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OBJECTIFICATION AND MALTREATMENT OF FEMALES DURING
THE PARTITION ERA IN *CRACKING INDIA* (1988) BY BAPSI SIDHWA

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ABSTRACT

The most shocking incident in the history of the Indian jetties was that the country was divided into two separate nations (i.e. India and Pakistan) at the end of the colonial era. Human rights were badly violated by the fanatics and their heinous acts of sectarianism. Although women were hardly given any opportunity to be part of freedom fighting, they became the worst victims of partition fierceness. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* which is one of the most remarkable works based on the Indian partition provides us with a sincere representation of the terrible impact of it on people of the subcontinent especially on the women. It gives a pictorial account of exploitation, male gaze, eve teasing, lust, rape, murder, abduction, and specifically assault on the private parts of the women, and amputation of their breasts which happened to be very common during the time of partition. Here, the character Ayah is an analogous figure representing the nation as a woman or a mother. The molestation of Ayah's body and the depiction of other minor female characters can be equated with the molestation (partition) of India. This present paper will foreground the dimensions of gender relations to

victimize and oppress women. It will take up a feminist approach to show oppression and exploitation against women as portrayed in the novel to drive home the conclusion and will suggest possible ways for the emancipation of women.

INTRODUCTION:

Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1988), subsequently published in the United States as *Cracking India* (1991), is the first Pakistani Anglophone novel that not only narrates the story of Partition is always a metaphor for the irreparable loss of the partition of India but also testifies to the multiple expressions of gendered violence that formed the crux of the ethnic genocide of partition. Sidhwa's *Cracking India* is an example to give us insight into the public frenzy, communal hatred, exploitation of women, extreme disintegration, and large-scale sectarian violence. Sidhwa's *Cracking India* describes the series of events with such artistry that the tragedy comes alive. What distinguishes Sidhwa's *Cracking India* is the passive sensitivity through which the tragic event is depicted. Indeed, the novel deals with the various brutal happenings, however, among all sections of humanity, women suffer the most. Keeping this in view, the Bapsi Sedhwa has realistically illustrated the women's plight and exploitation in the patriarchal society. Keeping the above evidence under consideration the investigator intends to explore the representation of women in the context of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel, *Cracking India*. Sidhwa justified that the experience of partition was brutal for people of all communities like Train to Pakistan. In Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, a similar train comes from Pakistan. It too carried dead bodies only. Everyone in it was also dead and butchered. But they were all Hindus and Sikhs. In pursuance to the same, Graeber, A. G. (1991, p.25), is inclined towards the Muslim killings, and on the other hand, Khushwant Singh's Novel represents a train that carries the dead bodies of Hindus. Vaguely familiar, pointed out and identified the Mussulmans by the name"Graeber, A. G. (1991, Pp-201).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- 1- In what ways did Ayah and other women suffer the unjustified oppression in *Cracking India* during the partitionera?
- 2- How do female characters show resilience in the face of physical and psychological trauma in the partition period?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The novel *Cracking India* largely deals with the melancholic saga that took place during the partition. However, during the diasporic movement of participation, children and women were the most victimized section of the subcontinent. Keeping this in view, the present study intended to explore the gendered violence, rape, and prostitution of women during partition. However, in the present study, these variables will be explored in the context of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India*

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Though hundreds of books have been written on the history of partition, it is difficult to have a complete and clear picture of the partition of India, its impacts, complexity, and consequences. Indian subcontinent drank the sweet

nectar of freedom from the foreign yoke of British colonial rule but had paid a heavy compensation in the form of partition and was divided into two parts—India and Pakistan. Dr. Asaduddin writes: The partition of India, a momentous event in Indian history, continues to tantalize historians, haunt the Indian psyche, and cast its shadow on our social and political life. It is closely linked with the chronicle of our freedom struggle that made the actual liberation of the country from foreign yoke an experience of violence, slaughter, and exile for many. One of the most massive demographic dislocations in history, with its attendant human tragedy, it defies chroniclers to come to grips with it in all its dimensions. Tomes of analysis and exegesis by historians and bureaucrats have not led us anywhere closer to a definite understanding of the phenomenon, even though the recent works of Bipin Chandra, Ian Talbot, Ayesha Jalal, and Musirul Hasan have brought fresh insights into the field. Historical accounts and official documents, despite their apparent ‘transparency’ and ‘factuality,’ can tell us only about statistics of at least one million deaths, ten million refugees, and so on. The trauma of partition and agony experienced by the people of the Indian subcontinent found its voice in the literature on partition produced by various writers from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in different languages. An acclaimed poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz lamented about the brutalities and atrocities of partition, “This stain covered daybreak, this night bitten dawn. This dawn is not that dawn we craved for.” Muslims living in India migrated to Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs living in Pakistan migrated to India leaving behind everything; their ancestral homes, tradition, and culture, and became refugees with empty hands. Women became the largest sufferers, who were assaulted, tortured, sexually abused, and abducted by men of opposite communities in the name of religion. This tragedy of partition gave rise to the International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts to a new literary genre called “Partition Literature” almost in all languages of the Indian subcontinent, particularly in Hindi, English, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Telegu, and other vernacular languages spoken in the subcontinent. This paper within its short canvas will endeavor to reflect briefly on partition literature in English.

This part of the study gives an overview of different authors who have worked in terms of partition literature. Jajja (2012), also talks about the theme of partition and migration that affect the minds of people during division. He puts it that: “Sidhwa in *Cracking India* depicts the greater migration in the human history as a result and price of the partition”. Talluri Mathew Bhaskar (2015), in his article on *Cracking India*, focuses on the loss of humanity which was the result of religious consciousness. He sees religious extremism as a means of spreading disharmony which resulted in frenzy and chaos. He also shows the psychological effect of the partition on the lives of the people. He talks about the loss of relations, and trust and how even friends became the enemy of each other: “In a world gone topsy-turvy, friends turn into foes”.

The theme of feminism has been broadly discussed by different researchers. They have said that the novel has a feminine perspective. Women characters are being shown as commodities. These are the ones who bear the burden of the wrongdoings done by the men. Jacquelynn M. Kleist (2012), in her article about feminism in *Cracking India*, also talks about the fact that much of the

partition literature focuses on female victimization, “Because of the focus on female victimization, much of the writing about partition reduces both men and women to perfect binaries: rapists and rapes; protectors and protected; villains and victims; buyers and bought; sellers and sold”. The issue of female suppression and marginalization in *Ice-Candy Man* has been discussed by many researchers. Almas Akhtar, Shaista Andleeb, and Prof. Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Awan (2015) have specifically shown the oppression of women in the novels, *The Holy Woman* and *Cracking India*. They say *Cracking India* is an epic of female suppression and marginalization. Other research has been done on the strength of women characters in *Cracking India*, as opposed to showing themes weak. Kleist (2011) and Waugh mode (2011) have also dealt with these themes of female strength that women strive to come out of their plight and finally move forward from their degraded and tormented state to start their lives afresh.

Gender plays a crucial role in determining the space and maltreatment in society. Gender is the social and cultural construction of norms and values to suppress women. According to Lorber, gender establishes the differences between men and women, despite the evidence that “women and men are more similar than different” (Lorber 1994, p.5). Gender is not biologically determined but rather exercised by the patriarchal web. In societies where females are less valued and possess fewer rights than males, they are inevitably more vulnerable to violence and death (Hudson, 2009, p. 67). As follows, feticide is not always a result of direct violence, it can take the form of medical and nutritional neglect. For example, there are lower vaccination rates among female populations in India and Pakistan, later presentation for medical treatment, and females are more likely to suffer malnutrition than males (Grech, 2015, p. 852). In areas such as South and East Asia, this manifests in high mortality rates of females, and in parts of China and India, males are more than females by 10-15% (ibid). Globally, there are 101 males to every 100 females, denoting 100 million fewer females on the planet than would be expected when considering overall birth rates (Hudson, 2010, p. 67). Disparities in the sex ratio and a surplus of males have potentially devastating consequences for society (Hudson, 2010, p. 70). Historically, spikes in the male population have been linked to increased societal violence and militarism, related to dominant gender norms of violent masculinity (Cockburn, 2004, p.31).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Different notable authors portrayed the gory and bleak sides of the partition are Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Chaman Nahal, Khushwant Singh, Bhisham Sahni, Banshidhar, etc. The present article will focus on the violation against women as it is depicted in Bapshi Sidhwa’s novel *Cracking India*.

The terms ‘masculine’ and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality, the relations of the two sexes are not quite like that of two electric poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as it is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general, whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. (The Second Sex, p. 83)

However, the land serves as a background for promoting the political agenda of different communities. Since the body of a woman is equated with the homeland it also becomes a victim of partition like the undivided India that was split into two separate nations – India and Pakistan. Since a woman is treated as a territory, it becomes a site of honor, prestige, and at the same time a commodity to be abducted and violated. In the history of Indian freedom fighting, we witness a dichotomy between male and female. The ravaged bodies of women became a medium through which the message of one community was carried out to the other community. In this way, a woman's body was treated by the people with the meanest mentality. Bapsi Sidhwa has dexterously presented these pathetic scenes in her novel and has vehemently condemned those who view that a woman "is created to be a toy of man" (Wollstonecraft, p.66).

In *Cracking India*, Lenny, the child protagonist forces her cousin to help her rip a doll's female body apart and she does so to express her bitter feelings on hearing the news of the partition of India. It implies the connection with the real body which in turn is associated with the geographical division of any geographical land. The present paper will highlight the dimensions in which gender relation is essential in understanding and analyzing the phenomena of a nation. It will also examine the role of women as reproducers of 'nation' in the context of the partition of India.

The novel is written from a feminist point of view. Feminism is a movement that plays a very important role in highlighting the suppressing the women in a male-dominated society. In this society, women are considered inferior to men by denying them their proper rights. Sidhwa in the present novel exposes the marginalization and suffering of women which they experienced as a direct consequence of partition. Sidhwa in her novel makes a painstaking effort to represent this history of suffering that remains unnoticed and neglected by the dominant political discourse. She goes against the conventional male discourse of partition to put forth a feminist version of the historical events. Her characters are strong enough to give voice to the innumerable voiceless women. Lenny, the narrator in the novel is presented with the intuitive power of describing a situation though she is merely a girl. Ayah is described as "everything about her is eighteen years old and round and plump" (*Cracking India* p.3).

METHODOLOGY:

The present study is intended to explore the impact of partition on the female bodies and mind in the context of *Cracking India*. Keeping in view, the study was carried out in a marginalized nature. Therefore, the present study is qualitative. While exploring the objectives above and addressing the questions being posed, secondary sources are consulted to pry the study. A 'Close Reading Technique' (of textual analysis) is applied to probe and examine the above feature of feminism in the novel. Accordingly, the present study was carried out in the context of a feministic approach.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:

The partition of India resulted in ten million refugees and a minimum of one million died from the rioting, fighting, and migrating. It was all done to give India and Pakistan a separate identity so that the Hindus and the Muslims could live in harmony among their crowd. No matter, how just was the idea to divide a secular India, into an India for Hindus and a Pakistan for Muslims, the execution was poorly implemented. The once brotherhood between the communities was torn apart based on religion. The Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs who lived together before became thirsty for other people's blood. It was fratricide at such a large scale that nobody was spared: men, women, and children. In the name of partition there occurred jealousy, loss, cupidity, cunning, and death by butchery, by rape, and by deracination. In the entire body of writings of Bapsi Sidhwa, a commitment is reflected in the exploration of the trauma of Partition. She unfolds in the backdrop of her writings the hindered communication and the domains related to the Partition catastrophe confirm the violent frenzy that lies unnoticed beneath the apparent jubilation of Independence. There is linguistic heterogeneity in the chaotic ambiance of society. The essential trauma relates to culture and identity. The writings of Sidhwa took a post-colonial turn when the writer critiqued alienation and separation in the partition of the nations and the partition of the individuals. Partition of a nation is a political event but partition of individuals is a psychological hindrance that is impossible to overcome. In *Cracking India*, the expression of the traumatic communication caused by Partition is very much authentic. It makes alive the grotesque and bizarre experience of the refugees, mass murders, and exploitation on both individual and collective levels. Sketched in Hindu and Muslim blood, Sidhwa's Novel, *Cracking India* narrates how women are reduced to the status of sexual objects and relate the peculiar disadvantages, social and evil, to which they are subjects. *Cracking India* is a melancholic saga of gendered violence, female suppression, rape, prostitution, and marginalization of women of both communities. Ice Candy-man is one of her admirers who sells popsicles, but he also treats her as an object by touching her physically. 'Things love to crawl beneath Ayah's sari. Ladybirds, glow-worms, Ice Candy-man toes (p. 19). He is the main male character which sustains his role till the end of the novel and his actions and reactions first depict him as a lover and second as a revenge seeker. His lustful nature is quite obvious when he takes her to a restaurant in Monozang Chungi, Lenny observes that his toes remain busy and Ayah's hand also involves some sexual activity. Women suffered in the hands of a handful of fanatics almost equally in Pakistan as well as in India. Pain, suffering, and trauma were almost similar on both sides of the border. The description of riots at PirPindo, the Muslim village that fell on the Indian side of the border is equally terrifying:

"Rana saw his uncle beheaded. His older brothers, his cousins. The Sikhs were among them like hairy vengeful demons, wielding bloodied swords, dragging them out, as a handful of Hindus darting about the fringes, their faces (.....Sidhwa, *Cracking India* P-99)

The novel *Cracking India* projects realistically women's plight and exploitation within the context of a patriarchal society. It exposes how men establish their masculine power and hence fulfill their desires by brutally

assaulting women. Ayah also has two new admirers Chinaman and Pathan who objectified Ayah. Chinaman is a cloth-seller who comes daily just for Ayah. He tries to touch Ayah while showing the bosky and mentions lustfully that it is silky like your skin. Despite her resistance, Chinaman is stubborn in his ways. Patha Sharbat Khan is a knife sharpener. He brings dry fruits for her to attract her. He also considers himself an object of pleasure and enjoyment. While as on the other hand, it poignantly depicts how women endure the pain and humiliation enacted upon them. In this novel, Sidhwa represents a series of female characters who survived in the chaotic time of 1947 in India which can be registered as a period of the worst religious riots in the history of humankind. Emotional turmoil, individual weakness, and barbarities of communal riots inflicted on women have been faithfully projected by Sidhwa. The whole story has been narrated by Lenny who relates the horrors of violence and her observation and reactions. She not only observes but analyses men's degrading attention toward women. When the partition riot erupts, the Ice-candy-man seizes his chance to debase the Ayah and leads a Muslim mob to Lenny's house. The Parsi family and its Muslim servants hide the Ayah, but Lenny unwittingly betrays her. Ayah is dragged away by the mob and raped. After her degradation, the Ice-candyman sets her up in a house in the prostitute's quarters in Lahore. Having proved his mastery over her, he now professes to be crazily in love with her and wants to marry her. She, having been betrayed by him and physically abused by the mob, refuses to accept him. The women from Lenny's family eventually rescue her and she becomes a candidate for rehabilitation. Lenny is thus a witness to the varied women victimization in the time of partition of India.

We see the minor female characters dealing with and bearing the loss of their dignity and self-esteem in the name of gender roles and discrimination. Pappo and her father Macho, are the worst examples of oppression where a daughter is wildly and brutally beaten and psychologically abused by her father. Rather than becoming an affectionate father, he pounds Pappo drags her to the ground cries, and yells at her as a curse. In the second chapter of the novel a typical husband brings his ill child to Col. Bharucha for a checkup. His wife is fully covered in a shabby black burka. As the doctor investigates about child's disease, the husband bends and asks her wife every time. This is strong evidence of female maltreatment. It depicts the patriarchal binary construction.

Sidhwa depicts the events overtaking the partition in their naked cruelty and ruthlessness. Thus, from the above discussion, it is evident that women were sued as sexual objects and the revenge on the opposite community was taken with the help of rape; Subash Chandra (1980) writes thus:

“In a “patriarchal social set up,” ‘masculinity’ is associated with superiority whereas ‘femininity’ is linked with inferiority, and while masculinity implies the strength, action, self-assertion, and domination, femininity implies weakness, passivity, docility, obedience, and self-negation”. (Subash: Chandra: Pp-88) The protagonist Lenny, a Parsi in *Cracking India* is an eight-year-old polio-stricken girl child who views the partition through her innocent eyes. She feels alienated due to her physical deformity but her Ayah, who is a mother figure to her sees to it that she is well looked after. Ayah's sexuality is

magnetic and her lovers are attracted to her like a moth to a flame. Bapsi Sedhwa tried to highlight that during the decades of partition, bringing forth various women-centric partition narratives into the historical retelling of partition has challenged this aspect. Bapsi Sedhwa designate that the position of women during partition was equal to rape, abdication, and prostitution. The statements of Sidhwa can be well justified. For instance, Butalia, U. (1998. P. 27) In her essay *Community, State and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India* argued that women's aspirations were seen as:

“I am a woman / I want to raise my voice / because communalism affects me / In every communal riot / my sisters are raped, my children are killed . . . / my world is destroyed/ and then / I am left to pick up the pieces . . . / It matters little if I am a Muslim, Hindu or Sikh / and yet I cannot help my sisters. Violence is almost always instigated by men, but its greatest impact is felt by women. In violent conflict, it is women who are raped, women who are widowed . . . in the name of national integrity and unity . . . We women will have no part of this madness, and we will suffer it no more . . . Those who see their manhood in taking up arms, can be the protectors of no one and nothing”
..... (Butalia,1998, p. 2).

Sidhwa holds the strong resilience of women during partition. The women characters of the novel are approachable and resilient of their uniqueness and cannot be easily dominated. The feministic resistance is narrated through the characters of Lenny, her Ayah, and Santa her mother. Additionally, the Godmother confirms their independent selfhood and pliability in carrying new roles and responsibilities. In this regard, Mishra, P. V. (2018), commented-

Cracking India shows an important action of a “gynocentric view” of reality in which the female mind and experiences are presented with a massive style”. (Mishra, 2018, p.16).The investigator justified that women are just a plaything in the hands of the males of society. Bapsi Sedhwa represented the miseries, pain, and trauma faced by women of the society in different cultures, subsequently, Sidhwa Partition is based on women’s perception as their trauma has remained ignored. In this regard, Navin Patwa (2013, p. 29) analyzed that;

“Sidhwa treats the theme of partition from a woman's perspective. The women's sufferings were left unnoticed by historians and literary authors. Sidhwa becomes a spokesperson of the women and creates a character Ayah, and presents the calamity that befell her (abduction, gang rape, conversion, marriage, and prostitution)”.

The narrative informs the reader that a temporary rehabilitation shelter in the neighboring house is established for raped/abducted women who were recovered by the state post-partition. This halfway house is representative of how “women who survived wartime rape often suffered physical damage and were left isolated”. These women can therefore be called a “disenfranchised class”. Lenny observes that the women in the camp next door “keep to themselves, unobtrusively conducting their lives, lurking like night animals in the twilight interiors of their lairs” (Sidhwa 1988: Pp-189-190).

CONCLUSION:

Thus, to conclude, the investigator can argue that Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1988) exemplifies how women's bodies, reduced to the status of a mute token, become the primary targets of horrific violent acts during ethnic warfare between two communities of men. They were treated as sexual objects. Besides, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1988) specifies that raping and prostitution of women were considering political and religious revenge towards the members of the opposite community. The predominance of gendered violence during the Indian partition was because attacks on women were symbolic of the honor and purity of the religion/country to which the women belonged. Besides, from the above discussion, we can argue that the Novel, "Ice-Candy-Man/*Cracking India*" demonstrates the need to re-examine narratives about women during partition. Ayah's abduction and bodily violation are the results of personal jealousy and vehemence of her rejected lover who, as an opportunist, uses the ethnic clash of partition to justify his vindictive actions as a valiant performance of his Muslim nationalism and manhood. Furthermore, Sidhwa, through Hamida, reveals that despite the states' paternalistic efforts to recover and rehabilitate abducted and raped women, these violated women became a reminder of the nation's shame, which led to the social death of the victimized gendered subject. Sidhwa also emphasizes the difficulty, or rather, the impossibility of articulating violence against women in its entirety. Sidhwa, through her narrative strategy, underscores that rape narratives can lead to a second violation of the victim. For the surviving victims of sexual violence, articulation is impossible because of the twofold fear of reliving trauma and facing social castigation. In essence, *Cracking India* allows for exposing the patriarchal nationalist agenda at the time of partition that used women's bodies as a means of inscribing power relations between two opposing ethnic groups, thereby erasing the gravity of the embodied violence enacted on the female body.

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