

## WOMEN AND PARTITION IN SELECTED SHORT - STORIES

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*“No single story would they find  
Of an unbroken happy mind,  
A finish worthy of the start”*

W.B. Yeats

The partition of the Indian sub- continent and the creation of Pakistan is undoubtedly life changing event for the sub- continent and one of the gravest of human tragedies outside of war and famine of the twentieth century. Partition of India followed by migration dragged the country into an era of disintegration, anxiety chaos and abnormal conditions of living. The violence that was unleashed during partition and migration of communities was massive and the worst sufferers were the women and children especially women of all communities were at the receiving end. Women suffered violence in its most brutal forms- abduction, rape, kidnappings forced marriages, honor killings. The male of both the communities took revenge by committing excess on the womenfolk of the opposite community. Literature in its various forms of literary representation dealing with partition such as novels, stories, plays; films, painting etc. depict this aspect. If we talk of short stories than the narratives like **Open It!** by Saddat Hassan Manto, **Lajwanti** by Rajendra Singh Bedi, **A Leaf in the Storm** by Latitambika Antarjanam, **Exile** by Jamila Hashmi are just few stories which very beautifully narrates the pain and misery from the feminist perspective about the violence inflicted on women during Partition.

**Lajwanti** by Rajendra Singh Bedi is a heart wrenching portrayal of the gender aspect of the partition. After two years of Partition when the government of India and Pakistan decided to heal some wounds by tracing abducted women on both sides and returning them to their homes. They did not realize that they could be creating another problem, many of these women may had been married with children and may had resigned to their fate when they were once again uprooted and asked to re-live the trauma of Partition. The other problem was whether their families back home would accept them now that they

had lost their chastity. A wife- beater Sunderlal in “Lajwanti” becomes social activist and gets elected secretary of the newly formed “Rehabilitation of Women” committee. He was elected to this post because his own wife Lajwanti has been abducted during those dark days of Partition. Every morning he would swear to himself.

“..... *If I ever find her again if I ever again do, I shall honor her and give her a place in my heart.....*”<sup>1</sup> Narian Bawa in the story represents those who opposes the rehabilitation of women who offers the rusty example of Ram ejecting Sita from his “ideal kingdom”. When Lajo returns back Sunderlal becomes gripped by an unknown fear at once. Lajo stood before him trembling with hope and despair. Sunderlal found Lajo unlike what he imagined. She looked much healthier and fair and he like other husbands thought

“.....*if she had been comfortable and happy there why did she agree to return?*”<sup>2</sup>

Sunderlal fails to identify the signs of pain and anguish on the face of Lajo. He starts calling his wife “Devi”, although what she really desires is a little genuine love as apposed to the worship that he offers. He raised her to such a pedestal that it becomes difficult for Lajo to come to equal terms with life. She was never the same Lajo again. She wanted to share so much with Sunder Lal but he was not ready to listen. She desperately struggled to tell her side of story to Sunderlal so that she could feel clean again. But Sunderlal always shrank from her and she longed for an ear who could listen to her story. Her sorrows remained locked up in her breast. The story which commenced with lots of promise ends again with a sad end where a man fails to understand the point of view of woman sufferings. As a result the long silence between Sunderlal and Lajo cannot be broken.

Similarly Jamila Hashmi’s short story **Exile**. The narrator of the story “a maid” is an orphan because of Partition. She was abducted. Her abductor after killing her parents brought her to his house. Pushing her into the courtyard he proclaimed “**Look Ma I have**

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*brought you a Bahu. She is tall and good looking of the girls who fell into our hands tonight. She was the prettiest. She will be your slave.*<sup>3</sup>

There were no songs and dance, no celebration to welcome her. No one greeted her at the door, no mehndi, no saindhoor yet she was a bride.

Day in and out she desperately longs to see her relatives and friends whom she left behind. She sat outside the door of the house everyday with her bundle of hopes and stared longingly down the lane.

This was the irony of partition days, the narrator of “Exile” wanted to be with her family and friends whom she has left behind and Lajwanti though returned was still facing identity crisis among her own near and dear one’s and in her own country “*How a world which was so familiar had suddenly become a world of strangers.*”<sup>4</sup> Exile is no doubt one of the most accomplished stories on partition dealing with the trauma and psychological aspect of fairer sex.

She knew very well that no one will accept a woman who has been despoiled yet she longs for her brother everyday, her eyes have turned to stone. The distance between her and her relatives have widened with the passage of time which was now difficult to fill.

When the soldiers from the other county come looking for abducted women she surprises the readers, she realizes “*.....the city of dreams, which I had built, crumbled into dust and vanished. My life had taken roots in Sangraon and the roots had spread wide and deep.*”<sup>5</sup>

We accept her to reach out for freedom but she can’t afford to forget the fact that she had become a mother. She is no longer her old self. She realizes that

the only option left for her is to hide from the soldiers in the land of her captors. Rather than going into exile for a second time this Sita accepted Ravana’s house.

*Open It!* is another story depicting madness caused by partition on women. Saddat Hasan Manto was a popular but very controversial writer of his times, who faced many prosecutions because of his sex oriented expressions.

Manto brought to his readers how a woman is explored and used by man for their individual satisfaction.

*Open it!* revolves around two main characters Sirajudin and his seventeen years old daughter Sakina. Sakina was lost on their way to Mughalpura from Amritsar. Sirajudin meets eight self-appointed social workers (volunteer) during his search for his daughter and implores them to trace her.

Each day he prayed for the success of those young volunteers who reassured Sirajuddin that if his daughter is alive they will bring her one.

One day Sakina is carried to the doctor’s camp from a near by railway line where she was lying unconscious. She was subjected to successive rape by the volunteers belonging, ironically enough to her own community. The oft repeated rape forces her to be so attuned to the phrase “Open it” that she unties the chord for her pyjamas on hearing the doctor say open it where he meant open the window.

Apart from the age old political and social structures that discriminate against women, natural calamities, political upheavals and wars add to women’s burdens. The stories dealing with women’s issues talk of the atrocities inflicted upon women during partition and how they endeavour to restructure their life and survive.

## REFERENCES

1. Bhalla, Alok ed., stories about the partition of India, Harper Collins, New Delhi, 1999, P. 71.
2. Ibid, P. 79.
3. Ibid, P. 57
4. Ibid, P. 122
5. Ibid, P. 64