



Research Paper

The Horrors of Partition: Atrocities against Women in India and Pakistan.

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The Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was one of the most tumultuous and events in modern history. As the British colonial rule came to an end, the Indian subcontinent was divided into the independent nations of India and Pakistan, leading to one of the largest mass migrations in human history. Amid the Chaos and violence of partition, women on both sides of the new border faced unimaginable atrocities, becoming the target of horrific violence, abduction, rape and murder.

The scale and brutality of the attacks on women during Partition is difficult to comprehend. Estimate suggest that between 7500 to 100000 women were abducted and subjected to horrific sexual violence, while many more were killed. In the Mayhem, countless women also committed suicide or were killed by their own families to “protect their honour”. The trauma and suffering inflicted on women during this time would have a lasting impact both on the individual. Survivors and the collective psyche of the nations that emerged from the ashes of Partition.

The experiences and stories of these women have been meticulously documented in historical accounts, novels and personal narratives, providing a harrowing glimpse into the horrors they faced. Through this works we can bear witness to the immense courage resilience and humanity of the women who endured unspeakable atrocities, as well as the devastating toll the violence took on their lives and the generations that followed.

One of the most well known real life accounts of the atrocities against women during Partition is the story of Sakina Begum. Sakina was a young woman living in the Punjabi village of Chhajjalwaddi, near the newly formed India-Pakistan border . As violence erupted in the region, Sakina and her family attempted to flee to the safety of India. However there, caravan was attacked by a mob of men, and Sakina was abducted.

In her memoir, Sakina recounts the horrific ordeal that followed: “they tied my hands and feet took me to a house. There they raped me in turns, all night long. I pleaded with them to kill me, but they refused.” After the assault, Sakina was held Captive for several months, before finally being rescued and reunited with her family. The trauma she endured would haunt her for the rest of her life, as she struggled to come to terms with the unspeakable violence she had experienced.

Sakina's story is just one of the Countless similar accounts that emerged from the chaos of Partition. In the novel “Azadi” by Chaman Nahal, the protagonist, Leena faces a similar fate. As Leena and her family attempted to flee to India, their train is attacked by a mob of men. Leena is abducted and taken to a makeshift camp, where she is repeatedly raped and abused. The novel's a portrayal of Leena's ordeal is haunting and unflinching depiction of the horrors that many women faced during this time.

Another well-known literary work that explores the trauma of Partition is Khuswant Singh's novel “Train to Pakistan”. In the novel, the character of Nooran, a young and vibrant woman is abducted and subjected to horrific sexual violence. The novel's vivid description of Nooran's Captivity and abuse are a heart breaking testament to the suffering inflicted on women during this time.

The Stories of women like Sakina, Leena and Nooran are not isolated incidents but rather part of a larger pattern of systemic violence and oppression that targeted women during Partition. In the chaos and

upheaval of the mass migration, women became easy targets for attacks as they were perceived as Symbols of their community and their “honour”

In many cases, the violence against women was not only physical but also psychological, women were often forced to witness the murder of their loved ones, or were coerced into converting their religion and marrying their captors. The trauma of these experiences was compounded by the social stigma and sterilization that many survivors faced upon being reunited with their families.

One such example is the story of Hamida, a young woman from Punjab region who was abducted and forced to convert to Islam during the Partition. In her memoir, Hamida recounts the horror of being separated from her family and taken to a strange home, where she was made to wear a burqa and told that she was now a Muslim woman. “I cried and begged them to let me go, to return to my family, she writes but they just laugh and said that I was now their property”.

Hamida's story highlights the ways in which the violence against Women during Partition was not only physical but also deeply rooted in the Politics of identity and community. By forcibly converting and marrying women like Hamida, the perpetrators of these attacks sought to assert their dominance and undermine the very foundations of the Communities they were targeting.

The psychological trauma and social stigma faced by women like Hamida was often compounded by lack of support and resources available to them in the aftermath of Partition. Many survivors were ostracized by their own families and communities, who saw them as fainted or dishonoured. Others were denied the opportunity to reunite with their loved ones, as the chaos and confusion of the mass migration made it difficult to trace and recover the thousands of women who had been abducted.

The challenges faced by women survivors of Partition violence were further exacerbated by the Political and social upheaval of the time. In the newly formed nations of India and Pakistan, the issues of “recovered” women became a source of tension and Controversy, with both governments struggling to address the sheer scale of the problem.

In India, the government established the “Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act”, which aimed to recover and repatriate the women who had been abducted during Partition. However, the implementation of this policy was fraught with difficulties, as many women were unwilling or unable to return to their families, having been assimilated into their new communities or facing the prospect of social stigma and rejection.

Similarly in Pakistan, the government established the “women's Relief and Rehabilitation Committee” to address the issue of abducted women, however this committee faced significant challenges, including a lack of resources, political interference and the reluctances of many women to come forward and identify themselves as survivors of sexual violence.

The trauma and suffering inflicted on women during Partition has had lasting consequences, both for the individual survivors and the societies they lived in. Many women were forced to carry the burden of their experiences in silence, unable to fully process or heal from the horrors they had endured.

The long-term impact of this Violence can be seen in the intergenerational trauma and social stigma that continues to haunt the descendants of Partition survivors. In her book “The Other Side of Silence”, Urvashi Butalia explores the ways in which the stories and experiences of Partition women have been passed down through the generations, shaping the social and cultural landscape of both India and Pakistan. Butalia's research reveals the deep and enduring impact of the Partition violence, as survivors and their families grappled with the legacy of trauma and loss. Many women who experienced the horrors of partition were unable to openly discuss their experiences, leaving their and grand children to piece together the fragmented narratives and unspoken pain that shaped their family histories.

This intergenerational trauma is also evident in the literary and artistic works that have emerged from the partition experience. Novels like Bapsi Sidhwa's “Cracking India” and Deepa Mehta's film “Earth” have powerfully captured the ways in which the violence of partition continues to haunt the collective psyche of the sub-continent

Similarly, the work of visual artists like Nalini Malani has grappled with the legacy of Partition, using powerful and evocative imagery to explore the trauma and resilience of the women who endured its horrors. Malani's installation “In Search of Vanished Blood” is a haunting and visceral exploration of the gendered violence of Partition, inviting viewers to confront the ongoing legacy of this tragic event.

Through these literary, artistic and historical accounts, we can begin to understand the true scope and scale of the atrocities committed against women during Partition. The stories of women like Sakina, Leena, Nooran and Hamida serve as a powerful testament to the resilience and humanity of those who endured unimaginable suffering, even as they remind us of the devastating consequences of unchecked violence and the urgent need for justice and healing.

As we grapple with the complex and painful legacy of Partition it is essential that we continue to bear witness to the stories of these women, to honour their experiences, and to work towards a more just and

equitable future. Only by acknowledging the full extent of the atrocities committed during this period can we begin to heal the deep wounds that continue to shape the societies of India and Pakistan.

Ultimately, the stories of Partition women serve as a powerful reminder of the human capacity for both cruelty and resilience and of the enduring need to build a world where such horrors can never be repeated. Through their Courage, their suffering, and their enduring spirit, these Women have left an indelible mark on the history of the subcontinent, and their legacies will continue to inspire generations to come.

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