

Partition And Violence Against Women: A Study Of Rajinder Singh Bedi's Short Story Lajwanti

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Introduction:

Partition of colonial India in 1947 led to the formation of two nations, India and Pakistan. At the time of its independence from almost two centuries of British rule was a deeply violent and gendered experience. Women were subjected to horrific forms of sexual violence during partition, which question the positions of women in the patriarchal society. Moreover, the victimization of women of the "other community" (Butalia 203) was not only the kind of violence women faced. Besides, no one even hesitated in condemning "the abduction and rape of women, the physical mutilation of their bodies, the tattooing of their sexual organs with symbols of the other religion" (Butalia 204) to name a few of the atrocities women had gone through during partition. However, communities are not willing to speak about the fact that many women were killed by their relatives to "save their honor" (Menon and Bhasin 31); and also many committed suicide for the same. Again to protect children and women from forced conversion, many male members were "martyred" (Menon and Bhasin 64). There were also women who had escaped martyrdom and honourable death by their own family but these issues are even less discussed. The state, too, as the history of partition shows, duplicates the violence of fixing the value of a woman in terms of her sexuality and to treat merely as a currency in an honour economy.

This paper aims to examine the history, the structure of the category of honour itself as it is tied to the patriarchal notions of female sexual purity and chastity. The lines between choice and coercion are very difficult to draw in this context because nowhere in the discourse on partition, such incidents of honourable deaths and martyrdom count as violent incidents.

Keywords: Partition, Violence and Women, Honour, Purity and Chastity of Women.

Objectives:

To understand the partition violence in general we will have to take into account the large scale violence that has been inflicted upon women during that period. Though there were many significant differences between the nature of violence that has taken place in the eastern and the western regions but one thing that has been in common is that women of all ages have become targets of communal violence. Moreover, partition has played a very important role in determining women's relationships to their families, to their communities and to the nation. This paper aims to surface these problems and also how this affects personal life of Lajwanti, Sunder Lal's wife in Rajinder Singh Bedi's short story Lajwanti.

Methodology:

Partition gives us a fair chance for the critical analysis into the nature and structures of gender relationships. Thus it paves the way for the feminist analysis to have a better understanding of the event itself and also issues related to partition. A Post Colonial feminist perspective has been taken in this paper to deal with Bedi's portrayal of women characters against the backdrop of trouble-torn lives in post-independent India.

Analysis:

Woman becomes a symbol of nation, be it a wife, a mother or a goddess is a perpetual metaphor throughout the ages. In the history of partition and communal violence, female bodies become the specific site of violence. Rajinder Singh Bedi's short story, *Lajwanti* is originally written in Urdu, in 1951, depicts the complex layering of violence during the time of partition. It portrays the historical imagination of woman in the context of nation formation as well as a woman's life in normal times and in the time of a political catastrophe. It shows the vicinity of violence in both domestic space and the political space of nation-making and extreme forms of gender violence that partition brings forth and abduction is one of them. Abduction as a gendered violence weaves manifold implications where women are ethicized, raced and then relegated to the status of an object of desire.

Bedi's *Lajwanti* is a short story set in colonial India. *Lajwanti*, a young girl who got married to Sunder Lal. After marriage, Sunder Lal, "never spared any effort in treating his own *Lajwanti* as badly as possible and beating her on the flimsiest pretext, taking exception to the way she got up, the way she sat down, the way she cooked food – anything and everything" (Bedi 15). Nevertheless, during partition, when *Lajwanti* was abducted, Sunder Lal was inconsolable. He became the secretary of the group to rehabilitate the abducted women and worked with zeal. Then one day, *Lajwanti* was spotted in the Wagah Border. Unlike "the husbands, parents, or siblings who refused even to recognise" (Bedi 18) the recovered women or those who raised voices that they "were not about to take back . . . Muslim leftovers!" (Bedi 26), true to his word and deed, he went and brought her back. After her return, however, there was a remarkable change in his treatment of her. From this point onwards he "no longer called her *Laju* but *Devi*" (Bedi 27). He stopped beating her and treated her as befitting a *devi*, a goddess. His *devi*, however, was not allowed to speak of her trauma, no matter how much "she felt overwhelmed with desire to tell him all, holding back nothing" (Bedi 28). While he assured her she was not to be "blamed for what has happened. Society is at fault for its lack of respect for goddesses like" (Bedi 28) her, he also "deftly avoided listening to her" (Bedi 27). And therefore, "*Lajwanti* could not get it all out" (Bedi 28).

Lajwanti shows the complex contiguity, even overlap, between the violence that frames women's lives in ordinary times, in perfectly banal household arrangements, and violence that erupts in a political upheaval, especially that created as the violence of nation marking and nation-making. It is the everyday world that lends logic to the domestic battery of women; it is also the everyday world that provides the ready availability of logic, expressible in easy everyday speech, which renders recovered women as leftovers. It can be seen how the abduction of women becomes logical in the formation of a nation. The narrative is styled in such a way that the household story of *Lajwanti*'s abduction and recovery mirrors inverting as a mirror would depict the patriarchal logic of turning woman as goddess to woman as victim.

The story ends on an ominous note with two statements on Lajwanti: Lajwanti “withdrew into herself and stared at her body for the longest time, a body which, after partition of the country, was no longer hers, but that of a goddess” (Bedi 27). And secondly: she was filled with “a nagging doubt, a misgiving,” which turned into a “chilling finality. And not because Sunder Lal had mistreating her, but because he had started treating her with exceeding gentleness.” (Bedi 29).

Conclusion:

To conclude it can be said that the symbolization of nation as a woman or goddess that locates nation into flesh and blood female bodies which renders the female body of the other community and nation as a logical location for abduction, rape and other forms of gender violence. The only way Sunder Lal can accept the abducted and recovered body of his wife back is by inverting the logic of this victimization to re-turn her body to that of a goddess. The violence the female body went through in its transition from the abducted women to the goddess is thus forcibly erased. It is, therefore, is of critical importance that Lajwanti is not allowed to speak of her trauma. This process of goddess-making is also, however, historically imbricated with that of nation-making, and Lajwanti feels the violence that underwrites her becoming a goddess. That is why she is full of misgiving even though Sunder Lal stops beating her; the new gentle treatment from her husband she receives upon return is unbearably violent to her than the she was used to earlier. This story, therefore, shows how an analysis of the woman of and in partition makes visible the violence of symbol-making, central to cultural nationalism, and provides us with an immanent critique of this process.

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