

## SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

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### **Subliminal Exploitation of the Vulnerable and the Paradox of**

### **Independence in Protiva Basu's *The Marooned***

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#### **Abstract**

Protiva Basu's *The Marooned* explores how refugees were left at the mercy of fellow citizens in India (after political Independence) and how drastically they were failed by those who they had put their trust in. This article looks at how literature written during this time reflects the turmoil, moral conflict, ethical violation and confusion brought forth by the partition. Through an analysis of themes such as displacement, division, memory, molestation, sex trafficking, brutal death, and loss, it delves into the paradoxical nature of independence and the shattering impact it had on the vulnerable residents of a devastatingly shattered India.

**Keywords:** exploitation, partition, trauma; refugees, subjugation, women, nostalgia, displacement, violence.

Indian partition literature refers to the body of literary works written by Indian authors in the aftermath of the country's partition in 1947. The partition marks a pivotal event in the country's history, which saw the division of India into two separate nations – India and Pakistan. The literary works of the time reflect the cultural, political, and emotional upheaval caused by the partition. Partition literature has a prominent place in Indian literature and is a testimony to the resilience and creativity of Indian writers. The diverse themes and genres of partition literature present an intense tapestry of Indian history and culture.

Basu's *The Marooned*, originally published in Bengali as *Dukulhara* is a powerful narrative on the theme of independence and its paradoxical nature in the context of the Indian partition. Through the experiences of the protagonist and her all-female family members, Basu highlights the complexities, contradictions as well as the traumatic consequences of such nationwide conflicts on ordinary people. Ultimately, the story serves as a poignant reminder of the devastating impact of political decisions on human lives and the need for greater empathy and understanding in the face of such helplessness during historically monumental divisions and conflicts.

While independence is often associated with freedom, Protiva Basu's *The Marooned* highlights the paradoxical nature of independence. Through characters and dire circumstances, Basu centres on how a supposedly newfound liberation, leaves behind a trail of blood and heart-wrenching anguish. She highlights the struggles of partition and the consequences of independence for those left behind. Basu's work, therefore, underscores the complexities of independence, both in its immediate aftermath and in the long-term consequences that accompany it.

Furthermore, the paradox of independence is evident in the novel's portrayal of the marooned Bindubashini and her family's continuous yearning for the mainland. While they have left the mainland, they still long for the security and stability it once provided. This

highlights the complex nature of independence, as it is not always a complete liberation from all forms of oppression and suffering. Uttara lay sleepless and sobbing as she said, “It would have been better to stay back and die rather than this, mother” (Basu 163). The longing of the characters who are metaphorically marooned for the mainland reminds us that liberation is an ongoing process and that it is not always a straightforward journey towards complete freedom.

While the idea of independence offers a promising vision of liberation and national unity, it is simultaneously intertwined with themes of displacement, violence, and loss. According to literary critic Alok Yadav, this paradoxical nature of independence is often represented through the literary trope of the “double bind,” where characters are forced to make impossible choices between conflicting values, ultimately leading to a sense of alienation and despair. Refugees like Bindubashini and her family from East Pakistan witness the cyclical nature of independence as both a source of hope and disillusionment that underscores the ongoing struggle for meaning and identity in post-partition India.

The new Indian government had the responsibility and challenge of building a nation that offered equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of their religion or caste. While independence marked the end of colonialism, it also led to the displacement and loss of lives of millions of people during the partition, making it a bittersweet moment in Indian history. While the Partition is often celebrated as a moment of reclaiming independence from British rule, the brutal violence and displacement of millions of people stand as a stark reminder of the high price that the citizens paid. Protiva Basu’s short story, *The Marooned*, captures the trauma and devastation through the eyes of a vulnerable female refugees who wish for protection from the men of the society by the men of their family who are no longer alive. Wishful thinking and hope only gets helpless people so far. The brutality of the people in power and their unwillingness to let even a drop of sympathy or conscience percolate to their hearts is considerably questionable and triggering. People like Keshabananda let themselves get

corrupted by morally vile men like Rajiblochan Sarkar and Shashisekhar for the sake of superficial happiness and prosperity.

They set up organisations like the ‘Abalabandhab Samiti’ (Friends of Distressed Women) to whitewash their heinous crimes. Bindubashini was told that the mission of Keshabananda’s life was service to mankind and that he had devoted his life to the welfare of refugees. Influential men like Shashisekhar, while non-consensually sexually abusing a fourteen-year-old traumatized refugee, make films named ‘Bastuharar Bedona’ (The Agony of the Homeless). They never take into consideration their victim’s pleas for help or their traumatic background thus lacking basic humanity. However, they do not seem to hesitate in flaunting their ‘creative genius’ via art forms whilst deceiving multitudes of people.

“Bending down he touched Bulu's feverish forehead and shook his head pityingly. Even this slight gesture of sympathy brought tears to Bindubashini’s eyes” (Basu 165). The shameless breach of innocent trust after Bindubashini confides in Keshabananda about their turmoil is the representation of many such nefarious people who are entrusted with the safety and care of those in need. “And Keshabananda? Whom the refugees know as their saviour, their benefactor, how easily without any qualms he could sacrifice her to satisfy the lust of the great Mr. Rajiblochan Sarkar” (Basu 169). Uttara had called him “Father”.

The feeling of being marooned on a deserted land of existence cut off from family, friends and former ways of life, is a common theme in many Partition stories, revealing the complex emotional terrain of independence. The story depicts absolute emotional dependence on the community they have left behind which gets shaken by the notorious religio-political agendas of politicians. There is portrayal of communal violence, division, and political games played by the leaders of both sides, who care little for the plight of their own people. This is exemplified in the short story “Big Boy Now,” by Sirish Chandra Bose, where the protagonist, a young boy who has fled Calcutta, struggles to reconcile his newfound security in India’s

newly created East Pakistan with his longing for his mother and his former home. While in *The Marooned* by Protiva Basu, Bindubashini and her all-female family keep living and moving on with hope until they meet they are taken advantage of, abused and even killed by those that they trust in this new land:

The fools from East Bengal, they are so gullible and can be tricked so easily. You don't even have to spend a jot of wit. Just a few kind words and how they trust on you, depend on you. With a lost and distraught look how easily they come to you in the hope of a new life! Idiots, fools, what else can happen to them? This is what they deserve! (169)

Through the characters, the author explores themes of identity, displacement, and trauma that continues to resonate with contemporary readers. Furthermore, by contextualizing *The Marooned* within a broader historical and literary framework, we appreciate the ways in which this work exemplifies the rich and diverse tradition of partition literature in South Asia. Overall, *The Marooned* represents a thought-provoking and meaningful contribution to the ongoing conversation about postcolonial nationalism and its discontents.

Not only is Bindubashini's family uprooted from their ancestral home and memories but also their only source of secure income. A false sense of security is promised to them if they managed to get to the other side of the border. The family loses every remaining piece of jewellery or money on their way, in the absence of a young man in their family. This throws light on the subjugation of women. In comparison with other works of Indian partition literature, *The Marooned* stands out as a unique portrayal of the human experience during the tumultuous period of separation. Protiva Basu's short story delves deeper into the emotional and psychological impact on individuals caught in the midst of the chaos.

Through her writing, Basu creates a compelling narrative that calls attention to the bind of helpless female refugees subjected to abuse. The emotional and sexual abuse of women are

perhaps some of the most inhumane forms of violence that exists in our society. This type of abuse causes immense physical pain and often leaves the victim with psychological scars that last a lifetime. The act of physically harming women is an attempt to exert power and control over them, and it is a violation of their basic human rights. In many cases, physical abuse is the result of deep-rooted cultural beliefs and gender inequality, which perpetuate the notion that women are inferior to men. It is a tragic reality that many women are subjected to physical abuse by their partners, family members, or strangers, and it is often difficult for them to seek help or escape these abusive situations. The physical abuse of women is a morally reprehensible act fuelled by Keshabananda and acted out by men such as Shashisekhar and Rajiblochan who had no moral judgement, sympathy or fear of consequences of their actions. Even the fellow farmer refugee gets away with molesting Milu while she was asleep and Uttara was too terrified and tired to raise her voice against a man.

In Khushwant Singh's 'Train to Pakistan', the train carrying refugees from both sides of the border is symbolic of the paradox of independence as it represents movement towards a new life as well as separation from their homes and loved ones. Furthermore, the communal violence of the partition can be viewed as a paradox where a desire for independence led to the loss of countless lives and displacement of millions. Riots, meaningless bloodshed and baseless fear hovered all over the people. *The Marooned* delves into the psychological effects of displacement and highlights the emotional trauma experienced by refugees. One of the most critical aspects of the human experience is a sense of belonging and a strong attachment to one's culture and community. However, the characters are repeatedly forced to abandon their home and everything familiar to them, leading to feelings of displacement, detachment, and a profound sense of loss. This loss is not just physical but also emotional, as the characters struggle with their identity, cultural roots, and a sense of self.

Other works that address the paradox of independence include V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, the protagonist struggles to achieve independence despite being born into a family dependent on colonialism. Similarly, *The Final Solution* explores the struggles of Mallika, a female refugee who gets trapped by Pramatha's foul intentions of turning her into a prostitute.

The short story, *The Marooned* begins with an uneasy air of terror and panic before the readers are informed of the initiation of the exodus from East Pakistan. "Panic was palpable among minorities" (Basu 157). Characters are seen grappling with the aftermath of gaining independence. Bindubashini is said to be crestfallen and the narrator asks who or where was it that she could go to. By the end of the story, we know that there was nowhere or no one that she could go to. The paradox of independence extends beyond just the fictional characters in *The Marooned* and can be seen in the larger context of post-colonial South Asia.

In conclusion, the paradox of independence is a theme that challenges the narratives of Indian partition literature, particularly those that depict the experiences of those marooned in between India and Pakistan. While independence was a momentous occasion, it also created new forms of oppression and marginalization for those who remained stranded in a liminal space. The complexities of the post-partition era demand nuanced readings that recognize the multiple facets of independence and the various forms of violence it can yield.

*The Marooned* is significant in Indian partition literature because it captures the complexities of migration and violence during the partition. Through the portrayal of characters who are forced to part from their family after facing a series of unending losses, the novel highlights the sense of displacement felt by many individuals during the partition.

Importance of understanding the paradox of independence in Indian partition literature and its relevance in contemporary society. Furthermore, the importance of understanding the paradox of independence depicted in Indian partition literature extends beyond its historical

relevance. It holds contemporary relevance in numerous ways. For instance, the prevalence of communal violence and forced migration due to religious differences in present-day India indicates that the issues relevant during the partition still pervades the country's social fabric. Similarly, the complexities of identity formation and the politics of exclusion continue to drive many societies around the world, making the partition literature's themes ever-so pertinent and informative in the present times.

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