Chapter-8

WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF PARTITION

Partition of the subcontinent, and establishment of two independent nations of India and Pakistan, was the culmination of love-hate relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims. It occurred with remarkable suddenness and in a manner that belied most anticipations of the immediate future. There was merely a seven years span between the first formal demand by Muslim League for Pakistan and its establishment. From the 1940s to today a great deal has been written about the partition and the violence accompanying it.\(^1\) But one important phenomenon of the partition which separates the violence of 1947 from the earlier communal riots concerns the invasion of private sphere in which women were the main sufferers. There was widespread sexual savagery: about 75000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of different religions in their own land, indeed sometimes by men of their own religion.\(^2\)

The partition demand was adopted at Lahore in March 1940. This demand, of an important section of Muslim leadership, for a state of their own was articulated more widely and in clearer way by the Muslims across the subcontinent year after year. Elections in early 1946 were largely held on communal lines i.e. on the question of Pakistan. The Muslim League performed well in Muslim majority constituencies all over the country and thus claimed to be the sole representative of the Muslims.\(^3\)

In Punjab, there were two types of sentiments on this question. In the countryside cross-communal co-operation and amity prevailed, while in towns politics was structured on communal lines. The Congress was weak in Punjab and it was identified with the interests of the Hindu urban commercial classes. So its appeal was marginal among the rural Hindu communities.\(^4\) Therefore Muslim League was unable to form a ministry in Muslim majority province of Punjab and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and

\(^1\) For a detailed bibliography on this aspect of Partition, see Gyanendra Pandey, Remembering Partition, UK, 2001, p.3.
\(^2\) Urvashi Butalia, The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India, New Delhi, 1998, p. 3.
\(^3\) Gyanendra Pandey, op. cit., p. 22.
\(^4\) Anders Bjorn Hansen, Partition and Genocide: Manifestation of Violence in Punjab, forward by Ian Talbot, New Delhi, 2002, p. viii.
managed to do so by the skin of its teeth in Sind. The Unionist Party institutionalized the political approach and its leading members were able to maintain relative tranquility in the countryside. The British were ready to pour considerable resources economic and political to maintain peace in the countryside, which formed the heartland of the Indian army. It was when the rural Muslims deserted the Unionist Party that the conditions were created for the blood letting of 1947.5

The growing belief in a Muslim majority state where Islam deals equality with and justice would flourish and reign, generated great enthusiasm among the Muslim middle classes, especially the youth. The idea of Pakistan was supported by intellectuals, students, teachers and professionals. Every word of Jinnah was digested and etched on heart. Pakistan was seen as the only answer to Hindu oppression. And the League campaigned enthusiastically against the Congress and its leaders. The Muslim League preached that the formation of Pakistan had two aims: freedom from Hindu oppression and foreign rule.6 To be a true Muslim, everyone should be prepared to lay down one's life for Pakistan. Anyone who was unable to make any sacrifice for his own religion and nation was no Muslim at all but a renegade a 'quisling' and a Kafir.7

The mid of 1946 brought momentary agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League on the Cabinet Mission plan to establish a loose federation, with the Muslim majority provinces of North Western and North-Eastern being grouped into two federating units and the rest of India into a third and with a provision of constitutional review after ten years. But it collapsed and on 16 August 1946 the Muslim League decided to organize 'Direct Action day'. On that day violence broke out between Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta. Several thousand people were killed in four days. Violence spread to other areas.8

After Calcutta, the violence was reported in its worst form in Bombay in early September and in early October in East Bengal. The communal fire spread to NWFP in January and to the Punjab in March. It was in the beginning of March 1947 that the League agitation succeeded in bringing

5 Ibid., p. vii.
6 Ibid., p. 28.
7 Ibid., p. 29.
8 Gyanendra Pandey, op. cit., pp. 22-23.
down Khizr Hyat Khan led coalition Government in the Punjab. The fall of the Unionist Government was seen as a turning point in the history of Punjab partition. The communal frenzy had gripped the population and the Muslim League was viewed as a creator of an independent country—Pakistan (Pure Land) for them. It led to demonstrations and counter-demonstrations and threats to fight to the finish. Violence had spread to the cities of Lahore and Amritsar. In Rawalpindi and Multan, attacks were more fierce and more savage than before. In some areas savagery was carried out mercilessly and men, women and children were hacked or beaten to death and their houses burnt. There were cases of forcible conversion of males and abduction of women. Due to widespread violence and heavy causalities there was considerable exodus of population towards central and east Punjab by the end of April 1947. The official estimates of refugees in Punjab put the figure at 80,000.9

Satya M. Rai remarked, "When the Muslim League leader Mr. Jinnah suggested exchange of population on 10 December, 1945 and again on 15 November, 1946, it was not seriously considered by the Congress leaders. Referring to the driving out of the Hindus from Noakhali, he said that the transfer of population was already in action and some machinery should be devised for effecting it peacefully."10 A Muslim student of Lucknow University in 1946-47 recalled that "no body thought in terms of migration in those days. All thought (the Muslims) that everything would remain the same. Punjab would remain Punjab and Sind would remain Sind, there won't be any demographic changes, no drastic changes anyway".11

The announcement of partition plan on 3rd June with transfer of power as early as 15th August shocked the whole nation. According to this plan the decision to partition Punjab and Bengal should be taken by their legislative assemblies. In Punjab, the plan received a mixed response. The Sikhs reacted strongly against it because of the fear that they would be in minority in both Indian and Pakistani Punjab. The Shiromani Akali Dal called it 'death of Sikhs’ and declared that Sikhs wanted a free sovereign state with the Chenab and

9 Ibid., p. 24.
Jamuna rivers as its borders. On 4th June, five deaths and five fires were reported from Lahore alone and Amritsar witnessed two communal riots. The Gurgaon district was also in disorder and nearly 60 persons were more or less burnt down.

The decision to partition Punjab (and Bengal) was endorsed by the Congress Working Committee on June 14. In his speech at the meeting Gandhi expressed his reluctance and his sadness over the turn of events. He ended his address by saying, "This decision puts both our religions on trial. The world is watching us. In the three quarters of the country that has fallen in our share, Hinduism is going to be tested. If you show the generosity of true Hinduism, you will rise in the eyes of the world. If not, you will have proved Mr. Jinnah's thesis that Muslims and Hindus are two separate nations, the Hindus forever will be Hindus and Muslims forever Muslims, that the two will never unite, and the God of the two are different."  

Despite his appeal for restraint, riots in the province were rapidly spreading from 18th November 1946 to 15th May 1947, reportedly 3280 were killed and 1390 injured. The actual number may go high as figures from Rawalpindi and Gurgaon were uncertain. The fires and killings had become a daily phenomenon. The people were not sure that whether it would be safe to stay after partition, or not. Another uncertainty was the division line. After face to face with one Sikh leader Giani Kartar Singh, Mr. Jenkins reported that they would accept nothing short of Chenab river as the western boundary. The Muslims, however, were hoping to reach as far as Ambala as their eastern boundary. The crucial task of drawing boundaries was entrusted to a British official, Sir Radcliffe who was unfamiliar with India and Indian politics. However, there was little hope of a peaceful solution.

To counter the anxiety, on 24th July it was announced by the Partition Council that both India and Pakistan would guarantee protection to all citizens and they agreed to set up a Special Boundary Force from 1st August. Jinnah did not want the division of Punjab, and when left with no choice but to accept the division, the Governor informed Giani Kartar Singh about Jinnah's assurance of religious and personal freedom to minorities in

12 Anders Bjorn Hansen, op. cit., p. 130.
13 Ibid., p. 132.
14 Ibid., p. 132.
15 Ibid., p. 136.
Pakistan. Giani Kartar Singh replied that he had no confidence in Jinnah and the Sikhs were in great danger. But in early 1947, Master Tara Singh and other Akali leaders had come out in support of Congress plan to divide Punjab. They called it sheer tyranny and [a] moral betrayal to leave the Sikhs of the western Punjab districts to fend for themselves.

On 8th August, Mountbatten made it clear that Jenkins would be the most competent official for handling the situation. He also agreed to wait and see the reactions to the award (Boundary Line). The daily causalities were estimated between 50-100, and the commander of newly established Punjab Boundary Force, Mr. Auchinleck the recommended that “the Joint Defence Council” should have the authority of both Governments to declare any affected districts to be ‘disturbed area’. On 12th August Mount batten informed Jenkins that the award for Punjab would not be ready before 15th evening or 16th morning. The uncertainty about the boundary award increased the violence. The people in disturbed areas were not sure of where to go. On 9th August the first fully organized train attack took place, in which one woman and one child died and ten injured. The culprits disappeared in Faridkot in a jeep. The law and order had broken down because in Eastern Punjab there were hardly any police officers left since the Muslims constituted 90% of the Punjab police force. The disarming of Muslim policemen in Amritsar made officers and their families fearful of their safety and many had started leaving.

In the light of continuous violence and deteriorating break-down of administration, the situation in twelve districts, which were to be divided, and approximately 12 million affected people, was uncontrollable for the Punjab Boundary Force and its commander. It utterly failed to protect the minorities and or organise the peaceful exodus of people from one country to the other. On August 11, Jinnah delivered his first speech to Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in Karachi appealing to Hindus and Muslims for working together.

16 Ibid., p. 140.
17 Cited in Gyanendra Pandey, op. cit., p. 32.
19 Anders Bjorn Hansen, op. cit., p. 144.
20 Ibid., p. 145.
But it was too late. On the other hand Congress leaders kept on appealing to the people to stay where they were.

On 15th August 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru addressed Independent India, "Before the birth of freedom we have endured all the pains of labour and our hearts are heavy with the memory of sorrows." But the 'father of nation' decided not to take part in the independence celebrations. Disillusioned by the partition, the massive violence and for being sidelined by Congress leadership, Gandhi stayed away from Delhi. He went to Calcutta to appeal to Hindus and Muslims to live in peace. However, none went to Punjab where thousands were being killed, abducted or raped, and millions were on the move.

Though much has been written on partition of India but there has been little attempt to fathom the depth of brutality, which had been inflicted on women. In this partition, as discussed earlier, women were the chief sufferers. Their relatives either killed the women or they committed suicide to save their honour by jumping down from moving trains or into wells. Mass exodus of people had started. At the end of August there was hardly any non-Muslims left in Lahore compared to the 30,00,00 prior to rioting.

In Sheikhupura, on 26th August a band of Baluchi (Pakistani) soldiers organized a huge massacre of non-Muslims. Around ten thousands were killed and many girls molested. The attacks were now becoming frequent. The abductions, molestation or rape of women was a weapon to humiliate men unable to protect honour.

The other side of the historical and political side of partition is extremely bleak. The orgy of violence, carnage, rapes, abductions and cold murders rocked the province. M. Asaduddin opines that the human dimension — broken families, ties and relationship, physical disability and disease, the psychological trauma of torture, amputation, rape, abduction, and atrocities can never be fully quantified without going through the literature on

21 Ibid., p. 147-148.
22 Ibid., p. 155.
24 Ibid., p. 159.
25 Ibid., p. 160.
Though the writers, whose stories have been discussed are not by conventional political standards, 'influential' yet must be heard, opines Mushirul Hasan. They articulate the mood and sensitivities of large numbers of aggrieved and tormented people who had no say whatsoever in the actual transfer of power to two sovereign nations. They distinctively share and convey to us the agony, pain, sorrow of the people that were caught in the internecine communal conflicts.27

Many stories of various languages have been selected for depicting the partition scene by various writers. Here, the selected Urdu stories are of progressive writers which highlight the gender issues. None of the writers could keep himself aloof from the tragic events of genocide during partition of the country. Krishan Chander’s book of short stories called, *Hum Vaihshi Hain* (We are Barbarians) was published in 1948. It used a novel technique of using unconventional narrators such as "train' in Peshawar Express or a hired killer. The story *Peshawar Express* is a living document of shame and guilt of the times through an imaginative delineation of the atrocities perpetrated by each of the communities. The story begins;

"I (Train) heaved a sigh of relief as I pulled out of Peshawar railway station. My carriages were jam packed with passengers, all of them Hindus. They have converged here from Peshawar, Hoti Mardan, Kohat, Charsada, Khyber, Landikotal, Bannu, Naushera and Manshera. Overcome by grave insecurity in Pakistan, they were trying to escape to India".28 As the train heads forward people were bidding goodbye to their own homeland with heavy hearts but were grateful that they were still alive and their women folk had escaped molestation or rape. At Taxila railway station a ghastly sight of a procession greeted them. Each Muslim in the procession was carrying the corpse of a Hindu on his shoulders. Two hundred corpses were entrusted to the care of Baluchi guards. They put ten to fifteen corpses in each carriage. After all this done, the processionists ordered the station master to allow the train to move. But it was again stopped by mob. The leader of the mob thundered, "Line up, you infidels".29 Then they were lifted up one by one and

29 Ibid., p. 187.
made to stand in line. Two hundred living corpses, their faces down, the miscreants eyes were pricking them like arrows. The Baluchi soldiers went into action. Fifteen people fell at Taxila station which once boasted of a leading university of Asia.

The writer has portrayed the ghastly sight in train in this way, “Death had stalked through every carriage. There were corpses in the middle of each carriage, surrounded by living corpses over whom the Baluchi guard stood smiling. Somewhere a child whimpered, an old mother sobbed, a young wife moaned for her dead husband”. 30 On its way to Gujrat the train was again made to stop. They ripped off the burqas of veiled women. “We are Hindus, we are Sikhs!” the women cried. “These people have abducted us.” But the young men only laughed and dragged the women down the train. “We are going our way with these women,” they shouted. “Come if any one of you have guts to stop us.” 31 Reaching Wazirabad, the place known for joint Hindus-Muslim’s celebrations of baisakhi, but this year it was a gruesome baisakhi. The crowd surged over Railway platform, dancing and singing villagers forming the vanguard, followed by a concourse of naked women ranging from old grannies to young virgins. The women’s hair hung loose, their body bore marks of injuries, they walked erect as if the heavy shadow of death had completely eclipsed their naked bodies. The naked women were made to sit among the refugees. It is one of the darkest chapters of the history. The writer has portrayed a heart rending event in the train. A child crawled to a women and said, “Why are you sitting naked?" He wondered if she was returning from her bath. The old woman forced back her tears. The sons of her own land had given her a sinister bath.

“And your clothes, where are they?” The child asked, “The clothes bore the marks of the married bliss,” the old women replied, “They have taken them away to cleanse them of those marks.” 32

At Lahore station, the train stopped on platform no. 1 while another train from Amritsar carrying Muslim refugees from India stopped at platform no.2. The Muslim volunteers searched thoroughly all the carriages and took away all the gold, silver and other valuables from passengers. A number of

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30 Ibid., p. 188.
31 Ibid., p. 189.
32 Ibid., p. 190.
33 Ibid., p. 190.
Hindu refugees were butchered on the platform to complete the fatal tally. According to the writer the situation was not different in India. Muslims in Brahmin clothes were put to trouser test and then pierced through chest. They did not spare the Deputy Commissioner of Ambala Cantt and his family. There a girl holding a book in hand cried, “Don't kill me, convert me to Hinduism. I am prepared to embrace your religion. I am also willing to marry one of you.” But she was tortured to death. Her book got soiled with her blood. The title of soaked book was, *Socialism; Theory and Practice,* and the writer was John Strachey. But the dead body of the girl was thrown in jungle to be preyed upon by jackals, crows and vulture.

The story ends with train’s desire, “I hate to carry a cargo of blood and flesh dripping with hatred. I will haul food grain to famine stricken areas. I will carry coal, oil, and iron ore to the mills. The pious and simple women, secure in the love of their husbands would cast loving glances at them and children.... Then there will be no Hindu and no Muslim. They will all be workers and human beings.” In this story, the writer has portrayed the most ghastly and disastrous event of recent India. The crimes committed on women crossed all limits of brutality. They were openly raped and forced to walk naked in the streets. Krishan Chander has portrayed train as a witness of brutality throughout the province.

In her remarkable work on the oral histories of women in Partition, *The Other Side of Silence,* Urvashi Butalia gives voice to a man who narrated how his father killed his sister. “When my father swung the kirpan (sword)... perhaps some doubt or fear came to his mind or perhaps the kirpan got stuck in her dupatta (head scarf) no one can say. It was such a frightening, such a fearful scene. Then my sister with her own hand removed her plait and pulled it forward... and my father with his own hands moved her dupatta aside and then he swung the kirpan and her body and neck rolled off and fell... there... far away.” Likewise several other non-Muslims killed their daughters to save their honour at the Sheikhupura massacre.

Late Mrs. Vidyawati Seth narrated her woes on her way from Bhawalpur to India that her daughter, who was very young and beautiful, became a problem. She had to dye her face black to save her honour.

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34 Ibid., p. 191.
Sudhir Kakar tells the story (real one) told by his elder brother. Sohan Lal who was married to a pretty girl, five months earlier, threw away himself in front of train and killed himself. On the day of departure every arrangement was made with truck driver for an escape from Lyallpur. In their absence house was attacked. After coming back they saw that the house was being looted by five husky Muslims with butcher's knives. The corpse of younger brother was lying in the courtyard. They were bringing out packed trunks from inside and throwing them outside.36

"Then two of Muslims went inside the house and brought out Sohan Lal’s wife and the leader pulled her to him. She sat on the man’s lap, naked to waist, her petticoat ripped open and the Muslim’s hairy hand, like a giant black spider, covered her thighs. After laying her on the ground next to our brother’s corpse, where drops of blood still oozed from the severed neck, they raped her in turn. I was holding Sohan Lal tightly, my palm covering his mouth. If he had made the slightest sound, the Muslims would have discovered us. But I do not think Sohan Lal would have done anything. His legs were buckling under him and I had to hold him up. After they finished they ripped open her belly."37 Sohan Lal never said a word after it was all over. He remained mute for days on the way in crossing the border. And before reaching Rohtak he killed himself.

The above-mentioned incident was not a solitary case. What the progressive writers witnessed and felt, they have given voice. One of the most important writers on partition is Saadat Hasan Manto. Much was written about communal killings of 1947 but little of it has survived as literature. Either it was of no literary value or a weepy description of events. Manto tried to capture and comprehend all dimensions and perspectives of human behaviour. He demonstrated the intrinsic nobility of man, his barbaric deeds and brutal acts.

Saadat Hasan Manto’s sketches on the tragic partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan are unforgettable. These sketches bring alive the most traumatic episode of history of the country. In his stories on the partition Manto has raised women issues very lively and openly. He was

36 Sudhir Kakar, The Colour of Violence, New Delhi, 1995, p. 34.
37 Ibid., p. 35.
tried for obscenity by Pakistan censors for two of his greatest stories *Thanda Gosht* and *Khol do* on partition.

His stories like *The Assignment, The Last Salute, Mozail, The Dutiful Daughter, The Woman in Red Raincoat, Toba Tek Singh, Open it and Colder Than Ice*, written between 1947-1955 are masterpieces in themselves. These stories are adjudged to be the basis of our history of partition. One of his many stories *Khol do* is being produced here with a view to be an evidence of atrocities on women. Monto’s story *Khol do* is about a young girl who became the victim of atrocities during partition. The story begins:-

"The special train left Amritsar at two in the afternoon, arriving at Mughalpura, Lahore eight hours later. Many had been killed on the way, a lot more injured and countless lost‘.\(^38\) After gaining consciousness, amidst screaming by men, women and children, Sirajuddin lay still and gazed at dusty sky. He was in deep shock, which brought him back to the events of last night. Attack… fire… escape… railway station… Sakina. He rose abruptly and began searching her daughter Sakina in the crowd in refugee camp. Everybody was looking for his lost sons, daughters, mothers, wives and other relatives. He sat down away from the crowd and tried to think clearly. He was sure that Sakina’s mother was dead. She had died in front of his eyes. He could hear her voice: “leave me where I am. Take the girl away.”\(^39\)

He could recollect that while running away Sakina’s *dupatta* had slipped to the ground and he had stopped to pick it up, Sakina said, “Father leave it". He could feel the bulge in his pocket. It was Sakina’s *dupatta*, but where was she? A few days later some young men brought back women and children left behind on the other side. Sirajuddin gave them description of his pretty daughter. The young men assured him that if his daughter was alive, they would find her. Sirajuddin prayed for them.

On their next trip out they had found a girl on the road side. She was scared. She confessed that she was Sakina, daughter of Sirajuddin. They were very kind to her. One of them gave his jacket to cover her self but many days have passed, Sirajuddin had no news about her daughter. One day he


saw those young men in the camp. He shouted whether they found her
daughter? They replied in positive.40

In the evening he saw four men carrying the body of a young girl
found unconscious near the railway track. They were taking her to the
hospital. He entered the hospital and saw the mole on her left cheek.
‘Sakina,’ he screamed. The doctor switched on the light and stared at
Sirajuddin. “I am her father,” he screamed. The doctor looked at the
prostrate body and felt the pulse. Then he pointed out towards window and
said to the old man, ‘open it’.

The young woman on the stretcher, moved slightly with painful
slowness. She unfastened her cord of salwar, pulled the garment down and
opened her thighs. The story ends with Sirajuddin’s shouts with joy, “she is
alive, my, my daughter is alive.’ The doctor broke into a cold sweat.41 In this
story Manto has portrayed the sketch of a helpless girl who became a victim
of partition violence. Listening ‘open it’ she pulled down the garment and
opened her thighs, but her father did not notice it, he screamed with joy after
seeing his daughter alive.

The story depicts that the specific emphasis of these attacks was on
the symbol of sexuality and reproduction. The female body presented an
opportunity to conquer the enemy territory. The attacks on the female was
made on two levels. Firstly, the women as an embodiment of the community
honour and secondly their bodies as the site of community reproduction. The
modus operandi included molestations, rapes, stripping, parading naked in
queue through the streets, branding breasts and genitals etc with shouting
slogan of ‘Pakistan Zindabad’ or ‘Hindustan Zindabad’, cutting off the breasts,
knifing open the womb and killing the foetuses. The rape and humiliation of
women was an indication of sowing seed in the enemy’s womb. The women
were used as earth for sowing the seed as each community acknowledged
the role of woman as bearer of future generations.42 The women who were
pregnant with bad seed were forced to undergo abortion to maintain purity of
the community, others were planted with good seed of their own.

40 Ibid., p. 13.
41 Ibid., p. 14.
42 Anders Bjorn Hansen. op. cit., p. 162.
One witness narrated that a baby boy was snatched from his mother and then cut into two. The mother was afterwards stabbed with a spear. The attacks on female occurred in both communities. "At a village in Sialkot district, relatives of a girl were forced to stand around while she was continuously being raped."43

Sudhir Kakar wrote about the cutting off male genitals and the sadist fury directed against female breasts, which were hit repeatedly by iron rods, stabbed with knives and lopped off by scythes and swords. 44 I remember one such event my grand mother used to tell that in Kharkhoda (Sonepat) the infants were crying with hunger and searching for feed from their mothers’ bodies whose breasts were stabbed by the angry mob. Then the young children were thrown into the burning fire.

Sexual violence occurred in a big way during partition. On a mere sociological level, the main reason for the preponderance specifically of sexual violence in the partition riots in the north may be that the undivided Punjab remained comparatively a violent society. The socially approved dictum was that men use physical power to protect their zar (wealth) joru (woman or family honour) and zamin (land). During partition people were uprooted, looted and killed. Even the children were also the main targets on similar lines. The perpetrators showed no mercy to any one.

At Harnoli in the Mianwali district fierce fighting took place between the Hindu and the Muslim mobs. The attack was organized with the help of Muslim army, which used tanks. More than half of six thousand inhabitants were massacred and children were snatched away from mother’s laps and thrown into boiling oil. Hundreds of women saved their honour by jumping into wells and throwing themselves into burning houses. Girls of 8 to 10 years of age were raped in the presence of their parents and killed mercilessly. Women having cut off breasts and naked were made to walk in bazaars of Harnoli.45

Another feature of atrocities on women was abduction. About 8000 girls and women were abducted from Harnoli only. Though both Muslim and non-Muslim leadership were apparently against mass migration but either

43 Ibid., pp. 161-162.
44 Sudhir Kakar, op. cit., p. 37.
tacitly or openly encouraged the communal elements to cleanse the minorities. The murderers of minority community were considered heroes and were openly defended in the law making bodies. Justifying the massacre of Muslims in East Punjab, S. Udham Singh spoke in Assembly, "If our Hindu and Sikh brethren had not risen to defend themselves, the province of East Punjab would not have existed at all."  

As a result physical annihilation of the minority had become a matter of determined policy with the majority communities in spite of declarations to the contrary. The mass exodus of people to save the life and honour in majority community was the only alternative. In view of deteriorating situation and failure, the Government thought to set up machinery to evacuate the unfortunate people. At the central level, the Government appointed a special officer to act as Chief Liaison Officer (CLO) on its behalf with the East Punjab Liaison Agency. The Joint Rehabilitation Board laid down policies with regard to the reception and rehabilitation of the refugees.

The entire provincial machinery was engaged in the task of evacuation, relief and rehabilitation. The Indian Boundary Force had failed in tackling the situation. Hence, it was disbanded on the midnight of 31st August and the task of maintaining peace was taken over by India and Pakistan. In the beginning of september, casualties had reached high proportions. According to Mudie, the Governor, the number of refugees crossing the border daily was between 1,00,000 and 1,50,000. He blamed the Sikhs for the mass migration.  

It was estimated that nearly 21 lakh Muslim refugees had moved to West Punjab since 1 August 1947 and during the same period 20 lakh non-Muslims had left for the east Punjab.  

About 673 refugee trains were run between 27th August and 6th November 1947. Transporting 23 lakh refugees inside India and across the border of these 13,62000 were non-Muslims and 9,39,000 were Muslim.  

Huge foot convoys each 30,000 to 40,000 were organized by Military Evacuation Organization (MEO) and Liaison Agency to move the bulk of rural population, especially those who were still

46 Satya M. Rai, op. cit., pp. 75-76.  
47 Anders Bjorn Hansen, op. cit., p. 167.  
48 Satya M. Rai, op. cit., p.78.  
in possession of their bullock carts and cattle. East Punjab set up 21 refugee camps\(^{50}\) in different districts of Punjab and a number of such camps in west Punjab. The refugees were to first report at Transit Camps at the entry points like Fazilka, Ferozepur, Khem Karan, Atari, Amritsar and Dera Baba Nanak from where they were to proceed to the areas allotted to them under central plan. The number of refugees in camps had risen above 7.25 lakhs in November 1947. The Government of India set up a big refugee camp at Kurukshetra, which could accommodate more than two lakhs refugees. A separate rescue home for women was also set up at Jullundhar with accommodation for 800–900 women.\(^{51}\)

Abduction of women and children was the worst feature of the partition. To counter this grim situation both the Governments realized the urgency of recovering abducted women. After a joint tour of affected areas by the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan on 3\(^{rd}\) September 1947, they declared that forced marriages and conversions would not be recognized. Mahatma Gandhi exhorted the Government to stake there all on rescue of abducted women. Considering the emergency character of the task, a base camp was to be set up at Lahore for recovered non-Muslim women and for Muslim recovered women at Jullandhar.\(^ {52}\)

The process of the recovery of these women was long and difficult. They fell under two categories. First, some who did not object to being evacuated were called indisputable group. Second, some of the women found it difficult to leave the new surroundings where they had rooted themselves. The fear of second dislocation and their non-acceptance by Hindu families became a major problem. Gandhi and Nehru repeatedly appealed to Hindus to accept their sisters and daughters back. The ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation issued a pamphlet quoting Manu in order to suggest that a woman who had sex with someone other than her husband became purified after three menstrual cycles and could them be taken back.\(^ {53}\) The other problem posed by these abducted women was the children born of their union with men of other community. It was suggested that such children should be treated as ‘war babies’ and left behind in the country in which they

\(^{50}\) Satya M. Rai, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 79.
\(^{51}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 80.
\(^{52}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 81.

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were born. Older children were meant to stay with their natural father and
unborn children in the womb would clearly have to be aborted. The abortion-
Safaya (cleansing) was taken up by the state, and specific hospitals were
targeted (Damyanti Sehgal names Kapur Hospital in Delhi). This hospital
made vast amounts of money on such cleansing operations. The project was
financed out of special budget put aside by the state, at a time when abortion
was not legal in India.54 Besides, there were some cases of disputed women,
which were presented to the Tribunal, and in case of further differences, the
matter was referred to high powered officers of India and Pakistan for
recovery of women. The government of Punjab appointed Shri S.S. Madan as
the Legal Adviser to East Punjab Liaison Agency at Lahore to fight cases of
abducted women before the Tribunal set up for this purpose.55

The Indo Pakistan Agreement laid down the responsibility to search
out abducted women. In order to prepare a list of the abducted women and
converts, the Central Recovery Office (CRO) on either side compiled the
claims of relatives who crossed the borders. But no authentic list could be
prepared. Around ten years after the partition in 1957, the search for women
had almost petered out. At that time, a total of 35,863 women had been
recovered from both India and Pakistan out of an estimated number of
45,000.56

Those abducted women who were childless were fearful whether they
would be adopted in the old homes or not. The story, Lajwanti by Rajinder
Singh Bedi is an excellent story depicting the real picture of events of
abduction and exchange of women in the Hindu community in the period
immediately after getting independence. The story begins. "After the blood
bath of the partition, the wounded whose number was legion, wiped the
blood from their bodies and rising to their feet, turned their attention to those
who though looking unharmed had their hearts full of anguish"57 Refugees
were settled and a movement began to recover women who had been
abducted and to restore them to their homes. The orthodox were strongly
opposed to reinstating these abducted women, and many of less orthodox

54 Ibid., pp. 196-197.
55 Satya M. Rai, op. cit., p. 82.
56 Anders Bjorn Hansen, op. cit., p. 179.
57 Rajinder Singh Bedi, Selected Short Stories, trans. Jai Ratan, New Delhi, 1989,
p. 51.
too could not bring themselves to take back wives and daughters who had been defiled by other men. Therefore, a committee was set up to run a campaign to fight such ideas and to create an atmosphere in which such women would be received with love and dignity. Babu Sunder Lal was secretary of this committee whose own wife had also been abducted. He led the procession to mobilize support and worked day and night for its success.

Sunder Lal had never been a model husband. He was very harsh towards his wife and always kept an eye on her. His wife Lajwanti was a country girl. She was delicate and slender like a branch of the mulberry tree. But her slimness was not because of ill health but because of her inherent strength. She could easily carry heavy loads without a scowl on her face. But Sunder Lal was a quick tempered man, who often lost his temper and quite often beat her. She on her side did not regard such ill treatment as anything very unusual. Like other village girls she knew that all husbands beat their wives and if any of womenfolk rebelled against it, the girls themselves would say, “what sort of man is it who can’t keep his women under control?”

The beating of women was canonized in songs in rural areas. Sometimes Lajwanti herself sang:

“No city boy for me,
He wears heavy boots
And I have such a slender waist!”

But she caught sight of a city boy and ended in marrying him. The city boy was Sunder Lal himself. Lajwanti had become habitual of beating, and even after the most violent quarrel Sunder Lal had only to smile once and she would be unable to restrain her laughter, would run to him and fling her arms round his neck and say, “If you hit me again I won’t speak to you,” and it was obvious that she no longer gave a thought to the beating by Sunder Lal.

One day Lal Chand told Sunder Lal that he had seen Lajo Bhabi on Wagah border. He had identified her because of tattoo mark on her chin, and another on her cheek. He said, “She came in exchange of abducted women between India and Pakistan.”

59 *Rajinder Singh Bedi*, op. cit., p. 52.
It was a fair exchange right on Wagah border. Pakistan counted out sixteen abducted women and counted in the same numbers sixteen on both sides. But there was a rumpus. Our volunteer complained that the women they were handing over to us were middle aged and old. Then one of their volunteers pushed Lajo forward. “Call her old, do you?” he asked. “Have a look at her. Is any of the women you have passed on to us comparable to her?”

After a day she was brought back, dressed in Muslim style and in fear and trembling, in case Sunder Lal refused to take her back. But the slogan of his movement was, ‘Dil Mein Basao’- give them a place in your hearts, and Sunder Lal had said to himself, ” only let Lajo come back I will really and truly make her a home in my heart.”

Now he no longer called her Lajo but addressed her as devi a standard Hindu mode of respectful address. He resolved never to ask her past experiences when she was abducted. All he has ever asked her was:

“Who was it?” Lajwanti had lowered her eyes and replied, “Jumman”, ‘Did he treat you well?’
‘Yes.’
‘He did not beat you?’
Lajwanti laid her head on Sunder Lal’s chest and said, ‘No.’ Then she said, ”He didn’t beat me, but I was more afraid of him than I was of you. Even when you beat me I was never afraid of you ... you won’t beat me any more?”
‘No devi I won’t beat you any more.’
But Lajwanti didn’t want to be his devi. She wanted to be his wife, just as she was before.

The story ends:- ‘Sunder Lal has given her shelter under his roof but had he accepted her? She was living and yet rootless. Sunder Lal had neither eyes to see her tears nor ears to hear her sighs’.

Bedi’s primary intention in the story is to highlight the plight of women in a society in which men are obsessed by concern their own honour and the women’s deepest feelings and needs are considered irrelevant. He also shows how complex are people’s emotional needs and capacities. On one side,

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61 Ibid., p. 218
Sunder Lai opposes traditional attitudes and on the other, he does not feel her wails. He also presents heart-rendering events of partition, especially the hair raising episode of abduction and exchange of women like commodities.

Apart from what Rajinder Singh Bedi has raised, there were numerous difficulties in recovery of abducted women.

1. Abducted women had been frequently changing hands from one man to other. So no up to date information could be recorded.

2. A number of abducted women were sent to Pakistan occupied Kashmir or some other tribal areas or closed districts, which had no entry of Indian officers.

3. Some of the girls were abducted by influential Pathans e.g. a Pir was stated to have 30 girls in his possession, an MLA said to have 115 with him and 70 in control of an ex Registrar. Besides another MLA had in possession nearly 800 non-Muslim abducted girls.

4. Many girls were reported, as having being killed in riots and sometimes Pakistan Police officers became the culprits. While parties of Pathans sold the abducted non-Muslim girls for Rs. 10 or Rs. 20, they kept mum. Some of them became prey of their lust in the camps.

5. The foremost problem was psychological, that has been raised by Rajinder Singh Bedi in his story Lajwanti, because a number of these women had got married and got adjusted to that life. Many became pregnant during evacuation. The society was doubtful of accepting them in the old homes. So when they forced to evacuate, a number of them escaped from transit camps and plunged into the darkness.63

The atrocities were not limited to women alone but also had to suffer men. The castration of males and cutting off males genitals and the female breasts incorporated the conscious wish to wipe the hated enemy off from the earth by eliminating the means of its reproduction and nurturing of its infants64

A number of children were killed, or left behind by the fleeing relatives or became orphan whose parents had been killed. There were others who were abducted with their mothers. Such children were handed over to the claimants. But there were some children who were born during the period of

63 Satya M. Rai, op. cit., pp. 82-85.
64 Sudhir Kakar, op. cit., p. 37.
abduction of their mothers. In such case, the first preference for future custody of the child was given to his father and if he was unwilling to care the child then he was given to abductor.  

The tragic partition left deep wound on every body’s mind, body and soul. The incidents of retaliation were prominent, particularly in cases of train attacks. Whenever a 'ghost train' laden with corpses arrived on one side, another would immediately be sent to them. According to a British officer “the murder, brutality, looting, ill treatment of women and small children in evacuee trains had exceeded even Belson and other bestialities created by the warped Nazi mind.”

The uprooting of people from their motherland could never be easy. The idea of formation of Pakistan was thrilling one but the implementation of partition plan was destructive and genocidal. As Governor Jenkins realized that “it would be difficult enough to partition within six weeks a country of 30 millions which has been governed as a unit for 98 years even if all concerned were friendly and anxious to make progress”.

In Mewat, riots occurred between the dominant landholding community of Hindu Jats and cultivating community of Muslim Meos, which raged from May 1947 and reached climax in October-November 1947. Some worst outrages against Meos occurred in states of Alwar and Bharatpur. On 17 November, a column of 80,000 Meos was said to be on its way to Pakistan but two days later moved back, having decided that the risks in Indian Mewat were smaller than those involved in trying to reach and settle down in Pakistan.

Such cruel and wicked happenings moved the people and the writers. The progressive writers described the black deeds of human beings vividly and movingly. The departure of people from their motherland was very painful. Ismat Chughtai’s story, Roots depicted the pains and sorrows of uprooting the people from their roots. The story begins: ‘Everyone’s face was ashen no food was cooked. It was the sixth day the children had been out of school and at home.... The same old scuffles; wallops, wrestling and somersaults, as of 15th August had never come. The fools did not realize that

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65 Satya M. Rai, op. cit., p. 86.
67 Ibid., p. 139.
68 Gyanendra Pandey, op. cit., p. 39.
the British were gone leaving behind as they departed, a deep wound that would not be healed for years to come. The surgery on Hindustan has been performed with crippled hands and blunt scalpels so that thousands of arteries have been slit, a river of blood is flowing and no one has any stamina left to stitch the wounds up. 69

Everywhere the atmosphere was gloomy and tense. Muslims were feeling that they were under house arrest. Living together for centuries, none could be able to identify them as Hindus or Muslims. Ismat portrayed the relationship of the families of Roop Chand, and their’s which was continued for three generations. Though they were supporters of various political parties but despite all, their friendship and love remained unchanged.

Abba and Roop Chand ji, who had already retired from hospital, were good friends and now his practice was limited to their family. When anyone sneezed, he was dispatched to Doctor Sahib or Doctor Sahib himself reached there without delay. The fun would start when Amma did not feel well. She would tremble fearfully.

"No, no, I am not going to be treated by that joker," but who would ignore the doctor at home. So, the moment doctor heard Amma was ill, he came running. "Well, if you are going to eat all the pulao and Zarda by yourself you will get sick," he teased her.

"You think everyone is as greedy as you are?" I say the illness is just an excuse. Bhabi why don’t you just send for me! I shall come. Why do you carry on this charade?" 70 His eyes twinkled mischievously. Cursing him Amma would pull her hand away and Abba would merely smile.

Beyond this medical transactions Abba and Roop Chand Chacha were very helpful in family affairs of each other. But since 15th August when tricolour had been hung at Doctor Sahib’s house and the Muslim League flag had gone up their’s, a chasm had been created. From that day Ammaji lost her voice, she gazed with sorrow at the frightful depth of this chasm and trembled. When after having lost everything to looters, Bari Bahu’s parents arrived with much difficulty from Bhawalpur and when Nirmala’s in-laws came

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70 Ibid., p. 193.
from Lyallpur nearly half dead, the chasm widened. Without discussing the matter, *Bari Bhabi* began packing her luggage.

‘Don’t touch my trunk,’ *Amma* finally spoke and everyone was dumbstruck.

‘You won’t go,’ *Bare Bhai* asked tartly.

‘My goodness, may I be cursed! Why should I go to die among the Sindhi women? Those wretches flapping their wide *pyjamas* as they run about!’

“So go to Sanjhie in Dhaka”.

‘Then go to Rawalpindi to Farida’s, Khala said. ‘May God forgive me! May God save everyone from the Punjabis? It is language of hell they speak’. Her tongue loosened.

‘What is this childish talk? The leader of National Guard spoke irately.

‘No one is making any sense. Do you want us to stay here and be killed?71

“You people go. There is no reason for me to go. These are my last days,” *Amma* said.

“*Amma* is senile, her wits aren’t about her at this age,” *Manjhie Bhai* whispered in his brother’s ear.

‘What does she know about cruelty that is being inflicted on innocent people?’

If *Amma* had a sharp tongue she would have said,” ‘Where is that country that was ours, whose soil gave us birth, the soil in which we rolled about and grew up? If it is not our country then how can a place where you live for four days become our country? ... Is it a country or a pair of shoes which if they are a little tight are discarded in favour of another pair?72

But when her sons, daughters, son-in-law and daughter-in-law, and grand children began boarding the lorries, her heart broke into a million pieces. The tearful eyes put a gaze on lorries and on her house. After the departure she looked into each room rememorizing all signs of life. The corner where tens of umbilical cords were buried. Ten souls have taken first breath of life. At night there was silence all over. Roop Chand’s wife brought food tray but it remained untouched. Who knows how many distressing thoughts, finding her alone fell upon her all night?. Trains were being

attacked, and passengers cut down. The crop that she had irrigated with her blood for fifty years had gone into exile in search of new fields. All night she confronted images of the lacerated wounded bodies of her grown up daughters and other family members till slumber over took her.

When she opened her eyes she realized there was a familiar touch upon her pulse.

‘Arey bhabi, I will come if you send for me, why do you have to undertake the charade? Roop Chand ji was speaking behind the curtain.’

‘And bhabi today I must have my fee. Look, I have brought you good for nothing sons all the way from colony junction. They were running away, the scoundrels.’

The aged lips fluttered with renewed life. She sat up. For a moment there was silence. Then two red hot gems rolled down and fell on Roop Chand ji ’s wrinkled hands.

In the story *Roots* Ismat portrays the pains and sorrows of the people’s departure from their roots in a very realistic manner. It also portrayed the bond between Muslim and Hindu families, which remained unbroken after temporary rupture. Ismat seemed to be optimist in uniting the Hindu-Muslim as they lived for centuries before the partition catastrophe. Though there is a dearth of material on victimization of women during partition, but the literature fulfills this emptiness. Hindi writers have contributed little on this issue but Urdu and Punjabi literature like Bengali have enriched the history of the events of 1947. A wide range of topics and problems pertaining to partition and its aftermath, which were uncovered so far have been covered in literature.

Progressive Writers uncovered the pains and sorrows of dejected women. This literature touched the human beings at their sensitive and contemplative best while describing partition. Mushirul Hasan maintains that official records do not reflect the pain and agony, fear and affliction dismay and disillusionment which creative writings do most eloquently.74

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It is impossible to make an accurate estimate of total loss of life, or the extent of damage to property and number of suffered women. The fact finding organization examined nearly fifteen thousand witnesses which bear testimony to murder of fifty thousand non Muslims. It is only a fraction of the total devastation caused. Thousands of villages were not included in the collected data. Out of total 19,914 villages in west Punjab only 2094 are covered by the evidence collected by fact finding organization. A large number of villages were converted to Islam, so they are also not included in figures. The problems of communal riots, refugees, their miseries, rehabilitation, conversion, raping and abduction, recovering of Hindu women and rehabilitation, psychological suffering of individual and families can not be fully understood without the help of literature. The portrayal of partition in literature reveals the physical suffering and psychological pains suffered by the people.