

## **NARRATIVES OF RESILIENCE: THE ROLE OF BRITISH INDIA'S PARTITION IN SHAPING WOMEN'S LITERARY EXPRESSIONS**

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### **Abstract**

*The Forum aimed at analysing how the phenomenon of the Partition of British India changed women's writings. Further, it explores as to how the Partition discourse, with elements of violence, displacement, and survival scripted in its storyline has influenced Women's writing in general both in the historical past and modern period. The review of the existing literature and empirical evidence indicates that women's writings on Partition reveal deep psychological and emotional spaces. It has a focus on particular themes and the switch in the approaches to writing prose before and after the Partition happens and questions how these changes occurred in the literary instances of women. It also seemed important to separate a concluding episode embedded in literature for the purpose of analysing its applicability to the operation of collective memory and identification of women's emotional resources. Also, it connects with different cultural and social transformations, which are described in women's stories and investigates how the selected texts depict or subvert new cultural images. Speaking of the research process, the paper analyzes various case studies related to authors like Kamla Das, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Saadat Hasan Manto in order to compare various narrative strategies and their effects on literary and socio-political perspectives. Thus, the study also evaluates the role of Partition literature in the contemporary feminism and adequacy of the subject in explaining the present day issues of society.*

**Keywords:** *Partition of British India, women's literature, narrative transformation, psychological trauma, collective memory, feminist writing, socio-political impact*

### **1 Introduction**

The event of Partition of British India in the year of 1947 has become one of the most horrific and monumental events in the history of South Asian Society, which resulted in

the formation of two different countries, India and Pakistan. This division was accompanied by high level of violence, forced displacement and severe social transformation. More than a million people died and approximately 15 million had to migrate as they sought to cross new boundaries created to avoid sectarian massacres (Butalia, 1998). Partition is considered as a rupturing event that marked the consciousness of a people and has been explored in literature. The role of Partition in literature is immeasurable since many works that established themselves as masterpieces for their understanding of the human spirit under stress located themselves in the Partition context. The Indian and the Pakistani writers have tried to explore the leitmotif of partition both from sociopolitical and psychological perspectives and as a result the two nations boast of a large literary canon emblematic to the sufferers of partition. A body of work relevant to this event does exist and this work does not only document history but also shows the mental and emotional effects of the event.

Despite the fact that the Partition literature mainly deals with political and communal approaches, there is now a rising demand to give importance to women's point of view regarding the subject. Thus, women who are thought to be the custodians of the cultural, and familial honor become the main victims of the violence and displacement that follows such assaults. They had a raw deal; the experiences described are typical of gender-specific savagery like abduction, rape, and forced conversions (Menon & Bhasin 1998). However, at first, women's voice remained unheard and silenced, although their suffering reached the scale of millions of victims. Thus, while women tended to remain silent in lieu of the political stories about Partition in the aftermath of the event, the process of looking into the event through the lens of women has picked up pace in the last few decades. By presenting the human aspect of the tragedy and optics of untapped strength, women's literature on Partition presents a nuanced of aspect of women and what they endured and overcame.

The central research question of this paper is to look at how the British India's Partition will causes shifts in women's literary aims and the subjects they write on. This paper aims to assess how women's histories of partition impacted themes, styles, and genres of women's writings through analyzing current literature related to the event. The paper will focus on the psychological and the emotional state in women's literature with focusing on the processes linked to trauma and recovery. Besides, it will examine the cultural and social shifts in women's writing and include examples of well-documented female writers, who depicted the trauma of Partition.

The objective of this paper also includes giving a brief on the history of Women during the Partition with focus on violence displacement and survival. It intends to decipher the changes with respect to thematic concerns and representations of the narrative style in the pre- and post-Partitioned literature, the psychological and emotional dimensions of

women's writing on the Partition. Besides, the paper will analyze cultural and social transformations reflected in the women's stories and carry out the analysis of the works of the prominent female writers Kamla Das, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Saadat Hasan Manto. It will also consider the impact of the Partition literature on the current women's literature and the category of feminist writing. Through the analysis of these aspects, this paper seeks to advance the existing scholarship on the impact of Partition in forming women's literary voice and demonstrate the significance of recounting these narratives for furthering women's rights and gender equality in modern, complex political landscapes.

## **2 Women's Experiences During Partition: A Historical Overview**

Despite being a political and geographic event of the partition of British India in 1947 was not only a political and territorial division of the subcontinent but was a human tragedy which affected the lives of millions of people. Violence and turmoil escalated and women have been acknowledged to have been affected the most out of all the genders. The historical narration of feminine sufferance during the stupendous cataclysm manifest in the political division of Indian Subcontinent is quite complex and chilling, based on numerous documented materials, personal narratives and oral histories.

Intense riots happened during the period of Partition which no region of the subcontinent has seen ever before. Women were Ayesha, targeted in terms of communal honor, and were severely tortured, kidnapped, raped, forcibly converted and murdered. Some cultures saw women being murdered by their families with the intention of defending the family honor from any tarnish by the rival community (Menon & Bhasin, 1998). Such acts were informed by male-dominated culture, which deemed female virginity and purity crucial, regardless of the loss of women's lives and agency. As one of the adverse effects of abduction or rape, some of the affected women were even turned away by their families and communities after the traumatic experience, leaving them emotionally naked.

The scale of displacement during Partition was enormous, in particular, it is considered that around 15 million people were relocated across borders newly drawn on the map of South Asia (Butalia, 1998). It was regarded that women and children comprised a large number of such displaced population, walking long distances and at times without food, succumbing to diseases besides facing more episodes of violence. Most women suffered the loss of their families, homes, personal belongings, and had to begin a new life in strange territories that themselves were often unfriendly to them. As stated such shelters that were established to host the refugees were really poor and this exposed the affected individuals to more hardships. However, the female counterparts prove to be very strong, shoulder to shoulder they provided support and strove to make a new life for themselves in a rather unsavoury environment.

Recollections from painful reminiscences and eyewitness narratives have substantially contributed to capturing these experiences, providing a firsthand look of the females' sufferings in the wake of the Partition. Scholars like Urvashi Butalia in her *The Other Side of Silence* published in 1998 and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin in *Borders & Boundaries* published in the same year have really helped to give voice to these testimonies. Such accounts always present the opposite view of the official historiography as well as in most cases, the people are left with the psychological trauma which official papers fail to capture. In analysing women's testimonies, the quotidian aspects of partition are laid out in substantial detail; the discourses of loss, survival and agency are proliferated.

Testimonies and narratives disrupt the official discourses which have been previously provided mainly in terms of political events and actors. They give voice to the. This essay, therefore, looks into the role of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Kamila Shamsie's *A Season of Spanking* in depicting the experiences of ordinary women in the violations of the Partition. For instance, from the narrated life histories, most of the women related how they assumed new responsibilities as heads of families, earners of money and community leaders in the absence of male members of the family (Butalia, 1998). These stories force one to recognize the major changes Pakistan's Partition rendered to women's lives by altering their positions and new roles in society.

Thus, the understanding and recollection of women's suffering and strength during Partition are vital for comprehending the painful history of this important period. The documentation of violence, displacement, and survival recorded in the families' and survivors' testimonies reveals much detail about the incident. Thus, through literature and history, scholars and writers have acted as the voices of these women who explain the gendered aspects of partition which are less explored and noted amid the historical change.

### **3 Transformation of Women's Literary Expressions**

Going back to the origin, the Partition of British India in 1947 not only redraw the map of South Asia but also affected women's writing in terms of literary works. As such, some of the components of this change are the differences in the themes chosen before and after the Partition, how Partition impacted women's narratives in terms of style and genres, or the appearance of strong female literary works that embody Partition experiences.

The Pre-Partition women's writing in India was mostly centered on social issues, freedom movement and portrayal of women in home affairs. Some provided guidance on proper behavior for women in the family, education of girls and the social ills concerning them including early marriage and dowry. Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das were some of the leaders which this literary period produced to portray themes such as identity, love and

nationalism in a fairly stable political frame. But with the occurrence of the great events that led to partition there was a dramatic change of social contexts in the themes. The literature produced by Indian women after Partition also started to explore themes of dislocation, shatteredness, and confusion arising from the partition. The themes of the private and public violence of women became stressed, which corresponds to the defragmented and violent society of the epoch. The literature produced at this time contains a strong concept of darkness, displacement and the effort to survive. It also touched on the post-violence injuries and post-conflict and reflected on issues to do with memory and trauma.

The effect which Partition has shifted women's narrative style and genre is best seen in terms of way stories have been written and the genres that started appearing in the wake of 1947 event. The conventional methods of writing, especially about history, which is a linear process, was replaced by fragmented and even non-linear writing which mirrors the fractured and topsy-turvy situation of Partition. Such a change let the writers depict the richness and the versatile aspects of their experiences in a more truthful way. Pioneering women engaged oral histories, personal testaments, and autobiographical themes more frequently, these innovations gave women an opportunity to narrate and communicate their and others' suffering. The fictionalization of reality along with the incorporation of real-life incidents became one of the principal features of Partition literature. For example, is narratives such Amrita Pritam and Ismat Chughtai used copious imagery, and descriptive language to write about the tragedies of partition and the psychological distress. Besides, to write first-person narratives, there were memoirs and autobiographies due to the need for women to record and make sense of their experiences. These genres allowed authors to contemplate and focus on their selves and then explain the state of the world as well as their new roles. The narrative styles got closer to the individual and spiralling, in correspondence with the topics' psychological density and the personal involvement of the subjects depicted.

Altogether are the following numerous and the most successful works of Anglo-Indian women writers that depict the aspect of the partition in details and have produced worthy additions to the genre of partition literature. This piece is a sorrowful cry for the tragedy of partition and an appeal to the Sufi poet of Punjab – Waris Shah to see his beloved 'Punjab' in ruin. This poem emerged as one of the most memorable and repeated articulations of people's mourning for the loss during Partition. Both "Roots" and "The Quilt" describe the experience of women traumatized by the Partition, sexuality and identity issues are the main concerns of the two stories. Nevertheless, the shocking discursive tenor of Chughtai's prose M- as well as discovering fresh motifs and concepts in them M- helped her write a story that was unconventional and provocative, in terms of unmasking

the less-represented consequences of the Partition on women. Accounts of the Indian independence and the ensuing partition can be viewed in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel, *Ice Candy Man* published under the title- *Cracking India* in 1988. Thus, there is an important element of the childlike in Sidhwa's meta-narration that renders her account of the horrific events after Partition and the new, fractured subjectivities that emerged, normal. Therefore, it is evident that the novel is a social and political analysis that describes the effects of revolution on women's lives.

In other words, the evolution of women's literary productions after Partition has to be revealed as a markedly qualitative change with regard to themes, forms of narration, and genres. This paper sought to make an analysis of how the effects of the Partition had impacted women's writing in South and Women Asian region hence contributing to the evolution of strong women literary works that are still relevant to this day. As chronicling the personal and communal aspects of Partition, these works not only narrate an important historical event but also point to the processes of the south asian women's survival and survival in the face of adversity.

#### **4 Psychological and Emotional Landscapes in Women's Writing**

Importantly, sexuality was evident in the reactions to the Partition of British India in 1947 which left psychological impact on the people especially women. These pointers include the victims' psychological trauma and healing; portrayal of suffering and strength; and literary processes of memory and bearing witness, via literature in the representation of the event.

The works of women writers when it comes to the partition are characterised by a detailed analysis and understanding of the psychological aspect that was witnessed at this time. The different stories present the effects of violence and displacement, and loss on the psychological wellbeing of women. The subjects of these works are the various manifestations of trauma, such as nightmares, anxiety, depression, and a more extensive concept of loss. Women's writing reveals aspects of how these psychological pains are developed and continue to unravel affecting the next generation. For instance, the primary subjects of Amrita Pritam's work included loss and longing. One of her poems is "Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nu" which I believe to be a message of desperation of Partitioned societies. Both the muscles and the heart of Bengali nationalism are vibrantly depicted, and the psychological trauma of the agony of one's homeland being destroyed and fellow citizens being slaughtered only to have their deaths filmed for the entertainment of voyeurs is effectively presented in Pritam's lyrical prose. In the same way, the Partition is visualized from a sexual abuse perspective in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy-Man* that also shows how the event shapes the personality of a young girl and how traumatic experiences can

permanently harm a person's character (Sidhwa, 1988). The theme of healing is also featured as a prominent strand of women's Partition narratives. The narratives are thus full of the tortuously gradual nature of arriving at a point where traumatized individuals can start healing. The process of transcendence is showed through their transformations stressing the aspects of repentance for sins, search of a identities and starting a new life in the post-war ruins. Literature is made into an enjoyable and healing place where the wounds of the Partition are identified and given a way to be healed through narration and sufferance.

The ordinary women, who migrated during and post partition, obviously went through several emotional turbulences, which are described in these books. These difficulties are not limited to the sphere of feelings, but can also include feelings of grief and despair and anger and helpless. Through writing, women successfully express the actual feelings that occurred in the course of the partition, giving the reader an insight of their minds. Some of Ismat Chughtai's short stories like *Root* and *The Quilt* present women as struggling with their sentiments in times of turmoil. The principal themes in Chughtai's works are met psychological conflicts such as betrayal, loneliness and absence of individuality in an arbitrary society. Her style of writing does not conform them, but provokes the recognition of women and what they are capable of coming out from strength and suffering muscles that are ever in constant maneuver in these regions of emotional (Chughtai, 1995). This endurance is the repeated motif in the literature of the women of the Partitions and this lays stress on the ability and spirit of womenities during the calamities. Telling these stories helps to understand how women complied with new conditions, helped one another, and started creating new lives. It is fascinating to focus on perseverance in the represented woman's life and show her and other similar women as survivors and fighters who, regardless of being torn apart by violence and forced displacement, were rebuilt as agents of change.

In the book titled 'Reading the Other' Corbett draws attention to the fact that literature functions to bear witness and process the trauma associated with the occurrence of Partition. Specifically, women's writing presents gendered insights into the common topics of suffering and survival. These stories also contribute to the social memory since are storing private and group's experience then might be erased or lost. Partition has been examined in many books and essays, some of which are historical, and others are fictional, but Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* is a remarkable text that from oral histories and documented testimonies of women we get a sense of what Partition was like. Thus, through articulating these women's suffering, Butalia proves the role of literature in exposing and narrating the histories of those who suffered the most (Butalia, 1998). These narratives about partition therefore give the readers complex and detailed picture of the

event as it occurred to women and to some extent make sure that their tragedies are not forgotten. By writing, women take their experiences, pain, and suffering through partition; they narrate, thus formulating part of the historical event. In this sense, writing and the act of storytelling are way of regaining control over the narrative and of making sure that Partition history does not lose its way into oblivion. It conveys crucial information about the mental states of individuals who witnessed one of the most significant and devastating phenomena in the social history of South Asia through women's testimonies.

This paper attempts to argue that the psychological and emotional territories that women's Partition literature maps are significantly haunting, as those territories contain the dark terrains of trauma and healing, the throes of suffering, and the strength to rise after a devastating catastrophe. They establish an essential function of dealing with and remembering the history of Partition and bearing witness to women's stories. Women's writing does not only present the accounts of their lives and those of their communities but also enters the discussion on trauma and healing.

## **5 Legacy and Continuing Influence of Partition Literature**

The Division of British India in 1947 can be stated to have shaped the essence of the use in literature particularly among the female authors. Some of the vital legacies of Partition literature are the elements of the women's writing of the contemporary phase that addresses those issues and the way partition is the part of the feminist concern even today.

Hence, he commented that contemporary women's literature still follow up on the themes and narratives as found during and after partition. Some of the prominent themes outlined in the literature are displacement, loss of identity, communal riots and women's strength. Partition has generated a storehouse of emotions as well as psychological experiences and this has set up shop for contemporary writers. For instance, in the novel *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie three of the main characters traveling from Japan to India, then to Pakistan and Afghanistan indicate a postcolonial subject of post partition India. It also deals with issues of loss, identity and the quest of finding a home, something that many people went through during the times of Partition (Shamsie, 2009). On the same note, the narrative architecture of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy (2017) superimposes personal and political trajectories with a continual Partition trauma within people's experiences as well as social relations (Roy, 2017). These modernised texts also demonstrate how the topics of Partition limber move on to influence new accounts and make it possible to keep the narratives of 1947 alive.

Basically on the genre of literature, Partition has influenced modern feminism writing in a significant way. Through describing those terrible events in which women of South Asian



region suffered, including the violence against women during Partition, as well as various sorts of displacement, and their endeavour to survive, the basic groundwork for the discourse of feminism has been established. These narratives have unveiled how different forms of violence are Sexualised and have represented how women can survive violent encounters all this has proven to be resourceful for feminist interpretation and dissection. Many writers of the post-South Asian, post-modern form of feminism have borrowed elements of the Partition stories and it's narrative style to question other matters of gender, sexuality, power and identity. For instance, *Women Domestic Workers and Partition: Surviving the Partition and the Post Partition Context* by Urvashi Butalia have ensured that women are at the center of stories considering that many narrations tend to erase women (Butalia, 1998). Exploring the said works would also allow the reader to appreciate the literary patterns which are revolving on the strength and courage in telling women history as well as demonstrating the strong relationship between the concepts of femininity and trauma. Also, the analysis of the trauma, memory and identity issues of partition has help to lay out the tools for discussing the similar situations of the feminist writers in the modern context such as the communal riots, war and migration.

In essence, the narratives of Partition have not lost their significance in explaining modern problems in the field of socio-politics. The themes coming out of the partition literature such as displacement, communal tension and the search for identity, remain current with issues of today's global society such as status of refugees, the ethnic conflicts and nation/cultural identity respectively. Options of the partition give vital information about the sufferer's aspect of political actions and top fallout of communal 'riots' and displacement. For instance, the social and political crises in South Asia and the existing enmity between Indian and Pakistani people reflect the topics of Partition narratives. The episodes of displacement and crisis of identity are reminiscent of the contemporary refugees and immigrants' experience. The literature that we read brings out the challenges of the issues of Partition and makes an audience more sympathetic and better able to grasp not just the politics of the situation but the people who got caught in the middle of the political game. Besides, the literary works of Partition have shaped modern political discussions as recent discourses on reconciliation, memory, and justice. The memories that are recalled in these tales are the individual and communal recollections to validate the call for reconciliation and to remain cognizant of history's lessons. Help for critical analysis of the present state of affairs and policies being implemented as well as the spectator's awareness of how their society treats the minority and the forced migrants.

Therefore, it is seen that a continuity of Partition literature is visible in present day women's writings that appear and persist in themes and narratives today and also in terms of its effects on feminism present day writing and the relevance of these concerns in the

present sociopolitical scenario. Through exploring the aspects of trauma as well as the process of rehabilitation and recovery in the female characters of the works under analysis, it is possible to gain a deep and complex insight into the event that has reshaped the history of South Asia. The biopics also guarantee the recounting of those from the time of Partition and the inclusion of the survivors' stories into modern literature and discussions.

## 6 Conclusion

This essay has illustrated how such women's literary expressions based upon the context of the Partition of British India have offered psychological, emotional and social analyses of the event and culture in its aftermath. The present paper has demonstrated how the Post-Partition literature, especially that written by women explores the wounds of a destabilized society and the strength of people who lived through that time. Thus, through studying the changes in the themes of the British Indians' literature before and after the Partition, the deep psychological and emotional experience depicted in women's writing, and the legacy of the Partition literature in the contemporary feminist discourses, this analysis has shown that the theme of the Partition is alive in women's writing.

These major points of finding underscore the importance of the Women's Partition literature in the writing of histories as well as the processing of the collective memories of a people. These Works of Literary Fiction give traumatic honest accounts of lives during partition, the displacement, and the struggles of women and their ability to create new lives, which do not only mark them as records of womanhood with the respect to partition, but also use it as a tool to discuss the sociopolitical issues that we continue to observe today. The themes of loss of one's home and identity, and violence within communities are as timely now as they were at the time that the novel is set in 1947 and contain social messages about the cost of political decisions on ordinary people and the resilience of the human spirit.

In the large scheme of things, it can be seen how Partition literature dovetails into women's studies. First of all, it opposes the patriarchal approach in historical writings by focusing on giving voice to female characters and let the women's stories be heard and told. Secondly, it expands and improves the possibility of the usage of feminism, as the reader can get the deeper perception of gendered violence and people's coping strategies. Thus, the themes of trauma, memory, and identity that get reflected in Partition literature are a veritable goldmine for the feminist critics interested in the ways gender intertwines with history.

Finally, it focuses on social justice where partition literature helps in understanding the suffering of the minority communities and helps in changing the contemporary policies and prejudice of society.

As for the future research and literary work, the perspectives are immense and include all the above points from E to Z. The first approach is comparative analysis of Partition literature involving the various regions and cultures of the world by looking at how the common themes of displacement and coping have emerged in other conflict and violence regions of the world. Further, there is literally a much greater potential to conduct deeper studies of other perhaps less explored women writers, and of their roles and work in Partition literature. There is another research direction linked to the examination of the influence of Partition literature on the following generations, including ways in which Partition literature is incorporated in works of the latest generations of writers and is read by the audiences. Last but not the least, combining and integrating more than one discipline based on literary scrutiny along with social, historical, and psychological perspectives opens up a quite profound understanding of Partition and its effects on women's lives and literary production.

Therefore, it is imperative that women's Partition literature continues to retain its scholarly focus on recounting the survival of one of the most topical and horrible experiences in the South Asian history. In this sense, understanding the trauma, resilience, and changing literary narrative of women enhances the study of the contribution of women in literature as well as the community's bibliotherapy. When analysing the significance of Partition narratives in the modern world, it can be stated that it underlines the notion that the past should be remembered and understood in order to avoid the repetition of the tragic events, and the voices of the people, who experienced Partition, are still important in today's society.

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