



Partition and Women in Fiction

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Abstract : *The Partition of India was the process of dividing the sub-continent along sectarian lines which took place in 1947. Partition affected the masses in general but women were the worst sufferers. This research paper is based on the study of three novels—Khushwant Singh's **Train to Pakistan** Bhisham Sahni's **Tamas** and Bapsi Sidhwa's **Ice-candy-Man** to find out the impact of partition on women.*

Key Words: *Partition, Women, Victims, Violence, Massacre.*

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Introduction :

The Partition of India was the process of dividing the sub-continent along sectarian lines which took place in 1947 as India gained Independence from the British rulers. The predominantly Muslim states of India became the nation of Pakistan, while the rest remained with the Republic of India. The two self governing countries legally came into existence at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947. The ceremony of the transfer of power was held a day earlier in Karachi, at that time the capital of the new state of Pakistan, to allow the last British Viceroy, Louis Mountbatten, to attend both the ceremonies in Karachi as well as in Delhi.

The Partition of India and the associated bloody riots inspired many creative minds in India and Pakistan to create literary depictions based on this event. While some works depicted the massacre during the migration, others concentrated on the aftermath of partition in terms of difficulties faced by the refugees on both sides of the border. Some of these important works in fiction are Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1971), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980), Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-*

candy-Man (1988) Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* etcetera.

Objective :

This research paper studies that period of Indian history that witnessed along with the joys of freedom the shock and trauma of partition. The research paper aims at bringing out the mayhem of the partition of India, especially its traumatic impact on women, who formed the vulnerable and marginalized section. How partition impacted the lives of ordinary men and women have been recorded not just by historians but also by writers of literature. This research paper proposes to study three novels by three different writers – *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, *Tamas* by Bhisham Sahni and *Ice-candy- Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa. This research paper will also try to find out regional specificities if any since the selected novels are set in different geographical locations.

Train to Pakistan: *Train to Pakistan* is a novel by Khushwant Singh published in 1956 in which Khushwant Singh tells the tragic tale of the partition of India and Pakistan and the events that followed. He presents the events which destroyed the normal life of the people of “Mano Majra” a small imaginary village which forms the backdrop of this novel.

Khushwant Singh, in his novel, *Train to Pakistan* shows how communities in India lived in peace and harmony before the politics of Mano Majra shattered it. At Mano Majra which stands for India, the day begins with Muslim prayer leader facing west towards Mecca and calling “Allah-O-Akbar”. This is followed by the Sikh priest who waits for his turn and allows the Muslim priest to finish his call to prayer. It indicates the kind of harmonious atmosphere that prevailed in India among various religious communities. Singh, further shows that in spite of religious differences, they all pay their reverence to the same village

deity, the Deo. Singh gives a balanced and unprejudiced account of the tragedy of partition.

One of the most important female characters in the novel, is of, Nooran. She is the daughter of the Muslim priest of the village and beloved of Juggut Singh and is carrying his child. The child in the womb of a Muslim girl, fathered by a Sikh is used as a metaphor for the joint social, cultural and political past of the Sikhs and the Muslims and their peaceful co-existence.

Another important character is of Haseena, a teenager prostitute. Hukum Chand, the Deputy Commissioner is shown fondling Haseena. He plays a crucial role in saving the lives of Muslim refugees by not arresting Iqbal and Juggut Singh at the desirable time. The earthly love of Hukum Chand for Haseena asserts itself and averts the catastrophe.

Another woman character is Sundari. She has been married four days ago to Sunder Singh. During the partition riots, she is gang raped by a mob and molested. This shows a frightening image of the assaults made against women.

Thus, the novel presents the helplessness of women at the time of partition. “Women killed their own children and jumped into wells that filled to the brim with corpses”. (Singh, 31) The author effectively depicts the widespread violence and brutalities inflicted against women at the time of partition which was certainly a dark chapter in Indian history.

Tamas: The novel *Tamas* (1971) was originally written in Hindi by Bhisham Sahni but it was translated into English in 1988 by the author himself.

The word *Tamas* means darkness that is the darkness of communalism. *Tamas* is based on the communal riots in the early days of 1947 which broke out in Rawalpindi and Sahni was a witness

to it. During the communal massacre which broke out among Hindus, Muslim and Sikhs, lots of people were mercilessly killed but women were the worst victims. Women were sexually assaulted and victimised at the time of partition.

Jasbir Kaur, one of the female characters in the novel, jumps into the well along with the throng of women to save dignity and honour on hearing that rioters have entered into the village of Sayedpur. The incident of "Well of Death" throws light on the helplessness of women.

The other female character is Banto, who is the wife of Harnam Singh. They are the only Sikh couple in the village Dhok Ilahi Bakshi. They leave the village due to the communal disturbances. We see Banto suffering as she loses her house and shop in the riots. She is a helpless mother who loses her son Iqbal Singh and daughter Jasbir Kaur.

In another incident the daughter of a Hindu Pandit, Parkasho is kidnapped by a Muslim, Allah Rakha. He brings her home and torments her. This incident indicates how women were treated even worse than animals. "Don't kill me", she said, "All seven of you can have me as your keep". (Sahni, 288)

Rajo is a Muslim woman who provides shelter to Banto and Harnam Singh at the time of need. The character of Rajo represents the redeeming human qualities.

Tamas realistically presents the horrors that women experienced at the time of partition. At the end of the novel, the events after the riots show how the British implemented their "divide and rule" policy and destroyed the very foundation of Indian community life.

Ice-Candy –Man: *Ice-Candy-Man* is a novel by Bapsi Sidhwa. Sidhwa is a Parsi writer of Pakistan origin who as a child witnessed the horrors of partition in her home town, Lahore in

Pakistan. In this novel, Sidhwa chronicles the destruction of Lahore and its people during partition riots with powerfully constructed memories recalled through the eyes of Lenny, an eight year old Parsi girl who is disabled by polio. There are strong autobiographical tones in the novel for Sidhwa also had a limp in her leg, identifiable with the narrator of the novel. Lenny is growing up in the midst of a historical event whose implications continue to flare up communal eruptions to this day in the sub-continent.

The novel presents a number of female characters who experienced the horrors of partition in India and Pakistan. Men using their masculine powers brutally assaulted women: "...setting fires, looting, parading the Muslim women naked through the streets- raping and mutilating them in the centre of villages and in mosques". (Sidhwa, 38)

The character of Rodabai, Lenny's Godmother represents a very firm and progressive facet of Parsi women in the pre and post- partition society. Lenny, the female protagonist who is the narrator of the story, shares her personal experiences at the time of partition. Another important character who brings out the emotional and physical turmoil of women most importantly in the novel is that of Ayah.

Sidhwa brings to light the marginalized section of the society, exposing the condition of women. The atrocities that women faced at their hands were an overt assertion of their identity.

Thus the novel *Ice-candy-Man* along with picturing the horrific condition of women during partition, generates a kind of hope with its open ending, of the return of Ayah to India. This novel is remarkable for bringing an assortment of characters vividly to life and catching the Indian sub-continent during partition with immediacy, wit and tragic power.

Conclusion:

The partition of India affected millions of people and brought religious unrest in the country. Women were the worst sufferers of partition and their miserable state is presented authentically in fiction.

Ice-Candy-Man portrays the brutalities inflicted on women, while *Train to Pakistan* presents the emotional trauma of its women characters and *Tamas* deals with both aspects. The trauma of partition resulted in loss of mutual harmony among diverse communities living together for centuries.

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