

## **I. Anita Desai and Bapsi Sidhwa as Female Writers**

Anita Desai holds a prominent place among younger group of Indian English novelists. Desai's work is part of a new style of writing to come out of Indian which is not nearly as conservative as Indian writing has been in the past though. Her fiction is colored by her personal views; influence of her parental heritage has been a key to the social biases in her fiction. In her novels she has depicted various changes, which have affected lives since independence. The post colonial Indian women have been radically affected by such matters as the increase of western style of education, choice of marriage partner, career expectation and the losing of the joint family. Desai, being an educated woman of half-European descent, is sensitively situated to record the crisis of Indian colonial bourgeoisie after independence. This crisis leads them to live: live a life of general alienation nostalgia. Each of her novels are set in a social context and focuses on a life at a particular stage. Her characters strive and aspire to get the goals in a complicated and unsystematic world; one of her recurring themes is the struggle of women to assert their independence in a restrictive Indian society.

Desai's most of the protagonists are females and the World which they occupy is domestic. Her fiction depicts women in their traditional roles, women as grand daughter as daughter, as wife, as mother. Her attempt is to explore the inner world of sensibility, the particular kind of Indian sensibility rather than the outer Use of style while is supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of her principal characters-the stream of consciousness. Her novels are peopled by women who are in perpetual quest for meaning and value of life. The 'existential struggle' of the women who refuse to float along with current form the core of Anita Desai's novels. Her characters refuse to surrender their individual selves. Their inability to

compromise and surrender inevitably result in isolation and loneliness. Her women are hypersensitive and highly individualistic. Though they do not voice their protest against uncongenial surroundings and insensitive people, their bruised selves let out a silent cry. They refuse to yield and compromise and prefer death and miserable life. In their existential struggle they suffer intensely but refuse to be crushed.

*Cry the Peacock* is about love of life, the young protagonist, Maya's effort to tell her story to herself: to discover some meaning in her life. The novel begins with the death of Maya's pet dog, which serves a functional correlative of her own impending pre-mature demise that has been forecast by a temple official. The peacock serves as a symbol 'Signifying 'psychic dissolution' of the heroine. 'Married to a clever and successful lawyer Gautama, Maya is convinced that her husband has little in common with her. In the relation of husband and wife there is always a sense of lack. They represent the two poles: the one is excessively emotional while the other is coldly detached from human affairs. Maya and Gautama are the two opposing selves who, given their adamant natures, refuse to come into a productive and dialectical relationship and together come to terms with a complex reality (218). In order to be free or to preserve her self-respect she murders her husband and undergoes inner psychic turmoil herself.

Monisha, the protagonist of *Voices in the City* is a fictional extension of Maya. Monisha is a young woman of a sensitive and open nature and for her the setting of the novel, the teeming city of Calcutta, proves to be a prison without bars. Leaving her own beautiful house in Kalimpong, she comes to stay with her husband's family in Calcutta, radically different from her former environment. She tries to find comfort and happiness with her husband, Jiban, but she is destined to get nothing but disappointment from him. So she is driven to her tragedy as she fails

to take an active interest in the life around her. Her husband could have taken her out of shell, but he never tries to know her and to recognize her. The city for Monisha is a symbol of the dichotomy of existence. She fails to choose between death and drab life. but finally she chooses death. She, like Maya in *Cux the Peacock*, is on a quest. As observed in "A Study in ;Alienation"

Monisha's quest for identity is a quest for the ultimate wisdom, a search for infinite solitude. The struggle within her is the struggle between herself-identity and the other identity, existence and non-existence. Her quest for identity stems from her failure to comprehend the essence of existence. She is an incomplete self who pines for self-completion and self-fulfillment. Alienation to her is a necessity. (Swain 90-91)

Unable to sustain from her own resources Monisha shows symptoms of anomie. which leads to her final physical self-destruction. Her fate is that of an uprooted individual. In a system of norms, at odds with her own cherished ideals, Monisiha suffers acute psychic strain and disjunction of being,

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* marks the increasing complexity in Anita Desai's artistic vision and imaginative control. Forty-five year old Sita, mother of four children and pregnant with a fifth and her practical husband Raman, a well-to-do factory owner, occupies a world where they are placed in opposition

Sita acknowledges that her husband's practical instincts are faultless and he possesses the strength of mind while it is she who felt safe in hiding; and isolation. Because of this fear of exposition, she refuses to give birth the child. Her refusal to bring the fifth child to birth for "fear that the outer reality would crush them out of

existence is indicative of her profound loss of inner identity which precludes her from all meaningful relationally" (Clement 224). Sita relates her emotional fragility with the wounded eagle which is 'to tortured and devoured' by the city crows. Unable to stay with her husband and family, Sita decides to «o to the magic island of Manori. Sita's return to the island of her childhood is symbolically the return to the 'great womb' which can preserve both her unborn baby in her womb and herself' intact: where she will find her selfhood preserved Anita Desai's protagonists (women) refuse to compromise and surrender and are incapable to accept the perspective of their partners which, inevitably result in isolation and loneliness, forcing them to expose the inner psychic trauma. Nanda Kaul, the protagonist of *Fire on the Mountain* is no exception to this. The novel projects the conflict between the need to alienate in order to retain one's identity and the wish to be involved in the painful struggle in life. The novel begins with Nanda Kaul's withdrawal from the world. She desires nothing. She struggles for a life of asceticism, free from all worldly desires and cares. Her alienation is self-imposed and self-willed which takes nowhere. Her quest for stillness is thwarted by the unwanted arrival of Raka, her great granddaughter. Residing in the mute milieu of Carignano, she seeks and identifies different from all worldly values and passions. Even the sight of a postman irritates her. In contrast Raka is alive to the environment around her. Nanda Kaul, betrayed by her own children, refuses to involve herself a child's world again - real or imaginary. Her withdrawal and self-created loneliness is destroyed by the news of her once friend Ila's rape and murder. Now Nanda realizes that all her life, she was neither a housewife nor a woman. This drives her into guilt-conscious death where:

The fire becomes the symbol of her guilt-ridden, traumatic passion, which is ultimately annihilated. The fire on the mountain is the

symbolic projection of her pent-up emotions, which erupt into volcanic flames.. Ultimately, with the death of Nanda, this illusory word is obliterated. Her crisis for identity is resolved. The fire is the desire within Nanda and her death is the symbol of wish fulfillment or self-assertion. The fire within her erupts, at length, manifesting itself in her death. (Nayak 108-95)

Feminist critics have viewed *Clear Light of Day* as a novel about new women who does not compromise with patriarchally structured society. The *main* protagonist Bim keeps her ambition ahead despite submerging in great trial, trouble and tribulation in her life. They say that the novel basically is about Bim's desire to be independent to be courageous; and to dress and stroke like a man enables her to grow up both strong and confident. It is only because she has trained herself to be different that the much eulogized characteristics of women i.e. weak will, dependence and shyness are alien to her perception. Bim refuse to confine herself to her role as a traditional woman showing an insignificant victim or object for others use and pleasure.

The encounter between East and West, especially, India, on the one hand, and Britain, America and Europe, on the other, is a recurring theme in Indo-English Literature. Indo-English writers view the encounter from different perspectives, and possibilities of mutual understanding between the two sides have been explored in their works. The theme is given a rich variety of treatment in poems, short stories, novels and dramatic works. Kamala Markndaya, Manohar Mlalgonkar, raja Rao, ruth Prawar Jhabvala, are among the writers exploring the theme of cultural encounter in their works. Their main concern is the encounter caused by love, sex, marriage and the alien social milieu. They represent the problems and prospects of establishing intimate and meaningful relationships between two racial and cultural groups.

Anita Desai in a like manner depicts the cultural encounter in her novels. Herself being a half-European descent and residing in USA, she truly captures the cultural dilemmas. She depicts the problems of the immigrants in a new culture where her protagonist strives for an order. Sometimes they succeed and most of the time the new culture, custom, and language and value systems of such society become hostile to them. Because of this hostility, they strongly feel the need of their home -the native land. Similarly sometimes she depicts the eastern and western cultures and protagonist's attempt to survive in a new land simultaneously and at other times, she furnishes the analogy of two cultures through the characters occupying two different cultural spaces

*Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, the first novel to deal with such problems arising from cultural difference, tells the story of Indian immigrants to England, their problems and desperate longing for native land. The novel covers different aspects of the East-West encounter between the British and the Asiatic immigrants in England. Adit Seri, a young man from India, lives in England with his wife, Sarah. For few years he has been working as a travel agent. Like this fellow immigrants, he quietly pockets insults and humiliations to which he is continually subjected.

Fed on English literature in school back in India and exposed directly to English life and manners for years, he feels a sense of cultural affinity. This closeness however, does not obliterate the sense of his own 'cultural identity'. He secretly longs for Indian food, music and friends. This longing suddenly grows intense during one of his visits to Sarah's parents and Adit from then feels panic and isolated in the alien land. Finally he leaves for India with Sarah. Though, he regards England as a land of infinite opportunities, and condemns the poverty and misery of his own countrymen, "England does not, however, accept him. He is like others, abused, insulted and humiliated all the time even by school children (Aithal 98).

Desai's novels look at the problem from a new perspective and present the theme in yet another way. *In Custodi* depicts the cultural encounter, not between the East and West, rather between the Hindu and Muslim cultures. The novel is set at the time of partition of India and the problem is the preservation of the great Muslim tradition and Urdu poetry India. Deven, the protagonist of the novel, who belongs to the Hindu culture, is a true lover of Muslim Urdu poetry. He has to teach Hindu literature written by Hindus and does so poorly and without spirit. For him, the Muslim poet Nur is an ideal whose poetry, as Deven believes, contains all the enchantment and romance he had ever experienced in his life. But he is victimized by Muslim friends like Murad Beg and finally by his ideal Nur. He is disillusioned with Nur's demands for money for a contract operation, for a pilgrimage to Mecca. In the character of Siddidui", Desai "shows us the worst side of Urdu/Muslim culture-its snobbishness. Its eternal nostalgia for the lost glory of an early Empire" (Rushdie 72-73). Deven fails to interview Nur, but he feels relief and gratitude at his failure because it relieves him from further suffering. He even destroys the poetry written by Nur's young wife without even reading it. But, this poetry offers him the material for the beginning of a revival of Urdu poetry. Hindi speaking, Hindu India is now responsible for the preservation of the great Urdu culture of its former Muslim rules.

Desai's latest novel *Fading, Feasting* treats the theme of cultural encounter by depicting two cultures through the story of a family who resides in India and their son who has gone USA for higher education. The novel is divided into two parts: first part, which can be termed as "Indian half deals with the problems of relationships between male and female within the family and their respective roles in traditional Indian society. The norms, values and traditions Indian society are

contrasted to the second part, which may be termed as 'American half where their son Arun is confronting the culture, which is alien and completely different from his own'. The Indian half is, in a way, story of Uma, the eldest girl of the family.

The censorship on girls, and the premium on sons in the traditional Indian society are in contrast to the freedom, women enjoy in the open society of USA. When, Arun was born as a third child, Uma was forced to sacrifice her education to help Mama to look after Arun. Such notion prevailing in Indian society is further contrasted to the freedom enjoyed by the daughter of Patton family in the USA. Even Arun compares his sister, Uma, in India to this girl. He wonders but is helpless, for he cannot change the norms and values that are guiding the Indian life. When second daughter has been born, the name Arun had already been chosen in anticipation of son. But it was changed in disappointment, to Arun. The parents lack ambition for daughters but are highly ambitious for their son. Uma, in her late 40s, living with her parents, still asks permission to have a job. Her marriage was broken for two times. The arranged marriages produce their own painful comedy when Uma proves difficult to pair off. Such challenges faced by Uma are presented comparatively with the freedom, the girl from Patton family enjoying in her choice of occupation, and life-partner. Desai comparatively reveals such problems through Uma, in this sense Uma represents that place of girls in traditional Indian society. As Sylvia Brownrigg rightly observes:

*Fasting, Feasting* is a novel not of plot but of comparison. In beautifully detailed prose, Desai draws the foods and textures of an Indian small town and of an American suburb. In both, she suggests, family life is a complex mixture of generosity and meanness, license and restriction. The novel's subtle revelation is in the unlikely



similarities In one dark moment, Arun recognizes in the pious' bulimic daughter a version of his own unhappy sister Uma, and the shock provokes a reflection on these two frustrated women: but what is plenty? What is not? Can one tell the difference'.? Desai's novel is a moving eloquent exploration of that question. (Brownrigg Online Posting)

Apart from novels, Desai has written numerous short stories and has published two collections. Her stories reveal the characteristics of her novels Like her novels, the stories are marked by her clear, pungent prose, her artistic vision. And her preoccupation with the 'revelation of human psyche'. Her main concern in the stories is the individual's attempt to survive in the world, where values, norms and principles are incapable of guiding the people. Though each story covers a small world but the characters and the world they occupy is the 'microcosm of the macrocosm'.

Some of her stories are set in Indian society, where Desai's keen observation examines its culture, the individual dilemmas and their efforts to attain selfhood far more realistically. She is fully conscious of her culture and choice of subject matter and its artistic treatment fully suits her consciousness of Indian society and culture. Even the stories, that are set in the town or suburb of USA or UK, bears Indian character and their Indianness is comparatively projected with the values, norms, traditions, inherited or practiced by the characters from the west. By bringing Indian characters and 'Indianness' together with the West, she focuses on the mutuality in terms of exclusiveness. But while depicting such cultural dualities in a single story, she perfectly maintains the balance and remains neutral

Her stories varies in theme or subject matter, since she covers wide range of human experiences and moulds them with her personal experiences in order to give

the artistic truth rather than mere reality. Though, they bear different subject matter, her stories do have some sort of unity and show a thematic affinity with novels.

Central to both short stories and full-length novels is the author's serious engagement with the forces of human nature. Like her novels, the characters in stories are incapable of making the connection between the actual and the ideal, between fact and inspiration. Throughout the stories, while depicting the moods of her characters, "she can pass hilarity to sorrow and back again to a sense of joy of the perceptual moment as nimbly as the birds" without making her reader notice such quickness (Clement 232).

Desai's first collection of short stories *Glimpses at Twilight and Other Stories* shows that her achievement as a short story writer is equal to the mastery of the craft of novel. Each of the stories is a perfect designation of poetic-prose, containing an authentic world picture of Indian life that ranges from the life of middle class in a village to the life of upper middle class in a metropolis, and from the characters of different age, sex and groups. Uncertainty is one of the often-recurring themes in the collected stories. The 'twilight' in the opening story serves as a symbol of 'gloom', which ultimately serves as the setting for the whole volume.

*Diamond Dust*, the second volume, contains nine radiant new stories. These collected stories are a splendid addition to Anita Desai's distinguished career as a novelist. In this collection, stories are different in plot and treatment of characters, but they do have thematic unity or homogeneity regarding the novels and previous collection of short stories. In this collection, Desai continues her peerless exploration of the tension between social obligation and personal independence. the complex dynamics of families and the clash between the old and the new. More than this, in this book:

Old relationships stir up buried resentments, a beloved dog causes havoc, a businessman away from home sees his own death, and freedom springs in surprising way. In this brilliant new collection of funny sad, compassionate and charming stories. Anita Desai shows us ordinary lives in a disconcerting world where hopes and dreams clash with disappointment and the human spirit shine strongly from India to Canada and England. (Back Cover page by Vintage 2001)

Throughout her novels, children's book and short stories, Desai focuses on personal struggles and problems of contemporary life that her Indian characters must cope with. She traces the cultural and social changes that India has undergone as she focuses on the incredible power of family members, paying close attention to the trials of women suppressed by Indian society. Desai is a genius for she portrays her country so vividly with the way the eastern and western cultures have blended there.

Bapsi Sidhwa is a distinguished Pakistani Parsee female writer. She was born in Karachi in undivided India in 1938 to Tehmina and Pesthoton Bhandara. She was brought up and educated in Lahore. She had as polio as a child and spend a lot of time with the servants. Sidhwa holds a significant space in common wealth fiction. She is known for her perception, a sensitive portrayal of characters, diversity of themes, supply style and above all, her punching sense of humour. Thematically her novels are rooted in the continent where she was born and brought up. Moreover, her novels possess a cosmopolitan appeal which readers can feel as a palpable presence beneath the characters and tales of a particular time and locale and herein lies her charm. Sidhwa has a distinctive parsiethos in her writings. She is also remembered for her writings capture a unique individual voice. She has published four novels so far– *The Crow Eaters* (1978), *The Bride* (1983), *Ice-Candy Man* (1988) and *An American Brat*.

Her first novel, *The Crow Eaters*, hilariously depicts the lives and fortunes of the junglewals, a Parsee family in British India. Regarding this novel, Rashmi Gaur says that this novel is "criticized by some critics and member of Parsi community for presenting unfair and ribald picture of her community" (11). Expressing her admiration for her community she remarks:

Because of a deep-rooted admiration for my community-and and enormous affection for its few eccentricities as this week of satirical fiction has been a labour of love. The nature of satire being to exaggerate, the incidents in the book do not reflect at all upon the integrity of a comma of honour are rewarded. (11)

This novel describes the social mobility of a Parse family we also find strong autobiographical element. Sidhwa She turns autobiography into by her clever use of irony. The use of irony prevents the novel from becoming either laudatory or disparaging, an inherent danger when an author writes about his or her own community both the shortcomings and achievements. The achievement is stupendous, yet doubt are raised about it. Freddy's fame and wealth are shown to have dubious roots. The maintenance of identity in spite of being a microscopic minority, of which Freddy is so proud, is shown as a mere public relations, bordering on sycophancy:

And where, if I may ask, does the sunrise ? No, not in the East. For us it rise – and sets – in the English man's arse. They are our sovereigns? Where do you think we'd be if we did not carry favour. Next to the nawbas, rajas and princelings we are the greatest toadies of the British Empire! there are not ugly words, mind you. They are the sweet dictates of our delicious need to exit to live and prosper in peace. (14)

The novel is humorous and also farcical at times with occasional serious touches, accurately portraying the society it is set against. It has a somewhat loose, episodic

structure. Much of its comic energy and exuberance derive from a string of gags or comic episodes. However, the novel has memorable characters. "individual but not atypical. With its sprightly dialogue and ironical tone, the novel evocatively presents not only a particular time and locale, but also encompasses a people with deep historical consciousness. The novel ends, with the threat of Partition looming large in the background.

*The Bride*, her second novel, is a tragic story of the interaction of two different cultural paradigms— the patriarchal mountainous tribe and the westernized urban plain. Though *The Crow Eaters* is her first published novel, *The Bride* is the first novel which she had actually written. *The Crow-Eaters* is published first owing certain political reasons. Sidhwa was apprehensive about the reactions to the novel as it is based on a true story which underscores the suppression of women in the traditional male-dominated society of Pakistan. While Sidhwa was camping in the remote regions of the Karakoram mountains, some army personnel told her the story of a girl who was taken from the plains by an old tribal to marry his nephew. Unable to put up with her: harsh life she ran away and survived for fourteen days the rugged mountains of Karakoram. Her husband and tribesman ultimately hunted her down and beheaded her. Sidhwa initially wanted to write a story on this incident which had deeply moved her, but it soon became an obsession, and was developed into a novel, giving an optimistic twist to the source episode. Dealing with individual stories, the novel lays bare the violence which the women have to face in a repressive society. The protagonist Zaitoon is pitted against a hostile environment and with sheer will power and grit is able to overcome obstacles strewn in her path. She is ultimately protected and saved, which suggests that an awesome, ancient, natural order

combined with a young girl's defiant spirit can overcome the oppressive shackles of a conspiracy of men.

Sidhwa's third novel *Cracking India* came out in 1991. Using a child narrator presents the kaleidoscopically changing socio-political realities of the Indian sub-continent just before the Partition. This extremely taut and highly sensitive story takes up the themes of communal tensions, using religion as a way to define individual identity, territorial cravings, political opportunism, power and love, and binds them together in a very readable narrative. The novel contains a rich undercurrent of legend and folklore and as Anatol Leven remarks in *The Literary Review* her Rabelaisian language and humour impart a vivacious charm to it. It presents the Parsi dilemma of retaining allegiance to political masters as well as a Parsi Pakistani perspective of Partition. Without histrionics or preaching Sidhwa's novel communicates her desire that one should learn lessons from history. In her interview with Julie Rajan she comments:

If we are not going to learn lessons, we are doomed to repeat our evils. Historically people have gone on fighting each other for religion. for land, for women, for position, for greed -and those elements prevail still. Man's nature has not changed – hut one can try and hope it will. (9)

*An American Brat (1994)* is Sidhwa's fourth novel. Set within familiar surroundings, her earlier novels portray different facets of human life in her home territory. In her latest novel the locale is shifted to the united State of America. The authorial concentration is still focused on problems related with individual and collective identities of her people. The novel narrates the experiences of Feroza Ginwalla, the

rebellious daughter of Cyrus and Zareen Ginwalla, who is sent from Gulberg. Lahore to Denver, Colorado for some exposure to a liberal way of life. The young woman journeys through three cultures-her own community's Parsi culture, her country Pakistan's Islamic Culture and the Western culture of the United States of America. Shy, traditional and conservative Feroza, who in her school days has objected to her mother's sleeve-less sari-blouse, quickly gains independence once she is in America. Her journey towards independence involves several choices, almost all of them forcing her to move away from the rigid, constricting more of her childhood society. Her assertiveness is riddled with doubts and represents the confusion of her generations, which as a result of the burgeoning trends of globalization is forced to make many cultural adjustments. The protagonist partially reflects Sidhwa : precaution of freedom she was able to find as a woman in America and maintains a light hearted and entertaining tone even while discussing serious issues. Like most diasporic writing by authors front the Indian subcontinent. *An American Brat* also takes up the socio-political complexities of contemporary Asian people, weaving history- and politics inseparably in its fictional narrative. The theme of migration and re-adjustment, which Sidhwa has taken up in her fourth novel, has been taken up by several contemporary novelists. Timothy Mo in *Sour Sweet* (1952). Bliarati Mukherjee in *Jasmine* (1989). Jhumpa Lahiri in some of her short stories and Buchi Emecheta in several of her novels have taken up similar themes. yet Sidhwa has handled it with a lot of humour and a contemporary perspective, imparting a unique charm to her writing.

Sidinwa is a member of the Parsi Zoroastrian sect, a distinctive live minority who, in the 7th century A.D. left Iran for South Asia in order to avoid religious persecution. Her novels present the vivid accounts of the Parsi mind, social behaviour,

customs and value systems. She also possesses a fiercely individual voice which is never subjugated by the presence of a deep ethnic awareness. Despite including lengthy descriptions of Parsi ritual, and gatherings, her novels never degenerate into bare sociological documentations. She describes socio-historical facts of the Parsi life, mixing them up with a satirical style and lampoon aptly recreating the Parsi milieu. She chronicles the changing attitudes of the young, and the apprehensions of the elderly about the submersion of their identity with a humorous tune, though without ever diluting the gravity of these issues.

Like many people brought up in the sub-continent. Bapsi Sidhwa is fluent in several languages. She has complete command over English, Gujarati, Punjabi and Urdu. However she has always written in English. Terming herself as a "tail-end product of the Raj, she has commented in her interview with David Montenegro, that she feels comfortable in writing in English. Her English though is punctuated with Parsi proverbs and Gujarati and Urdu words, permitting her an elaborate word play and a racy flow of narrative. The verbal jugglery which she uses in her novels makes her style postmodernist. In her interview with David Montenegro she clarifies her views, I think you just juggle for the best meaning, somehow. And certain words are so much more expressive in mother language. Something that is zestful comes out so much better said in Punjabi, or something that is emotional or romantic comes out better in Urdu. Or certain Gujarati words carry so much more meaning. And you just automatically adopt this mixture to be more expressive.

Words of common parlance like *atash*, *Gathas*, *buraas* *Goondas*, *Arrey*, *Janab* *yaar* are frequently used in her novels to convey the local ambience. Words and phrases from regional language give the reader a feel of the raw pulsating emotions. Heightening their sense of appreciation of the narrative. When: Feroza in *An*



*American Brat* looks at the incredibly beautiful night-lights of Manhattan from a distance, she cries out in Punjabi: *vekh! vekh! Sheher-di-batian*". *Cracking India* recites verse after verse in Urdu to express his passion for Avah, Jerbanoo in *The Crow Eaters* uses loose disjointed sentences to convey her meaning and vitality. The insertion of vernacular language into flawless English intoned sentences results in new language rhythms and intonations. The strain of extrovert ribaldry in her work has liberated the subcontinental English fiction from what Anatol Leven calls the prim and stilted norm. She has achieved what Khushwat Singh has crusaded for many years, greater freedom and less inhibition in the depiction of sexuality in English novels of the subcontinent. Bapsi Sidhwa has been a trend-setter in this aspect. Nantita Gokhale and the mellowed queen of smart, Shobha De are other modern Indian-English novelists to have followed this trend. Normally she writes in a linear fashion-barring limited stylistic experimentation in *Cracking India* and *An American Brat*, she adheres to the Dickensian method of a gripping story.

Sidhwa feels that in contemporary age, the author has a proselytizing role to play. Through her writings she wants to draw the readers' attention to various problems of the society Oppression of women, religious fundamentalism, unjust oppression of women, religious fundamentalism, unjust evaluation of historical events etc. are some of the maladies which are vociferously presented in her novels. She tells Montenegro: "But I do think that a writer can at least place facts so that people recognize themselves and stop taking themselves too seriously or start seeing themselves in a more realistic light. We all are so prone to see ourselves as a little better than other person" (105).

Sidhwa's prowess over the genre is impressive. She is one of the most exciting common wealth novelists writing at present. Her humorous tone, irreverence

to established traditions, sense of fair play, subtle characterization and taut presentation of events impart a very specific charm to her novels. Bapsi Sidhwa holds a very special place among contemporary writers of English fiction in the sub-continent.

## **II. Gynocentric History of the Partition of India**

The enterprise of feminist historiography of the partition of India is to underscore the feminist perception of violence perpetrated upon women during an apocalyptic event of partition violence of India in 1947. The partition of India has left a lasting impression of monstrosity and horrific emotional duress upon those people who had experienced the partition violence directly or indirectly. From the killings, rapes, kidnapping, looting and banditry to the externalization of extreme form barbarism, the Indian sub-continent suffered in a great extremity but the partition and its pervasive violence are not much discussed in the history book of India. In the exultation of Independence, the partition violence has been normalized.

The female historiographer like Urvashi Butalia, Ritu menon, Kamala Bashin, Deepika Bahri, Kama Daiya break the tradition of gendered history by revising the partition history of 1947 from the perspective of feminist cum subalternist subjectivity.

Though 1947 was marked as the period of India's Independence, the bloody ethnic and communal riots of partition of ten overshadow the importance to independence because of its much more direct impact on the lives of people.

Within the space of two months 1947, more the seventy-thousand women were abducted and raped. Countless children disappeared. Homes villages, communities, families and relationships were destroyed yet, more than half a century later, little is known of the human dimension of this event (Uruashi Batalia, "The other side of silence).

So far as women experiences at the time of partition are concerned the so called realist representation was made but such representation praises the patriarchal

construction and defends the communal dictatorship over women rather than showing the real tragedies of female victims. Since female writers are discontented with such gendered history they began to seek true involvement of woman during partition. These female writers challenged the so called realist representation of women experiences and explored how women and their experiences are structure by the discourse of gender and nationalism.

Rith Menon and Kamal Bahin have also exposed the politics behind the exclusion of women's suffering during partition violence. They describe partition as a watershed event for it causes the killing of mass populations, particularly women. But such a massive violence remains absent in text book history. Emphasis on the hostility between the religious communities and state affairs indicates that though the act of partition was tragic, it was an imitable politico-religious movement for national and secular, identity. Menon and Bhasin argue that along with the factual data the misery and the plight of the victims should also be included in the history of partition. Familial violence whereby husbands killed their raped wives and fathers killed their raped daughters, for the sake of their family honour, is completely out of the history book. The patriarchy treated the women's body as a territory either to be conquered by the man of the other communities or to be protected by their own families. Regarding historian's indifference towards this familial and communal violence upon women's sexuality, Menon and Bhasin comment:

official and even historical accounts of partition she is as the unfortunate outcome of sectarian and separatist politics, and as a tragic accompaniment to the exhilaration and promise of a freedom fought for with courage and valour. They have looked at the causes and consequences of the division of the country, analyzed the details of the

many 'mistakes' and 'miscalculations' made examined the genesis of the call for a Muslim Homeland, and so on. But when we start looking for social histories or for accounts that try to piece together the fractured reality of the time and the event itself for a non-official perspective, a perspective from the margins, as it were we encounter a curious void. Perhaps it has been too painful, too difficult to separate personal experience from corroborate fact, too hazardous, at least for those who tried to record it, to claim 'objectivity'. Indeed, so far only some 'fiction' seem to have tried to assimilate the enormity of the experience. ("Abducted" 1-2)

When partition histories are analyzed from the perspectives of the margins, a visible gap can be detected. The question of such events are recorded and by whom counts a lot. Gender ideology is the factor that Menon and Bahrin find to be the main cause for such representation.

In this way, partition violence of India included the familial and communal violence in which women always remained essentially at the receiving end as primary victims. The nature of such familial violence was so patriarchal that the death or killing of their fellow women was glorified as martyrdom or an act of bravery or of supreme sacrifice for saving their purity and honour.

In the same way, the history of violence has been treated in the "historiography of modern India as aberration and as absence, aberration in the sense that violence is seen as something removed from the general run of Indian history" (Gyanendra Pandey, 35). Historical discourse has been able to capture and respect the movement of violence only with great difficulty. Though on 15 August, 1947, India celebrated with joy its first day of freedom but the sense of joy was mixed with pain

and sadness. Then where is the description of pain and sadness of people? It has been lost in the history. In India, there is no institutional memory of partition: the state has not seen fit to construct any memorials as that of the first and the second world war. The experience of the first and the second world war is commemorated in western Europe and Japan through the erection of major national monuments, there is not surprisingly, no equivalent for partition in India. There is nothing at the border that marks it as a place where millions of people crossed, no plaque or memories at any of the sites of the camps, nothing that marks a particular spot as a place where partition memories are collected. Partition really was the dark side of independence. Under the so-called veil of independence, hundreds of thousands of people got traumatic experience; lost their relatives, homes and so on but these all remain unrecorded in the national historiography. 'Unity in diversity' is no longer the rallying cry of Indian nationalism. On the contrary, all that belongs to any minority other than the ruling class all that is challenging singular, and local not to say all difference appears threatening intrusive "foreign" to this nationalism (Pandey 45). As in the history writing, so in films and fiction, Indian intellectuals tended to celebrate the story of Independence struggle that in dwell an agonies of partition. Partition has been represented, here moreover in the likeness of a natural disaster in which human actions play little part for from the run of daily life. This is also the line that respectable, academic nationalist historiography has followed.

Gyandhra Pandey in his book 'Remembering partition: violence, Nationalism and History in India' has discussed the truth of the traumatic, genocide violence of partition and has also discussed how several different techniques are employed by national historiography to avoid partition violence. One is to declare such violence non-narratable regarding victimization as the other side of history. Another

disciplinary device that is widely used to distance such fearful movements of part is that of transforming the history of the event into history of its cause of origins which thus help to represent violence as other side of history. Another way to make the violence non-narratable is to localize at in time, as a freak occurrence like a natural calamities which requires no historical explanation.

As that of above-mentioned points discussed by Gynendra Pandey national historiography of partition of India also employed that technique to veil the stark reality of partition violence. Gynendra Pandey does not support the so-called official records of partition of India, as it does not capture meticulously the each and every event brought out by partition and its aftermath. He seems to be in favor of dismantling and deconstructing the officially sanctioned historiography, which externalize one truth at the expense of multiple facts of truth. In a sense, he is in favor of revising and reconstructing the true historiography of partition of India.

Anita Desai by capturing each and every aspects of partition of India in her widely acclaimed novel *Clear Light of Day*, has stood as a revisionist historian. In the novel, by trying her best of unfold multiple dimensions resulted from the most wolfish barbaric and sundering event, she is trying to rapture the so-called official rhetoric, which is very parochial, logocentric and essentialist in nature.

Beerendra Pandey, one of the intellectual stars of revisionist historiography in his article "A Paradigm Shift in the Representation of Violence in Partition Short Stories by Women Political Irony in Shuna Singh Baldwin's "Family Ties" (105). talks about the bloody partition which had taken place on the partition of war in which at least one hundred thousand women are said to have been abducted and raped by all the three parties involved – Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. The representation of the gendered violence, which remains effaced in the history textbooks of both India and

Pakistan receives a central treatment in partition fiction by women writers, "especially the survivor" (105).

By drawing on the ideas of Ian Talbot, Pandey stresses that historians can get clue about this neglected aspect of the reality of partition from the creative writings of the women survivors (235), he says:

drive home the point that in times of external war or civil war, it is women who are inevitably singled out for particularly humiliating treatment – molestation, rape, abduction or forcible marriage – and it is they who have to suffer for the amplified ignominy. Women's bodies are considered by Indian men, Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, as the repository of men's honour. 'Power rape', the raping of women to demonstrate and defeat rival men in patriarchal societies, is quite common in many parts of India, as indeed in many other areas of the world. The rape of a woman is akin to the rape of the community to which she belongs.

(Pandey 105)

Pandey, further says that the feminist reconstruction of partition violence has received central attention in the revisionist historiography of 1947 by women writers such as Ritu Menon, Veena Das and Uruashi Butalia who focus on the double subordination of women through abduction and recovery, rape and murder. The revisionist feminist history, in the words of Mirinal Pande, "has developed a third subaltern eyes, that glosses over accepted social mores and eminent personalities of the day for the working-class women's version of what history and society look like from a woman's point of view" (120). The spotlight falls on investigating how for the gendered identity is subordinated to the needs of the religious or the ethnic community, and what this means for a concept such as secondary citizenship. Honour-whether family



or national – turns out to be the major factor in the subordination of women to the status of secondary citizenship (Pandey, 106).

Urbashi Butalia, a feminist critic of partition violence being completely dissatisfied with the depiction of partition lives of ordinary people, she questions:

why had historians not even attempted to explore what I saw as the 'underside' of this history, the feelings, emotions, the pain and anguish, the sense of loss, the silences in which it lay shrouded  
[ . . . ] was this just historiographical neglect or something deeper – a refusal on the part of historians to face up to violence so driven with pain and grief that there needed to be some distance before they could confront it? (275)

Stressing on the fact that historians could not bring objectivity of partition violence because their families were also involved in it. Death, displacement, dislocation, loss of home and family – these were close "to the lines of many historians" (175). In Urbashi Butalia's discussion with Bapsi Sidhwa and unsubtle reference to *Cracking India* itself, it is this kind of shockingly biased representation, which assigns the worst kind of stereotypes to both Indians and the Pakistan, that the Butalia called "a chauvinist history masquerading as nationalism or rather chauvinism masquerading nationalism". The politics of the language of violence in such celebrated classics as *Azadi* and *Cracking India* raises the question. What kind of language writer of partition violence should employ that neither reduces the specificity to the experience nor mollifies the possibility to co-existence? (Pandey 12).

Because the entire violence and tragedies of partition violence were not visited and examined properly, she strongly opines that there should be a re-examination of history of partition because re-examination is "deeply rooted in the concern of the

present (276). she understand why certain kinds of historical explorations of the past are rooted in particular kinds of experience of the present. It is the present, our involvement in it, our wish to shape it leads to the kind of future we desire, that leads us to revisit and re-examine that past. Most of the victims and survivors of the partition violence were now in their seventies and eighties. It become important for the historians who are revisiting the partition because they can "speak to the survivors, gather the testimonies" (276). For the survivors themselves, the distance of a half century, the events that they had been in that interim also, worked as a kind of impetus which surfaced memories of the time. While many still found, it painful to speak about that time in their lives, there were others who wanted their stories to be recorded, they felt that for them the time had come to do so. The condition recurred to be right for a new exploration of partition to begin. Being skeptical to the tools of conventional history, she says that documents government reports and speeches could not really capture real traumas, feelings, emotions and other indefinable things that make up the sense of an event. Showing the exclusive nature of historians she further asserts that many historians have spoken of, "how selective amnesia and memory are at the root of the relationship between human beings and their history, that a historiography as a technique to "dissipate anniversary and cultivate memory" (277). For these reason she wants the feminist historiography to view the partition violence.

Ritu Memon and Kamala Bashin the two feminist critics also becomes critical to the official and historical accounts of partitions violence. They say that the historical accounts see partition "as a tragic accompaniment to the exhilaration and promise of a freedom fought for with courage and velour" (11). Placing themselves the side of non-official perspective from the margins, they say that void seems to exists in those allounts because the real and the entire traumas of the victims are not

objectively recorded. That is why they question the authenticity of such recording - individual bias, political stance, ideology, class, gender, all become factors, that are critical to any analysis or representation. They further opine that reverberating still in the general consciousness is to make enterprise more treacherous. But without such an attempt they say:

They myriad individual and collective histories that simultaneously run parallel to official accounts of historical moments, and are their level almost inevitably get submerged; with them many also be submerged the countering of accepted and acceptable-versions to be buried eventually in the rubble of what Gyan Pandey has called the "aberrations" of history.

The story 1947, they say is gendered narrative of displacement and dispossession of large scale and widespread communal violence and of the realignment of family community and national identities as people were "forced to accommodate the dramatically altered reality that now prevailed" (120).

Deepika Bahri, the next feminist critics, also talks about the female victims of partition who may have lived to tell their pain and suffering but did not who are in fact, "forbidden from speaking of it, their bodies have been covered, the memories stored always, the stories stifled" (85). She explores how the narrator of the partition novel is able to successfully understand and represent the experience of abducted women without any first-hand knowledge of these things herself.

Dilli Didur, bringing under his focus the ideas of Bahri argues that it is equally important to be attentive "to the limits of the narrator's understanding, given the fragmented and indirect status of partition memory and the power exercise in and through the practice of writing history" (447). Bahri argues that a narrators'

prospective offer a sensitive and careful telling of a story on behalf of those who can not, have not been allowed to tell it" (447). Citing the stigma associated with abducted with 'abducted' women's experience Bahri doubts that testimony can be useful for 'retrieving' women's memories of these events when 'by all accounts, what remains of women's experience, of personal violation are either a contract of silence or reference so oblique as to be little more than metaphorical abstraction" (47).

Didur further says, Bahri characterizes that metaphoricity of indirectness of these accounts as placing a 'veil' between the 'reality' of these women's experience and the historian. She further argues that in absence of "direct testimony, fictionalizes and second-hand accounts have attempted to capture the elusive experiences of women during this turbulent time" (447). The perception that women have memories of these events that they are focused to suppress, stifle or store away and the literature can somehow liberates these stores from hiding runs throw out out Bahri's discussion.

Bahri seems to be acknowledging the fact that the sexuality contaminated women during the sectarian violence are unlikely to testify about their experience, so Bahri concludes that "literary historiography should unveil, uncover liberate from silence and oblivion these women's stories" (446).

Bahri further suggests that the gaps in abducted women's testimonies might be filled by imagined accounts of their experiences, other works on historical memory provocatively "concentrates on its original incompletes, or what Spivak has called 'loss as loss' in the first instance" (447). Spivak argues that "chronological and continuous accounts of history, need to " acknowledge the silence between bits of laugh age. . . a silence filled with nothing but noise that disrupts the continuity of historical narratives in any context" (448). Her idea is that literary representation of history foreground the gaps between and within different perception of reality and

thus offers a uniquely disruptive view of hegemonic histories, that is why to understand the reality of abducted women' experience, she/he turns her attentions to the gaps in order to understand the power relation that informs its construction.

Regarding this issue of partition violence, Ira Raja in his *Stories to Tell: Women's Agency Activism and Emancipation in South Asia*, highlights women predicament. In Amritsar where she grew up, every family has a horror story to tell says Deepa Metha, the Indo-Canadian Director of *Earth*, the 1997 film about the partition of India (102). Regarding Urbashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* it would seem this is true, but that every family has an equally horrifying story to hid. The fact about partition are easily found. Most political histories of the event tell us that within months of the sub - continental division in August 1947, 1 million people were dead, 12 million displaced, and 75,000 women raped or abducted. What is much less easy to recover are the voice and subjectivities of people and women who lies behind the fact (101).

From three decades of feminist historiography we know that a recorded life history can be treated as a straightforward representation of experience. The process of 'recovering voices' in other words is never simple. It was made even more difficult in the Indian instance by the fact that, unlike the Jew is Holocaust of world war II, the partition of Indian did not allow for a clear distinction between victims and the perpetrators of violence. Commenting on the reluctance of her respondents to remember, Butalia wonders if this might be a reason 'Why people did not wish to remember it publicly, except perhaps within their families where the "ugly" of this history could be suppressed' (101).

The usefulness of both *The Other Side of Silence and Borders and Boundaries* lies not simple in their retrieval of the historical experience of subaltern

people who have been marginalized by mainstream history. They also bring into, the public archive memories which have been actively suppressed by the community itself. As he points out:

The so-called honour, killing of women, children and old people in the name of protecting them from rape corded conversation; the double dislocation of many women who were forcibly recovered from their inter religious marriages to their Cont-Indent one-time abductors and restored against their wishes to their own communities for rehabilitation; the not significant number of women who were raped by men of their own communities at a time when popular rhetoric drew upon a monistic conception of 'us' Vs 'them'. (Raja 103)

None of this is exactly revelation but neither is it the staple of partition history or even necessarily the staple of oral narratives about partition violence. While Intra – familial violence, constituted as martyrdom sought willingly by the women, is readily admitted by men who have killed and live to tell the tale, other stories such as those of women resisting rehabilitation or being subjected to sexual violence by the men being touched as their guardians require a painstaking piecing together from historical documents memories as well as oral narratives.

Kavita Daiya, in her article "Honourable Resolutions" says, the abduction and rape of women was one of the salient forms of violence that prevailed in that period of transition. Indeed, in a letter dated April 4, 1947, to even Jenkin regarding the March 1947 riots in the Punjab and north west Frontier province. As Nehru writes:

There is one point, however, to which I should like to draw your attention, and this is the question of rescuing women who have been abducted or forcibly converted. You will realize that nothing adds to

popular passion more than stories of abducted of women, and so long as there women are not rescued, trouble will simmer and might blaze out. (Daiya 231)

Nehru's letter constructs women as victims and objects of both religious communities and the communities and the colonial state: it fails to grant any voice and agency to the particular desire to the "abducted" women themselves, presenting them as victims to be rescued.

In the last decade, feminist and subaltern studies historiography has shown how anti-colonial nationalist discourse in India was gendered. These studies "demonstrate that while Indian nationalist supported and indeed demanded suffrage and equal political rights for Indian women patriarchal nationalist discourse in the pre-as well as post independence era" (231). Aness Qidwai's memories reveal that Nehru's position was reflected in the official ideology and the The Recovery operation of 1948 in the new Indian and Pakistani states: abducted women were represented as "properties" belonging to particular national communities. This determined that all abducted women should be "rescued" and "returned" to their rightful owners (231). The official estimate of the number of abducted women during partition was 33,000 non-Muslim women in Pakistan, and 50,000 Muslim women in India. Meridian sarabhi, who figured prominently in the plans of the India and Pakistani governments to "recover" abducted women, asserted that the official account of abducted women in Pakistan was ten times the 1948 official figures of 12,500. Over the course of eight years in all about 30,000 women were "recovered".

Regarding recent feminist historiography, she says, has argued that during partition, abducting women from the other community became a common way to dishonor the Muslim/Hindu others. The appropriation of women from the other

community was a "way to affect the collective honor, religious sentiments and the physical reproduction of that community" (232). Often these abducted women were forced to convert. They ended up marrying their abductors. The program of the two government to exchange women lead to the continued discursive production of abducted women as objects, as religiously marked Hindu or Muslim subjects according to their family origin and ultimately, as symbols of the patriarchal nations honor. As Ritu Menon and Kamla Basin have shown in their pioneering work on the experience of Indian women during partition, "family community and state emerge as the three mediating and interlocking force determining women's individual and collective destinies . . . once again recast them as keepers of national honour and markers of boundaries: between communities and between communities and countries (232). It is significant, however, that many women who had been abducted resisted his forced government repatriation and refused to return to their original families. They had settled into new lives which children and family and did not want upheaval and displacement again. Moreover, they recognized that they would be "stigmatized and cast out as dishonored and impure if they were to return" (233).

In thoughtful piece that draws out the problems of writing a "non-imperious" history of partition, Urvashi Butalia has acknowledged the complex responsibility of the intellectual to the refusal of most abducted women, when interviewed, to remember and speak of their experience of abducted or sexual violence. While Menon and Bhasin have written about the legal and political discourse around this "recovery" of abducted women, the memory of the violence of abducted remains today both an object of horrified curiosity and site of silence unnarrativized in south Asian history. In this moment, Sidhwa's literary attempt to bring the scene - memory of that violence into being risk a patriarchal nationalist criticism haunted by the fear of its repetition the present.



The feminist historiographers write partition history by highlighting the experience of pain of suffering of women recollected in the heart of traumatized women specially of means of abducted rape and murder. By using the tool of data collection tape recordings, field observation and taking interviews with the partition victim the feminist writers have emerged partition literature that caused a major upheaval in the partition history disrupting all the other relationship in the patriarchal community. Raising the question of gendered violence from perspective they approach the question of identity, country and religion, and of the intersection of community, state and gender. Besides, they, evaluate the state's responsibility to the refugees in general and women refugees in particular, as articulated in the policies and programs of the government. Their feminist intervention concerns with issues of identity politics and unravels the complex relationship of post-colonial state with religious communities in the aftermath of communal conflict that helps to rewrite the partition history from the side of feminist historiography. In so doing, the feminist critics blend the subaltern subjectivity with their feminist consciousness. They do not simply raise the issue of the women subalterns. Therefore, feminist historiography of partition subverts the masculinity approach to the history of 1947 and seeks to restore women to history and to restore the nation's history to women so that women could be brought into focus of enquiry, a subject of the story or an agent of the narrative.

### III. Women and Division: Partition of the Family and the Country in

#### *Clear Light of Day* and Feminist Perspective of the

#### Partition Violence in *Cracking India*

Anita Desai's novel revolves around the domestic upheavals of Hindu bourgeois family in Old Delhi, a family forever transformed by the ideology of a religiously inscribed nationalist movement. Desai depicts two "Daughters of independence" whose lives seem singularly unchanged despite the rhetoric of independence that gave rise to two nation-states. The reading of *Clear Light of Day* is not offered as a systematic the body of Desai's works, nor do suggest that all bourgeois women's writings from India *must* be read as *primarily* engendered by the discourse of colonialism and nationalism. But because Desai's text does strategically see the rise of nationalist fervor, the discord between Hindus and Muslims, and the partition and the death of Gandhi in the construction of its narrative, the post-colonial critic can provide a nuance reading of the complex function of gender in the topology of this particular postcolonial novel. Hopefully, this analysis will suggest to feminist postcolonial critics the importance of dialogic readings of other bourgeois Indo-English texts which can wrest nation "from the context of easy allegorization" (Surleri 14) and provide more comprehensive examinations of the structural function of gender in the political discourse and performance of colonialism and postcolonial.

Most critics of *Clear Light of Day* address the links between individual life and history that weave through the book, reading the often violent domestic upheavals in the Das family against the historic background of an Indian nation born in the wake of a bloody partition. The occasion for the narrative is the present or, more specifically, a summer in the 1970s, when Tara, the younger sister, returns to the Old

Delhi on one of her regular visits from Washington, where her husband, Bakul, is a functionary in the Indian diplomatic corps. Though Bimala, the older sister, is a teacher of history at a local women's college, her life seems arrested, still circumscribed by the old boundaries that include the Das house and garden and the home of their next-door neighbors, the Mistras. Her companion, other than the members of the Misra family, is the silent, psychologically scarred younger brother, Baba, whose only source of solace and entertainment is the reverberating sounds of 1950s Western songs played on a scratchy gramophone.

If during the independence movement issues concerning the rights of women could be strategically included within the immediate nationalist platform, after independence the difference between the genders was effectively deployed to shore up patriarchal power and to establish the firmness of national purpose. The initial demands of freedom for women did generate certain changes in the status of women at the personal and political front, but the alliance between the discourse of nationalism and that of the women question was fraught with contradictions and ambiguities. Even as Indian women were being granted the right to vote and struggling much harder for the passage of a Hindu code that would reform the areas of personal law such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, woman as repository of an untainted, unchanging "Indianness" became the sign of the imaginary feminized nation whose chastity had to be safe-guarded by virile nationalists against Western penetration. This difference between woman as sign and women as equal personal and political participants in a nation-state produces a negotiable conundrum for women who are constantly struggling to be one and act the other.

This violence is highlighted by Desai in the character of Bimala, who is the head of a household without being either wife or mother and who has an occupation.

She is not suppliant and can participate as an equal in conversations with men. She claims that she loves her pet animals more than any mother could love her children; and she smokes, a vice that further distances her from conventional women. In some ways, she resembles an Indian version of the eccentric English bluestocking, attracting men by being handsome, not beautiful. Tara, on the other hand, had married young, and as she acknowledges, her husband "had trained her and made her into an active, organized woman who looked up her engagement book every morning, made plans and programs for the day ahead and then walked her way through them to retire to her room at night with the triumphant tiredness of the virtuous and the dutiful" (21). Tara does not desire to change her life for Bimala's, but there is an element of self-loathing that refuses to be held at bay when she watches Bimala holding court:

Tara was pricked with the realisation that although it was who was the pretty sister . . . it was Bim who was attractive. Bim who . . . had arrived at an age when she could be called handsome. All the men seemed to acknowledge this and to respond . . . Tara did not smoke and no one offered her a light. Or was it just that Tara, having married, had rescinded the right to flirt, while Bim, who had not married, had not rescinded? No, it was not, for Bim could not be said to flirt . . . Bim never bothered. (36-34)

Bim never bothered to be else or to please anyone. At least this is what Tara believes is true. We are privy to Bim's discontent, love ever, to her sense of feeling trapped in Old Delhi where nothing changes, where history has already happened, living a life that stands still, as exciting narratives take place elsewhere—London, New York, Canada, the Middle East, and, closer to home, New Delhi (5). Despite Tara's assertion that she and her family need to come back periodically to be in touch with "eternal

India," Which will continue long after "Nehru, his daughter, his grandson . . . pass into oblivion," along with other post independent government malpractices such as bribery, corruption, poverty, and "redtivism" (35), she is frustrated and frightened by Bim's refusal to distance herself from the past. "Why did Bim allow nothing to change? Surely, herself Baba ought to grow and develop at last, to unfold and reach out and stretch. But whenever she saw them, at intervals of three years, all was exactly as before" (12). But what Tara perceives as Bim's desire to remain rooted in the past constructed by Bim as the inevitable pitfalls of the role she has been forced to play. In 1947, when the Indian nationalists were struggling to generate the narrative of a united Indian nation, Bimala was dramatically overtaken by incidents beyond her control. With the death of the parents, her brother Raja's tuberculosis, and the widowed aunt Mira-masi's gradual retreat into alcoholism. Bim by default had to take over the reins of the Das household. A defiant youthful challenge against the inevitable marriage plot that determined the lives of women— "I won't marry . . . I shall never leave Baba and Raja and Mira-masi. . . . I shall work—I shall do thing. . . and be independent" (140)—takes an ominous turn as Raja leaves to become a surrogate son of a Muslim family and Mira-masi dies the horrific death of a hallucinating alcoholic. The desire to be independent now overtaken by the need to nurture Baba and Mira-masi and placate Raja, she is apotheosized by her only suitor, the Bengali doctor, as a self-sacrificing domestic goddess. Thus, instead of a Joan of Arc or even a Florence Nightingale. Bimala's lack of desire for a suitor is revised as a desire to be the female archetype. "Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others—to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your life for them" (97). Bimala finds this speech "horrendous, . . . so

leadly spoken as if engraved on steel for posterity" (97). Her repression of the doctor's last visit is intimately connected to her denial of this attributed status.

Bimala's primal memory of her final encounter with the doctor's solicitous advances, she stumbles over a cobbler crouching in the dark, murmuring Gandhiji is dead. In her overwhelming need to break the news to Raja, she abandons any pretense at being an interested, subservient girlfriend and rushes off home. There, once the initial shock and grief over the news has died down, Raja turns to Bimala and asks, "And your tea-party, Bim? How was it? Has Mrs. Biswas approved of you as her daughter-in-law?" (94). Bimala is appalled and angered at Raja's obvious assumption that she wishes to be somebody's daughter-in-law and that she could possibly be interested in as shallow a person as Dr. Biswas. Her initial anger, however, gives way to laughter as she brushes off Raja's words as a brother's natural desire to torment his sister. It is much more difficult for her to erase Dr. Biswas's words given his idealization of her as a female "sati savvaatri". Hence her need to suppress the last encounter: There was no more time, one that she never admitted and tried to remember" (94).

The narrative of bourgeois morality and respectability that bolsters the nationalist discourse constantly seeks to protect its boundaries by domesticating and circumscribing the economy of power operable in the nonnormative. Nationalist ideology "absorb and sanction middleclass manners and morals and play a crucial part in spreading respectability to all classes of the population" (Mosse 9). Thus Bimala's sexuality, an aspect that is highlighted in an incident in which Bakul, Bimala's brother-in-law, bends to light her cigarette, is denied because it is abnormal and dangerously freed not being directed at any one man: "There was that little sensual quiver in the air as they laughed at what she said, and a kind of quiet triumph in the way in which she drew in her cheeks to make the cigarette catch fire and then

threw herself back into the chair, giving her head a toss and holding the cigarette away so that a curl of smoke circled languidly about her hand" (36). Because Bimala refuses the advances of the doctor, he has no other recourse but to inscribe her disdain for his overtures as a defense against anything: that might dissuade her from following her natural call to be the angel of her father's house.

Tara, scared of any emotional confrontation, unwilling to understand or accept the implications of Raja's obsessions with Hyder Ali's family, Baba's uncanny silence, and Mira-masi's gradual deterioration, gravitates towards the Misra household through whom she meets Bakul, who dutifully asks Bimala for her sister's hand in marriage, and leaves for foreign shores. Bakul signifies the typical "modern" Indian man who believes that the true sign of progress is the right balance of tradition and modernity. He courts Tara at the club but respectfully comes to the house to ask for her hand in marriage. Bimala's response is cutting in its sarcasm: "'I'm head of the family now, am I? You think so, so I must be.' . . . I don't think you need to ask anyone—except Tara. Modern times. Modern India. Independent India" (81). Bakul feels his position as a desirable suitor undermined by this abrupt, dismissive gesture, and one realizes that even though a "modern" man of Bakul's ilk might initially be attracted by the likes of Bimala, having her as his wife would prove hazardous to his authoritative presence:

*Clear Light of Day* common flags the historical drama of the partition violence of 1947 beneath its fictional drama. The partition of India is not a simple event leading to the formation of two nations-India and Pakistan. While talking about partition of India, pervasive violence comes at once. From the killings, rapes, kidnapping, looting and banditry, the Indian subcontinent continues to suffer from psychological wounds, etched by partition. Arguably before the Indian partition, the

twentieth century had not experienced such a massive and excruciating migration of people" (Ahmad 10). From the birth of the nations, communal riots flared up from the remote villages to the cities. Hindus, Muslim and Sikhs slaughtered each other by stopping trains to and from India and Pakistan and skirting the throats of the passengers. They raped women and murdered children in the fields Property was seized from migrating groups. Civil tension continued mounting for several months. More than 75,000 women were raped, kidnapped, abducted, forcibly impregnated by men of the "other" religion, thousands of families were split apart, homes burnt down and villages abandoned. Some women were so embarrassed of the sexual humiliation that they refused return home. Many women and girls saved their honor by "Self-immolation (Menon and Bhasin, 30). They collected their beddings and cots in a heap and when the heap caught fire they jumped on to it, raising cries of "Sat Sri Akal". In this way, the destruction of families through murder, suicide, broken women, and kidnapping caused the post partition trauma.

The horrendous events of partition of India in 1947 is saturated with cold-blooded violence perpetrated on women since women by nature are sensitive and peace loving creature, they hardly take recourse to violence but the irony is that it is women who become extreme sufferer in the whirlpool of violence-cum-patriarchy. In the network of patriarchal sap of an Indian society women were very much suppressed by both from the hands of men of the other community and within their own families. We find many such cases in the history of partition violence that if women from any religion were raped and impregnated. then families simply rejected them with the view to maintaining their socalled honor at the expense of pathetic life those women were leading. Many of them had been forced to die at the hands of men and own in their hands poisoned, strangled or burnt to death, put to the sword,



drowned etc. In fact, the dramatic episode of violence against women during communal riots bring to the surface, savagely and explicitly, the familiar forms of sexual violence charged with a symbolic meaning that serves as an indicator of the place that women's sexuality occupies in an all male patriarchal arrangements of gender relations between and within religious or ethnic communities.

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 other by "dishonorinp' their women. In this respect "the rape and Molestation of Hindu Sikh and Muslim women before and after partition probably followed the familiar pattern of sexual violence and of attack, retaliation and reprisal"(Menon and Bhasin 41). The violence against women during partition cannot be separated from the violent hostility that erupted between Hindus and Muslims at that time. The repertoire of violence on all sides included profaning every thing that was held to be of sacred and symbolic value to the other-from pig and cow slain in front of mosques and temples to the circumcision of non-Muslim men, and the forced consumption of beef by Hindus-and this extended to sexually violating their women. The preoccupation with woman's sexuality formed part of the contract of war between the three communities, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims.

Women's bodies were targeted as the battlefield during the partition of India and its rampant violence. As a matter of fact, in a world riven by ethnic and communal conflicts in which women are not only the victims but also the weapons of war. From Bangladesh to the Balkans, from Cambodia to Colombia, Peru to Liberia, Rwanda to Somalia and Uganda, the ravaged bodies of women has become 'envelope

to carry the Sidhawa observes elsewhere, women are the living objects on whose soft bodies victors and losers alike vent their wrath, enact fantastic vendettas, celebrate victories" (1990: 380). During the partition violence both losers and victors regarded female's soft body as an object of wrath. In the male-dominated society like India, if a raped woman speaks of her shame could accept the fact that she can no longer occupy any available and acceptable social space. A woman raped can no longer belong to any of the known categories of virgin, wife or widow and are thus effectively erased from the social register. During the partition violence hundreds and thousands of women had undergone same experience. Thus was the day of partition of India especially for the woman.

The novel *Clear Light of Day* does not engage with the violence, that is, the sudden inhumanity of neighbour turning on each other in the name of religion and ethnicity, which however, is the case of *Cracking India*. The novel focuses on the plight of Das household as a result of Raja's determination not to participate in the nationalist excoriation of the Muslims. Raja's interest in Mogul culture, and his fascination with Urdu language and literature becomes concentrated on the imposing figure of Hyder Ali, the Muslim landlord. His youthful defense of the Muslims against the rabid violence and existence fundamentalism of his Hindu friends during the precarious days of the last few months of British rule quickly turns into an obsessive concern of the fate of the Ali family at the expense of his own. Even though the novel commends Raja's and Bimala's nonpartisan politics, it also critiques Raja's native idealism.

When the boys at Hindu College found that Raja was one Hindu who actually accepted the idea of Pakistan as feasible, they changed from

charmed friends into dangerous enemies. . . . When he spoke to them of Pakistan as something he quite accepted, they turned on him openly, called him a traitor, drowned out his piping efforts at reasonableness with the powerful arguments of fanatics. They so much wanted him [Raja] to join them. He was so desirable as a member of their cause in his idealistic enthusiasm, his graceful carriage, his incipient heroism.

(57)

Raja's heroism remains nascent, and he is forced to spend the worse day of the partition ill with tuberculosis, too weak to do anything other than impotently anticipate the inevitable fighting in the streets and the burning and looting of Muslim property. Raja's bravery is expressed only in his fantasies; when one of his terrorist friends places a guard outside the Das house to monitor Raja's contact with his Muslim neighbor, for a moment, he thrilled at the idea of his importance, his dangerousness. He saw mob at bay. The very thought made him break into a sweat. Just as Raja's weak body prevents him from imagining the unimaginable calamities that the partition heralds, the narrative too seems unable to speak the unspeakable endured by millions. Hyder Ali is found to be safely ensconced in the Muslim haven of Hyderabad; Raja recovers from his tuberculosis and in keeping with his romantic predilection marries Hyder Ali's daughter. However, Raja can deny the division of India and Pakistan and set himself up as the exemplary Indian in independent India by moving to Hyderabad and marrying Hyder Ali's daughter — Hindu, Muslim are brothers— only by abdicating his responsibilities as the eldest son. Raja's infatuation with the strong masculine figure and presence of Hyder Ali is greatly distinguished from his relationship with his own father, who is presented as aloof and unapproachable. It is not that Raja's father is feminized, but his prolonged absences

from the household and his impenetrable self-absorption prevent the consolidation of the paternal signifier as the Law of the Father. By contrast, Hyder Ali becomes for Raja the apotheosis of masculinity in relation to which his Hindu family appears emasculated. This specific yoking of two heterogeneous cultures undermines the usual binary gendered opposition of colonizer and colonized as male and female. The alliance between Raja and Hyder Ali assumes a homoerotic east that is not regated by Raja's marriage to Ali's daughter.

Of course, Raja's eventual departure of Hyderabad and his marriage to Benazir is equally motivated by Hyder Ali's immense wealth. Raja discards one cocoon like existence for another, exchanging the dazzle "of the impressive figure of the old gentleman with silvery hair, dressed in white riding clothes seathed upon a white horse" (47) for the vision of his son disguised in grand Mogul robes riding a toy white horse. Raja's love of theatricality, buoyed by the grim reality of a burning Delhi and a chaotic country split into two, allows him dramatically to abandon all domestic duties at the death of his father. He refuses to worry about a few cheques and files in father's office as everyone becomes a refugee.

Finally, *Clear Light of Day* shows main characters submerged in the nostalgia of glorious past. She is showing a sad history after partition and its violence. Desai is also foregrounding the domestic upheavals in the Das family and a bit to the Misra family at the backdrop of national upheaval in 1947. As women were badly affected by the partition of the country. Similarly, in the novel due to partition of the family the writer is showing the suffering of the women in the family rather than men. Either in the case of Bim or in the case of Misra sisters and widow Mira Masi, all are grappling with the problems arisen from the partition of the family.

The novel, *Cracking India*, by Bapsi Sidhwa is about the experience of partition from the perspective of a Parsee family in Lahore. An eight years old Parsi girl, Lenny Sethi, from an upper-middle-class household, narrates her family's experience as Partition becomes an imminent political reality in 1947. In the novel's account, Parsis, or Zoroastrians, were politically and religiously neutral in a conflict whose primary players were Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, as such, through the perspective of child narrator. The Parsi perspective purports to present a dispassionate account of the transformations wrought by Partition; in the process, it signals the forgotten minoritization of the Parsi community itself in this history. As the title suggests, the novel illustrates how partition cracked India and fragmented friendship and familial ties in rural and urban neighborhoods. The story is told in the present tense as the events unfold before the young girls' eyes, thought moments of an older Lenny looking back and remembering are apparent. Lenny is stricken with polio, lives in Lahore, and is a Parsi. The characters that surround Lenny include Slave sister, Electric Aunt, Old Husband, Godmother, Ayah, and Ice-Candy-Man. Ice-Candy-Man is a Muslim street vendor drawn, like many other men, by the magnetic beauty of Ayah, Lenny's nanny. As India is partitioned, Lenny observes the transition of Ice-Candy-Man through the roles of ice cream vendor, bird seller, and pimp. Lenny is particularly attached to Ayah, an attractive and loving young woman hired to take care of her. Ayah is popular among the male workers that frequent their neighborhood and their haunt, Queen's Garden, every evening. While they all compete for Ayah's favors and attentions, it becomes subtly apparent that she has chosen Masseur.

As Partition becomes imminent, acts of communal violence—arson, lootings, and murder— and the subsequent migrations begin to disrupt the community of friendship that had been formed around the Sethi family, and around Ayah. Masseur

is murdered and his body is found, with his head severed, in a gunnysack on the street.

As Partition draws nearer and the violence escalates in Lahore, there comes a day when a mob of Muslim men roaming the city to attack Hindu arrives at the doorstep of the Sethi's bungalow. In the exchange that follows, we witness how particular practices of encoding the identity of "co-religionists" and others rearticulate a cosmopolitan community of friendships into abstract, polarized relations of ethnic difference. All the members of the household gather before the mob to confront it, and Lenny notes that the men in the mob look like "calculating men, whose ideas and passions have cooled to ice" (190).

Bapsi Sidhwa, in her novel *Cracking India*, displays the extreme violence done upon women during the apocalyptic event of partition violence. Indeed, the continuing patterns of violence in the history of the subcontinent in the alternative of partition speak of enduring trauma, betraying a wound that has never quite healed. The damaged bodies and psyches of women who become the sites of the worst violence. Ayah's, one of the most victimized or traumatized subject of the novel '*chocolate chemistry*' attracts attention from men of all kinds, including who stops to exhort her to let the 4-year-old Lenny walk rather than ride in the pram. Her myriad and faith stable coterie includes, among others, the Ice-candy man, the Sethi family, the masseur, the government house gardener, the butcher, Sher Singh, the sepoy from the barracks, the wrestler and even a Chinaman, with all of whom she enjoys a comfortable and flirtations relationship. As Lenny notes "only the group around Ayah remains unchanged. Hindu, Muslims, Sick, Parsee are as always, unified around her" (p.106). The degree of torture that Ayah has undergone is vehement when the processions of looters and violent mob are heard in all directions when the rumble of carts and the roar of men shouting slogans are heard Lenny senses danger:

Then they are roaring and charging up our drive, wheels creaking  
 hooves clattering as the whipped horses stretch their scabby necks and  
 knotted hocks to haul the load for the short gallop. Up the drive come  
 the chariokeers, feet planted firmly in shallow carts, in singlet and  
 clinging linen bright sun. Calculating men, whose ideals and passions  
 have cooled to ice. (Sidhwa 191)

In the process of inquiring about different persons suddenly somebody inquires about  
 Ayah. After a split second's silence Imam Din calmly says that she has already left  
 Lahore a day before. When the crowd pesters on, he swears by God and the crowd is  
 silenced. Suddenly Ice-Candy man his hypnotic, reassuring face transforms into a  
 saviors', blotting out the ugly frightening crowd. Putting his arm around Lenny on a  
 charming face he asks about the Ayah:

Ice-Candy man is crouched before me, "Don't be scared, Lenny baby",  
 he says, "I am her". And putting his arms around me he whispers, so  
 that only I can hear: "I'll protect Ayah with my life ! You know I will  
 . . . I know she's here where is she? (194)

When Lenny finds sudden change in Ice-Candy man's face then only she realizes that  
 she has betrayed her Ayah. After they found Ayah, she was dragged out. They  
 dragged her by her arms stretched taut and her bare feet. Her lips are drawn away  
 from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like the dead  
 child's scream less mouth. Her violet sari slips off her shoulder, and her breasts strain  
 at her sari-blouse stretching the cloth so that the white stitching at the seams shows. A  
 sleeve tears her arm. These details show how inhuman and barbaric treatment was  
 exercised upon Ayah. This further shows how she became the object of gang rap. Still  
 her moments of sufferings aren't ended. As Lenny narrates:

The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces. (195)

Ayah has been brutally gang raped 'rescued' by her 'admirer' Ice-Dandy man, prostituted by him when he learns of Man of repatriates her. Lenny learns the pitiless face of love. By the time she and Godmother see her, Ayah has already crossed to a threshold that permits no return. Hira Mandi, Lahore's red light district is quite another world where unveiled women flant themselves brazenly. In this new home, Ayah has been recreated completely. As Lenny absorbes this new, grotesquely commodified body, Ayah raises her eyes. "Where have the radiance and the animation gone? Can the soul be extracted from its living body? Her vacant eyes are bigger than ever . . . colder than the ice that lurks behind the hard in Ice-Candy man's begailing eyes'. Ayah says "I want to go to my family . . . whether they want me or not" (273). Lenny notes that her voice is harsh and guff as if someone has mutilated her vocal cords. At last, she is rescued by Godmother, but what tragedies she has undergone is never known to us, but we can only imagine. These above-mentioned points regarding the horrendous and traumatic experiences of Ayah that she has undergone during partition violence helps us understand the fact of the atrocity and extreme violence perpetrated upon women during partition years.

Not only Ayah, but Hamida, a muslim woman kidnapped by sikhs and housed for a time in the Salvation Army refuge has also undergone unbearable traumatic experiences during partition years. A wife and mother, Hamida has been permanently displaced by the partition and barred from her home, her husband and her children. "They are better off as they are', she says, turning her face away, when Lenny asks her



why she does not go to see her children. My sister in law will look after them'. 'If their father gets to know I've met them, he'll only get angry with and the children will suffer. The shame that belongs to the men who have violated them is instead attached to women. Regarded as national patrimony, these women remain commodities. As Butalia Urbashi opines "Today, in remembrance ritualized all over north India, the "brave women" who "voluntarily" gave up their lives are remembered and talked about. No-one speaks of the abducted and raped women" (83). Even though many of these, like Hamida and Ayah are still alive the women themselves" will not speak about their experience, after it is unknown to their families" (82).

Indeed Sidhwa allows no recrimination, no first hand descriptions and no parting words. As menon and Bashin have said:

it is rather unlikely that we will ever know what exactly abduction mean to all those women who experience it because it is rather unlikely that they will ever speak of it themselves, directly, society still enjoins upon them the silence of the dead around an event that, to it, was shameful and humiliating in its consequence. (35)

This is the scene of violence that becomes ordinary during Partition and refashions everyday life. Accounts of Partition are replete with incidents of castration and both voluntary and forced conversion of men, women, and children. To address the anxiety of the masculine other's "proper" religious identity, forcing men strip in order to examine whether they were circumcised or uncircumcised was seen to be the ultimate, foolproof test of whether they were Muslim or Hindu/Sikh. Circumcision, the shaving of facial and head hair, and the shaving off of the Hindu Brahmin's traditional, short, plaited hair on an otherwise bald head were routine Muslim conversion tactics for men and boys.

In the discourse that produces the test of a proper Muslim, this incident reveals that women never inhabit that identity of a proper religious subject. Women's bodies are not marked in ritual ways for women are never "properly" ethnically identified except through their relations with men. Hence, the signs of women's ethnic difference appear at the sartorial level, already one level removed from the somatic marking of male bodies. Of course, during Partition, many women who were abducted and raped by men from the "enemy" community were branded with religious symbols on their bodies. These symbols did not signify the women's conversion; they represented their otherness before the violence, and their "other" identity as shamed, conquered, and violated by the religious community with whose symbol they were branded. Paradoxically, then unlike in the case of Hari's circumcision, this violent encoding of religious signs on the woman's body reinforced her previous ethnic identity and her location in the present.

*Cracking India* has strong women characters who want to forge their independent identity. In a patriarchal set-up which is essentially discriminatory against women and emphasizes on conditioning them for life-long and willing subjugation to men the women of *Cracking India* are not only conscious of their desires, but also eagerly assertive about their independent handling of situations. The male characters, despite the fact that they initiate almost all events of the novel, remain peripheral and apathetic, lacking the will to change and transcend their circumstances. The women characters subtly but effectively subvert the ingrained elements of patriarchy, privileging female will, choice, strength along with the feminine qualities of compassion and motherhood. *Cracking India* can undoubtedly be termed as a feminist novel—the traditional novel eulogizes the heroic qualities of men only, while in feminist narratives women acquire such attributes by their active

involvement in and control of situational contexts. Lenny, the narrator in *Cracking India* is also the centre of the novel, retaining her independent identity in diverse situations. Her attitude towards her nameless cousin significantly portrays the feminist need for assertive equality. At this point it shall be interesting to note that all women's writing may not be necessarily feminist. A piece of writing which justifies, propagates or perpetuates discrimination against women cannot be termed as feminist. Only that artistic work which sensitizes its readers to the practices of subjugation and opposes them can be treated as being feminist in nature. *Cracking India* not only sketches and critically reviews the dehumanizing patriarchal norms engendering a discriminatory social climate, but also portrays the struggle against them, as well as the desire to manifest an assertive self-will on the part of its women characters.

Lenny, the child narrator of the novel, witnesses the barbaric cruelties of the Partition days, including the inhuman commodification of women. Yet what emerges as the dominant note/thematic motif in the novel is not the victimization of women, but their will and sustained effort to fight against it and overcome it. Most of the other Partition novels in English, as well as in other languages, have concentrated largely on the helplessness of women pitched against oppressive male forces. Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Monohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* in English. Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Epar Gang, Opar Ganga* in Bangla, Yashpal's *Jhootha Sach* in Hindi, and the short stories of Saadat Hsan Manto and Kishan Chander in Urdu highlight the trauma women had to undergo during the cataclysmic times of Partition. Even the more contemporary authors have not been able to escape it. Amitav Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* has talked about the national trauma of Partition using the device of the child narrator and taking the linear time narration. Shauna Singh Baldwin in *What the Body Remembers* talks about the mutilation of

woman's body and its impact on the collective gender memory. Sidhwa on the other hand treats the theme of Partition with a clever juxtaposition of images and an underlying ironical humour without compromising with the innate independence of women.

Lenny is a handicapped girl representing a miniscule minority. She is also free from the effect of social conditioning most of the Indian girls have to undergo. She is a young, curious and vivacious child, eager to know what is happening around her and participating in it vigorously. The socio-religious divide creates in her an awareness of her own identity, but even prior to that she had become conscious of the creation of the gender, the socially accepted role of women and girls, and also of her burgeoning sexuality. She is aware that her world is compressed. This awareness is intensified when Col. Bharucha prophesies her future, "She'll marry, have children—lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams." (15) Lenny observes the gender-based relationship in the society and accepts it as a peripheral part of her experiences, without allowing it to colour her own individuality. "She notices how in Col. Bharucha's clinic a woman has to discuss her child's health through her husband. (12) During her visit to Pir Pindo she notices how Khatija and Parveen, the adolescent sisters of Ranna, like the other girls in the village, already wear the responsible expressions of much older women "affecting the mannerisms of their mothers and aunts." (54) They are perplexed by Lenny's cropped hair and short dresses. These early impressions of Lenny, presented with multiple strains of irony, humour and wit exhibit her awareness of gender stereotypes. She perceives many differences in the personality traits and interests of men and women. However Lenny is neither influenced nor conditioned by her perception of gender based social stereotypes—that she assertively retains her interests is evident in her attitude towards

her Ayah, Hamida and her cousin. When Godmother arranges a meeting with Ayah, Lenny insists on accompanying her. She feels that Ayah has been wronged and ashamed by her friends and she shares her humiliation. She wants to "comfort and kiss her ugly experiences away" (254). She does not think that sexual exploitation should remain a mark of shame for any woman, "I don't want her to think she's bad just because she's been kidnapped" (254). She also keeps Hamida's past a secret under the impression that if revealed her mother may sack her. Her sympathy bonds her to all the women characters in the novel.

Very early in the novel the reader notices Lenny's consciousness of her own burgeoning sexuality. Her open background and liberal upbringing make her receptive to her early sexual stirrings. She enjoys the admiring covetous glances Ayah receives from her admirers and displays traditional feminine smugness and coquetry. She vividly portrays *Cracking India's* toes, Ayah's furtive glances towards Sharbat Khan and the Masseur's intimacy with Ayah. Her relationship with her cousin, allowing clandestine forays into physical intimacies, shows her mental independence. During their walks to the bazaars and gardens she irreverently points out boys and men to her cousin whom she finds attractive. She sums up her attitude neatly when she says, "Maybe I don't need to attract you. You're already attracted" (220). Cousin angrily complains to Godmother, "She loves approximately half of Lahore . . . why can't she love me?" (232).

Despite the pressures of socially constructed gender-roles and expectations the awakening of an individuality which is pulsatingly present in Lenny can be felt in other women characters too. Lenny's mother belongs to the privileged economic strata of the society. She can engage several servants to look after the children and other daily chores. She is kept busy with her social obligations—entertaining guests and

partying exhaust her time. Lenny's physical handicap has generated a sense of guilt in her which often surfaces in her conversations. She says to Col. Bharucha, "It's my fault, I neglected her—left her to the care of Ayah" (16) Lenny admires her delicate beauty, but resents her "all-encompassing" motherliness. She is initially possessive about her mother but soon learns to cope with it. Her mother's voluptuous appeal generates a subtle jealousy too in her psyche:

The motherlines of Mother . . . How can I describe it? While it is there it is all-encompassing, voluptuous. Hurt, heartache and fear vanish. . . . The world is wonderful, wondrous—and I perfectly fit in it. But it switches off, this motherliness. . . .

Mother's motherliness has a universal reach. Like her involuntary female magnetism it cannot be harnessed. . . . I resent this largess. As father does her unconscious and indiscriminate sex appeal. It is a prostitution of my concept of childhood rights and parental loyalties. She is my mother—flesh of my flesh—and Adi's. She must love only us! (42)

Lenny is given ample personal space by her mother. Though decisively controlling and channelizing her children's life, she allows them to frolic around and view life from their won standpoints. Lenny is permitted to accompany Imam Din twice to a village Pir Pindo, her visits to parks and restaurants with Ayah are also unchecked. She is also able to effortlessly control the entourage of servants and run her household effortlessly. Despite her liberated handling of children and a modern life-style, she is very much a traditional wife, humouring constantly the wishes of her husband. She is almost servile in her attitude towards her husband, coquettishly appeasing him and trying to create an atmosphere of pleasant laughter around him. Lenny sceptically

looks on when her mother chatters in saccharinely sweet tones to fill up the "infernal time of Father's mute meals" (80). Though Lenny's is not able to decipher it, her remarks hint at the presence of an inner void in her mother's personality. Most of the women writers have hinted at the presence of an inner hollowness in the lives of women, which is often shielded by the deceptively beautiful screen of their social graces and obligations. For women like Mrs. Sethi, social elegance is not simply a pleasure, it is also a bondage, because herein they are forced to accept their role as female. The conversation during the party the Sethis organize for the Rogers and the Singh explicitly suggest that it is a woman's erotic capacities, not her intellectual caliber, which is integrated with the life of society. Her driving spree along with the Electric-Aunt to smuggle petrol in order to help their stranded Hindu and Sikh friends, and the rehabilitations of Hamida shows her humanitarian understanding of the situation, and also a desire to do something meaningful.

A major part of the novel's discussion is centred on Lenny's Ayah Shanta. She is a Hindu girl of eighteen and everything about her is also eighteen years old (3). Though she is employed with considerate master, her condition is that of an unprotected girl whom everybody treats only as a sex object. Looking at Ahay, Lenny also becomes conscious of her sexuality:

The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down, they look at her. Stub ended twisted beggars and dusty and beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy man, marked in piety, shove aside their pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships. (3)

While the sexuality of Lenny's mother lies beneath the veneer of sophistication and unfulfilled longings, Ayah's is transparent and self-serving. She is fully aware of her sexual charm and uses it without an inhibition to fulfill her desires. She has accumulated a good number of admirers who regularly assemble in the Victoria Garden—the Ice-Candy-Man, the Masseur, the Government House gardener, the restaurant owner, the zoo-attendant, and a knife-sharpening Pathan are her regular admirers. Lenny also learns to identify human needs, frailties, cruelties and joys, looking at these people during her outings:

I learn also to detect the subtle exchange of signals and some of the complex rites by which Ayah's admirers co-exist. Dusting the grass from their clothes they slip away before dark, leaving the one luck, or the lady, favours. . . . I escape into daydreams in which my father turns loquacious my mother playful. (19)

Ayah uses her charm to obtain easy gains—cheap doilies, cashew nuts, extra serving of food etc. She successfully uses her charm as a strategy of survival and manipulation till the violence of Partition destroys her familiar world. Her portrayal also represents the male exploitation of female sexuality Ice-Candy-Man manages to kidnap her with the help of some hooligans and forces her into prostitution. Despite her conviction that she is now an impure person, she retains her will to go back to her family and face life anew. Her refusal to admit defeat despite physical and emotional mutilation and her determination to probe into future alternatives imparts a moral courage to her.

Godmother and Slave sister—Rodabai and Mini Aunty—are other major female characters in the novel who are presented with a sense of glee. The one-and-a-half-room abode of her godmother is termed as her haven by Lenny, her "refuge from



the perplexing unrealities of my home on Warris Road" (1). She is also a surrogate mother for Lenny in a mutually fulfilling relationship. Her portrayal is presented to us by Lenny in a fascinated manner, as if she is an idolized entity. She is presented as an old lady, plainly attired in Khaddar sarees, covering herself from head to foot, possessing a penchant for sharp wit, accurate repartee and a profound understanding of human psyche.

She makes it her business to know everything about everybody (239), and tries to help people whenever she can. She donates blood, seeks admission to a boarding school for Ranna, traces the Ayah in Hira Mandi and manages to send her back to her people. She is a formidable person too and scolds the Ice-Candy-Man for disgracing the Ayah, "Oh? What kind of man? A royal pimp? What kind of man would allow his wife to dance like a performing monkey before other men? You're not a man, you're a low-born, two-bit evil little mouse!" (248). Despite Slavesister protest she permits Lenny to accompany her to Ayah's place. She is also a sensitive person. When she realizes that Ayah, despite her marriage with Ice-Candy-Man, does not want to live with him, decisively sets about to rescue her. Pier Paolo Piciucco comments that the plot of the novel comes to a head because of the Godmother. Her visit to the Ayah has the trappings of a trial: she sits and acts as a judge. Unlike other female figures of the novel Godmother has transcended her sexuality and emerges as an authoritative presence, able to achieve her desires. She incarnates the ideal of strength in female characters.

Godmother's attitude towards Mini Aunty, whom Sidhwa has very aptly termed as the Slave sister, draws the reader's attention for its incongruous eccentricity. In her dealing with people outside her immediate family circle she displays compassion and understanding, but her attitude towards her husband and her sister is

shorn of such sentiments. She fully dominates her household in which her husband is only a peripheral presence. She is insensitive, churlish and cruel to her sister and constantly bosses over her. Her sister does all the household chores, while she only criticizes her nastily:

If you think you have too much to cope with you can live someplace else. (224)

Don't think I've not been observing your tongue of late! If you're not careful, I'll snip it off. . . . God knows, you've grown older—and fatter—but not up! This child here has more sense than you. (164)

Lenny adores her godmother as she fights her battles for her, though it cannot justify the Slave sister's exploitation.

Muccho, the sweepress, and her daughter Papoo are other female characters who can be mentioned here. Muccho takes Papoo as her rival and saddles her with all the household chores, beating and abusing her on slightest pretexts. Ayah and other servants constantly try to save the young child from this abuse but often their efforts are fruitless. Once she had to be admitted to hospital for two weeks as she had concussion as a result of her mother's severe beating. But despite this senseless maltreatment, Papoo cannot be browbeaten into submission. She is strong and high-spirited, but as Sidhwa suggests very early in the story, "There are subtler ways of breaking people" (47). Muccho arranges her marriage with a middle aged dwarf whose countenance betrays cruelty. Papoo is drugged with opium at the time of ceremony to suppress her revolt. Lenny curiously studies Muccho's face during the wedding ceremony and is startled to find a contented smile on her lips—"smug and vindicated" (188). The sketch of Muccho suggests that women themselves are unconsciously bound by their conditioning and saddle their daughter with a repetitive fate, treating marriage as a panacea of all ills.

The women characters of *Cracking India* draw our attention to the facts of victimization of women and their compulsions to define their lives according to the pre-fixed gender roles. They also expose the patriarchal biases present in the archetypal social perceptions. Lenny, the child protagonist, recognizes these social patterns and exhibits the vivacity to transcend them. She also records the multi-faceted trauma women had faced during the unsettling and devastating days of Partition. The narration of the story by a girl-child ensures that the surrounding world would be seen through a feminine eye. The novel presents women as a twice oppressed category on stage: firstly, as human beings suffocated by violence and secondly, as women burdened by the bond and impositions of a patriarchal society.

## V. Conclusion

*Cracking India* becomes a feminist text in the true sense of the term successfully attempting to bring to the centre stage the female protagonist. The protagonist, while on the one hand, comes alive on account of their realistic presentation, on the other, she serves as the means of consciousness among the female segment of the society. Literature is a powerful social framework, and Sidhwa through her extremely absorbing and interesting work seeks to contribute to the process of change that has already started all over the world, involving a reconsideration of women's rights and status, and radical destructing of social thought.

*Cracking India* projects the violence and chaotic days of India Pakistan partition in 1947. Through the character of Lenny, Sidhwa has given graphic details of the political changes occurring in the country, as well as its effect on the citizen of India. The novelists have very realistically illustrated women's plight and exploitation in the patriarchal society. Men established their masculine powers and hence fulfill their desire by brutally assaulting women feel elated and victorious whereas women's endure the pain and humiliation of the barbarity enacted upon them. Sidhwa, as a novelist, talks of emancipation of women.

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* is also a general story of womens' emancipation in the light of the independence of India and her simultaneous dimension. The emancipation, however, is not easy. The desire for resolution of domestic upheavals, articulated as it is by Bimala, who throughout the novel has struggled against easy solution, suggests the difficulties women encounter in trying to break away from the image of women is no differently perceived: by the father, the husband, and in a way more troubling till by the brother and the son. Finally, both

Sidhwa and Desai are reluctant to be called feminist because, even though, they highlight women's emancipation, they do not dramatize easy solutions of the difficulties of their protagonists.

## Works Cited

- Asnani, Shyam M. *Critical Response to Indian English Fiction*. Delhi: Mittal Publication: 1981.
- Bahri, Deepika. "Telling Tales: Women and the Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa's *Cracking India* Interventions: *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. 1.2 (1999) 84-92.
- Butalia, Urbashi. *The Other Side of Silence*, Durham: Duck UP, 2000.
- Daiya, Kavita. Honourable Resolutions: Gendred Violence, Ethnicity, and the Nation *Alternations*. XXVII, 2002. 21-47.
- Desai, Anita. *Clear Light of Day*. UK: Vintage, 2001.
- Didur, Jill. "Lifting the Veil: Reconsidering the Task of Literary Historiography" *Interventions*. Vol. III, 2001. 446-51.
- Gaur, Rasmi, ed. *Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man: A Reader's Companion*. Delhi: Asia Book Club, 2004.
- Jamkhandi, Sudharkar Rathakar. "Old Delhi Revisited in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*." *Commonwealth Fiction*, Vol. I. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Classical Publishing House, 1988: 245-52.
- Krishnaswami, Shanth. *Glimpses of Women in India*. Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1983.
- Kumar, Priya. "Testimonies of Loss and Memory: Partition and the Hunting of a Nation" *Intervention: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. 1.2 (1999) 76-83.
- Menon, Ritu and Kamla. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998.
- Nabar, Vrinda. "The Four-Dimensional Reality: Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*." *Image of India in the Novel in English. 1960-1985*. Hyderabad: Orient

Longman, 1993. 102-12.

Pandey, Beerendra. "A Paradigm Shift in the Representation of Violence in Partition

Short Stories of Women: Political Irony in Shanna Singh Boldin's "Family

Ties." *The Atlantic Literary Review*. Vol. V, 2004.

Pandey, Gyandendra. *Remembering Partition: Violence Nationalism and History in*

*India*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.

Raja, Ira. "Stories to Tell: Women's Agency, Activism, and Emancipation in South

Asia." *Australian Feminist Studies*. Vol. XVII, 2002.

Rajeswori, Mohan. "The Forked Tongue of Lyric in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of*

*Day*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 32.1 (1997): 47-66.

Ray, Sangeeta. "New Women, New Nations: Writing the Partition in Desai's *Clear*

*Light of Day* and Sidhwa's *Cracking India*." *Engendering India: Women and*

*Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives*. Durham: Duck UP, 2000.

83-107.

\_\_\_\_\_. "New Women, New Nations: Writing the Partition in Desai's *Clear*

*Light of Day* and Sidhwa's *Cracking India*." *Women and Nation in Colonial*

*Narratives*: Durham: Duke UP, 2000: 126-147.

Sidhwa, Bapsi. *Cracking India*. Durham, Duck UP, 1991.

Singh, Jagdev. "Ice-Candy-Man: A Parsi Perception on the Partition of India." *Bapsie*

*Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man: A Reader's Companion*. Ed. Rashmi Gaur. New

Delhi: Asia Book Club, 1996. 147-59.