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Unveiling the Layers: A Journey into the Covertures of Women Partition Survivors

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ABSTRACT

The primary focus of this research paper is based upon the oral narratives of women, presently residing in India, who had witnessed and survived the Indo-Pak partition in 1947. This paper is part of the innovative research on *Locating Women in the Context of Partition: An Account of Lived Experiences and Unheard Voices*. The paper tries to explore women in totality in the context of partition. This research project not only attempted to acknowledge the presence of these women during the partition but also is an attempt to see the history of partition through their eyes. It is evident from the historical data that in situations of war and conflicts, women are extremely vulnerable. They are the most humiliated, exploited, oppressed, deprived, harassed and discriminated against category. They had to undergo the same during partition. It was not an exceptional event for the women survivors as their completeness was totally ignored. Their gendered stature decided their fate to experience the entire event differently. The ambiguity of their gendered identity, on one hand made them easy targets for humiliation/ sexual assault and on the other, their identity was attached with chastity, family pride and honour. “Unveiling the layers” is an emotional journey in to the covertures of these women, who not only narrated their life experiences but also provided a platform to understand the partition from their perspective.

Key words: Partition, women, survivors, vulnerable, gender.

INTRODUCTION

Bargaining on a product was going on in a grocery shop. Someone tried to show a mirror to the shopkeeper, “don’t ask more than the price, you’ve to pay it somewhere.” Ah! An elderly voice, which was loud but husky, filled the atmosphere, “nothing happens; those who lose just lose and those who gain just gain. Since *vibhajan* I am still waiting for my dues to come to me.” With tears in her eyes she held her stuff and left, leaving all the faces turned towards her.

Partition was the most striking event of Indian history. The entire freedom struggle process could barely comprehend the cost at which it culminated and freedom was

gained by the country. When history is picked up, time and again shadows are chased. There is painful awareness that a dead world cannot be reconstructed in its completeness however thorough or revealing the documentation might be. Historians make do with whatever evidences they have, explaining things in the context of cause and effect. They can never be certain about the actual event as their certainty is incidental since some of them are unavoidably remote from their subjects. This does not hold true for the partition survivors in general and women in particular. Their world is not dead although there is a sense of incompleteness in having left their homes after partition.

The year of 1947 occupies the most specific and relevant space in the history of India and Pakistan. There are multiple versions of histories related to freedom and the result of freedom, yet it is a struggle to delineate authenticity to the facts and events. One can glance through several readings, experiences of the researchers, the chronological events which unfolded at that time and realize that some events were in the hands of our leaders. Some were out of reach. Still they occurred in a bitter form and the only rationale for those bitter events was that they were unreachable and uncontrollable. Chandra (1999) writes about History in one of the Congresses organised on History: *History Congress work is to ensure that history teaching, writing and historical research remains the business of historians while political groups and parties confine themselves to making history, good or bad.* The partition of India and Pakistan, 1947, had a history of negotiation, negation, networking, lobbying, self interest, power politics, separation and hatred which ultimately culminated in the division of community through violence. The whole process of power politics was rotating around two major organizations i.e. Indian National Congress (INC) and Indian Muslim League (IML). *On June 3, 1947 the partition plan was announced which required the Punjab and Bengal assemblies to vote on whether they wanted to keep their provinces united or partitioned. Both the assemblies voted in favour of partitioning their provinces* (Ahmed 2012).

From the early years of schooling, history texts provide copious information related to the major events of pre/during and post partition. Though the given text helps to imagine the situations and create an understanding of the events, many questions and dilemmas remain in the minds of readers. Some are addressed and some did/do not get a voice. Details of the violent events of the partition during 1947 are painful, traumatic and depressing to recall but after a gap of six decades, these memories are fading away. Major histories on partition show that violence was restricted to Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, and that Europeans and Anglo-Indians were not targets (Mcmenamin 2006).

We cannot ignore the memories of those women who were not harmed physically due to their socio-political status but were the passive observers of the events. Further Mcmenamin (2006) explores that there were incidents where British women were sent back to Britain by their husbands and other family members to provide them security.

In the year 1946 there were families who migrated to New Zealand apprehending violence. Many preferred to stay back as they felt safe because the emerging rift was not against them. It is apt to quote an interesting narrative collected by Mcmenamin (2006): *At Partition it (the violence) was mainly between Indian against Indian..... Before the Government had agreed to quit India, the British and Anglo-Indians were the focus of attack, and then it changed once they agreed. They were not the targets. It was between themselves (Hindus and Muslims).* As a result, number of families decided to stay back. These families witnessed and experienced partition. The post partition socio-political scenario further created a situation and number of families moved away to different countries for better job opportunities. These transitions affected the physical, mental and emotional well-being of those who underwent these experiences. Partition, as a whole, affected the social lives of everyone. However, it affected the women contrastively. Women were not the ones who were deciding their fate, their killing or living or migrating. Women faced violence at various levels; communal, at family level and at the macro level. They were being abducted, kidnapped, raped, killed. They were forced to commit suicide in order to protect the family honour. Furthermore, in the name of recovery they were disowned by their families, their children were deprived of basic rights as they were considered illegal and wrong. *The stories of distressed girls from East Punjab and wrecked women from this side of the border were identical: the flight with family and neighbours from village to camp; on the police orders, the beginning of the journey in a convoy to Pakistan; ambush on the way; abduction of all young women during the attack; division of all these spoils among attackers, police and army. The conspiracy transcended borders* (Kidwai 2011). What mattered at that time was the vulnerability of the other half of humanity. During the crisis, the patriarchal power and position imbalance gave the people license to play with the respect and dignity of women and young girls irrespective of where they belonged to—India or Pakistan. *On December 6, 1947 an Inter-Dominion Conference was held at Lahore at which the two countries agreed upon steps to be taken for the implementation of recovery and restoration, with the appointment of Mridula Sarabhai as Chief All India Organizer. The recovery operation itself was in the charge of the Women's Section, Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, with Rameshwari Nehru as Honorary Advisor. The primary responsibility for recovery was with the local police, assisted by the staff of one additional inspector general, two deputy superintendents of police, 15 inspectors, 10 sub-inspectors and 6 assistant sub-inspectors. Between December 1947 and July 1948 the number of women recovered in both the countries was 9,362 in India and 5,510 in Pakistan* (Menon & Bhasin 1998).

The Central Recovery Organization was constituted under the leadership of Lady Mountbatten. By the year 1954 the committee had rescued 17000 women from Pakistan and sent to India and 20,000 Muslim women from India were sent to Pakistan (Kidwai 2011). It took more than seven years and during this period the experiences of these women decided the course of their lives. Yet, the states decided their fate, which was once again imposed on them. What was going on in their minds? Did they have an opportunity to spell out their desires? Did they face uprootedness again? Was coming or going considered as their choice? Number of issues haunt the minds and hearts when we try to see woman as a total and a complete being. *The Indian and Pakistani governments were insensitive to the complexities of human relationships. Believing the women to be on the wrong side of the border, they now tore them away from their new relatives, and sent them back to their earlier families or locations. They did not consult the concerned women, undermining their right to take decisions regarding their own lives* (NCERT 2008). Justice was far from them. To the extent, the justice bestowed on these women compelled them to

experience revictimisation as they had to leave the present existing familial relations and get back to their land of origin. Butalia (*from Gender to nation* 2004; Eds. Rada Ivekovic and Julie Mostov) substantiates that at partition abducted women, who were recovered, did not have the right to refuse being recovered. One can find the examples of gender unequal practices related to recovery and rehabilitation at various levels. The women who were so-called rescued and recovered faced another brunt of brutality by their near and dear ones, the family members, fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. *As recovery work went on, the greatest difficulty was not to facilitate acceptance- instead, we found that most abducted girls didn't want to return* (Kidwai 2011).

The issues of purity, acceptance, pregnancy, honour and shame, fear of rejection, trust, accepting the fate as it was/is, apprehending the fears and insecurities of future were the factors of refusal. There were instances as Kidwai (2011) records *when Hindu women had been recovered from Pakistani Muslims, their relatives had refused to take them*. To which Menon & Bhasin (1998) posed the question of belongingness of women. Hence, women who were active and passive victims of the process of partition, have their own individual memories to be looked into. Paucity of data in the context of other than Hindu and Muslim women is felt. Experiences of British, Anglo- Indian and other existing minority group women were mostly not a prime concern. Data reveals that British and Anglo-Indian women did not experience the atrocities (violence) and discrimination what Hindu, Sikh and Muslim, and in some cases those of lower castes, experienced. Recording accounts of those women who had not faced any attack, harm or atrocities but had observed/ heard of violence on other women i.e. Hindu and Muslim helped to locate women in different circumstances. Insecurities towards their own lives, people related to them and the experiences of other women in their surroundings, who had faced those atrocities, left indelible impressions on their minds.

Women in family, popularly known also as home makers, locate themselves in and around family ties. Hence, their experiences of a social event may throw a very different light altogether on the incident of partition especially on women and their families. Women narration of the nation is different from that of men. In men's narratives of the nation, women are often seen as symbols of national and family honour. In women's narratives, the concerns are often different: the need to keep the family together, to contain grief, to put closure on unexplained deaths, to try and somehow contain the violence that such a situation inevitably unleashes (Butalia 2004) are paramount.

War is gendered (Goldstein 2001). Women and men experience any situation of war and conflict differently because the gender specific roles and responsibilities attached with the specific gender restrict the individual as well as the institution to think and act beyond that. It is not that the women did not play any significant role in the process but the tendency to reject women's contribution or to place her in centrality, perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce biases and discrimination. *Time and time again, women are labeled victims and put in the category of vulnerable people together with children, irrespective of the increasing responsibilities they take over in the absence of men* (Puechguirbal 2012). Micro unit of any society i.e. "family" does not consider their women empowered enough to take decisions, argue and negotiate. In the situations of war and conflict, women are put behind and expected to follow the commands and decisions taken by men. Woman is considered the pivotal point or backbone of the family when it comes to nurture and care but the presence of women in peace, conflict and security issues and talks is sidelined. Representation of women is again gendered in any area whether it is domestic, commercial or international and is determined and decided by men.

Women, defined by the international community as civilian victims, need a (male) protector who will risk his life for them. The masculinization of the protector leads to the feminization of the protected (Enloe 2007). This gender perspective keeps women in the category of victims and deprived which not only makes them vulnerable but also places them in the periphery. Conflict theory asserts that social problems occur when dominant groups mistreat, discriminate and exploit the subordinate ones. Men, as the dominant gender, subordinate women to maintain masculine power hierarchy which makes women a vulnerable category along with the children. Women as a powerless homogeneous group are considered victims in war and conflict situations where men are the perpetrators yet are seen as saviours or protectors. Masculine norms of reference is being used throughout and women's perspectives are unheard and ignored. Gendered experiences of women due to gender exclusion in such situations give an entirely different picture of the context. Physical and psychological integrity of women is always under threat in such situations. Their security and well being is a big concern. Enloe (2010) rightly expressed that *Wartime life is gendered. So is wartime death.*

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The category of women who lived partition is at the elderly phase of their lives. The study attempted to catch the sociological experiences of this phasing out data. People must have heard neighborhood stories and tried to learn about partition through personal interactions. Such stories have also found space in various forms and in varied contexts. However, there are unrevealed truths which are still embedded in the deep recesses of the minds of those who have lived through these experiences. One generation will pass in silence to which Butalia (1998) citing Krishna Sobti, writes: *a whole generation of women was destroyed by partition.*

The social events and realities such as movements, riots, conflicts and partition concern those who are directly or indirectly affected by such events. This research attempted to bring to the foreground the lived realities of these people, what it felt like to be a woman at the time of partition, how they dealt with the atrocities meted out to them during that time and to give a voice to the hitherto silent and suppressed lives of people, especially women and make the younger generations, aware of the conflicts that the older generations went through pre/ during/ post partition and the compromises they had to make in process.

The available materials shed very little light on familial relationships. These accounts have been collected and analyzed through the lens of history, politics, religion and national boundaries per se. The present study is an attempt keeping in mind the sociological perspective.

The researchers of this generation will learn the sociology of past generations, the life during partition, peoples' lives, especially of women who were in their teens. This will certainly build the connectivity of the present generation with their roots. It will provide a new canvas to locate and trace women.

The oral testimonies and narratives are the tools of research which give an opportunity to the respondents to be at ease and take their own comfort into consideration so that they travel down the memory lanes in a convincing manner and on their own terms. This qualitative research will be an addition in the field of qualitative research tools itself.

OBJECTIVES

To study the socio-cultural and emotional issues of women who lived/ experienced partition

Women from different castes, classes, religions, communities and countries experienced the partition in different ways. This research is an attempt to understand and analyse the socio-cultural and emotional difficulties and issues faced/ experienced by these women. How do they understand the class, caste and religion dynamics of that time? How did those experiences affect their physical, mental and emotional well-being?

To locate women in totality in the context of partition

Here totality means the varied experiences of women folk. On the one hand, it is an attempt to understand women across the cultures, irrespective of their caste, class, creed, religion, community, nationality and on the other, it focuses upon the social, cultural, emotional and physical experiences of these women. This study tries to sketch/ create a wholesome picture of woman.

METHODOLOGY

The project adopted qualitative methodology as a part of hermeneutics. It tried to explore the lived experiences of women partition survivors. It made an effort to explain their untouched and unheard realities.

Universe of the study

The universe of the study consisted of the women survivors of the partition (1947) across India. This study attempted to collect the unrevealed and silent narratives of these women and also to locate women in totality; irrespective of their origin, religion, caste, community and age.

Terms defined

Women: Adult female human beings who were young adolescents /girls at the time of partition.

Partition: An event or process of dividing a land/territory into two parts. Here, partition means division of Indian sub-continent into India and Pakistan in 1947.

Survivor: A woman who experienced and survived and is alive after 1947 partition in which others have died.

Vulnerable: Women who were exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed (either physically or emotionally) at the time of partition.

Gender: The state of being man or woman which depends upon the differences made by the socio-cultural construction of the society.

Sampling

The research study adopted the method of purposive sampling of **100** women partition survivors

from various parts of India. Preferably from the areas:

- which were most affected during the partition like north-west India;
- where the refugee and rehabilitation camps were established;
- the areas where majority of Anglo-Indians were settled.

It is important to note that the data has been collected from this side of the border, that is, India. It is a limitation of this study as well. However, the focus of the research has been more on women in a conflict situation. Nevertheless, the present research paper explains the two narratives in detail to give a feel and understanding of the whole context of women in partition.

Delhi and nearby areas witnessed the events of partition (pre/during/post) very closely. Not only were the refugee and rehabilitation camps established here at the time of partition but people migrated here from Pakistan and from other border areas in search of employment and women from such families were part of this study.

Tools of Data Collection

1. Narratives, interviewing and narrative collection

Narratives are event-centered and have a specific and particular history, located in a particular time and space. Narrative interviewing is conducted in a one-to-one environment and is unstructured in its nature. Its purpose is to draw out a participant's account of a significant event (or events) as experienced by the participant so that the interviewer has minimal interference in the conversation as to minimize any influence the interviewer may have on the participant's views and the words. The interviewer, however, used prompts to ensure that the participant kept on track with the direction of the interaction and interview.

This form of interview is very interactive where participants talk and describe their experiences in the form of a story. King (2003) very rightly said that *we live and make meaning of our lives through stories*. Mattingly, C and Lawler, M.C. (1998) describe that stories concern action, more specifically human action, and particularly social interaction. Stories have plots. They have beginning, middle and end, so that while they unfold in time, the order is more than mere sequence but reveal a *sense of the whole*. Stories show how human actors do things in the world, how their actions shape events and instigate responses in other actors, changing the world (and often the actors themselves) in some way. Stories also reveal the way events and other actors act upon someone, shaping their possibilities, the way they view themselves and their world. Stories explore the complex motives that drive individuals to act in some ways rather than others and they also reveal the constraints of environment, of body, of social contexts that delimit a person's possibilities for action. *Narrative interviewing inquires into their lives in a holistic, culturally appropriate manner because storytelling allows the research participants to select, recollect and reflect on stories within their own cultural context and language rather than in the cultural context and language chosen by the researcher* (Bishop 1994).

Why narrative interviewing in this research?

Narrative interviewing was chosen as the main tool of data collection because it allowed respondents to provide narrative accounts of their lives and experiences the way they wanted to. This kind of interviewing is an attempt to empower the respondent, to ensure their participation and also to encourage them to find and speak in their own 'voices'. Some stories went very long and survivors kept on telling about the event but other issues were also attended. If they would have been interrupted and stopped in between, there would have been a

chance to miss the whole sequence of subsequent information which may be relevant. But, of course, the job of the interviewer became more challenging by trying to keep the interview on the right track (to talk about specific times and situations).

There were many who shared that they had not told all this even to their near and dear ones as nobody had/ has time to listen to them. This one-on-one environment helped to strengthen their voice and also gave them ample time to reflect upon the situation and the context. A rediscovery of voice is specially crucial and significant for those whose socio-cultural, ethnic and religious background not only makes them marginalized but also leaves them feeling misunderstood, voiceless, unheard and vulnerable. Narrative interviewing not only informed us about the realistic description of socio-cultural life of the individual and the place but also the difficulties and the challenges faced by the individuals as they lead their lives. We can learn and understand about their personal experiences including the innermost ones.

This piece of research focussed upon the meanings attached to an individual's (woman) experiences and also on the way those experiences are communicated to others. As a result, narratives provide an ideal medium for researching and understanding an individual's lives in a social context. Chase (2003) argues that narratives do not simply provide evidence about individuals but provide a means to understand more about the broader culture shared by a community of individuals. Their narratives also give glimpses of the cultural framework within which individuals make sense of their lives.

Open-ended questions were framed which helped to initiate the interview and also in putting the participants into a narrative frame of mind. These loosely framed questions gave the scope to the narrator as well as to the interviewer to engage in and to build the rapport. As qualitative researchers, we often work to achieve narratives as self-observation, in which participants move to a position of interest in remembering and telling their stories in a self-reflective manner.

The sensitive-topic interview

Our research involved asking participants to tell their stories of sensitive, painful, horrifying and emotionally-charged issues. It was a big challenge to make participants have faith in us to share their stories of partition. While participants were sharing their stories it was difficult for them to control their emotional outflow. Telling one's story has the potential to carry a tremendous psychological implication for the story teller (Rosenthal 2003). Kirsh (1996) argues: *Narrative recreates experience through the eyes of the experienced, and brings with it the richness of personal and social history.*

Group interviews were also conducted in old people homes, associations and groups. The purpose of holding group interviews was to get the feeling of the context and ensure participants' engagement with the context. Some of the old people were not comfortable sharing their individual personal experiences alone but they readily responded well in group.

Participant observations were done throughout the field work. Interviewers observed that while survivors were sharing their personal narratives of traumatic experiences, their emotional outpouring was uncontrollable. Through their body language and broken voices, their pain and sufferings could be assessed and understood. Sometimes a long pause or a silence was enough to narrate the situation. Observations helped to assess and understand the psychological status of the survivor as well. There were moments when survivors did not have the appropriate words to narrate the event but their facial expressions described it well.

Document and content analysis was very important to orient the research team about the event and the context. Anthologies, poems, relevant books, write-ups, biographies, songs, articles and audio-visual aids including films were discussed and analyzed. These documents and contents helped the team to get a deeper understanding of the event. It also helped the team to differentiate between facts, myths and opinions. Survivors also shared the songs of freedom (*azaadi ke geet*), poems, phrases, slogans, news items/ headlines, radio programmes of those days which helped the researchers to analyze that data better.

Recording Narrative interviews was very useful to store the data. Video recording, voice recording and field notes have been a big resource which can be revisited time and again. Survivors who gave consent, only their narratives were recorded keeping in mind all ethical considerations. These recordings not only helped the research team to frame a new set of questions to be asked to the same subject but also to improvise the list of questions as well.

Narrative 1

One of the survivors came to India from Rawalpindi, Pakistan after the partition of 1947. An adolescent of 12 or 13 years, *main badi choti si* (I was very young), she said that their Muslim neighbours told them to leave Pakistan as it was not safe to stay there anymore. *Dange hoye te sab ne kiha ki hun jao, aapni jaan bachao.* (When the riots started, everyone said that we should leave and save our lives). Some people of the other community helped their friends of the different community but most of them did not for fear of retaliation from other members of their own community. They left 5-6 days before 15th August, 1947. Those who could leave earlier, came to India safer. Those who left near or after the partition date had to suffer a lot. *Laashaan diyaan bhariyaan gadiyaan aayiyan si* (Trains full of dead bodies came).

She had harrowing experiences to narrate. *Lokaan te julm te bahut hoye* (People underwent lots of atrocities). She came to India with her family by train. En route she witnessed cruelties, killings, a lot of death. There were people writhing in pain, some had no arms while the legs of others had been cut off. Cut limbs could be seen everywhere. The killings made matters worse. People were petrified for their lives. Saving themselves was of paramount importance.

Those who were left behind, to look after properties, were forced to convert. They were coerced into eating meat; even old women were not spared. Islam was imposed on them and they were compelled to read *Kalma*. Those who resisted were mercilessly killed. Young girls and women were raped, molested and physically abused. *Choti jaat diyaan kudiyaan nu zabardasti musalmaan bana dende si* (Young girls from lower castes were forced to become Muslims).

During riots, people of other communities robbed those of other religions of cash and jewellery. *Musalmaanaan de khilaaf ghat julm hoye* (The extent of atrocities against Muslims was much less). Earlier the relations between the two communities were very good. *Chattan ch koi banne nahin si* (There were no boundaries on roofs). *Bachche ik chat ton dooji chat te daud-de si* (Children would run from roof to another).

They took three days to come to India. The train, that they came in, was stopped for a very long time at Lahore. People were robbed. There was massacre everywhere. There were people who refused to part with their belongings. Their limbs were cut off and thrown away, especially those of young men.

Her elder sister was wearing lot of jewellery. When the robbers came, she was told to cover herself with a quilt to save herself.

The train was stopped at Ambala Cantt. and they were made to get down as it was not safe to go further. She does not remember who told them to get down but all their relatives got down.

Many of the people, who had left Pakistan, to come to India, did not think that they would be in India for long. They felt that they would come back once things quieted down. That was the reason behind not bringing anything with them from Rawalpindi. *Kuj vi naal nahin lai ke aaye* (We did not bring anything with us). *Khaali hath aaye si othon* (We came empty-handed from there). She said that the politicians might have been aware of the situation but common people thought that they would come back after a vacation of a month or two. *Sab sochde si ki waapis te chale hi jaana hai. Ghar te othe hi si* (Everyone thought that they would go back. Home was there).

While in Rawalpindi, they lived under constant terror. People said that doors of houses should not be opened to anyone in case it might be people from other community, who had come to loot or take away young girls. They lived under terror for a very long time.

After about 4-5 months, when it became clear that they could not go back, all hope left them. *Saade taan dil hi tut gaye* (Our hearts broke). People lived under that sorrow for a very long time. They were traumatized when they came to know that they could not go back. It took many years for many people to settle down after Partition.

Hindus of lower castes changed their castes to upper castes. When they came to India, they married girls of upper castes to be safe. *Verme Pakistan ch nai si* (Vermas in Pakistan were barbers). Barber was the lowest caste in Pakistan. They changed their castes for a better living. *Nai* (Barbers), *Chamar* (Sweepers) were lower castes in Pakistan. They gave false certificates to get government jobs. Some Hindus of upper castes were forced to become lower castes. People of lower castes started living better lives when they came to India.

All through the narrative, she kept repeating that she was very young. *Galaan taan badiyaan suniyaan ne* (I have heard many stories).

Narrative 2

This survivor was 9 years old at the time of Partition, *daswaan lagaya hoye si* (10th year had started). She was not educated. The name of their village was *Manga*. They had a lot of land. There was no school in their village. Her father was a *Nambardaar* (village head). She said: *Bhare ghar chad ke chale gaye si* (They left entire/full houses).

Musalmaan 10 nambar de badmaash si (The Muslims were crooks). But, the Muslims who used to work at their house/ land had to show their presence as a mark of respect to her father. Their smaller village was called *Tibba*. Her father brought 200 people with him. All came to the *Manga* village.

Miltry waale talaaashi laen aaye si, ki asla hovega (Some military officers came to check their house, thinking that they might have ammunition).

Some people brought their jewellery with them while others buried their valuables in the ground.

There was a small *kasba* (town) *Rai Vind*. The *thanedaar* (police officer) of that place told his fellow brothers from the same community that he would drop the railway crossing down when the caravan from *Manga* would come. They could, then, come to loot the caravan from behind.

A military truck and 4 *Gorkhas* came with them. The *Gorkhas* left them at village *Lalyaani*. The way was about 40-45 kilometers. 4,000 bullock carts had come. It was a big caravan. It took them 2-3 days to reach *Hindustan*. They stayed one night in *Rai Vind* and one in *Lalyaani*. No untoward incident happened with them because of military.

There was a canal near Amritsar. *Othe laashein bahut si* (Many dead bodies were there).

Someone had a daughter. He had thrown her away. My father said if it would have been a boy, he would have taken that boy with him because he had no son and only three daughters.

Government gave the people beddings and quilts.

In India, they stayed near village *Goindwal*. Then they came and stayed at the village *Mahu Kaul* and then the government allotted them land.

Musalmaan nu raaj pehle mil gaya si (The Muslim came to know the secret—of Partition—earlier). *Jawahar Lal Nehru nu raaj baad ch miliya si* (Jawahar Lal Nehru came to know the secret later).

In the time of 1947, the Muslims wanted to rob everyone. But, now when people go to *Nankana Sahib*, people from the other side give them a lot of love. When the survivor's relatives and brothers went to *Nankana Sahib*, people were very hospitable. Her father was a very influential man. He was also a very nice/decent man. He helped many people. But no one could go back.

She lamented her lack of education. *Je padhe-likhe hunde, te bahar jaande* (If I would have been educated, I would have gone out). When a person is educated, she can talk to others. When a person is not educated, she remains only for the house.

They came with 2 buffaloes and 4 bullocks. Her father had given 9 quintals of brass and had said that he would come back and take it.

Her brother is younger to her by 11 years. A school started in the *Mau* village near *Talwandi*. Her brother was sent to study there.

Aajkal bachche khachare ne (These days children are very smart/clever). These days girls should study but they should study with a pure heart and not spoil the name of their parents.

Jihda aaya Pakistan ton, uhnaanein takleefaan bhugtiyaan (Whosoever came from Pakistan, they went through many troubles).

Odon log jaat-paat de bade pakke si (In those days people were very particular about castes). These days people do not believe in castes.

The Sikhs never gave their children to the people of other communities.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

During the course of this study, many aspects, which affected their lives; directly or indirectly, advantageously or adversely; came to light. Some were mere shadowy figures while others were more tangible and concrete. Some were events they had never lived but heard about while others were unfinished businesses, which might have been completed had the partition not taken place. Some events they had lived through, which presented incomplete episodes of their lived history. Some were reflective interpretations even though they claimed them to be true and telling accounts of their experiences. And, of course, the certainty of their answers/ the supply of their explanations could also be unreal since their memories might have faded and the real could, thus, become intermingled with the fictional since these are/were their experiences which they wanted to relegate to the deepest parts of their minds or forget altogether. The challenge, for the team, was to deal with and accept this predicament in such a way so as to create something meaningful, with insight and revelation. The idea was to not only allow the readers/ audience to reflect upon the experiences of the survivors but to also appreciate, more deeply, the complexities that lay at the heart of their existence.

Irrespective of caste, class and religion and across the country, the women survivors shared their gendered experiences. The gendered exclusive socialization and patriarchal mind set kept the women on the secondary pedestal. It is quite evident through the narratives that the situation of women and young girls was even worse at the time of partition. More than hundred women were interviewed and their narratives were collected. Two narratives from the whole compilation are taken here to analyse. In the entire process of partition men are portrayed as active leaders, decision makers, gainers, protectors and fighters and on the other hand, women as passive receivers, followers, losers, victims, miserable and vulnerable. It is not only evident in literature but also reflected in the experiences of the survivors. Women were restricted to the private sphere; within the boundaries of four walls, they never dared to cross those boundaries.

These gendered power relations and hegemonic masculinities place the women at margins, deprive her from the resources and ostracize from the group.

The only way to show power over a community is to violate its women-folk. Young girls/ newly married women were raped because the men of the community wanted to show their power and strength over the rival community. Violence against women was seen in all communities. Most of the survivors told mortifying tales of violation of a woman's body, tales which could put anyone to shame. It has also come to light that women from the downtrodden groups were threatened and forced to convert their religion. However, if they denied, they were mercilessly killed. On the contrary, there are also instances where men of so-called lower castes forcefully married upper class/caste women to secure a social position of repute.

Those belonging to affluent families were in a position to send their women-folk and their valuables to India before partition. Their women did not experience horrifying event/s. Those, who did not have the means, suffered the most. Violence was meted out to women at the time of partition and later on during rehabilitation and resettlement. When each narrative was analysed separately, it was found that within the woman category, there were many sub-categories attached with their socio-cultural identity. Women from different socio-political backgrounds experienced partition differently. The economic and social conditions played an important role in their saving, missing, abduction, killing, rescue, migration, relief, resettlement

and rehabilitation. This skewed sample relates partition with the violence at various levels such as (a) individual/personal: where they were expected and forced to be passive (mentally, emotionally and physically) (b) familial: where women were told to commit suicide or were killed to maintain the honour of the family, they were shifted to safer places much earlier. It is also recorded that women were bargained/traded in exchange for freedom or to save the life/lives of the male member/s of the family. One survivor informed that in some places a kind of barter system was followed. To save the girl, money and assets were given to the powerful members of the rival community. Numerous cases were recorded by Butalia (1998), Kidwai (1990) and Menon & Bhasin (1998) where women and young girls of the family were forced to end their lives to save the honour of the community. Life and death of the women was decided by the men of their own community or by those of the rival community. *War time life is gendered. So is war time death.* This statement of Enloe (2010) was made in context of the research on Iraqi women during war. However, it also holds true for the riotous situations of present-day India, where the status of women is highly compromised. (c) caste and class: lower class women had a journey full of pain, trauma, suffering, brutality, and discrimination (d) communal: being a member of the other/rival community they were tortured, molested, raped, mutilated, abducted and were even forced to change their religion at times, to marry their rapists (Christian women were safe from these suffering because it is said that riots took place between Hindus and Muslims) (e) national: they were forcibly recovered and were told to abandon their children, forced to marry again with the native men. Brutality of men towards women at the time of partition was a mob reaction and most of them did not even know the reason for such behaviour. Multiple forms of violence was enacted upon them which not only sabotaged their physical and psychological integrity but also their emotional and mental well-being. Women were sexually assaulted, raped, abducted, killed; their bodies were mutilated, religious tattoos were inscribed on their bodies and, in many cases, even the breasts of women were cut off. They were forced to parade naked in public places. In the name of religion and to show its supremacy, the body of woman was targeted. The female body became the communal as well as the national subject. It cannot be denied, that at the macro level, women are facing the same atrocities across the globe in war-time/ crisis situations. Thus, Goldstein's statement *War is gendered* (2001) holds very true in the present-day world. When the attempt was made to understand these women in totality, some questions and issues remained in the minds (i) in the battle between land (state) and rule (governance), the body of the woman is subjected to all atrocities to show power (ii) in patriarchal set-ups, women and their chastity is considered to be the pride and honour of the family but in contradiction, in war and conflict situations, violation of her 'chastity' becomes a powerful tool to show victory over the rival community (iii) woman as an Individual and woman as a category had been neglected and rejected in the entire process of partition/ conflict.

Ambivalent gestures were noticed from interviewees: some shared the memories of their people, places and belongings. It can be concluded here that women experienced partition contrastingly, which is full of pain, trauma and sufferings. This study is an 'unveiling of layers' in a real sense because many survivors admitted that sharing their experiences was a first journey of its own kind. It helped them to vent out those feelings and emotions, which had remained buried deep in their minds. This also helped them to relieve the burden they had been carrying with them for decades. This disclosure worked as a catharsis for many of them though, for most of them, reliving the unpleasant memories of the past, posed a lot of stress.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The fact cannot be denied that there are not many survivors left who have witnessed partition (1947). Future researchers, interested in this area, will have to make extra efforts to approach these survivors and record their stories. Due to lack of time the research team was unable to see the impact of partition in other regions except north but it is also true that partition affected every one irrespective of their caste, class, region and religion.

Though this piece of research tried to come out of the notion that partition (1947) was between the Hindus and the Muslims and tried to catch survivors from other religion as well as other regions to give a holistic picture but this is also evident that very less work has been done on Anglo-Indians and the British settled in India during that time.

Again, due to limitation of time, the academic researchers were not able to talk to a single British woman which would have given an altogether different perspective of the feeling of the ruling community during those days. There are families who stayed back in India despite the end of British Raj; their account would definitely have contributed to enrich the data of partition and to develop a divergent outlook as well.

The marginalized category, i.e. woman, becomes doubly marginalized and vulnerable if it belongs to the lower socio-cultural and economical stratum. They had never been part of the masses. Their silence also needs a voice and that voice should be included in the mainstream history of partition.

When it comes to partition history, academia has always looked upon the written documents and literature. It is thought to be the most reliable and authentic data. That is true in a sense but the oral histories and narratives cannot be ignored. This form of qualitative data collection is not acknowledged substantially and supported by researchers. Especially in the context of partition, oral literature of collective voices is very important and can work significantly to explain that context.

Pandey (1994) has pointed out *the need for inclusion of a variety of voices, some of which could be construed as offering contradictory perspectives*. There is an urgent need to collect these unheard voices, otherwise, after a few years even if people want to hear them, they would not be able to do so. Research interventions should be done to collect these voices so that the partition history could also have a voice of women.

Narrative interviewing is a very effective method for qualitative research. There is no doubt that the generation, who had/have suffered and survived partition, is disappearing. The State should provide funding and other means to future researches if they wish to work on this topic. Soon there would probably be no survivors to talk to. Hence, there is need for the State to expedite matters to facilitate quality research work on this. In the present context, across the globe, at the macro level, wars are raging and women are being affected as a result of that. The academia needs to focus attention on this issue to look at women in totality. The present study is an attempt to see women in the context of partition of India (1947) at the micro level. In situations of war and conflict, women experience the event/s differently. So, women as a category, their perspectives, needs to be paid attention to by the State for policy formulation for their resettlement and rehabilitation.

When there is talk of India-Pakistan partition, the focus has always been on the Northern region. There were many women, affected by violence during partition, who resettled or migrated to the far-off, remote areas post partition. Researchers need to go to those far-off areas to talk to

those to get accounts of their ‘lived experiences and unheard voices.’ It is all the more important to capture those faded, ‘missing’ and ‘silent voices’ to prevent the notion that “missing voices” are nothing but ‘missing history.’

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