

The Psychological Condition of Women during Partition in Bhisham Sahni's Novel 'Tamas'

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The Partition of India and Pakistan was the most horrible event in the history of Asian continent in twentieth century. This inhumane event changed the life of innumerable people and many of them even lost their lives. The aftermath of the partition left the people into an era where there was chaos, anxiety, sorrow and devastation.

This paper makes an attempt to analyze the psychological condition of women sufferers during the partition. It can be said that the women and girls were the worst victims of partition. The women of all the communities involved in the partition faced the violence and molestation in its most brutal form. Abduction, rape, kidnapping, forced marriages, killing for honour, forced to live in the brothels were the things which became a common treatment for the women and girls of the respective communities. The men folk of the opposite communities revenged the partition by violating, killing and mutilating the women of the other community. Bhishma Sahni has tried to portray the real situation of women of women by narrating their pain from his actual memories of partition.

The condition of women in India has gone through many changes over the past few years. According to the studies women have enjoyed equal status and rights as men during the early Vedic period. Later on the status of women began to decline with the Islamic invasion and later on with the spread of Christianity. The practice like Sati, Jauhar and Devdasi came into existence, however they are banned in the modern India. During the British rule many reformers such as Rammohan Roy, Ishwarchand Vidyasagar etc. fought for the upliftment of women. Later on women played an important role in India's freedom struggle.

In India women have been traditionally portrayed in literature as gentle polite, submissive, warm and soft hearted. The scenario in which they are kept is that they were put into the subordination to the male members of the society. They were in many places,

confined to the family, and were also divided the equal rights to men. Later on in the initial period of the twentieth century, there were changes observed in the condition of women. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jyotiba Phule and Mahatma Gandhi gave their contribution in the upliftment of women's condition in India. The spread of women education gave way to the self confidence, economic independence and respect for themselves. Women also tried to find out the reason that why were they marginalized, exploited and disrespected by the men till now. The spread of awareness about feminism through literature and other means made them strong and they started to take part in the development of society with full conviction. So many renowned authors presented the female characters with a change of attitude fighting against the patriarchal society and emerging out from the darkness. Women finally started to oppose the role they had been enforced to carry on without their consent, they refused to be subordinated.

In the novel Tamas, Sahni expresses the fear of belongingness through his character Banto. Banto is Harnam Singh's wife. Harnam Singh and Banto decides to leave their home, village and their shop as their friend Karim Khan warns them that there is a fear of marauders attacking. Banto was in a great confusion that what she should pick up before leaving her house and what leave behind.

As soon as they come out of their house the entire place became alien to them. The marauders looted their shop along with house and burnt them. In this condition they move forward and knock at the door of Rajo who helps the couple and provides them shelter until they leave safely. It is the woman only who feels the pain of the ailing couple. She could realize what it takes to make a building, the home and then see it burning in front of own self. The other woman Rajo who acts as a life savour for the couple also realizes their pain and distress. She even without the consent of her husband and son tries to save them and allows them to hide in her house. She says to Harnam Singh and his wife that "you have knocked my door with some hope and expectation in your heart and so I shall answer the menfolk of my family myself" (Sahni Bhisham, Tamas, 258).

Rajo values humanity and compassion over the religious barriers. She proves that a woman is above than the man made religious fanaticism. Rajo is well aware with the pain of the couple who have lost their home, belongings and the place where they had spent many years.

“ Partition was not the division of nations but of communities , values, memories and dreams. It is a phase in history when Hindu won, Muslim won , political stalwarts, but humanity lost.”

But the women ironically didn't lose their selfless nature, attitude of caring for humanity, even during this chaos. Another woman character presented in the novel having infinite patience, is Nathu's wife, she is the woman who never makes any demand, and is always ready to relieve her husband from his mental sufferings. She is the woman who felt contented in whatever little she had. A general quality which a woman possesses was in her too i.e. inner balance and not to demand things which are beyond their reach. She always used to be cheerful and wanted her husband to be happy. Her world was limited to her husband and supported him in every phase of life without any expectation.

In another incidence Sahni represents the psychology of a woman Jasbir Kaur during the partition violence. She had an intense devotional frame of mind, so everyone in her village used to call her 'the daughter of the Gurus'. She was brave, courageous and dedicated towards her duties. She was caught in a situation where the Turks or the Muslim fanatics advanced towards their village , and so in order to save themselves all the villagers along with the women and children gathered in the Gurudwara.

“Inside the Gurudwara, a large no of women and children sat huddled against the wall to the left. In the rising crescendo of shouting and shrieking, all the women had gathered at one place. The face of Jasbir Kaur was flushed as though she was in a state of frenzy. Her hand was on the handle of the Kirpan, holding it tightly.”(Sahni Bhisham, Tamas, 291)

As soon as the news comes that the Turks are near to the Gurudwara, the women folk comes out like the martyrs in a row. Their head was Jasbir Kaur. Bare footed and with flushed faces the women followed Jasbir. Few of them had their babies in their arms and many of them were holding the hands of their children and were taking them along. It was a pathetic moment when no one knew where they are moving towards. All of a sudden Jasbir Kaur chanted the name of Wahe Guru and jumped into the well. And then the rest of the women also jumped into the well along with their children. Surprisingly, as the Turks entered into the Gurudwara not a single woman was left alive.

In the next incidence of the novel Prakasho the daughter of a Brahmin couple had been kidnapped by a Muslim Tonga driver of the same village. Now her parents too didn't want

her back as her mother says that, “ of what use is she coming back to us? They must have already put the forbidden things into her mouth.”(Sahni Bhasham,Tamas, 330)

On the part of Prakasho , she too knew that her parents will not be able to rescue her against Allah Rakha. As Allah Rakha had his eyes on Prakasho for a long time but now these partition riots gave him a chance to kidnap her. However he performed the Nikah rites with Prakasho the next day. Slowly by the time she also accepts Allah Rakha as her husband may be because she was not left with any other option . She felt that she has entered into a new phase of life and accepts it with some fear , sorrow and hope for a better future .During partition the women were forced to take decisions as their choice didn't mean anything to the menfolk either from the same or from the opposite community. Although all the women were not this much lucky as Prakasho. Because as we know many women were abducted ,raped, mutilated, killed brutally, made to parade naked in the market place and many more forms of violence which were possible had been forced on them.

It is installed in the psychology of women folk since their childhood that they are not that strong as men so they need protection and support of men. If there was any miss happening kind of thing or crimes against them done by the men, then it was felt better to keep quiet and not to raise even a word against the culprit because he is strong and mostly because he is a man and he won't be affected even if there is any issue involving him. But for women it will put a mark on her honour. Women didn't have any personal identity; they used to be recognized in relation to their husband, father, brother. Awareness and empowerment of during Indian Independence was uncountable and almost negligible.

In this scenario when partition was forced on them, the women and girls became helpless. It is quite unbearable for any lady to her own people being killed in front of her and also to face molestation, abduction, rape; mutilation or we can say violence and humiliation in all its possible ways. They were also worried about their daughter's future. So many women and girls opted for suicide and killed even their kids along with them. In this way they wanted to escape from this situation, they were in, by ending their life.

Amongst everyone specially the female members of the society had a feeling of disappointment, hopelessness, chaos, pessimistic approach towards life. Like Jasbir Kaur in Tamas all other women were also horrified to think about the situation that, if in any case they were kidnapped or abducted by the rioters, suicide was the easiest way to avoid the terrible situation.

Jasbir Kaur along with the other women who jumped into the well , Prakasho, Rajo, Banto are the women who represent the psychology of all other women who suffered the havoc of partition. Women should be praised for their contribution and participation in Independence movement. And today also all the women should feel proud on the whole womanhood because it is the woman who has been marginalized, killed, molested, humiliated in many ways and everywhere on this earth but above all they tried to overcome these adverse situations made by the society to bound the women into shackles and establish themselves as an independent identity. But still there is a lot more to be done for the welfare of womankind and girls not only in our country but in the whole world. And this is possible only when all of us will unite and participate in all the spheres of life and society as well.

Works Cited

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3. Sahni's, Bhisham. *Tamas*. New Delhi : Penguin Books, 2001. 291. Print 4. *Ibid*. 330