

Materiality of the Female Body and the Partition Fiction

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Abstract: It's well known that the Partition triggered one of the bloodiest upheavals and horrendous chapters in history. These uncouth acts reflected the mindset of the patriarchal community wherein women were considered objects of honour. Partition violence situated women as objects of possession and vehicles of communication of reprisal between opposed groups of men. Across the borders, while villages were plundered and burnt, women were mutilated and sexually tortured, and trains crossing the border were found full of dismembered bodies.

In the Partition fiction, woman's body has been discussed in larger concept of nation. In fact, the concept of "woman as nation" has been a cliché of the Partition scholarship. But this paper will explore how female body has been treated as an object. It will investigate the parallel treatment of non-living things as objects and women body as objects in the selected partition narratives where both have monetary and exchange value. The paper argues that during the Partition, women body was treated as an object or to use Appadurai's concept as commodity (having exchange value). This study will draw on Arjun Appadurai's "The Thing Itself", *The Social Life of Things* and Brown's "Thing Theory" to read short stories like *Khol Do* and *Thanda Gosht* by Saadat Hassan Manto, *Lajwanti* by Ravinder Singh Bedi, and works of fictions like *Ice- Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa. It will employ the theory of Material Memory and Thing Theory to study the violence against women during the partition.

Key Words: Material Memory, Partition fiction, Thing Theory, Woman's body

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the Partition led to one of history's deadliest upheavals and most horrifying chapters. The impolite behaviours mirrored the patriarchal culture's view of women as objects of honour. Women were positioned as objects of possession and means of communication for retaliation in partition violence between opposing groups of men. While villages were pillaged and set on fire across the border, women were tortured and disfigured, and trains crossing the border were discovered to be filled of dismembered bodies.

Gendered violence figures prominently in Partition narratives because of the violence which was perpetrated on female body. The gender-specific reading of Partition genocide facilitates a discussion on various forms of violence that targeted women. Even though India attained Independence after two hundred years of colonisation, the euphoria of finally attaining freedom was dismantled when Independence was accompanied by Partition of Indian sub- continent. However there were multiple reasons for the blow, but this paper focuses specifically on violence against women, their body and treatment of women's body as materials or objects. The abuse of women by male members of the opposing religious organisation included kidnapping, rape, genital mutilation, and public humiliation. The most frequent ways that this kind of violence was displayed on female bodies were genital mutilation or branding, tearing out their wombs, wearing only their underwear as they were paraded on the streets. This type of assault was allegedly used to degrade the men of the competing religion to whom the ladies belonged. The violence perpetrated against women by their own family members is a second type of violence. This can range from honour killings to male relatives requesting that their mothers, daughters, or wives commit suicide in order to preserve the community's chastity and purity. The assertion that women were not treated as people but rather as symbols of societal and national pride is supported by both types of assault. Finally, rape occurs on public streets or in houses of worship.

It is crucial to consider the extensive violence that was committed against women during that time in order to comprehend the violence associated with the partition in general. Women of all ages have been the targets of communal violence, despite the fact that there are numerous notable distinctions between the types of violence that have occurred in the eastern and western regions. Furthermore, the division has had a significant impact on how women relate to their families, communities, and country.

Rajinder Singh Bedi's *Lajwanti*

In *Lajwanti* by Rajinder Singh Bedi, the bodies of the truckload of kidnapped women were traded between the two countries. In this short story, the families of the kidnapped women desired that the women would commit suicide to protect their honour and morality. There was a quarrel after the exchange of sixteen women from each side. They considered the women who were delivered to the opposing side to be elderly or middle-aged and not helpful. Large crowd and animated conversation were present. To demonstrate that they were distributing better items than the opposition, one of their colleagues shoved Lajo onto the truck's roof and took her dupatta. Lajo became too humiliated to bare her tattoos when she looked her in the eye, so she started to cover them up. Both sides threatened to take back their "goods!" as the dispute grew fairly heated. These examples from Rajinder Singh Bedi's tale demonstrate how women were considered as little more than basic commodities. Their bodies and conditions were examined and compared, just like any other commodity purchased from the market.

Throughout the ages, women have become a symbol of the nation, whether as a wife, a mother, or a deity. Female bodies turn into the distinctive target of violence throughout the history of partition and intergroup conflict. The 1951 Urdu short story *Lajwanti*, Rajinder Singh Bedi illustrates the multi-layered violence that occurred at the time of the Partition. It depicts a woman's life in both regular times and during a political catastrophe, as well as the historical imagination of women in the framework of country creation. It demonstrates the presence of violence in both the household sphere and the political sphere of nation-building, as well as the extreme gender violence that division brings about, of which kidnapping is one. Abduction as a form of gendered violence has several repercussions, including the ethnization, racialization, and reduction of women to the status of objects of desire.

Lajwanti demonstrates the intricate connections—and occasionally overlaps—between the violence that permeates women's lives in everyday circumstances, in seemingly banal domestic settings, and the violence that emerges during political upheaval, particularly that which is produced as the violence of nation-marking and nation-making. The ordinary environment supplies the ready availability of reasoning, expressible in simple common speech that depicts recovered women as leftovers and lends logic to the household

batteries of women. It is clear how the kidnapping of women becomes inevitable during the creation of a country. The narrative is written in such a way that the family story of Lajwanti's kidnapping and recovery inverts like a mirror to show how patriarchal thinking turns women from goddesses to victims.

"today's gift is tomorrow's commodity. Yesterday's commodity is tomorrow's found art object. Today's art object is tomorrow's junk. And yesterday's junk is tomorrow's heirloom." (15). According to Arjun Appadurai, anything and everything is capable of travelling from a commodity to the singularity and back. By being invested with humanity, slaves who were previously sold as property can eventually become humanised, personified, and reenchanting.

The idea that women are nothing more than belongings has been fully accepted in the world of Lajwanti. Imagine the agony of being abducted, taken to a foreign country, and repeatedly raped over a period of months or possibly years. As a result of their inability to save their honour and their inability to commit suicide, these women are considered as mere embarrassments when they finally succeed in getting back home. Humanity, whose defining characteristic is each person's freedom to logically choose and pursue her own goals, is violated when women's bodies are treated as objects. A being endowed with humanity has the capacity to decide what is good and to come up with plans for recognising and advancing that value. Humanity is what makes each person special. It distinguishes them from both animals and non-living things. Humans have a sense of dignity that is lacking in things and animals since they are different from other species in this way.

Manto's Short stories

Manto's writings portray the traumas and violence endured by the typical man during the Partition of the Subcontinent, but not via a sovereign head of state, but rather through individuals who wield some semblance of authority and influence over others. Men who benefit from the patriarchal framework of society, which gives them dominance and authority over women, and thus have an edge over women. The turmoil and savagery that the regular people had to endure during the division are represented by the character in *Khol Do*. This is the story of Sakina, a young girl who was abducted, then sexually molested by both her abductors and her rescuers. Finally, her father discovers her in a traumatised

state at a hospital. There is also a hint of the historiographer's suppression of the voices of women. By her gestures, Sakina gives voice to the numerous women who suffered as a result of the atrocities carried out during the uprising violence. Sakina's gesture gives voice to such women who were bearing the brunt of the division's pandemonium, and were hushed and therefore lost to history. Sakina's "dupatta" was just an inanimate object, but it made him think of her, and that was all that was left of her before she disappeared. The various types of power that are employed against Sakina are all repressive in character. She is first and foremost an oppressed victim of the men who raped her. *Khol Do* also looks at the ways in which both the opponents and the putative protectors of women who immigrated to their "respective" countries mistreated them. Sakina, a Muslim girl, is portrayed in the story as frequently being attacked by men of her own race and religion, as well as by Hindu and Sikh men. It is necessary to look at this skewed nationalism, where the defender turns into the predator and where everyone is struck by the collective crazy. Manto explains how the guys who were viewed as the protectors of national pride and honour were the ones who succumbed to bestiality and insanity.

In nearly all of his short works, Manto aimed to depict the connection of religion, national identity, and patriarchy while also attempting to understand the political foundations of the female body, over which social outrage was played on. His tales expose the horrifying truth of a society in which women's bodies are still used to commit crimes and establish the superiority of one religious group over another. The intersection of religious hatred and gender-based violence is also highlighted in these accounts. There is a widespread notion that one might enjoy harming someone who belongs to a different community. The narrative *Thanda Gosht*, which is based on this idea, makes a statement about the severity of rape by rendering the perpetrator helpless because he attempted to force himself onto a dead woman. It is claimed that the offender, Ishar Singh, suffered both physically from being attacked by his wife, Kulwant Kaur, as well as psychologically from trying to rape a dead body. Ishar Singh, who the author uses to symbolically represent the psyche of a rape victim, is subjected to physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual trauma before being transformed into a lifeless piece of meat at the end of the story, much like how rape victims are

frequently made to feel like they are just meat. Ishar Singh's character reveals the incredibly fragile nature of toxic masculinity. His female characters remain independent, assertive, and defiant of the physical restrictions they have encountered. Without knowing if the woman was alive or dead, the body of the woman was only utilised as a sexual object. Women in Manto's writings are the result of a creative process in which they assert their identities, display no signs of fear, and reclaim spaces that are rightfully and intrinsically theirs. He acknowledges the structural subjugation of women through institutions and does so without adding a moral code. As a result, he depicts a prostitute and a homemaker as victims of institutionalised misogyny. At the same time, he is seeing the emotional chasm that has engulfed them both.

Ice Candy Man by Bapsi Sidhwa

In the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa, men's communities commit atrocious acts of violence against one another, using women's bodies as mute symbols and the primary targets of these crimes. Gendered violence was particularly common during the partition of India because attacks on women were viewed as attacks on the honour and purity of the religion or nation to which the women belonged. This symbolic perception of actual bodily pain led to two distinct sorts of violence against women. Women from the opposing religious group's male members were the first to suffer violence in an effort to demonise and humiliate the other faith and nation. To prevent the ethnic and familial purity from being corrupted by the other religion, the second sort of violence involved male family members killing their female relatives or pressuring them to commit suicide. The first form of violence in this scenario is the main focus of Sidhwa's book. In addition, the depiction of rape and kidnapping, followed by the rescue and rehabilitation of the victims, enables one to decode various manifestations of the patriarchal ideology motivated by religion that predominated during the time of the partition and successfully undermined the reality of women as individuals and transformed them into objects of worship. Also, the story emphasises how difficult it is to expose rape narratives because language cannot adequately convey these horrible deeds while upholding the victim's dignity. This is a result of the lack of attention given to reports of rape and kidnapping of women. When the novel begins, only months before the partition of India, in the city of Lahore, Ayah is

in charge of prepubescent Lenny. She is a young Hindu woman who is revealed to be a strong woman who exercises autonomy over her life and her multi-ethnic group of suitors. Masseur and Ice-candy-man are the two most renowned Muslim suitors of Ayah among this group of non-Muslims. Men find Ayah to be highly intriguing since she is shown as having a lot of sensuality and beauty. Ayah also makes the most of her feminine agency to manage unwanted attention from guys like the Ice-candy man. Women were rarely given this freedom of travel at the time of the division. Ayah stands for the prosperous, united India that is ultimately threatened and destroyed by racial fanaticism. In this India, people of all races and cultures prosper and thrive in the background. The same woman gives in to obsessive religious violence after using the threat of losing their companionship to suppress conversation about religious rivalry among her suitors. It is crucial to note that of the two Muslim suitors, Masseur—the one Ayah chooses as her beloved—represents the peaceful ideology of communal belonging, whilst Ice-candy-man could be contrasted to the hysterical mob that actively strives to impose one's religious superiority over another. In this circumstance, immediately before Ayah is abducted, Lenny finds Masseur's body, neatly cut in a gunny sack. It is crucial to understand that Masseur's death signifies the rejection of pacifist beliefs in the face of the brutal intergroup strife during partition. Although Sidhwa does not mention who killed Masseur, it is possible to assume that Ice-Candy-Man killed his fellow Muslim out of bitterness and anger because Ayah picked Masseur over him, thus rejecting him. Hence, rather than being motivated by hatred of a group, violence is perpetrated in this situation. A difficult example of a guy committing violence against a follower of a different religion is Ice-Candy-Man's abduction of Ayah. Instead, in an effort to atone for past wrongdoings, Ice-Candy Man turns to community violence.

However, they can also be recommoditized, reduced to the status of simple tools or bodies once more, put back on the market, sold for a profit, and discarded into the realm of inanimate objects. Just like any other object, the women's body were also treated as mere objects which was used by men to satisfy their bodily hunger, a tool of revenge from the opposite community as seen in *Khol Do*, *Thanda Gosht*, *Ice Candy Man*, and just like objects have a return value, the same way women were exchange or returned after they were used as seen in *Lajwanti*. The

significance that people give to objects is inevitably a result of human interactions and motivations, particularly in the way that those things are used and passed around. The writers of the collection *The Social Lives of Things* look into the social and cultural settings in which products are purchased and sold in both the present and the past. The essays focus on culturally defined trade components and socially regulated processes of circulation to show how people value goods and how things add value to social ties. By considering things as though they have social lives, the authors provide a novel viewpoint on how value is externalised and sought after. They examine an extensive range of goods, from human relics to oriental carpets, to demonstrate that the logic underpinning everyday economic life is not as dissimilar from that which explains the trade in exotic goods and that the distinction between modern economics and simpler, more distant ones is less clear than previously thought. The editor argues in his prologue that beneath the seeming infinity of human aspirations and the seeming diversity of material forms are intricate but specific social and political structures that regulate trade, desire, and taste. Whereas the women's bodies during Partition were handled with the highest lust, inhumanity, and no regard as if they were merely non-living objects, we see that in these essays, the objects are treated as being of societal relevance.

Things according to Bill Brown's "Thing Theory" are different from ordinary items. In other words, the "thingness" of objects becomes obvious and knowable when the smooth surface of the object-world is disturbed. Glass breaks because it asserts its being as a thing, physically stopping the flow of cognition. It grabs our interest and becomes difficult to ignore. Thingness is an excess of some kind. Such quality raises an object above its basic function and object-level subordination. His theory in no way ignores the human topic. It is merely a process that constantly circles back to the subject even when it begins elsewhere. In truth, Brown isn't particularly interested in things on their own. In contrast to items, which are passive, compliant slaves to human expedience, he is concerned in how things contribute to shape and transform people. Thing theory for him is "a condition for thought," enabling "new thoughts about how inanimate objects constitute human subjects, how they move them, how they threaten them, how they facilitate or threaten their relation to other subjects" (7). Things also herald new ways of thinking about subject-object relations. "The story

of objects asserting themselves as things,” Brown argues, “is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (4).

As more details about the suffering of the common people came to light during the investigation, the partition of India was seen through a variety of lenses. Yet, it is untrue that women have been entirely excluded from the history of the split after an effort was made to examine their situation and their role in the inquiries. This was done at a time of great ethnic conflict. They are not treated as people who suffered but rather as data and objects for study. Women are not portrayed as historical figures because they are marginalised from the public and political arenas, which are where history is created. They are therefore not involved. It has been debated historically in recent decades to include several women-centric partition stories in this aspect of the partition story. The violent crimes committed against women's bodies weren't directed exclusively at them. The bodies of the raped and deformed women actually posed a threat to the male members of the religious cult to which the women belonged. Using women's bodies, one religious group was able to demonstrate its superiority over another.

Any and everything has the ability to move both ways from a commodity to the singularity. Slaves who were formerly bought and sold as property can eventually become humanised, personified, and reenchanting by being imbued with humanity. As the women during Partition, they can likewise be re-commoditized, reduced to nothing more than simple bodies or instruments, reincorporated into the market, and emptied into the universe of uninteresting things. Their bodies were traded as a commodity with a set value.

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