

The Untold Stories of Partition: An Analysis of *Torn from the Roots: A Partition Memoir* by Kamla Patel

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Article History: Submitted-30/09/2019, Revised-06/11/2019, Accepted-09/11/2019, Published-20/11/2019.

Abstract:

The Partition of India has been one of the most traumatic event in the history of the sub-continent. While the dominant narrative of history emphasizes on the political upheavals, the life experiences of its women victims remain buried under manifold strata of the past.

Kamla Patel's work *Torn from the Roots: A Partition Memoir* narrates personal histories of the women who experienced the brunt of partition; bringing out a unique facet of history that has gone almost unrecorded and unexplored. This alternative history throws light on the abduction of women followed by the forced recovery and rehabilitation by their governments. This paper especially focuses on the rehabilitation programme initiated by both the governments for rehabilitating the abducted women as recorded in Kamla Patel's memoir who was in charge of a 'Recovery Camp' in Lahore and was responsible for recovering Hindu women left or forcibly detained in Pakistan.

Keywords: Partition, recovery, rehabilitation, victims.

Kamla Patel was born in 1912 in Nadiad, city of Gujarat, India. She came under the influence of Gandhi when she was admitted to his Ashram by her father. It is here that she came under the influence of Gandhi and began her life as a social activist. After a year of her marriage Kamla Patel became a widow at the age of nineteen. It was then that she decided to devote her remaining life in the service of the country which made her contribute significantly in the country's freedom struggle. Through Gandhiji, she came into contact with activists like Mridula Sarabhai, who was the Chief All India Organizer of the Recovery and Rehabilitation Programme. Sarabhai took Patel under her wing, handing her over the responsibility of recovery work in Pakistan. She was stationed at the Gangaram Hospital in

Lahore as Mridula Sarabhai's representative. Patel went on to work with Mridula Sarabhai, Rameshwari Nehru, Sucheta Kriplani and others for the recovery and rehabilitation of abducted women and children during and after the Partition.

B. R. Nanda, in his memoir, *Witness to Partition* asserts that Partition of India happened before it was actually scheduled for, as 'the transfer of power' was preponed from June 1948 to August 1947 (Nanda 25). One of the reasons being the British inability to handle the sudden increase in the instances of communal violence in united India. Furthermore, the large scale brutality of Noakhali riots of October-November 1946 had seriously shaken the resistance of Congress towards the division of the country. Nanda mentions that the disruption brought over by Jinnah's 'direct action demonstrations' in March 1947 forced the Congress leaders to chose from "a lesser evil... partition or civil war" (Nanda 25). It was these direct action demonstrations that ushered the way of the communal bloodbath, forcible conversions, and abduction of Hindu women in West Punjab (Nanda 23). Historians claim that communal violence was triggered with the migration of these religious minorities from West Punjab. As these people migrated from West Punjab they brought with them the tales of horror which initiated retaliation of the people from the other side. This brought about unprecedented acts of genocide, abduction, rape, and human trafficking.

Amidst this communal hatred, there stood Gandhi clearly against the creation of Pakistan, declaring that he would resist the division of the country even if Congress accepted it. Gandhi whose stature in Congress as well as in the national politics was unchallenged failed to prevent the increasing communal animosity and its subsequent violence which finally culminated in the partition of the country. This was a huge blow on the reposed faith of the masses on the statesmen of the country. Splitting up the nation on the basis of its religion, tore apart not just the state into two parts but its citizens as well. The religious minorities on both sides of the border paid the price of this division of the state. Anders Hansen calls the partition of 1947 a "humanitarian catastrophe," due to which nearly five lakh people lost their lives, and around nine million crossed borders between India and Pakistan (Hansen 1). The historical records of the Partition mostly focus on the causes, negotiations, and events leading to the Partition of the country, what is ignored are the deep scars this historical event left particularly on the female populace. Innumerable women were kidnapped and subjected to unimaginable forms of torture. Their tales of horror either have been left unrecorded or women themselves being illiterate or too ashamed have restrained themselves from sharing their experiences. It is, for this reason, works like *Torn from the*