

Freedom Movement, Partition and Their Effects on the 'dangerous outcasts' As Portrayed in Contemporary Films and Literature

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Abstract

This present work discusses the historical practices of tawaifs and prostitutes in Indian history and portrayal of them in films and literature. Sumanta Bannerjee in his book "Dangerous Outcast: The Prostitute in nineteenth century Bengal" (1998) talks about how the profession of prostitution underwent a vast change in Bengal after the Britishers came into control. They legally controlled this ancient profession which caters to the basic instinct of mankind. The Britishers during their rule, enacted many laws subjecting the women's body to the state control. Their motive was to mainly protect the government servants. Such discipline and punish was extended even during India's independence and during the partition. 'Rajkahini' (2015) and 'Begum Jaan' (2017) are films where these so called dangerous outcasts live in a house along the Radcliffe line which was formed due to the partition of Bengal in June, 1947. The brothel houses eleven women who are mainly concerned about their business and not about national politics. They are several women who are rejected by society and betrayed by family. Each has a story of her own which has forced them into this profession. The brothel caters to all ranks of the society but partition finds them redundant. 'Heeramandi' (2024) is a film about the lives of the tawaifs in pre-independence Lahore and portrays the gradual deterioration of their cultural value and their involvement in the freedom movement. Similarly, there are many literary works which portray the plight of these women during India's freedom movement and partition. Pratiba Basu, Manik Bandopadhyay, Amrita Pritam and Sadat Hasan Manto's short stories speak about the plight of women who are almost forced into prostitution. This paper is a comparative study of the dangerous women as portrayed in selected literature and films. The ancient and contemporary history has further degraded the status of these women which needs to be organically studied. They are no less than the freedom fighters in standing up for the little piece of the undivided land which they called their home.

Keywords: Freedom movement; Partition; prostitutes; dangerous women; films; literature.

Introduction

Historical Practices of Tawaifs and Prostitutes in Indian History

Tawaifs and prostitutes have long been a part of India's history. They are deeply ingrained into the structure and practices of the society. Previously there were fine distinctions between tawaifs and prostitutes but with the coming of British imperialism, these women were mostly seen as dangerous outcasts. Pierre Bourdieu in his chapter 'Structures, habitus, practices' connect the concept of habitus with past experiences of a person - "The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices - more history - in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought, and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than

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all formal rules and explicit norms.” (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 280) Bourdieu takes it from Durkheim that ‘In each one of us, in differing degrees, is contained the person we were yesterday...’ and himself theorizes that “The habitus – embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present. This autonomy is of the past, enacted and acting, which functioning as accumulated capital, produces history on the basis of history and so ensures the permanence in change that makes the individual agent a world within the world.” (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 281) I quote Bourdieu here with reference to the history of partition of Indian subcontinent in 1947 and its aftermath and its effect on especially women. Partition made this specific group of displaced women further marginalized and reproduced the patriarchal structure of exploitation in a different way. Even though I focus on the historical events of India’s freedom movement and partition in my paper, one should keep in mind that partition is a continuing process which goes much beyond its time line. The way in which women were treated during the freedom movement and after partition is a part of the habitus or practise of society since the pre-colonial and colonial times which I will elucidate further.

Literature Survey

Partition and Inclusion of Refugee Women into Labour Market

Debjani Sengupta in her book *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities* points out about many partition alongside the main partition as people crossed borders divided over class, creed and religion. She mentions the short stories of Narendranath Mitra (1916-75) who portrays the anxieties of pre-partition times. ‘Palonko’, ‘Headmaster’ and ‘Kathgolap’ should be especially mentioned. Sunil Gangopadhyay in his novels *Arjun* and *Purbo Paschim* (East and West, 1988). The novels shows the lives of Hindus and Muslims from 1935 to 1980, linguistic nationalism of Bangladesh, Jinnah’s arrival in Dhaka and the implications of partition in fifty years. She also mentions the inclusion of women in the labour market – “In the 1960s, novels we also come across issues of rehabilitation, the opening up of the labour market to a large section of the women refugees and the expanding city as markers of newer aesthetic impulses in contemporary fiction.” (2016, p.19) Women are the easy victims of war from the ancient to the current times. Whether they are the Palestinian women or the Rohingyas, displaced women have to suffer the most.

Deterioration of Tawaif Culture and The Role of The Britishers

Saba Dewan in her book *Tawaifnama* researches about the disappearing tawaif culture and how dancing and singing are replaced by only singing and such performers are gradually mentioned as ‘gaanewalis’ and ‘nachnewalis’. She explains that tawaifs were sophisticated dancers cum musicians who were much sought after lovers and they were so much proficient in arts that poet like Bharatendu Harischandra known as the father of modern Hindi frequently visited them. With time the term ‘tawaif’ has been synonymously used with the word ‘prostitute’ and is stigmatised by society. There was also religious integration between the Hindus and Muslim tawaifs when the culture existed gloriously. ‘Teez’ was previously celebrated by both the communities in the rainy season. Sindoor was used by the daughter-in-laws of both the cultures. The gradual deterioration of these women is attributed to the colonial rule:

Colonial writers like Buchanan routinely described women who practised a vast spectrum of female sexualities that existed outside marriage as ‘prostitutes’. This representation was informed as much by Victorian morality as by Hindu and Muslim laws newly fashioned under the Company rule to administer justice to the natives according to their separate religious canons. The process of this law-making was based on the search for, and translation of brahminical scriptures in Sanskrit and Quranic injunctions, seen by colonial rulers as a ‘historically fixed’ and ‘authentic’ body of laws and codes representing the customs and beliefs of all Hindus and Muslims respectively. Interpreted by Brahmin priests and maulavis, these laws represented the worldview of the traditional elites and glossed over the traditions and practices of a wide range of less privileged castes and communities which, lacking textual sources, might have sought their legitimacy in customary laws. (2019, p.38)

Why Prostitutes are Dangerous Women and How are They Contained?

Prostitutes are generally taken as dangerous women about whom society has continued to devise their strategies to degrade them further. One cannot forget the history of partition which rendered several women destitute and degraded them further by pushing them into this world of human trafficking. Sumanta Banerjee (2000) points out the East India Company’s strategies about the Contagious Diseases Act (1864, 1866 and 1869) which controlled and limited the movement of the prostitutes around the army barracks. This is part of the larger social forces to control the movement of women. I prefer to use the term ‘prostitute’ rather than the more European term ‘fallen women’. The boot shaped map of Calcutta was enforced by the city’s Commissioner of Police in 1881 to put the place under the Contagious Diseases Act. Such implementation and categorisation can be related to Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1976) where human civilization has practised such containment and categorization to maintain the hegemonic structures of governance in society.

Fine Distinctions Between Tawaifs and Prostitutes

The parlance of this section of women can be found in the popular songs and sayings as pointed out by Sumanta Bannerjee. These women often cracked jokes and made their deceased husbands and the males in general butts of ridicule. Their slang words find entry in popular songs. The slangs mainly refer to the body structure, erotic suggestions and sexual acts. Religion also played an important role in determining the population of the prostitutes. Hindu prostitutes were more in number than Muslim ones as Hindu widows were more ostracized with little chances to remarry. Again prostitutes preferred to cater to their own castes only though this rule was often broken. The Muslim prostitutes mainly descended from two sections – courtesans of the Mughal period and poor Muslim women who were victims of famines and displacements. There is a difference between Hindu khemtawalis and Muslim baijis. We get the names of Nikki, Ushoorun, Begum Jan, Hingool, Nanni-Jan and Supan-Jan who practised North Indian music and thus entertained Raja Rajkrishna Dev of Shovabazar, the Bhadrakalok members of society, landed dewans and the Englishmen visitors. These women were part of the status symbol as well as a part of the cultural fear and anxiety of the middle class Bhadrakalok (Partha Chatterjee clarifies and defines this term) who wanted to protect the construct of the widow as a desexualised being and the construct of the wife as an obedient, meek and subordinate woman.

Babu Culture and Their Patronising of Dangerous Women

Partha Chatterjee in the chapter titled ‘The Nationalist Elite’ of his book *Nation and its Fragments* introduces the concept of bhadralok:

The terms middle class, literati, and intelligentsia all have been used to describe it. Marxists have called it a petty bourgeoisie, the English rendering of petit marking its character with the unmistakable taint of historical insufficiency. A favourite target of the colonizer’s ridicule, it was once famously described as “an oligarchy of caste tempered by matriculation.” More recently, historians inspired by the well-meaning dogmas of American cultural anthropology called it by the name the class had given it to itself – the bhadralok, ‘respectable folk’; the latter interpreted the attempt as a sinister plot to malign its character. (Chatterjee, p.35)

Chatterjee further substantiates the role of this class:

It was this class which constructed through a modern vernacular the new forms of public discourse, laid down new criteria of social responsibility, set new aesthetic and moral standards of judgement, and suffused with its spirit of nationalism, fashioned the new forms of political mobilization that were to have such a decisive impact on the political history of the province in the twentieth century. (Chatterjee, 1993, pp.35-36)

Ashis Nandy further defines the babu

... even the babu has been grudgingly recognized as an interface who processes the West on behalf of his society and reduces it to a digestible bolus. Both his comical and dangerous selves protect his society against the White Sahib. And even that White Sahib may turn out to be defined, not by skin colour, but by social and political choices. Certainly he turns out to be, in these pages, not the conspiratorial dedicated oppressor that he is made out to be, but a self-destructive co-victim with a reified lifestyle and a parochial culture, caught in the hinges of history he swears by. (Nandy, 1983. pp. xx)

Sinha, Kaliprasanna in his novel *Hutom Pechar Naksha* (1862) translated as *The Observant Owl* by Swarup Roy almost comically observes that:

The babus of the city set out on a jaunt in their phaetons, self-driving buggies and broughams with their well-heeled friends and hangers-on. Some headed for their garden-houses. Most of the babus, except a few refined ones, were accompanied by a fleet of carriages packed with whores and wine. Some didn't allow their coachmen to wear coats of arms or insignias, lest people should recognize them. Some, however, don't care a damn about slander; they think whoring is a heroic job! They rode through the street gallantly with their mistresses alongside; their attitude was – 'What do I care?' (Sinha, 1862, p. 4)

How to Distinguish Between Prostitutes and Temple Dancers or Baijis?

Sumanta Banerjee separates the concubine from the temple dancer and the commercial sex worker. Earlier dynasties employed concubine within feudal households and temple dancers within the larger public space to basically satisfy and contain the lust of men. In the capitalist society, the prostitute sells her capital just like the industrial worker sells his labour. Except the prostitute, the others like the temple dancer and baijis were given some space for cultivating and showcasing their skills like that of singing, dancing and performing for specific person or general public. The prostitute caters to the sexual demands of her client in exchange for monetary benefits. Her client is also the part of the same system.

How Prostitution was Treated in Ancient Times?

In the pre-Capitalist times, Kautilya's 'Arthashastra' vouches that society provided security and sanction to the trade of prostitution which was treated as any other trade with its rules and regulations. Prostitutes were an essential part of the economic system as they paid taxes and customers who deprived or harmed them were imposed fines and punishments. Vatsyayana in his text 'Kamasutra' recommends honour and respect for a courtesan of the highest order in the same lines as kings. According to Kautilya prostitutes were also engaged as spies by the Mauryan kings. The colonial administration converted them to criminals and outcasts with no inclusion within the society.

In ancient times violated women were not taken back by their family but told to serve the victors' households in the capacity of prostitutes. In 'Iliad' we find warriors fighting for girls and even retreating from war as their favourite mistress was taken away from them. The

famous cold war between Agamemnon and Achilles for Briseis is a story well known to many for which Achilles withdrew from the Greek side which cost them heavily.

Role of The Tawaifs in The Mughal Period

Tawaifs enjoyed a life of class, comfort and grandeur in the Mughal period. They accompanied the retinue of kings and princes and they were also appointed to teach manners and etiquette to young royalty. They were famous for their institution of high art of singing and dancing. But with the interference of the Britishers and decline of the rule of the Nawab, the tawaifs were condemned as polluting the society. The Britishers passed new laws to contain these dangerous outcasts who spread diseases among the virile army men.

Present Study

Prostitutes or Tawaifs Portrayed in Cinema

Prostitutes are often portrayed as the heroine or anti-heroines in films. Acting profession especially in case of women is often compared to prostitution where a woman sells her body to sustain herself in society. Society thinks that there is a fine line between acting and prostitution. Women from respectable families were not often allowed to act in theatres and films. Bollywood or Tollywood heroines often play unconventional roles like that of negative characters like vamps and prostitutes. It changes and challenges their images and also fetches them onscreen awards for doing unconventional roles. Rani Mukherjee plays the role of a call girl in *Laaga Chunari Mein Daag* (2007). Kareena Kapoor plays a prostitute named Chameli in *Talaash* (2012). Bipasha Basu plays the role of Bobby in *No Entry* (2005). Priety Zinta plays the role of a call girl who is hired as a surrogate mother in *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke* (2001). Sushmita Sen plays the role of a prostitute in *Chingaari* (2006) who is drawn into this trade to make a living for her daughter. But she is not able to dissociate her daughter from this trade. Tabu plays the role of a bar dancer in *Chandni Bar* (2001). Rani Mukherjee plays the role of a nautch girl in *Mangal Pandey* (2005). Alia Bhat plays the role of a prostitute in *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022) and in *Udta Punjab* she plays an innocent poor girl forced into this degraded trade. Srijit Mukherjee's *Rajkahini* (2015) and *Begum Jaan* (2017) are films about prostitutes who need to be evicted from the area which happens to be the Radcliffe line which was drawn by the then administrators to partition India. The freedom fighters who are the stakeholders of reformation and morality want the prostitutes to be evicted from the area. Begum Jaan is the head of the prostitutes who runs the brothel in a dilapidated kothi which is situated at the far end of the village. She is a widow from Benaras who was later sold into prostitution. She gradually became a tawaif and later arrived into this area and built this kotha.

Theoretical Framework

A cultural study of tawaifs and prostitutes is also proposed from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras (approximately from 1800s to 1970s) down to the contemporary times in the Indian subcontinent. The cultural condition of these women forced the Britishers to term them as dangerous women. Patriarchy was fraught with anxiety and fear regarding these women. These anxiety and fear assumed numerous shapes and forms. These forms of cultural anxiety and fear are reproduced in texts ranging from the ideological to the imaginative. These are some of the texts that are also proposed to read. Films and English texts that are in translation and are related to this condition are also studied. The condition of prostitution is made complex due to the interplay of these several aspects such as historical, social, colonial, political and economic.

Methodology

Here, the approach is comparative, intertextual and selective. Some texts are consciously selected for reading. Roland Barthes in his essay 'The Death of the Author' defines what is a text:

We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture. (Barthes, p.4. 1967)

Hayden White's concept of metahistory is propagated in his book *Metahistory*, and reference will also be made to his work because both history and fiction are dealt with in this study: *The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century* (1973) notes the concept that the writing of history is guided by the historian's selection. In an essay titled "The question of narrative in contemporary historical theory" he distinguishes between 'historical' from 'fictional' stories.

Where the aim in view is the telling of a story, the problem of narrativity turns on the issue of whether historical events can be truthfully represented as manifesting the structures and processes of those met with more commonly in certain kinds of imaginative 'discourses', that is, such fictions as the epic, folk tale, myth, romance, tragedy, comedy, farce, and the like. This means what distinguishes 'historical' from 'fictional' stories is first and foremost form rather than content.

Thus referring here to Barthes and Hayden White I find that my texts include 1. Historical events, 2. Films 3. Laws, 4. Literature, 5. Silence and occlusion.

Study of Select Films And Literature

Begum Jaan

Begum Jaan in Srijit Mukherjee's film (2017) of the same title is continuously projected as historical and mythic figures like Razia Sultana or Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi. Even though she is a prostitute, she has a sense of morality of her own. She gives shelter to destitute women and slowly introduces them into this profession. This film is also influenced by Sadat Hasan Manto's short story 'Khol Do' (Open It!) We find that she pampers her women, gives them the love of a mother and makes them come to terms with their present reality. Throughout her life she has faced several circumstances which has made her learn that men are not to be trusted.

Begum is a strong willed woman who utters with determination that everything is under her law. She gives shelter to women who have been victim of the injustices of their family or society. She gives shelter to women who have been violated by men and therefore rejected by their family. She also gives them names as they have undergone through traumas and forgotten their names. She is not concerned about the caste or creed of her customers and is only concerned about the appropriated payment of her services. The gravity of the Radcliffe line is beyond her manner of apprehension. She laughs at Srivastava and Ilias who are government representatives of Hindustan and Pakistan and bring in government orders to evict these women from this house of ill repute. Previously Begum Jaan had an aura of her own and even the local policemen were afraid of her. The women feel a sense of belonging and familiarity among themselves while they are under the guardianship of Begum. She has rescued and given shelter to these women and they are indebted to her in many ways.

The men are mostly shown to be exploitative and double faced. The school master expresses his love for Begum Jaan and tells her to elope with him. When Begum refuses, the school master turns revengeful and tries to escape with one of the girls. He promises marriage and rehabilitation for the girl but sells her again. This is a way of giving a lesson to Begum. The government officials engage professional rioters to run fear into the hearts of these women so that they clear the house. The rioters kill Sujit who is the male servant of the household and also feeds them with the pet dog's meat.

The upside-down house of Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* about which Thamma recounts is symbolic of the partition of her country. The house stands as a metaphor for the unity of the country with its smallest symbol of the family. The division of the family among the brothers with a black line drawn between the house makes the two families strangers to each other. Thamma like Begum Jaan fails to see the shadow line drawn by the colonisers or the nation builders to separate a country without any consideration of the common people.

Begum Jaan's house or kothi is symbolic of the undivided country which is visited by everyone alike regardless of their caste, creed or religion. She vents her laughter and surprise when the government officials from both sides of the country come with the government order to divide her house. Begum Jaan never discriminated between her customers who are entitled to use her service only in exchange of monetary benefit. She refuses to budge an inch from her established business venture and complains that her business is disrupted by the riots and the crossing over of the people from both side of the border.

She also raises her voice against the routine check-up of the girls for venereal diseases who are detained and given no government help whatsoever. This is a reference to the identification of the prostitutes as dangerous outcastes who had to be controlled by the government to protect the officers from contracting these diseases and thus losing their vitality.

She laughs at the idea of freedom when the school master brings in crackers and sweets to celebrate India's forthcoming independence. She complains that a woman is never truly independent in a man's world. She cynically laughs at the idea of independence and does not find that it is in any way beneficial to her.

Begum Jaan and her women find the final solution in performing self-sacrifice just like the women who used to perform sati or 'sahamaraan' along with their husband. The women do not flee or opt for relocation but arm themselves with arms and ammunition. They undergo a rigorous training in shooting under the guidance of Saleem, the Pathan bodyguard. When the rioters attack them with guns and canons, the women does not budge from their area. They attack the men with equal vigour before falling in front of the bullets. They are no less than the freedom fighters in standing up for the little piece of the undivided land which they called their home. They chose death and sacrifice over relocation or a second life due to partition.

Heeramandi

Heeramandi (2024) is a film by Sanjay Leela Bhansali about the historical and present Heeramandi in Lahore where the tawaifs have been living since the Mughal era. This place was an area of high art and culture and Nawabs used to patronise these women. It is an existent geographical location situated inside the walled city of Lahore and there is a mosque called Badshahi mosque to the North of it. It is presumed that it turned into a red-light area after the British colonisation. The name 'heera' has two connotations – it implies the dancing girls or tawaifs who stayed in that locality. The second implication is that the area has been named after Hira Singh Dogra, the prime minister of Raja Ranjit Singh who opened a business

centre in the form of a grain market. The Pakistani film *Taxali Gate* released on 24th February, 2024 is also based on the present day Heeramandi area.

Heeramandi is a film set in just pre-Independence era and the setting is a kotha which houses many women who are under a head woman who looks over all their affairs. In the pre-independence 1920s Heeramandi was an area bustling with the activities of the tawaifs who enjoyed the patronage of the nawabs for their art of singing and dancing. The film opens with Rehana selling a newborn boy to nawab Qutub-ud-din for a priceless necklace. The mother of the son wakes up and searches for her son and at last demands an explanation from Rehana. Rehana is very arrogant and proud of herself and she demands that she be called 'huzoor'. She declares that boys have no place here as their future is only to be a pimp or hizra. She also calls herself God. Mallika, the mother of the son is infuriated and promises to steal everything from her one day. Mallikajan murders Rehana and thus takes her revenge and consequently inherits her fortune and empire. Mallikajan was taken to the police station and the inspector forced her to confess but she denied everything. Then Nawab Zulfiqar, her accomplice arrived and bribed her way out of the police station.

The film fast forwards twenty five years later. The Englishmen wanted to commercialise their songs by recording through their gramophone. They suggest to Mallikajan that Bibbojan's voice be recorded through a gramophone. Mallikajan identifies them as rare as the moon whose light never enters anyone's house. She does not want to be easily accessible as any commodity and wants to preserve the exclusive status of Heeramandi.

Nawab Zulfiqar patronises Mallikajan and he has won the title of Khan Bahadur for patronising the Britishers. The internal conflict between the tawaifs is portrayed in this film series. Alam Zeb is the daughter of Mallikajan who is estimated to be the future huzoor but she is inclined to be a poet. Mallikajan is shown to be very strict who imparts life lessons to her daughter. One day when Saima was helping Alam getting dressed, a pearl necklace breaks and a pearl is lost in the hamam water where she was supposed to take a bath. Alam takes the blame but Mallika orders her daughter to find it otherwise she will sell Saima to replace the pearl. When she returns the pearl, Mallika is pleased to find that her daughter has grown up and therefore she declares that Alam's 'nath utrai' (loss of virginity) ceremony will be performed on Basant Panchami. But Alam resists and Mallikajan recollects that she also responded in a similar way to her mother. Mallika insists that this is the destiny of every girl in Heeramandi. Alam declares that it is her dream to become a poetess and she will pursue her dream.

Meanwhile, Tazdar Baloch the hero of the series returns from Oxford after studying law and has got the offer of a job from a Bombay firm. But his father tells him that Nawabs never work as servants but they have to cater to the needs of the Britishers. He believes that the presence of the Britishers will ensure the comfort of the Nawabs. But his son believes that the Nawabs are nothing but servants.

Cartwright, the British officer comes to visit Mallikajan and demands one of her nautch girls to perform for him in exchange of money. But Mallikajan just laughs at him and Patto (her maid) interprets her gesture as scoff at the Britisher's demand. She is so powerful that she declines the offer and exclaims that only her coin has value here. Loyalty is also a big factor with Mallikajan.

Alam refuses to attend a mehfil called by Tazdar's grandmother where Mallikajan is invited. But when Alam hears that the noted poet will showcase his poetry, she steals into her mother's carriage and attends the function. This film showcases an old world charm with elegant décor and opulent architecture. Love intrigues and handling of power among the tawaifs showcase the private politics in the cultural world. It is a self-sufficient world where the whims of these tawaifs reign supreme. Here, tawaifs also take part in anti-British movement. Bibbojan even took part in this freedom movement and helps the freedom-fighters by providing them pistols hidden in books in bookshops.

Lajjo is in love with Zorabar (a nawab but actually the illegitimate son of Mallika who was sold to a childless nawab) but she is so much love-struck that she has taken recourse to alcohol. Zorabar actually invites her to dance in his nikaah mehfil and also humiliates her by slapping her publicly. There is a heated exchange between Mallika and Zorabar where Mallika reveals his true identity. Lajjo dies on her way back home and Mallikajan in her funeral states that tawaifs gain freedom in their death.

Lajjo's dancing scene at her lover's wedding ceremony is inspired by Amrita Pritam's short story 'Shah di kanjari' or 'The Shah's Harlot'. The story is set in Lahore and is a rivalry match between two women – the wife and the courtesan from Heera Mandi. Shah who is a rich Sikh businessman has taken Neelam as her courtesan. Now Shah's wife invites her to perform in her son's wedding festivities. The wife's has worn a plain pink saree and she at first feels herself inferior to the bright green garara and red shirt and gold jewellery of the courtesan. Then the wife claims moral victory over the courtesan by touching her son's head with a hundred rupee note and giving it to the courtesan.

Fareeda comes back and declares revenge on Mallikajan for murdering her mother Rehana and also selling her at the age of nine. The power game between these tawaifs is shown in

different generations and how the kothis are organised, assembled and run. Fareedan and Cartwright are shown to be bisexuals. They join hands and become accomplices against Mallikajan. They reopen the file of Rehana's murder.

Tazdar's father invites Cartwright and Handerson. Tazdar informs his group members who likewise plan to kill Handerson. Fareedan breaks the tawaifs culture and arranges nath-utrai and plans a party with British and Nawabs. Cartwright and his men rapes Mallikajan who comes to release her daughter and thus revenges his previous humiliation. Mallikajan is severely hurt both physically and psychologically. The tawaifs understands through this insulting behaviour that the Britishers have no respect for these nautch girls.

Tazdar's father makes Cartwright arrest him to prevent his nikaah to Alamzeb. Alam changes her bridal wear into mujra costume and performs mujra on her wedding night. On the other hand Tazdar dies as he is violently beaten in the police station who tries to extract information about his group members. Fareeda arrives within time when she hears that the marriage is stalled and pleads Cartwright but he calls her a snake and dismisses her. Tazdar dies in front of Fareeda's eyes. Cartwright lies to the devastated father that the freedom fighters barged into the police station to kill Tazdar to prevent their names from getting revealed. Tazdar's father is made to understand that these freedom fighters are the enemies of Tazdar and the Nawabs. Meanwhile Bibbojan and Mallikajan give shelter to the freedom fighters. The police instruct the Nawabs not to patronise the tawaifs anymore. The Nawabs do not go to the tawaifs and Mallikajan decides to hand over the keys to Fareeda. Mallikajan decides to hand over the keys to Fareeda. She also declares that she will light the mehfil only when India gets independence. Mallikajan contributes her jewellery towards funding of the rebels. The last scene is that of Bibbojan being shot for killing Handerson and the tawaifs marching towards the place where Bibbojan is to be shot. This film portrays the contribution and involvement of the tawaifs towards India's freedom movement.

Tawaifs and Prostitutes in Literature

Amrita pritam

Amrita Pritam's *The Shah's Harlot* portrays a prostitute who has internalized her socially marginalized status, even as she becomes the object of competition and resentment from the married wife. The story further underscores how the economic precarity and displacement generated by Partition pushed many women into prostitution, revealing the gendered consequences of historical upheaval.

Manik Bandhyopadhyay

Manik Bandhyopadhyay's (1908-1956) short story 'The Final Solution' needs to be mentioned here as it tells the story of a destitute family from East Bengal who crosses over to West Bengal due to partition and finds themselves without occupation, shelter or food. Mallika is the protagonist of this short story and we get the whole situation through her eyes. Mallika's husband being a nonchalant, indifferent and feverish person has maintained an uncaring approach towards his family. Mallika and displaced women like her is the target of the pimps like Pramatha who want to recruit women in flesh trades. Mallika is a reluctant woman whose hands are tied by her motherly instinct for her child who goes to sleep crying from hunger. She wants a job for her husband but Pramatha says that under such circumstances jobs are scarce for men. Pramatha comes in the guise of welfare society worker who help the refugees during this situation. Mallika once provided with milk, shelter and money exclaims that he is a God. The college students had warned her and explained the type of the job for almost ten minutes but Mallika turned a deaf ear to them as her primary need was protecting her child. Mallika accepts that she is fully aware of the evil intentions of Pramatha – "Do you think I don't know what villainy is? Can't I figure out who's honest and who's treacherous? He puts on an act of sincerity, but can he hide the look in his eyes? We are living with our backs to the wall. Had it been otherwise we would have kicked him in the teeth and shown him the door. But we are helpless." (Bandhopadhyay 23) Mallika is not even given protection by the police officers. Mallika's sister-in-law Asha does not want to work under such persons like Pramatha even though Mallika accuses her to be the cause of their ruin. Later when Asha relents and accepts the offers, Ramlochan dismisses her for Mallika. Pramatha gives them shelter along with four other families in a house from which a Muslim family had been cast out by a riot raised by Pramatha himself.

Mallika experienced everything when she went to live in the rented house provided by Pramatha. She witnessed that "The driver returned to the vehicle. A while later Mallika saw a married woman, a few years older than herself, wearing a nice sari, get into the car alone. She looked extremely dejected. Mallika could sense where the woman was being taken. She had known all about it in her days and nights on the railway platform, living among the multitudes. That boy and girl had spoken to her in detail about Pramatha's various activities. She herself had seen how a girl or a woman returned alone – in a short time – an hour perhaps, clutching a few coins in her fists, filled with impotent rage." (Bandhopadhyay 25)

Mallika had accepted the profession of prostitution but she could not accept the fact that Pramatha would enjoy her first. "Suddenly Mallika saw red: Blood came surging to her head. She had accepted the fact that Pramatha was going to engage her prostitution, but she couldn't tolerate the thought that he had planned to enjoy her first, before introducing her to the profession." (Bandhopadhyay 29)

Prativa Basu's (1915-2006) short story 'The Marooned' is about a widow who had to leave her palatial house and property behind in East Bengal to avoid the riots. The grandeur of her wealth is expressed in the following lines:

In an iron chest, she still had at least forty tolas of gold, three Benarasi sarees, two sets of silver service and some copper and brass sets. The sprawling house was still quite impressive, though a bit dilapidated...All these were the remnants of an affluent past and were now lying in the darkness of the store-room. (Basu 158)

She had lost all the male members of her house and witnessed "riots, meaningless blood-shed, baseless fear..." She depended on the Muslim tenants of her estate but Jamir Mian withdrew their protection and allegiance in these trying times. Bindubashini had no other recourse but to pack her belongings in small bundles and start her journey amid this chaos. The crossing over along government lines is very inhuman and painful:

Across the vast fields the government had arranged for two ropes to be stretched from one end to the other, serving as a passage. Thousands of people entered the narrow passage. The children and pregnant women got crushed in the crowd, trunks on people's heads banged against and broke other people's heads, some clawed at the female bodies in the crowd, some picked pockets, taking away the meagre cash one carried for the road. (Basu 161)

She handed over all her jewellery one by one in lieu of the honour. She expected to be safe and sound once she would be among the Hindus. She expected charitable associations and volunteers to wait for her. Her daughter-in-law Uttara's uncle at Jhmapukur Lane in Calcutta did not respond to their call for help. As they settled as refugees with application for various jobs – the men applied for jobs as masons, young women applied themselves to household works, little boys did some jobs in front of paan shops and little girls turned into beggars. But Bindubashini could not find herself useful. A sadhu by the name of Keshabananda took the four women together in his shelter and one by one disposed them off to disreputable services. Uttara was disposed off as a governess of two girls of a widower. Actually Keshab supplied women to Rajiblochan Sarkar, a blackmarketeer in the guise of a government organization member of 'Abalabandhab Samiti.' Then followed fourteen year old Milu who was supplied as a heroine to Sashisekhar of Parabat Film Company. Keshab brought Milu to Sashisekhar and the latter raped her.

Sadat Hasan Manto

Sadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) portrays some brutal pictures of partition where men become animals and women are reduced to the status of prostitutes. In the short story titled "Khol Do" (Open It!), the grieving father Sirajuddin frantically searches for his teenage daughter Sakina amidst the refugee camp. Humanity is shown to be totally lost and the men

display more of the brutish side to themselves. The father is similarly in a state of shock – “A series of images flitted across his mind- images of plunder, fire stampede, the train station, gunshots, night, and Sakina.” (Manto 74) The ‘dupatta’ has a special mention here. Her father tries to retrieve this piece of cloth which is symbolic of her daughter’s modesty but in vain. The cloth remains inside his pocket but Sakina, the real person is no more with him. Partition has turned men into vultures hungry for female flesh and women are degraded into prostitutes. In this story, we find that the hypocrite young group of volunteers identified and located Sakina but did not bring her back to her father but repeatedly raped her as is suggested by the story. The narrator shows the hypocritical nature of the young men – “The young men tried every which way to please her. They fed her, gave her milk to drink, and then helped her to get into the lorry. One of them even took off his jacket and gave it to her because she was feeling awkward without her dupatta, making repeated but futile attempts to cover her chest with her arms.” (Manto 76) The hope that Sakina is saved from her plight is shattered in the next few lines when the boys feign ignorance about her in front of her father. She was at last found unconscious by the train tracks. Her pathetic status is reflected in the title of the short story. The doctor’s command of opening the door is obeyed by the corpse like Sakina who removes her salwar to lose her modesty once more.

Conclusion

The prostitutes in the South Asian countries are never respected or recognised or given their proper status in society which is shown by history time and again. The British colonial policy has further degraded the tawaifs and baijis into commercial sex workers who are considered to be the invisible part of the society. These women were no less than the freedom fighters who at least had glory attached to their names. These women are mainly associated with the cultural fear and anxiety which the patriarchy still holds against them. They once held a distinguished position in royal courts which is depicted in the films and history but gradually they suffered a lot of degradation at the hands of society. Partition has further downgraded them into destitute women or the innocent women were forced into this profession to earn their living or maintain their existence. These women faced exploitation from the early colonial times which continued to the contemporary times. The trauma faced by the prostitutes or women in general crossing the borders are multiplied many times due to the impact of partition as reflected by the literature and films discussed in this paper.

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