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Indian English Partition Literature and Women: Re-reading *A Reading of Violence in Partition Stories from Bengal*

**Abstract**

History has often narrated itself into dynamics of mainstreamed variables. The reframing of the marginalized narratives often goes veiled when we fail to critically perceive the voice(s) suppressed under the violent mnemonic horizons of body and identities, within a political framework. Both in 1905 and 1947, the trajectories of partition was so tremendous that the narratives and tales no longer restricted itself to the armed forces and division of lands for power, but has shifted its paradigm to the subtle layers of sufferings or *tandava* it caused, which is related to what Suranjana Choudhury in her book *A Reading of Violence in Partition Stories from Bengal* (2020) regards, “Partition violence has been presented in the guise of a calamity, a *pralaya* or *tandava*” (Choudhury, 20). Drawing the concept of women Judith Butler in her work *Gender Trouble* (1990) stated that “Women are the sex which is not “one”. Within…a phallogocentric language, women constitute the unrepresentable…women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity” (Butler, 13). This clearly explains the political objectivity women are placed into, and the absent voice(s) they are eventually created as. This paper shall therefore, review how women’s voices have been marginalized in historical partition.

**Keywords**- Women, Bengal- History, Gender, Partition, Politics

**Introduction**

The History of Feminism has drawn three prominent waves which further included many fragmented definitions and political standpoint(s), like when initially the black women protested saying that their journey can be partially or no where similar to the journey or the struggles of ‘white-women’; hence, the world was presented with Black-Feminism. Feminism assisted in diagnosing the pathologies of culture which if described as a complex social apparatus dices the norms and regulations and is a stratified concept with hues that light up the disillusionment and dissent. Multiculturalism indeed has appreciated the difference in cultures but has also made avenues accessible to analyze it from queer perspectives. Over the first, second and third wave of Feminism, few crucial comprehensions of ‘deconstruction and post-structuralism’ enhanced the understanding of ‘identity and politics’ in simultaneity. As the plurality of Feminism was now utilized based on required privileges, and the advantage of a particular group of people resulted in overlooking the disadvantageous position of the remaining. It therefore becomes immensely necessary to adopt the lens of gender theory while studying and visualizing both literary and socio-political framework of any culture and important to apply the same in everyday life and not just limit to educational sphere, because then only we can sensitize people that gender is performance rather than essentialisation, and how within the mainstream literature application of Gender studies assists in understanding the ‘re-presentation’ of the marginalized identities, where presentation just remains an illusion. Politically, Gender is molded as a device to regulate and control bodies/identities, to conveniently maintain the “nude-makeup” like social structure of our society.

The term "history" is a colored political term whose complex embellishment can be deciphered when the term is decomposed as "his" "history". "His" is a pronoun used in place of masculine/boy nouns. Our society, strategically divided into binaries, believes in the binarized manipulation of "opposites" to derive and establish meaning in everything. In this regard, Gail Rubin's article notes that thinking about sexuality is "strategically" composed of dichotomy, one side being the positive, the good, the moral, the strong, the right, and the other aspects are negative, bad, immoral, weak, and contrary. error. If so, "he" is indeed the opposite of "she", a pronoun used instead of feminine/girl nouns. Story is a broad term that means a detailed description of a fable, an event, a person, a place, or an object, but it can also mean a work invented and "constructed" by thought, mind, or person. Here the association of the 'created work' with the masculine pronoun 'to be' leads, mathematically, to the creation of the fable of being, he, the man. So what about ``you'', ``woman'', and ``you''? Finding her story or her story in narrative/his story therefore requires the help of certain hermeneutic apparatus such as feminism and gender and queer theory, and ultimately leads to the unknown and perceived It helps you project a "story" that isn't there.

**Women in *A Reading of Violence in Partition Stories from Bengal***

Literary theory and its interestingly fluid usage in literary texts even till date has made the field of Literature intersectional, reflective, interpretative and hence a spectrum, a sequence of thoughts, a journey through which the reader are able to make the ‘illusive’ world associated with reality. Gender and sexuality are the two more complex terms, culturally constructed and ambiguously related, in the spectrum of feminism which considers "sex" an operational term to theorize its perspectives on cultural deconstruction. In accordance to Stevie Jackson and Jackie Jones article- *Contemporary Feminist Theory*, which can be related here, states that, “The concepts of gender and sexuality as a highly ambiguous term, as a point of reference” (Jackson, 1998, 131)*.* Helene Cixous notes in “Laugh of Medusa” that men and women, as identities and bodies, enter the symbolic order during a different way and therefore the subject position hospitable either sex is different. Cixious’s understanding that the centre of the symbolic order is ‘phallus’ and every-body surrounding it stands within the periphery making women (without intersectionality), the victim of this phallocentric society. To thin, ‘gender and sexuality’ as an inherently, unquestionable connection, then it only results in constructive understanding that henceforth becomes an oppressive tool of marginalization, that keeps getting filtered as per geo-locations; the dichotomy of ‘penis/vagina’ over years has linked itself to male/female understanding of bodies. The complexities created on and around ‘a body’ get an immediate deconstruction when Judith Butler said in her book Gender Trouble [1990], ‘body is just a word’, and that it is strategically used under artificial rules for the convenience of ‘power’ to work, which in turn has become a “norm” to attach one’s sexuality with their Gender and establish that as “naturally built”.

During the partition of Bengal, the lives of women were horrendous. Their mnemonic struggles were never penned down within the main historical framework. Surajana Choudhury states how the body and identity of women suffered multiple subjugation(s). In her book, Choudhury narrates diverse modes of partition of Bengal stories and also depicts how selection of such stories has been done by the mainstream history and their consequences. This book has presented immense traumatic discourse of identities which went through the skirmish of sufferings both mnemonic and physical, where the lanes of revisiting were painful enough. The channel of violence not only limited to the politics of victimization rather was also piped towards the self as Choudhury writes-

Violence is tantamount to one of the clearest projections of Partition. Its dynamics—the nature of violence, its repercussions on society and the individual, and the forms of its socio-cultural and political insertion—are invariably imbued with the aesthetic sensibility of its writers. The event’s singularly violent character makes it a highly controversial and inflamed domain of research. Beyond the murder and pillage of others, it also involved enormous violence directed towards the self (Choudhury, 14).

# The dynamics of violence on women left silent impact and marks on the deduced belief that violence is a natural phenomenon wherein the automaticity of emotions gets expressed. The social structure in its phallogocentric discourse has removed the victimization of women as a part of mainstream histories when dominant dialogues of ‘freedom’ get counted. The fear of partition spears through the spiral channels of political hegemony and the controlled rule of a body. The issue of partition is concomitant to the concept of identity politics and community survivalcomplexly. This book has subjectively and objectively presented the dynamics of representing the historical parameters of partitioned lives and displacement, the socio-cultural impact of traumatic war and its violence on people in subtle yet political manner. This book in all its possibility has questioned the ability to qualify the violence of Bengal partition with all its complexities and tried analyzing the emotional lane of suffering within the structural analysis of violence. The bodies of women were haunted as a ground of revenge and pleasure. Women no longer remained the protective delicates but a victory to be won and smashed. The horrors of violence on women during Bengal partition had an intersectional lens of apprehensive analysis. The sense of race and an othered notion worked while oppressing women of their own to right to uphold their voices. The scholarly work on the historical presentation of women during Bengal partition is less and now only during the early twenties, is there certain availabilities. The commemoration and denegation of impurity was stamped and hanged on women throughout the Partition. But the traumatic suffering of women became silence; from being the victims of rape to commodities of migration they remain desolated in the history of Bengal partition as Himanshi Nagpal in her article “The Partition Of Bengal: Challenges Faced By Women And Migrants” writes-

The communal violence in the Bengal region started in October-November 1946 with the **Noakhali riots** and the women had to bear the brunt, becoming victims of rape, abduction, and forced conversion and marriage. Some women were also simply deserted later by their families on account of being pregnant as a result of rape or being ‘impure’(Nagpal, 5).

**Conclusion**

Bengal Partition is different from the partition history of Punjab and India as a whole, for it seemed like a world was lost. This cataclysmic issue went silent on many levels. Bengal partition received less attention in comparison to any western partitions taking place. Literature and scholars often emphasized on the data and statistics of the scenery as a whole rather than any particular re-focus. The dominating theme of Bengal’s partition was search for a safe shelter amidst the displacement and in an ambience of general violence. The partition of Bengal is both ironic and porous for its presence and violence of bodies and identities as Joyjit Ghosh and Mir Ahammad Ali states, “the Bengal border, as depicted in partition stories, is often huge as well as ‘impossibly long’. But there is an ironic dimension to the border as well: the border is porous and fragile” (Ghosh and Ali, 7). Thus, the stories of partition of Bengal held our fears of trauma and the complex sufferings of women ever remained silent in the mainstream historical depiction.

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