

CHAPTER-VI

PARTITION SHORT FICTION: UNFOLDING WOMEN'S MULTILAYERED EXPERIENCE OF PARTITION

I inhabit a terrain called existential in-betweenity. That, I suppose, is the metaphor for our times. Perhaps that is a metaphor for life itself.

-Brij V. Lal

The short story, although of a comparatively late origin occupies a popular and significant space in literary discourse. This observation is justifiably applicable to the Partition short story as well. As Hasan (2008) rightly observes:

In the literature on Partition, the short story holds a position of pre-eminence...The short story, by encapsulating individual fates, held its own against the unfolding of multiple histories in the novel. The short durative of the story carried as much punch as the epic sweep of novelistic time. (p. xiii)

The short stories written by the women writers take the reader beyond the blood and gore of Partition violence to engage with the consequences of the event on the human psyche. The Partition short story also assumes significance in that it is a potential medium to sound a warning about the lessons to be learnt from history.

This chapter is divided into three sections dealing with Amrita Pritam's *The Skeleton*, Jamila Hashmi's *Exile* and Ismat Chughtai's *Roots* respectively. These Partition short narratives defy any attempts at categorisation. *The Skeleton* and *Exile* both reveal stories of abduction. There are common concerns of exploration of memory and trauma that connect them but they are also different in many ways. *The Skeleton* begins in the third decade of the 20th century and ends with Partition, whereas *Exile*

begins with Partition and explores the post-Partition consequences of abduction. The women protagonists in the two stories differ in the way they respond to their abduction and work out differing strategies to come to terms with it and make peace with their inner selves. *Roots* explores the story of an old woman whose sense of belonging to her land of birth is deeper than her allegiance to her religion. Memory is one common area that it shares with the other two stories. These stories are about women who are placed in their individual predicaments and whose sense of self is carved out of their ability to negotiate these predicaments.

I

Amrita Pritam's *The Skeleton*

*From the depths of your grave,
Waris Shah,
Add a new page to your saga of love
Once when a daughter of Punjab wept
Your pen unleashed a million cries,
A million daughters weep today; their eyes turned
To you, Waris Shah.*

-Amrita Pritam

This section examines *The Skeleton* as a story that acknowledges the presence of polarisation of communities based on religion even before Partition happened. It seeks to understand the effects of abduction and forced marriage on the mind of Pooro with the added experience of parental rejection, all of which are causes for intense trauma. This section also explores how Pooro's journey of reconciliation is marked by

her belief in the ideas of an all encompassing humanism, Partition providing her the moment when she is able to make peace with her inner ghosts.

Amrita Pritam (1919-2005) was amongst the first of the Partition writers to have pioneered the entry of women into Partition fiction. Her immensely troubling story, *The Skeleton*, focuses on the plight of abducted women. No writer from the Punjab was better informed than Pritam of the manner in which women were caught in inter-religious or inter-clan wars. Her stories draw from her own vast experience of the conflicts that arose before and during Partition. In her autobiography *The Revenue Stamp*, she recollects about Partition:

At the time of the partition of the country in 1947, when all social, political and religious values came crashing down like glass smashed into smithereens under the feet of people in flight...Those crushed pieces of glass bruised my soul and my limbs bled. I wrote my hymns for the suffering of those who were abducted and raped. The passion of those times has been with me since, like some consuming fire – ... (1994, p.16)

Pritam and her family were uprooted from Lahore and in the mass exchange of refugees had moved to Delhi. She recalls the horror-filled days:

The most gruesome accounts of marauding invaders in all mythologies and chronicles put together will not, I believe, compare with the blood-curdling horrors of this historic year. Tale after tale, each more hair-raising than the last, would take a whole lifetime to tell. (1994, pp. 29-30)

It speaks volumes for the insight and farsightedness displayed by Amrita Pritam in her ability to acknowledge the need for forging reconciliations. She acknowledges the damage that is caused to a woman's psyche and dignity when she is the target of violence – both everyday and communal. Pritam finds the answer not in polarisation and division, not in reaction and revenge, but in the process of social repair and acceptance of such abused women. Amrita Pritam has avoided a stereotypical portrayal of Muslims while projecting the Hindu-Muslim divide. Even as a small child Pritam had not been able to accept the idea of separate utensils in their home meant for her “father's Muslim friends” (Pritam, 1994, p. 6). Rebellious against this custom she says:

This broadened the outlook of my innermost eye, and even after having suffered so much from the Partition, I found it within me to deplore dispassionately the holocaust caused by the devotees of the two religions. Thus it was that I came upon that painfully sensitive face around which my novel (sic) *Pinjar* (Skeleton) was written. (1994, p. 19)

Pritam's story is about sixteen year old Pooro who is abducted by a Muslim as a revenge against her family. Though Pooro escapes from the clutches of her abductor, her Hindu family refuses to accept her as they no longer consider her to be 'pure'. This rejection by her parents forces Pooro to return to her abductor, Rashida, undergo a forceful conversion to become the Muslim Hamida and marry him. In order to understand the abduction of Pooro, one needs to go back to the events in the past history of the two families. The chief source of friction was an unsettled payment of a loan on interest taken by the Sheikhs by mortgaging their house. Pooro's family, the Sahukars, realised the loan by taking possession of the mortgaged house. This left the Shaikhs “homeless” (Pritam, 1987, p. 7) and the Sahukars heaped further humiliation

on them when their men abducted Rashida's aunt keeping her for three nights. The loss of home and their woman's honour goaded the Sheikhs into doing to the Sahukars what was done unto them. It called for a similar violence and Pooro's abduction is a sequel to that act. The social conflict relating to non-payment of a loan is at bottom a religious conflict. The ill will between the families culminates in a feud with women caught in the crossfire. Therefore, Pooro is a victim of both Hindu and Muslim vengefulness and intolerance. This communal hatred has crucial gender dimensions. The abduction of Pooro is based on the idea of difference. That both families perceive each other as the 'other' is evident from the fact that they "have been at loggerheads for many generations" (Pritam, 1987, p. 7). The Sahukars gain a dominant position by not only rendering the 'other' homeless but also reinforcing this by forcibly taking their woman. The Shaikhs perceived this loss as a loss to men of the 'other' religion. Religion, in fact, is a deciding factor in setting boundaries for identities. The idea is found in Raman's (2010) observation, "Identities are delineated by deciding on differences; this invariably involves the marking of boundaries, and gender is crucial in the maintenance of these boundaries" (p. 14). The 'other's' religion is marked on Pooro for life when the name Hamida is engraved on her hand. Later, as part of violent acts committed on women's bodies during Partition a somewhat similar marking would take place. A similar fact is recorded by Menon and Bhasin (1998), "Tattooing and branding the body with "Pakistan, Zindabad!" or "Hindustan Zindabad!" not only mark the women for life, they never allow her (or her family and community) the possibility of forgetting her humiliation" (p. 43). This way, the women "*became* the respective countries, indelibly imprinted by the Other" (Menon and Bhasin, 1998, p. 43). Daiya (2008) has a similar opinion about it:

...these symbols, like “Om” or the crescent moon on the women’s bodies, did not signify the women’s conversion; instead these symbols represented their “otherness” (or their prior, other identity as Hindu, Sikh or Muslim) before the violence , and their “other” identity as shamed, conquered and violated by the ethnic community with whose symbol they were branded. (p. 70)

Pooro’s new name also raises questions of identity and identification of the female. The original Hindu self vies with the new Muslim one. The subconscious defies complete erasure of the past self. The shifting boundaries between Hamida and Pooro – “Hamida by night, Pooro by day” (Pritam, 1987, p. 11) – wrecks psychological havoc on her so much so that “In reality, she was neither one nor the other; she was just a skeleton, without a shape or a name” (Pritam, 1987, p. 11). Abduction has placed her on a point of no return to her earlier identity, yet memory of the now displaced identity still survives. This reconstructed identity is one that is ambivalent because the sense of duality as well as shrinkage is there. She is Pooro, yet not wholly Pooro; she is both Pooro and Hamida; she is a living human yet still only a skeleton. All that constituted her earlier identity – family, home, honour, bride-to-be, religion, and finally name – have been stripped away one by one. The series of shock experiences has left her numb. This incapacity to be whole again will remain till the time of Partition when she will be able to rescue Lajo, her abducted sister-in-law, from the trauma of a similar fate as her own.

The inability to accept Pooro back and protect her after her abduction makes her family equally culpable in her trauma and tragedy. The family is under a sense of siege and its very existence will be under threat if Pooro is taken back hence they have no qualms in shunning her. Her very identity as a Hindu no longer stands. The best bet for

her parents is the preservation and protection of the sons and her presence would jeopardise that now. They are, to borrow from Menon and Bhasin (1998), under the “shame-fear-dishonour syndrome” (p. 59). A similar obsession was at work during Partition when the voices of women who had been abducted or raped was sought to be silenced. The other women that Pooro empathises with, i.e., Taro, Kammo and the mad woman, although are not Partition’s victims, are subjected to abuse. They are victims of the same patriarchal mindset that was at work which created Partition’s abused women. Their experience points towards the potential for destruction that human beings have. Their stories along with that of Pooro’s acknowledge this potential as being present not only during the specific event of Partition. The capacity to destroy is exhibited in the ordinary day to day course of existence. To borrow a term from Menon and Bhasin, this can be seen as “a continuum of violence” (1998, p.40). Twelve-year-old Kammo, motherless and abandoned by her father, has been enslaved by a grim aunt under the guise of offering her shelter. A spirited Taro challenges the institution of marriage. Married to a man who already had a mistress, she considers herself to have been demeaned to a prostitute who is used for her body. The mad woman who takes shelter in Pooro’s village is raped and dies during childbirth. This serves to highlight the violence and abuse that are a part of women’s everyday experience. The only difference is that during communal violence instances of abuse towards women take on more savage and inhuman proportions.

The skeleton imagery is used by the author to bind the experiences of the three women – Pooro, Taro and the mad woman – together. The stripping away of her original identity has left Pooro “just a skeleton” (Pritam, 1987, p. 11). Taro’s marriage to an adulterous husband has caused her great trauma to which her family remains

immune and this results in her physical emaciation and “her bones stuck out of her flesh” (Pritam, 1987, p. 18). The tramp like woman who has been cast away by her husband and second wife turns mad and, “she was more like a skeleton than a living person” (Pritam, 1987, p. 21). This suggests the connection and affinity that Pooro feels towards these women who are experiencing not just a physical wasting away but one that is psychological and emotional as well. The suffering of these women brings about a changed perception and new awareness in her:

She had seen other people’s sorrows. They made her own troubles appear very small. She had heard of houses that were not homes. Taro’s story made her own home appear like a haven of refuge. (Pritam, p. 20)

This realisation enables her to clear, to a very large extent, the debris from the past and to organise and give to her life some sort of order and happiness. Her love for her son Javed and the adopted child and also gradually evolving affection for Rashida help her in holding on to her sanity.

These events occur as a kind of prelude to what was to unfold some years later with Partition. Pooro’s experience is one that countless other women went through when they were made to carry the burden of their community’s honour. It also acknowledges the undercurrents of communal divide that was present even before Partition took place. Narratives of violence to women and their dislocation are not peculiar to Partition. The attitude displayed by Pooro’s parents is typical of the Hindus in North India who place “greater emphasis on purity and pollution” (Butalia, 1998, p.161) than do the Muslims. Butalia mentions about rescued women during Partition, “Such was the reluctance of families to take these women back, that Gandhi and Nehru

had to issue repeated appeals to people assuring them that abducted women still remained 'pure'" (1998, p.160). Pandey (2001) voices a similar experience of Partition's abducted women, "Many abducted women, separated from their husbands, fathers, brothers, and other male and female relatives, for a few days, or weeks or months, found it difficult to gain acceptance back in their original families and communities" (p. 182). Altekar (2009) observes that in ancient times "the son was valued more than the daughter" (p. 30). Elaborating this point, he writes:

In the Brahmana literature there is one passage observing that while the son is the hope of the family, the daughter is a source of trouble to it. A similar idea occurs in the *Mahabharata* also. The *Ramayana* tells us that when Sita came of age and her marriage had to be arranged her father's anxiety became as intense as that of a poor man, who suddenly loses all his money. (2009, p. 5)

Recent surveys done by Chaturvedi and Srivastava (1914) have come up with findings that the parents of the region of North India still exhibit a preference for boys over girls. Daughters are reared only to be shoved towards their ultimate calling in life, i.e., marriage at a young age. They emulate their mothers. According to Chaturvedi and Srivastava, "When a girl sees her mother looking after the household chores, like, cleaning, washing, cooking, baby, care etc., and deprives herself of comforts of life, she also imbibes these notions" (1914, p. 33). Fourteen year old Pooro's marriage is arranged to Ram Chand because "Pooro's parents were resolved to lighten themselves of the burden of a daughter" (Pritam, 1987, p. 1). Thus even before the final act of rejection after her abduction, Pooro has once already borne rejection when perceived as a 'burden' to be removed. Rejection is also implied in Pooro's mother looking forward to her sixth child hoping fervently it is a boy as "She had had enough daughters, and

now that fortune was smiling on them once again and they had plenty to eat and sufficient to wear, she wished that her next child should be another son” (Pritam, 1987, p. 2). Fulfilling cultural expectations Pooro has acquired more than sufficient training in cooking and running the house and was “like her mother’s right hand” (Pritam, 1987, p. 5).

It is interesting to note that Pooro, though belonging to a rural background, has a consciousness that places her at par with one like Laila of *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. They are similar in their ability to empathise with the marginalised and the voiceless, in having a sensibility that is disturbed by the indignity and injustice heaped on women, and in the solidarity and responsibility they feel towards the less fortunate. *The Skeleton* reinforces Amrita Pritam’s faith in the power of the woman as the redeemer. Pooro’s abduction and forced marriage to Rashida sets her on a ceaseless quest for a credible meaning to life, eternally seeking an intelligent purpose to living. The romantic veil of life having been abruptly snatched away at the age of fifteen, she is able to take a hard look at society’s injustices towards her. Although a victim, Pooro transforms herself into a vibrant personality with an indomitable will of her own.

Pooro’s acceptance of her fate is born out of pragmatism. Sensing Rashida’s personal merits, her disgust at her situation gradually wanes giving place to a stoicism that sees her through. She initially undergoes a paralysis of will with the disintegration of her familiar world. There is a resignation to the inevitable. Therefore, she first appears as the doomed female. But, after this phase, she is forced to acknowledge the innate goodness in Rashida and she gradually develops a bond with him. Life with her abductor, after marriage and over a period, becomes bearable. Rashida is protective rather than restrictive and they can easily be termed a happy, well-balanced couple.

There is a distinct transformation in her from youthful, emotional to pragmatic, and maternal. Their marriage is a gamble, the odds heavily piled against Pooro. Part of her vital nature has been destroyed. Even her newborn baby at first fill her with disgust and she equates it to “a slimy slug”, “a tick” and “a leech” (Pritam, p. 14) desperate to fling it away. However, it is this baby which helps her to pick up the threads of normal life. Butalia has presented accounts of men claiming that women jumped to their own death rather than face dishonour, thereby protecting their family’s honour. Pooro’s parents would also rather have her dead. However, Pooro herself does not subscribe to the idea of adopting a role as upholder of community’s honour.

Pooro is seen to contain great capacities as a mother. Apart from being a mother to her biological son Javed, she becomes a mother to an adopted child and showers her motherly care on the scared and neglected Kammo. Born to a madwoman and obviously the result of rape, the child is readily adopted by Pooro who nurtures him and breathes new life into him. Her motherhood is also compelled to pass the test of religion when the child is exploited as a weapon to polarise the two communities. Refusing to think in binaries, she embodies a more pluralistic understanding of society. When the Hindus claim the child forcing her to give it up it is as if the story of her own abduction on the basis of religion were being repeated.

Abduction and forced marriage could have resulted in the waste of her life. But Rashida’s nature breaks the spirit of rebellion in her. This, however, does not mean that the routine of domestic life has helped her forget the past. A quest remains. Pooro’s soul seeks closure. There are two things which haunt her from her past. Ram Chand, her fiance before her abduction, and his village Rattoval still hold a compulsive fascination for her so much so that she agrees to accompany a relative to Rattoval to lay these past

ghosts to rest. At the end of a brief meeting with Ram Chand, she is finally able to turn away from this memory forever saying, “Poro has been dead a long time” (Pritam, 1987, p. 31). The other quest is to experience the homecoming she was denied when her parents shunned her after her abduction. Forced to accept her circumstances, she is never reconciled to it. Her inner self still needs to come to terms with her abducted state. Even years later despite achieving a balance in her relationship with Rashida, the demons of the past still remain to be extirpated. This is, however, not gained through revenge and bitterness, but through her understanding of the plight of other women and extending her solidarity and support to them. She sees herself in other women who have been victims of patriarchy and makes it her mission to make a difference to their lives. In their redemption, she is redeemed, in their suffering she suffers. With each wronged woman she encounters she establishes a bond, a kinship that goes beyond family or blood ties. Poro’s soul finds liberation through that which is positive. Unlike the passions being played out in the larger arena, Poro creates harmony, not conflict. Hers is the image of the author’s faith in hope and humanity. Placed in a desperate situation, Poro’s narrative is yet not one of despair. With such abundant generosity of heart, Poro cannot remain a victim for long. What has happened is that the revolt and turmoil have been channelled towards the more positive. She has replaced futile rebellion with the policy of inclusion and a serene wisdom. She chooses action rather than defeat and withdrawal. She never believes in the apathy of inaction – fulfilling both her need for dignity as a human being and her need for nurturance. She continues her meaningful engagement with life and with living. All her past ghosts are finally laid to rest with her act of rescuing her sister-in-law, Lajo, from her abductors during Partition. Having confronted the same situation herself, she sees her own return and

restoration in Lajo's. Pragmatism is at work here too when she refuses to take this one last chance to finally join her long lost family and be herself 'restored'. She realises the futility of reclaiming her identity as 'Pooro'. Having been forced to reconstruct herself as Hamida, with not even the remotest connection with her parents, she chooses not to cross the border, but remain in Pakistan. For Pooro, an inner Partition along with the crossing of borders had already occurred with her abduction. A physical crossing over would not recover her past nor erase memories.

Pooro's disguising as a *khes* seller is used as a subterfuge to deceive Lajo's abductors. Her strategy is reminiscent of Butalia's account of the methods adopted by women workers involved in the rescue and recovery operations. They "adopted disguises, used false names" (Butalia, 1998, p.145), entered the house of the abductors, won their confidence and extracted information. According to one oral account recorded by Butalia, they would "sell eggs and ask for lassi" (1998, p. 145). A deep knowledge of the state of affairs regarding both the plight of abducted women and the daring attempts that were made by women workers to rescue these women seems to have guided Amrita Pritam while narrativising Pooro's experience. Pooro sells *khes* to Lajo's abductors and asks for water winning the trust of the woman in the house. Pooro can well be seen to have a potential to become an activist on the lines of Kamlaben Patel, Damayanti Sahagal, Anis Kidwai or Mridula Sarabhai, all of who were deeply involved with the recovery and rehabilitation of women abducted during Partition. Pooro's own secret and almost lone mission – she is helped only by Rashida – to rescue and rehabilitate Lajo by singlehandedly freeing her from the clutches of her abductor, becomes all the more poignant for it is a reminder of the support she herself was denied. Pooro's refusal to go "back to her people" (Pritam, 1987, p. 49) is dictated by

her realisation that a simple return to the past is not possible. When she asserts at the end , “My home is now in Pakistan” (Pritam, 1987, pp. 49-50), it is actually a reference to a third space that she has carved out for herself – between a familiar, romanticised past and the present with its futile opportunity of reconciliation with her family. The one is in the past; the other has come too late. Pooro’s decision calls to mind the accounts of protests recorded by Menon and Bhasin of abducted women who refused to be rescued:

You say abduction is immoral and so you are trying to save us. Well, now it is too late. One marries only once – willingly or by force. We are now married – what are you going to do with us? Ask us to get married again? Is that not immoral? What happened to our relatives when we were abducted? Where were they? (1998, p. 97)

Pooro carries within her a similar anguish of being cast aside by her own parents who she comes to see as being transformed into a “stepfather” and “step mother” (Pritam, p. 16).

Pooro’s pre-Partition experience of abduction, thus, finds an echo in the stories of abduction of thousands of women during Partition. This section has examined how her story serves to underscore the similar price that women paid during Partition for the appeasement of men’s desire to settle inter-community rivalries. The humiliation and trauma thus unleashed fell to the women’s lot. Pooro’s response to the dark side of humanity lays stress on tempering conflict than emphasising it.

II

Jamila Hashmi's *Exile*

Eyes closed, I often cross the border.

Eyes don't need a visa

Dreams have no borders.

-Gulzar

Jamila Hashmi's *Exile* shares a similarity with Amrita Pritam's *The Skeleton* in that it too engages with the theme of abduction. The abduction sponsored by communal conflict and a patriarchal mindset that Pooro faced in the pre-Partition era, Hashmi's protagonist Bibi faces as a direct form of Partition violence. This section of the chapter examines the great spiritual price of compromise that the abducted woman had to pay during Partition. Memory and trauma, being two key issues, are used to explore Bibi's experience of being Partition's witness, victim and survivor.

Jamila Hashmi (1929-1988) was an Urdu writer from Lahore. Hashmi was also Partition's witness. Born in Amritsar, her family migrated to Pakistan "because there was so much violence and bloodshed in Amritsar" (as cited in Alipota and Khurshid, 2014, June 16). Hashmi offers new perspectives into the abducted woman's experience. Besides suggesting the large scale violence that overtook a large number of people from both sides of the border, Hashmi has very efficiently placed the story of the fate of women in the context of Partition. Hashmi is not interested in the historical reasons for the cause of the abduction. She engages with the impact of the abduction on the woman and explores her inner consciousness as result of this abduction. She is interested in how the abducted woman struggles to negotiate the new meanings of social space, grapples with memory and trauma, accepting that which is inevitable and yet exhibiting

an abiding sympathy for those dependent on her. Hashmi narrativises the exilic experience of abducted women who were brought to the wrong side of a border created by a history of conflict engaged in by men and whose position is omitted in historical narratives.

That the author is sensitive to the fate of the abducted women is clear from the fact that she relates the story of a Muslim woman who is abducted by Gurpal, a Hindu without denominating them by their specific religions. The woman remains unnamed throughout the narrative and all we know is that she had been addressed as Bibi by her brothers before their separation at Partition. Bibi's family becomes a victim of the communal violence. Her father had failed to realise the full implications of Partition and by the time he does, the violent mob had come to his doors. He had made the mistake of placing "his faith in the life and values of the past" (Hashmi, 2012, p. 49). Her father and mother were butchered to death and Bibi is the lone survivor and a witness to the cruel carnage. Her brothers presumably are alive as they were not on the scene of the carnage but her connection with them is permanently severed as she now belongs to a different country and her exile and dislocation are complete. At the time of her abduction she was dragged when "my head was not covered with a chunni" (Hashmi, 2012, p. 49) by Gurpal. The 'chunniless head' is the symbol of violation of the honour of a Muslim woman who is traditionally not supposed to expose her uncovered face before strangers. Like many other women who were abducted, and brought to the village of Sangraon Bibi is forcibly brought to Gurpal's house and presented to his mother as his wife and her *bahu*. He promises his mother that Bibi would serve her like a slave. The cruelty of the situation is intensified by the fact that

she was forced to become a bride without any ritual ceremony. She undergoes the devastating experience of feeling profoundly violated.

Bibi is acutely conscious of not being the traditional bride. Marriages in North India are lengthy affairs with events being spread over several days. However, there were no rituals that reinforced the significance of marriage for Bibi. A particularly popular custom for brides is the application of *mehendi* on her hands, a wish that was never fulfilled for her. The word marriage rings hollow for her. Her status of wife has a false ring to it because she never experienced the ceremony of *rukhsati* or *bidai* as is the custom in various communities of North India. *Rukhsati* or *bidai* is the ceremony after the wedding when the bride leaves her natal home and is taken to her husband's house. It is accompanied by traditional songs lamenting the daughter's separation from her parents and involves an emotional and tearful farewell. Such customs are sanctioned by culture and their non-performance leaves a traditional wedding incomplete. These rituals signify a girl's transition from her natal home to her husband's home. The bride is also entitled a traditional welcome in her new home, which includes the singing of wedding songs, music, dancing, new clothes and jewellery. Apart from the celebration and gaiety that they entail, these ceremonies have the supposed function of smoothening the bride's integration into the new family. The idea of becoming a wife without the actual ceremony being performed is unacceptable to Bibi who mourns its absence.

The story takes off from the symbolic context of Dusshera and the related fair linking the burning of the effigies with the violence of Partition and the abduction and exile of Sita to Bibi's. Gurpal, in Hashmi's *Exile*, represents Ravana the archetypal abductor. It is on a day of Dusshera that Gurpal is taking Bibi and the children to the

fair. On her way to the fair, Bibi remembers her past of a happy family and how she longs for a reunion with her brothers and is also tortured by the thought that the return to the past was impossible, “The very fact of separation stands like a wall between people who once loved each other. Once separated they are fated never to see each other’s face again...they can never return to their past again” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 41). There is an intense longing for the past which results in constant turning back to the old days. Nostalgia no doubt reminds us of happier times but nostalgia is always triggered by the sense of loss of something in the present. The present therefore has to be marked by melancholy for nostalgia to set in. Bibi experiences nostalgia and melancholy of the expelled. She feels intensely isolated and lonely. The passage of time has not dimmed the memory of the past and it is a constant in her life. Bibi inhabits two worlds – one in reality and the other in her imagination. Like all exiles, Bibi’s quest for a return to her own country represents the quest for a home which she can only recreate in her memory but which will forever be out of reach.

There are spaces and places of remembrance. The space before abduction was her home consisting of her parents and her brothers. Embedded deeply in her psyche is the image of family get-togethers; a childhood filled with innocent moments playing with and decorating the doll’s house and looking at photographs. As Bachelard (1994) puts it, “the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (p. 6). Looking at it from Bachelard’s perspective, Bibi’s natal house is her “first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word” (1994, p. 4). That house was “Paradise itself. A real place of bliss” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 44) which had lulled Bibi into imagining and dreaming it would always retain the characteristics of her ‘doll’s house’, “We can all live here – Amma and Baba, Bhaiya and Bhabhi. All

of us. Life is a happy song. We lack nothing. There is no need for anything more” (Hashmi, 2012, p 44). She refers to that home as “city of magic” (Hashmi, p. 50) and “city of dreams” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 50). Bibi carries this earlier daydream of her picture-perfect home and relives it in her new home born out of the reality of her abducted state. This idyllic picture of her earlier home is permanently etched in her mind, never to be forgotten. Bachelard’s idea of home and its association with day dreaming may be mentioned here for a better understanding of Bibi’s experience:

...the places in which we have *experienced daydreaming* reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time. (1994, p. 6)

Bachelard further suggests:

Through dreams, the various dwelling places in our lives co-penetrate and retain treasures of former days. And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood...We live fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection...memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams... (1994, p. 6)

Bibi’s mind has accepted that the route to home no longer exists, but even when that space, to borrow from Bachelard, “is forever expunged from the present, when, henceforth, it is alien to all the promises of the future” (1994, p. 10) yet its power in the present cannot be denied. The past home, to borrow from Bachelard once again, carried

“experiences of heartwarming space” (1994, p. 10) which have remained so indelible that they have the power to instil hope and expectations when she “recalls old dreams and tales” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 52).

Bibi finds that she has embarked on a journey and covered a long distance. The spaces between the past and present are unbridgeable and she “...can no longer walk across to the other country” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 45). The boundaries that divide the two nations also create irreversible borders between her and her relatives. For Bibi the lines that divide her past and her present, i. e., ‘here’ and ‘there’ are starkly etched out lines in her imagination without any blurring or fluidities of borders. A whole host of words are chosen to reiterate many times this divide – ‘wall’, ‘obstacle’, ‘distances’, ‘paths....obliterated’, ‘lights....extinguished forever’, ‘wilderness’, ‘no fixed destination’. The lavish use of spatial metaphors is the clue which conveys the immobility that affects her present moment. After her abduction ‘home’ takes on new meanings. Her mind rejects the notion of the new ‘home’ as home. Although she adjusts over time, she can never really shake off the feeling of isolation. Sangraon is an alien country; and the consciousness of being in exile, of being banished cannot be erased. She sees her house in the new country as a “wilderness” (p. 42) and herself as a “lonely tree” (Hashmi, p. 42) which reinforces the idea of barrenness. She perceives the “distance” between her relatives and herself as “very great” because of her “despoiled” state. Partition and her condition of abduction have produced different social spaces which have forced her to re-determine human relationships.

Bibi undergoes multiple exiles – from her past, from her family and home, from her culture and country. Said’s (2000) remarks in *Reflections on Exile* can be related to Bibi’s experience, “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to

experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted". Bibi's condition of exile has to be understood as different from that experienced by diasporic people in the twentieth century context. Largely, such people have the option of reclaiming their original countries and the severing from the homeland need not necessarily be permanent. Said (2000) likens exile to "death but without death's ultimate mercy". As he sees it, exile "has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography" (Said, 2000). For Said (2000), it is a tall order to expect writers and poets to capture the loss and mutilation suffered by the exiled in all its exactitude because they elevate the condition of exile and "lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity". They obscure in their writings "the compounded misery of undocumented people suddenly lost, without a tellable history" (Said, 2000). Hashmi, however, cannot be accused of this as she has recovered in creative literature the experience of mutilation and loss suffered by Partition's exiled and that which otherwise has no historical documentation. Bibi has been wrenched from everything she had previously been familiar with and finds herself to have been deposited among strangers. In her journey from the familiar past to the alien present, she has seen unimaginable horrors to her family and the memories of which she carries within. The condition of exile for Bibi is not created merely out of the event of Partition but linked to it is also the desire of the male to assert his identity and dominance over the 'other'. Her abduction and rape occur due to her being a woman and she is consigned to further peripherality in Gurpal's house. She encounters power imbalance in his household with him, his mother and his grandmother turning masters and she denigrated to the position of a slave. 'Dumping' Bibi before the women of his house, as if she were an inanimate

object, Gurpal gives them the licence to do as they please with her, “She will be your slave. Order her to grind corn, fetch water. As far as I am concerned, you can ask her to do anything you wish. I have brought you a Bahu!” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 40).

The *bahu* is a North Indian cultural construct and she is traditionally assigned women-centric domestic duties and chores which most of the time verges on unpaid labour exploitation. Bibi will replace the maids who have to be paid and this would be a sure shot method for cutting costs. Gurpal’s mother and grandmother are as much complicit as Gurpal himself in reducing Bibi to her devalued status. The subsequent value that she earns is because of her exemplary behaviour as dutiful daughter-in-law and wife, ironically without legally being either. Carrying cow dung, milking the cows or weaving are chores she adapts herself to and in the course of time Muslim Bibi earns her mother-in-law’s approval and fits into the “Hindu construction of *Grihalaksmi* or the goddess of the home” (p. 143) as Bannerji (2011) puts it in another context. However, under the visible dutifulness of doing “everything quickly and efficiently” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 46) is the invisible intention to lose oneself in work so as not to have “time to think about my loneliness” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 46). Bannerji (2011) also observes that, “In order to qualify as ‘good’, women have to foreswear their desire for a self” (p. 160) and having to fit into the mythical mould of the ‘devi’ or goddess, Bibi’s life becomes less oppressive and more bearable. But all the while as she engages in normal activities in the present, her other side remains troubled by memories of the past. These memories constantly disturb the present. Such memories can never bring about a complete closure of the past suggesting that the event of Partition itself can never be considered to have achieved completion. The rupture that Partition brought in the life of Bibi is one, which continues forever. Bibi’s act of remembering is the

writer's attempt to include the perspective of women while trying to make sense of the events of Partition.

Although Bibi continues to dream of a return to her past and to be united to her original family, she is aware of the impossibility of its realisation. When she is asked by her daughter Munni about her 'Mama' (maternal uncle), she finds herself at the crossroads of the past and the present. It revives the memory of the past, which cannot be completely erased. Like the division of the country, her soul is divided between her two lives, the past and the present. There are moments when she hopes that her brothers would come and take her home. However, she also realises that she has crossed the border and "can no longer walk across to the other country. Besides, I have travelled far with Gurpal and I no longer have the strength to go any further" (Hashmi, 2012, p. 45). The story is a metaphor for journey on many levels. One is the spatial journey which Bibi has to undertake when she is forced to move from one country to another after her abduction. The second is the cultural shift, which occurs for she is forced also to move from one community/religion to another. The other kind of journey she undertakes is the temporal one where she moves backward and forward in time. The story stresses upon the spatial and temporal movements. The old spaces – her parents' home and her 'country' – have been left behind forever. However, memory will not erase the old spaces. Bibi continuously talks about movement from one place to another without reaching any sort of a destination. The conflict between the past and the present, between the dream and the reality remains perpetual, "The heart is very stubborn. I don't know why it refuses to forget the past." (Hashmi, 2012, p. 52) The Partition of the country was done with a stroke of Radcliff's pen, but the exiled has to suffer a

perpetual division of the self between the past and the present. Memory does not remain silent forever.

Forgetting is an integral part of memory. There is a relationship between forgetting and forgiving – these provide answers to questions of how to live with memories, which are disruptive and traumatic. To be able to move on with the business of living Bibi must attempt to accept the new that is thrust upon her and acknowledge the loss of the old that she still yearns for. Closer to the event Bibi remains in mourning; it is only later that she is able to engage with it, come to terms with and make peace with her own self. One strategy to affect such a peace is to realise that as a woman marriage for her would anyway have entailed living with a complete stranger because cultural practices would disallow any say in the selection of a husband. From her point of view marriage would have been a journey into the unknown, similar to the one she is forced to undertake now.

A woman like Bibi is sought to be subjected to two separate patriarchal agendas. In the first one, men like Gurpal use the bodies of women of the ‘other’ community to proclaim their conquest, and in the other, the state assumes a patriarchal role by choosing to decide the fate of such women. Butalia (1998) and Menon and Bhasin (1998) have in their work discussed elaborately about the state project which undertook the task of recovering and restoring women who were abducted during Partition. This project was equally coercive in that it forced the restoration of countless women regardless of the fact whether they wanted to be restored or not. According to Manchanda (2006), “The patriarchal state *infantilised* the abducted and raped women, denied them the possibility of representing themselves and in the process effectively disenfranchised them” (p. 213). Ramone’s (2011) critique of the attempts by the state

to 'recover' the victims of violence and abduction "long after they were practically useful to those victims in many cases" (p. 67) is relevant here to comprehend Bibi's dilemma as an exile and her reconciliation to exile as home:

Women who had been abducted were intended to be 'recovered' from their new homes and taken back to their original region and their family. The Abducted Persons Recovery and Restoration Ordinance became a Bill and then an Act, under which legal authority it created a working definition of an 'abducted person', which took no account of free will either at the time of the assumed abduction or at the time of 'recovery'. In practice, although there may well have been a number of women who were relieved to be recovered from positions of servitude within their abductor's household, there were a large number of women who wanted to stay with their new families. From an outsider's perspective, it might be difficult to imagine that a woman would choose to stay with a man who had once abducted and raped her and forced her into marriage, as was the common scenario. (p. 67)

Pandey (2001) writes in a somewhat similar vein providing a reason for abducted women's refusal to be restored:

As it happened, many abducted women were hesitant about returning to their original families and countries – for fear of ostracism; because they felt they had been 'soiled'; because they could not bear the thought of being uprooted yet again and exposed (possibly) to new levels of poverty and uncertainty; or simply because they were grateful to their new husbands and families for

having rescued them from (further) assault and afforded them some protection.
([p.167] parenthesis in original)

Even with the passage of time and the growth of new bonds, Bibi still has the option of leaving with the people conducting the recovery operations and so leaving behind Gurpal's house and her children forever. Facing a similar quandary like other abducted women, she has done her own calculations and has come to the conclusion that "circumstances force us to find our own paths" (Hashmi, 2012, p. 46). Bibi's refusal to be restored is caused by her apprehension and doubt about the future in the old country, which would be yet another exile, "Instead of going into exile for a second time it seemed as if Sita has accepted Ravana's home" (Hashmi, 2012, p. 52). Bibi needs answers to some questions when the soldiers come to take back abducted women like her, "Where had they come from? To which country? To whom?" (Hashmi, 2012, p. 50). Will the 'Restoration' process of the state lead to a total restoration and 'recovery' of her past? She doubts the state's ability to reassure her. Her abduction and the subsequent late recovery attempts make Bibi reconstruct her ideas of her country and her changed notions are in response to the different person she now is, "For the first time in my life, my faith was shaken. The city of dreams, which I had built, crumbled into dust and vanished" (Hashmi, 2012, p. 50). She has to make her choices keeping this situation in mind.

Bibi's decision to stay back and remain 'unrecovered' also stems from a mother's concern for her child. This decision is more significant in the light of the fact that she reminds herself that she is "Munni's mother" (p. 50) and "[Munni] now stands as an obstacle between me and my relatives on the other side. The distance between them and us is very great" (Hashmi, 2012, p. 45). She has two other children who are

boys but her decision is never associated with them. It is only “Once Munni was born, however, my dreams loosened their hold over me” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 50). Munni is a girl and hence Bibi cannot abandon her and choose to go over to her own country. The possibility of being abducted and raped comes particularly to the woman’s lot which is the lesson life has taught her. This also takes us to the traditional role of women engaged in childbearing and childcare which is one of the reasons which has always led to lack of mobility for women. It reinforces the idea of woman as the nurturer who has to give up her desire for freedom at the cost of motherhood. Her decision is guided by pragmatism and she accepts the life with Gурpal and the children because “a journey with companions is easy” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 47).

With the birth of Munni, the old bonds are loosened and their hold on her becomes weaker. Bibi starts participating in the social life of her new home: “occasionally my voice could even be heard in the songs of Sangraon” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 50). She has become conscious of her new responsibility that “apart from being a sister, I was also Munni’s mother” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 50). She is compelled to create for herself a revised sense of community and responsibility. The new space that destiny has carved out for her makes her grapple with new meanings of identity, home, and changed landscapes, both physical and cultural. Now that she finds her “life had taken roots in Sangraon, and the roots had spread wide and deep,” (Hashmi, p. 50) her dreams of return to her past “crumbled into dust and vanished” (Hashmi, 2012, p. 50). As a result, she refuses to go with the soldiers who had come to Sangraon as part of the rescue party. According to Manchanda (2006) the state perceives a displaced woman like Bibi “as being devoid of agency, unable and incapable of representing herself, powerless and superfluous” (p. 206). She points out that “women in our patriarchal

acculturated state system are largely seen as non-subjects” (2006, p. 206). Hashmi’s Bibi thwarts this masculine state machinery by means of subterfuge. In order to subvert the state’s plans, she remains undiscovered and invisible to the state. Discovery would place her at the mercy of the unknown men and take away forever her right of selection. Her decision can be seen as an attempt to find her feet and consciously restore her life towards a footing which makes more sense than all the senselessness that has been the cause for the uprooting in her life. For the sake of survival and her daughter’s future, she negotiates a compromise and reconciles to the present. Kamra (2015) suggests that “we have let nostalgia and lament become the end points of our engagement with the 1947 partition” (p. 163). But Hashmi moves beyond the mere representation of nostalgia and lament to foreground not only the trauma of an abducted woman as victim but also the woman’s ability to rise above her victimhood and evolve the most pragmatic strategies available to her for not only her own survival but those dependent on her.

Hashmi’s linking of the ancient Hindu myth of Sita’s abduction to that of Bibi’s is an attempt to prove that the issue of abduction transcends Partition. At the time of Partition abduction of women took place across religions – Hindu, Sikh and Muslim men were guilty in equal measure in taking on the role of Ravana to abduct the other community’s Sita. We assume that Bibi, the abducted woman is a Muslim and Gurbal her abductor is a Hindu or a Sikh, for Hashmi relates the story without denominating them by their specific religions. That her abductor is constantly referred to as Ravana and she is seen in terms of Sita facing a ‘second exile’ implies that the question of abduction transcends both Partition and religion. It was an issue during the ancient times; it happened on a large scale during Partition involving all three communities

directly affected by Partition; and the apprehension that this situation could be repeated in the future is inherent in Bibi's decision to remain behind for the sake of her daughter.

Partition has set a journey in motion, which is endless. Bibi's story provides a vital glimpse into the complex layers that make up the life of Partition's abducted women. Bibi's schizophrenic existence would preclude reconciliation, but she is finally able to transcend her predicament and works out the necessary adjustments to effect a sort of self-rehabilitation. Menon in *No Woman's Land* observes that abducted women who remained untraced often adopted survival strategies by effecting an "honourable compromise" (2004, p. 7). According to her, "Women like them challenge the very notion of fixed identities, of birth-bound allegiances to religion and community, because their only unchanging identity is that of womanhood" (2004, p. 7). Alienated in a world to which Bibi is transported by force, she embarks on a long voyage of contemplation to comprehend the meaning of the life thrust upon her. Although trapped in an oppressive environment, Bibi's challenge is to adjust with reality without giving in to emotional frailty.

To conclude, it has been found that Bibi's abduction during Partition has imposed boundaries which like the political borders cannot be transgressed. It has also created a complete divide from home and family that Bibi must settle for. Exiled and alienated, her strategies of survival are guided by pragmatic considerations both for herself and her daughter. Tracing Bibi's constant movement between the past and the present it is seen that her inner consciousness, riddled with memory and trauma, cannot retrieve the past.

III

Ismat Chughtai's *Roots*

*You were slaves till yesterday, so were we.
And then came the season of freedom bathed in showers of blood...
Between you and us rage rivers of fire
Tall frowning barriers of hate
With a mere glance, however, we can tear them down;
We can forget, forgive the cruel part;
And again embrace you, yes we can.
But first you will have to break your swords,
And cleanse these bloodied garments;
After that we shall be strangers no more.*

-Ali Sardar Jafri

Writers like Chughtai had already started the process of documentation of personal experiences almost immediately after Partition. *Roots*, written in 1952, is a Partition story subscribing to a secular progressive perspective. It is the unique story of a strong-willed old woman who is on the brink of dislocation during Partition but whose individualistic notions of community and nation go counter to the dominant statist definition. The section analyses how the old lady, i.e., Ammi's words match her deeds and giving credence to home and its memories she rejects the idea of nation based on one's religion. Interconnected issues such as memory, home and community have been explored by Chughtai in the context of the uprooting and displacement that took place in the wake of Partition. She draws attention to the changed attitudes of the Hindus and Muslims towards each other indicating the resulting differences. The aim has also been to examine the stress that is laid on replacing the antagonism with solidarity and reaffirmation of old bonds. Known as firebrand writer, Ismat Chughtai

(1915-1991) was closely associated with the Indian Progressive Writers Association and her perspective on Partition is imbued with its philosophy.

Ismat Chughtai's *Roots* relates the story of an exceptional aspect of humanity in the context of Partition. Radcliff's mechanical division of the country created a large-scale migration on communal lines. The narrator of *Roots* has placed the story of his Muslim family and their neighbour, a Hindu family in the context of the Partition and the consequent migration. The story goes on to show how the deep bonds of humanity could not be completely snapped even in the midst of the growing distrust and violence between the communities in general.

Ammi's Muslim family and Doctor Sahib's, i.e., Roopchand's, Hindu family lived in a Hindu majority area of Mewar with houses facing each other. The relationship of the two communities and their conduct and culture was such that it was difficult to distinguish between an ordinary Hindu and an ordinary Muslim. The question of Pakistan and Hindustan remained only a subject of political debate among the members of the two families cutting across religious lines. Political affiliations did not have any effect on the relationship between the two neighbouring families. The political drama that was unfolding all around had no effect on "the love and friendship between the two families" (Chughtai, 2012, p.12). The entire issue of the creation of Pakistan was discussed as if it were a sport not to be taken up seriously. So far as the women were concerned they remained indifferent to the entire proceedings: "Ammi and Chachi would stay clear of politics" (Chughtai, 2012, p. 12). The day-to-day life of the two families was deeply interconnected. Even after the narrator's father's death, the Hindu Doctor Sahib "not only continued to love the family but also became aware of his responsibilities towards it. No important decision was made in the house without

consulting him” (Chughtai, 2012, pp.13-14). This idyllic world of neighbourly friendship and human relations was gradually coming under the attack of the distrust and the growing divide between the communities at large. A very ordinary incident became the beginning of the growing distance. The tension caused by the communal violence on the other side of the border slowly brought about the divide between the two families. They were earlier more or less politically neutral. But, now the tricolour was hoisted over Hindu Doctor Sahib’s house and the League’s flag over the Muslim narrator’s house. When the news of the growing number of refugees from Rawalpindi percolated to the region, “the distance between the two houses seemed to crawl with venomous snakes” (Chughtai, 2012, p. 14).

All the members of Ammi’s family prepare to migrate to Pakistan but Ammi refuses to move as she is rooted to the place. When they try to persuade her to go along with them to the new country she asks:

What is this strange bird called our country? Tell me where is that country? This is the land where you were born, which gave birth to you: this is the earth on which you grew up; if this is not your country, how can some distant land where you merely go and settle for a few days become your country? (Chughtai, 2012, p. 16)

The departure of his neighbours leaves Roop Chand so conscience-stricken that he suddenly goes to the station and brings the migrating family back to the house. The return of the neighbours revives the old bond and a smile begins to play on Ammi’s lips. Thus, the earlier jovial atmosphere of the past is restored.

In the midst of the universal madness that had gripped the two communities during Partition there were also at least a few stories of neighbours risking themselves and protecting the property and life of the persons belonging to the other community. *Roots* attempts to restore sense and faith in human relationships in the midst of Partition violence and mayhem. As a writer delving into the woman's psyche in most of her stories, Chughtai tells the story of an old woman who strongly resists the idea of giving up her home. The old woman Ammi is portrayed not as a passive character or as one who seeks protection. She exercises agency and choice and attempts to survive the horrific events by electing to stay rooted to her home. Her obdurate will cannot be bent. When her family decides to migrate, she swims against the tide and does not let Partition's blow consume her. Ammi is like those "large numbers of people (who) chose fidelity to place rather than to religious community" (Menon and Bhasin, 1998, p. 230). It is her powerful memories of her life in the family house that is one of the deciding factors for her choice. Another is the deep sense of belonging to India which is also her home.

Ammi does not leave home, and is signified as a wife and a mother, thereby seemingly not challenging the bifurcation between home and the public space. Yet in Ammi there is to be noted an alternative formulation of womanhood. She rises above the maternal familial role and transgresses societal expectations. The state's notion of freedom is seen as an imposition by Ammi. She does not subscribe to the idea of nationalism shaped by the forces of religious fundamentalism. The 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric of freedom is not for her. Her decision goes against the established notion of a mother who is all sacrificing for her children. Her decision to not accompany her children to Pakistan is at variance with the established trope of motherhood. *Roots*

questions the concept of defining one's identity as members of a particular religious community rather than as citizens of a secular state. According to Menon and Bhasin (1998), "For the vast majority, "country" was something they had always thought of as the place where they were born and where they would like to die" (p. 229). They also point out, "Partition made for a realignment of borders and of national and community identities, but not necessarily of loyalties" (p. 230). The central players of Independence and Partition proceeded with the decision of dividing the nation on the basis of religion. Ammi questions this and destabilises their theory of Pakistan as an ideal nation for Muslims and India for Hindus and other religions. Ammi's act of resistance, to borrow an expression from Behera (2006), is a "triumphant rejection of borderlines imposed by both states" (p. 42). Agha (2012), commenting on the character of women like Ammi in Chughtai, finds in them a duality as they are the "annapurna" (p. 201) and at the same time "violently disturb the convention" (p. 201).

Ammi cannot begin life anew – a predicament faced by all those who were forced to migrate whichever side of the border they were in. For her the space of the home is not a passive container or a simple canvas against which the events of her life unfold. It is in fact an active player suffused with meanings and the significance of which has been undermined by the larger narratives of Partition. Writing about the relationship of the house and memories, Bachelard (1994) remarks:

...thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate...our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated. All our lives we come back to them in our daydreams. (p. 8)

Contained within the home for Ammi is the social space staging the enactment of personal interactions at both the individual and group levels. The way she interprets her house is defined by her relationship to it. Spaces and things are cherished. The house is not a mere structure for her. To borrow a term from Bachelard (1994) it is “eulogised space” (p. xxxv). For Ammi, the space of the home is associated with her entry into the house as a newly wedded bride – an experience which in the traditional Indian context is the most important phase of a woman’s life. The home contains in it the memories of her life as a wife and a mother. She moves from room to room – rediscovering and reliving all the past moments – her whole being revolting at the idea of leaving the treasure-house of memories forever. To use an expression from Bachelard, Ammi finds herself “on the threshold of a day-dream” (1994, p. 13). Day-dreams help her retrieve memories of the house and she not only recaptures still images but also moving images whose energy makes them come alive to rise up to meet her. Some images are captured with photographic precision, “she saw the room in which her husband had first embraced her; where the veil had been lifted for the first time from the face of an innocent and trembling bride...” (Chughtai, 2012, p. 17) and recalls the day her husband died, “It was in front of that door that his body had been lowered into that coffin” (Chughtai, 2012, p. 17). She reconstructs her past through her memories embedded in each of the rooms of the house. Every room tells the story of the different roles she has fulfilled in life – that of the newlywed bride, wife and mother. The very corners of the room have emotional significance for all her ten children were born in the room and their umbilical cords buried in the corner. It is as if the room had become a part of her own self and severing herself from it was unthinkable. They are not mere rooms but

intimate spaces attached to her identity. To borrow from Bachelard (1994) again this is “localization of our memories” (p. 8) in “the spaces of our intimacy” (p. 9).

Home for Ammi has also produced the cultural space where she and her family interact with the Hindu neighbours. It is therefore the lived space where the everyday life of the members is tangibly played out. The precincts of the house and the home have thus played a decisive role in shaping her identity as a wife and mother and also as a member of the larger community. J. Singh (2014) has pertinently observed on how strong the bond is between home and women:

The Partition meant mass migrations but the women reacted from the depths of their being at the idea of leaving home. Many literary narratives bring out this anguish. The women, in the patriarchal system of India, were always confined to domesticity and it perhaps symbolised their world of living and the outer world was prohibited for them. That was why women reacted sharply to the idea of leaving home. In the normative structure of society, a woman is complexly identified with the home and woman fixes her identity securely within the framework of her family confined to the four walls of house. (p. 198)

The family’s interactions with neighbours have taken place within the domestic space of the house. The intimate spaces within the home have had a powerful influence leading to emotional attachment through memories and a sense of familiarity. Raju (2011) suggests, “So overwhelming can be the power of place that it may effectively cut across other axes of differentiation...” (p. 33). The space of the home provides the sense of safety – this safety is threatened if dislocated from home. It is traditionally living away from home that entails living away from guardians, but in Ammi’s case,

this is reversed. It is by living in her home that she loses her guardians who in her old age are her family who elect to migrate to Pakistan. She stretches the traditional gender boundaries by refusing to choose her children over her roots and her nation. During times of conflict, the ties which bind people together are shared cultural and religious identities. Thus, Ammi's own identification should have been with her own 'imagined community' of people in Pakistan and her family. But subverting such notions of nationalism, she refuses to acknowledge such clear-cut distinctions which polarise groups. Her electing to stay in India while her family migrates pushes her towards an old age vulnerable to loneliness. However, she is undeterred in putting her dignity and self-determination centre stage even in harsh and challenging times. Her valorisation of the home over the new Muslim nation of Pakistan is a result of the identity as a woman she has constructed and derived from the former.

Ammi's decision asserts that religion can survive without compromising on its original tenets – not in isolation from other cultural, intellectual and religious currents, but in close interaction with them. This interaction which has been an ongoing process between the two families is sought to be reversed, an idea that Ammi abhors. There was an unquestioning acceptance of intermingling of lives till the communal riots broke out. Through Ammi, Chughtai advocates building relationships within a secularised idiom. Ammi is all for reviving cross-community linkages and age-old ties which may have been fractured by Partition. Ammi blames her sons and other members of her family for giving in to the state's agenda which has at the hands of the cartographers created rifts between people of the same home and members of the community. She attacks them for so easily changing their concept of belonging and citizenship. Their decision to migrate and the withdrawal of emotional support by those whom she had previously loved

throw into total disarray the concept of home and community which she had hitherto envisioned. The story draws attention to the changed attitudes of both communities and the split it resulted in. But it also articulates as to how solidarities across these differences are made possible. The doctor persuades and brings her family members back home at considerable risk to his own life. This achievement translates into a victory of sorts.

The film *Garam Hawa*, based on an unpublished story by Chughtai and directed by M.S. Sathyu, continues, as in *Roots*, to engage with the consequences of Partition. Even in the picturisation of her story, Chughtai's basic concerns with issues relating to Partition remain fore-grounded. When Salim's brother Halim chooses to migrate to Pakistan, their ancestral house is declared an evacuee property as it was in Halim's name. As the house is handed over to a Sindhi Hindu refugee from Pakistan, Ajmani Sahib, Salim's family is exiled from their home. This pathetic situation becomes the occasion for the representation of Salim's mother's rootedness to her ancestral home. The grandmother, Dadda, in spite of her refusal to move, has to be physically lifted and taken to a rented house. However, despite this uprooting she cannot die in this alien home. Therefore, she is brought back to her 'real home' the *haveli*, where she dies in peace. Like Ammi of *Roots*, Dadda too finds the idea of leaving the house unacceptable. When the family discusses the notice from the Custodian to vacate the house Dadda says, "Show me. Who can make me leave my house?" Bachelard's (1994) opinion that "Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are" (p. 9) proves apt in both Ammi's and Dadda's case.

The ending of *Roots* is in keeping with Chughtai's liberal humanist ideals, which had deep faith in notions of interpersonal relationships between communities. It

is a story of repair and restoration amidst an atmosphere of betrayal and terror. In her survey of Partition literature by writers from the subcontinent in 'Communal Violence and Literature' Chughtai's philosophy becomes equally apparent. Not agreeing with the one-sided and biased representation of either community in the works of writers like M. Aslam and Ramanand Sagar, she attacks them for being "reactionary" (Chughtai, 2004, p. 48). She criticises them for engaging in a blame game and producing a literature which did nothing to assuage the pain of Partition. She feels this literature was ineffective. She was firmly convinced that literature had the responsibility to create and rediscover hope and optimism and that "to create great literature one needs a sensitive heart" (Chughtai, 2004, p. 54). Ahmed's (2009) observation on the Progressive Writers' Association, of which Ismat Chughtai was an active member, is worth mentioning here:

The progressives did not write to produce mere fiction. Their imaginative literature provided social commentary on events that were shaping the subcontinent over an extremely turbulent period. They did not just reflect such events as they unfolded; instead they chose to raise social concerns and questioned established ideas. The PWA set out to use literature and the arts to reshape society as well as give expression to people's lives. (pp. 4-5)

Though Chughtai was a Muslim, she decided to live in India in spite of quite a few of members of her family migrating to Pakistan. In her writings she has conceived of a secular India while at the same time acknowledging the tensions between religions which according to McNamara (2010), "secular nationalism tended to side step by the celebration of unity in diversity" (p. 97). Bharat (2012) translates from Chughtai's autobiography which records that as a child, the writer was a witness to the closeness shared by Hindus and Muslims but also "realised that there was something inherently

different between a Hindu and a Muslim” and she was “conscious that the verbal avowals of brotherhood went hand in hand with a certain constraint” (p.23). Ammi refuses to acknowledge the Indian-Muslim binary that led to the creation of Pakistan. For her, as for Chughai, Indian nationalism is fluid enough to allow for differences, even the Muslim one. Bharat (2012) translates Chughtai’s beliefs thus:

Religion and the culture of a nation are two different things. Here I have an equal share just as I have in its soil, its sunlight, its water. If I play with colour during Holi and light lamps during Diwali, does my religious belief take a beating? Is my belief and conscience so weak, so incomplete that it can be reduced to pieces? (p. 32)

M. Asaduddin (2009) states that stories like *Roots* “show the existential absurdity of the hatred that erupts between Hindus and Muslims. They also demonstrate the power of stereotypes in perpetuating cultural prejudices and explode the myth of cultural incompatibility between the communities” (p. xxiii). What emerges here is Chughtai’s belief that individuals have the option to select their religious and cultural identities within the private spaces of their lives. Ammi makes her choice by freeing herself from communal constraints.

The above analysis reveals the protagonist Ammi to be similar to some other women characters that have been examined in this study. In her pluralistic concerns, she echoes Laila and Pooro. Like them, Ammi emphasises human relationships over individual concerns of class or religion. It has also served to underscore the significance of ‘home’ for the ordinary persons threatened with dislocation during

Partition, a concern that has been completely missed out by the official versions of Partition history.

This study had set out to establish whether the women's Partition experience was linked to their everyday experiences as women. The women protagonists in the three selected stories have been examined in their relation to family, home and community in their life-course and also their experiences of Partition. What emerges is that the latter experience cannot be delinked and seen in isolation to their perception as wife, mother or daughter. The issue of abduction with its resultant trauma in the case of Puroo and Bibi, and the threat of being uprooted in the case of Ammi, have been seen and understood in terms of their position as women within the family and community. As delineated in the chapter, their involvement in the Partition experience has been shaped by patriarchal structures, be it of family or of state.

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