

Borders and boundaries women in indias partition history essay



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There has been immense regional conflict in the regions of India and Pakistan which has affected the population over time in a great way. One of the many events includes the Women's partition in August of 1947. The concurrent independence of a secular India and creation of the Islamic state of Pakistan created an outbreak of violence along the border areas as Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims fled towards either Pakistan or India. In the process, more than eight million people abandoned their homes and nearly one million died. Women were widowed, abducted and murdered. The Novel *Borders and boundaries: Women in India's partition* written by Menon, R. and Bhasin, K does an excellent job in describing the events that occurred by showing the perspective of two groups of women.

In order to better understand the struggle faced by the women in India during the partition it is first best to understand the historical context of the region and the cause of the partition. The partition of India is considered to be one of the greatest tragedies in history. The partition resulted in the division of both the Hindus and the Muslims who had resided together for hundreds of years. This led to immense territorial conflict such as boundary disputes, three wars between both India and Pakistan, a nuclear arms race, and cross border terrorism. Ever since the partition of the Indian subcontinent by the British in 1947, India and Pakistan have been bitter rivals and the Kashmir conflict remains unresolved. During five decades, they have fought four wars. Three of those wars were over the disputed region of Kashmir (including the region of Jammu), which is divided by the "Line of Control". " In 1947-1948, almost immediately after Independence, they fought a long and intense battle over the formerly independent state of

Jammu and Kashmir; in 1965 they fought another war over the same piece of land; in 1971 the two engaged during the civil war that severed East Pakistan into the budding state of Bangladesh; and in 1999 they fought once more in the mountains of Kashmir (Trehan209). In addition to these actual wars, twice during the past fifty years the two countries have endured crises that brought them close to war" (Ganguly 2). The effect of the partition was deep rooted and raised many questions and issues. One of the most significant issues was the issue of refugees which resulted in the most painful way for both Pakistan and India. The city of Delhi received the most number of refugees and overall 35000 refugees landed up in the northern parts of India including areas such as Panipat and Kurukshetra which were used in camps. Workers who were involved in the recovery programmes. Thousands of women, both Hindu and Muslim, were abducted by men of the other community during the communal riots is common knowledge. That the states of India and Pakistan intervened to recovery total of over 30, 000 abducted women from each other's territories until 1957 by virtue of the Inter-Dominion Agreement of 1947, and later the Abducted Persons Recovery and Restoration Act 1949, is less well-known. Why these states did so, and what this experience meant for the recovered women, has not been subject to historical analysis until recently. This collective amnesia is no coincidence. It has its roots in the Thus the partition of India, is looked upon as one the most devastating events in both India and Pakistan. The partition affected both the physical location and the psychology of the people. The partition affected the population as a whole in an immense way but it particularly affected women of the specific region. The novel Borders and Boundaries:

Women in India's partition sets up a great framework to describe the brutality and struggle endured by women of this time.

The Novel *Borders and Boundaries* begins by emphasizing on how women were instructed or forced to commit mass suicide, had their body parts such as their feet, hands, and breasts cut off, and were kidnapped and raped in the midst of the regional conflict between the different religious ethnic groups such as the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. However the author tries to target a different aspect and in specific explain the recovery of women, the Hindu and Sikh women of India, and the Muslim women in Pakistan in the aftermath of the Partition. The novel talks about a series of events which explores the histories as recounted to the authors. In the book the women during the partition who were sent back to the country and the women who organized for these women to be sent back are defined to be the protagonists. Many of the women who organized this movement alternated between the belief that they were part of a larger thing for an independent India, and the belief that the decisions being made were in best taste of a bad situation, in order to comfort the victims of the people during the partition.

Thus, a group of Muslim girls who are forced to go to Pakistan bitterly ask the woman who arranged their repatriation: "Who are you to decide for us?" But Mridula Sarabhai, who spearheaded the bill for the return of kidnapped and abducted women, argues that repatriation is a citizen's right. Here is a dilemma which international agencies, such as the UN's High Commission for Refugees, are familiar with THE slaughter which accompanied the 1947

partition of India occupies a peculiar space in the literature on genocide
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because it defies the common definition of genocide as perpetrated by one community on another, relatively defenceless, one. More often than not, it is put aside as a unique event, which begs even the conveniently ragbag category of “ ancient animosities” into which Bosnia and Rwanda have been thrust. Yet, it is difficult to think of a more potent statement of genocidal intent than tattooing “ Pakistan Zindabad” on the body of a Hindu woman, or “ Hindustan Zindabad” on the body of a Muslim woman. As acts of eradication go, this is the spiritual complement to mass murder. It leads us again to ask how we are to understand the near-total ethnic cleansing which occurred in Punjab in comparison with Bengal, where many Hindus and Muslims remained during and after Partition, or with southern India, which was not swept by Partition frenzy.

Borders and Boundaries begins by describing how women were led to commit mass suicide, had their breasts, hands or feet cut off, and were raped or kidnapped in the course of Partition violence. But its central subject is the ‘ recovery’ of women-Hindu and Sikh by India, Muslim by Pakistan-in the immediate aftermath of Partition. The book itself is an act of recovery: it moves between a series of oral histories and analytical comments which probe the histories (as recounted to the authors). Its chief protagonists are women who were repatriated and women who organised the repatriation. One of the most interesting of its many strands is the complex and often troubled relationship between repatriator and repatriate. Thus, a group of Muslim girls who are forced to go to Pakistan bitterly ask the woman who arranged their repatriation: “ Who are you to decide for us?” But Mridula Sarabhai, who spearheaded the bill for the return of kidnapped and abducted

women, argues that repatriation is a citizen's right. Here is a dilemma which international agencies, such as the UN's High Commission for Refugees, are familiar with.

While all of us can imagine-immediately, on our skins-the trauma that women who were forcibly repatriated underwent, few think of the often agonising decision that the bureaucrat in charge of returns might find herself making. One of this book's valuable contributions is to let us see each individual's pain, without relativising it, and to tell us-albeit in tantalisingly small fragments-of those occasions when a woman was not repatriated against her will.

On this issue, however, Menon and Bhasin, leave me puzzled. They cite figures showing that almost twice as many Muslim women were repatriated from India as Hindu and Sikh women from Pakistan, and add that the official figures for kidnapped or abducted women showed a similar ratio (50, 000 Muslim women in India and 33, 000 Hindu and Sikh women in Pakistan). They also say India was more pressing on the return of women than Pakistan.

What are we to conclude from this? That India was more anxious to expel Muslim women than Pakistan was to expel Hindu and Sikh?

It is not only in the rhetoric of nationalism, as Menon and Bhasin point out, that women become both symbols and substitutes for the nation. With the terrible example of the Serbian rape camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina before us, it is only the human desire to gloss over such unspeakable acts that allow us to forget-or rather, to partially bury-their memory.

Borders and Boundaries performs the invaluable task of excavating our own brutal histories for us, and it stretches a line of consequence between the events themselves and their aftermath as dealt with by the Indian State. It is satisfying that such a book should appear in the 50th anniversary of Indian and Pakistani Independence, for it returns us again and again to the question of the expectations and failures of a mai baap sarkar. Our preoccupation with this issue has been stressed both at home and abroad-where it has been seen as the reason why the 50th anniversary celebrations were so low-key.

It is too much to expect that a book of this kind will answer all the questions it raises. Yet, because of the histories the book gives us, one cannot help but ask whether mai baap expectations were in themselves ill-founded. Did we expect the Indian government to fulfil Queen Victoria's promise? Or does this book, like many others now appearing, show that we are now, finally, measuring the gap between what we hoped Independence might lead to and what we have?

Strikingly, most of the women who organised repatriation oscillated between the conviction that they were part of a grand enterprise, of independent India, and the belief that they were making the best of a bad job, of offering whatever small comfort they could to the victims of Partition. That engagement to the State is missing now. Menon and Bha-sin quote a Sikh woman who survived Partition violence to relive it in the 1984 communal riots against Sikhs. She remarks that she has no nation now. And I am reminded that the women who worked in relief and rehabilitation camps in Delhi, during those riots, did so as citizens who were enraged by the paralysis of government, not for the sake of a nation.

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