

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Feminist Perception of Partition Violence in Devi's *The River Churning*

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By

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Abstract

This dissertation concentrates on Jyotirmoyee Devi's *The River Churning* in order to explore the painful experiences of women partition victims whose stories of pain and suffering have been excluded from the official history of Indian partition violence 1947. Through her novel, Devi questions the validity of such history by rewriting the same history by demonstrating its politics of exclusion and inclusion from the perspective of the female victim. As a feminist writer, Devi challenges the patriarchal ideology of the "purity" of the community where women's body is regarded as a territory to be preserved or conquered. One community takes revenge upon the other by exercising its territoriality over women's body. In such acts women suffer from double victimization. First, she is sexually assaulted by the other community; next, she is alienated by her own community since she remains an impure being, a black patch in her community's honour. Such a dual nature of patriarchy, which made women pay for the crimes of which they are the chief victims, gets exposed in Devi's novel *The River Churning*.

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1. Introduction: A Subalternist-cum-Feminist Approach to the Partition Violence of 1947

This research work focuses on Jyotirmoyee Devi's *The River Churning* which explores the traumatic experiences of women partition victims whose stories have been silenced by text-book histories. Devi calls into question society's idea of the purity of female sexuality and takes it as a manipulative device in the hands of patriarchy. The author's anger is directed against the violent tampering with female body to express the triumph and intimidation of one community over another. As a feminist writer, Devi challenges the patriarchal ideology of the "purity" of the community where women's body is regarded as a territory to be preserved or conquered. One community takes revenge upon the other by exercising its territoriality over women's body. In such acts women suffer from double victimization. First, she is sexually assaulted by the other community; next, she is alienated by her own community since she remains an *impure being, a black patch in her community's honour*. Such dual nature of patriarchy, which made women pay for the crimes of which they are the chief victims, gets exposed in Devi's novel *The River Churning*.

Dissatisfied with the official history of the partition of India 1947 which largely excluded women's vulnerability during partition, Jyotirmoyee Devi has tried to write a new history of partition concerning women's suffering and sacrifice by giving space to the silenced stories of pain and trauma that thousands of women underwent during partition. Through the recounting of partition riot and the horrific experience of her protagonist Sutara Dutta, Devi has unearthed the veil of silence that has covered these victimized women. While giving space to the voice of the victimized women, Devi, like other feminist historiographers Ritu Menon, Kamala Bhasin, and

Urvashi Butalia, exposes the patriarchal biases prevailing in the discourse of partition. In order to highlight the traumatic experience lying repressed in hundreds of women, Devi has used the personal narrative in her novel. By tracing the experience of partition victim Sutara, Devi has brought to the surface the plight of women during partition that lay buried in the womb of history.

Written in 1967, published in book form a year later, Jyotirmoyee Devi's *The River Churning* is one of the rare examples of a partition novel in Bengali written by a woman. In the novel Devi tries to uncover the core of the subjugation of women by a specifically male violence on which the social order is dependent. For the feminist writer like Devi, such order is shot through hypocrisy and cowardice. Devi detects such injustice at the heart of the vivisection of the Indian subcontinent into two and later, three states. The tragedy of this holocaust, carefully elided in the history books, is brought by the author through the life of a Bengali middle class girl Sutara Dutta.

Born a hundred years ago in the prosperous family of Sansar Chandra Sen, the Dewan of the Maharajah of Jaipur, Jyotirmoyee Devi had occasioned to empathize with the marginalization of women by their community through her early widowhood at the age of twenty-six when she returned to her natal home with six children. With little or no formal schooling, because she was married off at the age of ten, Devi discovered the world through the spectacular discovery of her pen. From within the four walls of the pure inner domain through which the upper caste Hindu male maintained his purity and tradition, Devi's writing continuously exposed the cruelty, harassment and violence perpetrated upon women in the name of preserving the social order through the ritual purity of the community. Hence, her protest is not flawed by paranoia; rather, it is informed with a clear-headed understanding of the manipulation of private spaces by the so-called public domain of history and statecraft.

Throughout her life, Devi wrote about marginalized, oppressed and destitute women, but it would be a mistake to trivialise her writings as a mere apology for social reform and social action because Devi is alive to the process of exclusion and marginalization of the women whom society constructs as deviant. She anticipates feminist historiographers where her feminism is directed towards the bondage of the socially oppressed. In the novel *The River Churning* her clinical representation of partition refugee Sutara's life through the use of personal narrative uncovers the fact that exploration of the "present" is not possible without the study of the unforgettable past loaded within it.

In the context of the brutality and unleashing of a violent male sexuality at the time of partition riot the women's body became an easy site to dishonour the other community. Thousands of women were abducted, raped and either murdered or forced into committing suicide. Patriarchy demonstrated its ugliest face and women became helpless victims of male barbarity and the notion of honour. Thousands of women died or became homeless, and many more had their lives laid waste. Their silenced history has been brought into focus by the partition narrative of women writers. Devi's *The River Churning* has the similar target of restoring women to history. In so doing, Devi, like feminist historiographers, focuses on the necessity of restoring women to history not only to challenge conventional history-writing but to emphasize that a representative history can only be written if the experience and status of one half of humankind is made an integral part of the story.

Through the account of Sutara's double marginalization as she is victimized by the alien community and is ostracized by her own community, Devi gives voice to the traumatic experience of women as partition victims. In the official history of partition of India, hardly any attention is paid to the various ways in which women died or

suffered during that period of massive violence. A closer look at the suffering of women at that time raises the curtain on the bizarre male violence on the one hand and the horrific dismembering of the women on the other. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin in their research on partition find gender biases in the official history of partition as far as the issue of women is concerned:

It is not that women are altogether absent from partition histories or even from official records; it is just that they figure in the same way as they have always figured in history: as objects of study, rather than subjects. They are present in some reports and policy documents, and no account of partition violence for instance, is complete without the numbering details of the violence against women. Yet they are invisible. Furthermore, their experience of this historic event has neither been properly examined nor assigned historical value.

(Borders and Boundaries 11)

Menon and Bhasin are of the opinion that historiography of partition demands the cognition of claims for personal identity which has been lost in high political and patriarchal discourses. In such discourses the diversity of individual experiences got homogenised and the intense silences of women remained ignored for a long time. Though women are present in several official or unofficial documentation of partition history, they have been primarily perceived as objects, not "subjects". Contrary to such biased representation, the feminist historiography of partition with its attentive scanning of the fictional and personal partition narratives with a conscious focus on women protagonists helps us towards a sensitive mapping of the inner terrain of the female psyche.

Jyotirmoyee Devi relates the issue of the *Stree-Parva* of *Mahabharata* with her novel *The River Churning* in order to explore how history is constituted by myths within the framework of manipulative device of patriarchy. *Stree-Parva* is the story of the endless exploitation of helpless women which continues through the combined efforts of savage men and lurks behind all heroic deeds. In this context the author writes: "No history has recorded that tragic chapter of shame and humiliation which is forever controlled by the son, the father and their race" (Devi, "Author's Note" XXXV). Here, Devi's focus is on the conventional structure of the society where women are completely identified with their homes and have a strong sense of belonging. It is not strange that a woman fixes her identity securely within the framework of her family confined to the four walls of her house. If displaced from such a format of existence, she is shorn of the basic marker of her identity and with that she dies an unnatural psychic death. In the novel, because Sutara has lived in a Muslim house or in a sense she has crossed the boundary of the so-called purity maintained by her Hindu community she is treated as an untouchable. She has to bear a prolonged and unbearable panoptical gaze of her own community. Through the depiction of Sutara's exclusion, the author, here, tries to lift the veil on a *Stree-Parva* in history. Since the beginning the patriarchal prejudices have been strongly loaded upon women. Even their identity as goddess or Devil is determined by the society. Regarding this patriarchal control over women's body and mind, Neera Desai and Maitheryi Krishnaraj state:

The basic rules for women's behaviour as expressed in the laws of Manu insist that a woman must constantly worship her husband as a god, even though he is destitute of virtue or a womanizer. Women should be kept in dependency by their husbands because by nature they

are passionate and disloyal. The ideal women are those who do not strive to a break these bonds of control. (229-330)

The Indian society remains firmly rooted in the patriarchal ideology which is premised upon male supremacy and a legitimization of women's oppression. Because this ideology remains largely unchallenged and unchanged, violence against women is also perpetuated, sometimes in the old forms and sometimes in different and newer guises. The patriarchal society shows a strange mixture of traditional and modern values in case of women's issues even today. On the one hand, the society has the belief that women must get education, employment, better health care and more freedom of choice, on the other, the basic view of women that they are inferior and subordinate beings remains unchanged. Thus, the problem of violence cannot be resolved without changing the basic view of women as inferior, servile, self-sacrificing, and essentially the instrument of sexual gratification and reproduction.

Such a dual nature of society is exposed in Devi's novel *The River Churning* where the protagonist Sutara is "hit twice by patriarchy, first by the male of one community who establishes his own *identity* by exercising his territoriality over her body, second by her 'own' community which invokes compulsions of ritual purity to exclude her from the ritually pure domains of hearth and marriage, and drinking water" (Bagchi, "Introduction" XXXII).

By making her protagonist Sutara recount the violent tale, Devi has subverted the patriarchal notion that looks upon women as mere objects. In fact, they are the sole witness to violence because they retain the memory of loot, rape and plunder in their bodies. With men, the representation of violence may take a more formal or organized narration. Their telling has been incorporated into, and is part of, the master narrative -- the male consensus incorporates many singular voices into whole.

The women's telling, on the other hand, exhibits ambiguous character of lived experience and thereby challenges the normalising discourse of men: "Women's are the dissonant voices which are ordinarily deflected, ignored, subordinated, excluded or destroyed" (Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries* 56).

Partition has affected women deeply. An increasingly common phenomenon in post partition India is the mass rape of women as a political weapon. If a woman is viewed primarily as her husband's property, an effective way of penalizing him is to snatch away or violate his property, that is, his wife. This kind of large scale violation of women, with rape used as an instrument of revenge upon men, has been widely experienced in situation of communal violence. The traumatic violence meted out to the numberless women at the time of partition demolished all sense of self, existential or social, granted to them by the constrictive patriarchal consensus. If they did not die a physical death, they died many a psychological death.

During the time of partition control over women's sexuality was perpetuated through male protection of the community's honour, which was, inscribed on the bodies of women. For their own honour and the community's dignity, men forced their women to die by providing them with weapons, strangling them, drowning them or burning them. In other cases, as a product of patriarchy, women themselves gave their consent to such brutal acts. Their elimination denoted their martyrdom and their murders acquired social sanction, since the act of killing had after all the noble purpose of safeguarding honour. However, there were women who resisted the imposition of such a death and confronted the possibilities of rape and the stigma of sexual impropriety. Finally, those who survived the riots emerged with a greater existential autonomy. Not only did they accord space to themselves for growth, they

also created in themselves the enterprise for independent living. This is clearly manifested in Devi's novel.

It is a matter of surprise for feminist writers like Devi that history is so much biased towards women. The mass suicide of women is glorified as an act of pride for preserving community's honour in the text book history but the story of those women who face the challenge of the time and dare to build their own independent self is glossed over. Women's courageous struggle and their victory are silenced by the patriarchal discourse. Jyotirmoyee Devi presents her protagonist Sutara with a complete individual self striving to survive on her own. The transformation of partition victim Sutara into a college professor asserts women's ability to live independently without any support from the patriarchy. Through this episode Devi fills the blank spot that remains in the textbook history of partition and hence creates a new history of women victims of partition challenging the conventional narrative of women's status as inferior, submissive and shy.

Hence, to conclude, even if partition created numerous problems to different groups, due to different constraints, I have specified and limited my field of study only to the stories of trauma (I use the word "trauma" in a loose sense rather than in the sense of its theoretical thrusts) of women excluded from official histories. To conduct this research I have used subalternist-cum-feminist approach to interpret the partition violence and its consequences on the lives of women. Feminist approach is not singular but there are diverse modes even within feminism. So, this research employs subalternist-cum-feminist perspective to concentrate not on the general issues of all women but on the specific experience of subaltern women during the partition violence. My interpretation of historical details concerning the social prejudice upon women, gendered bias and communal violence upon women's sexuality follows from the research work of feminist historiographers such as Ritu Menon, Kamala Bhasin and Urvashi Butalia.

2. Feminist Historiography of Indian Partition Violence

Feminist Historiography of the partition of India seeks to underscore the feminist perception of violence perpetuated to women during the 1947 partition in India. Female victimhood and a feminist critique of patriarchal communal violence on women at the time of partition in 1947 are absent from the textbook history. The female historiographer like Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kamala Bhasin, and Aparna Basu break the tradition of gendered history by revising the partition history of 1947 from the prospective of feminist-cum-subalternist subjectivity. In their attempt they foreground the absent presence of women in the history of partition.

The partition of India into two countries, India and Pakistan, caused one of the most massive human convulsions in history. Though 1947 was marked as the year of India's independence, the bloody riots of partition often overshadow the importance of independence because of its much more direct impact on the lives of people:

Within the space of two months in 1947 more than seventy-thousand women were abducted and raped. Countless children disappeared. Homes, villages, communities, families and relationships were destroyed. Yet, more than half a century later, little is known of the human dimension of this event. (Urvashi Butalia, "The Other Side" 1)

Much has been written about the partition history of India with the special reference to mass migration and recovery operation. Regarding the women's experiences at the time of partition the so-called realist representation was also made but such representation simply valorizes the patriarchal construction and preserves the communal dictatorship over women rather than exploring the real plight of the thousands of victimized women during partition. Dissatisfied with such gendered

history, the female writers began to seek the true involvement of women during partition. In the process of rewriting a new female historiography of partition these writers not only disrupt the so called realist representation of women's experiences and involvement at the time of partition but at the same time they also explore how women and their experiences are structured by the discourse of gender and nationalism.

Jyotirmoyee Devi defines the absent presence of women in the history of partition as a preoccupation. In the "Author's Note", in the *The River Churning*, Devi comments on the irony of the chapter title, "Stree Parva", in *The Mahabharata*, which was written by a man from a masculine perspective. She explores the fact that even though the chapter depicts women as the target of an orgy of violence" the chronicler has not been able to give us a complete account" of the events (XXXIV). Devi asks why no account is provided of what happened to the women afterwards, and suggests that this is due to the gender of the epic poet:

But what happened afterwards? Vyasdev is silent about that. Which male poet would dare to write about that, and with what ink? No, such a pen, such ink and paper have not yet been produced in the world. The writer of the epic was a male, after all. He couldn't possibly describe the savage acts of barbarism, the exploitation of the female body by a group of cowards. His pen refused to move in shame, and that is why the male poet has left these stories out. (XXXV)

Here, Devi highlights the gender biases prevailing in the text-book history because women were the true sufferers of the horrific violence that goes beyond the experience of male. Devi further claims, "History is not written by cowards, and there are no women epic poets. Even if there were, they could hardly write the stories of

their dishonour and shame. The language has yet to be fashioned, so naturally stree parva does not figure anywhere" (XXXV). Here, Devi highlights the fact that the perspective of the historian and the process of signification are inflected with masculine privilege. Hence, she believes that the possibility of writing a "women's chapter" as a definitive account of "what happened" has not yet been realized.

While writing the partition history, most often the focus was given on the causes and impacts of partition. The male historiographers basically described partition as a government to government debate, and decisions and negotiations at the political level utterly neglecting the fact that it was a history marked by the absence of any attention or focus on gender. It became clear only after 1970s when female writers began to write the feminist historiography that the story of partition is deeply gendered narrative in which women were centrally implicated in a variety of ways. Regarding this, a feminist partition historiographer Aparna Basu says:

The history of partition is based largely on official documents as a history of government-to-government debate, concentrating on the differences between the congress and the league and on the British policy of divide and rule. This history has ignored the dislocation of human lives and the loss, trauma, pain and violence people suffered.

(271)

Basu as a feminist historiographer finds a void in the text-book history regarding the traumatic experiences of women. Official history focuses on the actions of the state such as recovery operation and the act of rehabilitation. But the traumatic experience of women victims is hardly given any place.

In the same view Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin have also exposed the politics behind the exclusion of women's suffering during partition violence. They describe partition as "a watershed event" for it causes the killing of mass populations, particularly women. But such a massive violence remains absent in textbook history. Emphasis on the hostility between the religious communities and state affairs indicates that though the act of partition was tragic, it was an inevitable politico-religious movement for national and secular identity. Menon and Bhasin argue that along with the factual data the misery and the plight of the victims should also be included in the history of partition. Familial violence, whereby husbands killed their raped wives and fathers killed their raped daughters, for the sake of family honour, is completely out of the history book. The patriarchy treated the "Women's body" as "a territory" either "to be conquered" by the men of the other communities or to be protected by their own families. Regarding historian's indifference towards this familial and communal violence upon women's sexuality, Menon and Bhasin contend:

Official and even historical accounts of partition see it as the unfortunate outcome of sectarian and separatist politics, and as a tragic accompaniment to the exhilaration and promise of a freedom fought for with courage and valour. They have looked at the causes and consequences of the division of the country, analyzed the details of the many 'mistakes' and 'miscalculations' made, examined the genesis of the call for a Muslim Homeland, and so on. But when we start looking for social histories or for accounts that try to piece together the fractured reality of the time and the event itself from a non-official perspective, a perspective from the margins, as it were-we encounter a curious void. Perhaps it has been too painful, too difficult to separate

personal experience from corroborated fact, too hazardous, at least for those who tried to record it, to claim 'objectively'. Indeed, so far only some 'fiction' seems to have tried to assimilate the enormity of the experience. ("Abducted" 1-2)

When partition histories are analysed from the perspectives of the margins, a visible gap can be detected. The question of how such events are recorded and by whom counts a lot. Gender ideology is the factor that Menon and Bhasin find to be the main cause for such representation.

In this way, partition violence of India included the familial and communal violence in which women always remained essentially at the receiving end as primary victims. The nature of such familial violence was so patriarchal that the death or killing of their fellow women was glorified as "martyrdom" or an "act of bravery" or of "supreme sacrifice" for saving their purity and honour.

Aparna Basu is of the opinion that the gendered history of partition mainly focused on the problem of religion, caste and most often of migration but during these religious, social and political riots how women were victimized and what their lot turned to be was hardly mentioned in history book. Therefore, she says:

Women in this communal holocaust became the most vulnerable and least protected victims. The brutality that accompanied partition that deliberately targeted women, for the wounds inflicted on them scarred and tainted entire communities. Some women were forcibly abducted, while others were left behind and lost in the confusion as their families ran from their lives. (271)

After being abducted by the other community, the women were supposed to be impure and they are regarded as black spot in the honor of their community. The situation was so much horrific that women were bound to suffer both from the outsiders as well as insiders. Most often they were abducted, raped and converted by the outsiders who were different from them in terms of religion and caste. In other cases, when there was the possibility of their abduction, their own father, brother, husband or even son killed these women with their own "Kirpans" (swords) or consigned them to the fire in the name of saving their honour. On the face of this double victimization there appeared no way out at all. After being abducted or raped the women were forced to commit suicide because their families were not in the position to accept them anymore, rather these women were thought to be a huge burden, for they had become impure beings in the eyes of their relatives. The condition of women during partition riots was so much vulnerable that they threw themselves into burning houses to escape being molested. In addition to the horror of self or enforced immolation, there was the horror of abduction, too.

The traumatic experiences of forced abduction, rape and unwanted marriage that ruined the lives of thousands of women were more painful than any of the other violent activities that occurred in the wave of partition. It was during partition that men took revenge by abducting women and counted the act as something to be proud of. A large number of abducted women were sold, often several times. There was nobody a woman could turn to for help: "She had to live with the man who abducted her even if he may have killed her husband, brother or father because she had no option" (Basu 272). The women for such abductors were nothing more than mere creatures captured inside their palms. The society behaved badly with the women; they were looked down upon and treated as objects: "Women were sold or given away

as gifts in the same way that baskets of oranges are sold or given as gifts" (Basu 272). The abduction of women happened in a large scale and the effect of abduction is so much traumatic and agonizing that it goes beyond what one can imagine. Such a painful history unburies the buried events and incidents in textbook history:

When women were forcibly abducted, sold, raped or remarried, they suffered unimaginable cruelty and humiliation. Having been uprooted from their families and familiar surroundings, they had to struggle hard to reconstruct their lives in new circumstances and in an alien culture. The remaking of the self must have been a traumatic experience.

(Basu 272)

Basu, here, finds a pathetic picture of an abducted woman who had to live with the man who had abducted her with the feeling of gratitude that he has given her home and security. She is bound to change her lot neglecting her own self even if it is impossible to do so.

The partition violence of 1947 made thousands of women to be rootless pushing them into the ditch of misfortune. In spite of being innocent, they were made victims and were forced to change their lot. After partition some efforts were made from the side of the governments to recover or rehabilitate the abducted women but the recovery operation itself turned to be a violent action for these women:

There were numerous causes when women from both the dominions did not want to return but were compelled to do so against their wishes . . . the experience of being abducted as Hindus, converted and married to Muslims, recovered as Hindus but forced to live behind

their children in Pakistan, or vice versa, made these women extremely insecure and unsure of their identities. (Basu 283)

The problem of children made these women to be torn between two sides: they could not leave their children behind because of their irresistible motherly love towards them, at the same time they could not return to their own community because of the children born out of unholy union.

These women, even if they were rescued from their abductors, were so frightened and unsure whether their original families would accept them. They feared that their natal families would regard them as "soiled". So, they refused to leave their new home. For those who had children the situation was worse. In such condition these women were often forced to choose between their children and their "families". They displayed their "reluctance" to return because they were torn between two sides in the name of recovery.

On 6 December 1947 the two newly formed nations, India and Pakistan, came to an agreement on the question of recovering the abducted women and rehabilitating them in their native place. But in this act the original place for women was defined in terms of religious and communal basis. In this regard, Urvashi Butalia says: "This vocabulary of recovery, rehabilitation, homeland was actually a euphemism for returning Hindu and Sikh women to the Hindu and Sikh fold, and Muslim women to the Muslim fold. Both countries agreed that this was what had to be done" ("Community" 45). Here, the act of recovery means to bring back the women, who had been taken away by other community, to their own community where the concept of belonging and otherness for women, indeed, was defined by the men of respective countries. Women themselves did not have a choice.

The act of recovery and rehabilitation for abducted women, in effect, reflects the double dealing of the state. Recovery was intended to give shelter to the abducted women. However, the state announced in the same vein that the wish of those victimized women would get no currency to promote the patriarchal norms and values. In Butalia's phrase, "Persuasion was clearly a Euphemism, since the agreement had categorically stated that the women's wishes were of no consequence" ("Community" 47). Recovery operation was intended to shield the women's happiness but it went against their will and choice. Irony inheres in the reinforcement of the strategy and mention of its purpose in the state deployed recovery.

The central recovery operation with its basic assumption claimed that any women found living with a man of the other religion after a certain date would be presumed to have been abducted or forcibly pushed into that relationship, and she therefore had to be rescued: "If women protested, and said they were in one or other relationship as a matter of choice, it was assumed that such statement were being made under pressure and had therefore to be discounted" (Butalia, "Abducted" 93). Thus, from the abducted women's perspective, the recovery operation was the double dislocation, a repetition of trauma. When women were abducted, in course of time, they had somehow managed themselves in the new environment and after that in the name of recovery they were ordered to return to their earlier place keeping them in the position to be torn between two sides. Such act once again questioned their identity as it reminded them of the terrific violence they had faced.

Thus, the recovery operation was fraught with national honour- the honour was laid on the body of Mother India. It implies that the loss of these women was the loss of their original families. The old families were the legitimate families and the women had to be restored to these families. Women were trapped in such a way that

they were not able to raise their voice independently, even if they wished to articulate their opinion. They did not have freedom of opinion even at their home. So, they were trapped inside and outside. Nevertheless, these were the families which were held up as legitimate for women. Therefore, they had to be removed from the other non-acceptable families and relocated into the real ones. This would be the honourable act for the state. In this regard, Butalia says:

If colonialism provided Indian man the rationale for constructing and reconstructing the identity of the Hindu woman as a 'bhadramahila', the good, middle-class Hindu wife and mother, supporter of her men, Independence and its dark 'other', partition, provided the rationale for making women into symbols of the nation's honour. ("The Other Side" 152)

Here, Butalia shows the dual nature of the state where women and their sexuality are assumed to be nation's honour. But in case of abducted and sexually assaulted women, state marked them as a shame for nation's honour thereby ostracizing them from the community.

In the recovery operation the problem raised was not only about women, but also about their children. Most of the women who turned out to be permanent refugees were those who had become pregnant. They were unacceptable to the family and the society, even though the government wanted to rehabilitate them. Women whose babies were born in Pakistan after partition would have to leave them behind, but those whose children were born in India, would be accepted as Indian citizens. Regarding the problem of children born of abducted women, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin say:

For the government this was a complex problem. In Indian society, a child born to a Hindu mother by a Muslim father was hardly acceptable, and if the relative of the women did not accept such children the problem of rehabilitation of a large number of women and children would arise. A special conference was held in Lahore to discuss the implications of this, where the majority of social workers felt that it would be wise to leave all such children with their fathers instead of allowing their mothers to bring them over to India, where, eventually, they were likely to end up in orphanages. ("Abducted" 19)

For these two writers the state's policy of recovery was indeed a callous solution to the problem because separating women from their children by sending them away brought the grief and dislocation on the part of these women denying them of the right to decide their own future or mould their own life.

The issue of illegitimate children, because they were conceived out of rape or forced marriages, only made things worse for the female victims. The victimized women's wishes whether to stay with the abductor husband was not considered:

Their marriages were considered illegal and their children illegitimate; they could be pulled out of their homes on the strength of a policeman's 'opinion' that they were abducted, they could be transported out of the country without their consent, confined in camps against their wishes; have virtually no possibility of any kind of appeal. (Menon and Bhasin, "Abducted" 26)

The above mentioned issues such as forced marriages and illegitimate children and the state law clearly indicate that the recovery operation was an application of force on the female victims.

Apart from the problem of abduction, rape, forced marriages and recovery operation women were being exploited by the patriarchal society even in the name of martyrdom. In her study of partition violence and women's involvement in it, Urvashi Butalia finds patriarchal nexus of state authority not only in the recovery act but also in every aspect of women's life. She states that the gendered history of partition repeatedly talked about the acts of recovery and military evacuation assuming it to be conducted on behalf of those victimized women. In the similar fashion, the partition history valorized the mass suicide of thousands of women to escape being molested as the act of bravery or matter of national honour. Butalia finds irony in assigning the halo of martyrdom to those women who had committed mass suicide. The state deployed the trope of martyrdom to enslave women and their sexuality. Death for these women, either by the hands of the outsiders or family members was the only reality. It, indeed, is a violent event ever experienced in Indian history. But ironically, instead of looking at such event through the lens of violence the state bestowed the act with the glory of martyrdom.

The act of mass suicide by jumping into wells is located into the comfortable symbolic realm of sacrifice for the community, victimhood and even non-violence. To remember these women repeatedly as symbols of the honour of the family and community is then also to divest them of both violence and agony. The report of "Thoa Khalsa incident" testifies the valorization of one kind of violence during partition which continues to be lionized even today through the memorial rituals performed in Gurudwars:

In Thoa Khalsa, Some 90 women threw themselves into a well in order to preserve the 'sanctity' and 'purity' of their religion, and to avoid conversion. A small community of survivors from these villages . . . keeps alive the memory of these deaths by holding an ample remembrance service in the local Gurudwara, in which the implements of that week are recounted by survivors. The tales of the women's sacrifice occupy a prominent place in the ceremony, it is they who are seen to have upheld, by offering themselves up for death, and more particularly 'heroic death', the 'honour' of the community. (Butalia, "Community" 37)

The mass suicide in Thoa Khalsa was certainly a terrific event. But remembering these women as symbols of the honor and community is to cover a veil of silence over the patriarchal consent on the part of violence on women.

Notions of honour as defined by the community and family often paralleled with that of the state. Violation of female sexuality was considered as defilement of communal honour. Thus, the bluff of the purity of female sexuality was used as a manipulative device by the hands of patriarchy and the community enters with nationhood in order to keep alive the class hegemony. The rape and abduction during partition reflects the violent tampering with the female body to express the triumph of one community over another, as the way it is picked up as an exclusionary boundary with which the women's own community preserves its class identity:

For community and families, the women were seen as taking upon themselves the tasks of preserving community and racial honour, and honour was understood as a function both of the mind-which is why the biggest danger was forcible conversion-and the body, for after

conversion would follow sexual congress with the male of the 'other' community". (Butalia, "Community"52)

Most of the women committed mass suicide because of above mentioned ideas prevailing in the patriarchal society. Women who did not acknowledge the honour of the nation, the state itself invested them as a 'humanitarian' task. The interest of the patriarchal state converged in their perception of women's place in the larger community. At the moment of the birth of two nation states in the place of one colonial state, the bodies of nameless women and their sexuality were brought under the control of their respective communities to accomplish the grand act of vivisection. Therefore, Butalia remarks: "A gendered history of partition would thus need to focus attention on the centrality of women in changes in community and family, in the making of a 'national identity', in the communalism that so deeply marked this particular event and in many other aspects" ("Abducted" 91).

Community as patriarchy is one of the root causes for creating the gendered history of partition. "Throughout the nationalist period in India, patriarchal interest at the community level attempted to police women's sexuality as a means of maintaining control over land, resources and re (production)" (Didur 230). The claim that women were both in need of protection and disdainful of sexual contact with outsiders sustained the community's image of moral superiority and readiness for nationhood. At the time of partition, this claim became the focal point of a struggle among Hindu, Muslim and Sikh patriarchal communities in their desire to maintain and improve their influence in the post-colonial nation state. The prospect of partition set off a wave of gendered violence directed towards women intended to humiliate and thus undermine the nationalist claims of the other. In this regard Veena Das remarks:

Communal violence and the violence against women have received attention in the social sciences, but what interests me particularly is one strand in the re-description of these events. This strand relates to how the facts of abduction of women and children, and of violence against them, and of the birth of unwanted children, are all dislocated from the status of being events pertaining to family and community, and how they become the events which concern the new nations of India and Pakistan . . . rather than families and communities. (6)

In her re-description, Das mentioned about the gendered violence in which a veil of silence has been thrown around the abduction and rape of thousands of women. Such female victims gradually came to be defined as the "responsibility" of the nation. The state recovered them and housed them in temporary shelters so that they would be given back to their natal families, but as things turned out, most of them were not welcomed back for the fear of social stigma to the family and the community. Then the state again responded by attempting to redefine the values of female purity and family honour. Das tries to highlight the truth of the victim as a result of daily suffering, daily humiliation, and the everyday experience being violated. Thus, she considers the issues of partition violence as an "unraveling of pain and suffering" of the millions of women victims who endured all sorts of suffering and pain at the hands of the family and state. They could neither understand their plight nor raise their voice against the inhuman treatment. Their history of suffering is simply ignored or covered up.

Subaltern feminist reconstruction of the history of partition provides a radically alternative understanding of partition with vital implications for current conflicts and violence uncovering the previously marginalized or other groups and

their ignored and suppressed history. It deals with the multitude of riots and episodes of collective violence between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslim along with the especial reference to the sexual violation of women on both sides. The sexual violence on women was premised on equating with notions of home, community and nationhood possessing them as either "ours" or "theirs". Women were encoded as sites for masculinist protection or destruction. In such "politicized violence on women, rape was the most preferred weapon because rape symbolically renders docile her community or nation through forced penetration of her body with enemy's penis" (Pandey 107). Regarding such violence, Beerendra Pandey further remarks: "Mass rape is directed at making the victims hate the rapists so much that the minority community thinks in their interest to migrate permanently" (107). Tattooing and branding the women victims at the time of partition violence in 1947 with "Pakistan Zindabad!" or 'Hindustan Zindabad !' permanently mark them as appropriated by the enemy.

The feminist historiographers write partition history by highlighting the experiences of pain and suffering of women recollected in the heart of traumatized women especially by means of abduction, rape and murder. By using the tool of data collection, tape recordings, field observations and taking interviews with the partition victim the feminist writers have produced partition literature that caused a major upheaveal in the partition history disrupting all the other relationship in the patriarchal community. Raising the question of gendered violence from a feminist perspective they approach the question of identity, country and religion, and of the intersection of community, state and gender. Besides, they evaluate the state's responsibility to the refugees in general and women refugees in particular, as articulated in the policies and programmes of the government. Their feminist intervention concerns with issues of

identity politics and unravels the complex relationship of a post-colonial state with religious communities in the aftermath of communal conflict that helps to rewrite the partition history from the side of feminist historiography. In so doing, the feminist critics blend the subaltern subjectivity with their feminist consciousness. They do not simply raise the issue of the marginalization or exploitation of women in general but direct their attention to the issues of the women subalterns. Therefore, feminist historiography of partition subverts the masculinist approach to the history of 1947 and seeks to restore women to history and to restore the nation's history to women so that women could be brought into focus of enquiry, a subject of the story or an agent of the narrative. It is in this line that I undertake an analytical study of Devi's *The River Churning* in the next chapter.

3. **Rewriting of Partition History through the Representation of Sutara's Double Victimization**

Synopsis of the Novel

Written in 1968, Jyotimoyee Devi's *The River Churning* is divided into three sections: "The Beginning"; "The Imposition", and "The Women". It is about the partition of Bengal and the communal violence it generated. The novel focuses on violence and attempt of rape of a Hindu girl, Sutara Dutta and her subsequent marginalization by her own community in the post-partition India.

The main narrative is presented as a flashback that opens on a night when a sudden strike of communal frenzy hits the peaceful tenor of existence of a Hindu household living in East Bengal. Before they have understood anything the father disappears, the mother jumps into the pond to save her honour, the married sister disappears and the young adolescent girl Sutara loses consciousness under the assault (and molestation). She is the only surviving member of her family to be nursed back to health by their Muslim neighbour.

After her six months' stay in Tamij's house Sutara is brought to Calcutta by Tamij and his son Aziz. Sutara meets her brother in Calcutta who had taken temporary refuge at his father-in-law's house. When Sutara meets her extended family the real tragedy of her life begins herewith. She is treated as an untouchable by the lady of the house. The elderly women of the house isolate her from the hearth and drinking water. Her arrival is not taken pleasantly. Ultimately, it is decided by her brother's family that she continue her study by living in a hostel and hence she is admitted in a Christian missionary school.

Sutara does well in her study and passes her graduation but during her life in hostel nobody from her so-called own family comes to ask about her desires. She is neither visited by her relatives nor invited in the family rituals and occasions. Even in a long holiday she is obliged to stay at hostel as an orphan since she is not welcomed by her relatives.

Sutara completes her M.A. in history living an isolated life in college hostel. In spite of being ostracized by her own family and community, she is selected as a lecturer at Yajnaseni College in Delhi and begins to live there. Now Sutara is independent, and her brothers need to invest no more financial support for her since she has made her survival possible through her own earning. During the period of her hostel life, Sakina and Aziz, members of the Muslim family which once had rescued her, frequently write letters to her and even meet her and show their concern for Sutara but she is totally deprived of love and compassion that she needs from her relatives. At the end of the novel Promod -- Sutara's sister-in-law's brother -- proposes her for marriage just some days before he goes abroad to study. Sutara cannot understand whether Promode proposed her out of pity, mercy or love. Anyway, the novel ends with Promode's hope that Sutara will wait for him for three years. Sutara who has never imagined the dream of her own marriage and of a family feels a new transformation within her body and mind. Her body which has been weighed down with all the heaviness of the earth is suddenly lifted and she feels as light as air. The novel ends with the dreamlike imagination of Sutara but the novelist does not clarify whether Sutara gets married with Promode or chooses to live a life of her own.

Sutara's Story of Double Victimization: Devi's Interrogation of Official History

Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel *The River Churning* tries to explore a new history of partition related with thousands of women victims of partition whom she calls the tortured and exploited women of all ages and lands, and who have been marginalized by the mainstream male writers while writing the historiography of partition violence of India 1947. Devi's pen relentlessly exposes the violation of human rights in the systematic humiliation dished out to women. The cruelty, harassment and violence were often perpetrated in the name of preserving the social order through the ritual purity of the community. *The River Churning* as a model shows how the fictional texts can be an important resource for understanding the collusion among state, patriarchal and elite interests in the treatment of "abducted" women.

In the official history of partition the glorification of women's mass suicide to preserve the national and communal honour during partition is repeatedly mentioned. Women and their sexuality were used as tools by both sides to take revenge and this act was counted as a matter of pride. In the name of national honour thousands of women were made scapegoat. The state, community and the family used women's body as a pawn in the name of nation building. But when the history of partition was written women and their sacrifice, their plight and misery were largely excluded from the text of history books. A monolithic view of history has been sustained by the silencing of less influential groups, particularly the women. Apart from physical damage, massacre and arson, innumerable women were victimized during the holocaust of 1947. Women were most vulnerable and were exposed to molestation by men during the communal war. More than just depicting the individual's journey from exile to recovery, Devi's narrative makes visible the convergence of patriarchal communities and nationalist discourses that inscribe themselves on women's body and

attempt to silence and marginalize their (women's) interests. The primary purpose of Devi's novel *The River Churning* is to revise the history of partition which is gendered and to give voice to the marginalized group: "Our history is full of such male aggression, socially condoned by patriarchal values, that make women pay for crimes of which they are the chief victims" (Bagchi, "Introduction" XXVIII).

As mentioned before, the novel tells the story of the post-partition experiences of a young Hindu girl, Sutara Dutta, who is orphaned by the partition riots and taken into the care of her Muslim neighbour, only to be shunned later by the extended family. The novel focuses on violence and, possibly, the rape of Sutara and her subsequent marginalization by her own community in post-partition secular India. Devi presents the physical trauma of the young, adolescent girl who has been victimized by both her own community and the alien community. Sutara is labeled as "abducted" by India but "polluted" by her extended family and the Hindu community. Sutara's narrative resists both these labels and highlights patriarchal, elite and Hindu-centric interests that are normalized in India even today as secular, universal and nationalist. Thus, Devi's narrative locates the "abducted" or 'polluted' woman as aporia in conservative nationalism by refusing to reconcile her identity with that dictated by the community or state. Her narrative discloses the "slippage" within the representative status implied by the concept of the nation-state and the citizen-subject in modernist history and gestures at its gendered connotations.

Regarding the belongingness or otherness of women, the community with its patriarchal nature plays the major role. In the case of Sutara, her Hindu community appears to be a blockage on the way of her living. During the time of partition the Muslim family of Tamijudin rescues her and gives her shelter. Sutara lives with a Muslim family after the sectarian violence and the loss of her family. Because of this,

her "pollution" is assumed without discussion. Here, a touch-me-not spirit pervades the atmosphere in Hindu society which is a great stain on social relations. Hindus do not have faith in Muslim people. In her narrative, after Sutara's arrival in India, Devi mentions the conversation between Bibha (Sutara's sister-in-law) and her Boudi (Sutara's cousins) to indicate the so-called class purity of Hindu society. She writes:

Have you taken leave of your senses? She has spent so many days in a Muslim household, six long months. What is left of her caste, you tell me ! It was good of you to bring her over, that is alright. But keep her away from household work as you would a low caste Hadi or Bagdi. Look at what she is doing, polluting everything. Who knows what she has done, the kind of food she has eaten there! (*River* 36)

The two women accused Sutara of polluting everything for she has fallen by living with the Muslim people for six months. The community people considered women such as Sutara on par with the lowest class people and treated them as such. The possibility that women could be 'held captive' or ostracized by members of their own community has been completely ignored by both the government as well as the historiographers. The government of India viewed all women found in the community of the other with suspicion in all circumstances. It refused to recognize the possibility that many women, like Sutara, may have been taken in by families of the other religious community simply out of compassion or practical needs.

Sutara's experience, after she returned to India, turned to be rather critical since she was considered permanently tainted. Even though circumstances surrounding her separation from her family during the riots are tame compared to those faced by other women, Sutara is still rejected by her family and community. There are no external signs of Sutara's pollution- no abduction, no conversion, no

marriage, no pregnancy, nor any evidence that she had been sexually assaulted.

However, the letter from Sutara's extended family indicates that her reception in India will not be pleasant. When Tamijuddin repeatedly requests Sutara's brother Sanat, who lives in Calcutta, to come to Lahore in order to take Sutara, Sanat writes a letter in lamentation of the death of his parents and only briefly mentions his sister.

Regarding this, the author writes: "If she wanted to return, they had to think of how to bring her over. But the letter showed no particular anxiety toward her" (16). In subsequent letters, the sense that Sutara is unwanted increases: "The letter was full of apprehension, but showed not a trace of concern for Sutara. Tamij Saheb could read between the lines" (17). Eventually, when Tamij and his son Aziz brought Sutara to Calcutta -- wearing Muslim dress, both for her and their own protection -- the extent of her rejection becomes clear. As Sutara greets her brother's mother-in-law, she is warned not to touch her: "No, no, don't touch me now. You have not changed your clothes" (31). The narrative further states:

She could overhear Boudi's mother's sharp tones, 'Are you out of your mind? Her clothes have been polluted by the touch of a Muslim Household. Why did you have to go and take her in your arms? . . . 'Don't we have a deity in the house? And Brahmin widows come here also. How can you have her pollute everything? (31-2)

When Sutara's nieces offer to take her to her room, Boudi's mother intervenes and instructs the servant: "See that she does not sit on the bed. She must be purified with Ganga water first. God knows what kind of forbidden food she has eaten there" (33). Jyotirmoyee Devi shows her anger and dissatisfaction against the dual control exercised by patriarchy. Thus, riot victims like Sutara are hit twice by patriarchy: first by the male of one community who establishes his own "identity" by exercising his

territoriality over her body, second by her "Own" community which invokes compulsions of ritual purity to exclude her from the ritually pure domains of hearth and marriage, and drinking water. The narrative is centred on this reduplicated aggression: "the first as physical assault on a woman's body and sexuality; the second, a prolonged and unbearable panoptical gaze by the community over Sutara's body and mind" (Bagchi, "Introduction" XXXII). It is against this ideology of the "purity" of the community that the protagonist of Devi's novel has transgressed. Had she had not been educated Sutara would have been washed away like so much flootsam. The marginalization by the community persists. Sutara is particularly unwanted at weddings and is considered an obstruction to the marriage prospects of future generation.

Even though there was no conclusive evidence that Sutara was sexually assaulted -- she is found unconscious in torn and dirty clothing -- she is considered sexually contaminated. Discussions of her marriage are cut short by Subha' mother's euphemistic reference to "other problems" that would diminish her prospects for a good match (71). The patriarchal fantasies are powerful enough to assume Sutara being sexually soiled. Jasodhara Bagchi suggests that Sutara's sexuality is the great "unspoken" in the novel; yet it remains the stake in the sinister game in which the community teams up with nationhood, in order to keep alive the class-caste entente of the hegemonic group in independent India. ("Female Sexuality" 74). Community and state conflicts over what to do about "abducted women" are thus resolved by maintaining a silence about their experience in these situations or casting them as passive victims who are polluted by the lustful other.

Sutara's experience of humiliation and ostracization within her own community by her own relations especially from women uncovers the role of women

as the enforcement of patriarchal codes that seek to maintain their own patriarchal patronage by distancing their identities from those considered polluted. Devi's narrative singles out the women in Sutara's family -- especially the older generation -- as the instigators of Sutara's alienation from the family. For instance, it is the "lady of the house" who constantly reminds everyone of Sutara's pollution and ensures that she is kept away from the food, kitchen and family gatherings (Devi 35). Similarly, the elder women in the family express repeated concern over the consequences that the stigma attached to Sutara's honour will have for the marriage of their daughters. These women are the ones who consistently uphold the rituals of purity that marginalize Sutara's connection to the family. The women play a significant role in maintaining the rituals of purity that exclude abducted/polluted women like Sutara and help to preserve the moral order that creates their difficulties. Regarding the agency of women Butalia remarks: "Our understanding of agency of women too needs to take into account notions of the moral order which is sought to be preserved when women act, as well as the mediation of the family, community, class and religion." ("Community" 24). Though patriarchal structures cast women as the bearers of "tradition", "honour" and "purity", women themselves contributed to the perpetuation of this practice in order to maintain their patriarchal patronage at the expense of the women concerned. By depicting Sutara's plight that is intensified by the female members of her family Devi attempts to unmask the hidden part of the history which is hardly mentioned in the textbook history. She revises the official history by exploring the fact that women were victimized not only by the opposite sex but also by their own. Thus, Devi in the novel reveals the fact that patriarchal codes and conducts are given continuity in the name of maintaining purity and honour by women themselves.

Devi's *The River Churning* is narrated by an intrusive narrator who both reports and comments on the events of the text. For example, after Sutara arrives in Calcutta and is ostracized by her extended family, the narrator comments: "This was a sad and confusing picture of our much cherished independence" (38). Moreover, unlike most historical accounts of partition, Devi's "Stree Parva" locates women at the apex rather than the margins of all those concerns, and, like feminist historiography, "casts an entirely new light on the apparent fixity of defining features of identity like community, religion, nationality" (Menon and Bhasin, "Abducted" 3). Through the account of Sutara's experience of communal ostracisation Devi reveals the nature of patriarchal nationalist discourses that attempt to silence and marginalize subaltern women's interests.

Devi's representation of the socio-political difficulties experienced by 'polluted' women offers a unique opportunity to address the complexities of woman refugees' relationships to the state and community. At a thematic level, Sutara's occupation as a history teacher provides the occasion to introduce the problematic that inflects the novel throughout: In what ways does the practice of writing history inform, whose story is told and how? The novel opens with Sutara looking over an "official" government memo prescribing which books and authors may be taught in her history class. She wonders at the absence of women's histories in the specified curriculum: only officially approved versions of the sepoy mutiny of 1857-58 were to be taught, from books by Dr. Sen, Dr. Tarachand and some others. Their books give an account of the revolt of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, and of the heroic deeds of the Rani of Jhansi, Kunwar Singh of Bihar, Nana Saheb, Tatya Tope and Mangal Sing. This made Sutara wonder. "History, after all, did not stop with these people" (1-2). Sutara is preoccupied with the lack of attention given to women's

histories and competing versions of the sepoy mutiny in the state-sanctioned syllabus. Enakshi Chatterjee's translation reinforces this point with its repeated use of the word "official" to designate the state's influence: "Sutara is pursuing the 'official circular' that contains the 'officially approved' curriculum she must institute in class under 'official orders' (1-2). Through this episode, Devi foregrounds the role of the Indian state in determining what is considered the truth about the past. This totalizing view of history is questioned through Sutara's students' resistance. Different girls from different parts of the country in her class ask: "Why it appears that people from some states had no involvement in the freedom struggle when they know from other sources that this was not the case" (2). Sutara's response to these questions reinforces her own skeptical attitude toward the curriculum:

History is a vast subject, it is not possible for one person to cover all of it. You can study in depth and write the history of your own nation. You can do it, Can't you? And, remember, history is not confined to the pages of a book. Besides, the victor is always prejudiced about the history of the vanquished, he keeps things from coming to light, he prefers to conceal. Does history tell you about the weak and poor? No.

(3)

The practice of writing and reading history that Sutara proposes foregrounds the fragmentary and diffracted qualities of the historical narratives that preoccupy Devi's novel: "history is not confined to the pages of the book" but is also co-implicated with the silences between the words and the blank spaces in the margins (3).

While reviewing the history of partition, Devi's novel shows its concern for the 'abducted' women's experience. In the novel, Sutara's experiences during the riot are represented in a fragmented and episodic way. After Sutara reflects on questions the

girls have asked her about "truth and falsehood presented in history books" at the college that day, her memories of partition violence in the small village where she grew up in Noakali began to return (4). Sutara recalls the community's diverse character where both Hindus and Muslims, rich and poor, lived together in relative peace. With the approach of partition, however, her family learns of riots in Calcutta through a letter from their relatives and, that same evening, violence breaks out in their own community. After Sutara's father returns from investigating a fire at a neighbour's house, he orders her mother to take the girls into the corner room of the house and bolts the door from inside. He warns them: "Don't come out of the house even if someone calls or bangs on the door" (7). Sutara's memories are characterized by confusion over her parents' fear and why they were asked to barricade themselves in the house.

Eventually, when the fire reaches Sutara's house, her mother emerges to set the livestock free but is intercepted by the family's Muslim Servants and "a few other unknown faces" (8). When Sutara hears her mother cry out, she attempts to go to her, but recalls "she could not make it":

Dark shadowy figures surrounded her; some tried to grab her by the hand. Breaking free she rushed to the pond at the back and jumped into the water.

In the light of the spreading fire everything was now visible one of the ruffians went after mother . . . but Didi (Sutara's sister) didn't stir. was she dead?

What happened to Diddi? Sutara couldn't tell. She wanted to reach mother and began to run, but stumbled and fell. Then everything went blank. (8)

The narrative of the attack breaks off here and is never completed in the course of the novel. The "blankness" that Sutara associates with these events is rehearsed throughout the novel along with a loss of a sense of time, anxiety, and questions about whether her family members are dead or alive. In addition, though the narrative states that in the light of the spreading fire everything was now visible, Sutara is unable to know if her sister is alive or dead, thus breaking the connection between perception and knowing.

The disjunction between perception and knowing is reiterated throughout the novel. After Sutara regains consciousness and is staying in the care of Tamij's family, the narrator comments, "Days went by, Sutara lost count" (10) and again, "Sutara lost count of days and nights" (11). Sutara's disorientation is accompanied by anxiety from an indefinable source and a loss of memory that disturbs her:

She had not recovered from the tremendous shock she had received. It had shaken her to the core. The exact nature of the blow which had stunned her physically and mentally was unknown to her-she was only aware of something terrible having crushed her existence out of shape. She could not clearly remember what had happened but the dreadful memories of that night kept returning like a nightmare. Did she fall to the ground or was she pushed down? What happened after that? Who rescued her and when? For how long had she been running a fever? (16)

Sutara is not even conscious of what had happened to her. The psychological shock is not less than the physical assault she faced.

When she is first able to walk about, she wanders outside to see her family's "burnt-down cowshed and the trees of the garden from a distance" and is haunted by "invisible scenes in her mind which she could not get rid of" (19). Devi's paradoxical representation of Sutara's experience of being haunted by memories that she cannot remember points to the traumatic origins of the birth of the nation. The gendered violence that Sutara's family experiences and her community's attempt to forget or disremember it resonate with the identity of the modern nation-state as a site of representation which can never be entirely complete. Sutara's experience with the other, her "recovery" by the nation-state but rejection by the community, is represented by Devi's text as a loss that disrupts the perception of the present.

Devi's representation of Sutara's experience foregrounds how patriarchal, conservative national codes and practices have been normalized in India since partition and inflected with the trauma of partition. In her flashback Sutara can hear the repetition of her father's words, "Keep the door closed". Here the narrative seems to refer much more than the action of bolting the door, and instead gestures toward the entire discursive context at the time of partition. At the time of attack, Sutara doesn't understand why her father wants them to hide in the house. But, after her rejection by her extended family, she has come to understand the events that unfolded outside the domestic sphere. Devi includes Sutara's final flashback at the moment when Promode asks her to marry him and thus return her to the domestic sphere and patriarchal patronage.

Though Promode's proposal to marry Sutara seems to recuperate her back into the domestic sphere of the nation, it is possible to read this sense of closure against

the grain. Sutara's marriage to Promode comes at a time when he is planning to leave the country. Thus, Promode's proposal to return Sutara from exile in her own so-called homeland is only a partial return. Promode appears to propose the marriage out of a combined sense of guilt and patriotic duty for how his family and nation have treated Sutara; it is as if his plans to live as an expatriate allow him to make the ultimate patriotic sacrifice; as a son of the nation planning to live in exile he thinks of marrying Sutara and removing her from the nation rather than directly challenging her treatment from within the state and community. His proposal to Sutara exudes a sense of his patriotic and patronizing impulses in its reference to the sympathy he feels for her: "I hope you won't say no. We talk of you often, Subha and Myself. We like you so much. I don't know about love, but we felt so sorry for you. Can you try to like us?" (129). Sutara wonders at Promode's motives: "What she wanted to ask was, are you doing this out of pity? Charity? Was this love? Was this kindness? But she could not bring herself to utter these thoughts" (130). Devi's narrative leaves these questions unanswered, ending the novel as Promode leaves Sutara in the boarding house where she has been living. Though the narrative concludes, "Today, suddenly, she realized that she was at the end of a long nightmare even though she had not really been aware of living . . . for the first time she felt she was not a respected college professor, but a young, dreamy girl", all is not resolved (133). As Sutara gazes out across the college courtyard, the "solitary and indifferent eucalyptus trees remind her of the presence of the other "inmates" i.e. 'polluted' women who will remain at the hostel after she leaves" (133). The narrative reads: "No branches or flowers to redeem them. Storm could not bend them" (133). Thus, this somewhat fairy tale ending for Sutara is undercut by the information that she will leave the other women behind.

Jyotirmoyee Devi takes a stand of partition historiographer through her fictional narrative. By juxtaposing fiction and fact she has woven those events of history which have remained either ignored or forgotten by the male discourses. The account of Sutara's horrific tragedy at the time of partition riot and her struggle to cope with the life there after being ostracized by her community and relatives indicate that the trials of partition victims like Sutara do not end with the assault on their body but are about to begin. Sutara remains almost untouchable for her extended family only because she is assumed to be sexually assaulted. Female sexuality is as much loaded with the semiosis of woman's social existence as by her private familial one since the community's control over female sexuality lies at the centre of patriarchy. Therefore, Jasodhara Bagchi comments:

It is not surprising that in writing a novel about partition Jyotirmoyee Devi's mind goes back to the Mahabharata. The Central event of the epic is Draupadi's public humiliation by disrobing and dragging her by the hair into the public arena. In the brahmanical patriarchal tradition hair is the symbol of female sexuality. The anguished reference to the Mahabharata while narrating the story of Sutara signifies Devi's protest at the degradation that women have to face at junctures of male-engineered social crisis. ("Female Sexuality and Community" 77)

Here Bagchi's remark indicates that women had been held captive by patriarchy and its members since the beginning and is given continuity by means of myths and legends so that woman can not get even a single chance to resist such patronage rather they are obliged to accept it in the name of traditional norms. The Semiotic load, taking the grab of culture, called upon to contain the so-called natural biological overflowing turbulent female sexuality, was one of the chief markers of a class

boundary of respectability. A process of otherization is implicit in this social process. Thus uncontrollable sexuality became a sign for women of the lower classes.

Legitimization through the control of female sexuality is growing as an essentializing force within the community. Moral regulation or, rather, a hypocritical obsession with women's sexual purity, marks the patriarchal foundation of the hegemonic class in India. As a feminist writer, Devi, through her protagonist Sutara, has challenged this foundation. Her protagonist, in spite of being a partition victim, being outcast by both the community and family, dares to make her survival with self-respect. Sutara's transformation from a partition victim to a college professor is an evidence of women's ability to create their existence in the society despite the lack of any support from the patriarchy. The patriarchal notion that women are in need of male to be protected is subverted by Devi's depiction of Sutara, a young girl who made possible her survival within her own decisions.

The River Churning depicts not only the traumatic experience of women partition victims like Sutara but also unmasks the patriarchal hegemony that remains in the society supporting the power politics. Sutara's conversation, regarding the leaders and other people especially male members who visited foreign countries or go abroad for studying, with Kaushalyavati provides an evidence of male hegemony. Sutara is ostracized by her family because she has lived and eaten food in Muslim family. When she raises the issue of eating and staying of leaders with people of all religion and castes Kaushalyavati responds: "Bibiji, how can you compare such people, ministers and ambassadors, with us! They are rich and powerful!" (79). The patriarchal society treats a woman as a second class citizen who has to follow each and every rule dictated by the society but in case of man he is free to do whatever he likes. Unlike abducted women the men "abductors" had easy access to complete

repurification. By releasing their captives, by returning abducted Muslim women, Hindu or Sikh men could regain their lost purity. It clarifies that all the rules and notions are made for the privilege of masculine body. During partition women were made victimized not only by the partition riots but also by these codes and conducts in the name of preserving cultural norms. The feeling of guilt that they are soiled, impure beings is not the fault of these victimized women. It is rather society's hegemonic nature and the panopticed gaze at women that made them feel as if they were a flootsam. Devi through her novel tries to unfold the patriarchal structure of the society which is the root cause for the women's plight. The male-centric nature of the society further becomes clear in the novel in the conversation between Amulya Babu (Senat's father-in-law) and his wife:

Amulya Babu looked grave, then with a faint Sarcastic Smile said,
 "Well well. But don't we ever have food from Muslim restaurants,
 chops and cutlets from Chacha's hotel? All of us have eaten the
 bakarkhani bread they used to send during Baker Id: Don't you
 remember?"

When I was transferred to Motihari in Bihar it used to be a common
 gift. We always used to wish them, though you women never touched
 them.

This gave his wife her cue. She said "Well, men will do such things.
 You break conventions in the home and also outside." (42)

The conversation above reflects the superiority of male-centric society which allows its male member to eat freely whatever is forbidden for women. Sutara stays in Muslim family not because of her choice. Tamij and his family have shown their

concern for Sutara as a human being. They have no any other intention in providing shelter for Sutara other than to help her. Out of pity and compassion they have simply protected an orphan, a tortured, and a victimized girl. In this regard, the narrative says: "Now a more mature Sutara looked back and realized that in actual fact they (Tamij and his family) were separated forever. But what would have happened if they had not rescued her in those troubled day? The very thought made her a shudder" (30). Had they not rescued her she certainly would have lost her life. When the Muslim family of Tamij rescued Sutara she was in between life and death. However, she got a new life from her Muslim neighbour but when she returns to India her extended family treats her as an untouchable. Though Sutara was not the cause of her victimization she is behaved badly. Because she has lived in a Muslim house her brothers and Boudi send her to the hostel to live a life of exile. Once she is sent to hostel she is rarely invited by the family. Even at the wedding party of Subha Bibha's relatives humiliate Sutara publicly questioning her past and leaving her behind to eat separately. Through these accounts Devi highlights the society's way of treatment of partition women as untouchables. In history there were many events which were made silent in order to preserve the male authority. In so many cases, despite attempts by the state to promote the reintegration of 'abducted' women back into the gendered space of the domestic sphere the community's perception of these women's contamination left them ostracized from society as a whole and relegated to a life of silence as permanent refugees. The indifferent nature of society which had different way of dealings with men and women though the cases were similar is an evidence that patriarchal society is the root cause of women's suffering.

Sutara's contact with the Muslim community outside the bonds of her family's domestic sphere threatens the status quo in her community. Her survival in the

absence of community protection threatens to make visible the gendered structure of the social contract and thus challenges the legitimacy of the community and state's claims to represent a homogeneous consistency. The temporary solution to coping with this threat in Sutara's extended family is to send her to boarding school, to everyone's relief. Devi writes:

Sanat heaved a sigh of relief, though he made no comment. Subodh and Sudhir, too, kept quiet.

"I think this is the best thing for the time being", said Bimal at last.

"Let her pass out of school, then we'll see what can be done."

About what could be done, none of them was quite sure. But the crisis was stalled for the time being. Spend some money send her to boarding school. (49)

Clearly, the boarding school is used by Bibha's family as, Donzlot says, a "surface of absorption for their unwanted niece" (qtd. in Das 57). It allows them to conform to the restrictive codes of conduct expected of the citizen-subject in the presentation of the spiritual sphere's purity. This becomes most evident during the holidays when Sutara and many of the other girls at the school do not return home for a visit: "The boarding house had to be kept open for home orphaned girls who were exiles, fugitives, with no place to go to" (56). It is not that the girls have no living relatives or friends, just that they are unwelcome in their homes. Further the narrative indicates that "frank discussions" among the girls concerning their background "were forbidden in the school" (57). The school is thus placed in a tactical alliance with the community and state. Because of this taboo, it is only when Sutara works as a teacher at Yajnaseni College that she learns that other women too share the experience of

losing their family and being ostracized. At this point, Sutara begins to understand identity patterns in and links between her treatment and others and is "amazed to learn that Muslim women had had to face the same trauma" (86). Here, Devi's focus on the treatment of 'abducted' and 'polluted' women precludes the idealization of any notion and instead shifts the reader's attention to the intersections and contradictions among patriarchal, community and state concerns.

Sutara's exclusion from the pool of marriageable women in the nation, because of her "polluted" status, leaves her in a state of alienation from the nation-state and her community. This exclusion is promoted as a necessary evil to maintain a homogeneous and stable representation of the nation-state. For instance, during a discussion among Promode and his friends about what to do with the 'problem' of 'abducted' women, his friend, Ajay, comments: "will you stop this, please? Let them die first, let them be wiped out'. We have got our government, that is the main thing" (118). It could be argued that in the Indian context today, Ajay's desire to wipe out the history of 'abducted' women in order to protect the patriarchal community state alliance is fulfilled. Butalia sets out the dichotomous treatment of women's stories in these situations vividly: "In the remembrance rituals that take place in gurdwaras in different parts of the country, the women's heroic steps in offering themselves up for death are valorized, while their abductions are glossed over" ("Community" 24). The seed of patriarchy is active enough to remind women of their submissiveness and servility. However, through Sutara's independent self as a college professor Devi challenges the patriarchal state's control of sexuality as it discloses women's ability to act in their own self-interest and negotiate their survival.

The male discourse of partition history valorizes partition to be an inevitable socio-political movement. It glorifies the freedom and independence that partition

brought for the two nation states -- India and Pakistan. But in the conflagration of partition thousands of people lost their life and most often women in large scale became rootless. They were made scapegoat and were constantly kept to be torn in between. As a female writer Jyotirmoyee Devi renders partition history through subalternist cum feminist perspective in order to place the marginalized groups in their respected place. When she approaches partition from the eyes of subaltern group what she finds is that partition brought neither freedom nor independence for the majority of people. Rather it nurtured power politics in the society. Devi's narrative reads: "What actually changed were the names of the two countries, and the people in power. The common people, innocent citizen, Hindus and Muslim, went about their daily business as usual. But they had to choose which country they wanted to live" (53). People are given identity in terms of their religion. Rather than an individual choice, state forced its citizen to stay or leave the country according to the state law. Now, Muslim and Hindu cannot stay together being good neighbours because they are divided into two separate groups.

History is written on the basis of historiographer's perception about the events. When a male writer reads or writes the history he hardly realizes what the abducted, raped or converted women think of this horrific incident because he as a male has not ever experienced such horrific experiences. Devi is sure that the gendered history of partition does not depict the actual account of victimized women and their bad fortune. Therefore her narrative indicates the otherization of women's issues in the course of writing partition history: "Who are the unfortunate people who had to give up their lives? Millions of poor people went through hell, their daughters were abducted, their children butchered. Has anybody kept count? Perhaps only god, if he's there at all" (85). Devi anticipates a revisionist, feminist historians through her novel

The River Churning. She rewrites the history of partition through her fictional character Sutara's double subordination within the male-centric hegemonic social order. However, Devi does not assume her representation as complete: "I have often felt that if the goddess Saraswati herself were to write our sad history in the pages of Time with the Ocean as her inkpot, she too will never complete it" (Devi, "Author's Note" XXXVI). Her frank assertion further proves that the partition violence captured in textbook lacks, indeed, so many events that need to be historicized or put forth in the days to come. Unburying of the buried incident of the past in its stark nakedness is the real duty of a historiographer.

4. Conclusion

Jyotirmoyee Devi, as a feminist writer of partition violence, has tried to subvert the masculinist representation of partition violence and at the same time explores how these representations are structured by the discourses of gender and nationalism. Devi's novel *The River Churning* seeks to restore the true experiences of women refugees at the time of partition by revising the gendered history of partition written on the basis of patriarchal notion and masculinist subjectivity.

The novel depicts the time span since the beginning of partition riot up to the point of the partition of India into two independent nations. During this period, what the condition of women was, especially how women's sexuality became a territory to be invaded for the male members of enemy community and how, after being victimized physically, women were forced to change their lot is brought into focus within the account of Sutara's horrific experience of partition riot. Devi's narrative explores Sutara's double subordination but at the same time her narrative comments on the new situation developed in the novel accordingly: "This was news to Sutara, that Gandhiji didn't want freedom at the cost of partition. But he had to accept. She wondered why, Much later, when she was older, she had asked herself who then had wanted this bloody freedom which played havoc with innocent lives? Who became independent then?" (Devi, *River* 55) This quoted passage clarifies that even if the country gets independence the persons who have been victimized during partition, especially women, never get chance to mix with the social order. "Society has a rigid stand, it was never moved by tales of woe of abducted and displaced women" (47). In the novel, after being orphaned by partition riot Sutara is rescued by her Muslim neighbour. This family provides her shelter for about six months until she is received by her brothers in Calcutta. Later in the novel, Sutara completes her study

successfully and becomes a professor at Yajnaseni college in Dehli. Though there is academic transformation within her self, her ostracization by her own community and family is unbearable. Partition allows independence to the country but the psychological wound that partition incurs to the thousands of women has never been healed. The official rules of the nation change but the patriarchal control over women's body and mind remains unchanged even after independence and the society and community with its patriarchal assumption treats the victimized women as a flootsam. Instead of viewing these victimized women through the lens of mercy and respect, the male-centric society rather ostracizes them treating these women as polluted beings. By depicting Sutara's double marginalization -- one by the other community as she is assumed to be raped by Muslim during the riot, and the other by her own Hindu community -- Devi highlights the complexities of women victims' relationships to the state and community. Through Sutara's account of struggle as a partition victim in the patriarchal society, Devi rewrites the history by incorporating those facts of partition that are often neglected in 'official' records of history. In so doing, Devi explores the manner in which patriarchal, state and community interests converge in the bodies of women and enforce strict definitions of their sexuality.

Sutara's experiences during the riot are presented in a fragmented and episodic way. After Sutara reflects on questions the girls have asked her about "truth and falsehood as presented in history books" at the college, her memory of partition violence in the small village of East Bengal where she grew up begins to return (4). Here Devi's narrative discloses women refugee's experiences without attempting to put them into an orderly and fabricated form that the scientificity of modern history suggests. At the final moment of the novel, Sutara's realization that "She had nobody, she has nobody" presented by the use of both the past and the present tenses in the

sentence suggests a tension in both the two moments in her experience. Devi's representation of Sutara's experience, in this way, foregrounds how patriarchal, conservative-national codes and practices have been used to normalize the discontinuities in the lives of women in India since partition. Thus Devi's *The River Churning* has sought to repeat women's experiences of partition in a different, non-realist, and fragmentary context in an effort not only to challenge the dominant perception of the painful events in partition history but also to dramatize the nexus between patriarchy and violence.

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