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Communal Violence and Female Body in *Train to Pakistan*, *Tamas* and *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*

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Communal violence had thronged India since its partition and is still prevalent. Women become the easy targets in this communal violence. Despite knowing that the activity the male adopts to set the score right with the opposite race is beyond human realization yet they pick up rape as their tool. Rape as sex and violence to gain victory against another race and its picturization in literature is what this paper aims to study through the social theories of body and rape with reference to *Train to Pakistan*, *Tamas* and *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*

Uprisings, riots, revolutions and even minor skirmishes with racial and political overtones provide an outlet for men to commit atrocities against women. Documentation of such atrocities is either inconsequential or tangential. The paper therefore deals with violence that women are subjected to during communal riots with special emphasis on *rape* as sexual violence through Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*(1956), Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*(1975) and Anita Rau Badami's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*(2006).

Violence according to Hannah Arendt in her essay *On Violence* (1970) comes with authority or "unquestioning recognition" tied to power which needs no justification. Violence therefore is an "instrumentation of strength" (James 53) which silences all. During the partition of India and Pakistan, and even after, India had witnessed violence in various colours through riots, killings, loot, rape, genital mutilation, battery and others. The archives of Hindustan times dated 10.02.2004 shows an issue entitled Chronology of Communal Violence in India. The issue has stated that ever since The Great Calcutta Killing of 1946, India has witnessed the communal riots of Noakhali, followed by 1969 Ahmedabad riots, 1984 anti-Sikh riots, 1987 Meerut riots, 2002 Gujrat riots and again in 2014 Meerut riots. In all these communal riots the frenzied mobs not only took over houses, slaughtered people, set ablaze villages but also dishonoured women. It has been estimated that during partition and just after between 75,000 to 100,000 women of all reproductive ages were kidnapped and raped or otherwise brutally murdered. Apart from these countless number of women had committed suicide along with their children to evade being raped or forceful conversion. According to Ritu Menon, such atrocities against women specially, are too overt the assertion of the identity of one race and the simultaneous humiliation of the other by "dishonoring the women". Women are the property of their male counterpart or their race. Therefore, the easiest way to gain victory over another race is to show how vulnerable the females of the race are; they are "rapable". Susan Brownmiller had shared a similar view on rape in her seminal text *Against Our Will: Men Women and Rape* (1975). She says rape is not for sexual satisfaction nor is it a visual stimuli that the rape victim presents through her dress, instead it is the will to dominate, degrade and possess on the "... part of a would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear." (Brownmiller 391).

Foucault claims. “[N]othing is more material, physical, corporal than the exercise of power.” (Foucault 57-58) and this power can be exercised through body as the body is both a political and cultural entity. Its desire and habits are the results of political discourses, therefore, to inscribe the female body with the enemy inscription in this case a star and a crescent symbol, or the perpetrators name who has outraged the woman’s modesty, or a khanda would mean a victory over the whole race. It has therefore been estimated that around 75000 women were abducted and raped by men of religion different from their own only during 1946 -1947. In this regard Jana Sawicki has claimed, “Disciplinary power is exercised on the body and soul of the individuals. It increases the power of the individuals at the same time as it renders them more docile.” (Sawicki 22) . In case of war related crimes, and in particularly this case religion becomes the disciplinary power.

During the partition of India and Pakistan women were raped, kidnapped, abducted, and forcibly impregnated by men of other religion. Thousands of women in order to evade these had jumped or were forced to jump into wells to end their lives along with their children out of fear. Poisons and opium were made easily available to the women by their family members to kill themselves. Those who refused and thought of living and seeing the future were shot or strangulated. All these crimes against women in the name of honour; and in the name retaliation women were raped, stripped, paraded naked; mutilating and disfiguring, tattooing of breasts and genitalia with triumphal slogans, knifing open the womb, killing of foetuses and amputating of breasts were some common violence that every women during the partition in particular had to face. This is not the end of the atrocities that were committed in the name of religion in our country. Just as the people had started to settle; India or more particularly the northern belt of India like Delhi and Punjab was struck with another communal riot again in the name of politics. With the assassination of the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi by her Sikh security guards as retaliation against the Operation Blue Star, thousands of Sikhs in Delhi and suburbs were killed, burned down. Once again women, the Sikh women underwent both the psychological as well as physical violence. This is what the paper attempts to show. It’s not the physical violence but also the psychological trauma which the females of the society undergoes on seeing daughters, sisters, mothers, brothers or any member of the family being butchered in front of their own eyes.

Khuswant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956) recounts the partition of India in the summer of 1947 through the village Mano Majra, situated at the India Pakistan border. The trouble begins with the arrival of the ghost train carrying the slaughtered bodies of Hindus and Sikhs from the side of Pakistan and with the arrival of refugees from these riot effected places with heart’s filled with hatred due to the violence they have witnessed. Slowly the whole village becomes divided and eventually burst into a communal violence to establish one’s superiority over the other. On the other hand Bhisham Sahni’s *Tamas* (1975) is set in a small town of the frontier province in 1947. It tells the story of Nathu, a sweeper, who is bribed and deceived by a local Muslim politician to kill a pig for a veterinarian. But, the following morning the carcass is discovered on the steps of the mosque and the already tension filled town now erupts. Muslims massacres scores of Hindus and Sikhs, who in turn kill every Muslim they can find. It should be noted that the incidence reflected in this novel are true accounts of the Rawalpindi riots of 1947. Anita Rau Badami’s *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006) is set in India and Canada; and it tells the lives of three women Bibiji aka Sharanjeet Kaur, her niece Nimmo and Lila Bhatt at the backdrop of the Khalistan movement and Operation Blue Star, which led to the assassination of the then Prime

Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi; which further led to the fifteen days anti Sikh riot that thronged Delhi and the neighboring areas, and finally the novel ends with the bombing of Air India flight 182.

The next part of the paper focuses on the female body as a site of oppression, following Foucault's ideas that bodies are directly related to power dynamics, therefore, to understand power reading the "bodies" become more important. To begin with Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) where Singh provides in minute details the female sexuality while showing the love making between Nooran and Jugga. Singh plays with words to show the female body and the "consensual sex" between the two:

He caressed her cheeks, eyes and nose that his hands knew so well. He tried to play with her lips to induce them to kiss his fingers....He brought her down flat upon his limb to limb." (Singh 14)
He further writes, "Juggut Singh's caresses became lustful. His hands strayed from the girls face to her breast and her waist....she is defenceless." (Singh 14)

A female body is always defenceless, it is a "tabula rasa", and one just needs to write. Therefore, even though the seed of communal uprising did not bloom at Mano Manjra, but the deliberate attempt to show the love making between two persons of different faith is a hint of what is to come on the female body; further, the use of the word "defenceless" (Singh 14) do show that the women experience their bodies as weak and alien that needs to be taken care of as viewed by Iris Young in her work *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (1990), where she says:

[T]he modalities of feminine bodily existence have their root in the fact that feminine existence experiences the body as a mere thing- a fragile thing, which must be picked up coaxed into movement, a thing that exist as looked at and acted upon.(Young 150)
and the next that follows are:

Did your honour hear what the Muslim mobs did to Hindu and Sikh refugees in the marketplaces at Sheikhpura and Gujranwals? Pakistan police and the army took part in the killings. Not a soul was left alive. Women killed their own children and jumped into wells that filled to the brim with corpses. (Singh 22)

In other instance, he writes, "I hear a lot of women are being abducted and sold cheap. You could find a wife for yourself." (Singh 67) .If this was the case on the Pakistani side, the picture on the Indian side in cities like Patiala and Ambala were also the same: gentlewomen's veils were taken off, "...stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market place." (Singh 115). Women's breast were chopped off, bellies were torn open. The most heart touching picture that Singh gives is the rape of Sundari, a lower class, who thought of making love with her newly married husband instead:

"The mob made love to her. She did not have to take off any of her bangles. They were all smashed as she lay in the road, being taken by one man and another and another"(Singh 168)

In this case, what Sundari experiences though is sexual but is not sex instead it is violence. The crimes against women do not stop here. Bhisham Sahni gives a more chilling picture of such crime in *Tamas*. After the daylong exploitations carried out by the Muslims, the “mujahids” narrated their experience to one another; and one says:

When we got into the lane, the karars began to run this way and that way. A Hindu girl went up to the roof of her house. As soon as we saw her, we ran after her. There were nearly ten of us....When my turn came there was no sound from her; she wouldn't move. I looked down at her. I had been doing it to a dead body.”(Sahni 402)

When thousands of women were butchered to death, there were another lot who were abducted, forcibly converted and married to their abductors. This happens with Parkasho. Initially she rejects to respond to her abductor cum husbands calls but ultimately she gives up to satisfy Allah Rakha's sexual need as she is aware that none can rescue her anymore. The question that rises here is that if ever she is rescued also she will not be accepted by her Sikh community. Therefore, mass conversions of religion also become a sight of violence inflicted upon women.

The above violent pictures of the partition are the articulation of the male sexual power as the cultural and political absolute. On the other hand Anita Rau Badamai's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*(2006) shows the psychological violence that a women is subjected through after witnessing the partition and its violence and also the post partition riots of 1984 after the assassination of Indira Gandhi through the character of Nimmo. The character of Nimmo is studied here in the lights of Elizabeth Grosz's theory of volatility of bodies. Grosz in her text *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporal Feminism* (1994) takes up two prominent views on body to present her own view. She writes that on one hand the body is regarded as an exterior expression of interior dynamics (like desires, the subconscious structure). That is the body is the process of “inside out” (in Grosz's term). The other prominent view is that the body is an expression of the dominant social discourse that surrounds the subject that is “outside in”. But for Grosz the body is the “intersection between the two” (Cahill 80). That is the body is like a *Mobius Strip* which has the advantage to show the relation “between two things- mind and body.” (Cahill 81).

Nimmo's bodily comportment is like a Mobius Strip. It is the expression of both her internal desires and drives as well as of the dominant social discourses. This is seen through her need for an identity which is born out of her physical displacement as a result of 1947 mass migration and subsequent disappearance of her entire family in partition violence and her reactions after the anti-sikh riots of 1984.

Dauri Kalan, her village “appeared to have vanished, leaving no trace.” Nimmo had witnessed her mother's rape and the subsequent death of her. Badamai's devotes a whole chapter- *A Bin of Grain* to bring out her mental trauma through flashback technique. Kanwar, Nimmo's mother hid her in a sack full of grain to save her from getting abducted but in the process she herself plead and screamed to the attackers and then her sound became the sound “like the one a stray dog had uttered when they found it dying in the gully behind their house” (Badami 155) This memory along with the memory of “dirty, bleeding woman who had held her and rocked her and wept with a soundless, juddering agony”(Badami 156) ;and “a lavender-fragrant feet suspended above the floor” (Badami 159) retains in her mind forever. But she never tries to recall them even when her aunt Sharanjeet wanted to know what happened to her sister. A

witness's recall of trauma is like going through another process of rape, the rape of mind and memory. But such conditions are always accompanied with a hysterical outburst and this happens during the anti-Sikh riot of 1984. Nimmo's daughter Kamal is burnt alive while Nimmo tried to hide her in a steel box and her husband Satpal and son Pappu are immolated by the Hindus. Nimmo survives all these experiences, these new understandings and the experiences of her body becomes integrated into her subjectivity and so the reaction that she provides after getting robbed of her identity once again in the 1984's violence or nationalism is a direct effect of her experience. Her attempted suicide and then slowly removing herself from the public life and creating a fictional life of her own where she performs her daily chores and waits for her family is a mother-daughter's hysterical outburst; that is if she could had a *bharoli of grain* just like her mother she could possibly had saved her Kamal.

A study of *Train to Pakistan (1956)* and *Tamas(1975)* somehow problematize the area of rape and female body; as both the works tend to celebrate the rape story which do portray the celebration of male autonomy. It is here that Badami differs from the two, as rape becomes an embodied experience in her work.

Thus, outraging the female modesty, her autonomy whether physically or psychologically has become as a social phenomenon. Formulations of laws or punishing the perpetrators is a limited reaction towards the "rape culture" unless and until we start changing the thoughts about sexuality and gender and accept to provide the females their deserved space which is not illusory or vulnerable by not questioning the victim whether her modesty was indeed outraged by a penis or was it an act of self sexual drives.

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