



ISSN 0976 8165

THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English

OCTOBER 2019
VOL. 10 | ISSUE - 5

10TH YEAR OF OPEN ACCESS

Editor-In-Chief
Dr. Vishwanath Bite

www.the-criterion.com



About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

The Untold Stories of Partition: An Analysis of *Torn from the Roots: A Partition Memoir* by Kamla Patel

Siddhi Tripathi

Research Scholar

Department of English & OELs

Dr. Hari Singh Gour Central University, Sagar (M.P.)

&

Prof. Nivedita Maitra

Department of English & OELs

Dr. Hari Singh Gour Central University, Sagar (M.P.)

Article History: Submitted-30/09/2019, Revised-06/11/2019, Accepted-09/11/2019, Published-20/11/2019.

Abstract:

The Partition of India has been one of the most traumatic event in the history of the sub-continent. While the dominant narrative of history emphasizes on the political upheavals, the life experiences of its women victims remain buried under manifold strata of the past.

Kamla Patel's work *Torn from the Roots: A Partition Memoir* narrates personal histories of the women who experienced the brunt of partition; bringing out a unique facet of history that has gone almost unrecorded and unexplored. This alternative history throws light on the abduction of women followed by the forced recovery and rehabilitation by their governments. This paper especially focuses on the rehabilitation programme initiated by both the governments for rehabilitating the abducted women as recorded in Kamla Patel's memoir who was in charge of a 'Recovery Camp' in Lahore and was responsible for recovering Hindu women left or forcibly detained in Pakistan.

Keywords: Partition, recovery, rehabilitation, victims.

Kamla Patel was born in 1912 in Nadiad, city of Gujarat, India. She came under the influence of Gandhi when she was admitted to his Ashram by her father. It is here that she came under the influence of Gandhi and began her life as a social activist. After a year of her marriage Kamla Patel became a widow at the age of nineteen. It was then that she decided to devote her remaining life in the service of the country which made her contribute significantly in the country's freedom struggle. Through Gandhiji, she came into contact with activists like Mridula Sarabhai, who was the Chief All India Organizer of the Recovery and Rehabilitation Programme. Sarabhai took Patel under her wing, handing her over the responsibility of recovery work in Pakistan. She was stationed at the Gangaram Hospital in

Lahore as Mridula Sarabhai's representative. Patel went on to work with Mridula Sarabhai, Rameshwari Nehru, Sucheta Kriplani and others for the recovery and rehabilitation of abducted women and children during and after the Partition.

B. R. Nanda, in his memoir, *Witness to Partition* asserts that Partition of India happened before it was actually scheduled for, as 'the transfer of power' was postponed from June 1948 to August 1947 (Nanda 25). One of the reasons being the British inability to handle the sudden increase in the instances of communal violence in united India. Furthermore, the large scale brutality of Noakhali riots of October-November 1946 had seriously shaken the resistance of Congress towards the division of the country. Nanda mentions that the disruption brought over by Jinnah's 'direct action demonstrations' in March 1947 forced the Congress leaders to choose from "a lesser evil... partition or civil war" (Nanda 25). It was these direct action demonstrations that ushered the way of the communal bloodbath, forcible conversions, and abduction of Hindu women in West Punjab (Nanda 23). Historians claim that communal violence was triggered with the migration of these religious minorities from West Punjab. As these people migrated from West Punjab they brought with them the tales of horror which initiated retaliation of the people from the other side. This brought about unprecedented acts of genocide, abduction, rape, and human trafficking.

Amidst this communal hatred, there stood Gandhi clearly against the creation of Pakistan, declaring that he would resist the division of the country even if Congress accepted it. Gandhi whose stature in Congress as well as in the national politics was unchallenged failed to prevent the increasing communal animosity and its subsequent violence which finally culminated in the partition of the country. This was a huge blow on the reposed faith of the masses on the statesmen of the country. Splitting up the nation on the basis of its religion, tore apart not just the state into two parts but its citizens as well. The religious minorities on both sides of the border paid the price of this division of the state. Anders Hansen calls the partition of 1947 a "humanitarian catastrophe," due to which nearly five lakh people lost their lives, and around nine million crossed borders between India and Pakistan (Hansen 1). The historical records of the Partition mostly focus on the causes, negotiations, and events leading to the Partition of the country, what is ignored are the deep scars this historical event left particularly on the female populace. Innumerable women were kidnapped and subjected to unimaginable forms of torture. Their tales of horror either have been left unrecorded or women themselves being illiterate or too ashamed have restrained themselves from sharing their experiences. It is, for this reason, works like *Torn from the*

Roots by Kamla Patel; *In Freedom's Shade* by Anis Kidwai; *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia, become significant as they enable personal 'history to be remembered'. Robin Thomas in his essay, *Reflections on Memoir as a Literary Genre and the production of my memoir, including the musical component* places memoir in the category of 'Life Writing.' Thomas is of the opinion that the memoir often carries the elements of 'social history'. In such works of art, the focus is on the ordinary beings of society. Works such as Kamla Patel's, *Torn from the Roots: A Partition Memoir* come under this category, successfully portraying the relation between the state and its subjects, particularly the impact of state policies on its populace. Works like these help in preserving the experience of the masses which would otherwise be lost, thus providing the ordinary public a place in history. *Torn from the Roots* is, therefore, a significant work of art, that is crucial not only for its literary merit but also for its historical worth. Initially, she had no inclination to pen down the tales of these ill-fated women, as the memory of their pitiful condition made her "agitated and mentally uneasy" (Patel xiii). The recollections of those gruesome tales filled her with extreme loathing towards men, she believed that, once the "veil of civilized behaviour" was taken off, the brute nature of man came to the fore. She was of the opinion that narrating such ghastly tales would do no good (Patel xiii). The impact of those memories was so much that it took her twenty-seven years to calm down so that she could narrate the "incidents in their proper perspective and in a proper frame of mind" (Patel xiii). The life experiences of those captured women were so horrid that even a person like Patel, who had not lived those atrocious happenings could not make herself recall them. Patel, therefore, mentions that she emphasized particularly on "the incidents when humanity and goodwill prevailed" (Patel xiii). This shows that the author intentionally refrained herself from recounting the experiences of women that were too gruesome to recall. Further, it can be understood that many more life experiences of such women that have gone unrecorded. It was after three decades of completion of the Recovery and Rehabilitation Programme that she finally gathered the courage to write down the cases of those victims which had moved her so profoundly that it got imprinted in her memory. Patel has narrated her encounters with these women during the Central Recovery Operation, making the reader witness the pain of these women through her writings.

After the division of the country both the governments were flooded with complaints of 'missing women' by their relatives. When the Governments of India and Pakistan realized the magnitude of the situation they signed an Inter Dominion Agreement on 6th December

1947 in Lahore (Patel xvi). Its aim was the speedy recovery of the abducted women and their further restoration to the families where they actually belonged. Patel mentions that approximately 25,000 Hindu and Sikh women were kidnapped in the regions of the newly created Pakistan, while 12,000 Muslim women were kidnapped in India (Patel xviii). Women who had been abducted were between the age of 12 to 50 and above. The task of recovery was handed over to the social workers who voluntarily came forward to provide their services to the state. These social workers carried out this task with the help of police officials.

Women became the victims of men who perceived them only as commodities that could be bought, sold, used for momentary personal gratification and then thrown away. It is evident in the case of numerous women who were passed on by men as “gifts” while others sold off as commodities during riots. Women who were of no use to their abductors were thrown out like trash on the streets. The author mentions that these women were rescued and rehabilitated by the respective governments while there were such cases where women were sold a number of times before they finally got a roof over their head. Patel mentions that such women, “happened to settle down after changing hands four or five times” (Patel 19). What is astonishing is the fact that such inhumane acts were not only committed by the common people, the victims of partition but also by those who were entrusted with the protection of women. Recalling such a case Patel narrates that in her initial days of work two women accused Indian men of raping them while on their way to Lahore. These men were the ones who were entrusted by the government with the task of their safe passage from India to Pakistan. After this incident, the authorities made it compulsory for women volunteers to accompany the rescued women who were being transferred from one camp to the other.

Another aspect of transfer of such women was that they were considered as mere numbers. The author mentions about an Indian officer who would start bargaining with the social workers with regard to the numbers being rescued from the other side of the border, saying: “You will get the same number of Muslim women from here, that you sent us over from Lahore” (Patel 29). This attitude of men really agitated her, she “felt like snapping back at the officer that a woman is a person, she is not a property where you can have a fair deal of exchange” (Patel 29). The humane aspect of such transfer was somewhere missing as both the Government and the officers looked at the bigger picture and failed to consider the emotional aspect which made the sufferance of these women more acute.

Another astounding fact is that women were abducted even by the men who themselves were on the run to save their lives. After interacting with a few Sikh and Hindu men, the author came to know that, even the refugees who were migrating from Pakistan to India on foot managed to capture a few Muslim women who were alone and happened to be around their caravan at that time. The distressing fact here is that, people who themselves were uncertain of their lives after leaving behind all their property in Pakistan, even in such a critical condition they could not let go of the opportunity to grab hold of women. The author mentions that such men never felt guilty for their wrongdoings, instead, they justified their acts saying that they had rightly married these women “after sprinkling amrit” on them (Patel 33). Men often boldly claimed their rights on the women they kidnapped. These abductors saw women as mere objects, that could be replaced by the other. The author narrates one such conversation with an abductor: “Bibiji you say you cannot return these women to us. But we have heard that many Hindu women come to you from Pakistan. If you cannot return these women, just give us one of the women who have come from Pakistan” (Patel 33). Needless to say, womenfolk were mere possessions to such men, who could be taken away or replaced as per their requirements.

The women who were abducted suffered the most inhumane treatment possible. The author recounts the case of 600 women and children recovered from Kunja district of Gujarat. These women looked like a bag of bones. Their skin was full of sores, their hair was filled with lice, their clothes were dirty and torn. The author was deeply shaken by the sight in front of her. One of these women had lost her three children due to absolute starvation. The extent of their malnutrition was such that their skeletons were clearly visible, and the children who were seventeen years old looked no older than eight or nine. Those women did not have any salt for six months, and had survived only on a dry roti and bathed once in 15 days. They were nourished so poorly that the camp doctor had clearly prohibited any food item except rice and yogurt; otherwise, there were chances of diarrhea and choleric epidemic to those women. After having spent half a year in absolute hunger and poverty those hapless women had completely lost their hope in humanity. They, therefore, did not trust the camp officials at all. And hence, hid rice in their torn cloth pieces that were provided during the lunch hours, so as to make sure that they had some food to eat, in case the camp officers went against their word and did not provide them food at night.

The author states that the majority of the rescued women were illiterate. It, therefore, was quite difficult to extract necessary information from them, particularly the time, place

and circumstances of their abduction, details of their abductors as well as the place where they were kept by their captors. What made the matter complex was the fact that until these women truthfully shared their details with the camp authorities their families could not be located in India, putting a hold on the rehabilitation process. This happened due to their fear that once the truth is told they would be subjected to further tortures. As they were well convinced that whatever had happened to them was their own fault. This tendency of self-victimization is analogous to the old patriarchal belief that a woman being defiled by a man is her own responsibility. Thus easily scraping off any kind of blame on men.

Women who were taken in by the men of other communities were subjected to physical as well as psychological confinement. Their abductors would often narrate horrifying fake stories about the recovery process which further stopped women from approaching the rescue teams. Such women were often under the belief that once they were sent to India they would be handed over to the men of Indian Army who would then have their way with them. Needless to say, hearing all these fake stories from the person they were living with gave them the idea that on the pretext of rehabilitation and recovery, they would be further wronged with. Therefore, these women avoided giving truthful information to the recovery officials and tried to convince the officers with all their might that they willingly went to these men belonging to the other religion, and were not forcefully captured. It was under these circumstances that the government decided to recover all women who were living with the men of other religious community. Thus all the conversions after March 1947, were unrecognized and efforts were made to recover the women under question, irrespective of their wishes. This led to further victimization of womankind, particularly those who were in love with the men belonging to the other religion, and had willingly decided to settle down with their lovers.

One such case is of Jitu and Ismat. Seventeen-year-old Jitu and fourteen-year-old Ismat fell in love during their annual Kashmir trips. As the news of partition of the country reached Ismat eloped from Rawalpindi fearing that she might never be able to meet him again. She reached the recovery camp posing as a Hindu girl who got separated from her family. After fabricating many stories in front of the officials she was successfully united with Jitu. The couple then got married in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, this piece of news reached Pakistan and the Rehabilitation Minister of Pakistan himself asked for the return of Ismat to her parents, during a meeting to his Indian counterpart Mr. Gopalswami Ayyangar. It was quite clear that until Ismat was returned to her parents the other rehabilitation cases of

Hindu women from Pakistan would be kept under hold. After much persuasion by the officials, Ismat agreed to go back to Pakistan for a week. It was decided that her parents would be allowed to meet her there and after seven days of her stay in front of the police, rescue officials and Jitu she would take the decision as to where she desires to stay, either in Pakistan with her family or with Jitu in India. A few days later when Patel went to meet Ismat to know her decision, she was shocked beyond her wits. The girl who stood before Patel looked similar to Ismat but her style and mannerism had completely changed, she openly declared that she had nothing to do with that Kafir's son. There is a possibility that her parents brainwashed her or forced her to utter such words which were completely unimaginable for Jitu. Listening to the entire episode Jitu went furious and refused to believe that Ismat had abandoned him. This incident affected him so much that he lost interest in life, for many months he kept searching for Ismat in Pakistan but to no avail, as her family had relocated Ismat to some other place. Jitu personally held Patel responsible for what had happened to him. After a few years, while traveling to Bombay, Patel happened to meet Jitu. Jitu was suffering from tuberculosis, he had lost too much weight and looked very pale. Against his doctors' advice to take rest, he kept traveling to places. Needless to say, he had completely lost interest in life. Patel was deeply pained seeing him in such condition but did not have the courage to give him any advice. The point to be stressed on is that Ismat was not abducted, and was returned to her parents against her wishes. She had willingly decided to spend her life with Jitu but neither her parents nor the government respected her decision. The fate of Ismat remains unknown but it can be easily concluded that she would have been forced into a loveless marriage by her family, turning her remaining life into torture. As a runaway girl is never treated with respect neither in a Hindu nor a Muslim society.

Another such case of forced recovery was that of a young Hindu widow named Prema who lived in Rawalpindi. Prema's family had migrated to India without bothering to take her along with them. Her family owned many mansions in that town which were taken over by the Muslims in that area except one in which she lived. Her neighbors continuously harassed her with the hope that out of sheer frustration she might migrate to India. One day all of a sudden Pakistani officials from the recovery department forcefully took her to the reclamation camp and handed her over to the author with the clear instructions of sending her over to their Jalandhar camp in India. This left the author skeptical about the intentions of Pakistani police, as never before had they willingly turned in any captured woman. The author, therefore, decided to investigate the matter thoroughly. Prema told the author that she

was in love with Tufel, who was a captain in Pakistani Army and since the army officials did not approve of his marriage with a Hindu woman, they decided to separate the couple, even after she had willingly converted to Islam. As the rules did not permit her prolonged stay in Pakistan's recovery camp, Prema was sent over to the Jalandhar camp in India against her wishes. Her love for Tufel left her in a state of depression, and to overcome her sorrow she started working in a refugee camp, but her condition did not improve. Then suddenly one day she disappeared, never to be found again. The author is of the opinion that Prema must have crossed the border in search of Tufel, her lover. What remains uncertain is the fact that, did she successfully find him or not? In case she did find him, would he marry her putting aside the risk the marriage posed on his professional life, as the Pakistani army was against this alliance from the very beginning which is why Tufel had been transferred to Baluchistan without any prior notice. There is also a huge possibility that instead of reaching Tufel, she might have been caught by the tramps who could have raped her or sold her off; a phenomenon which was quite common in those days. Needless to say Prema's fate and the fate of many more women like her remains unknown who were victimized by their own families, by their own Governments.

The Partition of 1947 threw the entire country in chaos, that resulted in many atrocious acts perpetrated on women. Men abducted women of the other religion to injure the honour of that community. Women are the agents of creation of the future generation of a community and a nation, and by injuring the honor of women men acquired their revenge on that community. As women, in general, are perceived to be the carriers of honour of their respective communities, and by targeting women it was believed that the rival community was being targeted. Thus, the honour of women, community, and the nation became interchangeable concepts. It was for this reason that men kidnapped, raped and sold off women of the other religion. And to undo this damage both the governments recovered the women under question to the places they rightfully belonged, putting aside their individual wishes. Women thus, suffered in both conditions as their consent was always ignored. Women were treated as, "baskets of oranges and grapes," which could be hoarded and traded (Hasan 117). The astonishing fact here is that both governments made the recovery process a matter of prestige. They relocated women from their respective relationships with men of other religions while instructing the social workers to, "consider the good of humanity at large and not give importance to individual feelings" (Patel 41). This clearly portrays the attitude of the governments which were bent on establishing their supremacy rather than

considering the happiness of these women. Such instances throw light on the socio-cultural aspect of the country; even more painful is the attitude of the state towards its women. It is this attitude of the administration which intensified their agony.

It can, therefore, be concluded that “women were the worst sufferers in the partition of the country” (Patel 162). Women suffered greatly; not only they were forcibly raped and converted, but were also forced to live with their abductors who often happened to be the murderers of their family members. The psychological scars of such women remained afresh as the memories of those wrongdoings were so dreadful that it could never be forgotten irrespective of the time elapsed. Women thus became voiceless beings who did not possess individual autonomy either over their bodies or their lives.

Works Cited:

- Datta, Anjali Bharadwaj. “Renegotiating the self: Recovery and restoration- The ‘Gendered’ Histories of Partition.” *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 35, no. 2, July 2008, pp. 191-208, doi.org/10.1177/037698360803500211. Accessed 22 July 2019.
- Hansen, Anders Bjorn. *Partition and Genocide: Manifestation of Violence in Punjab 1937-1947*. India Research Press, 2002, pp. 1-10.
- Joshi, Svati. “Torn up by the Roots.” *Manushi*, no. 48, n.d. http://www.manushi-india.org/pdfs_issues/PDF%20files%2048/torn_up_by_the_roots.pdf. Accessed 22 July 2019.
- Menon, Ritu & Kamla Bhasin. *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition*. Women Unlimited, 2000, pp. 67-81.
- Nanda, B. R. *Witness to Partition: A Memoir*. Rupa Co., 2003.
- Patel, Kamla. “Oranges and Apples.” *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*. Ed. Mushirul Hasan, Vol. 2, 1997, Roli Books, 113-23.
- Patel, Kamla. *Torn from the Roots: A Partition Memoir*. Women Unlimited, 1985.
- Thomas, Robin. *Reflections on the Memoir as a literary genre and on the production of my memoir, including the musical component*. 2016. Salford University, M.Phil dissertation. <http://usir.salford.ac.uk/41057/3/Robin%20Thomas%20M%20Phil%20016RandomChords.pdf>. Accessed 27 Sept 2019.