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Partition and Women: Exploring the Soul beyond the Scars of Division in "*Neighbours"* by Dalip Kaur Tiwana and "*Blades of Grass*" by Kulwant Singh Virk

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Abstract:
The 1947 partition of Indian subcontinent precipitated an immense and mandatory upheaval, involving forced and massive displacement of millions of individuals, communal and religious strife, and widespread acts of rape, slaughter, butchery, and assassination. This traumatic, protracted, and enduring movement ultimately gave birth to two distinct nations: India and Pakistan. The horrific happening also holds significance in its impact on the Indian women, as it is believed that by violating a woman's honour, an entire community can be tarnished. Nonetheless, amidst the prevailing chaos and dislocation, there exist exemplars of courage among women who dare to defy the status quo. While they may have endured the tumultuous demarcation of borders, with the passage of time, they learn to have a separate existence. It is essential and urgent to conduct a feminist reading of the partition as amidst the shadows of patriarchal dominance, some women consciously assume the role of protector and guardian, defying prescribed gender roles to forge paths of resilience and empowerment. The current scholarly inquiry undertakes an analysis of two survivors who albeit temporarily ensnared in psychological turmoil, exhibit suppleness and embark on a journey of self-rehabilitation. The paper focuses on two Punjabi short stories: "Guandi" by Dalip Kaur Tiwana and "Khabbal" by Kulwant Singh Virk which have been translated into English as "Neighbours" and "Blades of Grass" respectively. The overarching objective is to dissect the experiences of female victims of partition in these narratives, probing whether they succumb to the constrictions of essentialism or manage to transcend binary classifications in the aftermath of the intense brutality they endure during the partition by using feminist approach. The study aspires to unravel the complex interaction among trauma, identity, and empowerment, shedding light on the nuanced ways in which individuals navigate the outcome of calamitous events and reshape their destinies. The aim is to provide a deeper understanding of the characters' transformative journeys and the broader insinuations of their narratives in the post-Partition landscape.

Keywords: Partition, Partition Literature, Partition and Women, Trauma, Communal Attitudes, Political Turmoil, Collective Memories, Social and Individual Experiences, Divide and Rule, Borders and Boundaries.

You slaughter living beings and call it religion
Hey brother, what would irreligion be?
Great Saint – that's how you love to greet each other:
Who then would you call a murderer?
Kabir
Songs of the Saints of India, (51).

Introduction and Aim:

The drawing of that crooked line by the last viceroy, Louis Mountbatten, and a British lawyer and Law Lord, Cyril Radcliffe precipitated an immense and mandatory upheaval, involving forced and massive displacement of millions of individuals. People found themselves compelled to venture into unfamiliar expanses and regions, struggling to establish connections. These observations have been made in the context of the year 1947, when the Indian subcontinent was gripped by communal and religious strife, culminating in widespread acts of rape, slaughter, butchery, and assassination. This traumatic, protracted, and enduring movement ultimately gave birth to two distinct nations: India and Pakistan. The political, social, geographical, and emotional rupture that separated Muslims from Hindus and Sikhs polluted the atmosphere of what was once a united Hindustan. People were gripped with feelings of aversion and distrust for friends, relatives, neighbours, and ethnic groups. Millions were subjected to ineradicable impressions of horrific massacres and tremendous emotional pressures, with the legacy of this trauma becoming an enduring part of their genetic heritage. In this regard, it is essential to explore into historical, sociopolitical, and psychological ramifications of the partition, examining the enduring scars it left on the collective consciousness of the inhabitants. Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis of the broader geopolitical implications and consequences of the 1947 partition on South Asia's contemporary landscape is warranted, shedding light on the lasting impact of this seminal event on the region's socio-cultural fabric, inter-state relations, and ongoing conflicts.

The delineation and establishment of boundaries have the capacity to inflict both physical and psychological wounds upon individuals, deeply affecting their selves and identities. Among the numerous historical episodes etched in the collective consciousness of Hindustanis and Pakistanis, the cataclysmic events of the 1947 partition loom large as a pivotal moment, leaving an enduring imprint on their psyches and emotions. The horrific happening also holds significance in its impact on the Indian women, imposing upon their body, mind, and soul the weight of chauvinistic, nationalist, and religious discourses, ideologies, and stereotypes. In a patriarchal framework, women often endure violence during periods of tranquility, but their vulnerability intensifies during times of unrest, rendering them susceptible to molestation, forced conversions, coerced marriages, and even fatalities. Women find themselves subjected to a dual oppression—first, by the circumstances that

engulf them, and second, by the prevailing male mindset, which perceives them as emblematic repositories of honour.

Notably, men's attention often shifts towards women, partly because women constitute a vulnerable segment of society, and partly due to the erroneous belief that by violating a woman's honour, an entire community can be tarnished. During distressing times, women are regarded as territories meant to be infiltrated and invaded, further perpetuating their subjugation. The scars inflicted by the demarcation of boundaries extend far beyond the physical self, leaving ineradicable wounds on psyche, agency, and dignity of women. Understanding and addressing this complex issue is imperative not only for historical retrospection but also for shaping more equitable and inclusive societies in the present and future. The scenes of "disfigurement, mutilation, disembowelment, castration, branding . . ." show that "the most predictable form of violence experienced by women, as women, is when the women of one community are sexually assaulted by the men of the other, in an overt assertion of their identity and a simultaneous humiliation of the Other by 'dishonouring' their women" and also by treating women's body "as territory to be conquered, claimed or marked by the assailant" (Menon and Bhasin 39, 41, 43). The partition is still remembered by the survivors with heartrending memories of "women jumping into wells to drown themselves so as to avoid rape or forced religious conversion; fathers beheading their own children so they would avoid the same unavoidable fate" (Butalia 5). According to Sangari and Vaid, "women internalise the offered models and constitute themselves with varying degrees of conformity" to their predetermined and biased identities constructed by the authoritative patriarchy (Sangari and Vaid 14). Women's body is the site on which the dynamics of male reputation, the issues of begetting an heir at any cost and the binary constructions of the society are played upon. Women are "the inessential as opposed to … the Absolute" (Beauvoir xiv). There is no denying the fact that the Partition affected both men and women, "men . . . either they were killed or they escaped. Both ways they were . . . spared. If they died the problems died with them; if they survived they were resettled, they earned their daily bread and carried on. [But the women] were either left behind and treated like outcasts, often raped and brutalized—I mean if she came, she came with a guilty conscience, with the stigma of having been 'soiled'" (Menon and Bhasin 207-208).

A plethora of texts abound with instances of demarcating social, geographical, psychological, regional, national, and international borders: borders that serve to elevate and borders that segregate. Abstract boundaries find their place in interpersonal human relationships as well. In this context, another facet of boundary delineation pertains to binary oppositions and the institutionalized gender biases that result in the compartmentalization of men and women. These oppositions and discriminations perpetuate patriarchal dominance on one hand, while subjecting women to stereotyping on the other. Joan Kelly aptly observes that women are "the social opposite, not of a class, a caste, or a majority, but of a sex: men" (6). This segregation associates men with attributes such as daylight, strength, rationality, objectivity, knowledge, and reason, whereas women are linked to the night, darkness,

weakness, dependency, corporeality, materiality, and emotions, among others. Women are expected to accept that their existence is a reality only "in the shadow of a man" and they have been imbued with the lesson that they must not suffer "from the absence of one" (Beauvoir xii). In the Indian context, it is evident that women have, throughout history, found themselves defending the reputation of men and society. Prevailing ideologies and discourses continue to reduce women to the status of materialistic, indecent, indeterminate and formless beings lacking self-identity and therefore, in the "traditional time-frame of history [which] has been derived from political history, the absence of women in historical accounts is most unsurprising" (Menon and Bhasin 9). In a similar vein in his book *Unsettling Partition*, Jill Didur, agrees when he posits:

> When the trope of the citizen is tracked through the story of partition, it becomes apparent that events have a particular gendered character; the economy of meaning within the elite, patriarchal, and racist national imaginaires circulating at the time conflated the sacredness of the nation with the sacredness of Woman, making women both an object of protection and target of violence –both physical and discursive –in the struggle for independence" (7).

Didur sees how women are treated as objects to be protected, but in the hysterical catastrophic phase, women receive nothing else than violence even in the name of protection.
But it must be realized that the "history of women cannot in any circumstance, be ever the same as that of men" and neither can it "be subsumed in the history of mankind" (Menon and Bhasin 9). The violence inflicted upon women during communal insurrection "brings to the surface, savagely and explicitly, familiar forms of sexual violence—now charged with a symbolic meaning that serves as an indicator of the place that women's sexuality occupies in an all-male, patriarchal arrangement of gender relations between and within religious or ethnic communities" (Menon and Bhasin 41). As observed by Malik, the Indian woman's body becomes "tabula on which the history of a nation and the mores and rules of patriarchal society are indelibly inscribed" (195). Nonetheless, amidst the prevailing chaos and dislocation, there exist exemplars of courage among women who dare to defy the status quo. While they may have endured the tumultuous demarcation of borders, with the passage of time, they learn to "have a separate *identity*, a separate *existence*" (Menon and Bhasin 212 emphasis original). It, therefore, becomes imperative to focus on women as agents of narratives or subjects of the critical analysis. It is essential and urgent to conduct a feminist reading of the Partition as amidst the shadows of patriarchal dominance, some women consciously assume the role of protector and guardian, defying prescribed gender roles to forge paths of resilience and empowerment. These narratives of courage and resilience offer a lens through which to examine the multifaceted experiences of women within the context of partition, providing insight into the complex interplay of power, identity, and agency within a patriarchal framework.

Only through an in-depth self-analysis can we hope to forge a more equitable and just society, one in which individuals are liberated from the constraints of preconceived gender norms and

biases. Moreover, an exhaustive analysis of the evolving narratives, attitudes, and efforts to redress the injustices suffered by women in the aftermath of such cataclysmic events is essential. Such an examination serves to shed light on the resilience and agency of women who have, despite tremendous adversity, risen above the stifling socio-cultural norms and stereotypes to assert their rightful place in post-Partition societies. The current scholarly inquiry undertakes an analysis of two survivors who endure the harrowing trials of aggression and bloodshed and their psyches are deeply wounded by the tumultuous epoch they live through. These individuals, albeit temporarily ensnared in psychological turmoil, exhibit suppleness and embark on a journey of self-rehabilitation. Their recuperation, notably, involves dismantling traditional constraints and transcending psychological and social boundaries that had previously limited their life's potential. The paper focuses on two Punjabi short stories: "Guandi" by Dalip Kaur Tiwana and "Khabbal" by Kulwant Singh Virk which have been translated into English as "Neighbours" and "Blades of Grass" respectively. For the benefit of reader comprehension and convenience, this paper employs translated versions of the stories for all references and quotations.

The overarching objective is to dissect the experiences of female victims of partition in these narratives, probing whether they succumb to the constrictions of essentialism or manage to transcend binary classifications in the aftermath of the intense brutality they endure during the partition by using feminist approach. Furthermore, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding gender, trauma, and resilience in the context of conflict and upheaval unlaeshed during partition. In this framework we can explore the enduring relevance of these stories, shedding light on the indomitable human spirit's capacity to transcend adversity and forge a path towards empowerment and self-realization. The study aspires to unravel the complex interaction among trauma, identity, and empowerment, shedding light on the nuanced ways in which individuals navigate the outcome of calamitous events and reshape their destinies. In addition to the literary analysis, it is imperative to incorporate a broader contextual examination, considering the historical, sociopolitical, and cultural dimensions of the partition. This comprehensive approach enables a deeper understanding of the characters' transformative journeys and the broader insinuations of their narratives in the post-partition landscape.

Background:

The use of British policy of Divide and Rule, coupled with the opportunism of the upper echelons, tragically led to the subjugation of countless victims, including women who met watery graves, and the desolate, helpless masses—all of whom collectively experienced 'a sudden loss of national identity.' This disintegration of identity is underpinned by simmering inter-communal discord, resulting in human actions mirroring a distorted reflection of their environments and collective perceptions. It is essential to comprehend that belief systems, often perceived as essential, are in fact, the outcomes of entrenched habits and practices, developed in response to cumulative physical experiences. The dawn of independence on August 15th 1947 marked not only the long-sought-after attainment of

freedom and sovereignty but also ushered in the haunting spectre of Partition—a cataclysmic event rooted in ethnic conflicts that culminated in the fracturing of the land. The independence proceeded with "the growing divide between the Congress and the Muslim, debates between Jinnah and Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, and a host of other developments on the political 'front'" (Butalia 6). Menon and Bhasin consider the Partition of India as an implicit communal war, which gave birth to evils like religious orthodoxy and cultural chauvinism. With the announcements and delineation of new nation-states people were left with "fragments of memory, shards of a past, [and] remembrances bitter and sweet are strung together in a sequence that often has no chronology" (Menon and Bhasin 18). The turmoil and struggle of the people hint at the "futility and tragedy of demarcating boundaries, and the impossibility of dividing homes and hearts . . . and the terrible violence that accompanied forced migration" (Menon and Bhasin 7). The trains shuttling between newly born Pakistan and India symbolically transformed into 'corpse carriers,' their carriages overcrowded with dispossessed passengers, each clinging to their meagre possessions. These trains, albeit temporary abodes, encapsulated the collective uncertainty of forced migrants insecure of their ultimate destinations, emblematic of a fragmented destiny represented here by the relentless journey aboard these harrowing vessels. To substantiate the idea, it may be added that the violence that Partition released was "unprecedented, unexpected and barbaric" (Bhalla vii). The unfortunate survivors were profoundly traumatized by this journey, which exposed them to unforgettable and haunting darker facets of human nature—a descent into savagery, extremism, and senseless retribution.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the impact of drawing new borders extends far beyond mere physical demarcations on a map. They are not only as tangible markers but also as symbolic representations of power, control, and the exercise of authority. Jasbir Jain astutely observes that borders possess a dual nature, serving as both a barrier and a genesis. Borders give rise to enclosed spaces, fostering distinctiveness, and, most significantly, imbuing individuals with a sense of hegemony, authority, ownership, and possession. According to him,

> Borders are significant markers of nation formation and go on to create communities and identities. They mark territorial limits, define cultural practices and signify ownership and belonging. Metaphorically, they signify a moral restraint between the acceptable and the non-acceptable patterns of behaviour. . . . allow infiltration, invasion, taking over; they become in-between spaces; they define identities and nations; they exclude and dehumanize the 'Other', create polarities and power struggles, prevent fertilization of ideas; introduce inequalities. Borders also become fringes, margins, peripheries (Jain xv, xvii).

In response to the tumultuous epoch of 1947, a multitude of writers have shifted their focus away from the 'high politics to illuminate the diverse individual experiences marked by catastrophe and misfortune. Both long and short narratives have been skillfully interwoven to articulate the horrifying reality of a nation's division into two separate and adversarial

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entities. These literary works serve as a harrowing testament to the carnage, brutality, and barbarism that unfolded during the partition. The event of partition has, in essence, provided a profound and rich literary canvas upon which to examine the complex façades of the human psyche, the enduring trauma, the shifts in perception, and the transformation of ideologies, as experienced by both victims and survivors alike. It was during the mid-20th century that authors embarked on the journey of chronicling and commemorating the sacrifices and losses endured by the common people through various literary forms. It is imperative to recognize that every act of writing is inherently creative, serving as a mirror reflecting the society, its people, and their collective consciousness. Fiction, in particular, serves as an instrument for chronicling social transformations and creative evolution.

One such attempt is made by Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* (1956) where love and religion stand in opposition to each other. The tragedy of the two lovers adds a human dimension to the anguish and travail around. In *The Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hussain, the poisonous event of partition is narrated by a young Muslim girl Laila who has seen the days of communal harmony. The aftermath of partition changes Laila's perception towards life and leads to a discovery of a new self, a new identity. Manohar Malgaonkar in *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) highlights the British policy of divide and rule which eventually culminates into religious tautness between the Hindus and the Muslims. In *The Azadi* (1975), Chaman Nahal depicts India's freedom struggle based on one nation theory and its unity in diversity which is shattered by partition. *The Ashes and Petals* (1978) by H. S. Gill brings to fore the communal vehemence and insurrections in and around the area of Punjab. The novel explores partition from political and historical perspectives. The Hindu-Muslim uprisings of Bengal and Dhaka form the backdrop of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988). This narrative is built out of memories of people**,** each narrating a new anecdote. The title itself is reminiscent of the lines, imaginary or real, which unite or part people away. In *Ice-Candy-Man* (1991), Bapsi Sidhwa gives an astounding account of the rise of nationalism, hardening of communal attitudes and political turmoil. The short stories like "The Train Has Reached Amritsar" by Bhisham Sahni, "Loosen Up", "Cold Meat", "Anjam Bakhair", "Sharifan", "Toba Tek Singh" and "Khuda Ki Qasam" by Saadat Hasan Manto, "Pakistan Zindabad" by Kartar Singh Duggal, "Lajwanti" by Rajinder Singh Bedi, "A Prostitute's Letter: To Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah" and "Peshaawar Express" by Krishan Chander, "Separated from the Flock" by Syed Mohammad Ashraf, "Jila Watan" and "Padhiye Kalima" by Qurratulain Hyder, "The Dressing Table" by Salil Choudhary, "More Sinned Against Than Sinning" by Umm-e- Ummara, "Exile" by Jamila Hashmi, "They are Taking Me Away, Father, They are Taking Me Away!" and "The Miscreant" by Khaija Mastur, "Across the River Ravi" by Gulzar, "You will Always be My World" by Gurbahksh Singh Preetlahri, "Expelled" by Asif Farrukhi and "Lost Again" by Gurdial Singh show that the physical violence does not only hurt the body but also leaves wounds on the soul and the mind. These stories depict that the religious fanaticism and socio-political conditions become reasons of suffering especially for women. They are "shocking

records of those predatory time. . . . [and] suggest that the inhumanity of the Partition has so obliterated the moral realm that there is nothing left to retrieve and nothing to hpe for; people are now so degraded that they can only act as beasts" (Bhalla xx, xxi).

The aforementioned selection of novels and short stories, albeit randomly chosen, remarkably encapsulates the trauma inflicted by the partition and the emotional turmoil experienced by the characters. This turbulence engenders transformative shifts in their attitudes, oscillating from rigidity to adaptability and vice versa. It is worth noting that prior to British colonialism, the Indian subcontinent had experienced invasions and upheavals that disrupted the lives of its inhabitants. However, the era of British rule and the subsequent calamitous event of partition irrevocably altered the landscape, turning longstanding friendships into enmities and subjecting countless individuals to immeasurable suffering, both physical and psychosomatic. These narratives of partition unfold as a compelling saga, shedding light on the hardening of communal divisions and the chaos within the political sphere. They elucidate how the frenzy of political turmoil ignited a conflagration of separatism that ultimately consumed the very essence of humanity and human bonds. Partition literature paints a ghastly tableau of anxieties surrounding the event and delves into the underlying causes of this communal fury. These literary works adeptly straddle the dominions of political betrayal and the concealed experiences of ordinary individuals, offering a comprehensive and multifaceted exploration of a traumatic period in history. Through their narratives, these works not only elucidate the machinations of politicians but also bear witness to the silent suffering of the masses.

Analysis:

Punjabi Literature, encompassing a wide array of genres such as epics, qissa-kaavs, novels, short stories, and poetry, has made significant contributions in depicting formidable feminine attributes. The Punjabi literary works serve as a wellspring of inspiration for female readers, instilling in them the courage to challenge the prevailing misconceptions embedded within patriarchal structures. This phenomenon is vividly illustrated through iconic characters like Loona in Batalwi's 'Loona' or Puro in Amrita Pritam's novel 'Pinjar'. The two short stories authored by distinguished Punjabi writers, Dalip Kaur Tiwana ("Neighbours") and Kulwant Singh Virk ("Blades of Grass"), under consideration for the present paper, serve as exemplary instances of the portrayal of robust female characters in Punjabi literature. These narratives skilfully unravel the inner reservoirs of strength residing in their female characters, thereby dismantling the stereotype that labels women as biologically weaker. While it is accurate to acknowledge inherent physical disparities, it is equally important to recognize the reservoirs of spiritual and emotional fortitude that women often surpass men in possessing. In essence, these narratives echo the age-old adage that physical strength may vary among individuals, but the resilience, determination, and spiritual tenacity exhibited by women position them as formidable forces, capable of surmounting myriad challenges and contributing significantly to the transformation of socio-cultural norms and perceptions. These stories remind the readers that the strength transcends the confines of gender,

illuminating the path towards a more equitable and inclusive society. Both the stories prompt that "Life for the survivors after carnage of the Partition was hard won. . . . [it] deal[s] with their struggle for coherence and with their determination to avoid facing anything which could remind them of the blind forces unleashed by jingoism, hateful invective, chauvinistic nationalism and religious pride" (Bhalla xxvii). Bhalla contends that narratives of this nature grapple with partition as an stubborn component of our geopolitical reality, positioning it squarely at the heart of their preoccupation with the destiny of the region's civilization (xxvii).

"Neighbours" by Dalip Kaur Tiwana:

"Neighbours" by Dalip Kaur Tiwana is built around friendship of Suresh and Unees, who spend their life as neighbours both before and after the partition. Their fathers, close friends, foster a strong relationship between the two families. During their childhood, Unees and Suresh engage in playful camaraderie, teasing each other and revelling in each other's company. Unees and Suresh serve as exemplars of the broad-minded perspectives that should ideally permeate the interactions among individuals of all religions, with a particular emphasis on fostering unity between Hindus and Muslims. The motherless boy is so much loved by Unees's family that he addresses them as Ammi and Abu. Once Suresh offers rasgullas to Unees, a gesture she declines, explaining that Akeela had told her Muslims could not eat anything from the hands of Hindus. This episode underscores the generation gap represented by their parents, who hold less progressive views and remain ensnared in the narrow confines of religious dogma and fanaticism. However, Unees and Suresh display a different mind-set. Unees proposes an alternative approach when she says, "Listen, what we can do is: you eat our things, and I'll share yours, and we'll keep it a secret" (Tiwana 175). This clandestine agreement symbolizes their willingness to transcend the divisive boundaries erected by their predecessors, emphasizing their commitment to a more inclusive and harmonious coexistence. Their friendship that flourishes beyond the confines of religion is accepted and admired by Unees' mother also, as "Ammi, who sat with her back towards them, was highly amused at this innocent and secret conversation" (Tiwana 175).

As time elapses, the parents of Suresh and Unees begin to grow increasingly apprehensive about the growing closeness between the two young individuals. They believe that as the children are maturing, they should gradually reduce the amount of time spent in each other's company. However, the perspectives of the young kids diverge from those of their parents. When Unees' mother advises her to distance herself from Suresh, Unees is overcome with sorrow. When Suresh inquires about the cause of Unees' distress, her mother resorts to falsehood. This act of deception ignites a smouldering rebellious sentiment in Unees, leaving her seething and "fuming inside" (Tiwana 176). Unees does not conform to the stereotype of an ordinary girl who simply acquiesces to her mother's directive and sever ties with Suresh. Instead, when her mother instructes her not to converse with Suresh, she observes "the reproach in her daughter's eyes" (Tiwana 176). Even as a young girl, Unees emerges as one who possesses the courage to speak out against the oppression of all kinds:

physical and mental. She is seen tying her best to establish an identity of her own. She admires her own value-system and remains committed to her ideals. Unees displays "deep commitments to spiritual concerns, sharing and companionship based on understanding and sympathy, need for a sensitive approach in others towards themselves to understand their emotional and spiritual needs (Srivastava 122).

As time progresses, the tumultuous and troubled era of 1947 unfolds, marked by the departure of the British colonial rulers and the subsequent partition of the subcontinent into two separate nations, India and Pakistan. While the circumstances evolve, the affection shared between Unees and Suresh only deepens. When "the country was partitioned. The people of the country were divided. Carnage resulted. Everything turned topsy-turvy," Suresh broaches the topic of his marriage to Unees with his father (Tiwana 177). Although Suresh receives the anticipated response that "The circumstances today do not permit such a union," yet his eyes become "tearful," when his father gives him the gold bangles of his late mother to be presented to Unees (Tiwana 178). Suresh's father counsels his son to come to terms with the prevailing situation, encouraging him to accept the circumstances and move forward without clinging to the notion of a future with Unees. However, Suresh remains steadfast in his resolve, asserting that if they could not marry each other, they would not enter into matrimony with anyone else. He declares, "We'll spend our lives as neighbours" (Tiwana 176). The unwavering conviction in Suresh's voice emanates from the profound love he shares with Unees, providing him with the fortitude to stand resolutely and take a bold stance before his father. The unwavering confidence that both Suresh and Unees place in each other serves as the bedrock of their resilience and determination. It signifies the formidable strength derived from their love, enabling them to confront social expectations and familial constraints, and to chart a course that defies convention in pursuit of their shared happiness.

Unees becomes deeply distraught over the partition of the country into two separate entities, fully aware that this division will necessitate her departure from Suresh and her beloved home, compelling her to relocate to Pakistan. She understand that she has now become a refugee "who had to strive to relocate her identity in a radically different present, which, paradoxically enough, was shaped, influenced and conditioned by the very past which was irrecoverable" (Prakash 76). Unees' intense anguish finds expression in her words: "The Hindus will reside in one part, and in the other, only the Muslims---and then these parts will always be at each other's throat, and..." (Tiwana 177). For her "The real sorrow of Partition was that it brought to an end a long and communally shared history" (Bhalla viii).

In the aftermath of the partition, Unees and her mother find temporary refuge and security in the shelter provided by Suresh and his father. Unees harbours unwavering confidence that as long as Suresh remains by their side, the turbulent winds of change will be powerless to harm them. For a brief period, Suresh and his father serve as protectors for Unees and her mother. However, the inevitable moment arrives when they must make arrangements for the two women to depart for Pakistan. After sometime, "when some sanity prevailed, [Suresh's] Papa watched the situation for a few days and then arranged for the

mother and the daughter to leave for Pakistan" (Tiwana 177). As the truck carrying them recedes into the distance, Unees "... would turn around looking longingly at her house...at Suresh... Her home and Suresh receded into the distance and were gradually lost to the eye" (Tiwana 178-179). In this case Bhalla notes, "It is perhaps the fact that the daily life of the Hindus and the Muslims, at the ordinary and the local levels, even as late as 1946, was so richly interwoven as to have formed a rich archive of customs and practices, that explains why there is a single, common note which informs nearly all the stories written about the Partition and the horror it unleashed – a note of utter bewilderment" (Bhalla ix). The poignant story under consideration underscores the wrenching and bewildering impact of the partition on Unees and her mother, which severed not only geographical and political ties but also the deeply cherished bonds of love and companionship between individuals of different backgrounds.

Driven by their unwavering determination, Unees and Suresh harbour a thoughtful desire for reunion, and their relentless efforts culminate in remarkable achievements. The journey of their love remains unwavering and un-oscillating by the physical distance that separates them. In stark contrast to many individuals of their era who resigned themselves to their fates, Unees and Suresh choose a different path—one that extends the boundaries of their love beyond their personal connection to encompass the people of both nations. In the backdrop of a patriarchal society, Suresh enjoys the privilege of pursuing the dictates of his heart, latitude rarely afforded to women. It so happens since from the childhood women are given lessons:

> to be as women, i.e. passive, object-like, free beings mystified into believing that they are confined to particular natural roles which limit freedom. So, a girl is raised to believe that her destiny is to be a wife and mother and that she will experience satisfaction in these roles" (Beauvior qtd in Scholz 68).

In this social context, women are cramped within the confines of their homes, with opportunities for personal agency and self-expression severely curtailed. As Lata Mani astutely observes,

> Women become emblematic of tradition, and the reworking of tradition is largely conducted through debating the rights and status of women in society. Despite this intimate connection between women and tradition, these debates are in some sense not primarily about women but about what constitutes authentic cultural tradition (90).

The later life of the protagonists stands in stark contrast to the prevailing reader expectations. The majority of readers might have assumed that, as time passes, Unees would eventually relinquish her dreams and resign herself to a fate perceived as a divine decree. However, she emerges as a resolute, strong-willed woman who refuses to submit to her predetermined destiny. Instead, Unees chooses to heed the call of her heart and disregards the rigid and orthodox norms prescribed by patriarchal structures. Contrary to conventional expectations for a Muslim girl, she does not aspire to a conventional marriage in her religious community. In fact, she becomes a source of inspiration for countless other girls who, like

her, aspire to pursue education and build careers. Both Unees and Suresh undertake diligent efforts to elevate themselves to a position of influence, from which they can endeavour to persuade their respective nations that the physical border separating India and Pakistan holds no inherent significance. They understand that "there had been at Partition, no 'good' people and no 'bad' ones; virtually every family had a history of being both victims and aggressors in the violence" (Butalia 11). Their shared commitment to transcend these boundaries underscores their determination to foster unity and understanding among their people, challenging entrenched divisions and prejudices. The narrator tells that "Unees began writing and sending stories to newspapers and magazines, stories that lamented the vanishing Hind-Pak ties and unfolded the gradual ripping apart of the bonds of love. She extorted them not to tread on those fatal paths" (Tiwana 179). One may say that Unees,

> touched by annihilating violence and death . . . [depicts] the familiar social and religious space, which had once sustained them, is shredded by knives and goons. [She] records with shock as people in an obscene world become either predators or victims, as they either decide to participate gleefully in murder or loot or find themselves unable to do anything but scream with pain as they are stabbed and burnt or raped again and again (Bhalla xix).

A postcolonial cum postmodern-feminist reader may perceive that Unees, a forced diaspora, is no longer "shut up in her flesh, her home" and is no longer "passive before these gods with human faces who set goals and establish values" (Beauvoir 629).

Unees' pieces of literature elicit sympathy and progressively gather praise, their reputation spreading gradually to reach to the readers of India and here as well her stories are received with great appreciation. Suresh, fervent in his support for Unees, encourages both his friends and relatives to engage with and read her stories and ". . . then via clubs and councils, [the stories] became hot topics amongst the masses" (Tiwana 180). The lovers "draw upon their historical, cultural and personal memories to organise their narratives in the hope that such recollections would humanise [everyone] and so persuade [them] to find a way out to a different future" (Bhalla xxvii). The day which Unees and Suresh have been waiting for long finally comes and Aman Sabha Hind extends an invitation to Unees to visit India, while Suresh is selected as the leader of the cultural delegation destined for Pakistan. Thus, after a span of six years, precisely on the 15th of August, 1953, "two cars arrived from opposite directions and halted on the Hind-Pak border" (Tiwana 180). Those are the cars of the two lovers who have grown up waiting for this day to come. People "witnessed the bewildered spirits of the two nations embracing each other in the persons of Suresh and Unees" (Tiwana 180).

Thus, "Neighbours" encapsulates the concept that when an individual possesses unwavering determination, there exists no force in the world capable of obstructing the realization of his/her aspirations. Had Unees faltered in her resolve and determination, the attainment of such a momentous milestone would have remained beyond their reach. She remains loyal to Suresh and succeeds in meeting him after a period of six years. Only a

woman of strong heart and strong mind is capable of doing so. It proves that if an individual is mentally strong, then, the troubled times will not be able to weaken his strength. Unees remains steadfastly devoted to Suresh and achieves the long-awaited reunion after a six-year hiatus. Such an accomplishment is in the purview of only a woman possessed of both a resolute heart and an unyielding mind. It is only such an individual who can transcend the constraints imposed by political boundaries to unite with her lover. This serves as compelling evidence that a mentally strong individual can withstand the trials of tumultuous times without succumbing to the erosion of his/her inner strength.

"*Blades of Grass*" by Kulwant Singh Virk:

A similar thematic undercurrent pervades the narrative of "Blades of Grass" by Kulwant Singh Virk. It illustrates that trying times are incapable of eroding the forte and resilience of a determined individual. In this story, readers encounter a formidable female protagonist who, notwithstanding the mental and the physical torment endured during the partition riots, harbours an innate desire to commence her life anew with optimism. Uprooted from her place of birth, she emulates the characteristics and essence of 'khabbal' (which literally translates to 'grass') in her resolve to forge a fresh existence and extend her roots in a locale to which she has been forcibly relocated. The female protagonist can be rightly described using Beauvoir's words, when she opines, "Women are always trying to conserve, to adapt, to arrange, to build anew" (633).

As the narrative unfolds, readers are confronted with the heart-wrenching conditions that prevail during the tumultuous period of the 1947 partition. There is widespread devastation, and everything lay in ruin. Darkness pervades the landscape, particularly the darkness of ignorance, as people are engaged in bitter strife and bloodshed under the guise of religion. The beginning of the story presents a vivid picture of various items like "luggage, beds, cradles, tables, sofas, paintings" strewn haphazardly in the courtyards of police stations in Pakistan (Virk 158). "Once the proud possessions of their owners", these objects have been compulsorily displaced from their original homes and now lay abandoned "in a big heap" (Virk 158). Among these possessions, "cradles and paintings, in particular, looked absolutely out of place" (Virk 158). Many months have passed since the abandoned utensils have "experienced the warm touch of a human hand" (Virk 158). The situation has cast a cloud of despair over the whole land. New arrivals, who have come from different regions, are struggling to integrate with the local populace and "the cattle would observe their surroundings in confusion and would tread cautiously in the unfamiliar places" (Virk 158). Even the indigenous inhabitants find themselves increasingly alienated from the very places of their birth as "many of their family members and friends had moved away abruptly. Owners of factories had abandoned their businesses and employees. . . . For the locals, all of a sudden, their villages had become unfamiliar. They were not the same places where they had taken birth and had grown up. They felt disconnected from the canals and the streams flowing around their homes. They were unable to bathe in them, as the water had turned red with blood. Dead bodies and human limbs were frequently found floating in them" (Virk 158,

159). In essence, the entire order of things is overturned, compelling inhabitants, property owners and labourers to relocate. Using Bhalla words, it may be ascertained, "The events of 1947 not only violently uproot [populations] . . . but also suddenly estrange them from those simple words like friendship, neighbourhood, *peepul* tree, well… which they had nurtured for generations to craft their world" (Bhalla, *Partition Dialogues*, 7-8).

A story commencing in this manner might naturally lead readers to anticipate a tragic narrative, one fraught with despair and loss of all hope for survival. However, these initial reservations are dispelled as the story progresses, and readers encounter the symbolic significance of the story's title in a pivotal conversation between a father and his son. The son contends that in the present circumstances embarking on life anew is an arduous endeavour since "the entire land was being spattered by the blood of its citizens, blistered and disfigured with the fires of religious hatred; its roads were glutted with enough dead bodies to satisfy the ghouls of a major war" (Malgonkar 52). "Observing the state of destruction and chaos around him," the son exclaims, "'The entire land lies in ruins!'" (Virk 159). He believes that people have resigned themselves to the belief that they have little hope left. In response, the father imparts a reflective insight: life is an unceasing continuum, akin to the tenacious growth of 'khabbal,' or grass. Even when the grass is uprooted entirely, it manages to reassert its existence after a span of mere days. The father explains,

> No, my son. Don't be naïve. Haven't you seen the grass in the fields? When we plough the land, we pull the grass out, roots and blades. And what happen in a few days time? Little blades of grass break through the earth once again. It is as if the soil had never been ploughed at all (Virk 159).

The depiction of the growth of grass serves as a symbolic embodiment of the central theme of the narrative. In the story, a prevailing yearning to restore normalcy permeates everything and everyone. The narrator tells, "Everything seemed to try to find a footing, taking root again and wanting to go through the process of rebuilding" (Virk 159). An innate will to survive becomes increasingly discernible among the displaced individuals. Those who are allocated lands begin to regain stability, finding solace in their newly acquired farmland, which serves to mend their shattered spirits and re-forge their connections with their existence. Over time, even their cattle adapt to their new shelters in the unfamiliar surroundings of new residences and "they would [now] enjoy rubbing their itchy bodies against tree trunks or the walls of the sheds" (Virk 160). All of this serves as compelling evidence that, despite the myriad trials and tribulations endured during the era of partition, a persistent flame resides within these individuals—a flame that fuels their capacity to accept, adapt to, and accommodate the circumstances they confront.

A similar indomitable spirit is evident in the female protagonist of the story. She is a Sikh woman who has been forcibly abducted from India and transported to Pakistan. Her abduction occurs amidst a raid on a caravan of Sikh refugees by Muslim assailants. Ironically, instead of providing a new and safe home, migration simplified the task of abductors. It was easy to steal the women away while the convoys were on the move because the chance of

resistance were less as women could only wail and the men could not save them being homeless and defenceless. The migration to the newly formed country can be said to have acquired "heroic proportions in our times" because these journeys

> have sought to alter the cartography of the self. The point of departure is self exile and the crucial mileposts – the ones tell whether it is journey into madness or out of it, whether it is time to travel towards the future and self-actualization, or towards the past and defensive stupor – are not placed predictably along a road (Nandy 305).

In the second half of the story we see that narrator has been assigned the role of a liaison officer by the Indian government, charged with the task of rescuing abducted women from Pakistan and facilitating their return to India. His job "was to send the abducted women and families who were forcibly converted to Islam by Pakistanis, back to India" (Virk 160). It is during the course of this search operation that the narrator encounters the female protagonist of the story who, he is told by the local police inspector, "was the daughter of a former chief of a neighbouring village" (Virk 161). He discovers her in an almost broken and modest chamber situated at the far end of a courtyard in a dilapidated dwelling. The room is sparsely furnished, featuring a wooden shelf adorned with bronze utensils on one side, and on the opposite side, a mattress and bedding arranged on the floor. As the narrator enters the room, he encounters the female protagonist reclining on a cot, her body wracked by a severe fever. Strikingly, there is no one in attendance to provide care and solace, an anomaly in the narrator's experience. She had been abducted because one of the agendas of fanatic religious patriarchy at such times was to possess the female bodies which meant:

> ...not possessing the right or capacity to control everything that happens to or is expected of the body. Women's bodies are after all, like their lives, affected on all sides by various forms of explicit and implicit social, political, legal, symbolic and discursive control (Bowden and Mummery 45).

Typically, when the narrator enters the homes of abducted women, he finds them surrounded by a retinue of individuals. However, in the case of the female protagonist, she appears physically isolated, yet her owner's presence looms there in form of the thing that did not belong to her. He feels that "the room, the things inside the room and even her body belonged to someone else, someone not present there at that time" (Virk 162). To the narrator, she embodies a vivid manifestation of the enduring cruelties inflicted by men. When he sees the woman, "her lips were quivering and her eyes were swollen. . . . Her hands were bandaged. She had apparently been involved in a violent scuffle with someone. She looked absolutely devastated and depressed" (Virk 161). Her condition bears the message that, "Independence and its dark 'other', Partition, provided the rationale for making women into symbols of the nation's honour" (Butalia 192). Mooney also expresses similar belief that the female body is used and abused in various ways in order to fulfil notions of cultural tradition:

> Women's bodies become sites for the representation, contestation and control of identity, invested as they are with notions of collective loyalty, purity, and nurturance. Yet they typically have little control over or choice in the ways in which they

> represent and embody collectivities; not only do women mother communities and nations, but in appalling corollary are sexually brutalised when the collectivities they embody come under attack (159-160).

Abandoned and condemned to confront her cruel fate in solitude, the female protagonist of "Blades of Grass" has been forsaken by all, left to grapple with her torment unaided. Her condition, both physical and mental, diverges markedly from the norm. She can be categorised as women who are "stereotyped, culturally dominated and sexually objectified in ways that fragment and mystify them" (Sandra Lee Bartky qtd. in Scholz 85).

When the narrator encounters the female protagonist, he knew that her family and husband had been killed. He keenly discerns the indicative signs of solitude etched upon her countenance. In her immediate vicinity, there is no one who shares her caste, community, village, or religion. The notion of returning to her native land remains a remote and unfathomable dream. She has never been apprised of the possibility of reuniting with the people from whom she was so recently separated. Understanding the arduousness of facilitating her return to her home in her current woeful state, the narrator resolves to revisit her on a subsequent occasion. As he prepares to take his leave, the lady stops him and earnestly seeks a favour. The narrator readily assents to her request, and she proceeds to confide in him that "Now I am a Muslim. I don't have anyone left in this world to call my own" (Virk 163). Then she discloses the existence of her sister-in-law, Nicky, who, much like herself, fell victim to abduction by the Pakistanis during the attack on their Sikh group. The perpetrators of this abduction were the leaders of the assailants responsible for their separation. The lady expresses her fervent desire to reunite with her sister-in-law, believing that once they are together, she can arrange her sister-in-law's marriage and thereby reconstitute a family with newfound relatives. She yearns for someone in this foreign land, indeed in this world, to call her own.

In typical instances where women are forcibly displaced from their homes and homelands, subjected to the harrowing ordeals of rape and torture, often find themselves in one of two distressing predicaments: some tragically succumb to despair and take their own lives, while others lose all hope for continued existence and merely survive. However, the female protagonist defies categorization in either of these two prevailing responses. Instead, she manifests a strong determination to embrace her present circumstances, demonstrating no inclination to return to her place of birth because not all these so-called 'tainted/violated' women were fortunate to be accepted by their families and after being rejected by their own kith and kin they had no option but to survive in brothels and ashrams. Having endured uprooting once, the protagonist harbours no desire to undergo such displacement anew. Her aspiration is to forge a family in this foreign terrain, and she refuses to evade her challenges. Instead, she confronts her current condition head-on, exerting herself to adapt and acclimate. It is her affirmative mind-set that sets her starkly apart from those who share her tragic circumstances.

As the protagonist articulates her sentiments of being united with her sister-in-law and start a new family, a glimmer of hope radiates from her eyes. The narrator feels that the woman is now arranging "her present within the specific horizons of her past and her future" (Menon and Bhasin 18). Thus, this woman's entreaty exemplifies her steadfast determination to rebuild her world from the ashes—an aspiration that can be articulated only by one who, despite enduring colossal suffering, remains unbroken. She is now trying to cope up to live with "difficult things: loss and sharing, friendship and enmity, grief and joy, with painful regret and nostalgia for the loss of home, country and friends, and with an equally strong determination to create them afresh" (Butalia 7). This moment evokes the memory of the conversation from the earlier part of the story where a father and son discuss the unbelievable characteristics of grass. Much like khabbal that grows even after being uprooted, the woman after losing her place of origin, family, home, country, identity and honour, she exhibits the inclination to live, thrive, and integrate into her new world..

Whatley asserts, "Women are like reeds which bend to every breeze but break not in the tempest" (qtd. in Edwards 735). Such a hopeful sentiment is rarely expressed by individuals with weak resolve. Weak-willed individuals tend to resign themselves to the ashes into which their world has been reduced by external circumstances. They are prone to perceive every possibility through a pessimistic lens. However, the female protagonist of the present story embodies optimism. She views her circumstances favourably despite the bleak outlook. She acknowledges that there is no one awaiting her return in India, as her village and family members have fallen victim to massacre. Moreover, she recognizes her physical inability to undertake a journey. Nonetheless, her spirit remains unbroken. She resolves to make the best of the only choice available to her. Her decision infuses her with newfound hope for survival. In this regard bell hooks, in her work "Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics," asserts, "If any female feels she needs anything beyond herself to legitimate and validate her existence, she is already giving away her power to be self-defining, her agency" (56). The female protagonist exemplifies the resilience of a phoenix as she resolves to rebuild her world from the ashes of her previous life.

Conclusion:

When discussing the portrayal of women in literary works, one discerns that literature serves as a platform for writers to examine a multitude of complexities related to women. These explorations encompass social perspectives towards women, the portrayal of their mental and physical states in a literary work, and the attitudes exhibited by male characters towards the depiction of women in such works. Literature is often regarded as a mirror reflecting society, and the representation of women in literary narratives offers insight into how they are perceived in the prevailing social milieu. Mary Ann Fergusson in her work, *Image of Women in Literature*, opines, "One peculiarity of the images of women throughout history is that social stereotypes have been reinforced by archetypes. Another way of putting this would be to say that in every age women have been seen primarily as mothers, wives, mistresses, sex objects in their roles in relationship to men" (4). Partition literature adeptly

captures the prevailing sentiments of rupture, turmoil, anguish, and profound shock experienced by ordinary individuals during this tumultuous period. It depicts the mental and physical trauma experienced by women, successfully positioning women as central figures. Many literary works describe how the arbitrary delineation of borders and the creation of unbridgeable chasms between established homesteads and newfound dwellings ushered in a disoriented generation left without moorings. The partition, coupled with the coerced exodus from one newly-formed nation to another, etched an enduring scar upon the wrenched women. In a society that predominantly marginalizes the individuality of women, reveals a notable lack of recognition for women's agency. Consequently, such a society falls short in acknowledging women as formidable and proactive agents of change.

But the stories explored in this paper introduce us to women characters who find themselves in extreme situations, facing life-altering crises and still they make independent decisions that set them apart from the social norms and expectations imposed on them. These women take control of their destinies, refusing to be bound by the conventions of their predecessors. Jean-Paul Sartre posits that individuals must exercise their freedom to overcome defeat. It is well-established that those who make independent choices are better equipped to establish their unique identities. Those who defy conformity carve out their own space in the world. Freedom manifests through one's actions. People truly exist when they are engaged in meaningful action. Given that women have endured centuries of silencing by patriarchal forces, it becomes imperative for them to reclaim their voices and occupy positions of agency and influence. Future literature should strive to elevate readers' consciousness by offering realistic insights into female personality development, self-perception, and interpersonal relationships. Feminist criticism has achieved notable success in amplifying the voices of marginalized individuals, particularly women. The significance of studying and representing female characters, as exemplified in the present paper, lies in its capacity to unveil the shallowness of patriarchal structures that have relegated women to subordinate roles. Over the years, women have been unjustly burdened with false stereotypes, often internalizing these misconceptions. Consequently, it is imperative to deconstruct these entrenched traditional perspectives, thereby empowering women to attain the well-deserved and esteemed positions in society.

Both the stories arrest the triumph of marginalized women over the ones who want to fix their identity in accordance with the religious, patriarchal and national ideologies. At the end, we are introduced to powerful and evocative image of physically and psychologically uprooted women courageously standing at the threshold of a new world and a new beginning. The wounds of displacement and the bewilderment due to physical and emotional trauma have not been able to smother the flow of their lives. They have crossed the indiscernible but distinct and ingrained social boundaries. They defy the lines of demarcation, the psychological boundaries or binary oppositions and recover from the trauma and the irreversible loss. Other than being accounts of despair, both the stories, "Neighbours" and "Blades of Grass" are narratives of determination and fortitude of the two women

protagonists who fight against the odds and massive sense of loss. The analysis hints at the moral fibre of women, on whose shoulders a substantial task of rebuilding a new future falls. Unees and the protagonist in the other story have the courage to start afresh. They fall a prey to the perpetrators but they refuse to be victimized. These women appear as strong characters who know how to contest for their existences. They firmly attempt to establish identities of their own in the patriarchal world.

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