


RESCUED OR REPRESSED? MUSLIM WOMEN'S DISPLACEMENT AND SILENCING IN PARTITION LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

*This chapter questions the layered victimhood and artistic silencing of Muslim women during the Partition of India, concentrating on *River of Fire* (Qurratulain Hyder), *Aangan* (Khadija Mastur), and *The Freedom's Shade* (Anis Kidwai). Utilising an autoethnographic and feminist framework, this analysis studies how Muslim women's lives were fractured not exclusively by intra-community patriarchy but also by the brutality of nation-building schemes and state-sanctioned "rescue" narratives that performed communal majoritarianism. It raises crucial inquiries: How were Muslim women subjected to numerous forms of marginalisation – through household patriarchy, political brutality, and state supervision camouflaged as a safeguard? Prominent to this examination is the Islamic spatial construct of *zenana* (women's quarters) and *mardana* (men's quarters), which perform as symbolic and lived areas within Muslim cultural life. Instead of considering the *zenana* exclusively as a zone of repression, the paper emphasises it as a complex arena of female solidarity, memory-making, and modest opposition. In *Aangan*, the *zenana* evolves as a feminised archive of political consciousness, where women mediate quietness and suffering while cultivating ideological transparency. In *River of Fire*, Hyder disrupts civilizational binaries by intertwining a documented continuum in which Muslim women inhabit and transform gendered areas of both *zenana* and *mardana*. *The Freedom's Shade*, grounded in lived experience, starkly illustrates the physical and symbolic infringements of Muslim women's bodies during rescue and rehabilitation, and their dislocation from familiar household areas. Ultimately, this chapter critiques prevalent nationalist and communal frameworks that render Muslim women passive or mute. Rather, it foregrounds their nuanced agency within and beyond the *zenana*, placing these literary portrayals as cultural counter-memory and opposition against historical erasure. The study contributes to a profound understanding of Muslim women's life writings as rich sites of autoethnographic truth, where *tahzheeb*, household spatiality, and trauma converge in shaping gendered subjectivity during national turmoil.*

Keywords: Partition Literature, Muslim Women's Life-Writings, *Zenana* and *Mardana*,
Feminist Autoethnography, Cultural Displacement

INTRODUCTION

The Partition of British India in 1947 unleashed phenomena of cruelty and mass banishment. As Anand and Sharma (2000) note, around 15 million people were uprooted, and over 1 million lost their lives in communal brutality. Women's bodies evolved as battlefields during this epoch: scholars have demonstrated how women from minority neighbourhoods

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This chapter is a part of the book, '*Mapping the Trajectory of Indian Muslim Women's Life-Writings: An Autoethnographical Approach*' edited by N. Safrine.

ISBN: 978-93-49926-50-9 (ebk); ISBN: 978-93-49926-84-4 (hbk); ISBN: 978-93-49926-34-9 (pbk)

The ebook and print version of this book are available at:
<https://dx.doi.org/10.46679/9789349926509>

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