

English /Sem.4/EC-2(B)/Partition Narratives

Discussion on the Text : *LAJWANTI*

About the Author

RAJINDER SINGH BEDI (1915 – 1984) was born in Punjab region of Pakistan and moved to India at the time of the Partition. He was educated in Urdu. In his early working career he was a postal clerk. Later on he got a job at All India Radio. It was there he began his writing career. From here he moved to script writing for Bollywood movies and then into directing. He exploited his genius to represent Indian ethos using mythological references. He also wrote plays and penned dialogues and stories for films. Like Manto, his best known work pinpoints the immense human cost of the 1947 Partition of India divulged into Pakistan and India. Much the worst of this holocaust (death tolls range from 1/2 a million on up to 2 million) was felt by the women as men of diverse groups took their revenge by raping and abducting women of other groups. Hundreds of thousands of Hindu women were abducted by Muslim and vice-versa. Many of the women killed themselves from shame.

"Lajawanti" is about a once happily married couple who suffered in the riots resulted in the Partition of India. The effects of partition were very worse in the Punjab region where the story is set and where Bedi grew up. The wife Lajawanto was kidnapped. It is also a story about human cruelty. Not just the cruelty of the abductors but of the husbands and family of the abducted women.

Major Theme

“Lājwantī” by Rajinder Singh Bedi explores the plight of abducted women during the violence and upheaval of the Subcontinent’s partition in 1947. Sundarlal, an abusive husband whose own wife went missing during the conflict, actively campaigns for the repatriation of abducted women but is taken aback by the unsettling emotional transformations that attend the acceptance of his own wife back into his home. Bedi raises the problem of silence—the inability of survivors and perpetrators of violence to talk about what happened—which is a common theme in partition literature. It is always discussed the choice of character and background of the story to understand the main female character Lājwantī herself. The effect of partition is no doubt brutal but the theme has been developed into various psychic issues. Trauma of the protagonist is to be understood with close observation. Traumatic depression gives rise to several facets of human agony.

Critical Analysis

Partition related short stories magnify the riots, arson, killing, looting abduction and rape during the Partition. These stories reflect comprehensively in all its totality, reality, and variety of human suffering. As Alok Bhalla mentions about the writers of Partition stories: "They (the partition stories) are rather, witnesses to a period in which we fell out of a human world of languages, customs, rituals and prayers into a bestial world of hatred, rage, self-interest and frenzy". The writers of these stories frame the events in a variety of ways and read them according to their own sense of the multi-religious and multicultural past of the Indian subcontinent.

Lajwanti" depicts a world where women have totally internalized the idea that they are little more than property. Imagine the horror of being abducted, taken to another country and being raped over and over for perhaps years. When you at last return to your home country, you are told that your failure to kill yourself has brought great shame on your family and in many cases are driven from your old home.

Lajawanti's husband is at first overcome with joy when one day she was among the returned women. Sunderlal used to routinely beat his wife for the smallest matters. He asked if the man she spent long months with while abducted beat her. She says no. Then the husband begins to wonder why she looks better and healthier than before she was abducted. Maybe she was happier with the other man. He promises never to beat her again and he keeps his word. He never criticizes her like he used to. They never fight over anything. At first she is very happy. Then she realizes why this has happened.

Traumatic experience is understood as a fixed and timeless photographic negative symptom; it remains stored in an unconscious part of the brain. However, it maintains the ability to interrupt consciousness and maintains the ability to be transferred to non-traumatized individuals and groups. Moreover, this concept of trauma perceives responses as fundamentally pathologic and privileges the act of speaking or narration as the primary avenue to recovery. In other words, presenting trauma as inherently pathologic perpetuates the notion that all responses to any kind of traumatic experience produce a dissolute consciousness.

When Lajwanti goes missing during the conflict, her husband actively campaigns for the repatriation of abducted women. But the return of his wife put him in dilemma to express his emotional transformation. When Lajo returns she was standing before Sunderlal and trembling with hope, despair and fear.

The author raises the problem of silence; the ordeal of abduction gets high objectionable point of consideration. “Lajwanti” is a narrative that focusses on the effects of trauma in the aftermath of Partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan on the characters such as Lajo and Sunderlal. Both are victims of this epoch-making historical event and of the violence and mayhem.

Lajwanti is shown to re-experience the traumatic event through the intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams or later situations that repeat or echo the original, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma and also an exaggerated startle response. Her trauma is akin to the trauma of the nation. Although she is shown to have lived through the traumatic experience but she does not know it accurately.

Above all this story presents a true picture of communal devastation during the period of partition. The characters are well drawn and they represent lively picture of Indian population in undivided India with the cult of Hindu-Muslim ethos. The religion is not brought to condemn the nation in this story but the social fabric with the political upheaval is the culminating point in shaping this story.

Suggested Reading :

1. Original text in Urdu translated in Hindi, *LAJWANTI*.
2. Partition Dialogue by Alok Bhalla (O.U.P, Delhi)
3. Tiwari, Vibha and Abha Tiwari. “Premchand’s Grasp over Female Psyche as reflected in the persona of his Heroines in Sevasadanand Nirmala – A Critical Analysis.” *Daath Voyage: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English*. Ed. Saikat Banerjee Vol. 3 No. 3 (September), 2018.

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