,856. On the face of it, none of this seems particularly contentious: the state had simply intervened to protect its citizens’ rights and to return them to their families and communities. The recovery operation raised the hopes of many a woman for their re-union with their families.

“Where have the radiance and animation gone? Can the soul be extracted from living body? Her vacant eyes are bigger than ever. Wide opened with what they have seen and felt; wide colder….
But the illusion is dispelled the moment she opens her eyes not timorously like a bride but frenziedly strictly and says: ‘I want to go to my family’. Her voice is harsh, guff, as if some one has mutilated her vocal cords.
‘I will not live with him’. Again that coarse. Rasp ing whisper.
‘What if your family won’t take you back?’
‘Whether they want me or not, I will go’, She says”.

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126 Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, Borders and Boundaries, p. 68
127 Urvashi Butalia, “Community, State and Gender”, p. WS-16.
129 Bede Scott, “Partitioning Bodies: Literature, Abduction and the State”, p. 37.
130 Bapsi Sidhwa, Ice-Candy Man, pp. 261, 262.
But all the women were not fortunate enough to be accepted by their families. Thousands of women were rejected by their husbands and families and they had no option but to live out their lives in ashrams and brothels. Consider the following statement by a character in short story ‘Lajwanti’: “We will not take these sluts left over by the Muslims.” The partition literature depicts the inhumanity of the situation where these fate-smitten women were ravished by the others but left out by their own.

“Don’t you miss your children? I ask.
‘Of course’, says Hamida.
‘Then why do not you go to see them’.
‘Their father won’t like it’.
‘They must miss you. You could see them secretly, couldn’t you?
‘No. ‘They are better off as they are. If their father gets to know I’ve met them he will get angry and the children will suffer’, says Hamida turning her face away.”

Till October 1948, nearly 45,374 ‘unattached’ women were looked after by the Indian Government. M.Asaddudin, “India’s Partition: Literacy Narratives and Retrieval of History”, p.176.

Rajinder Singh Bedi, “Lajwanti”, Mushirul Hasan (ed.), India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom, Vol. 1. p. 182. Jawaharlal Nehru condemned this attitude and made a public appeal: “Among the many problems that we have to face, one of the most urgent is the recovery of girls and women who have been abducted. Their parents and relatives should welcome back and give them all comfort and solace after their harrowing experience. I am told that sometimes there is unwillingness on the part of their relatives to accept the girls back in their homes. This the most objectionable and wrong attitude for anyone to take and any social custom that supports this attitude must be condemned”. Bede Scott, “Partitioning Bodies: Literature, Abduction and the State”.p.44.

Bapsi Sidhwa, Ice Candy Man,pp. 221-222. The question of restoring abducted women to their respective nations which admitted of no easy solution in any case also generated new kinds of self-censorship and fear. Individuals who had gone almost berserk in the first phase of the violence and migrations, searching high and low for the sisters, daughters and wives they had lost, making anxious enquiries of friends and acquaintances from their original homes, combing refugee camps and hospitals, railways stations and bazaars, sometimes preferred to withdraw and draw a blind over the subject once the recovery of abducted persons became a public issue and matter for settlement between two governments: Gyanendra Pandey, “Disciplining Difference”, Saurabh Dube (ed.), PostColonial Passages: Contemporary History Writing on India, OUP, New Delhi, 2004, pp.173-174.
There was a large number who were not recovered despite their wishes for so. Thus, they apparently reconciled to the new circumstances but they carried within themselves a broken sense of irreparable loss of the past and family. Jamila Hashmi’s short story ‘Exile’ gives such a picture where the protagonist had to marry her adductor and the Sita had to accept Ravana’s home.\textsuperscript{134} Rajinder Singh Bedi’s short story “Lajwanti” revolves around the fate of a woman named “Lajwanti”. The name of the protagonist ‘Lajwanti’ refers to a plant whose leaves wither at a touch but during the partition thousands of Lajwantis were molested and crushed. The protagonist’s husband Sunder Lal is involved in the recovery operation. Along with his colleagues, he encourages the people to accept the recovered women back to their respective families. But the irony of the situation is that he himself is not ready to cope with the situation about which he had sermonized the others. Earlier, he had employed the mythical characters of Sita, Ram and Ravana and said:

“Even today, Lord Rama has thrown out Sita from his home - only because she was compelled to live with her abductor, Ravana. What sin had Sita committed? Wasn’t she the victim of treachery and betrayal like so many of our own mothers and sisters are today? Was it a question of Sita’s rightness and wrongness, or the wickedness of Ravana, the demon king, who had ten human heads, and one more, the largest one, that of a donkey…. Today our innocent Sitases have been thrown out their homes.”\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{134} Jamila Hashmi, “Exile”, Alok Bhalla (ed.), \textit{Stories About the Partition of India}, Vol.I Harper Collins, New Delhi, 1994, pp.39-53. The protagonist is picked up by a Sikh by whom she has two sons and a daughter. But all this cannot take the place of her lost world. The Hindu myth that the author takes recourse to along with the Dusshera celebrations marking the destruction of Ravana foregrounds a racial memory and consciousness in which the tragedy of women cuts across religion and communities: M. Asaddudin, “Literary Narratives and Retrieval of History”, p. 175.

\textsuperscript{135} Rajinder Singh Bedi, “Lajwanti”, Hasan, Mushirul (ed.), \textit{India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom}, Vol. I, p.185. “Ultimately, when quite some time passed, doubt no more remained an intruder but took place of joy, not because Sunder Lal had again stared maltreating her but because he treated her much more kindly than before. It was kindness that Lajo had not expected from him – she wanted, desperately, to become the same Lajo who would quarrel on a trifle and, at once, be friends again. Now the question of a quarrel between them did not arise for she was \\textit{devi} and he was her worshipper. And Lajo would look at herself in the large mirror and think that she could not be the same Lajo ever again. She had got back everything and yet she had lost everything – she was
In the aftermath of the Partition, patriarchy determined the fate of women. Abducted women were ‘recovered’ and restored despite their reluctance in certain cases.\textsuperscript{136} The purity of community identity maintained through the prohibition of intermarriage and extramarital sex outside the liminal spaces of the brothel, represents the archaic past that is invoked as anterior to the abduction, pollution and defilement of the women during the partition.\textsuperscript{137} The desire to ‘recover’ the experience of abducted woman in order to correct the historical ‘record’ is shown to share the same modernist assumptions that informed the state sanctioned recovery operation.\textsuperscript{138} This is the sentiment underlying the stories of kinsmen refusing to accept women who had been abducted or violated; or of men construing their kinship obligations in terms of the obligation to kill a beloved sister or wife rather than let her fall into the hands of men of the other community. Such women who were violated and rejected may be said to be occupying a zone between two deaths rather than between life and death.\textsuperscript{139} The recovery was made an issue of national honour. One of the Members of Parliament argued: “You will remember Sir, how when one Mrs Ellis was kidnapped by some Pathans, the whole Britain shook with anger and indignation and until she was returned Englishmen did not come to their senses. Here, where thousands of girls are concerned, we cannot forget this." The vocabulary of recovery and rehabilitation was little more than a euphemism for the rehabilitated and she was ruined” (p.191). Lajwanti’s secrets remain ‘locked in’ her breast. Sunder Lal could not accept her as a wife; rather he raises her to a very high pedestal, worships him as a devi which hinders her integration into the family structure and leading a normal life: M. Asaduddin, “Literary Narratives and Retrieval of History”, p. 175.

\textsuperscript{136} Parkash Tandon, \textit{Punjabi Century (1857-1947)}, pp. 250-53. In the meeting of the Partition Council in 1948, leaders of both the Dominions agreed that in the cases of reluctant women they should be ‘forcibly evacuated’: Urvashi Butalia, \textit{The Other Side of the Silence}, p. 160.

\textsuperscript{137} Jill Didur, \textit{Unsetlling Partition}, p. 160.

\textsuperscript{138} Given the stated goal of much work on women’s experience of the partition is to critique the assumptions behind this operation and explore how attention to gender identity can disrupt the past and present hegemonic definitions of national identity, a wariness of these kinds of retellings would seem to be in order: Jill Didur, “Lifting the Veil”, p. 446.

\textsuperscript{139} Veena Das, “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain”, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{140} Gyanendra Pandey, \textit{Remembering Partition}, p.166.
coercive practices of paternal state. The considerable pressure, sometimes even the force was brought to bear on them to convince them to do so.  

“Oh Sherbaz, what has happened to your axe now? Rakhi was saying again and again to Sherbaz but he was lying on the bed, just as a statue. He had not uttered a single word ever since he had returned from the house of Nambardar. He neither ate nor drank anything.  

‘Oye Sherbaz, I’ll sacrifice a million brothers on you’. Sherbaz was still silent. Tears appeared to be frozen in his burning face and led eyes.  

‘Oh my, Baz Shera, come, let us even away somewhere, Allah Rakhi said desperately. Sherbaz was lying silent, immobile and unconscious.”

A large number of women had either surrendered to their fate or they were pushed by the patriarchy into the vicissitudes of time. There was fear of rejection by their families and the continuing stigma of being abducted and molested. Thus, the women tried to relocate themselves in the new spaces.

“However, as the time passed Pooro gradually becomes reconciled to her circumstances, she tried to forget that Rashida had abducted and wronged her. She thought that she should love Rashidia, a lot. After all, he was her husband and the father of her son. This mattered alone. This mattered occasionally that she did not come to this village by her own and even would not go by her own”.

141 Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of the Silence*, p. 120. Begum Anis Qidwai who worked during 1947 observed and resisted: “Why are these girls being tortured in this way? What is the advantage of uprooting them once again? If making them homeless is not idiocy, what is it? To take a woman who has become a respected housewife and mother in her new home and force her to return to her old home and/or her parents is not charity but a crime. Forget this business. Those women who are left in Hindustan and those left in Pakistan are happy where they are: Gyanendra Pandey, “Disciplining Difference”, p. 173.

142 Kartar Singh Duggal, “Pakistan Hamara Hai”, p. 90. In 1949, Rameshwari Nehru said, “I am convinced that we have not achieved our purpose, and that it is inadvisable to continue the work of recovery any longer. Two years have elapsed since the original crimes were committed and though there may still be a considerable number of unrecovered women, to remove them at this stage from the homes, in which they have settled, would result in untold misery and suffering: Gyanendra Pandey, “Disciplining Difference”, p.173.

Kulwant Singh Virk’s short story “Khabbal” also portrays the same kind of mental map of a non-Muslim woman as the recovery officer reaches out to her for the recovery. But the women refuses to go back as there was no surety of acceptance by her family members, about whose life and death she was not sure.\(^{144}\) Saadat Hasan Manto’s short story narrates the tale of an old woman had gone almost mad in search for young beautiful daughter. Moreover, she is not ready to accept that she would have died. At last the old women sees her daughter with covered face but the young girl refused to recognize her and the recovery officer has to convince the woman that her daughter has died. This is too painful for the mother and she collapses on the ground.\(^{145}\) The literature graphically portrays the insensitivity and inhumanity of the recovery operation and at same time questions the notions of community, religion and honour which had been so ruthless for those who yearned for their reunion with the families:

“In response to the news of Government Proclamation about the handing over of abducted women, a sense of resentment surges in Pooro’s mind. When it happened to her, religion had become an insurmountable obstacle neither her parents nor her in-laws-to-be had been willing to accept her. And now, the same religion had become so accommodating.”\(^{146}\)

At the same time, a large number of women were recovered against their wishes. The recovery was a feeble gesture that compensated no one. All the rhetorics were merely plasters over an ignominious attempt on the part of the state to provide ‘coercive backing for restoring and reinforcing patriarchy within the family.’\(^{147}\) The recovery programme was propelled by the same sort of misogyny that had taken the shape of rape and torture at the hands of the enemy.\(^{148}\) Indeed, despite


\(^{146}\) Amrita Pritam, *Pinjar*, p. 67.

\(^{147}\) Urvashi Butalia, “Community, State and Gender”, p. 19.

the claim that the Recovery Act was based on humanitarian grounds, it can be equated with the violence of rape, forcible abduction and marriage with further violence perpetrated by the state in the relief and recovery operation. Many women were hesitant about returning to their original families and countries for fear of ostracism, because they felt they had been ‘soiled’; because they could not bear the thought of being uprooted yet again and exposed to new levels of poverty and uncertainty; or simply because they were grateful to their new husbands and families for having rescued them from assault and afforded them some protection. The governments of two dominions decided, however, that in such cases ‘they should be forcibly evacuated’. The large number of women opposed this forceful recovery as they had readjusted in the new domestic spaces. Pooro in *Pinjar* shows no will for her being recovered to her parents. Rather she says, “Now this is my place.” Kartar Singh Duggal’s short story ‘Pakistan Hamara Hai’ is a vigourous comment on this aspect. Women had to suffer a double wave of trauma. Firstly, when they were separated from their families and secondly, while being forcefully recovered when they had almost accepted their fate as wives of abductors or saviours. The story revolves around Ram Rakhi who later on became Allah Rakhi by marrying Sherbaz Khan. She had fully accustomed her to the new locale but at that very time the recovery team along with her brother discovered her and despite her protestations she is told that she belongs to India. She had accepted herself as a citizen of Pakistan. Then next day she was to be sent to India. Her husband ‘Sherbaz Khan’ loaded all her belonging in the truck. The last item to be handed over to her was a handfan over which she had embroidered ‘Pakistan Hamara Hai’ Gumukh Singh Jeet in his short story “Thandiyan Kandhan” depicts the inhumanity of recovery operation with which women were recovered despite their protestation.

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149 Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of the Silence*, p. 91.


The protagonist Chandar Kanta faces the similar fate in which she is forcibly recovered leaving behind her husband Nisar Ahmad and two children. She made every appeal that she had married and converted to Islam according to her own will but her voice was drowned in the brutality of recovery legislation.\textsuperscript{153}

Thus, the partition literature explores the conflicts of loyalties, the fragility of relationships and the divisions between home and nation. From within these fissures arises the need to re-examine the fixities of such concepts as honour and chastity.\textsuperscript{154} The literature also speaks about the phenomenon where the women had largely tried to readjust themselves. The sliding of representations of the female psyche between everyday life into the body that had become the container of poisonous knowledge of events of the partition perhaps helped women to assimilate their experiences into their everyday lives. Women drank the pain so that life could continue. Just as a women’s body is made so that she can hide the faults of her husband deep within her, so she can drink all pain - take the stance of silence.\textsuperscript{155}

In the final analysis, the literature portrays the pain of the women and guilt arising from betrayal of the larger corpus of family, nation and religion that promises to protect the women and children but then fails. It is collective shame of not only those who raped and maimed, but those also who stood by, those who escaped and did not look back – it is the shame of all those who belatedly share in the story.\textsuperscript{156}

Thus, the careful scanning of the fictional narratives of the partition helps in the emotional and sensitive mapping of the inner terrain of female psyche. These narratives unfold the reality which lies otherwise under the cover of ‘grand narratives’. Women being the representatives of their respective communities had to undergo inhuman treatment and literature and literature has tried to portray the


\textsuperscript{156} Deepika Bahri, “Telling Tales: Women and Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa’s Cracking India”, p.228.
injuries inflicted on the women during the partition. The literature deals with the silences and numerous kinds of psychological deaths of women during the mayhem of the partition. Thus it is compelling to examine the partition literature in order to rework the gender experience of the event and to make the inarticulatable pain accessible. Moreover, the partition fiction deals with the common gendered experiences, hopes and fears that transcended the communal divide. The partition fiction attempts to address the mental pain and their predicament. It uncovers the hitherto understood version of savagery of male power impinged on the women’s body during the partition. In the silence surrounding the women experience, the literature speaks for their inarticulable pain and their demolished selfhood.