



Scars That Speak: An Odyssey of Healing in Fozia Raja's *Daughters of Partition*

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Abstract

The Partition of India in 1947 stands not only as a political rupture but as a profound wound etched into the collective memory of the subcontinent. What was once a landscape of coexistence, where Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims lived in harmony, was suddenly torn apart by an arbitrary line drawn on a map. Fozia Raja's *Daughters of Partition* captures this cataclysm through a poignant reimagining of the event, narrated through the personal history of the author's grandmother, Taji Kaur, a survivor of the traumatic upheaval. In this intimate narrative, lives once bound by everyday routines are dismantled as the tides of history bring fear, betrayal and irrevocable loss. This paper examines how Fozia Raja chronicles not only the anguish of dislocation and communal fragmentation but also the silent, enduring psychological trauma borne by women. At its core, the novel becomes a site of testimony and recovery where memory transforms into resistance. This study explores *Daughters of Partition* as an odyssey of healing, a narrative where the scars of history speak and the act of storytelling becomes a path toward reclamation and resilience.

Key Words: Wound, Anguish, Scars, Trauma, Reclamation

The Partition of India in 1947 remains one of the most traumatic and transformative events, “a seismic rupture in South Asian socio-political and cultural fabric” (Ali and Saeed, 1593). Triggered by the colonial decision to grant independence, the subcontinent was bifurcated into two sovereign nations, India and Pakistan, on religious lines. This political act, shaped by escalating communal tensions, colonial administrative haste and the failure of negotiations between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim

League, led to unprecedented human suffering. The impact of Partition was immediate and far-reaching. Mass killings erupted. Acts of arson began to rule the roost, reducing shops, houses, and entire neighborhoods belonging to rival communities to ashes, leaving behind charred remnants of distrust and despair. Approximately 14 to 18 million people were “uprooted and displaced” (Bhat, 1) in one of the largest mass migrations in human history as Hindus and Sikhs were forced to leave Pakistan and Muslims to India. This forced migration was marred by horrific communal violence, like “a tidal wave” (Pandey, 25) including massacres, rapes and abductions, which resulted in the untimely deaths of nearly one to two million people. Families were torn apart and women were brutalized. The long-standing social and cultural bonds were severed, “there was a different reality: partitions everywhere, communal tension, religious fundamentalism” and “continuing divisions” (Butalia, 7). The trauma of Partition scarred generations. The legacy of Partition remains a poignant reminder of the human cost of political division and a defining moment in the subcontinent’s postcolonial evolution.

While the 1947 Partition of India has been studied widely for its political and communal ramifications, the gendered dimension of its trauma remains underrepresented in mainstream historical discourse. For women, Partition was not merely a geopolitical rupture but an intimate, bodily catastrophe. The communal violence that accompanied Partition targeted women’s bodies as symbolic sites of honour, purity and vengeance. Abduction, mass rape, forced conversion and brutal killings became tools of patriarchal and nationalist assertion. It is estimated that over 75,000 women were abducted across the newly formed borders and hundreds were “made to parade naked” (Menon & Bhasin, 55). The gendered trauma of Partition extends beyond physical violence. The silence surrounding women’s experiences, both in personal narratives and public archives, reflects a larger societal discomfort with acknowledging the full scope of their suffering. Women’s voices were either excluded or filtered through male narratives, rendering their pain invisible or secondary. Highlighting this gendered dimension is essential to understand the layered violence of Partition. Feminist literature and oral histories reclaim these silenced voices, demanding a more humane retelling of Partition that centres not just border, but bodies and identities fractured by trauma.

India’s Partition is widely recognized as a moment of extreme sectarian conflict, yet the gendered contours of its violence, particularly those affecting women, have remained underexplored. However, some recent authors such as Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, Shauna Singh Baldwin etc. have

foregrounded the distinct ways in which women experienced Partition, not only as victims of upheaval and displacement but also as symbolic bearers of their communities' honour, shame and patriarchal authority. In *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), Urvashi Butalia documents oral histories and reveals how women's bodies became battlegrounds of religious vengeance, subjected to mass abductions, forced conversions, sexual violence and even honour killings by their own families to preserve community's pride. In *Borders & Boundaries* (1998), Menon and Bhasin emphasizes that violence against women during India's Partition was structured. Anchal Malhotra's a non-fictional work, *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory* (2017) offers a poignant and innovative lens to understand the 1947 Partition through the personal belongings carried across borders by displaced individuals. Through oral testimonies and the intimate stories attached to objects such as jewellery, clothing, kitchen utensils and family heirlooms, Anchal Malhotra explores the events of the tumultuous events of India's Partition. The objects women brought with them often reflect deep emotional ruptures, forced silences and fragmented identities. Veera Hiranandani's *The Night Diary* (2018) highlights the profound confusion and psychological upheaval faced by children during the Partition of India. Nisha, the twelve-year-old protagonist, becomes a compelling voice for the countless young minds that struggled to understand the senseless violence, dislocation and communal hatred that accompanied the event. *The Night Diary* explores India's Partition and its aftermath through a gendered, humanistic lens. Nanak Singh's *Khoon de Sohile* (1988), translated as *Hymns in Blood* (2017) by Navdeep Suri, is a profoundly moving work on the horrors of India's Partition. Nanak Singh does not merely document history, he bleeds it onto the pages of his novel *Hymns in Blood*. The novel stands as a testament to the traumatic rift that tore through the Indian subcontinent and left behind fractured identities, violated women and broken humanity. These recent authors have redefined Partition literature by shifting the focus from political narratives to personal, gendered and human experiences as well as highlight women's trauma, resilience and agency. Their works not only bear witness to the suffering inflicted, producing "a therapeutic impact" (Arora and Dhawan, 24) but also honour the fragments of dignity, courage and survival that emerged from the blood-soaked corridors of 1947.

Fozia Raja's *Daughters of Partition* (2020) is a significant contribution to the growing body of Partition literature. It offers a poignant and intimate exploration of the long-term impact of the 1947 Partition on women's lives. Unlike conventional historical accounts that often prioritize political events and male-centric narratives, Fozia Raja's novel foregrounds the personal and intergenerational experiences of trauma,

silence, memory and healing. Set against the backdrop of one of the bloodiest episodes in the history of South Asia, the novel traverses decades and generations, illuminating how the wounds of Partition continue to echo in the lives of the descendants of survivors, particularly women.

Daughters of Partition recounts the life story of the author's grandmother, Taji Kaur. The novel offers the feminist perspective on the horrific realities of displacement, violence and survival during Partition of India in 1947. Set in pre-Partition Lahore, the narrative introduces Taji Kaur as a sixteen-year-old girl living a contented life within her Sikh household. Married young and already a mother, she is pregnant with her second child when the geopolitical landscape of the subcontinent begins to fracture. The drawing of an arbitrary border between India and the newly formed Pakistan soon erupts into widespread communal violence. Fozia Raja vividly portrays the escalating violence and arson in the city of Mirpur:

An orange flame erupted and engulfed the north of the city. Thick black smoke covered the Indian summer skyline, like English fog on a cold winter's day, making it difficult to witness the escapade...Neighbouring residents ran frantically through the streets and alleyways, in and out of their homes, arms waving in blind panic and terror. (141)

Trapped on the 'wrong' side of the divide, Taji and her husband are thrust into a terrifying struggle for survival. As riots, rapes and massacres sweep across regions, the couple is forced to undertake a perilous journey across the treacherous Zaskar Mountains, hoping to find refuge in the Indian territory. During her effort to escape with her husband and daughter, Taji gives birth to a son. She is compelled to abandon the newborn in a barren, isolated area due to pressure and dissent from members of her group, who were unwilling to risk their "lives for one baby" (167). This act of forced separation from her son inflicts deep psychological anguish on Taji, leaving behind a scar that memory refuses to erase. The trauma is further compounded when her husband, in the mountainous terrain, is brutally killed by a Muslim assailant who "brutally slashed his head off" (183) with a sword. The brutal beheading of Gurpal leaves a searing psychological scar on Taji, reflecting the profound trauma endured by such countless women during Partition. The sheer helplessness she experiences illustrates a visceral paralysis often associated with traumatic shock. Taji's "knuckles turned white", her throat "tightened" and she feels like "being strangled"(183) reveals her emotional turmoil. This dehumanizing spectacle of violence shapes her psyche with irreversible grief, underscoring the long-lasting impact of communal brutality on women's mental health and the haunting legacy of communal violence. The

massacre extends to other Sikh men in the caravan also, many of whom are murdered with shocking brutality, while some of the women are subjected to sexual violence.

During the Partition aftermath, women were reduced to symbols of communal domination, their identities overwritten and their bodies controlled. Taji is forcibly converted to Islam. The forced conversion of Taji exposes the gendered oppression during Partition. Her identity is reduced to a religious category and her survival is made conditional upon abandoning her faith “You either take the shahadat or you die, it’s simple”(211). This chilling ultimatum encapsulates the ideological extremism that sought to assert dominance by erasing the individual’s religious self. Initially indifferent to life or death, Taji’s decision to accept conversion is not born out of consent but from maternal instinct, her daughter Rajinder becomes the anchor that compels her to live. This moment lays bare the impossible choices faced by women at that time. Taji Kaur is renamed Rasheed and Taji’s daughter, Rajinder, is renamed Zainub. She is forcefully married to a Muslim man named Asaff: “They didn’t ask me if I wanted to marry Asaff, this stranger being imposed on me.” Through Taji’s ordeal, the novel offers a gendered lens on the trauma of Partition, revealing how national histories are etched onto female bodies and memories.

Daughters of Partition opens with a poignant encounter between Taji Kaur and Balminder, a cousin from her paternal family. This unexpected reunion revives her past life with her parents before India’s Partition. Taji Kaur was then joyfully married to Gurpal Singh. Reflecting on their bond, she remarks: “He (Gurpal) was my friend, my best friend. And once Rajendar arrived our world became even more fulfilled with our daughter” (39). Taji had felt so blessed with all she had then, Gurpal as her husband, the new house they had just moved into and the baby that she was expecting. She wondered what she had done to deserve such happiness. As the possibility of India’s Partition and the creation of Pakistan gradually becomes a reality, the fragile peace between the Muslim community and the Hindu-Sikh population begins to crumble. Taji’s once-stable domestic life takes a dramatic turn amid the mounting tension and eventual outbreak of violence. The communal brutality and riots gradually intensify in Mirpur. Taji is forced to abandon her home with Gurpal and their child, the very place where she and her husband had built their married life, where their first child was born, and where she was expecting another. Her anguish is palpable: “This was the house Gurpal and I had lived in after our marriage, where Rajendar was born...How could we just leave it?” (145).

The trauma that Taji endures is not just physical or emotional, it is historical and collective. Fozia Raja's portrayal of Taji's experience aligns with what trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth describe as the "belated experience," (7) where the impact of trauma is not fully comprehended at the moment of its occurrence but is relived through memory and narration. Taji's survival is marked by both the memory of what was lost and the silence that followed. The novel captures the weight of this silence, particularly in the way Taji refrains from discussing her past with her children and grandchildren. Her trauma festers quietly until the act of storytelling becomes a means of liberation. In this sense, Fozia Raja's novel *Daughters of Partition* becomes a vital intervention, foregrounding the voices of women. The novelist has reconstructed the fragmented memories of her grandmother and gives them coherence, agency and public relevance. The transmission of memory from Taji Kaur to Fozia symbolizes an intergenerational bridge, through which unspoken pain finds articulation. The novel is a sort of homage not only to the pain but to the endurance and resilience of women like Taji Kaur. In doing so, *Daughters of Partition* contributes to a more humanized and gender-conscious understanding of Partition trauma.

Conclusion:

The metaphor of "scars that speak" in *Daughters of Partition* encapsulates the novel's central concern: how pain, once voiced, becomes both memory and testimony. Scars, by definition, are marks left after healing, but in Raja's narrative, they are also reminders of unhealed wounds, silenced histories, and the endurance of the human spirit. These scars, emotional, psychological, historical, speak not only to suffering but to survival. Fozia Raja's protagonist, Taji Kaur, carries these scars across generations; her pain is inherited but not always understood until it is narrated. By giving language to her wounds, she finds a way to challenge the imposed silences that once defined her. Ultimately, "scars that speak" becomes a powerful symbol of feminist resistance, testifying that while violence may attempt to erase, storytelling re-inscribes identity, dignity and truth. Fozia Raja's novel *Daughters of Partition* transforms suffering into speech and speech into a step toward healing. It suggests that while scars may never fully disappear, they can be transformed into testimonies of endurance.

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