# The Abducted Woman in the House

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India presently occupies an extended moment for a woman's right to security as well as sexual autonomy, bodily integrity and the freedom to 'present' herself (rather than being represented) in both the public and the private sphere. In the December of 2012, thousands and thousands of young people spilled onto the streets to protest the brutal gang-rape of a 23 year old woman student. Since its very inception, however, this youth uprising was not solely contextualised in terms of 'crime' and 'increased security', but also in terms of India's 'rape culture' built by a patriarchal Indian state that legitimises both 'impunity' and 'immunity'. 'Impunity' not only of state security forces and the police in committing and abetting crimes against women, but also that of husbands, fathers, brothers, and male society in general; crimes, not only of a sexual nature, but also those that seek to police women, their dress, their sexual expression, their access to the public sphere and even to their own inner lives. And 'immunity' both in terms of a criminal justice system that inures perpetrators to their accusers and 'disappears' women's complaints, as well as in terms of a legal framework that explicitly exempts sexual violence on wives and explicitly criminalises the sexuality of the young – by the Indian Penal Code, a wife may never be raped, and even consensual sexual relations between a young woman of 15 and a young man of 17 amount to rape.

Young India's 'Tahrir' moment first met with the response it deserved, in the progressive recommendations of the Justice Verma Committee and in the Bill of Rights that it suggested for Indian women. In the numerous legal provisions that it suggested be enacted to dismantle the culture of impunity and immunity so long nurtured by the twin pillars of the Indian state – its security services and the family — the Verma Committee's recommendations responded to the call from the streets in an unusually affirmative manner. Building on the inputs it received from the Indian women's, youth, and LGBT movements, the Verma Committee brought into the ambit of the law the specific types of sexual violence that women, children and the LGBT community suffer, and also sought the removal of the existing exemptions that the Indian Penal Code provided the family and the State.

The euphoria with which this report was received was short-lived however. In the payback in patriarchal coin that this movement received, both in the Criminal Law Ordinance of February 2013 and the ultimate Criminal Amendment Act of 2013, while impunity has been dented and also the specific violence suffered by women has received recognition in the criminal justice system, immunity has largely been preserved, if not strengthened, when it comes to the family. A woman who is a wife cannot be raped, and consent is irrelevant for sexual relations between young women and men if they are both under the age of 18. 'Unnatural sex' is still outlawed, and only a woman may be sexually assaulted.

Looking back at this extraordinary period just past, of huge mass mobilisations and night marches organised by Indian women and students, of placards that declared that "my dress is not a yes", of young women launching themselves at the policeman who has just dragged her on the ground and beaten, it is worth asking some questions, which I think will establish the connections that I wish to explore about the women abducted during the Partition of India.

The first of these is a set of questions that relates how social movements of citizens are to be judged. Do they really end when there is the enactment of a law? Does the granting of some of the movement's demands in terms of a law require the ascription of a teleological motivation to the movement itself? Or is the intervention by the State

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always an initiative that seeks to contain the insurrection?

The second set of questions really comes into play if the answers to the first set are in the negative. If a movement is not teleological, in what forms may it persist? Given that there is a law that is not in full opposition to what the movement demanded, what are the dialectical relations it must enter into with the law that has interrupted it? What are the armoury and strategies that such social movements must build in order both to instrumentalise, as well as to confront, the roadblocks that the law places in its path?

Whether we consider the anti-rape culture agitations of the very recent past or all the way back to Mridula Sarabhai and her 'social workers' as they were then called, these questions offer what I think may be a new way in which popular histories of social movements may be written. If we do not evaluate movements in terms of the outcomes they win from the family and State, but in terms of the persistence of the questions they raise initially and refine subsequently through different political periods, perhaps we shall be able to sketch longer and deeper histories (and futures) of the movements we encounter. And in doing so perhaps we may better understand the reasons that underlie the appropriation of some social movements of the past by the very forces they sought to oppose.

This essay is an attempt to recover the fledgling Indian state's nascent activists, in the period 1947-1957 from the gridlock in which feminist discourse imprisons their activism. My intent here is not to quarrel with the feminist analysis of the patriarchal outcomes of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Rehabilitation) Ordinances and Act, in force till 1956, but to question the conclusion that these activists' proposals, methods, and intentions were in consonance with those of the State. The point that I wish to make is that this characterisation of the abducted women's period does not entail an identity of intentions on the part of the State and the social workers, *contra* Das (1995) who has seen the whole process of recovery as:

> ...an alliance between the state and social work as a profession, which silences the voice of victims by an application of the 'best interest' doctrine. This voice is silenced by an abstract concern with justice, the punishment of the guilty, and the protection of the honour of the nation. This concern, lucidly articulated within the Constituent Assembly as well as outside, the Assembly by national leaders, comprises a discourse of heroic and flatulent nationalism, which takes no cognizance of the feelings of the women themselves (Das 1995: p.73).

My contention will be that there was no such alliance, and that in fact, there is overwhelming evidence to show that 'social workers' were headed on a collision course with social mores, the political class, police and administration. From the writings of Anis Kidwai, the Urdu writer (1906-1981) and Mridula Sarabhai (1911-1974), the well known Gandhian nationalist, I shall show that the social workers did not perceive themselves as agents of the state or the family, arraigned against women reluctant to return, but as speaking for the women's cause.

### The 'Social Worker' and the Abducted Woman

To begin with, let me present a brief synopsis of the history of the recovery operations. On December 6, 1947, in the first Inter-dominion conference in Lahore, India and Pakistan jointly decided to mount a recovery operation, through a contingent of female social workers assisted by the local police. An ordinance called *Abducted Persons Recovery and Restoration Ordinance* was promulgated on January 31, 1949, and was subsequently replaced by the *Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act* of December 1949. One of the principal features of this Act was that it adopted a more comprehensive definition of the term 'abducted' than the one already provided in the Indian Penal Code. Another important aspect of this legislation was the provision for setting up of an Indo-Pak Tribunal to decide the disputed cases of abducted women. Camps for the stay of the recovered persons were to be established. The *Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act*, that replaced earlier Ordinances, was periodically renewed until 1957.

Feminist historiography of the past two decades (for example, Butalia (1998) and Menon and Bhasin (1998)) has shown, there can be no dispute that women were, in the words of Menon and Bhasin (speaking of Hindu women here), "abducted as Hindus, converted and married as Muslims, recovered as Hindus but required to relinquish their children because they were born of Muslim fathers, and disowned as 'unpure' and ineligible for marriage within their erstwhile family and community, their identities were in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction, making of them ... 'permanent refugees'."

There is no doubt that the abducted women's fears of what lay ahead was brushed aside by the Indian and Pakistani administrations in charge of recovery. But the social workers were not complicit in this silencing of the voices of these victims. As the extracts from Anis Kidwai's *In Freedom's Shade* show, it is through the 'social worker' that the abducted woman's refusal to return is given voice:

*In Freedom's Shade*, pp. 149-152

As recovery work went on, the greatest difficulty was not to facilitate acceptance—instead, we found that most abducted girls didn't want to return. Muslims seethed at these refusals, young men flushing at this ignominious disgrace of their community's honour. ...Readers cannot comprehend what I, as a woman, suffered when such things were said. I would try to explain, 'Try to understand their psychological state. Try to see why they refuse to return.' But the ranting and raving would continue.

Finally, I had to enquire about the reasons for refusal myself. The most common type was the fine and sensible girl, most eager to flee her captors. These girls' minds were alive to the dire situation they were trapped in and they spent every moment planning an escape They wrote letters to their dear ones seeking rescue even when they had no idea where they were being held. In their hearts, love for kin, faith and dignity reigned supreme. But put these ones aside and consider, if you will, the others.

Take the young woman who had spent all her life behind the purdah, never seeing the face of any other man besides her brother or father. Today, this girl loathed herself as a wanton who had expended her dignity by being with strange men for months. This girl was being offered a return home and she wondered whether her parents, husband, society, would own her again. A deep sense of misgiving and a fear of rejection would drive her to refuse the offer.

And there were also some married women, who believed their honourable husbands to be their companions until death rendered them asunder. They wondered how they could, tainted by infidelity and scandal as they were, ever face men as proud as them? Would their husbands tolerate such treachery? Would their gazes ever invest in them the same respect as before? These feelings would shackle their feet and they would say, 'What was written as our fate has come to pass. Leave us where we are to live out the rest of our days.'

There were also some girls whose eyes had opened in homes of great poverty, who had never eaten a full meal or clothed their bodies in anything but rags. But now, they were in the keep of such generous men, who brought them silken shalwars and dupattas, introduced them to the delectable taste of hot coffee and cold ice-cream, took them to see two shows at the movies in a single day. Why would such a girl want to leave such fine men to return to her parents, to a life of rags and scraps to conceal her burgeoning youth, to days of toil in the fields under a sun hot enough to melt her brain? And even if she were to do it, even if she were to leave this splendid man, so handsome in his uniform, all the romance that her old life had in store for her was a mud-spattered uncouth rustic, clutching the staff hoisted on his shoulder, for a husband. She wanted to escape this terrible past and that frightening future; she wanted to be happy in the present that was hers.

And for all women, there was another reason for refusal. How was she to know whether her self-professed rescuer was friend or foe? What if the rescuers were also traffickers? Until now, whichever strange man had taken her, had sold her. The fact that the rescuer wore a police uniform was no guarantee either. And even if it were not a uniform but an ornamental pagdi with a shining tassel, how could she trust that he was what he said, a man sent by her relatives? In almost all cases of rescue, this was the woman's suspicion, so much so that the rescuers would have to forcibly drag her away and her fears would be allayed only after two or three days with them.

The question of religion and of conversion rarely crossed the minds of such girls. After all, what was their religion to them? It was only Muslim men who went to the mosque regularly to read the Friday namaz and the Alvida namaz, only men who listened to the mullaji's sermons. Mullaji wouldn't let women even stand in the mosque. Every time he saw young girls, his eyes would redden, 'Get out! What do you have to do here?' Their presence in the mosque would defile the namaz; if they went to the dargah, there was the danger of a commotion; if they attended a qawwali mehfil, then the Sufi was in peril of straying from his contemplation of the One to thoughts of more earthly pleasures. Women simply polluted sanctity.

In any case, what did these women know of Islam? They had never been taught anything but a few kalmas and a little bit of the namaz. What relevance did that have? They had learnt it by heart and recited it by rote, but what connection did this prayer have with the soul? Her name was Rahimat, her abba Ramzani and her husband Nawab Idris. Besides a few Islamic names, what wealth of faith was hers that she should give up her life to safeguard it? And if truth were to be told, it was not as if the Almighty had kept her in such comfort. In fact, the god that this new man had was much more bountiful, for at least she was fed. No, it was better to let them rant on; she was certainly not going to leave this new man, who had brought such colour to her life.

I also met some young girls who angrily scorned the offer of return to husbands who had proven so cowardly that they just turned tail and ran, leaving the honour of their family, the mother of their children at the mob's mercy. These women would go mad with anger, 'You ask us to go back to those impotents? We kept on crying out to them to help us—In Allah's name, save us! Why are you running away? Why don't you strike these scoundrels? Wait! Take me along! But for each one, his life was most dear. There was no love for us. Why didn't they kill us with their own hands? We certainly don't want to ever see their faces again!'

...Both educated and illiterate girls had another problem. When the police or activists came to rescue them, they would be paralysed by the question: Will my parents/husband accept this child in my womb? What if they make me kill it, in the

name of honour? This fear would make them refuse to return.

In fact even those women whom the moralistic Anis Kidwai could not understand, are treated with respect, as nowhere is there a suggestion that these wanton women are to be forcibly repatriated:

...There is no denying that there were also some girls to whose way of thinking this immodest life appealed. The egotism that was the mood of the times gave licence to self-indulgence; and once they had sampled the pleasurable nectar of sin, their hearts rebelled against a return to that staid, disciplined life. However vitiated the atmosphere was, it was still in consonance with their natures.

Also among those who refused were a few modern, educated girls who believed that the world's problems could never be solved without 'international' marriages. Even before the riots, they had spurned religion and society, seeking out opportunities to demonstrate their open-mindedness; now, they were making hay while the sun shone. How could social workers ever hope to reform such sophisticated sinners?

### The 'Social Worker' and their Political Context

Although Anis Kidwai was never involved in the recovery operation per se, the militant, and even by 1948 increasingly pilloried, Mridula Sarabhai, too attended to what the women had to say. In a spate of articles that she wrote in newspapers, Sarabhai sought to make the voices of these women heard, and to impress upon the public the need for recovery work. In the 'Recovery of Captive Women' *Hindustan Times*, 14 April 1948, she begins by pointing out that at least one set of the interlocutors were women from both sides:

In recovered women's camps, Hindu or Muslim of Sikh, the stories that women relate have the same trend. At one time, the recovered women of three communities were kept together in the same camp. It was a heart-rending experience to hear them talk to each other. Whether they were Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs it did not matter, they talked as woman to woman, baffled, humiliated, stunned and full of doubts for the future. Why had they been made victims of brute force was the question that puzzled them.

And while it is the family-State that clamours the loudest for instant 'recovery', the 'social workers' knew that the fate of one woman is tied to another:

In both Dominions, the eagerness to recover their women borders on impatience. The question is asked: Why this delay? Blame is attributed to the other side. The average impression is that the recovery of the women is a simple procedure... Those who think this way are ignorant of human nature... By use of force alone one may be able to recover a few but large numbers would have to perish. It is only through active public cooperation and persuasive measures that we can get good results. ...One word to the waiting relatives... If they get to work in their area and help in recovery of captive women then they will be helping an early recovery of their women in the other Dominion.

From Sarabhai, we learn that most of the objections to the recovery operations that dominated Parliamentary and popular debates in the years to come had already been put into play by April 1948. In what Sarabhai clearly sees as an alliance of objectives between the abductors and those that do not want "settled women to be uprooted", she sees a societal and administrative reluctance to undertake recovery:

... Some continue to give asylum to abducted women as hostages, while others argue that "now that women have settled down in their new environments, why again upset them and create new problems in their lives?" ... Anyone who knows the psychology of a captive will not be taken in by this line of thought. Captive women have resisted, waiting to be rescued... With disappointment after disappointment on one side and on the other, the continuous all-out effort of the abductor has made them succumb to the instinct of self-preservation, and they have given in, but this does not mean that they welcome their new environment...

The time factor is of great importance... The great majority of captive women are going through hell. Every moment, every extra day, means more suffering for the captive women. ... It is only during the last two months that a special organisation has been started and a campaign launched. But the progress is at a snail's pace. ...if we want an early recovery, it is necessary to have a vigorous campaign to educate the abductors and society that by abducting women in your own area, you do not harm your opponent.

In fact, Sarabhai and her colleague Mrs. Bhag Mehta were frequently in conflict with the Chief Liaison Officer as well as the District Recovery Officers appointed to implement recovery operations even before the Act was passed. The minutes of a meeting of the Steering Committee for the recovery operation stand witness to this inherent conflict between Sarabhai's social workers and the East Punjab Liaison Agency: "The Steering Committee requested the C.L.O. to cancel his instructions to the DLOs that the women workers are not to go out alone in the districts. If a woman worker desired to go out alone, there should be no restriction on her movement. If, however, she wants the D.L.O. to accompany her, then it is a matter of mutual adjustment." (Item No. 4)[1] Far from being willing minions of a

patriarchal state, it is clear that the social workers were being treated as women who were themselves to be policed.

So why were social workers really needed? For one, not only was the police and the administration unhelpful in recovery, there were allegations that they were abductors themselves: On 30 April 1948, a small news item in the *Hindustan Times* tells us of an abduction attempt in which a subedar along with four others attempted to carry away the wife of a headmaster. But social workers were also needed because women would only confide in women, as Sarabhai writes in her article 'Abducted Women: Typical Problem Cases' on 18 July 1948:

"I am a Sikh. I am happy. Pray do not send me to Pakistan. I will do just as you want me to do. Please have mercy on me"—such would be the plea of a stunned young Muslim newcomer [to the camp]. There was no meaning with arguing with her at that stage. She had to be made to feel at home and given time to gather herself. ...Then the second stage — she would want to know why she was recovered. The third would be a query about conditions in Pakistan. What are they like? Were her relatives alive? Would they take her back? Had anyone made enquiries about her? And finally, by the evening, she would be so eager to go back that her impatience would not brook even a few minutes delay. But then fear of what would happen to her would make her nervous. She would go to Pakistan provided I went with her!

And only women social workers were motivated enough to challenge the 'honour'—'shame' nexus that ruled South Asian women's lives, and the ways in which instruments of the State legitimised it:

As the days went by and the possessors of women got to know of the method of recovery, they changed their tactics. They knew that women could not be kept back by force. The best way was to get their active cooperation in staying behind. They knew all about feminine psychology ...[and] exploited the women's fear complex and their conservatism. For the first few months they had waited to be recovered and had put up a brave fight against the allurements of the abductors. No help came, even those who might have been expected to come to their help had failed them. Now at least a rescue party had arrived. Who knows whether this was "it"...Why take a risk. So the number of resisting cases began to increase. Exaggerated accounts of these happenings gained currency and aroused sympathy for these "resisters".

In another piece in the *Hindustan Times* on 10 July 1948, 'The Problem of Abducted Women', Sarabhai speaks angrily of the lack of political will for recovery:

Members of legislative assemblies are generally believed to represent the people. It is surprising, however, to read the Assembly proceedings. Not one MLA either in Pakistan on the Indian Parliaments or the East and West Punjab legislatures had asked questions regarding the difficulties faced by their respective Governments in recovery work in their own territories. ...Joining hands in efforts to bring out women from the other side helps one in gaining popularity. It is a political asset. But to get out women from one's own Dominion is a struggle against one's own people. It is going against the popular trend — and therefore means a temporary setback in popularity. ...To the voters of India and Pakistan, this tendency [to woo the voter] spells danger. Until such time as they develop a real sense of discrimination and strength to face their exploiters, they need legislators that will guide them fearlessly.

On 8 August 1948, in the *Hindustan Times* article 'The Recovery of Abducted Women', Sarabhai presents a full typology of those arraigned against the recovery operation. Besides the village/town bully, the white-slave dealer, the procurers for brothels, the communal political organisations, there is a type who claims to be a victim: "we have treated the women shabbily, brutally if you like. But take the practical side. The Pakistan people have taken away our women. If now we give back these other ones we have, how shall we fare?" Another is the 'humanitarian', who "waited and waited but nobody turned up to claim her" and in the end had her married off into a good family; completely unmindful of the fact that the whole episode was in direct violation of the Inter-Dominion Agreement of September 1947.

At the top of Sarabhai's list, however, are the "influential protectors", who work against "the recovery of the women who are with highly placed individuals or someone under their protection". While some of "these zamindars, Civil, Police, and military officials and personnel, MLAs, and leaders of political parties" "keep the women in their own households, others have distributed them amongst their dependents and servants so that in case of an enquiry they would not be personally involved." It is these people that the Recovery operation has found "extremely difficult to tackle", because while some "hide their crimes under big political and nationalist theories", others like the Ministers from both sides of the Punjab have less artifice: "Why don't you give us the women we want. What is the use of sending us 'low' class women, when we give you a better type?"

"Are we women not citizens?" Sarabhai asks. "Have we no right to expect State protection and aid in adversity? Are not Ministers our representatives also?" A consideration of the debates that raged in the Indian Parliament between 1949 and 1957 on the recovery operation most emphatically assert that the majority of MPs were not. But this elision was not only applicable to the abducted women victims, it was also equally

applicable to the 'social workers'. In the next section, I shall consider a fragment of one such debate in the Rajya Sabha in 1952, on the matter of the *Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Amendment Bill, 1952.*

### The 'Social Worker' and the Abducted Woman in the Houses of Parliament

Lilavati Munshi (Bombay) began the debate by averring that what happened in 1947 was "ancient history" in which "rightly or wrongly, things have happened which we could not prevent". However, but now that "these persons have settled down", "have married and ...have children and ...have formed affection for their new homes," uprooting them would be a crime. Only those who genuinely wish to return should now be recovered, as "the first and primary consideration should be the free will and desire of the abducted persons themselves."

Taking Lilavati Munshi on, Savitry Devi Nigam (Uttar Pradesh) asked whether a woman could be credibly characterised as "happy" and settled to live with the murderer of her husband and sons? The reason why women did not agree to return to their families was because of the honour-shame nexus; so, the real task was actually to create a public mood in which women were allowed to return. And as for the children, how could it ever be said that they will receive a proper upbringing in a home in which their mothers had been subjected to such oppression? It would be far better, Nigam said, if these children were reared in children's homes.

The representative from Mysore, Shri C. G. K. Reddy's intervention into the debate, pit Munshi against Nigam. Given the subject, Reddy began by stating that he would have expected that "the hon. Lady Members here should have been able probably to contribute much more than what we practical men can do in this respect", Reddy rued the unfortunate fact that "the two Lady Members who contributed what they could to this debate were almost in violent conflict." The issue must be, Reddy cautioned, addressed by looking "at the facts as they are in the world, not as they should be". The clear-eyed gaze of "a practical man" revealed that:

> It is not as if it is only due to partition that this strange and most unfortunate relationship has come into play in this country or in the world. There are other occasions—in our country specially—when even though solemnised and respectable, marriages start off with a relationship almost akin to that between an abducted woman and another man. Are we not aware, Sir, that many of our girls are forced against their consent to marry men whom they thoroughly dislike? Are we not aware that even a few years of this remarkable companionship which more or less is thrust upon them—after five years, after some children are born, it is not possible for us to separate them?

If recovery operations were to continue, if 'social workers' were allowed to separate women from their families against their will, the very notion of family would be at stake. We would be led to "the logical conclusion of trying to separate men and women of the same religion living here, living in this country for years together, whose beginnings were as unfortunate as these beginnings have been". He added further:

> Are we to seriously agree with the Government and the hon. Minister and with this Bill—with the powers that this Bill seeks to give to the Government and agencies which recover these abducted women? Are we to seriously agree with the views expressed therein that we must break up that relationship? Sir, as I have said, it may be, it started off because of some lustful acquisition of a man. ...It is most improper and it is a shame... that even if that abducted woman has lived during the past five years' or during the last two or three years and today is happy and contented, loving her man whom she did not accept according to the acceptable principles as a husband, loving the children which have been born to her in this relationship, it is a shame indeed that we should break up this relationship.

No one in the House, especially the women members, dared to take on Reddy and his ill-intentioned but nevertheless pertinent characterisation of Indian marriage as a sequence of abduction, rape, and the eventual capitulation of a young woman. The debate returned to the topic of consent – of which the Minister Sardar Swaran Singh spoke: "consent lies in what is voluntarily given and not what is given under circumstances of helplessness or under influence." And although Dr. Seeta Parmanand, a D.Phil. in law from Oxford and the mover of the most Bills in Parliament to this day, did ask that "if a stay of five years at a place should bind [abducted women] to those persons and places, should it not be realised that several years' association before the event should bind them still more to the original home", the moment for an articulation of women's autonomy beyond the home and the family was never seized upon.

It is this inability to problematise the question of consent and to interrogate the nature of the family that ultimately caused the 'social workers' movement to flounder. Having managed to get the two Dominions to act against abduction by making reference to the claims of family, Sarabhai was unable to move beyond, or at the very least, question the bounds of the law.

> ...Once I had to interrogate a Hindu woman who had made a statement in court ... that she was a willing party and wanted to stay where she was. We were alone. I was facing a girl hardly in her teens. Her expression was full of sorrow; there was a

haunted look in her eyes. ...she asked a few questions: "Why did we want her? Were we interested only in her or others too? What about her izzat? How would her family react? Would they take her back. ... I drove home the point by asking her that how, if no one had registered her name with us, we could have found our way to her. ... Still she hesitated. Her mother and two nephews had been taken away but had not been separated and were kept together by the same family in a distant district. It was in order to save them that she had agreed to this life of "shame".

... She warned me that if she was asked to state what she wished to do in front of the Pakistan authorities or the Muslim relatives, she would say exactly what she had said in the court. If they were to find out that she was eager to go and went willingly, and we on our part failed to rescue her mothers and nephews, then the latter would to face a life of hell. Even though i had informed her otherwise, she was sure that her relatives were dead, except these three, and she did not want to lose them also. Moreover, she was by no means sure that we were going to be able to get her back finally. If we failed then her life too would be hell. ... But if by force of law we took her back, she would have no objection!

I was in a dilemma. She was in law not a minor but a full grown adult. What was to be one? The Pakistan authorities did their best to persuade her to go with me. But she did not budge. Should coercion not be used in a case like this?

To move beyond, what was required was a deeper understanding of women's experience of the institutions of the family and marriage, as well as the complex networks of women's solidarity that run through the camps. In an article on 27 July 1948, entitled 'The Recovery of Abducted Women', Sarabhai herself reveals this:

[These women in the camps] had developed a herd mentality. A few had become leaders, each with a group of her own. The police officers in charge made use of them to keep the others in control. This was but natural. How, otherwise could they manage such a crowd? But the leaders' power and influence also increased.

In a meeting, when this crowd of young girls confronts the social workers, "a young girl took the floor and argued out their case. 'You say abduction is immoral and so you are trying to save us. Well, now it is too late. *One marries only once. Willingly or by force, we are now married. What are you going to do to us? Ask us to get married again? Is that not immoral?* What happened to our relatives when we were abducted? Where were they? They tell you that they are eagerly waiting for us. No, you do not know our society. Life will be hell for us! Some of our nearest relatives are here living as converts. We can't leave them and go away."

Although this young woman and some others like her were won over, agreeing to return once their relatives actually came to meet them at the camp, there were yet others who first agreed and then changed their mind. Such was the case of one Muslim woman, who first accepted and moved out to the India-Pakistan Transit Centre, then returned to the camp a few hours later, expressing her resolve not to go to Pakistan. Sarabhai and others later found out "that the other women in the camp, particularly those who had formed their own group, had jeered at her for her weakness and criticised her for giving in." Ultimately, once the social workers told her that should she choose to stay in India, she would not be allowed to go back to her abductor, she capitulated to the social workers' advice. One of the reasons for this capitulation – although Sarabhai does not inflect them in the same way that I do – is that were she to stay, she would be sent to the Indian women's rehabilitation centre, where she would have to learn to be "economically self-reliant", i.e. the fear of another period of incarceration. Another cause could be Sarabhai's imputation that an abducted woman living with her lover would unleash a moral contagion: "we do not want to turn our menfolk into criminals and men without character."

Even for those who left willingly, farewells would be a spectacle:

Leave-taking was also a problem. It is said to be usual with women to cry when bidding farewell to someone but never have we known such hysterical outbursts as at these camps. the outgoing women and those remaining behind, saying goodbye to each other, raise such a tumult of grief that it draws the attention of the whole area, and the outsiders, not knowing what was going on, might easily suppose that violence and force was being applied to the women in the camp. In this way a big crowd is apt to collect outside and its sympathy with the women would be obvious. Only elaborate police bundobast saves the situation.

The pathos of this situation, in which the women who have nowhere to go to, tug at those who do, and the welter of grief that spills over in such partings, may appear to leave Sarabhai unmoved; actually, however, such a conclusion would be hasty. For Sarabhai goes on to remark that the desperation of all women in the camps is driven by fear of the future, of losing their children, of the reception they would get, of public opinion, and shame at the loss of honour. This fear is nurtured and embedded in them by the police recovery squads, novice social workers, and camp managers. Having been

deceived so often and having had to face so many "bogus rescue friends", these women have lost all faith in "human goodwill." These women are not are in "a normal state of mind" — "they have to be treated with the sort of technique that would be used by a psychologist" and "the wish of the women concerned should not be given undue weight".

It is up to us to determine what weight we should give this final comment. In my own view, the fact that these women had been raped and sold, and resold, and then incarcerated in the camps could hardly have set the conditions for an independent decision. Perhaps this is also what Sarabhai intends, because she makes a plea for individual treatment of all cases: "Following a general rule is harmful to the individual and the cause. Hence the tendency to frame inter-Dominion level rules for disposal of cases is to be discouraged." Had the social workers been able to work with the abducted women to create an alternative agenda for a radically different set of demands, in which a woman's fate was not to be determined by the willingness of a family who claimed her and in which women could claim each other, perhaps we would have witnessed a struggle that would have released both the social workers and the abducted women from the prison that Partition had constructed for them. That alternative agenda was not however one that was immediately available to people like Sarabhai and Kidwai, demanding as it did a reconfiguration of the social workers' class alliances and ideals of discipline in social reform. What were also needed were resources created by an interrogation of the patriarchal nature of the Indian State, the family, as well of women themselves. No such resources were of course available in a nation so overwhelmingly constructed by community and family.

It has taken sixty-five years for the Indian women and youth movements to be able to raise the questions of sexual autonomy, and even though our demands have on young persons' right to sexual expression and the recognition of marital rape for now have been swatted away, we are still better placed to answer at least some of the questions that Anis Kidwai asks in conclusion of her chapters on abducted women:

...A half-mad young girl comes to mind. She was brought to us by the police from some part of UP but she would also mention Bombay, Ahmedabad, Amritsar and, smiling meaningfully, scatter her narrative across these cities. She had a silken kerchief she would wrap around her head now, around her neck then; at times she used it to wipe her face, at others hid it in her bosom; when she had a headache, she wore it as a bandanna. I asked once, 'Gulab Bano, where did you get this kerchief from?' Gulab stared at me with large, round eyes, smiled and said, 'Niadar gave it to me.' Niadar who? The question always made her lower her eyes and whisper 'that one', as if to say—'Niadar, my love, who else?' Weeks of questioning could only establish that Niadar was the man who brought her from Bombay and married her. Whether the ceremony was Hindu or Muslim or both, we never found out. In any case, after this marriage, riots began and she fell into the hands of others. After being passed from hand to hand for over a year and a half, she ended up in UP. This adolescent couldn't bear this torment and upheaval and lost her mental balance. Even the name Gulab wasn't fully hers; at times she gave herself other names.

Niadar's kerchief, the memento of a first love, was wreathed around her neck—all else was lost. Within a year, so many men came into her life, but none was Niadar. All she wished for was him. With great equanimity, she would narrate: 'Niadar said, "Lalli, why do you roam about so? Come to my home and I will marry you."' He got her new shoes, fine clothes and then they were wed. When she was sick, Niadar took care of her. But soon something else would come over her and a string of names would spew from her lips, but all sequence and coherence would vanish.

Gulab, and all the other half-mad girls, who smile and laugh all the time, do they perhaps laugh at all of us, this nation and its denizens, this religion and its standard-bearers, this government, its laws, its pomp? Who knows what amuses them so?

Yet, we do not have all the answers. The abducted women's period is an extremely disturbing period in the history of the subcontinent, and at least to my mind, one that resists a simple resolution into good guys and bad guys. I imagine ourselves at the same point of history at Sarabhai and ask what would we have done different? Would we accept that women be left with their abductors? How would this be different from the ways in which India's lower courts routinely order rapists to marry their victims? Or take the fact that the ill-effects of sex-selective abortions in Haryana and Punjab are today mitigated by the purchase of brides from poorer parts of India. Can this trafficking be legitimised by the awareness that many such women live like 'real wives', and in far better circumstances than the homes that sold them off?

The questions that the raped and abducted women of 1947 and the raped and trafficked women of 2013 pose are not so different. The answers we are in a position to give now are better than those that the social workers of 1947 could, but they are still ones that not all women can utter. The December 2012 and subsequent movements have begun a wider social engagement with the right no to be victimised for rape, but our answers about a woman's rights to, and in, the home, are ones that have not even begun to be formulated in the popular domain Like the women of 1947, Indian youth and women hav

fought for a legal remedy against these wrongs; like them, we too have stumbled along the way; nevertheless, each battle also represents an important gain. For us today, the gain is that rape and sexual harassment are no longer only women's issues and that a change in law is no longer the sole goal of our movements; for the women of 1947-56, surely the gain must have been the understanding that the women's question must receive an autonomous articulation. To my mind, in order for us to sketch the trajectory of the journey we have made, a recovery of the social workers movement as one of 'ours' is absolutely essential.

## Notes

1. Source: http://www.sikh-history.com/sikhhist/events / partition_and_women.html.

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HATH-KAGHAZ

*History of Handmade Paper in South Asia*

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