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Department : English

Day : SATURDAY  
Date : 2020/04/02

Subject : GE 6: Women and Empowerment in Contemporary India  
Class : B. A (H), Second Semester  
Time- 11:45 a.m.-12:45 a.m.

## GENDER AND PARTITION

Gauri Mishra

**“The Partition forced thousands of women to lead fractured lives.”  
(Page 178)**

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“Partition was not just an event in the past but continues to impact the politics of the two nations even today... Whatever the political leaders hoped to bring about by effecting the Partition failed to happen and the result was the ultimate traumatic division resulting in communal violence and civil war.” (Page 172, second paragraph)

### 1. HOW THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A WOMAN RELATED TO PARTITION HISTORY?

#### a. The Concept of ‘Pavitrata’ (Physical and mental chastity)

i. It was rooted in orthodox Hindu belief, which evolved over time influencing the very core of the community and transformed into a **principal ideology for women**.

ii. The **honor of men** came to depend upon the **chastity of their women**.

iii. A **woman had to guarded** consecutively by her father, husband and son throughout her life.

iv. The **19<sup>th</sup> century** saw some social reform movements like **abolishment of Sati and child marriage**. **Legalization of widow remarriage** and a sincere effort was put into **educating women**.

v. These movements **did not question** the conventional stereotypes of women, the ideology of gender and patriarchy. **Even the relatively new sphere being granted to women confined her to the role of mother and wife**, equipped with some education and permitted some amount of social interaction outside her home.

**EXAMPLE:** [https://books.google.co.in/books?id=FHxJDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT5&lpg=PT5&dq=bhadra+mahila+criticism&source=bl&ots=tbPKjuwwfC&sig=ACfU3U3L4tLKlippZk7NjE\\_hob7sPudyDw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjuy-7IlpTpAhXfzjgGHb2oAIMQ6AEwAnoECACQAQ#v=onepage&q=bhadra%20mahila%20criticism&f=false](https://books.google.co.in/books?id=FHxJDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT5&lpg=PT5&dq=bhadra+mahila+criticism&source=bl&ots=tbPKjuwwfC&sig=ACfU3U3L4tLKlippZk7NjE_hob7sPudyDw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjuy-7IlpTpAhXfzjgGHb2oAIMQ6AEwAnoECACQAQ#v=onepage&q=bhadra%20mahila%20criticism&f=false)

The link above is for ‘The defining moments in Bengal 1920-47’. Read the third chapter on **Bhadra Mahila**. It will provide you with a better insight to the point made above.

- b. Rape of a woman was akin to the rape of the community to which she belonged.
- c. Women were represented as ‘territorial boundaries’ of a nation and such a thought has deep roots in Patriarchy.

“The fiction writer uses his work to relate personal experiences and memories, filling in gaps left by history and historiography. Memories and reminiscences help to bring out the personal and emotional element of the Partition trauma, something which history cannot accomplish due to its so called objectivity.” (Page 174, Fourth paragraph)

## 2. EXAMINING PARTITION: FICTION, NARRATIVES AND CINEMA.

- a. The work considered foregrounds the relationship between gender and nationalism and show how feminism engages with the ideology of nation.
- b. The fiction focuses on the emotional aspect of the trauma of the Partition. It provides with a testimony as valid as any historical account.
- c. These creative writers magnify the horrors of the partition by focusing on the plight of the migrants, the divided families in anguish, the trauma of the raped and abducted women and the horrific train journeys where no one survived to tell the tale.
- d. The literature of the partition brings out the pain of displacement and shows that this pain is universal.
- e. **The alternative history of Partition.**

f. **Partition Cinema** too beautifully portrays the conflict and history of that period.

***The Other Side of Silence (1998)***, Urvashi Butalia

### **IT DEALS WITH**

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- a. The oral narratives of the Partition victims and what they suffered during the period.
- b. Relationship between gender and nationalism and puts before us an idea of how feminism engages with the ideology of the nation.
- c. **A history based on-** memoirs, interviews and women's experiences.

*At a seminar in New Delhi, in 1994, Urvashi Butalia pointed out that "the human history of Partition has a lesser status than the political history"*

- d. The 1984 riots triggered her decision to write the book which reflects on the sheer mindlessness of violence and the horror it accompanies.
- e. **It was not easy to amass all the oral narratives.** As women were not allowed to speak because either a male member would answer in her place. *"According to Butalia, she had to listen for nuances and the half-said sentences to get what the women were telling her. Their silence spoke more than words."*
- f. Women's identities continued to be defined in terms of their religious communities, they were denied agency in every possible way.
- g. Butalia refers to the **search committees** set up by the two newly formed state.

***Ice Candy Man (1988)***, Bapsi Sidwa

### **DEPICTS THE:**

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- a. Hardening of communal attitude using the plight faced by the Parsi community.
- b. The characters represent a symbol, for example 'Ayah'-'Nation' and her 'Suitors'-'Marauders'.
- c. Amrita Pritam's novel ***Pinjar*** also deals with this image of a woman representing the 'nation'.
- d. Bladev Singh's Punjabi story, '*Jaandi vaar Diyaan Haakaan*' (Her Last Cries, translated by Tara Sekhri) is another fine example of similar narrative.

**MISCELLANEOUS**

- a. As **Ritu Menon** puts it “‘Belonging’ for women is also- and uniquely- linked to sexuality, honor, chastity; family, community and country must agree on both their acceptability and legitimacy, and their membership within the fold.”
- b. According to the patriarchal institution a woman should be exalted for her ‘self-sacrifice’.
- c. **Manto’s ‘Khol Do’**, is a beautiful piece of irony on how the powerful institutions like the family, community and the patriarchal nation state came to determine the fate of women at an individual and collective level.

### PARTITION CINEMA (After 1971)

- a. According to Shyam Benegal, a lot of beautiful cinema belong to a period during and after 1971.
- b. **Garam Hawa (1973)** based on Ismat Chughtai’s story represents the partition through a middle class Muslim family in Agra.
- c. Two films, **Khamosh Pani** by Sabiha Samar and **Pinjar** by Chandra Prakash Dwivedi, treat a subaltern subject from a relatively new perspective. They are based on stories of women raped and abducted who had to suffer in a world following patriarchal code of honour.

### CONCLUSION

This sensitive collation of memories, both personal and collective, opens a window into an aspect of the Partition which has not been highlighted enough by the so-called objective histories of partition.