

'An Open Secret'-The Other Side of Sacrifice and Sufferings: Women as Gendered Victims of Violence in Select Partition Narratives

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***Abstract:** The patriarchal construction of social institutions negotiates with women marginally. Thus, women become fragile, "the other", the gendered victims of, what Millett says, "sexual politics". This masculine power politics exercised during the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, when women in the process of 'otherization' become dehumanized and colonized at the hand of the patriarchal agencies, resulting in the coerced acceptance of their sacrificed and 'wretched' lives. The partition event historically forced women to bear at the psychophysical level with extremely painful experiences of the individual and mass pogrom, dislocation, abduction, forced marriage, abuse and rape, and self-sacrifice, suicide in the wake of unprecedented violence. The chief or worst sufferers to the partition cataclysm, a man-made event, become in the process 'manhandled' marginalized and 'female subalterns'. The present paper aims to study some 'events' and 'incidents' from Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* along with close reference to Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* to explicate the gender politics and the patterns of gendered violence and trauma inflicted on women in the patriarchal social construction during the partition negotiation.*

Keywords: Partition, women, patriarchal negotiation, female subaltern, violence, rape, victim.

"Violence is almost always instigated by men, but its greatest impact is felt by women"

– *Community, State and Gender*, Urvashi Butalia.

Partition Reality :

The above words uttered by Urvashi Butalia recapitulate the awful history and the context of overwhelming partition violence unleashed on women. The 1947 partition conflict suddenly created an ambiance of religious doubt and 'cultural incompatibility' (Memon, 384) and 'negative reciprocity' (Girad, 13) which results in unprecedented genocidal bloodshed and violence. Partition

cataclysm was a defining “moment of rupture and genocidal violence” (Pandey, 1), demarking two nation-states on the border of communal disbelief and enmity. This led to the chaotic and violent situation of mass killing, mayhem, conversion, humiliation, abduction, and raping women and forced marriage, which is described as “a concentrated metaphor for violence, fear, domination, difference, separation” (Samaddar, 22). The 1947 catastrophe deeply affected social life in diverse ways. Indeed, this event in Indian history has exerted a pervasive and profound influence on the politics, policies and ideologies of the nations of the subcontinent as well as the social and cultural life of its people. Men, women, children and the disabled suffered, were maltreated and got killed. The questions— who were responsible for it and was it unavoidable? – is a very controversial and matter of long debate. But the historical truth, ‘an open secret’ (Bagchi, n.p.) is that women and girls became the worst victims to this politics of partition. Thousands of women and girl children got raped, abducted and murdered and displaced in this bloody war. In this sense, the 1947 episode is “a gendered narrative of displacement and dispossession, of large-scale and wide-spread communal violence...” (Menon and Bhasin, *Abducted* 3).

Objective:

In this paper, some episodes and incidents from two partition novels – Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) along with close references to Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), a partition memoir have been taken under consideration to argue how women culturally constructed as ‘an object’ became chief victims to the partition violence and also were subjected to the patriarchal repressive notion of family, religion and community. The paper aims to explicate the gender politics and the patriarchal patterns of gendered violence and trauma inflicted on women during the partition negotiation.

Women and Partition Violence

During partition violence generated by communal animosity, women on account of their religious identity encountered distinctive tragedy and suffered in ways more than one family, community and the state level. During the partition chaos, “Women faced violence both from their own families and their communities” (Butalia, 215). Men always used women who sacrificed or were compelled to sacrifice for the honour of the nation, family and community. Sometimes the patriarchal apprehension that forceful rape and abduction of the daughters and women would dishonour the family compelled them to choose the path of suicide to escape both the experiences of terror and honour. Many women and girls got murdered, kidnapped, disappeared and missing suddenly. Even after their return and recovery (mostly by the state), they were denied access to their family. They were

forced to relocate. Many had to accept new life with their rapists or torturers, or people of the enemy community. Women and minors as the repository of honour of community were targeted as prime objects of persecution in masculine aggression. Women experienced unprecedented violence in various forms. Urvashi Butalia outlines the dimensions of gendered violence in *The Other Side of Silence*:

“Nearly 75000 women had been raped and abducted on both sides of the border at Partition.... Apart from the rapes, other specific kinds of violence had been visited on women. Many were paraded naked in the streets, several had their breasts cut off, their bodies tattooed with marks of the ‘other’ religion; in a bid to defile the so-called ‘purity’ of the race, women were forced to have sex with men of the other religion, many were impregnated. Sometimes families traded in their women, in exchange for freedom, at other times the women ... hundreds, indeed thousands, of women had been subjected to rape, and abduction...” (132).

Partition thus created for women multifarious troubles and identities—abducted, raped and defiled in negotiations with patriarchal order along with the identity crisis itself. In the eruption of demonic violence, the question of female repression denotes the subaltern position of women. Naturally, women during the crucial days of division suffered more than their male counterparts because of the patriarchal social constructions, where “male and female are two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different” (Millett, 2). Socio-culturally so feeble and incapable to retaliate, they became the most vulnerable and abused ones, the worst victims of partition fury having no scope to express but to weep inwardly. Silence as a metaphor echoes their sacrifice, sufferings and afflictions. Their silent sacrifice excavates the “history of deep violation physical and mental for women” (*Other Side*, 131). As ‘the history of violence’ being, as Ganendra Pandey argues, ‘distorted and written up as aberration and absence’ (*In Defence*, 559), the traumatic experiences of sexually and psychologically engendered women and girls remained unheard and it did not store for long in the patriarchal imagination. Neither the society, community nor the state governed by coercive and patriarchal machinery showed serious inclination and interest in the factuality of female cause and consequences. Likewise, there are rare historical documentation and public endeavour taken to bring out the tragedy of the ostracised women and girls without whose accounts and traumatic memories the historicity of the partition remains incomplete. This patriarchal hegemonic interpretation of historical facts falsifies the fact of wounded women’s history. While pointing out to this silenced feminine self, Urvashi Butalia in *The Other Side of Silence* argues that there was no scope created to heed and register their voices to the grave violence meted out on them by anyone – ‘the families, the state, and by historians’ (Butalia, 205) in order ‘to listen to their speech, their silences, the half-said things’ (Butalia, 126). On other hand, women were not

sanctioned to utter their pitiable experiences. Even the sexual survivors, in spite of having experience of multifaceted violence, were hardly allowed to articulate the tragic truth.

The history of partition is thus a narrative of patriarchy– its desire, dreams and decisions that intensified as well as suppressed the tragedy for the women. In this context, Veena Das argues that there was 'no public space and tribunals and court were made to interrogate the patterns of violation' and suffering women experienced (192-193). Thus, the patriarchal construction of the society and social institutions including family and nation-state devalues their importance and locates women as doubly peripheral female subalterns without history and voice (Spivak, 83) always made submissive to the whims of their men. The patriarchal nationalistic imagination "produces a construction of women which is subordinated to that of men" (Ismail, 218). The sacrifice and silence that surround the history of the private sphere of women during a public event like partition evidence the marginalization of women in the patriarchal nationalist dealings and discourses where women's "positions as independent, equal citizens in the nation were thwarted by the appropriation of 'woman' (and its related gendered significations) as a metonymy for 'nation'" (Ray, 97). In this negotiation women become the pawn and get their position and identity sabotaged and relocated in the underlying gender politics casting women as silent sufferers, 'sacrificed bodies'.

Writers' Experience

Partition discourse registers the grim experience of "manifold violence and losses" (Tomsky, 60) which blemished the 1947 phenomenon. An impressive number of writers including Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal, and Sahni, unlike historians, probe into the incidents and politics of partition days to depict the truth of partition violence on the ordinary people, especially women. But in the question of representation of women's experiences as victims, women writers like Ismat Chughtai, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Urvashi Butalia bring out with more 'fullness and perfection' the traumatic truth experienced by women from 'gendered perspective' thus 'foregrounding the marginal women placing at the centre rather than at the periphery' (Malik, 23).

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) as partition narrative records the vivid experience of partition happenings that caused an irreversible scar on the victims on the psycho-physical level. While representing the tragic life of partition days– its massacre, looting, atrocity and raping, Singh reliably pens the pain of human beings, in general, and women, in particular. He points out how the mass violence and unleashed terror created by the religious fanatics of each community jeopardized the life and identity of women of all religions and communities. It is believed that "each aspect of

reality is gendered" (Sangari and Vaid, 2). Hence women and girls, irrespective of their religious affiliation, suffer tremendously during the gruesome partition reality. The narrative of the novel sketches out the massive violence and atrocity let loose on the life of 'fragile' women. Singh makes belligerent people of all the communities responsible for the misery of women and others. This is evocatively hinted at by the novelist in the very opening chapter of the novel, "The fact is that both sides killed. Both tortured and raped" (1).

Khushwant Singh convincingly depicts in one side the barbarity perpetrated by the Sikh mobs on the Muslim women in Indian parts of the border, "They [Muslims] had heard of gentlewomen having their veils taken off, being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market place" (127-28). The fact is that women as the embodiment of the community's honour became the soft target of taking revenge on the enemy. The women from respected families were not exempted. They were unveiled to assault physically. The male gaze of the assaulters and rapists of women openly pierced the face and the body of the women and girls. They were forced to undress and march down the crowded roads, and the rapist set, like vultures, on these hapless women and young girls to molest and rape in the open spaces such as market place and roads. Many women committed suicide to save the honour of both themselves and their communities, "Many [Muslim women] had eluded their would be ravishers by killing themselves" (*Train*, 127). Singh also shows on the parallel level the communal fever that seized the Muslims too on the other side of the border. Like their Hindu and Sikh counterparts, they were equally engaged in the inhuman act of killing, raping and abduction of enemy women. Like Muslim women, Sikh women too committed suicide and/or sacrificed their lives for honour, "Sikh refugees had told of women jumping into wells and burning into themselves rather than falling into the hands of Muslims" (*Train*, 128). Extremely miserable moments loomed for, "those who did not commit suicide" as they "were paraded naked in the streets, raped in public, and then murdered" (128).

In the vengeful atmosphere of destruction and doubt, the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women underwent equally identical wounding and fate on both sides of the newly created border. Like Muslim women, the Hindu and Sikh women met with grim atrocities and they preferred sacrifice and suicide to dishonour as an escape route to satisfy the patriarchal desire and idea of honour that women are sexually pure. The patriarchal irony is that no man of any religion 'jumped into the well' but they spread the message that the women of 'other' community were 'killing themselves for honour, and women who did not die were being 'paraded naked and raped in public' as a warning for the female members of their community. Women who "preferred voluntary death" suddenly began to be imagined as "undying force" (Pandey, 2001:86). This makes it easier for the men of all religions to convince their women and girls to accept death as preferable to 'falling into the enemy's custody. Their religious identity shaped by masculine values is here placed above their

female identity. Many Sikh women were taught by the patriarchal nationalist fervor to prefer death by 'jumping into wells' to be more honourable to 'falling into the hands of Muslims' (128). The very cultural orientation made them think that "death was preferable to ... conversion and rape" (Butalia, 195). It is also indicative of the abject plight of women and girls at the critical juncture created by the patriarchal construction of border, nation and state which hardly values the cause and dignity of women and the marginalized. Patriarchy, as already said, used women conveniently for the safety and security of the family and the society or community and state thus making women scapegoat. In a time of danger, they are sometimes looked at as and forced to be "martyr" (Dey, 10) at the altar of fanatic nationalism patterned by patriarchy. In this regard, self-sacrifice in form of suicide becomes a trope of 'martyrdom', a state preferred term of sacrifice for national and religious honour and glory. Historically true, many women choose the path of self-immolation by committing suicide to save honour of the family and men. Unprotected by their 'superior' men, suicide by jumping into well and pond or other ways was the alternative open to them. The incident of accepting death by women collectively for honour reminds me of the incident of Toa Khalsa, a village (now in Pakistan) where ninety Sikh women being confronted by a Muslim mob jumped into a well to protect their 'honour'. While men failed to protect the villagers and the women, it is through their suicide and sacrifices the women decided to save the dignity and prestige of both men and the community from the 'dishonor' by the other. Born and brought up in the patriarchal social culture they performed the role assigned to them by the male society as moral 'duty'. Their inability to confront the enemy mobs and lack of self-defense following their death march point out to their male dependence. Women have no right over their bodies and life. Suicide is thus a syndrome of their cultural submission to patriarchy. But the Sikh patriarchal hegemony that indoctrinates the ideology of self-immolation among the Sikh women brands this mass suicidal as a great "mark of Sikh courage and valour" (Dey, 11). So is their 'sacrifice' associated with Rajput women's mass 'martyrdom'. The women's sacrifice was supposed to bring prestige and a reputation for their families and communities. But whoever was unwilling to commit mass suicide and sacrifice for 'hounour' were either forced to die even by their kinsmen, or degraded as deviators or traitors of the Sikh community. Butalia pointed out the other side of sacrifice through the experience of Basant Kaur who unwillingly jumped into the well out of her moral obligation for catering to the patriarchal nationalistic fervor of the community in *The Other Side of Silence*. These women willing or unwilling were all the victims of 'patriarchal consensus' (Butalia, 212) granted by the men and people of their family, community and nation. This "new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honor of a new social responsibility; and bound them to a new, and yet entirely legitimate, subordination" while assuring of women emancipation in 'sovereign nationhood' (Chatterjee, 1989: 629).

In this changing situation, people got obsessed with communal identification over women's honour and security. This hurt, as the novelist enacts, Imam Baksh's daughter Nooran deeply. In communal identity politics, her female self gets submerged. Noor's premarital relationship with Juggut Singh collapses just because she is a girl from the 'other' (Muslim) community. When she goes to Juggut's mother and tells her about her pregnancy (not forced) by Juggut before migrating to Pakistan, the old Sikh woman harshly rebukes her, instead of giving her shelter: "Get out, you bitch! You, a Muslim weaver's daughter, marry a Sikh peasant! Get out... go to Pakistan" (138). Her communal utterance at the critical juncture deeply shocks Nooran. She feels "heavy and lifeless" (138). Nooran becomes aware of her different identity, in spite of her birth and upbringing in the village where she no longer has a space to live as she is "a Muslim weaver's daughter" (138). Finally, she is made to accept the reality marked by religious identity during partition. Rejected, she leaves forever the village and the man she loves even when she is pregnant. Her body sexually is possessed by Jugga and she now conceives the baby in her womb, which is supposed to be 'contaminated' with the blood of enemy people Jugga. Significantly, both she and her unborn baby are denied in the patriarchal social construction. The premarital pregnancy and the resulting unborn baby of the non-consensual relationship between Nooran and Jaggua problematize the situation. She becomes victims of partition in dual ways first as a Muslim and secondly as a woman- a pregnant woman. In both cases, she turns out to be a subaltern who is forced to accept silently her position imposed on her by the new state policy and the patriarchal society. Even Juggut Singh, her lover does not come forward to stand beside her, though he sacrifices himself for her. But it was too late. However, Nooran's confession of her pregnancy "I have Jugga's child inside me" echoes the tension that she apprehends, "If I go to Pakistan they will kill it [unborn baby] when they know it has a Sikh father" (139). Her tension springs from the patriarchal notion of "impure" children—"the seed of other religion" conceived by a woman in her womb, thus, it is apprehended by the patriarchal society, polluting the entire community. It was imperative that 'pure' woman not only saves her individual and community honour but also the honour of the 'entire race'. This patriarchal ideology resounds in Nooran's father's reaction, (as she is also afraid of) to her premarital pregnancy. In response to the query of Jugga's mother, if her father was aware of it, she says: "No! If he [father] finds out, he will marry me off to someone or murder me" (139). Interestingly, her father Imam Baksh, though blind innocent man, was well oriented by both the religious nuances as well as the patriarchal doctrines. Finally, with her departure, her identities as a girl/ unwed impregnated woman/ mother as well as a mistress are jeopardized at the altar of patriarchal communal construction. This makes her sacrifice and suffer at the family and community level. Nooran finally takes refuge in silence.

The patriarchal gendered attitude is also reflected in the abusive words

of angry Jugga in his duel with Malli in the prison cell, "This to rape your mother. This is your sister. This is your daughter. This for your mother again....." (122). The word "rape", the recurring image of sexual domination in the partition narratives, is synonymous with virility and manliness. It is a mode of displaying manly power over (enemy) women – mother, sister, and daughter. It is this male dominating attitude, though casually uttered, largely responsible for the tragedy of women during partition. Even, the Deputy Magistrate Hukum Chand's sexual entertainment with Haseena, a young prostitute brought for his physical and psychological relaxation during partition troubles, is a patriarchal practice to use and dominate over women's body. He considers Haseena (though reminding him of his daughter) a mere object of physical entertainment. Her body becomes a site of male entertainment. Putting a glass of whisky to her lips, he pleads her, "Drink a little. Just a sip for my sake" (31). The old woman's description of Haseena as a 'shy girl', "not very pretty, just young and unexploited" (30), and without "the touch of male hand" (30) endorses the patriarchal idea of objectification of woman as a body defining her sexuality from the notion of 'purity'. The patriarchal concept of 'purity' is again echoed in the words of the old woman in the context of Haseena's hesitation to drink, "Government, she knows nothing of drink. She is hardly sixteen and completely innocent. She has never been near a man before. I have reared her for your honour's pleasure.... May your fame and honour increase" (31-32). Here Haseena's 'female body' becomes an object meant to be nurtured for 'man's pleasure', if required, at the expense of woman's pain and honour during the partition crisis.

This patriarchal ideology again displayed in the way many people in times of duress and violence took the serious matter of women's grave torture, trading, rape and abduction which seem to be least serious and indecent to them. Hence, common men find nothing wrong in treating women as objects of desire and domination. This is clear from the casual conversation between Bhola, the tonga driver, and Jugga on the tragic incident of abduction of women during the partition moment. They easily make fun of the abducted women who are nothing more than sexual body to be possessed violently, "Bholeya, I hear a lot of women are being abducted and sold cheap. You could find a wife for yourself.' 'Why, Sardara, if you can find a Mussulmanni without paying for her, am I *impotent* that I should have to buy an abducted woman?' replied Bhola" (73). Here Bhola gets offended because his virility is wounded with being associated with 'impotency'. It is because man is always "potent" and powerful, and the women's body becomes the space to display that potentiality. The dialogues here suggest the patriarchal ego as well as cruelty with which women are treated and traded during partition. The patriarchal atrocity and violence even pattern the basis of the man-woman relationship in the subcontinent where women are culturally subordinated to patriarchal hegemony. Singh exemplifies cultural violence on women concerning Sundari, the daughter of Hukum Chand's orderly. Before her

journey to Gujranwala with her husband as a new bride, Sundari is advised repeatedly by her friends and elder not to "take any of the lacquer bangles off" (186) so that they can be smashed during the first love-making with her husband, "Let him break them when he [husband] makes love to you and moulds you" (186). This sort of social practice and beliefs 'supposed to ward off bad luck' (186) promotes gendered violence on women. This belief seems to be more paradoxical when bangles get smashed by 'enemy men' during her forced molestation and rape on the street which shatters her dreams of new life with her husband, Mansa Ram, "The mob made love to her... being taken by one man and another and another" (187). Apart from physical mob violence on her body, what is significant is that here breaking of the bangles on a mutual level or forcibly is synonymous with the distortion of the female body and virginity. Thus, cultural violence sanctioned to the husband to prove his physical potentiality is equivalent to virility, and one without this quality is pigeon-holed as 'impotent' and fragile. This is what happened with Bhola who gets angry at being hinted at as impotent. In the patriarchal society, masculinity symbolizes power, self-assertion, and domination, while 'femininity' connotes 'weakness, passivity, docility, obedience and self-negation' (Chandra, 48). So, a woman in sex and society is expected to be soft, pure and passive, while men will be aggressive and violent. That's why the Sikh youth while inciting the Sikh villagers against the Muslim neighbours calls his fellow Sikh men "eunuchs" and "impotent" (155-156) for their lack of vengeful aggressive attitude and bravery against the enemy-Muslim community. Like Bhola, this young boy nurtures the identical patriarchal philosophy that is largely responsible for the troubles of women during partition. The desire of 'virgin' girls in the marriage as sought in the 'matrimonial advertisement in the newspapers' that Iqbal 'reads in prison cell' (76) also reconstructs the patriarchal binary of 'pure' and impure/contaminated women in the violent days of mass abduction and rape. Rape and molestation as sexual violence represent the greatest violation of the safety and security of the partition victims. The patriarchal pattern of family and society, as already stated, consider women's body as pure and untainted. Hence, these institutions consider women's rape as something that defiles the female body. Even the Sikh Army officer Sunder Singh's sole decision of shooting his wife along with his children in the train compartment to evade such 'defilement' of the female body might be taken as a 'glorious' action for a brave Sikh gentleman, but this endorses, to some extent, the same patriarchal ideologies that emphasize on the saving of the family 'honour' than the lives of women. A typical Punjabi husband feels it is his 'duty' to save his wife from moral defilement, and if fails to do so, he has the sole right to kill her. Thus, we see women in every occasion undergo a gendered experience in the sexist society of partition days, thus endangering their existence and identity.

Like Singh, Chaman Nahal narrates how women became the worst

sufferers of this communal savagery during and after partition in *Azadi* (1975). The narrative set at Sialkot accounts of how women experience the agony of abduction, killing, mass rape and naked parade, sexual humiliation and forced marriage and such brutalities. Thus, women in those decisive days were relocated and their identities are reconfigured. They are stigmatized in the patriarchal terms of religion and community. Hence, they become sometimes "a Mussulmanni" (*Train*, 73) woman, and sometimes "the filthy Hindu bitches" and "kafir women" (*Azadi*, 261). In both cases, women get victims to male atrocities. The novelist describes through Arun's experience the gruesome scene in the naked procession of "the kafir women" (non-Muslim women) in the open market of Narowal. Arun notices in the procession the grave marching of forty women, who "were all stark naked. Their heads were completely shaven. So were their *public regions*.... The bruises on their *bodies* showed they had been beaten and manhandled" (260). Here the women's 'man handled' 'body' excavates a history of violence and female suppression. As a sex-body, woman's private and public 'regions' and her nakedness are gazed at by the vengeful men as a contested site of revenge and domination on the enemy. In the patriarchal panoptic gaze women thus became a soft target of the opposite community. As Jisha Menon suggests, "the female body served as the terrain through which to exchange dramatic acts of violence. The gendered violence of the Partition thus positioned women between symbolic abstraction and embodiment" (121). Here women's body as a cultural agent becomes a marker of purity as well as defilement. It is both tragic and ironic that, "the bodies of women became vehicles for the honour – and dishonor – of the race" (Butalia, 263). But at the same time, the demonic fury and vulgarity of these mobs in the women's procession become an effective medium of exercising male power and territoriality over the female body which signifies domain, "territories that were violated, mutilated and tattooed with symbols of other religion" (Malik, 49). Hence, many men in the crowds displayed "their genitals" (262), the phallus, a symbol of their power, to women; and "men's eyes were settled on apertures and bruised buttock" of women (262). The exercise of similar male supremacy over the female body is exhibited in the way the Muslim women, like the Hindu and the Sikh women, are abducted, abused, paraded and raped by their Hindu and Sikh counterparts on the eastern side of the border. On his way to the Amritsar station Lala Kanshi Ram, the protagonist, shockingly witnesses "a procession of Muslim women through the bazaar" (289). This reminds him of his daughter Madhu Bala, (depicted on the memory of Nahal's sister Kartar Devi killed by Muslim perpetrators) who gets murdered on her way to Sialkot. The unprecedented barbarity on women's bodies as preferred sites becomes 'the most predictable form of violence on women, as the men of one community sexually assaulted the women of other communities, to simultaneously humiliate the 'other' openly 'dishonouring' their women (Menon and Bhasin, 41).

In the rising communal ire, the life of women was engendered severely. Many wicked and lustful men took the advantage of the fateful situation. Sunanda, the wife of Suraj Prakash Singh, is cruelly raped on her way to India by the Captain, Rahmat-Ullah Khan, who forgets his military ethics and moral compunction to quench his lust. Even he vainly indirectly lures her to reach her safely to India in exchange for sexually violating her body. Dr. Chander Bhan's two daughters aged 19 and 17 "had been carried away by the mob" (253). Besides, three men caught hold of Chandni, Arun's ladylove and "dragged her away" (280) and found nowhere. Thus, women got sexually abused, objectified and relocated during the partition. The male exploitation of female sexuality through sexual violence not only causes the 'reduction of the identity of women to a homogenous 'religious or a political affiliation' (Sen, xv) but also "reduces the victims to the status of objects" (Khanna, 19). Nahal again describes vividly the abject condition and the objectification of women:

"A number of abducted Hindu and Sikh women were in their custody. Many of the kidnapped women disappeared into private homes.... The rest were subject to mass rape, at times in public places. The rape was followed by other atrocities, chopping of their breasts, and even death. Many of the pregnant women had their wombs torn open. The survivors were retained for repeated rapes and humiliations..." (*Azadi*, 258).

In this sexual savagery, women, irrespective of community, religion and nation, became a sole possession to be conquered by masculinity. This is reflected in the conversation between Suraj Prakash and Niranjana Singh, "Listen, brother, don't you want to sleep with a Muslim girl? ... Muslim girls are so good in bed Hindu girls give up so soon!" (221-222). This exemplifies quite clearly why women got tortured and raped during the partition crisis. Despite being husbands and brothers who are worried about the safety of their wives and sisters on their journey to Delhi, these guys forget the pain of women belonging to other religious groups. These gendered perversion and hypocrisy ensure the cultural subalternity and exclusion of women. Violence and body are interrelated. A body as a 'product of cultural negotiations' stands for a symbolic space for power that deliberately and culturally keeps the 'subaltern body' silenced and disciplined (Kumari, 97). The female 'subaltern body' as a centre of negotiations reproduces a potential site for masculine hegemonic practice and norms that justify the construction of female disembodied and 'sacrificed bodies' during the partition.

It is because of the patriarchal cultural orientation, that recovered women suffered much. The abducted women faced a challenge from their family and society soon after their recovery. The abducted women allegedly brought disgrace to the family. In *Azadi*, the narrative goes on, "The women that were discovered were led away silently by their families" (282). No one expresses "joy at the reunion; some seemed sorry the girls had come back at all, spoiled

and dishonoured" (282). This indifferent attitude to women is echoed in the argument made by Lala Kanshi Ram with Padmini, Chandni's bereaved mother over Chandni's abduction and missing, "And who would now take her [Chandni] as a wife, even if she did come back?" (283) The duality of this patriarchal society is, that in one hand they demand recovery of these women who are living in the house of the enemy people. On the other hand, these women once recovered are branded as 'spoiled', 'fallen' and 'impure'. This patriarchal conspiracy underlined on both sides of the border "inflicted different forms of violence upon the female body, leaving the abducted female bodies in an unrestored space and turning them into abject bodies for their communities" (Arévalo, 106-107).

The wretched/subaltern condition of women in the male-dominated Muslim society is also reflected in the words of Nur, a Muslim girl, with her Hindu lover, Arun in the context of religious conversion which conditions their marriage. In response to Arun, Nur explains why she is unable to become a Hindu: "Because I'm a girl and defenseless and cannot force my will on my family and because you're a man, more independent than me (78). But, interestingly, when she asks him to defend and "make sacrifices for me" (78), Arun, in spite of being "more independent" man, neither 'defends' her nor makes 'sacrifice' for her because his manly ego, as well as his Hindu patriarchal cultural orientation, prevent him. Finally, Nur has to sacrifice her love to the conditions imposed by patriarchy on their relationship which ends in separation.

Conclusion

The reading of the texts under consideration in the partition context brings out the marginalized subaltern position of women and girls who silently sacrificed and suffered much because of the patriarchal hegemonic construction. All the writers— Singh, Nahal and Butalia in their ways focus on the aspect of the indescribable sufferings and painful experiences women underwent during the partition violence. They try to expose that women of all the communities equally suffered, faced identity crises, and got objectified in the patriarchal society. Though the partition brought painful experience for all, it was a different experience for women and girls who became 'sacrificed bodies' and victims not only to the male lust and whimsicality but also to male politics of scapegoating. In the partition violence, women's body was marked as a symbolic space of domination over the other and thus women became the common target of all the communities. The gendered construction of all the institutions including family, community and state policies were responsible greatly. Women- abused, abducted and recovered, - suffered in the family, community and state levels where women's bodies were labeled as 'contaminated' by the patriarchy. To conclude, it is these patriarchal values and underpinnings manifest in their motivations and actions in many partition cases that endangered the fate and identity of women, the 'martyr',

though they as 'non-violent' had no hands in creating this unspeakable partition holocaust. It was man-made, not woman's made. All the major decisions and strategies relating to the partition days were maneuvered and 'instigated by men', but its greatest outcome was 'felt by women as primary victims' (Butalia, *Community*, 34). The historical truth which is another open secret is that women suffered by men and more than men without any fault of their own. The gender politics behind the brutal history of partition, full of male violence and patriarchal aggression makes women pay for none of their crimes, making women the worst or the 'chief victims' to the partition violence.

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