

Women as Victims in Partition Fiction: A Study of the Novel *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*

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Abstract:

Woman victimization is one of the evils confronting women all over the world this evil is further compounded if they are placed in unstable political societies or events. Women being extremely vulnerable are easy targets of any form of oppression, humiliation, deprivation and discrimination. Partition literature explores the sexual trauma, sufferings and painful experiences of women during and after the Partition. This in many ways substantiates the fact that inequality of sexes is neither a biological fact nor a divine mandate but a cultural construct.

The paper aims to discuss the victimization of women and their traumatic experience through the perspective of a female writer namely Anita Rau Badami in her novel *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* a novel on the theme of the Partition of India and Pakistan. The Paper brings to light how the novelist has used her protagonists to explore a 'female consciousness and value system', an aspect which is conspicuously missing in the Partition fiction of the male writers. The novel substantiates how women's writings are produced from within women's experience or from their sub-conscious. The novelist has been influential in drawing attention to the differential history of women's experiences during the Partition. The paper emphasizes how narrating the stories of women characters who experienced the migration and violence, a women novelist contains the potential to reveal the complex dispossessions which is both psychic and material. The trauma, anguish, pain and ambivalence that mark the experience of Partition have been made evident and visible.

Key Words: Partition, women, victims, trauma, feminism

Introduction:

The theory that a woman's culture provides the specificity and difference to a woman's writing seems more convincing in the context of the works produced by female novelists on the theme of Partition of India and Pakistan. Culture incorporates ideas about women's body, language, and psyche and interprets them in relation to the social contexts and the cultural environment in which they occur. Women's culture forms a collective whole, an experience that binds not only women writers but also women readers to each other over time and space. Women writings reflect women's real words and real experiences.

According to Virginia Woolf, "women write differently not because they are different psychologically from men but because their social experiences are different. Her attempts to write about the experiences of women are conscious and aimed at discovering linguistic ways of describing the ways of life".¹

*"Many women writers seem to have realized the need for a separate literature that can speak for the feminine issues and experiences which have been either misunderstood or distorted by their male counterparts."*²

*"A woman's writing is always feminine; it cannot help being feminine; at its best it is most feminine; the only difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine."*³

Bapsi Sidhwa makes an interesting observation about a woman being a marginalized being: "Colonialism humiliated the men and they in turn, humiliated the women. So whenever the condition of society is weak or humbled, women suffer the most. It has given men the only vent for their frustrations. And that pattern continues with expectations of subservience from the women."⁴

One exceptionally powerful example of such work discussed in this paper is the novel *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006), by Anita Rau Badami. The novel is an imaginative response to the traumatic events of the Partition, portraying the great impact of the external events on the human psyche.

Anita Rau Badami is a Montreal based, 45 year old woman, who has received high acclaim for this most ambitious and powerful work. She is also the proud recipient of the Marian Engel Award for a woman writer in mid-career.

Badami's has been greatly influenced by Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Charles Dickens for the way these masters handle history, without allowing it to take over the story.

*"My memory keeps getting in the way of your history," reads the epigraph to the novel, and a traumatic piece of lived history was the catalyst for *Nightbird*. "It was autumn of 1984," Badami recalls, "just after Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards. I'd been married two weeks. My husband and I were travelling back to Delhi after our honeymoon. From our bus window I saw a Sikh man set on fire, then thrown over a bridge."⁵*

The traumatic incident is the seed for what became *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* However, Badami didn't begin work on the novel until 1995, when the revenge killings of innocent Sikhs became linked in her mind with the Air India disaster of 1985. Her biggest challenge in writing *Nightbird*, Badami says, was "keeping the history in backdrop, not letting it eat up the story. I wanted to humanize the facts, to give life and shape to the dry bones of history and to the randomness of reality."⁶

She realizes her objective by connecting the lives of three women whose destinies are intertwined by coincidence and the succession of violence. The novel encompasses a period of over half a century, from the years leading up to the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 to the explosion of the Air India flight in 1985. The sequence of events moves between the personal and political effortlessly and the characters of three woman protagonists are naturally integrated to the drama and turmoil generated by the Partition of India. Her empathetic understanding of the expatriate world is certainly exceptional..

The Exposé of Women Victimization in the Novel:

Can You Hear the Nightbird call? Is the story of three women: Sharanjeet Kaur better known as Bibiji in Vancouver, Leela Bhat, her neighbour from Bangalore and Nimmo, Bibiji's niece, who is orphaned by the devastation that engulfed India after the Partition, is now rebuilding her life in Delhi. The lives of all the three are once again shattered as the conflicts of the past and the present re-emerge and devastate. The Nightbird is a bird, whose songs are supposedly a portent of ill-luck.

Sharanjeet Kaur, the most brash and beautiful of the three grows up poor and fatherless in Pinjaur, a small village in West Punjab. Her father, before he disappears, when she was only six, "infects" her mind with the dreams of Canada, a golden promised land where magic happens because the poor return rich, not only with money but also with greater wealth of knowledge. She inherits her father's dreams of this strange land, and to realize her dreams of Canada, she steals the heart of her sister Kunwar's fiancé, and goes with him to Vancouver. The couple flourishes in Vancouver by running the restaurant The Delhi Junction Café which becomes the hub of the vibrant "desi" community. Indians and Pakistanis flock to the same tables, discussing their lives and more importantly their "homes" way back in their respective motherlands. The

couple, Sharanjeet now addressed Bibiji and her husband, fondly called Pa-ji, becomes the pillars of the Sikh community and to many Indian immigrants arriving in Canada subsequently. Bibiji is often haunted by the wrong that she did to her sister, Kunwar, for stealing her fate. She feels that her failure in bearing any child is perhaps the punishment she has received for that sin. Subsequently she is haunted by the disappearance of her sister during the Partition.

Once settled in Vancouver, Bibiji meets the pale-eyed Leela, her new neighbour. Born and bred in Bangalore, with a German mother and an Indian father, Leela struggles with the stigma of being “a half-and-half”, a feeling that she never overcomes within her. This also underlines the theme of in-between’s in the novel. On the way to the airport (from India to Canada) a young taxi driver, (upon knowing that she is leaving for Canada) hands Leela a slip of paper with his name and address. His wife Nimmo has an aunt in Vancouver. Coincidentally, it turns out to be Bibiji, who is Nimmo’s (daughter of her lost sister Kunwar) aunt.

This is the converging point of the lives of the three women. Bibiji and Nimmo get in touch with each other first through letters and later Bibiji flies to Delhi to meet her. She even helps the family with the financial aid they require to clear the debts and eventually adopts Nimmo’s elder son and takes him to Canada with the promise of giving him a life style and education that the couple can never afford.

Starting with the Partition of India, the story follows with the sequences and events of the changing Indian political scenario with the two wars with Pakistan, separation of Bangladesh, fight over Kashmir, death of Nehru, Indira Gandhi taking up the reigns of the country as India’s first woman Prime Minister, the demand for Khalistan, Indira’s policies with regard to the Sikh community, the government’s attack on the Golden Temple in the name of “Operation Blue Star”, the culmination of the Sikh’s bitterness leading to the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, followed by the massacre of the Sikhs in the country.

The time to time effects of these events in India have their strong bearing on the lives and behaviour of the Indians and Pakistanis living in Canada, as we can see from the changing atmosphere and environment at the ‘Delhi Junction Café’ and also from an attack on Pa-ji. “In 1965, when war broke out between India and Pakistan, the battle came to the Delhi Junction as well. The seating maps altered, and Hafeez and Alibhai moved defensively over to a separate table across the room from the Indian group. As the war across the world went on and casualties mounted on both sides, conversation between the two factions in The Delhi Junction ceased altogether...” (p.67)⁷

In this sense one can assert that 1947 alone was not the year of the Partition. It was in fact only the beginning of the Partition in India. All the events and incidents of communal hatred and violence and terrorism that India has been witnessing since 1947, can be traced to the Partition of

India. Hence Partition cannot be viewed as a single event of 1947 but as one which has cast its sinister shadow on the future as well.

The novel reaches a devastating culmination when the external political disturbances and conflicts erupt and destroy the lives of these three women. The army is ordered into the Golden Temple, the holiest of Sikh's shrine, under the Prime Ministership of Mrs. Gandhi. The resulting destruction leads to the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards, which in turn triggers revenge killings of innocent Sikhs. Less than a year later, Air India Flight 182, en route from Canada to India, explodes off the coast of Ireland, killing all 329 people on board. Two Canadian Sikhs were charged with sabotage.

The News Headline in *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), March 16, 2005 read: "Vancouver: In a stunning conclusion to a case that spanned 20 years, two Canadians were not guilty on first-degree murder charges in the bombing of Air-India Flight 182 that killed 329 people"---

"New Delhi: More than two decades later, the Justice Nanavati Commission report has revealed that only one police official... was convicted in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in which more than 3,000 Sikhs were killed in Delhi alone.... Interestingly, cases against 14 police officials could not be proceeded with as "files were untraced". Besides these, in cases against two officers "no charge sheet was filed" due to lack of evidence. Five others were "acquitted". Against one "no evidence" was reported"---*The Tribune* (India), August 9, 2005.

This escalation of violence in India reverberates in the Indo-Canadian community, pushing all the three otherwise resilient protagonists to disaster. Pa-ji is shot dead at the Golden temple in an attack by the Army leaving Bibiji thoroughly confounded and shattered. Nimmo's husband, her son and daughter are all slaughtered in the violence transforming her into a living corpse and Leela Bhatt was one of the passengers on board of the ill-fated Air-India Flight 182, hoping to visit her home for the first time after 18 years since her arrival to Canada.

This is one novel where women are in the front and centre of the struggles, transforming hardship and pain into power. In Badami's experience, women never talk about getting back [home]. Instead they are focused on keeping their children safe, cooking their family's next meal, and picking up the pieces of their lives. She strongly believes that women are resilient by their very basic nature. The three protagonists in the novel are inspired by a collection of survivor's testimonies published by People's Union for Democratic Rights/ People's Union for Civil Liberties in 1984 about the impact of the Delhi riots. One experiences these events through the lives, thoughts and understandings of these characters who endure the trauma of devastation. This is what can be perfectly called as a novel of women victimization. The novels bring home the impact of political and communal violence with immediacy and power that newscast and history records cannot.

The novel that covers the times of turbulence from the Partition to the assassination of the late Prime Minister Mrs Gandhi stands as the strongest evidence and conformation to the argument that whatever may be the cause, whoever may be the perpetrators the fact remains that it is always the woman who is on the receiving end of violence.

The trauma and the ordeal of the victimization in case of these characters can be discussed individually as each one of them underwent the suffering in their own ways: either themselves succumbing to the violence physically or becoming psychological victims upon losing their loved ones.

Bibiji is the most vivacious, colourful and dominant figure in the story. The opening lines of the novel describe her thus, “years before she stole her sister Kanwar’s fate and sailed across the world from India to Canada, before she became Bibiji, she was Sharanjeet Kaur”. (p.3). She loathed the heat, the dust, the smallness of Panjaur and was convinced that “she was meant for better things”. (p.21)

Thirteen years later in Vancouver, “she was the respected wife of a respected man”. “Bibiji had become a handsome young woman of twenty nine.....and her cheeks were taut and pink with good eating and better livingher voice..had grown deep and resonant as a temple bell, ringing solemnly out of the generous spread of her body”.(p.40).

She remains in constant touch with Kanwar, (married and now with children) through letters. She remembers guiltily how envious she had been to know that her sister already with two children was with the third, while she was still barren. Thinking of her childless state, she was certain that it was “Ooper-Wallah’s punishment. She had stolen a life and she would not be allowed to give birth to another”. (p.45). Kanwar, also regularly mentions in her letters, the political situation in India and the apprehension and fear of the approaching Partition. Suddenly by July in 1947, the flow of letters stopped and Kanwar’s silence began to consume Bibiji. She anxiously listened to the BBC News on radio of the fighting between the Hindus and Sikhs on one side and Muslims on the other, along with the beatings and rapes and killings occurring daily. In the months that followed more stories of savagery sweeping Punjab and Bengal trickled steadily into Vancouver: entire villages had been burned to ground, women had been killed by their own men to preserve their honour, trains loaded with dead bodied came and went across the newly established border, ten million people lost their homes, families, communities and memories. But out of this tumult of information and rumour came not a whisper about Kanwar or her family. Despite her trials, she found no clue of her sister even by 1948. She promised to herself that one day she would find her sister and bring her family to safety to Vancouver.

It was during this time in 1967, that co-incidentally, through her neighbour Leela Bhat, Bibiji succeeds in locating her sister Kanwar’s daughter Nimmo, living in Delhi. She immediately flies

to Delhi to meet her niece and her family with husband Satpal and three children. Spending a considerable time with this family she returns to Vancouver with Nimmo's elder son, convincing them of his bright future in Canada.

Life for Bibi-ji moves steadily, with the upbringing of her adopted son and affects of the continually changing political situation in India. In spite of living far away in Vancouver the Indian community is not detached from the politics in India and in no way remain aloof or impassive by the events. They remain equally involved and absorbed as their counterparts in India.

It was in 1984, that Bibi-ji and Pa-ji take the uneventful journey to Amritsar to the Golden Temple. It was the time when "Sant Bhindranwale is holed up in the temple complex with his followers and the government is out to get him". (p.314). "Pa-ji had heard of the deeply conservative preacher named Bhindranwale, whose pungent diatribes against the government of India were earning him an ever growing following among the Sikhs. He had heard the stories that it was Indira Gandhi who had promoted Bhindranwale for political reasons and now he had fallen into disfavour with her. But he could not really believe that a village preacher, however charismatic, could have the power to create this kind of violence....." (p.315). Regrettably he also did not realize and believe that this violence will consume him as well, because Pa-ji becomes a fatal victim to the firing of the police and the Army in the premises of the "Harmandir Sahib".

Once back to Vancouver, Bibiji lost track of her life. The Delhi Junction was closed indefinitely. She was unable to use the bedroom she had shared with Pa-ji. "when she looked in the mirror now, she found that she had grown old. All these years she had seen herself through her husband's eyes—a beautiful woman who never aged. But he was no longer here to look at her, and she crumbled, an old woman alone." (p.336)

She heard other rumours, wispy and uncertain, that something was about to happen to avenge the invasion of the Golden temple and the killing of Sikhs in Delhi -" she felt as if the world that she had known for so long, the stable, safe world, had been blown apart, leaving only smoky puffs.." (p.375).

The epilogue of the novel dated June 1986, portrays Bibi-ji thus: "Bibiji stands before her dressing table which she has not touched since Pa-ji's death...and sees her mother staring accusingly at her "greedy girl, Sharanjeet kaur," Gurpreet says,...one day you will pay for all that you have stolen from others. You will pay...I have, Amma, whispers Bibiji. She had grabbed her sister's fate, and Fate had turned around and taken that sister away. Then she had taken Nimmo's son, and he had so warped her sense of right and wrong that she had sacrificed

her friend Leela to the Gods. Now Bibiji is an old woman living in a dead house....with neither husband nor friend nor child, only ghosts and guilt for company". (p.394-95).

Kanwar, Bibiji's "sturdy, loving, lost sister" (p.7) was the direct victim of the Partition violence. She was as "unassuming as her surroundings".(p.3) and "who never did anything to stir her mother's anger" (p.8). She silently accepts her fate by marrying a humble farmer in the near-by village and holding no grudge at all on her sister. She moved to her husband's village and had three children. While Sharan moved to Canada, Kanwar stayed behind in a land that would soon be split into two nations.

This is what she talks about the impending Partition, in her letters to Sharanjeet: "ever since it was announced that there will be a division.....there has been unrest everywhere.....Punjab will be broken into two pieces....I do not know which piece we will end up in...."(p.44). Again she writes later," last week there was a big fight between the Mussalmans and the Sikhs in the north-west....across our land hearts are filling with anger and hate....I too am becoming suspicious of every Mussulman in the village. Now I notice there are more of them than of us Sikhs. If there is a fight we will be outnumbered.....I have a bad feeling about this Partition business. I am afraid." (p.50).

All her suspicions and premonitions of the Partition come true as Kanwar falls prey to the spreading violence. This is how Kanwar is victimized as recollected by her daughter Nimmo, who was very young at the time and witnessed the whole ghastliness of her mother's death. These horrific memories haunt her throughout her life: "the morning had drifted by in silence, when Nimmo recalled it....there was a commotion at the far end of the mud lane....her mother came rushing inside the house and locked the door. She picked up Nimmo and lowered her gently into the large wooden bharoli of grain in the dark corner of the house....Nimmo heard fists pounding on their door....the sound of footsteps entering the house and insistent male voices. Her mother's voice grew higher and angrier. It altered and became pleading, and then abruptly she uttered a single scream, which turned into a sound like the one a stray dog had uttered when they found it dying in the gully behind their house. Then it ceased, that quivering animal whisper.....when her mother eventually opened the lid and lifted her out of the bin, Nimmo hardly recognized the dirty, bleeding woman who wept with a soundless, juddering agony.....still in the dark her mother pushed her into an inner room, drew the door shut..." never to emerge (p.154-56). "Time lost its shape and meaning as she sat hidden in the grain. She sucked on her fingers, consumed by a terrible thirstshe crouched there until painful cramps overtook her legs...she tried chewing a few grains, but they tasted like chalk and made her even more thirsty. To her shame she felt her bladder open and the warm liquid spread around her bottom... what was her mother doing on the other side? Nimmo had wondered beginning to panic". (p.156-156).

Nimmo found herself adopted by the Sikh couple who had rescued her in the kafeela. She was eighteen when she married Satpal. Mother of three children now, Nimmo found herself settled into an uneventful existence. Yet the chalky taste of fear that had clogged her throat since her mother had thrust her into the wheat bin remained with her even now, when she was a grown woman with a family of her own.

Nimmo, Bibiji's niece, daughter of her sister Kanwar, can be seen as a psychological victim of first the Partition as a child and an adult victim in the riots of 1982. She was orphaned in the Violence of 1947 and lives perpetually haunted by the dark memories of her mother being raped and then committing suicide. Sometimes when she heard water running at night, she was reminded of her mother's furious washing, and her nostrils would fill with the smell of the pale violet soap...her fear was monstrous, silent thing that often woke her, sweating and shaking, from troubled sleep. It made her suspicious of everyone, even neighbours.....how could she explain what it was like to have your life pulled out from under your feet, to wake up one day and find you have no family or home in the land your people had tilled for a hundred years?..... And as much as she tried, Nimmo could not rid herself of the memory of a pair of feet dangling above a dusty floor, their clean pink soles smelling delicately of lavender soap." (p.158-59). Ironically the past re-emerges during the riots of 1984 when she hides her daughter in the same way as her mother had hid her, but still fails to save her life.

Quite incidentally, Nimmo too like Bibiji had always been an ardent admirer of Mrs. Gandhi and always defended her whenever Satpal voiced his dissatisfaction of Mrs. Gandhi's political moves and motives. In 1971, when she won the general elections with a sweeping majority it was also the year of Bangladesh declaring itself independent, with millions of refugees from East Pakistan crossing over to India. The animosity that had been simmering between East and West Pakistan exploded into an all-out war.

"Indira Gandhi is ordering Pakistan to stop massacring its citizens," Satpal said. "Why is she poking her long nose into other's peoples' affairs?" (p.238-39). "She is doing the right thing, our Indira-ji," said Nimmo staunchly..... "I am beginning to think that you don't like her because she is a woman!....I like Indira ji, she is smart and she gives woman courage. If we have a daughter, I want her to grow up into an Indira Gandhi." "War must be good for your Madam Gandhi's image," he said. "But for people like you and me it is always bad." (p.239) Soon his fears, about the rumours of the war became a fact. The country was at war. People fearfully discussed what would be the third war with their neighbour in the twenty four years since Partition. But Nimmo loved Mrs. Gandhi for her stubborn strength.....and for the sense that she gave to women across the country that if she could survive so could they. Satpal says about Indira Gandhi, "people are getting there...she takes away our river water and gives it to Rajasthan, she cuts up Punjab and creates a Harayana for the Hindus, and now she is planning to give them Chandigarh as well. That city belongs to Punjab. First it was Partition and half our land disappeared....how

much more are we supposed to give away? Without Punjab this country would be starving, and look how we are treated---like step-children! Is it fair?" (p.220). This was a country of excesses, and "Nimmo was determined not to be a victim ever again." (p.225).

But the unrest and discontent among the Sikhs was gaining power like whirlwind enveloping this minority community from India to Vancouver. "The Sikhs have been betrayed... first by the British who stole Punjab...then by the Congress Brahmins, who gave the Mussalmans their Pakistan and Hindus their India but left the Sikhs to die like flies in between; then by Nehru, with the rose in his jacket, and his cunning words, who tore our hearts in half by making our Punjab a bi-lingual state. And now we have been cheated again by that Brahman's daughter who takes the wheat that we grow....think what we Sikhs have got in return for all this.....are we going to let the Brahman's daughter bleed us to death?.....what we Sikhs must do is press for separation....we demand that the government of India return our Punjab to us, whole and undivided....we demand Khalistan, a land for the Sikhs, the pure and the brave....a country of our own in return of all that has been taken from us in the past hundred years..."(p.252-53). Thus the policies of the Congress party and government create an ill-will in the Sikhs. When emergency was declared in 1975, it only added to the displeasure especially of the Sikhs: "its because of the emergency....we have been deprived of all our rights, we can be thrown in jail and kept there forever if it pleases Madam Gandhi..... Thousands in jail! For thinking, for disagreeing with what Madam has done to this country...." (p.268-69). Nimmo shivered. She found it difficult to believe that the woman she so admired, and for whom she had voted in two elections, should impose such a thing as this Emergency without good reason. The country must be in danger she thought. How quickly fear had sneaked into their small, peaceful world, Nimmo thought. How fragile is her safety." (p.275) "Was the situation of the Sikhs in India so wretched? Could yet another division of the country heal the wounds that had been caused by the first one?" (p.292). The wounds that were caused by the Partition still fester and give rise to fresh suspicions.

The massacre and armed attack on the holy shrine of "the Golden Temple" intensified the dislike of the Sikhs for the government and lead to the most shocking and horrifying incident of the decade; the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. The retribution was achieved. This in turn triggered off the most savage rampage of Sikh massacre ever known. Nimmo stayed awake all night expecting violence to erupt out of the darkness. She could sense lurking it out there. She prepared herself to protect her daughter. The memories of the past, of the grain bhareli came flashing back. She locked her daughter in the steel almirah.. "It was the last safe place in the world that bin of grain...stay there my daughter... or they will get you." (p.361). She saw a spire of smoke emerge. Choked by dread, she ran back inside and saw that the man had put the whole room on fire. A strong smell of kerosene filled the room and in the centre of the fire stood the steel cupboard. Nimmo heard herself screaming. "A high pitched stream of sound that seemed to belong to somebody else." (p.362) Screaming all the time she raced to and

fro but the fire wouldn't die down. She frantically searched for the keys only to realize that the men had stolen the keys. The fire engulfed the almirah with her daughter shouting from inside. The flames leapt making everything blood-red and smoke-black.

Her son Pappu, who had left for the shop that morning, was also brutally burned alive and Satpal who was out of Delhi at the time met the same fate: "silently Satpal uncoiled his hair and waited trembling to see what further indignities they would inflict on him before they killed him. He wished he had the time to phone Nimmo once again. He thought of her as he had last seen her, standing in the sunlight; leaning against the door of their home.....he knelt while one of the men poured kerosene over his head, the acrid smell making him dizzy and nauseous. One man dropped a car tire over his head and jammed it about his shoulders, immobilizing his arms. Another lit a match to his streaming hair, wet with kerosene. The flames into his scalp, crept like a dreadful river down his face, licked at his eyebrows, his eyelashes. The heat burned his eyes and his last thought was that he could not even weep. He could not even weep." (p.371)

Nimmo is transformed into a living corpse, falling into the deep abyss of senselessness. She is Nirmaljeet Kaur- "A woman damaged in places too private to see." (p.399). Thus the novel has a gory ending.

Conclusion:

The portrayal of strong, intelligent women endeavoring to make their lives meaningful despite the cultural and political upheavals is the most praiseworthy aspect of the novel. This is something that is largely absent and omitted in the novels of male writers of the Partition fiction. This novel is a substantial addition to the genre of Partition fiction that fills this vacuum, that is; a woman's experience of the Partition.

The novel does not merely concentrate on the violence on women during Partition but its aftermath as well, encompassing the violence that was initiated with the Partition and continued till the assassination of Mrs Gandhi. The massacre of Sikhs on the streets of Delhi and other cities and towns of Northern India in 1984 was as if "it was like Partition all over again". The novel emphasizes the whenever the condition of the society is weak or turbulent, it is the women who suffer the most. It depicts how women, being extremely vulnerable, are easy targets of any form of oppression, humiliation, deprivation and discrimination.

"The Partition novels represent the great strength of human love after the horrors of partition holocaust, the endless catastrophes and inconclusive miseries which plundered their happiness and filled them with notes of tragic pain. The novelists therefore, display their characters as the sensible, humane and generous messengers of human love and they stand as the torch bearers to the homeless refugees who have the fractured consciousness and the broken hearts." ⁸ The note

of human love is not an end but it is a beginning to an end and the process will continue till human beings live on this earth.

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