

2016

# Women's responses to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a broken column, Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India and Sadat Hasan Manto's Mottled dawn

Ayesha Sadaf Khan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Khan, Ayesha Sadaf, "Women's responses to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a broken column, Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India and Sadat Hasan Manto's Mottled dawn" (2016). *Theses, Dissertations, and Projects*. 1612.  
<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/1612>

This Honors Project has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, and Projects by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@smith.edu](mailto:scholarworks@smith.edu).

Women's Responses to the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent in Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Saadat Hasan Manto's *Mottled Dawn*

Ayesha Sadaf Khan

Submitted to the Department of English  
of Smith College  
in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor's of Arts

Ambreen Hai, Honors Project Advisor

**Table of Contents:**

Acknowledgements.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1: Political Independence & Personal Freedom: Laila’s journey from double colonization to double emancipation.....	20
Chapter 2: Socioeconomic Class and Gendered Violence: Women’s Responses to Partition in Bapsi Sidhwa’s <i>Cracking India</i> .....	43
Chapter 3: Gender & Nation: Examining Women’s Responses to Partition in Saadat Hassan Manto’s <i>Mottled Dawn</i> .....	66
Conclusion.....	88
Bibliography.....	92

**Acknowledgements:**

First, I thank Professor Hai for her continuous guidance, advice and encouragement. I am so grateful to her for the time, effort and patience she dedicated to our project. I thank her for challenging me, for teaching me how to choose my words carefully and for inspiring me with her love for the “life of the mind”. Apart from being a phenomenal teacher, she has been a very supportive and genuine advisor.

I would also like to thank Professor Andrea Stone, my second reader, for her thoughtful guidance. Her recommendations for secondary research helped define the overall framework of my project. I also learnt a lot from her instruction and guidance when I took her class, Methods of Literary Study.

I am grateful to Smith College Al-Iman for providing me a community to lean on and for consistently reminding me that intellectual rigor is a goal I must strive towards. I thank Kavita Bhandari who encouraged me to write a thesis and patiently proofread several drafts and provided me valuable feedback.

## Introduction

In August 1947, the British Raj finally ended its three hundred year presence in India, partitioning the subcontinent into two independent states: Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. The Partition of British India was a cataclysmic event with rivers of blood and mass graves of corpses marking the exit of the British and the birth of the two new countries. The roots of the Independence Movement can be traced back to the War of Independence in 1857. Anti-colonial sentiment escalated during the Second World War when the Indian National Congress Party started a campaign of civil disobedience called the Quit India Movement. In the historical volume *Nations and Nationalism: A Global Historical Overview (Volume 2: 1880-1945)*, historian John McLane writes in the chapter titled “India” about how Muslim leaders grew wary of the Hindu Majority as the Quit India movement gained power (McLane, 804). Tensions between the two religious groups were so high that Indians were moved out of mixed neighborhoods in polarized ghettos. Local and religious political leaders encouraged the violence as H.S. Suhrawardy, the Muslim League Chief Minister of Bengal provoked violence against the Hindu population in his own jurisdiction of Bengal. Suhrawardy wrote in a newspaper that “bloodshed and disorder are not necessarily evil in themselves, if resorted to for a noble cause” (Dalrymple, 24). Tension between Hindus and Muslims transformed the Independence Movement for some Indians who now wanted the British to Quit India and Partition it into two new nation states divided along the borders of religion.

More than 10 million Indians were displaced across the newly constructed Indian borders during the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947 (Butalia, 1). Across the Indian subcontinent, religious communities of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims that had previously coexisted peacefully, attacked each other in a horrifying outbreak of religious violence. This led to one of the largest

migrations in human history with many thousands never making it across. The mass genocide was defined by massacres, bloodshed, looting, arson, forced conversions but perhaps the most ugly repercussion of India's Partition is the terrifying violence that ensued against women. This included mass abductions and sexual violence as seventy-five thousand to one hundred thousand women were kidnapped and raped with many being disfigured or dismembered (Dalrymple, 24).

The Partition of the subcontinent has been defined by acclaimed historian Ayesha Jalal as “a defining moment that is neither beginning nor end, Partition continues to influence how the peoples and state of postcolonial South Asia envisage their past, present and future.” (15). Similarly, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, feminist activists and social scientists from India, have written about Partition as an event whose “terrible stunning violence and.. silencing pall... descended like a shroud over it ... always hovered at the edges of history; breaking the silence has not only exposed cracks in family mythologies but the implicit consensus that prevails around permissible violence against women during periods of highly charged conflict” (255). Jalal, Bhasin and Menon's work helps us understand how Partition has left behind a disturbing and unpalatable legacy of violence against women.

This sexual violence against women by Indian men is well documented. For example, Nisid Hajari, a journalist at *Newsweek*, writes about the gendered violence of Partition in his non-fictional historical work *Midnight's Furies*:

“Gangs of killers set whole villages aflame, hacking to death men and children and the aged while carrying off young women to be raped. Some British journalists who had witnessed the Nazi death camps claimed Partition's brutalities were worse: pregnant women had their breasts cut off and babies hacked out off their bellies; infants were found literally roasted on spits.”

Hajari's work is one of many historical accounts on the Partition of India that records the senseless tragedy that ensued. These stories affect me deeply. I am dissatisfied with the accounts of nationalist historians that sanitize the horrific acts of violence committed against women into numbers, statistics and third-person, historical records.

In their book *Borders and Boundaries*, oral, feminist historians Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, discuss this shortcoming in nationalist historical records. Menon and Bhasin point out how women appear in Partition history and official records as objects of study, rather than as subjects: "They are present in some reports and policy documents, and no account of Partition violence..is complete without the numbing details of violence against women. Yet they are invisible. Furthermore, their experience of this historic event has neither been properly examined nor assigned historical value" (11). Bhasin and Menon also illuminate the troubling management of violence against women by the new states of India and Pakistan after Partition:

Women's sexuality, as it had been violated by abduction, transgressed by forced conversion and marriage and exploited by impermissible cohabitation and reproduction was at the centre of debates around national duty, honour, identity and citizenship...The figure of the abducted woman became symbolic of crossing boundaries. The extent and nature of violence that women were subjected to when communities conflagrated, highlights not only their particular vulnerability..but an overarching patriarchal consensus that emerges on how to dispose of the troublesome question of women's sexuality (20).

So where do we go for a richer inquiry into the experiences of women living through Partition? What tools do we have to conduct our research? In *Remembering Partition*, Gyanendra Pandey explains how Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus were "redefined" by the tragedies of Partition most fundamentally "as Sikhs and Muslims and Hindus alone" (16). Pandey explores how all over the

subcontinent since 1947 “men, women and children belonging to these communities - yet belonging to different castes, classes, occupations, linguistic and cultural backgrounds - have been seen in term of little but their Sikh-ness, their Muslim-ness, or their Hindu-ness” (16). These sentiments have led to deeper, familiar problems post-Partition. Pandey identifies the political isolation felt by the Sikhs that led to the “Punjabi Suba movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the Khalistani movement of the 1970s and 1980s” (17). Butalia identifies how Partition was followed by multiple more partitions “continuing divisions on the basis of religion” (6). These post-partition movements included communal attacks against the Sikhs in 1984, Muslims in 1989 in regions across India such as Bihar, Surat, Ahmedabad and Bombay that were openly supported by “political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Vishwa Hindu Paresad and the Shiv Sena” (7). Each of these communal clashes turned women’s bodies into a battleground and communal mobs were often encouraged by political entities as “Partition stories and memories were used selectively by the aggressors: militant Hindus were mobilized using the one-sided argument that Muslims had killed Hindus at Partition, and so they must in turn be killed, and their women subjected to rape” (Butalia, 6).

In their research, both Pandey and Butalia identify how official records of Partition adopt a reductivist approach to Indian identities that depends solely on their religious community. They describe the continued susceptibility of Indians to be swayed by communal rhetoric. This makes it even more imperative to find sources to decode or imagine women’s voices outside the work of nationalist historians that, according to Butali, Menon, Bhasin and Pandey, upholds communal agendas. Political actors that belong to or are influenced by groups such as the BJP and Shiv Sena promote communal violence against women and continue to perpetuate women’s exclusion and silence in history by recording their experiences according to the hegemonic demands of nation



and nationalism. My project will explore literary representations of those women who did not fit completely into this Sikh, Muslim and Hindu trifurcation. Through the texts I examine, it appears that Indian women's experiences in 1947 were influenced by the intersection of their "Sikh-ness, Muslim-ness or Hindu-ness", caste, socio-economic class and ethnic status.

Discourses are used to represent codes, conventions and habits of language that produce specific fields of culturally and historically located meanings. In his work *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault defined discursive practices as particular institutions and their ways of establishing orders of truth or what is accepted as reality in a given society (78). In his work *On Linger and Being Last*, literary critic Jonathan Elmer discusses the difficulties posed by historical discourse which is used to preserve what he terms "sovereignty" or the supreme power and authority of a nation. Sovereignty "conjoins individual and collective identity" (7) and so in nationalist historical records, individuals are ascribed identities that serve the ideology of the nation. In his book "Remembering Partition", Gyanendra Pandey identifies how the demand for Hindu or Muslim sovereignty reduced individuals into little more than their "Sikh-ness..Muslim-ness..or Hindu-ness" (16). In his work *On Linger and Being Last*, Elmer also proposes that literary expression becomes a medium to pose the "conceptual problems" and contain "the myriad ambivalences and over determinations that inform the trope of the sovereign individual" in nationalist discourses. He argues that literature solicits ambiguity to "register ideological and historical contradictions with greater sensitivity and nuance than other discourses" (7).

This powerful distinction between the discourses of literature and history foregrounds the motivation behind my thesis. In subcontinental politics, Partition stories are told selectively with political agendas. As Butalia, Menon and Pandey all identify, this promotion comes from the highest levels of political office which were in turn responsible for the recording of history in

official narratives. We cannot solely rely on history to understand women's responses to Partition because we have evidence to suggest that in the interest of nationalism, the sovereign states of India and Pakistan recorded women's experiences by positioning them according to patriarchal hierarchies and nationalistic interests. These interests permitted and encouraged the abuse of women's bodies and manipulated the preservation of women's honor as a propaganda tool to incite patriotism and revenge.

To locate women's experiences we must move beyond the discourse of history where nationalism often forms the bedrock from which the narrative proceeds. Instead, we can turn to the vast and expansive body of Partition literature. This project will explore how literary texts mediate women's experiences during 1947 and invite us to rethink how different women responded to the tumultuous times they lived through. Some never recovered, some remained ambivalent and apathetic and some saw "in this rupture a moment of unexpected liberation" (Menon and Bhasin, 19). Literature provides us a rich resource that literary critic Jonathan Elmer describes a "powerful model of thinking beyond the self-serving narratives of the nation state" (7). Partition literature provides us literary imaginations of women's responses to Partition outside what Elmer terms the "self-serving narratives of the nation state" (7).

Literary texts allow us to rethink the politics of Partition by narrating them from the imagined perspective of women's experiences. The lens of history relegates women to corners, sanitizes their experiences into numbers and statistics and dismisses them as a single, monolithic body that was repeatedly raped to preserve the honor of nationalist agendas. Literary critic Beerendra Pandey discusses how some history textbooks "effaced" the gendered violence of Partition (Pandey, 105). Literature can help us determine what history has left out through official records. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin point out how Partition literature "registered with despair

or anger and profound unhappiness...Nowhere in the thousands of pages of fiction and poetry do we even find a glimmer of endorsement for the price paid for freedom, or admission that this ‘qurbani’ (sacrifice) was necessary for the birth of two nations” (7). Jenny Sharpe encourages critics to see “the absent text of history in the margins of literature, as it is unconscious or “unsaid” (21). She writes:

The task of the critic is to read textual silences symptomatically, not as deficiencies to be filled in, but as necessities to be explained. History, forming the condition of existence to the literary imagination, places limits and restrictions on what can be represented at any moment. Fiction is granted the license to imagine events as they might have happened or in a way that history has failed to record. Since the literary work represents possible worlds rather than probable ones, I employ novels to show how they stage social contradictions and strive to resolve them. (22)

My project explores the cultural-political formation of women which transcends nationalism, religion and ethnicity and is shaped by their economic privilege or disprivilege. Through an exploration of Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1991) and Saadat Hassan Manto’s *Mottled Dawn* (1948), I examine how Hosain, Sidhwa and Manto imagine and represent different women’s different responses to Partition and how these fictional narratives mediate our understanding of women’s resistance and negotiation when faced with certain constraints during this period of historical trauma. I will use these texts to explore how writers tell the stories of women whose experiences are influenced heavily by an intersection of their gender, socioeconomic status, caste, geographical location (within India), familial religious group and ethnic status. Some of these women occupy disadvantaged positions and writers use different strategies to suggest how they manage their oppression. The most

disadvantaged of these female characters negotiate the constraints placed upon them to display limited agency within their social constructs. Menon and Bhasin point out how literature “reveals different truths” about women and this “fragment is significant precisely because it is marginal rather than mainstream” (8). They identify how the “perspective such materials offer us can make for insights into how histories are made and what gets inscribed, as well as direct us to an alternative reading of master narratives. At their most subversive they may counter the rhetoric of nationalism itself” (Menon and Bhasin, 8). My thesis is important because the past continues to exert its influence actively in the form of gender violence in the name of communalism and nationalism in modern communities living in the subcontinent today.

*Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *Cracking India* and *Mottled Dawn* are ideal for this project because these texts depict the multiple different forms of oppression faced by women from different ethnic, socio-economic and religious backgrounds. Laila from *Sunlight in a Broken Column* belongs to an upper-class Muslim *taludari* (feudal landlords in British India who were responsible for collecting taxes for the British) household located in Lucknow. Lenny, Mother and Godmother from *Cracking India* belong to upper middle-class Parsi families located in Lahore which employs a working class Ayah. Sughra, Sakina, Nasim and Mozail are Muslim and Jewish working class women occupying different geographical settings in Manto’s sketches and short stories about Partition collected together in *Mottled Dawn*. Between Laila, Ayah, Mrs. Sethi, Godmother, Sakina, Sughra and Mozail we find literary representations of feminist struggles during Partition from upper class, middle class, working class, Muslim, Parsi and Hindu families. This thesis consists of three chapters and each chapter deals with how a separate text unfolds its own conflict between women and Partition.

Instead of focusing on the forms of violence and oppression faced by women or the motivations behind them as most historians, oral historians and postcolonial scholars have done in the past, my thesis explores how Hosain, Sidhwa and Manto imagined women characters who pushed back in multiple ways against the different forms of patriarchal oppression they faced. The study centers on different Indian women who belong to different religions and ethnicities and occupy different socioeconomic classes;: Laila Godmother, Mother, Ayah, Sakina, Nasim Akhtar and Mozail. Some of the literature I include envisions Partition politics as one that helped women attain social liberation. Other texts aim to expose the unequal power relations between men and women that structure what history has recorded. Some of these texts locate the limited agency women exerted while they were victims of subjugation, a phenomena Deborah E. McDowell observes in African-American novels about black women who were victims of sexual abuse. McDowell points out that agency can be understood in a site of subjugation as the possibility of action without negating the unequal relations of power that restrict the ability to act (McDowell quoted by Sharpe, xiv).

Resistance, agency, negotiation and accommodation are terms I will use often over the course of my thesis. I define resistance as the push back against normative ideological beliefs that upheld the power of Indian men over women during the Independence and Partition era. It includes the expression of any defiance against the system of patriarchy that endowed men with power over women. I define accommodation as acceding to the patriarchal codes, conventions and traditions that governed gender relations in the Indian subcontinent. I define agency as strategies that allow for either self-empowerment of women or the external shift of power from men to women that allows women to achieve some semblance of control that improves their situations.

However, there are limitations to the terms “resistance” and “agency”. In her work *Ghosts of Slavery: A Literary Archaeology*, Jenny Sharpe points out these limitations when writing about the experiences of black slave women: “An uncritical celebration of slave resistance and resilience risks overlooking the conditions of subjugation and dehumanization that in many instances prevented the opposition to slavery, overt or otherwise” (xv). Sharpe’s work has helped me refine the tools I have to understand the limitations of the term “resistance” within the context of women’s responses to Partition. How can I break the binary of women responding to Partition as either oppressed and violated victims or empowered agents of resistance? Sharpe questions whether the “paradigm of resistance” projects onto the past “a contemporary desire to identify an opposition to slavery” (xv). The question may well be extended to study women’s responses to Partition. In this project, I will not study fictional women characters with the sole purpose of tracking what Sharpe terms “oppositional” (xv) practices that represent a “need to identify resistance in even the most accommodating of practices” (xv). I will not perpetuate the binary of oppressed victim or empowered feminist in my readings of women characters. Instead, I will locate “resistance” strategies without overlooking other stories where the intersection of class, ethnicity and religion made it impossible for women to oppose the sexual or emotional violence they were subjected to. Here, I will inquire into the contexts of women and how these influenced the forms of violence they faced and the modes they employed to negotiate their circumstances. Often, these strategies are enacted under very limited circumstances making them hard to classify under the terms “agency”, “resistance” and “accommodation” (xvi). Instead, I will explore how some women adopted what Sharpe terms “negotiated practices” to ensure their survival, allowing me to investigate women’s responses to Partition outside the resistance - accommodation binary.

I define negotiation as women's manipulation of the patriarchal structures that sanctioned sexual violence against them in the name of nationalism and left them with extremely limited options. These are "acts of self-survival" made within the "dynamic of non-consent" where even at their most vulnerable, these women "manipulate some degree of control" (Sharpe, xviii-xx). I will demonstrate how writers accord some female characters the privilege of displaying resistance while others are forced to negotiate. This will complicate what Sharpe describes as an "equation" of agency and resistance to include "questions of negotiation and survival" (xv, xii). Within this critical framework, I will explore women's resistance and agency as well as their limited agency that negotiates the rules of Indian patriarchy, becoming a "performance that exceeds strictly defined roles to them and as an action through which they reappropriated the place of their subjugation" (Sharpe, xxiii).

Attia Hosain's novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* traces the life of a young girl Laila growing up in a conservative, upper-class Muslim household under the political backdrop of the Independence and Partition movements of 1947. Laila belongs to a family of *taluqdars*, district landlords who collected taxes for the British. *Taluqdars* were invested in the status quo of colonial rule and feudalism, which were political and social structures that the Independence Movement sought to remove. Laila's growth in the novel is influenced by a combination of her Western education, the Independence movement and the religious tensions preceding the Partition of India. Hosain's narrative shows us how Laila utilizes political activism in public spaces to resist social oppression in her private spaces.

Laila refuses to comply with normative pro-Partition political opinions held by Indian Muslims surrounding her. Through her support for the Independence movement and her outspokenness against Partition, she understands how to gain freedom from oppressive structures

and uses her political outspokenness to rebel in her social sphere as well. I examine how the anti-colonial resistance of the Indian Independence movement educates Laila about a sense of injustice that she uses along with her Western education to question the gender oppression in *talugdari* customs. Laila challenges patriarchal customs within her home, speaks out against colonial prejudice and develops intellectual resistance by moving beyond the social and literally physical restrictions placed on her movements throughout the novel. Her exposure to political protests provides her with an awareness of justice and injustice which makes her feel out of place in the gendered social spaces she inhabits. She identifies the sense of duty to feudal ideologies adopted by her aunts and uncles as one that engenders unhappiness and discrimination. This rejection of social codes catalyzed by her relationship to India's two political movements enables Laila to reject her duty to the feudal order and pursue a love marriage with a man from a lower socio-economic class despite being disowned by her family as a result.

However, Laila's eventual escape from family and *talugdari* customs through her marriage does not have a happy ending. Instead, the novel ends with Laila reminiscing on how the charm of her love dies out in her marriage to Ameer. I read this text as one that simultaneously celebrates and exposes the privilege possessed by upper-class women in Lucknow who received a Western education and did not have to accommodate or negotiate the sexual violence that women from lower socio-economic backgrounds in congested, urban neighborhoods and rural villages in Bengal and Punjab faced. I explore how Laila's agency is enabled by her class privilege. She resides in Lucknow far away from the physical violence of Partition riots and has close access to student movements and conversations between her uncle and his important politically-connected friends is a result of her class status.



Unlike *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* is located in a different social and physical location. The narrator, Lenny, is a young upper-middle class Parsi girl growing up in Lahore in the midst of the political turmoil of the Independence and Partition movements. Lenny resides in Lahore, the primary city of the Punjab, where the worst Partition riots took place. In their essay "Veterans and ethnic cleansing in the Partition of India", Samitra Jha and Steven Wilkinson point out that a key feature of India's Partition was that "the violence and ethnic cleansing that occurred during Partition was far from uniform across the country" with violence against women being most severe in the state of Punjab (3).

Sidhwa uses the narrative voice of a nine year old Parsi girl named Lenny to take us into the lives of three different Indian women residing in Punjab. Lenny's Mother, Mrs. Sethi, is the matriarch of an upper middle-class Parsi household. Lenny's Godmother, is a single, elderly woman who is given the role of savior in the novel as she rescues Lenny's Ayah who has been abducted by Partition rioters. Lenny's Ayah, whose name changes from Shanta to Mumtaz in the novel, belongs to a working-class Hindu family and is abducted by a Muslim mob from the Sethi household. I will examine how Sidhwa constructs each female character using the lens of a child to expose how class, caste, ethnicity and economic system were intertwined deeply with women's experiences during Partition.

I examine how Sidhwa's work constructs a hierarchy among Indian women through her constructions of Ayah, Mother and Godmother. This hierarchy is influenced by the women's identities as Parsi or Hindu, working class or upper class, single or married, sexualized or desexualized in appearance. Both Ayah and Mother are disprivileged in different ways, Godmother occupies the rung of highest power because she is a single, upper-class Parsi woman who is not restricted by a husband or over-sexualized by male admirers. Ayah and Mother have lesser power

than Godmother for different reasons. Ayah is a working-class, Hindu maid who does not have the protection of a patriarchal family and has to constantly navigate uninvited expressions of sexual interest from working class Indian men who surround her. Ayah, unlike Godmother and Mother, has no financial or social security. Mother is privileged by her upper-middle class status, Parsi ethnicity and her position as matriarch in a patriarchal family. Although, these protects her from the sexual violence Ayah faces, Mother is abused in different ways. The text provides evidence that Mother is a victim of domestic abuse and has to rely on her physical appearance to cajole money out of her husband. Lenny is a nine year old child and her narrative has obvious gaps, silences and naive observations that Sidhwa uses to explore uncharted territories about women's experiences during Partition. Mother's character illuminates how women were heavily abused and sexualized independent of the events of Partition in their own homes and communities. Since domestic abuse was a tabooed subject, Lenny's harmless observations become a useful authorial strategy for Sidhwa to explore violations against women occurring during 1947 that were independent of the political climate.

I will explore the different challenges faced by Mother and Ayah and the strategies Sidhwa provides to Mother, Godmother and Ayah to fight against oppression faced by them or by women around them. Sidhwa exposes hierarchies that influence the multi-layered forms of violence Indian women experienced. She shows us how Godmother exploits her privilege and speaks on behalf of Ayah. If we were to conflate the struggles and responses of women as different as Ayah, Godmother and Mother we would homogenize them and brush past the question of who had privilege and what abuses women faced within their homes and communities outside the politics and nation equation. The responses of all Indian women cannot be reduced to a monolithic

experience because that would erase the different struggles of those who reside on the margins such as Ayah and Mrs. Sethi.

There are multiple sites of resistance, agency and negotiation employed by Sidhwa's female characters. Ayah and Mother negotiate the oppression they face in different ways and through them Sidhwa provides a deeper examination of the different forms of violence Indian women experienced. These include domestic abuse, patriarchy, classism, ethnocentrism, gender-based violence, polarization, socio-economic status and poverty. For Ayah, Mother and Godmother, these factors intersect uniquely and produce different responses to Partition. Ayah and Mother both negotiate their circumstances - Ayah has very limited agency within her constraints but Sidhwa shows us how she negotiates her future and eventually sets it on her terms by choosing between her limited options. She goes against the wishes of Ice-Candy Man and Godmother who both have, through Ice-Candy Man's gender privilege and Godmother's class privilege over her. Mother suffers domestic abuse from her husband and sets up refugee camps for abducted women and helps smuggle endangered Sikhs and Hindus out of Pakistan into India.

Manto's stories in his short story collection *Mottled Dawn*, feature a diverse set of female characters that belong to working class families. The female characters and short stories I will examine include Sakina from "Open It", Sughra from "The Assignment", Mozail from "Mozail" and Nasim from "A Girl from Delhi". These are ordinary Indians affected by Partition in different ways. Sakina and Sughra are young girls belonging to Muslim families who have little voice and no agency in the stories that feature them. Sughra tries to resist but fails painfully while Sakina accommodates to oppression as Manto demonstrates in a detached, clipped narrative how her body has been relentlessly assaulted. Mozail is a single Jewish woman who lives alone and pushes the boundaries of middle class morality. Nasim is a dancing girl who escapes from New Delhi to

Lahore during Partition. Manto enables both Mozail and Nasim Akhtar to exert agency in the form of escape or heroism.

Manto adopts different strategies to perform a unique kind of feminist work that pushes back against official narratives of how Indian women were affected by Partition. He creates characters who are multiply marginalized. Some of his female characters, such as Mozail and Nasim Akhtar, pursue lifestyles outside the boundaries of “respectable” women. Hence, they are exempt from the expectations of sexual prudery and delicacy of upper and middle-class Indian society. This allows Manto to write about tabooed topics using these subversive female characters who resist patriarchal forces openly through escape, attack and even murder of male rioters. The last chapter will compare four short stories and explore what Manto suggests about women’s experiences during Partition through these stories.

Manto’s work relies heavily on allusions, sexual images, gender convention and cultural signifiers to construct evocative metaphors that illuminate how men even raped women that belonged to their own religious communities. Manto’s exposure of intra-communal violence against women performs feminist work by breaking the stereotypical narrative and pushing the reader to think beyond boundaries of religion or ethnicity as the only cause agent of sexual violence against women in 1947. Manto’s characters and narrative often transgress cultural boundaries. He uses tools of gender switching that reject patriarchal conventions of proper male or female behavior and expose distasteful patriarchal notions of masculinity and male sexuality as understood by male perpetrators of violence during Partition.

The last chapter will explore how working class women in Manto’s writings respond to the deeply gendered ramifications of Partition. Manto applies many literary strategies which include irony, a detached and non-committal narrative voice and a diverse range of female subjects.

Manto's detached work makes his writing not be partisan to any one religious community. Through his non-nationalistic lens on Partition violence, Manto rejects the logic of Partition rioters who believed women's bodies were properties of their religious communities. By taking us into the lives of male perpetrators of gendered Partition violence, Manto's work suggests that the attacks against women served none of the stated nationalist ends but were instead gratuitous acts attacking *all* women. His sketches interrogate the logic behind the violence against women and find that the sexual horrors were embedded in deeply misogynistic cultural beliefs that were not bounded by religious identity.

Women in all of these stories negotiate oppression with different methods. This complicates the anonymous and monolithic manner used in official narratives of Partition to record women's experiences. The vastly different experiences of Laila, Ayah, Mother, Godmother, Sakina, Sughra, Nasim and Mozail can be used to address the forces that enabled women to push back against oppression. Jenny Sharpe asks similar questions about the experiences of Black slave women and "the translation of their action into representation, and the complicity of our readings with the documents on which we rely for imagining what transpired in the past" (xiii). These questions feature heavily in my study on Partition literature as I aim to unpack how different writers represented women's responses. My thesis will illuminate the strategies of resistance, negotiation and accommodation these women applied when responding to the different forms of oppression they faced during Partition.

## Chapter 1

### **Political Independence & Personal Freedom: Laila's journey from double colonization to double emancipation**

Attia Hosain's narrative in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* traces the life of Laila, a young girl growing up in an elite Muslim family of *taluqdars*. During British rule of the Indian subcontinent, the *taluqdars* were a wealthy class of Indian people who owned land and were responsible for collecting taxes for the British empire. Laila, the protagonist and narrator of *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, grows up during the Indian Independence movement and Partition struggle. The novel suggests that the charged political atmosphere of India enables Laila's personal freedom as her journey towards adulthood is marked by her social rebellion in marrying outside her class. Laila's trajectory in the novel has three distinct phases: her life behind *pardah*, her life after *pardah*, and her life after she becomes romantically involved with Ameer (a family friend who belongs to a lower economic class) against the approval of her family. Hosain uses Laila's development at each of these stages to provide the reader with a narrative that traces upper-class women's relation to patriarchal power in public and in the home during the political upheaval of Independence and Partition that statistics and master narratives fail to do.

This chapter tracks the growth of Laila to examine how she develops personal independence from her family as she witnesses and participates in the political events taking place around her, from a childhood state of being in *pardah* in a feudal system, to coming out of *pardah* but still being under her uncle's guardianship and her eventual marriage and adulthood. Due to her exposure to political activism, Laila understands how the Independence Movement threatens to destroy colonialism and by extension feudalism because feudal landowners or *taluqdars*, like her Grandfather and Uncle, enjoyed strong business relationships with the British Raj. While living

under *pardah*, she inhabits the old world of feudalism that restricts her to a life of segregation. The *zenana* creates an enclosed physical space for women where Laila is critical of family members who conform to and celebrate *talukdari* customs. She yearns for the world outside the *zenana* in response to her oppressive atmosphere. The principles of equality and selfhood that premise the Independence Movement teach her to see the gendered expectations in her own family. Much of the earlier narrative is dedicated to establishing her keen interest in the movement to decolonize India. When she meets Ameer, Laila extends these principles of political freedom to her personal struggle. Ultimately, the political movements of Independence and Partition empower Laila in her quest for social emancipation as she finds the courage to reject *talukdari* duty at the end of the novel.

Laila is a strong proponent of Indian Independence from British rule but is vehemently against the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. Her opposition to the Partition crusade enables her to identify ideologies of religion and tradition that encourage communal divide and classism within her political environment. In the social sphere however, Laila unconsciously acts according to these ideologies. It is only when she identifies and opposes them politically that she is able to identify and oppose similar ideologies socially. Laila rejects political ideologies that divide along religion and ethnicity and extends this liberalism to reject feudal ideologies that divide along class and gender. Thus, Laila's agency is established through her education and the political exigencies of her national setting.

### **Life Under *Purdah*: Physical Restriction, Traditional Oppression and Political Upheaval in the *zenana***

Laila opposes the feudal system and its gender constraints while living in the enclosed space of the *zenana* (women's quarters) and desires to move outside the *zenana*. She displays

unease with instances of gendered oppression and colonial prejudice and navigates a unique third space between colonialism and feudalism. When under *pardah*, Laila fights an internal psychological battle that influences her desire to gain social liberty. Laila's aunts comply with the wishes of her late father and provide her with a Western education which makes her occupy a unique and privileged place in the *zenana* where other women are provided religious education. Laila's privileged background makes it possible for her to be able to afford a Western education as she does not have to navigate the struggles working class women, such as her maids Saliman and Hakiman Bua, had to face. She resides in Uttar Pradesh, a North-Indian state where gendered Partition violence was not as escalated as it was in Punjab or Bengal. Hence, Laila's affluence, Western education and physical location, all privilege her to benefit from India's political upheaval and break away from the social restrictions she is born into. The novel suggests that Laila's Western education and political exposure empowers her to question *talukdari* restrictions in her formative years. In this section, I examine how the Independence movement educates Laila about a sense of injustice that she uses along with her Western education to question *talukdari* traditions when she lives under *pardah*.

Laila is critical of the *talukdari* traditions that her relatives uphold. She struggles to accept the mistreatment of tenants and servants in the *zenana* and is uneasy with the gendered modes of behavior she is expected to adopt. Laila's reluctance to comply with these gendered and patriarchal traditions allows Hosain to show the reader how these traditions are problematic and oppressive. In her essay "Multiple Forms of National Belonging: Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*", Anuradha Needham helps us understand how these patriarchal forces created the oppressive environment Laila resists. Needham identifies the "woman question" in British India that "was center to the ideological encounter between Britain and India" as the "roles" defined for women



did not emphasize “women's needs or concerns” but “certain anxieties about masculinity that had been called into question by colonial occupation”(3). Women played important roles during nineteenth century Indian politics as they upheld a “distinctive and autonomous Indian identity” (Chatterjee, 237). Partha Chatterjee argues that Indian nationalism constructed an “outer, material, public sphere” in which “men imitated the West to develop superior techniques” (237) and an “inner, spiritual, domestic or private female sphere that protected and nourished an essential ‘Indian’ identity”(237). Indian women were expected to guard “traditional values” (237) and maintain the “Indian” identity. This separation of men and women is important when Laila is under *purdah* in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* as she observes how her *taluqdari* family maintains this “private female sphere” (237). This “nourished” (Chatterjee, 237) an essential “Indian identity” (Chatterjee, 237) which separates them from the British despite working with them. *Taluqdar*s have their own socio political space and Indian traditions. Laila’s Aunt Majida and Uncle Mohsin belong to the school of thought believe that girls, like Zahra and Laila, should be raised to nourish this essential Indian identity and not be provided with a Western education. Laila describes how this guardianship of “traditional values” played out in the “domestic” roles her cousin Zahra embodies but she resists.

For instance, when their conservative Uncle Mohsin comes to visit them in the *zenana*, Laila points out how differently she and Zahra react to his presence. She rejects Uncle Mohsin’s invitation for physical contact but then goes on to describe how favorably the more traditional Zahra receives his “uncle”-like advances. “I moved out of reach of Uncle Mohsin’s outstretched arm” (19) and “went and sat near Aunt Abida” (19) whereas “Zahra responded to Uncle Mohsin’s invitation. He drew her near, rubbed his chin on her cheek and she squealed” (19). Uncle Mohsin criticizes Laila’s Western or “mem-sahib’s education” (23) which he believes causes “temptation”

(23) and threatens the “traditional values” (Chatterjee, 237) that “nourished” the “essential Indian identity” (Chatterjee, 237). He points out that “Zahra was brought up differently, correctly, sensibly”(24) since she went to “the Muslim school” (24) where she was taught to “read the Quran..know her religious duties...sew and cook” (24) and “learn a little English which is what Muslim men want now”(24). Hosain shows us that Laila’s resistance of gendered expectations is disapproved of by some of her family members. The only person to come to Laila’s defense is her Aunt Abida, who comments: “What Laila wears or does is not under discussion” (23). For her non-traditional outspokenness as a *taluqdari* woman, even Aunt Abida is subject to Uncle Mohsin’s criticism as he rebukes her saying: “How can I understand the workings of the mind of a scholar of Persian poetry and Arabic theology infected with modern ideas?”(22). Laila uses the difference between her and Zahra’s behaviors to criticize the *taluqdari* system upheld by Uncle Mohsin and Aunt Majida that subtly encourages the manipulative use of coyness and sexuality. Laila provides a detailed description of Zahra and Hosain provides Laila a keen sense of observation to show us Laila’s aversion to the “traditional values” that Zahra embodies.

“She was too full of some personal excitement which shone in her eyes and quickened her movements. Her eyes were large, slanting and protruding slightly, and she emphasized this with the line of *kajal* drawn outwards, dark and long at the corners. She used them to ask favors and attract sympathy. They drew attention from her commonplace nose, her greedy mouth. thought they squinted inwards slightly, and no wonder because she saw everything through herself. “(16)

Zahra’s “emphasized” use of ‘*kajal*’, a type of eye makeup, in a “dark and long” fashion indicates that she is well aware of her sexuality. The passage uses physical descriptions of Zahra to present her personality. Her “nose” is described as “commonplace” and reflects the simplicity

of her personality. Her “mouth” is ascribed the human quality of “greed” as her “eyes” squint “inward” conveying her self-interest which Laila extends to be a reflection of her tendency to see “everything through herself”. Laila’s critical presentation of Zahra as a fickle and manipulative demonstrates Laila’s precociousness: “She (Zahra) used them to ask favors” (16). Laila resists this kind of gendered behavior when under *purdah*. There is also a sharp difference in Laila and Zahra’s reactions to women’s education, class equality and arranged marriage. While Zahra has internalized oppressive, *taluqdari* restrictions, Laila is cognizant of them. Laila recognizes and criticizes how Aunt Majida and Zahra adopt a second-class status in the *zenana*. They have internalized norms of domestic behavior due to patriarchal, feudal traditions. Laila describes her cousin Zahra as someone who never “changed within herself” but altered her outward appearance and mannerisms to submit to the desires of masculine influences around her. Laila points out how Zahra transforms from the “dutiful *purdah* girl” that Uncle Mohsin approved of to the “perfect modern wife” to please her husband later in the novel.

The novel suggests that Laila and Aunt Abida, both of whom have been educated, are empowered by their “mem-sahib education” or their “modern ideas”. Anuradha Needham points out how notions of “honor” and “duty” are used to bind women “to various forms of legitimized oppression”, and Aunt Abida resists these “legitimized oppression(s)” when she defends “Laila’s right to receive an education; or when she insists on Zahra being present in the room while the elders arrange Zahra’s marriage”. However, Needham believes that Abida’s resistance “underscores her lack of real power” (103) because when Uncle Mohsin questions whether Zahra can “pass judgement on her elders?..Choose her own husband?”(20), Aunt Abida responds with trembling “pale lips” and says: “No, Mohsin Bhai..I have neither the power, nor the wish, because

I am not of these times” (21). Aunt Abida’s quickly defends herself as “not” of the “times” where a girl chooses “her own husband”.

I build upon Needham’s distinction between real power and lack of real power to argue that Hosain carefully constructs different levels of power embodied by the women who reside within the *zenana*. Characters such as Aunt Abida and Laila occupy different positions on this power spectrum. By questioning how they apply different methods of resistance, we can uncover how Laila’s feminism and social power in the novel are influenced by her Western education and political exposure, both of which distinguish her from Aunt Abida. So for instance, Aunt Abida resists when she wants Zahra to be present while the elders choose her future husband so that she can “hear our arguments, know our reasons..so she will not doubt our capabilities” (21). However, Aunt Abida is hesitant to speak out and is apologetic for her resistance by saying: “In the presence of my elders..I am not the one to be asked for permission”(21). Although Aunt Abida lacks “real power”, she still exerts more agency than Aunt Majida and Zahra. On the other hand Laila, as we will soon see, is much more forceful in her resistance, drawing her sense of injustice from the changing political order. At a point in the novel, she shouts “I hate you, I hate you”(27) at Uncle Mohsin when he accuses the servant Nandi of being a “slut” (29) which is a much more radical reaction to Uncle Mohsin’s oppression than Aunt Abida’s. Hosain highlights the distinctions between her women characters. Aunt Abida exerts more agency than Aunt Majida but these are small acts of resistance. Laila, however, exerts greater agency than Aunt Abida in the novel and stands in sharp contrast to Zahra who accommodates to the patriarchy. The novel suggests that education empowers both Aunt Abida and Laila to speak back to the patriarchs around them. However, while Aunt Abida grows up with colonialism and Eastern scholarship, Laila is raised

with access to both Western education and the Independence movement. Laila's political exposure empowers her to look beyond *talukdari* traditions, a privilege Aunt Abida does not have.

Hosain shows us how Laila's participation in the anti-colonial, anti-feudal *satyagraha* movement enables her to criticize colonialism and classism. In the novel, Laila flashes back to that "blistering day" when she watches "the procession of non-cooperators" from her "balcony" (51). They "had been halted, and the police had charged them with heavy wooden *lathis*" (51). A "hot sickness" burns inside Laila in response and she vows to "fight" for India's "freedom as the Satyagrahis did...to defy the might of the arrogant whites" (51). She stops "singing the alien National Anthem" and feels "part of a great movement" (51). Laila utilizes her political exposure to speak back to the colonialist prejudice of Mrs. Martin when she visits Laila and her aunts in the *zenana*. Her exposure to the *satyagraha* movement allows her to engage in acts of anti-colonial resistance when she lives under *pardah*. Led by Mahatma Gandhi, the *satyagraha* movement was a non-violent, non-cooperation civil rights movement that led to Indian Independence. Laila's support for the *satyagraha* movement along with her Western education enable her to develop a sense of justice and injustice that clashes with women around her who conform to oppressive social customs such as "playing the part of the dutiful *pardah* girl" (140). Laila calls to attention how Mrs. Martin changes her name to Lily when referring to her: "I felt my cheeks burn hearing the alien name she had given me" (46). This social facet of colonialism, changing a "native" name to an alternative in the colonizer's language, leaves Laila taken aback. Laila, who grows up at the intersection of Western education, conservative *talukdari* customs and independence movements hybridizes these differing ideologies around her to resist both oppressive *talukdari* customs and colonial prejudice. When Mrs. Martin advocates for her "customs" and her "own people", she mirrors Uncle Mohsin's insistence on his own "traditions". Like Mrs. Martin, Uncle Mohsin also

never calls Laila by her name instead adopting the derogatory “mem-sahib” to address her. Laila uses her power as narrator to show the similarities between Mrs. Martin and Uncle Mohsin. For Laila, they both represent oppressive systems that make her “uneasy”. Laila exerts agency and sharply rebukes Mrs. Martin’s nostalgia for the “old days” when locals “terrible crowds” were excluded from their own cultural processions of “lovely, lovely lights”. Laila points out that “We needed passes that day if we didn’t wear European clothes”(5). This is the first moment when Laila finds the courage to translate her intellectual rebelliousness to external resistance as she speaks up against Mrs Martin’s celebration of obvious colonialist discrimination. Laila notices and calls attention to how she, as a local, was being excluded from her own traditions. Despite her being previously attacked for her “mem-sahib” education by traditionalists inside the *zenana*, she is the first character in the novel to speak out against colonialism. Here, Laila leverages her exposure to politics to speak out against oppression that limits her.

When Laila is under *purdah*, she is visited in the *zenana* by her male cousin Asad with whom she is hinted to kindle a romantic relationship at the end of the novel after her husband Ameer’s death. Asad, like Laila, is an orphan with parents who were poorer than Laila’s parents but who were actively involved in the *satyagraha* movement. He occupies a position of power, relative to Laila, through his active involvement in the nationalist movement which is made possible by the social liberties provided to young Indian men. Hosain shows us how Laila and Asad’s friendship allows her access outside the “privatized domestic sphere” (Needham, 95) of the *zenana* into the politically charged public sphere where the Indian Independence movement was being fought. Asad has worn “coarse handspun cloth” (36) from “childhood” (36) and made to “hate all things foreign” (36). He speaks of becoming “a part of something greater” (54) than

himself in remembrance of his father who had “sacrificed his life and money ..fighting the British” (36).

His stories provide Laila access to the Independence Movement and influence her to be a part of the action outside the *zenana*. This political exposure, although limited under *purdah*, guides Laila’s outspokenness. Laila’s growing comfort with politics allows her to speak out against social grievances such as sectarian violence. She reprimands her cousin Zahid (Asad’s brother) for his support of sectarian violence against the minority *Shiite* Muslim community: “You haven’t a monopoly of hate and self-righteousness, Zahid”. She criticizes the harshness of the *taluqdari* system toward those who are not wealthy and rebukes Zahra for shouting in “an offensive manner” (45) to a sweeper. Laila also defends peasants who cannot afford to pay their taxes. When she advocates against the eviction of a tenant to Aunt Abida, “Phupi Jan...can’t you help her? Have pity on her?” she is told:

“I do pity her, but what is there for me to do? This is a matter of principle, my child. Life will teach you to subordinate your heart to your mind.” (62)

Under *purdah*, Laila feels an overwhelming claustrophobia in her intermediate environment. Zahra, unlike Laila, does not have the same sense of social justice activism in the *zenana*. The text describes Laila as the only female character who is secretly critical of the constrictions of physical space that surround her and she yearns to move outside the *zenana*. At the end of Laila’s life under *purdah*, Hosain shows us how she looks towards the outside world beyond the *zenana* where she she sees “light”. The “light” serves as a metaphor for the external world that Laila, due to her intellectual curiosity, desires to be a part of.

“But no one knew any of this. In the corridor beyond there was light. It broke into patterns of the fretted stone that screened this last link between the walled *zenana*..and the outer portion of the house” (18)

Laila resists through her desire to break free of “this last link between the walled *zenana*” and the “outer portion of the house”. She desires to subvert *talugdari* customs and move beyond the social and literally physical restrictions placed on her movements. On the inside of the *zenana*, Laila hears the “jingling of anklet bells” (18) which is an image she previously included in her physical description of Hakiman Bua whose “silver anklets” looked “incongruous” in comparison to Laila’s “black silver stockings”. Hakima Bua and her “silver anklets” are a defining feature in Laila’s descriptions of the old world or the *zenana* that only Laila can look outside of through “the fretted stone”. The chipping away of the physical space is symbolic of Laila’s growing agency that seeks to venture beyond the *zenana*. When under *pardah*, Laila is influenced by her politically charged environment, her education and her interaction with younger male cousins through which she mediates and reconstructs her role as a *talugdari* woman. Laila continuously feels like a misfit under *pardah* and is intellectually curious about life outside the *zenana*. As she displays an outspokenness about colonialist prejudice and is intrigued by political movements, she develops a unique resistance within herself. Laila’s development manifests itself in how she dwells deeply about the world outside the *zenana* while she is physically entrapped within the *zenana*. She negotiates the limits placed upon her while in *pardah* to move outwards through her imagination. Laila’s relationship to physical space when she lives under *pardah* becomes emblematic of her desire to escape the entrapment she feels inside the *zenana* under the customs of feudalism.

**Resistance of Gendered Expectations and Patriarchal Ideology in Life After *Purdah*:**



After the death of Laila's grandfather, his son Hamid replaces him as the family patriarch. He is accompanied by his wife, Aunt Saira, whom Laila describes as a conservative social climber. Under Uncle Hamid's guardianship, Laila is allowed to come out of *pardah* and pursue a college education. This accords her another degree of privilege along with her earlier Western education that sets her apart from Zahra, Aunt Majida, Aunt Abida and Aunt Saira, none of whom have received a college education. Laila's life after *pardah* marks the period between her life under *pardah* and her life after she becomes romantically involved with Ameer. She has attained the physical freedom she had desired but still describes herself as "outwardly acquiescent" (123). In this section, I will pay attention to how Laila's politically active college friends teach her how to confront the conservative mindsets of Aunt Saira and other older *talukdari* women. At college, Laila engages first-hand with young women her age who participate in protests against colonial rule and provide an alternative lifestyle to the *talukdari* version Laila has been socialized into. In their company, Laila is called out on her political apathy (which her friends believe is a result of her privileged *talukdari* background) and learns how to express her opinions about the Independence movement and oppressive *talukdari* traditions. Laila's relationship with her family members who enforce conservative conventions suffers after she comes out of *pardah* and finds herself unable to "share" (129) Uncle Hamid and Aunt Abida's "social life" (129). She resists the norms and behaviors *talukdari* society expects her to embody as a young woman of marriageable age.

Laila's college friends are from different socio-economic and religious backgrounds than she is: Nita is a Hindu from a middle class family, Nadira is a Muslim from a middle class family, Joan is an Anglo-Indian from a middle class family and Romana is from a *talukdari* background (similar to Laila's). India's freedom struggle undergirds all of their conversations and provides

Laila access to conversations about Independence and anti-colonialism that provoke in her a sense of justice (right and wrong) that she later uses to free herself from gender oppression. By seeing her friends engage in political debate, Laila learns that this is a space of activism she too can occupy. Within this politically active group of friends, Laila has her first exposure to those who openly resent and criticize her class and are not connected to her in a *taluqdar*-tenant relationship. While Laila has had exposure to socio-economic diversity through her interactions with her household servants Saliman, Nandi and Hakiman Bua, all of these are women who work for her family. Nita and Nadira do not work for her family and openly criticize the *taluqdari* class by voicing the hypocrisies and flaws in the feudal system that Laila has always felt “discomfort” with but never known how to articulate. Laila’s friends are passionate about certain causes - Nita is passionate about the economic mobility promised by a free India, Nadira is passionate about Muslim rule and Joan is an advocate for colonial rule. Laila’s apathy and lack of support for political freedom is heavily criticized by her friend Nita who considers it a privilege of Laila’s class:

“The trouble with you is you walk round and round in circles because you have no sense of direction. You sway and bend backwards thinking you are flexible and being fair, but you really are unsure.” (124)

While before Laila felt her indecisiveness and her inaction were a thing of her solitary mind, Nita attacks her lack of direction. Hosain uses the image of walking “round and round in circles” to describe Laila’s misguided state or “lack of direction” whereas before the path Laila yearned for was straight described by a “long corridor”. Although Laila has come out of *pardah* she has yet to find the freedom she desires. Laila is envious of Nitu and Nadira because unlike her, they do not suffer from self doubt: “When Nadira argued with Nita she defended her religious beliefs with

greater convictions than I defended my class because she had no doubts”(125). Nadira and Nitu’s political activism suggests to Laila that there is an opportunity for girls her age to be contrarian and empowered. Nitu and Nadira’s committed opposition to the normative political structure of colonialism teaches Laila how she can oppose the political structure of *taluqdari* system that she resides in. Laila’s ties to her “class” do not allow her to own India’s Independence movements but if she were to support a free India she would be ideologically breaking free of the political structure of her class and the social oppression that accompanies it (since *taluqdars* were the tax-collectors of the British and hence closely invested in the institution of colonialism). Through the political activism of the Independence movement, Laila explores her “doubts” about her class but does not jump on the great “Islamic world” rhetoric and chooses to remain apathetic to the struggle for a separate Muslim state. Her unique political outlook becomes important later in the novel as she struggles with her personal decisions.

Laila’s emerging consciousness is displayed through her critical introspection and rebellious outspokenness about the gendered roles *taluqdari* women are expected to fulfill. One afternoon when Laila has returned home from college, Aunt Saira calls her to share the same physical space as three conservative female guests who are visiting their house. These women include Mrs Wadia (a Parsi), Begum Waheed (a Muslim from a similar background as Aunt Saira) and Begum Sahiba (a Muslim *taluqdari* royal from a town called Surmai). Laila describes Mrs. Wadia as a proponent of British rule who prefers “Western” over “Eastern” culture:

“She went to Europe, was prouder of Western culture than those who were born into it, and more critical of Eastern culture than those outside it.” (129)

Laila, through her narrative, pays close attention to the social privilege that Mrs. Wadia embodies and describes her presence as one that exudes wealth with her “bright clothes” and

“elaborate jewellery” that provided her a “well bred air of dignity” (129). Laila’s critique of Indians who become proponents of the British provides us with evidence of her newfound commitment to the Indian Independence movement. Laila is disrespectful to women like Mrs Wadia in physical spaces dictated by *taluqdari* norms and customs such as the one that her, Aunt Saira, Begum Waheed and Mrs. Wadia occupy in this scene. There is an unspoken hegemonic structure in place which requires Laila to behave demurely and respectfully in front of these older women who are wealthy, classist traditionalists. However, Laila resists these expectations and walks in without changing out of her “cotton sari” (129). Her appearance is met with “critical eyes deepening every crease” (129). The “cotton sari” was a symbol of the *satyagraha* movement as it symbolized how Indians rejected colonial rule by wearing homespun cotton. Feudalism was a system similar to colonialism in the classism it legislated. Where the British occupied the position of master in relation to the local natives, *taluqdars* occupied a superior position of landowner to the peasant tenants. The *satyagraha* movement was both a threat to colonial rule and to feudal power since the movement advocated for greater economic mobility for Indian tenants and equality within members of the Indian population. By wearing a “coarse hand-spun sari”, Laila demonstrates her support for the *satyagraha* movement and rejects the classist *taluqdari* customs these women uphold. Laila describes Mrs. Wadia’s advocacy to exclude “common women”(129) from the “public park” (129) and shows us how *taluqdars* and other upper-class Indian people used their power to oppress other Indians in pre-Independence British India.

Laila rejects the oppressive socialization of women in her family in this scene and finds the strength to do this through her exposure to a different form of resistance in the Independence Movement. Aunt Saira identifies women as maintainers of the patriarchal notions of the old world and points out how her “dear niece Laila is being educated to fit into the new world” (131) while

“old traditions and culture” are always “kept in mind” (131). Her guest Begum Sahiba competes with Aunt Saira and responds: “In Surmai we bring up our girls to be good wives and mothers” (131). Both Aunt Saira and the Begum Sahiba use women’s roles within family life to perpetuate gender oppression. In their book “Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research”, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise point out how the gender roles of women as “wives and mothers” are a form of socialization that makes women internalize their second class status (Stanley & Wise, 66). The family becomes an institution that relegates women to roles as “wives and mothers” and in doing so fixes women in domesticized and servile modes of behavior (Stanley & Wise, 95). Hosain uses the subtext that follows Aunt Saira’s comments in this scene to show us how Laila rejects these domesticized modes of behavior. Laila is not aware that the reason her Aunt called her in front of her guests was to present her as a prospect for marriage to the Begum Sahiba for her son from Surmai. When Laila does realize this her reaction is to be “filled with anger against” Aunt Saira (132) who had “tricked” her “into “the presence of this hawk -like creature” (132). Laila’s response to being presented as a marriage prospect is one of disgust, starkly different from Zahra’s excitement about a marriage prospect at the beginning of the novel. Laila does not present herself as a docile, domestic and modest young girl as is expected of her in this moment. Instead of meeting the ideals of gender conformity, she reacts in the following manner:

“I shifted uneasily, my foot tripped the small table by me, and plates of *samosas*, sandwiches and spiced peas spilled in confusion. There were clucking sounds of dismay.”  
(132)

Laila’s failure to demonstrate domesticity by tripping “ the small table” could be an unconsciously enacted rebellion. In her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”, Judith Butler argues that gender is constituted

through the practice of performance (Butler, 522). Hosain's continuous use of animal imagery such as "hawk-like" (132) and "clucking" (132) to describe Laila's purveyors shows us the dehumanization Laila feels when she is up against this herd-like mentality that sought to oppress girls. Butler's argument of gender as performance is applicable here as Laila is frowned upon due to her clumsiness in the domestic arena as her spilling food such as "samosas, sandwiches and spiced peas" (132) is greeted by "clucking sounds of dismay" (132). Laila's inability to comply with the cultural codes and acts that embody her role as an eligible *talugdari* girl ready for marriage show her subversion of normative gender expectations. Laila's anger and rebellion is inspired by the social criticism she has previously engaged in with her friends when they collectively made fun of Begum Sahiba for she surveyed and rejected Nadira as a prospective wife for her son because she found Nadira's outspokenness rebellious .

When Begum Sahiba, Mrs. Wadia and Begum Waheed begin discussing a "scandal" where a Muslim girl "from a strict *purdah* family" runs away with a Hindu boy bringing "dishonour" to her family, Laila jumps to this unnamed Muslim girl's defence. Hosain shows us how communal violence and the religious, nationalist political climate of India seeped into women's conversations in their private spaces. Begum Sahiba makes a pious injunction "Wickedness cannot escape punishment" which Laila sharply rebukes: "She was *not* wicked"(133). Private, domestic spaces are hegemonically structured and here Begum Sahiba has more social power than both Laila and Aunt Saira due to her older age and status as a *talugdari* royal from Surmai. Hence, Laila resists authority and convention by talking back to the Begum in a social space where Laila is clearly inferior to the Begum since she is an orphan girl being presented as a marriage prospect. We are given insight into Laila's rebellious introspection: "They seemed like paper figures as hollow as

their words, blown up with air. There was nothing in them to frighten me.. I hated her for looking at me as if examining goods in a shop window.” (133).

Laila’s growing agency can also be identified through her changing relationships with various members of her family on topic of politics and *taluqdari* duty. These include Uncle Hamid and Aunt Abida. Laila resists Uncle Hamid’s patriarchal power in a tense, confrontational scene where he asks her “the feeling of the students” (160) on what Laila calls a “movement” (160) and he calls “a demonstration of irresponsible hooliganism” (160). Uncle Hamid tells Laila to “choose her words more precisely” (160). After policing Laila’s choice of language he then proceeds to demand insider information from her. Laila’s response to this situation reflects her growing maturity and her increased agency that have come as a result of her adeptness at navigating her family's opposition to the political movements that occur daily in her school. She responds: “Most of them have not dared to say anything against what they have been ordered to think” (160). While Laila is describing the censorship of public opinion within the student body with regards to the Indian Independence movement, the situation suggests many similarities to her social struggles where she often finds herself struggling with propriety. When asked for her own opinion, Laila says: “I’m sorry, I consider the question irrelevant.” (160). When Uncle Hamid asks “with sarcasm”, “Have you no freedom of thought?” (160), Laila replies “I have no freedom of action.” (160). This is an ironic question because Laila is not allowed any freedom of thought. Laila faces a dilemma of being unable to translate her intellectual resistance into physical freedom or “freedom of action”. The “freedom of action” that Laila seeks is one that will help her overcome what she has just described as “strong(er) barriers of tradition and fear”(160). Laila’s discomfort with these power dynamics is a display of her agency and she articulates her “rebelliousness” despite her “fear” (160). Uncle Hamid attempts to shut her down by saying:

“I respect an independent mind but while you are in my charge and until I consider you are fit, you will be guided by me. I will not allow any action of which I disapprove.”

“I am well aware of my position, Hamid Chacha. I am well trained.” (161)

Laila challenges the hegemony of the family patriarch and exposes how he hypocritically attempts to crush any hint of political rebellion in her by reminding her of his patriarchal power over her. Laila now acknowledges her aversion to *taluqdari* customs and traditions when she talks back to Aunt Saira, her friends and Uncle Hamid. Laila also does not read the books that Aunt Abida gives her to “love” her “own language and heritage” (139). The educated Aunt Abida is invested in the *taluqdari* world and dutifully gives up herself in an unhappy marriage to preserve it. At this point in her growth, Laila does not take pride in prioritizing the *taluqdari* system but nor does she question the sense of duty that Aunt Abida upholds. When Laila begins to oppose the Partition movement within the Independence struggle, she identifies this sense of duty as part of a feudal ideology that engenders unhappiness and discrimination and begins to question it.

### **Laila’s growth while witnessing Partition and becoming involved with Ameer:**

The last part of the novel transitions into the Partition Movement and follows Laila’s tumultuous journey towards marriage and adulthood. The rise of communal politics and the fervor of a free Muslim state provokes Laila into adopting unpopular political opinions that influence her decision to pursue an unorthodox marriage. She now actively rebels and openly questions her elders’ opinions. Laila has developed from the observant and introspective young girl who grew up under *pardah*. While Laila was a huge supporter of the *satyagraha* movement and was a critic of British rule (as shown by her opposition to Mrs Martin and Mrs Wadia), she is not an advocate for the partition of India to produce an independent Muslim homeland. Her political choice to not support the communal divisions that her friends believed in demonstrates her resistance of



normative and divisive political beliefs. Laila supplements her unconventional political ideas with analogous rebellious social opinions. Laila openly questions Partition and is emboldened to perform actions, such as sneaking out on dates with Ameer. The text shows that as the Independence Movement transitions into a struggle for Partition, Laila fiercely defends her opinions in both the political and social realms. For instance, she uses her opposition to a divided India between Muslims and Hindus to express her disdain for her Hindu childhood friend Sita's decision not to marry Laila's Muslim cousin Kemal despite their love for one another. However, Laila did not always have such liberal beliefs about intermarriage between Hindus and Muslims. Before Laila starts openly opposing the Partition movement, she defends Sita for her decision to not marry Kemal. When Laila's cousin Saleem's claims that Sita is "an orthodox Hindu full of prejudices against Muslims" (196), Laila responds: "That is not fair, Saleem. Could a Muslim girl marry a Hindu boy? Our religion forbids it." (196)

Perhaps, Laila supports Sita's decision to not marry a Muslim because of the social punishment Sita would have to suffer from her family and society for breaking the boundaries of Hindu-Muslim segregation. Or perhaps, Laila defends Sita's religious desire to not marry a Muslim since even Islam "forbids" inter marriage with Hindus. It is the first instance in the text that suggests that Laila could have internalized some *talugdari* systems to the point that she does not question them. She is also invested in marital segregation of Hindus and Muslims and cannot, in this moment in the novel, understand Saleem's suggestion that intermarriage could be a possibility. However, with the rise of communal politics, she begins to question these policies of division that she previously believed in within her social realm. When Laila begins to openly speak out against Partition rhetoric, she also simultaneously challenges Sita's decision to not marry Kemal regardless of whether Sita makes her decision out of fear of social ostracization or because of her

own personal beliefs. Laila questions the segregation of Muslims and Hindus and her cousin Saleem tries to quell her complaints by terming segregation the “reality” of the “communal problem” (197). Saleem points out to Laila to not expect much from a religion that “forbids people to eat and drink together” (197) since it makes “real friendship or understanding” (197) impossible. Laila tells him “not to generalize” (197) all Hindus. All the men of her family accommodate the All-India Muslim League’s campaign for a separate Muslim homeland, Saleem and Kemal with their support and Uncle Hamid with his decision to run in the election. However, Laila stresses the importance of unity and adopts a contrarian political view despite her subordinate position in the *taluqdari* household due to her female gender. She uses her liberal, anti-communal views to question the religious premise that makes Kemal and Sita unable to marry each other. She realizes that she is not beholden to any of the systems she has grown up in and this revelation spurs her social rebellion. Laila experiences a sense of dissonance from the gap between her political liberalism and her family’s conservatism. However, she uses freedom of thought to gain the strength to be involved with Ameer. Ameer encourages her to take action:

“You have a duty to yourself; your own life to live. Others cannot live it for you; they can be selfish too. One has to make a choice, even if it is difficult” (206)

And Laila does take action. She first kisses Ameer in her family garden despite the clear threat of Aunt Saira or Uncle Hamid catching them. She also marries Ameer against the wishes of her family. The text provides evidence of Laila’s resistance not just through her marriage to Ameer but also through her last arguments with Sita and Aunt Abida. Though Sita and Aunt Abida advocate for two very different forms of conservatism, Hosain strikes a connection between them by making Laila’s response to them very similar. Earlier, Laila defended Sita’s decision to not marry Kemal but now she confronts Sita about her decision to not make a commitment to him: “Marry Kemal,

Sita, marry him without thinking about it so much that you cannot see anything ahead but doubts. If you believe in it enough it will be all right. It must be” (216). She terms Sita’s decision to opt for an arranged marriage as “wrong and perverse” and terms her convincing Sita to marry Kemal “as if I were pleading for myself” (216). Sita’s decision could be influenced by a fear of familial rejection instead of her own religious beliefs, however, both these reason are influenced by conservative patriarchal forces that Laila has learnt to reject. Laila also battles familial rejection, albeit lesser than what Sita would have to face because while Ameer is from a lower socio-economic background, he is still Muslim. Laila still has the courage to make the decision to break apart from her family to marry who she pleases despite the personal cost.

Laila learns to reject “duty” for “self” through the political betrayals she witnesses around her as the political movements around her evolve. Uncle Hamid and Aunt Abida’s *taluqdari* world is replaced by the fervor of the democratic Independence Movement. This teaches Laila how to demonstrate anti-colonial resistance and stand up to oppressive gender expectations. The Independence Movement evolves into the Partition struggle and Laila disagrees with how Muslims around her turn the *satyagraha* movement into a fight for a separate Muslim homeland. She describes their “indiscriminate use of God’s name” (262) to fight for a separate Muslim homeland as “embarrassing” (262). She speaks out against divisive political ideologies and simultaneously rejects similar divisive social ideologies. She lies to her family and dates a man they disapprove off. At the same point in the novel, she rejects Aunt Abida’s desire for her to be “dutiful” (252). Laila points out how Aunt Abida conforms to ideologies that only bring “unhappiness” (252). Laila identifies the root of their unhappiness as a sense of duty to traditions of elders who are “generations” (252) apart from them, and follows Ameer’s advice and chooses her own “self” (252) over “duty” (252). It is this conformation to “duty” (252) that has led Aunt Abida to be trapped in

an oppressive marriage. Laila no longer feels anxiety or discomfort as she understands that her social oppression is a result of a flawed ideology upheld by her family that she can now identify. She makes her decision to split apart from her family and marry Ameer against their wishes at the same time that British India is split apart into two new nation states, India and Pakistan.

**Conclusion:**

Laila observes and introspects during her life under *purdah* and her Western education enables her to express discomfort with oppressive *taludari* traditions. After she moves out of the *zenana*, she forms meaningful friendships with politically active college friends. Laila leverages the outspokenness of student-led Independence movements and learns how to talk back to figures of power within her own family. She adopts contrarian opinions and openly opposes the Partition Movement despite being Muslim herself and having many Muslim friends who actively campaign for Pakistan. Her culminating act of agency is to separate from her family and pursue a love marriage with a man below her in socioeconomic class that her family does not approve of. Laila develops at each stage of her journey from *purdah* to womanhood to widowhood during the Partition and Independence Movements. Through the politically charged environment, Laila learns how to challenge social and gendered oppression around her.

## Chapter 2

### Socioeconomic Class and Gendered Violence: Women's Responses to Partition in Bapsi

#### Sidhwa's *Cracking India*.

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India* is a postcolonial text that explores the political upheaval of Partition. The narrator, a young girl Lenny, belongs to an affluent Parsee family in Lahore. Lenny cannot attend day-school because she suffers from polio and is hence taken care of by a beautiful Hindu nanny whom she addresses as "Ayah". In addition to Ayah, Lenny's growth in the novel is influenced by her Mother and her Godmother. Between Mother, Godmother and Ayah, Sidhwa provides three female characters who occupy different social locations based on their socioeconomic class, ethnicity, marital status and religion. These social locations in turn influence Ayah, Mother and Godmother's experiences before, during and after Partition. Ayah is abducted by a Muslim mob during a communal riot while Mother and Godmother are safe from such gendered violence due to their Parsi ethnicity. In this chapter, I will examine how economic class, ethnicity and religion influenced the violence Sidhwa's female characters faced during Partition.

In his book *Remembering Partition*, Gyanendra Pandey provides us context on the Parsi community's role and position in India's social fabric during the Partition. He describes the Parsi community of India as a "microscopic minority" (157) that enjoyed a "privileged economic and social position" because they had like "true citizens..contributed to the economic, intellectual, social and political development of India" (157). Parsis are not discussed in historical narratives of Partition because they were not members of the three warring religious communities: Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Hence, they are Indian but still provide a perspective outside the triangular views of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh nationalists. *Cracking India* is based in Punjab where Partition

violence was amongst the worst in the subcontinent. In his book *Remembering Partition*, Gyanendra Pandey points out how when “Hindu, Sikh and Congress leaders proposed the Partition of Bengal and Punjab in April 1947, neither Jinnah nor the Punjab and Bengal Leaguers were pleased” (30). In April 1947, Jinnah “pleaded with Mountbatten” to not Partition Bengal and Punjab since they had “national characteristics in common: common history, common way of life, and where the Hindus have stronger feelings as Bengalis or Punjabis than they have as members of Congress” (30). However, Punjab was Partitioned and in *Cracking India*, Sidhwa describes how both upper-class and working-class women dealt with the communal and religious violence that ensued in the newly partitioned province.

The diversity of female experience that we see in *Cracking India* helps us understand how women’s responses to Partition were nuanced and complex. Indian women experienced different forms of violence and Sidhwa show us how these varied experiences cannot be translated into binaries of victim or savior, raped or not raped, abducted or not abducted and displaced or not displaced. Sidhwa challenges these binaries and exposes how Indian women navigated different forms of gender violence based on their social locations. Violence could be domestic abuse from their husbands in their homes or sexual harassment by working-class men in their workplaces or sexual violence by communal mobs during Partition. Godmother faces none of these oppressions. Mother accommodates to domestic abuse. Ayah negotiates sexual harassment in her workplace and is eventually abducted by a Muslim mob during Partition.

Mother, Godmother and Ayah adopt different positions of privilege or disprivilege during Partition and this causes them to navigate different circumstances. Hence, Sidhwa’s women characters adopt different methods of negotiation, accommodation and resistance to respond to their situations. Sidhwa provokes a deeper examination of the multiple forms of violence Indian

women experience, such as anti-Muslim violence, anti-Hindu violence, patriarchy, classism, poverty, domestic abuse and gender based violence and how these intersect in different ways to provide different stories. There is a hierarchy of oppression in *Cracking India* that is influenced by Mother, Godmother and Ayah's social locations. Lenny's Mother, Mrs. Sethi, is a victim of domestic violence but is not subjected to any sexual violence by communal mobs during Partition riots due to her Parsi ethnicity. She uses her influence as an upper-class Parsi woman to help abducted women and her Sikh and Hindu friends who are trying to flee the communal violence in Lahore safely. Through Mother, Sidhwa depicts a female character who exerts agency and rehabilitates abducted Indian women.

Sidhwa's work shows us how Indian women were at risk of violence from sources other than Partition riots. This acknowledgment helps us complicate the challenging circumstances women faced during Partition which included intra-family domestic violence. Patriarchy was a structure that endowed men with privilege which they abused to inflict violence on women. This violence could occur in the form of domestic abuse, abduction, rape and forced prostitution. Sidhwa shows us how patriarchal privilege was utilized by both Father and Ice-Candy Man in different ways. Father physically and verbally abuses Mother whereas Ice-Candy Man leads a mob to abduct Ayah. While Ice-Candy Man's actions are a public spectacle, Father's crimes are committed in hushed voices in his bedroom away from the servant's eyes. This challenges the assumption that Indian women were only at risk of gender violence by men from other communities. Instead, Sidhwa exposes how inter-community violence was spoken about publicly while inter-community abuse of women within their households or sexual harassment of working class women at their workplaces was ignored since it did not further nationalist agendas.

### **I. Mother: Domestic Abuse and Feminist Activism During Partition**

Lenny's Mother is a Parsi housewife and through her Sidhwa depicts a character who is Indian but not part of the Hindu, Muslim or Sikh communities. She lives in Lahore, Punjab where Partition riots occur but is not threatened or violated by them. Mother is positioned by Sidhwa as an in-between character to Ayah and Godmother. Unlike Ayah, Mother is not working class and does not have to venture outside her home to earn a living. Unlike Godmother who lives autonomously in her household and is privileged by her senior age, Mother is subservient to Father both economically and socially within her household. Although Mother is protected from the communal violence Ayah faces, she is domestically abused by her husband who is having an extra-marital affair. Mother needs Father's economic assistance to sustain herself whereas Godmother does not have to navigate a similar dependence.

In a humiliating scene in the novel, Sidhwa shows us how Mother slyly cajoles money out of her husband for her day-to-day expenses and this dependence makes it impossible for Mother to leave Father when he abuses her and cheats on her. Sidhwa illustrates how Indian women become victims of domestic abuse through their economic dependence on their husbands. Mother, Ayah and Godmother are all inhabitants of the same patriarchal structure that makes Mother subservient to Father and Ayah subservient to Ice-Candy Man but Mother's Parsi ethnicity privileges her over Ayah. Mother and Ayah are both disprivileged due to their gender before Partition but Ayah's Hindu ethnicity and working class background also makes her vulnerable to attack from communal mobs.

Sidhwa demonstrates women's economic dependence on men and in doing so exposes the forces of monetary subjugation that upheld the structure of patriarchy. Mother succeeds in cajoling money out of Father but has to be humiliated to acquire the money. However, we must acknowledge how Mother negotiates her circumstances. In view of the absence of financial



independence for upper middle-class married women, Mother consciously utilizes her sexuality to “handle” Father and subvert his dominance within their marriage: “She (Mother) is a virtuoso at juggling the range of her voice and achieving the exact balance with which to handle Father..’Jana!’ Mother says in a throaty expression, ‘you know I’m going to get you!’ And she lunges around the bed..Mother clutches the headboard and tries to dodge, taking a step this way and that. Then, climbing on the bed, she scrambles across the mattress on all fours’(76). Sidhwa uses phrases such as “lunges”, “on all fours”, “throaty expression”, “clutches”, “dodge” and “scrambles” to make Mother’s behavior similar to an animal in flight. While these images could be read to dehumanize mother, they also demonstrate how Mother manipulates the norms of middle-class morality and uses her sexuality to make Father uncomfortable and accommodate to her financial demands. Father is afraid of what the servants will say at his wife’s behavior. Hence, Mother manipulates a societal code that expects married couples to behave modestly in front of their servants and not publicly divulge any information of trouble in the household. Mother behaves untraditionally and empowers herself through a gender hierarchy that is intended to maintain her dependency. She manipulates her sexuality to her advantage. She creates a scene in earshot of Yusuf the servant who is currently “outside their window.. Shaving the leaves from the trees with a scythe” (76). Lenny notes how “being a more private person, Father is more particular” about being “conscious of the servants” (76). Mother enlists Lenny’s help with the spectacle as Lenny runs “around the bed” and exaggerates her “modified limp” and grabs “hold of Father’s leg” (77). Lenny has previously informed the reader that her parents are “conscious of the servants” and “squabble in low voices” (77) but “Father is more particular” (77). However, when Father manages to trick himself out of Lenny’s hold and locks himself into the bathroom, Mother stands outside the door and makes a loud sound: “Jana! Let me in, Jana,” Mother cries, shaking the door

and rattling the loose iron bolt” (77). Meanwhile, “Yusuf and his scythe have moved to shave another tree” and Father opens the doors “uncomfortably aware of the ubiquitous servants” (77) and calls Mother a “stupid twit” in a “harsh, hushed voice” (77). The use of the word “harsh” indicates that Father is abusive in this marriage and the word “hushed” voice could indicate how he is keen to keep his harshness a secret. When Mother finally cajoles the money out of father she “sprints out of the room” with a “triumphant cry.. Her stubby fingers closed on a large wad of notes” (78). Mother exploits Father’s fear of humiliation and social emasculation in front of their servants as Father “hisses” through “the door” and is “ostensibly mindful of the servants’ ears” (78). The scene ends with Mother locking the money in her cupboard and continuing her traditional roles by “picking up Father’s clothes and tidying the beds and getting dressed” and blowing kisses at father with a “dew in her eyes” and a “misty smile” (78). Mother negotiates the codes of propriety to manipulate her husband into giving her money.

The great evolution in Mother’s story comes post Partition when she exerts agency by using her mobility and influence to assist with the rehabilitation efforts. When the Muslim mob attacks the Sethi household, Lenny describes Mother as powerful and unafraid: “Mother, voluptuous in a beige chiffon sari, is alert. In charge. A lioness with her cubs. Ayah, with her haunted, nervous eyes, is lioness number two” (190). The political uproar of Partition provides her an avenue to push beyond the restrictive role of a wife and fight for those women who are vulnerable. Before Partition, Mother is economically dependant on Father whereas Ayah is working and hence financially independent but with very limited means. However, post-Partition Mother is able to step beyond her role as a traditional housewife and help women who were abducted in Partition riots whereas Ayah has very limited options.

When Ayah is abducted by members of a Muslim mob, the Sethi family replaces her with another nanny for Lenny who is named Hamida. Hamida is a Muslim woman who has been disowned by her family because she was abducted by a Sikh mob. In a powerful scene in the novel, we see the newly hired Hamida taking pleasure in the cook's torture of a stray cat. "Imam Din's caught the *billa* (cat)!" says Hamida, her narrow face lighting up. Sidhwa uses Hamida to depict a female character who derives a sadistic pleasure in Imam Din's torture of the vulnerable cat. Sidhwa subverts the victimized female stereotype through Hamida and mediates women's responses to Partition by providing a female character who takes pleasure in the violence enacted upon vulnerable creatures. Hamida defends Imam Din's torture saying "He's not going to die. He's a tough old alley cat" whereas Lenny is screaming "Let him go". When Mother comes to rescue the cat and beats Imam Din for his actions, Lenny notes how Hamida says in "her conciliatory and submissive manner "Look at the tears in your clothes..I'll sew them so they look like new!" (238). Hamida conforms to the norms set by patriarchal structures and apologizes for Imam Din. Hamida's excitement at the spectacle sharply contrasts with Mother's anger in this scene.

Imam Din's assault on the cat is watched by a "crowd" (236) of "neighbours and servants" (236). His abuse of the cat is grotesque as the "huge black and battle-scarred cat" (236) is "trapped in the screen door" (236) and Imam Din presses "his whole weight on the frame to hold the slippery intruder"(236) and the "panicked creature is splitting wildly" (236) as the crowd watching the spectacle keeps growing . Sidhwa sets up Imam Din's assault on the cat using similar techniques to how she sets up the Muslim mob's assault on Ayah that I will discuss in the second section of this chapter. Both scenes are set up as public spectacles where the perpetrators derive a sadistic pleasure from the victim's helplessness. However in the scene with Imam Din, Mother powerfully steps in to defend the cat and beats up Imam Din with a fly swatter. We must acknowledge

Mother's intervention as she "snatches" the fly swat from Lenny's hands and waves "her arms in an awkwardly feminine and energetic way" (237). She "strikes" (237) Imam Din's "legs, arms, shoulders and even his shaven head" (237). Mother punishes the perpetrator of the assault, albeit absurdly, while a huge crowd had previously watched Imam Din's torture of the cat without intervening. "When Imam Din "snatches the fly swat" from Mother, she yells "get out of my sight!" (238). The text suggests that Imam Din is hurt by Mother as he has "tears in his shirt" with "fine lines of blood congealing on his forearms" (238). Lenny notes how when Mother arrives on the scene she screams: "Let her go at once" (237). The different judgement of the cat's pronouns by Lenny and Mother is apparent as Lenny notes: "She cannot see the cat's gender - it is secreted behind the door- but the rest of us seem to know it's a *him* (emphasis Sidhwa's) (237).

After this scene, Sidhwa provides clear evidence of Father cheating on Mother and physically abusing Mother through Lenny's narration:

"And closer, and as upsetting, the caged voices of our parents fighting in their bedroom. Mother crying, wheedling. Father's terse, brash, indecipherable sentences. Terrifying thumps...Sometimes I hear Mother say, "No, Jana; I won't let you go! I won't let you go to her!" Sounds of a scuffle. Father goes anyway. Where does he go in the middle of the night? ..Why...when Mother loves him so? Although Father has never raised his hands to us, one day I surprise Mother at her bath and see the bruises on her body." (224)

This shows how Mother's experience with domestic abuse causes her to have a strong sense of justice and injustice. Due to her class privilege, she can fight back against injustice when it presents itself in classes below her. She exerts agency by defending the helpless cat, thrashing Imam Din for his actions, smuggling Hindus and Sikhs across the border at risk of her own life and helping abducted women return to their homes. Godmother tells Lenny that telling anyone

about this “could get your mother into real trouble” (251). Lenny notes how “Mother develops a busy air of secrecy and preoccupation that makes her even more remote. She “shoots off in the Morris” and stores petrol even though it is “rationed” (182) and “it is an offense to store it” (182). It is later revealed that Mother smuggles the rationed petrol to help her “Hindu and Sikh friends..run away” and for the “convoys to send kidnapped women to their families across the border” (254). Mother breaks the law and risks her safety to help other battered women and vulnerable Indians. Like Laila from *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Mother utilizes her class privilege to defend those Indians who are vulnerable and downtrodden. While Laila defends servants, Mother defends vulnerable cats, women and minorities and moves out of the role of a traditional housewife to become an activist due to the political upheaval of Partition.

While Mother’s resistance is very commendable, we must acknowledge that her display of agency when she steps in to defend the vulnerable cat, is made possible by her class privilege. Imam Din is a working class man and Mother is an upper middle-class housewife who employs him. It would not have been socially acceptable for Imam Din to fight back against Mother and hence she is able to beat him without fear of retaliation. A working class woman like Ayah or Hamida could never take such bold measures against a working class man. However, within her own class Mother is a victim of domestic abuse due to her gender disprivilege and economic dependance on her husband. Although Mother is empowered and capable of exerting agency in public spaces such as her refugee camps, she cannot demonstrate resistance against her husband’s abuse. To her credit, the text provides evidence that she tries by refusing to allow her husband to visit his mistress however she pays for her resistance with a physically battered body. Sidhwa exposes how upper-class women who demonstrated agency in the wake of Partition violence were still abused within their households by family members. Patriarchy is a structure that was

independent of Partition and women in India of all classes continued to suffer from its forces despite the evolving political movements. Hence, violence against women does not only exhibit itself in inter-communal violence as nationalist historians would have us believe. Mother advocates for others using methods of resistance that she is not able to employ herself in resisting the domestic abuse her husband subjects her to.

## **II: Subaltern Struggles: Ayah, Pappu and Hamida's experiences during Partition**

Sidhwa depicts Ayah, Lenny's nanny, as a working class Hindu character who is heavily sexualized by her admirers (including Lenny). Before Partition, Ayah resists sexual harassment from Ice-Candy Man and demonstrates agency. Partition makes her more vulnerable since Ice-Candy Man opportunistically uses her Hindu ethnicity to incite sexual violence against her. Ayah's vulnerability in all three periods of the novel, before Partition, during Partition and after Partition, shows us how the structure of patriarchy endowed men with privilege before and after Partition. However, the strategies of resistance available to Ayah regress as the political environment around the Sethi household changes. She regresses from a life of financial independence to a life of forced prostitution and commodification. Ice-Candy Man profits from her body as she becomes a dancing girl in Lahore's red light district post Partition. Sidhwa exposes the opportunism of men like Ice-Candy Man who not only abducted and raped women but then went on to commercialize their bodies.

From the start of the novel, Sidhwa makes Lenny narrate how Ayah is seen by her admirers in a very sexualized manner:

“Up and down they look at her..Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretenses to ogle her with lust...Ayah is chocolate brown and short. Everything about her is eighteen years old and round and plump...Full-blown cheeks, pouting mouth and smooth forehead

curve to form a circle with her head.... And, as if her looks were not stunning enough, she has a rolling bouncing walk that agitates the globules of her buttocks under her cheap, colorful saris and the half spheres beneath her sari-blouses.” (13)

Lenny presents Ayah as sexually enticing, almost a sum of her distinct shapes: “short”, “round”, “plump”, “curve”, “circle”, “knot”, “spheres”. We are not asked to view Ayah’s struggles and vulnerability as a working class Hindu domestic servant but instead to survey her as an object. Many times in the novel Ayah is described as “chocolate”, a physical detail that underscores her ethnic status. Sidhwa depicts Ayah as an objectified female domestic servant whose “breasts” and “buttocks” are a cause of great attention. Sidhwa shows how Ayah’s sexuality attracts even “holy Men” who “shove aside their pretences” to “ogle her with lust”. Ayah’s attractiveness makes her a victim of sexual harassment before and during Partition. Ice-Candy Man only harasses Ayah after confirming her Punjabi ethnicity: “Shanta *bibi*, you’re Punjabi aren’t you?” (38) to which Ayah “warily” (38) responds “For the most part” (38). Ice-Candy Man considers it important to confirm Ayah’s ethnicity before “his ingenious toe darts beneath her sari” (38). Ayah responds by “angrily smacking his leg and smoothing her *sari*” (38) and threatens to “get *Bajee*” (38) to “V-bomb” Ice-Candy Man into “ash” (38) because he has “no sense or shame” (38). At this point in the novel, Ayah is sexually empowered and exerts agency by defending herself against Ice-Candy Man’s harassment. Ayah’s Punjabi ethnicity makes her an easier target for harassment and through this Sidhwa shows us how gender violence intersects with issues of class, religion and ethnicity. This is not the only instance of Ice-Candy Man sexually harassing Ayah because at another point in the text Lenny notes how “Sometimes a toe snakes out and zeroes in on its target with such lightning speed that I hear of the attack only from Ayah’s startled ‘Oof’ (86).

After Partition, Ice-Candy Man capitalizes on the rhetoric of Partition to complete these acts of harassment that he had previously been unable to do. In her essay “Cracking the Nation: Gender, Minorities and Agency in Bapsi Sidhwa’s “Cracking India”, Jill Didur argues that “part of the fascination that Ayah holds for Lenny is related to her ability to exercise some agency *despite* the subordinate social position she occupies” (86) as Lenny perceives that Aya’s ‘chocolate chemistry’(86) will allow her “to negotiate her desire for sexual intimacy with a variety of men from diverse cultural backgrounds and thereby subvert patriarchal expectations for her behavior” (86). Didur argues that Lenny’s friendship with Ayah is subversive as it “challenges patriarchal, racial and class conventions” and allows Lenny to be inspired by Ayah to “cultivate” her “self” by learning from Ayah through crossing “carefully marked boundaries of race and class” (85) on how to manipulate her sexuality. To argue that Lenny, an upper class Parsee girl, learns from Ayah’s sexual agency is problematic. Instead, I read Sidhwa’s presentation of Ayah and Lenny’s relationship as one that exposes how working-class women like Ayah were subjected to uninvited male attention. While Lenny benefits from this friendship by learning how to resist Cousin’s overtures, Ayah is punished for her supposed sexual subversion due to their different social locations. This comparison further shows how Ayah is disadvantaged while Lenny is privileged and this affects the violence they are forced to navigate. When Ice-Candy Man asks Ayah why she doesn’t wear “Punjabi clothes” (38) such as “shalwar kamizes” (38), Ayah responds that working class women who wear Punjabi clothes get “half the salary of the Goan ayahs who wear saris” (38). Sidhwa shows us how Ayah was aware of her ethnic disadvantage and hid her Punjabi ethnicity using her clothes for a higher salary and exerts agency by talking back to male servants who try to abuse her. In comparison, Hamida is conciliatory of the patriarchal forces that influence her life.



Before Partition, Ayah has admirers from different religious backgrounds who converse with one another about Indian politics and Partition riots. In a scene in the novel, multiple working-class male characters, the butcher, Ice-Candy Man, Masseur, Sher Singh and the gardener, discuss the politics of Partition with references to the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities. Sidhwa shows us how Ayah is excluded from this heated political debate where the working class men are arguing with one another to defend their religious communities. Although Ayah is an outsider in this political conversation due to her female gender, Sidhwa illustrates how she mediates the communal tensions in Masseur and Ice-Candy Man's argument. Ice-Candy Man incites Hindu-Muslim tensions and verbally attacks Masseur: "With all due respect, malijee.. But aren't you Hindus expert at just this kind of thing? Twisting tails behind the scene..and getting someone else to slaughter your goats?"(99). Ice-Candy Man verbally attacks Masseur but his issues with Masseur run deeper than Hindu-Muslim tensions. Ice-Candy Man attacks Masseur because he is jealous of how Ayah favors Masseur. Again, Ice-Candy Man uses political rhetoric to carry out personal agendas. Ayah senses the tension and mediates the argument by interjecting and astutely bringing the British Raj into the conversation: "What's the new Lat Sahib like? This Mountbatten Sahib"(99). Through this she reminds the crowd of their common enemy and momentarily dispels communal tensions. However, Ice-Candy Man makes a lewd comment about Mountbatten's wife and takes the conversation back to communal politics by talking about how the Sikhs "fell right into the Hindus' trap" (100). Ayah again senses discomfort and mediates the conversation. She "stands up, smoothing the pleats in her limp cotton sari. 'If all you talk of is nothing of is nothing but this Hindu-Muslim business, I'll stop coming to the park' (101). Ice-Candy Man responds: "It's just a discussion among friends..Such talk helps clear the air..but for your sake, we won't bring it up again" (101). Ayah manipulates her exclusion from this conversation to cite her

discomfort as the reason behind her departure. Since Ice-Candy Man, Masseur and the Butcher are all sexually attracted her, they comply with her wishes and stop arguing.

When Partition does happen and Hindu-Muslim tensions peak in Punjab, Ice-Candy Man leads a Muslim mob that arrives at the Sethi household to abduct Ayah. When the mob arrives, Lenny narrates how the herd-like crowd “drag(s) Ayah out” (195):

“They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet - they want to move backwards - are forced forwards instead. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like the dead child’s screamless 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 under her arm” (195).

The only strategy Mrs Sethi and Ayah could orchestrate together to protect her was to trick the mob into believing that Ayah was not home and had gone to Amritsar. However, even this attempt fails as Lenny gives them away. Sidhwa uses similar strategies to present both Ayah’s defencelessness in this moment and the stray cat’s defencelessness when it is tortured by Imam Din (as discussed in the previous section). Ayah is cornered and “forced forward” (195) similar to how the cat is “trapped in the screen door” (236). Both Ayah and the cat’s suffering are surveyed by a “swarm” (194) of men and a “large crowd” (236). Ayah and the cat’s response to their assaults are also very similar. Ayah’s “lips are drawn away from her teeth” (195) and the “resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth” (195). Similarly the cat is “frantically twisting” with its “teeth bared” (195). The similarity between the assault on Ayah and the cat shows us how some of the working-class men around Ayah enjoyed the torture of vulnerable bodies, be they women or animals.

In her essay “Honorable Resolutions: Gendered Violence, Ethnicity and the Nation”, Kavita Daiya argues that Sidhwa does not provide a voice to the violated Ayah when she is abducted. Daiya argues that instead Sidhwa “dramatizes her abduction as a visual spectacle whose terror (for the reader) makes Ayah unable even to scream”. I want to build upon Daiya to point out that Sidhwa’s strategies in presenting Ayah’s abduction have certain weaknesses. Sidhwa does not take us into the interiority of Ayah’s struggle and chooses to focus on Ayah’s physical debasement. The passage represents another of the text’s fixations with Ayah’s physical appeal and horrifying image of her mouth opening like a “dead child’s screamless mouth”. Her “screamless mouth” draws attention to Ayah’s lack of narrative agency as we never hear her scream in the text. Instead, we are asked to survey her as a sum of her physical parts “her breasts strain” (195).

Sidhwa also chooses to present Ayah’s abduction from Lenny’s perspective which limits how much the narrative can convey Ayah’s thoughts in the moment since Lenny is a child who does not fully understand what is going on. Sidhwa’s use of a child narrator results in self-imposed limitations that disallow Ayah’s own perspective not only in this scene but throughout the novel. We never hear how Ayah felt about the uninvited attention of her male admirers before the Partition riots even began. Perhaps, Sidhwa does not provide Ayah a voice out of authorial concern for “delicacy and sexual prudery” that critic Rajeswari Rajan identifies as a strategy used by writers when writing about sexual violence (Rajan, 74). This concern for “delicacy”, that Rajan points out, made topics of rape and sexual violence tabooed as they did not conform to norms of “respectable” literature.

Sidhwa always presents Ayah as a sexualized object whom Lenny always sees as welcoming and manipulating her male admirers and Sidhwa never humanizes her by taking us into her perspective or interior struggles. Sidhwa later breaks the narrative for Rana to tell Lenny his

story and makes me question why she does not break Lenny's narrative to empower Ayah with a similar voice. Perhaps, this is because Sidhwa cannot imagine the subaltern's thoughts about her sexual violation and so she shows us the subaltern's physical responses from the perspective of another character's observations. Yashpal uses different strategies of representation in his Partition epic *Jhootasach* or *This is Not that Dawn*. In his work, Tara is a working class Hindu woman who, like Ayah, is raped by a Muslim man during Partition riots. However, Yashpal depicts the scene from Tara's perspective and shows her resistance: "Tara tried to free her arm..she fought back as hard as she could..she had still not given in and continued to resist" (360).

In her influential work *A Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry writes that: "what is literally at stake in the body in pain is the making and unmaking of the world" (23). Scarry argues that the experience of pain is so anterior to language that language cannot adequately describe it. A person exerts agency if they have felt the pain and can describe it after the event of pain has finished. This is because they can now marshal the language to speak about the pain that they suffered and have now overcome since they can communicate about it using language as "the act of verbally expressing pain is a necessary prelude to the collective task of diminishing pain" (9). Hence, Sidhwa and Yashpal provide different strategies of agency and negotiation to Ayah and Tara after they have suffered the pain of sexual trauma. Sidhwa does not give Ayah an opportunity to tell her story due to the limitations of the narrative which uses a child narrator. Sidhwa never allows Ayah to exert agency and marshal language to describe her pain. On the other hand, Yashpal does provide Tara the agency to marshal language to tell her pain and she turns her life around after her harrowing experience during Partition. She exerts agency by using her "spoiled" status to not return to her working-class, conservative, patriarchal family and instead moves to New Delhi and starts a successful career in journalism which allows to become financially independent.

While this is a weakness in Sidhwa's representation of Ayah, we must acknowledge that Sidhwa's work has strengths. Through Ayah's experience, Sidhwa draws attention to class politics and their intersection with gender violence during Partition. I will now examine how Sidhwa presents Ayah in this passage. She does not provide us with any dialogue or report of what Ayah says but does she provide Ayah any other strategies of resistance or negotiation? The passage of Ayah's abduction ends with a focus on Ayah's face:

The last thing I noticed was Ayah, her mouth slack and piteously gaping, her hair disheveled flying into her kidnappers' faces, staring at us as if she wanted to leave behind her wide opened and terrified eyes.

Sidhwa's voice switches from passive to active in this description of Ayah and grants more agency to Ayah as Lenny's observation continues. At first, Ayah's lips are "*drawn away*" but then her "*breasts strain*", "*her disheveled hair fl(ies) into her kidnappers*" and then she "*stare(s) at us as if she wanted to leave behind her wide opened and terrified eyes*". Ayah resists by "*stretching taut*" (195) as "*a sleeve tears under her arm*" and although she is previously described as "*short*", "*four men*" are required to subdue her which shows us how hard she resists. Ayah's Hindu ethnicity, working class status and lack of patriarchal family protection makes her vulnerable to rape. Ayah works as a nanny potentially due to financial concerns which does not allow her to move to a new location for concerns of safety and so there is a strong financial reason for her predicament. Ayah also works at the Sethi household because she feels safe with the Parsis and thinks of their home as her home, and her eventual removal from this space back to her original home (after her abduction), is sad because it reflects the lack of choice women had post-Partition regarding their fates. At the novel's outset, Ayah is capable of manipulating her sexuality to rule over a circle of religiously-diverse suitors. Even as Sidhwa celebrates this sexuality, she implies, through Ayah's fate and through that of the other women in the novel, that sexual violence is a pervasive presence in these women's lives. It is precisely the pervasiveness and habitual

acceptance of sexual violence that eventually leads to the proliferation of violent acts enacted on women's bodies as "the turbulence of 1946–47 re-labels or re-calibrates rape and other acts of domestic violence against women as acts of "communal" aggression" (Mitra, 26).

In her essay, "Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*", Ambreen Hai examines the problem of socioeconomic class in how Sidhwa represents women. To examine different women's responses to Partition in *Cracking India*, we must pay attention to how Sidhwa not only provides depictions of women characters across different classes but also provides us with multiple female characters who reside within the same class. This multiplicity of characters provides us with opportunities to make comparisons between them and understand how there were multiple factors of oppression including but not limited to Partition violence. These factors influence different characters to different degrees. Hence, there was not one monolithic experience of Partition for Indian women and there was not one homogenous experience of Partition for working-class Indian women. Hamida and Papoo are also working class characters who provide points of comparison to Ayah in *Cracking India*. Papoo is a working class character like Ayah but is a *Dalit* and hence belongs to a lower Hindu caste than Ayah which causes her to be even more disprivileged than Ayah. She is "broken" when her family marries her off to a much older man. Papoo initially resists, "enact[ing] tempestuous tantrums of protestation," but is eventually restored to a "precarious semblance of docility" (197). When Lenny arrives at the "celebration," she finds the young bride lying in a "crumpled heap of scarlet and gold clothes" (197) and when Lenny tries to wake her up, she appears to be drunk. Later, Muccho shakes her awake, calling her "ufeemi" [an opium-addict], and Lenny realizes that Papoo "has in fact been drugged" (200). She is married off to a dwarf, "a dark, middle-aged man with a pockmark-pitted face". Lenny is left "imagining the shock, and the grotesque possibilities awaiting Papoo" (199).

The story of Papoo's coercion into marriage accurately reflects the misfortunes of millions of sub-continental girls routinely married off before the legal age of consent. It also draws attention to how Indian society used methods such as child marriage to enable violence against women. Pappo's fate and the sexual violence she will face is independent of the nationalistic politics of Partition and hence Sidhwa exposes what a deeply patriarchal society Lenny resides in which legitimizes underage marriage and where the primary enabler of a child's underage marriage is her own mother.

Through Hamida, Sidhwa depicts another working class character who, unlike Ayah and Mother, dangerously accommodates to the patriarchal structure that surrounds her. Her reaction to her rape and forced marriage is very different to Ayah's as she tells Lenny that "Hai" her "fate" (226) is to be a "fallen woman". Sidhwa shows us how Ayah negotiates her future in comparison to Hamida who sorrowfully accommodates to her circumstances. When Lenny suggests to Hamida that she could go see her children "secretly" (233), Hamida responds "they're better off as they are..If there father gets to know I've met them he will only get angry" (233). To this Lenny comments "I don't like your husband" (234) and Hamida responds : "He's a good man," hiding her face bashfully in her *chuddar*, It's my kismet that's no good..we are *khut-patli*, puppets, in the hands of fate" (234). Hamida apologizes for and justifies her husband's patriarchal behavior and has internalized her second-class status. Through Sidhwa's depictions of Hamida and Muccho (Pappu's mother), we see that working class Indian women also upheld the patriarchy and enabled violence against other women. In addition, women like Mother and Hamida also face intra-familial oppression from their own husbands.

However, if we now turn to examine Ayah's decision at the end of the novel, we can see how she negotiates her circumstances and exerts a limited form of agency. Ayah has two options,

to stay with Ice-Candy Man and remain married to him or to return to Amritsar to her family. Ayah chooses to leave Ice-Candy Man to return to her own family and in doing so exercises her own choice and manages to escape her rapist. She tells Godmother that she will “not live with him” (273) because she “cannot forget what happened” (273). When Godmother inquires as to what she will do if her family does not take her back, Ayah responds “whether they want me or not, I will go” (274). Thus, Sidhwa shows us how even within her limited options, Ayah resists by choosing the option that would be more defiant of her rapist and does not conform to subcontinental traditions of never leaving one’s husband after marriage. This is a pitiful form of justice but must be acknowledged as Ayah’s resistance in the face of very constraining possibilities. She makes her own decision about her future and this allows her to shift power from Ice-Candy Man to herself.

### **III Godmother: Privileged Feminism by Upper Class Characters during Partition**

An analysis of Sidhwa’s presentation of women characters during Partition in *Cracking India* would not be complete without a discussion of Lenny’s Godmother who is a well-respected elder and an important part of Lenny’s life: “The intensity of her tenderness and the concentration of her attention are narcotic” (17) to Lenny. Lenny’s physical description of Godmother is completely desexualized: “She wears only white khaddar saris and white khaddar blouses beneath which is her coarse bandage-tight bodice. In all the years, I never saw the natural shape of her breasts”(13). The stark difference between Sidhwa’s representation of the domestic servant and the upper-class Godmother’s clothing choices is telling: Ayah is the playful servant while Godmother is the respectable elder. Godmother is dignified and modest whereas Ayah’s sartorial choices are “colorful” and “cheap”.



Godmother plays an important role in the novel as she leads Ayah's rescue from *Hira Mandi* in Lahore's red light district where Ayah now lives with Ice-Candy Man. Godmother rebukes Ice-Candy Man for his actions and helps Ayah escape to a refugee camp. Although Godmother rescues Ayah, Sidhwa shows us how Godmother is safe from the sexual violence and carnage that accompanies Partition as a result of her upper-class status and Parsi ethnicity. Godmother utilizes her privilege to exert feminist agency but Sidhwa shows us how her language still conforms to patriarchal ideology. When Godmother reprimands Ice-Candy Man and comforts Ayah, her comments demonstrate how she has internalized disturbing patriarchal traditions: "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.... You have permitted your wife to be disgraced! Destroyed her modesty! Lived off her womanhood!" (260) She questions Ice-Candy Man's masculinity and raises issues about women's "honor" and how he has "disgraced" his wife. Sidhwa depicts Godmother as a respectable community figure and then shows how she believes that women are a man's honor and hence legitimizes the patriarchal forces that spurred the gendered violence of Partition. were. Ayah can either stay married to Ice-Candy Man or return home to her family in Amritsar. However, we must not forget that it is Godmother's class and age that places her above Ice-Candy Man in the social hierarchy and makes it possible for her to reprimand him just as how Mother used her privilege to reprimand Imam Din. Ayah and Hamida are not accorded the same class privilege to speak back to men of their class but Ayah still commendably spurns sexual advances from her admirers before her abduction. Godmother could have never reprimanded a man of her own class and ethnicity, accused of the same crime, in a similar manner.

She also encourages Ayah to stay married to Ice-Candy Man and forget the injustices meted out to her: "What's happened has happened..But you are married to him now... You must make

the best of things. That was fated, daughter. It can't be undone. But it can be forgiven.. Worse things are forgiven" (273). Sidhwa exposes the patriarchal beliefs that existed even within the affluent sections of society. Godmother believes that it is acceptable for Ayah to conform to a life married to her rapist because the past cannot be "undone". There is no suggestion of Ayah getting any semblance of justice. Godmother counsels Ayah about her limited options and through her activism, Sidhwa exposes how dismal the futures of most abducted women

After her abduction, Ayah is never extended an invitation to return to the Sethi household as Lenny's nanny after her rescue by Godmother raising a very important concern of how Sidhwa chose not to provide this third option for Ayah. This shows how Lahore is different post-Partition and the Sethi family does not have the power to disregard the religious nationalism that has gripped the subcontinent. Sidhwa shows how Godmother only envisions Ayah's life in terms of roles that are approved by modes of male power and hence Ayah returns home at the end of the novel. Jill Didur describes the recovery operation which returned abducted women to their families as one where "the agency of 'abducted' women had to be elided and their identities (re)constituted in the domestic sphere" (66). Didur points out how under the laws of the new states of India and Pakistan, abducted women were treated as commodities who had to be returned to their patriarchal families. Didur terms these patriarchal families the "nest of the modern (male) citizen-subject" (44). The new states did not pay any attention to the individual choice of these abducted women. Sidhwa makes Ayah return home to her birth family after her rescue from Ice-Candy Man at the end of *Cracking India*. This, albeit a much better future than staying married to Ice-Candy Man, it is still questionable as Sidhwa shows us how Godmother, the mediator, provides only two patriarchal solutions for Ayah's future. She does not imagine Ayah's life after her rape as one independent of India's patriarchal structure.

**Conclusion:**

Sidhwa recreates the decolonization of the Indian subcontinent and the resulting violence that ensued through Partition by showing us how privileged upper class women (like Godmother) respond to the volatility of their political environment by demonstrating acts of feminist agency. Sidhwa also exposes how other women were not able to demonstrate this form of agency due to their ethnicity and working class status which along with their female gender puts them at a double disadvantage and relegates them to roles of accommodation and limited negotiation. This hierarchy influences how Partition is experienced differently from different perspectives. In *Cracking India*, Sidhwa depicts women characters positioned in different social locations, some of whom are violated as a result of Partition violence while others who are violated independent of Partition due to other patriarchal forces such as domestic violence. Sidhwa's distinction between these different forms of violence is important as it helps us recognize that the patriarchy existed before, during and after Partition and was the primary structural cause of violence against women in many different forms. Gyanendra Pandey writes in his book *Remembering Partition* that events like the Partition provide single stories to multiple individual and do not pay attention to the complicated nuances of an individual's circumstances. They homogenize multiple different identities into one national community since "without these moves..the 'nationalizing' and 'cleansing' operations of our times would have been harder to initiate"(121). It is much easier to incite communal violence if the experiences of all women are homogenized to portray them as victims of inter-community violence while instances of intra-community violence are left ignored since they do not serve national agendas. Sidhwa humanizes these struggles and pays attention to the intersectionality between class, ethnicity and religion to unpack the 'nationalizing operations of our times' (Pandey, 121).

### Chapter 3

#### Gender & Nation: Examining Women's Responses to Partition in Saadat Hassan Manto's

##### *Mottled Dawn*

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) was an established Urdu short story writer who migrated from Bombay to Lahore during Partition. In an interview with the Hindustan Times, acclaimed historian and Manto's grand niece Ayesha Jalal said that Manto was a "monster for some people.. Because he wrote about things you are not supposed to write about..He broke a lot of taboos. This sensibility..was way ahead of its time" (Jalal, "Manto Liked to Defy Norms") . Manto's Partition narratives have been compiled in various collections and this chapter will work with the collection titled *Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition*. In the short stories, "Toba Tek Singh", "The Dutiful Daughter", "Thanda Gosht (Cold Meat)", "Khol Do (Open It)", "Mozail" and "A Girl From Delhi", Manto constructs female characters that belong to a variety of different social locations. They are dancing girls, prostitutes, refugees, home makers and rebels.

I will demonstrate how Manto uses a detached and non-committal narrative voice and a diverse range of female subjects to show us how different women responded to Partition. Manto is not partisan to any one religious community. In his short story *Sahai* he writes: "Don't say that one lakh Hindus and one lakh Muslims have died. Say that two lakh human beings have perished'(120). Manto looks beyond religious belonging and his fiction digs deeper into the logic behind the violence committed against women during the Partition. His short stories demonstrate that the sexual violence faced by Indian women during Partition was not solely caused by the

religious fervor that gripped the subcontinent in 1947. His texts suggest that the attacks against women served none of the stated nationalist ends but were instead gratuitous acts attacking *all* women. His sketches interrogate the logic behind the violence against women and suggest that the sexual horrors were embedded in deeply misogynistic cultural beliefs that were not bounded by religious identity.

This chapter will focus on the different narrative strategies Manto uses to show us the multiple ways Indian women responded to Partition. The short stories that I explore all use women's experiences to engage in critique of the Partition. In "Toba Tek Singh" and "The Dutiful Daughter", Manto imagines how marginalized Indians, such as asylum inmates and abducted women, respond to the state's forced relocation of their physical bodies based on their religion. I will examine the strategies of accommodation and negotiation Manto depicts through Sakina in "Khol Do" and an unnamed Muslim girl in "Thanda Gosht (Cold Meat)" and demonstrate how he engages in anti-nationalist critique. "Mozail" from "Mozail" is Jewish and does not belong to the Hindu, Muslim or Sikh communities Nasim Akhtar from "The Girl from Delhi" is a prostitute. Both Mozail and Nasim do not adhere to norms of middle class morality and Manto uses their "outsider" perspective to expose the horrific violence that accompanied Partition and criticize the religious nationalism that gripped the subcontinent in 1947. His stories suggest that Indian women who resided within the patriarchal, domestic setup of the Indian family were not capable of exerting a similar form of agency and adopted different methods of resistance.

#### **I. Manto's case against 'recovering' women:**

Just before sunrise, Bishan Singh, the man who stood on his legs for fifteen years, screamed and as officials from the two sides rushed towards him, he collapsed to the ground. There, behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other side, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth, which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.'

- Saadat Hasan Manto, Toba Tek Singh,  
*Mottled Dawn*

This classic parable of Partition appeared at the end of Saadat Hassan Manto's short story 'Toba Tek Singh', an extraordinary engagement with the splitting of the Indian subcontinent. Bishan Singh, a Sikh asylum inmate from the village Toba Tek Singh is informed of the post-Partition agreement between the new Indian and Pakistani governments to transfer asylum inmates across the newly constructed borders according to their religion. He is forcibly transferred along with other Hindu and Sikh inmates from an asylum in Pakistan to an asylum in India. Bishan Singh responds to his forced removal from the asylum with a futile challenge against the state's decision to transfer him. The story ends with his refusal to enter India resulting in his sudden death in a no man's land between the Indian and Pakistani borders. Bishan Singh's mental illness reflects the disorientation and perplexity of the displaced common man in post-Partition India. The forced assignment of a subject's new regional location was based wholly on their religious identity making Bishan Singh's confusion resonate with the experiences of many Indians living through the Partition.

The irony of this parable lies in how Bishan Singh's refusal of his absurd and irrational demographic displacement from his asylum becomes a sign of sanity and reason. This powerful, satirical short story explores how ordinary Indian citizens wrestled with the physical dislocation, religious nationalism and forced citizenship that accompanied Partition. In "Toba Tek Singh", Manto deploys allegory to assess the absurd territorial constructs of the two new nations that use their new state apparatus to enforce division laws that drive citizens like Bishan Singh to their death. Many postcolonial scholars and historians have written about the narrative strategies Manto uses in "Toba Tek Singh". In his book *Speaking Havoc: Social Suffering and South Asian Narratives*, Ramu Nagappan points out that "Toba Tek Singh" is an absurdist story that "smashes political notions with preposterous farce" (87) and is representative of how "nationalism glossed

over the extraordinary diversity and fragmentation” within the Muslim and Hindu communities (89). In her book *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia points out that Manto uses Bishan Singh’s death in a No Man’s Land between the two borders of India and Pakistan to represent how “in the histories of Partition that we know..the permeability of some communal boundaries, had no place..Your identity was fixed..Yet, identities do not easily fall within such boundaries. They are fluid, changing, often expedient” (Butalia, 258).

Indeed, as pointed out by Nagappan and Butalia, Manto’s allegory, irony and slapstick comedy in “Toba Tek Singh” do provide a powerful political critique. However, I read “Toba Tek Singh” as more than just an allegory of the painful division process of physical territories during Partition. Manto aims to capture the isolation felt by marginalized bodies forced to relocate by the state. The transfer of asylum inmates in “Toba Tek Singh” mirrors the Indian and Pakistani government’s decision to retrieve and exchange abducted Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women after Partition. Bishan Singh represents marginalized Indian bodies who have not reconciled with the reality of Partition and whose preferences have not been taken into account by the state when inscribing the post-Partition relocation laws.

Bishan Singh is isolated in an atmosphere of chaos that mirrors the social fabric of India. He is surrounded by Anglo-Indians, a Muslim engineer, a Muslim inmate who was a devoted volunteer of the All India Muslim League, a Hindu lawyer and a Sikh inmate who believes he is Master Tara Singh, the leader of the Sikhs. All of these inmates, with the exception of Bishan Singh, are invested in the religious nationalism that foregrounds the exchange of asylum inmates into their new countries. Bishan Singh’s predicament shares striking similarities with the predicaments of abducted women who were “retrieved” and relocated under the Women’s Recovery Operation post-Partition with no regard of their personal choice. They were surrounded

by abductors and saviors who were invested, like the inmates and officials who surround Bishan Singh, in the religious nationalism that accompanied Partition. At the end of “Toba Tek Singh”, Bishan Singh stands in a “no-man’s-land on his swollen legs like a colossus” (7). Singh negotiates and his eventual exertion of agency leads to death.

Manto creates two gaps: the figurative gap between Bishan Singh’s anti-nationalist desire to reside in Toba Tek Singh and the state’s forced transfer of him to India based on his religious identity and the physical gap between India and Pakistan where Bishan Singh dies. I read these gaps as representative of the gap between some Indian women who did not want to relocate across the new borders and the official state actors who legislated that these women be reclaimed under national “Recovery” laws. Bishan Singh’s problems of dislocation, nationality and citizenship were also faced by Indian Women who were forcibly exchanged across the borders based on the state’s decision of where they belonged and not their own. I am not criticizing the state’s decision to retrieve abducted women who wanted to be retrieved. I want to draw attention to how Manto’s character Bishan Singh could mediate our understanding of the predicaments of women who resided somewhere post-Partition and did not want to face further physical displacement. The narrative in “Toba Tek Singh” suggests that state laws should have been nuanced to take into account individual consideration. This concern has historical significance. Gyanendra Pandey writes in his book *Remembering Partition*, that the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act, allowed a police officer to enter any place “without warrant and search the place and take into custody any person found therein who, in his opinion, is an abducted person” (Pandey, 166). Pandey notes that “many abducted women were hesitant about returning to their original families and countries - for fear of ostracism; because they felt they had been ‘soiled’; because they could not bear the thought of being uprooted yet again and exposed to new levels of poverty and



uncertainty.. The governments of the two dominions decided, however, that in such cases ‘they should be forcibly evacuated’ (Pandey, 167).

In another of Manto’s short stories “The Dutiful Daughter”, Manto provides a tragic account of an old Muslim woman who regularly wanders the streets of Amritsar (in the new state of India) looking for her Muslim daughter who was abducted during the Partition riots. This old mother refuses to migrate to Pakistan without her daughter even though many Pakistani rescue workers posted in Amritsar attempt to convince her to do so. A rescue worker is moved to “tears” by how “broken” she looks and decides to “make one last effort to take her to Pakistan” (76). As he crosses the street to convince the old woman to migrate to Pakistan with him he notices a couple:

‘The woman’s face was partly covered by her white chaddar. The man was young and handsome - a Sikh. As they went past the old woman, the man suddenly stopped. He even fell back a step or two. Nervously, he caught hold of the woman’s hand..”Your mother,” he said to her. The girl looked up, but only for a second. Then, covering her face with her chaddar, she grabbed her companion’s arm and said, “Let’s get away from here.” (77)

The mother’s trauma at losing her daughter highlights the tragic human suffering caused by Partition violence that tore families apart. However, what struck me was the daughter’s decision to not acknowledge her mother. Instead, she adopts a rushed and frantic tone that communicates her desire to not reunite with her mother and return to her previous Muslim home. The irony of this short story is apparent in the daughter’s desire to get away from her grieving mother who toils to be reunited with her; the daughter is hardly “dutiful”. Perhaps, Manto wants to challenge the reader to consider how some abducted women did not want to return to their original homes. The Women’s Recovery Operation paid little attention to the personal choice of abducted women

before again uprooting them across the new borders much like the state takes little note of the personal choice of asylum inmates in 'Toba Tek Singh'.

In *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia writes about how under The Abducted Persons Recovery and Restoration Ordinance "no matter what the woman said, how much she protested ..the woman had little choice in the matter..Many women protested. They refused to go back" (Butalia, 115-7). Butalia notes:

" The women had to be brought back, they had to be 'purified' .. and they had to be relocated inside their family and their community. Only then would moral order be restored and the nation made whole again and only then..would the emasculated, weakened *manhood* of the..male to be vindicated. If Partition was a loss of itself to the 'other', a metaphorical violation and rape of the body of the motherland, the recovery of women was its opposite, the regaining of the 'pure'..essential..crucial for the State's - and the community's self legitimation." (150)

Kirpal Singh records how an abducted woman protested her forced relocation saying "Why should I return? Why are you particular to take me to India? What is left in me now of religion and chastity? I have lost my husband and have now gone in for another. You want me to go to India where I have got nobody" (Singh quoted by Butalia, 117). Research done by oral historians shows how many abducted women wanted to subvert the state's agenda either out of fear of the stigma that would accompany their return to their relatives or because, as twisted as it sounds, their lives post-abduction were better off than their lives before (Butalia, 119). In her book *Azadi Ki Chaon Mein (In Freedom's Shade)*, Anis Kidwai records the the reasons behind why some abducted women did not want to be recovered:

“there were some women who had been born into poor homes and had not seen anything other than poverty..And now they had fallen into the hands of men who bought them silken salvars and net dupattas,,who took them to the cinema..Why should they leave such men and go back to covering their bodies with rags and slaving in the hot sun in the fields?..They also had another fear. The people who wanted to take them away, whether they were friend or foe” (Kidwai quoted by Butalia, 117)

Instead of using female characters in “Toba Tek Singh”, Manto uses a marginalized asylum patient who is treated as a second class citizen, to explore the trauma of physical dislocation in the absence of freedom of choice. Manto could not have openly criticized the state’s recovery policies regarding abducted women without fear of judicial persecution so he uses the farcical allegory of asylum inmates to describe the “exchange agreements” (6) which had “lists of lunatics from the two sides ..exchanged between the governments, and the dates of transfer fixed” (6). The beautiful girl in “The Dutiful Daughter” challenges this supposed reclamation of women by the state. The mother’s death at the end of “The Dutiful Daughter” symbolizes how the removal of women from the domestic unit of “family” led to their familie’s demise. I read the daughter’s refusal to reunite with her mother and her mother’s death as representative of how things cannot go back to how they were before Partition. She resists relocation and Manto uses her story to demonstrate how the new states sought to reinstate women as if they were commodities.

## **II. Manto’s criticism of patriarchy through his depiction of intra community violence and inter community violence against Indian women**

‘Khol Do’ (“Open It”) is a horrifying story of cross-border violence in which a Muslim family, Sirajuddin and his daughter Sakina, become victims of a riot on a train taking them from Amritsar, in the new India, to Lahore, in the new Pakistan. Sirajuddin and Sakina are forced apart

and the story recounts Sirajuddin's desperate efforts to be reunited with his daughter. He requests a group of Pakistani Muslim volunteers to help recover Sakina. These volunteers are described in the text as "young men armed with guns" who had a "truck" (9) and said "they brought back women and children left behind on the other side" (9). Sirajuddin describes his daughter as "fair", "very pretty", "big eyes, black hair, a mole on the left cheek" (9). The young men find Sakina "on their next trip out" and "they seemed to have scared her" (9) so "she had started running" (9) and the rescuers "finally"(9) catch up with her in a field. The use of the word "finally" indicates that Sakina resists what she perceives to be a sexual threat. However, upon being "rescued", the narrative shifts towards Sirajuddin from whose perspective the reader is told that "many days had gone by" (9) and he had "still not had any news of his daughter" (9). This is odd since Sakina has been rescued but has not yet been reunited with her father. One evening there is "sudden activity in the camp" (10) and Sirajuddin follows "the body of a young girl found unconscious near the railway tracks" (10) as she is carried to the camp hospital. Through "the mole on her left cheek" (10) he recognizes that this is his daughter. The conversation that ends the short story is a chilling and horrific representation of the sexual trauma Sakina has undergone:

"The doctor looked at the prostrate body and felt for the pulse. Then he said to the old man (Sirajuddin) pointing at the window, 'Open it' The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord that kept her shalwar tied round her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs. 'She is alive. My daughter is alive,' Sirajuddin shouted with joy. The doctor broke into a cold sweat. (10)

Sakina's response indicates that she has been repeatedly raped for many days by the Muslim men who had gone to rescue her. She misunderstands the doctor when he asks her father

to open the window and instead unconsciously responds to a man's voice saying "open it" by numbly lowering her shalwar. Her unconscious surrender to the sexual cruelty that accompanied Partition is a far cry from her previous resourceful response at the sight of the gang where she "ran" to the field to avoid them. Sakina has been betrayed by men from her own community and her trauma has disconnected her from the social relevance of language. The doctor, aware of the misunderstanding between himself, Sakina and Sirajuddin responds by breaking "into a cold sweat". Partition led to anarchy where men like Sirajuddin were disjointed from reality. He believes that the "gang" of Muslim rescuers saved Sakina. Sirajuddin's dissonance exposes how men were blithely unaware of the abuse within their own camps and rescue missions. His reaction mirrors how male subjects had bought into the rhetoric of communalism so much that it did not occur to them that Indian women were at risk from their own communities as well. The text also suggests that Sirajuddin loses Sakina because he stops to pick up her fallen *dupatta*. The *dupatta* is a loose piece of cloth worn by South Asian women that symbolizes modesty. The fallen dupatta suggests a loss of honor and violation that Sirajuddin was perhaps trying to avoid. "Sakina's dupatta had slipped to the ground and he had stopped to pick it up..He could feel a bulge in his pocket..It was Sakina's dupatta, but where was she" (9). Ironically, this misstep on Sirajuddin's part separates him from Sakina and shows us how misplaced men's priorities were in the patriarchal structure that young girls like Sakina grew up in.

"Khol Do" provides a representation of sexual violence done to women within communities that we do not find in official historical documents. To record this would betray the masculinist nationalist politics that sold the Partition agenda by claiming how women of Muslim communities were being raped and dishonored by men from Sikh and Hindu communities and vice versa. Manto is not alone in this exposure of intra-communal violence against women. The famous

Hindi writer Yashpal wrote about the commodification of women by men from their own communities in his novel *Jhootasach: This in Not that Dawn* where refugee women are kidnapped and sold in the countries they had come to seek safe haven in. Yashpal and Manto use fiction to mediate how women responded to Partition violence within their own communities. “Khol Do” performs feminist work by breaking the stereotypical narrative and pushing the reader to think beyond religious rivalries as the only reason for sexual violence against women in 1947. In *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia records intra community sexual violence through testimonies from social workers who performed rehabilitation work post-Partition. Butalia gathers testimony from Anis Kidwai who worked at two Muslim refugee camps recovering Muslim women abducted by Hindus and Sikh men: “In all of this (rescue)..the ‘good stuff’ would be shared among the police and army, the ‘second rate stuff’ would go to everyone else. And then these girls would go from one hand to another and then another”(Butalia, 119).

In his essay “The Argument of Fiction”, Ramu Nagappan points out how Manto adopts “a highly immediate” (Nagappan, 81) tone “offering a kind of journalistic realism that makes available in raw fashion, experiences of dislocation, disorientation and bodily stress” (Nagappan, 81). Manto’s work exposes intra-community violence that would never be explored in what Gyanendra Pandey terms “national histories” or “biographies of the nation state” (Pandey quoted by Nagappan, 81). Under this framework of national histories, violence against women becomes a reflection of a political process of decolonization that became ugly. In *Khol Do*, Manto takes us away from these official “national histories” and provides a story that deconstructs the “process by which the dominant culture codifies” trauma. (Tal quoted by Nagappan, 76). In my analysis, the “dominant culture” is the newly constructed state that “codifies” sexual violence against women as caused by inter-community clashes or motivated by religious nationalism. Tal notes

how a survivor's location within the "complex network of communal relations determines the reception of their testimony and the interpretive and revisionary pressures that will be brought to bear on their traumatic experience. Members of opposing interest groups will attempt to appropriate traumatic experiences while survivors will struggle to retain control of those representations" (Tal, 18). Hence, female survivors of Partition had their stories heavily censored to serve the agenda of their new governments.

Manto exposes the threat of sexual violence that Indian women faced from their own communities and the "revisionary pressures" applied by states that hushed up intra-community violence since it threatened the religious nationalism upon which the creation of a Muslim homeland was premised. Sakina's rapists betrayed the nationalistic principles of Pakistan being a Muslim homeland where all Muslim women were safe. Manto does what Pandey describes as "stepping away from these official, authoritative narratives" by providing "credence to partial, fragmentary, personal, sympathetic narratives" (79).

*Khol Do* has been celebrated as a short story that explores the "human pain of partition" (Fleming Riots and Refugees, 105) and the effects of the "violence and dislocation of its victims" (Fleming Another Lonely Voice, 80). However, Manto's work in "Khol Do" has also been criticized. Harveen Mann argues in her essay "Women in Decolonization: The National and Textual Politics of Rape in Saadat Hassan Manto and Mahasweta Devi" that Manto uses Sakina's unconscious accommodation to criticize the rhetoric of religious nationalism that premised the Partition. She points out how in some of Manto's stories, the "raped woman is written into the patriarchal national narrative" (128) not to "thematize her own suffering" (128) but to "signify the horrors of Partition" (128). Hence, she becomes a "stand-in" (128) for the "macro political rape of the "body" of India and Pakistan" (128) relies "upon representations of sexual violence against

women to forward his nation based criticism” (131). Mann argues that to represent women as only “targets of physical violence” (129) is to “deny them agency, roles of resistance and their very voices (129).

Sakina’s voicelessness throughout the story is also problematic as it makes her vulnerable be read as an allegory of Partition. By providing her a voice, Manto could have humanized her and allowed us to distinguish her from the structures of nationalism and communalism that contextualize her in the story. Mann makes an important point about how there could be an ideological problem in how women’s sexual trauma during Partition is represented and it is a weakness of Manto’s work in “Khol Do” that Sakina’s trauma could be read as a tool used by Manto to engage in anti-Partition critique.

Mann argues that Manto uses Sakina’s trauma to criticize the Partition and does not provide her with a voice which makes it impossible for her to exert agency. However, I read Manto’s representation of Sakina’s trauma as a literary representation of the response of a woman who does not have any voice or agency and is completely disempowered during Partition violence. Mann’s argument is problematic because it leaves no room for writers to show the difficulties of women who felt unable to speak. Additionally, the strength of Manto’s work in *Mottled Dawn* is that he provides us a range of women’s experiences. In many of his other short stories such as “Mozail”, women are provided with voice and agency. It is problematic if women’s experiences of sexual violence during Partition are turned into metaphors for the nation or anti-nation critique. In his essay “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the “National Allegory”, literary critic Aijaz Ahmed responds to Fredric Jameson’s argument that “all third world texts are necessarily.. Allegorical...they are to be read as what I will call national allegories” (Jameson, 69). Ahmed points out how “literary texts are produced in highly differentiated, usually over-determined



contexts of competing ideological and cultural clusters, so that any particular text of any complexity shall always have to be placed within the cluster that gives it its energy and form, before it is totalized into a universal category” (Ahmed, 23). Ahmed argues that third- world literature is not always a national allegory and Jameson’s use of the word “nation” slips towards the terms “culture” and “society” (Ahmed, 14). I apply Ahmed’s ideas to critique Mann’s argument. Mann reads Sakina’s rape as a metaphor for anti-nation critique but does not pay attention to the complicated nuances of her circumstances. Manto is trying to show us that Sakina is not raped because of Partition, she is raped because she is vulnerable. He is not trying to show how unfortunate Partition was because it led to such ugly violence against women. Instead, he wants to call attention to how such grotesque sexual violence was caused by factors much more complicated than just communalism and Partition. He criticizes patriarchal forces that allowed men to be so opportunistic and prey on any vulnerable woman,

In another of Manto’s short stories “Thanda Gosht (Colder Than Ice)”, Manto explores the sexual trauma some women faced during Partition. A Sikh rioter recounts to his mistress how he abducted a beautiful Muslim girl and assaulted her only to discover later that she had been dead for a while.

”He began to speak, very slowly, his face coated with cold sweat. ‘Kalwant jani, you can have no idea what happened to me. When they began to loot Muslims shops and houses in the city, I joined one of the gangs..There was this house I broke into..and there was one girl.. I said to myself...Ishr Sian, you gorge yourself on Kalwant Kaur everyday...how about a mouthful of this luscious fruit! I thought she had gone into a faint, so I carried her over my shoulder all the way to the canal..I decided to trump her right away..I threw the trump but, but..she was dead...I had carried a dead body... a heap of cold flesh.’” (21)

Ishr Sian commodifies both his Sikh mistress and his Muslim victim as “luscious fruits” to “gorge”. Ishr Sian uses the same vocabulary to describe a woman from his own community and a woman outside his community. Through this careful choice of images, Manto shows us how the sexual violence against women during Partition was not spurred only by religious identities as Ishr

Sian's language of consumption does not discriminate against women due to their religion. They are all fruits to be "gorged" (21). In "Thanda Gosht", Manto shows us the deeper and uglier layers of misogyny beyond the grand narrative of nation and nationalism. In her book *Pity of Partition*, Ayesha Jalal writes about how 'Colder than Ice' was not well received as Manto was charged for obscenity by the Press Advisory Board. In a story published in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, Chaudhry Muhammad Husain a self-appointed guardian of Pakistan's censorship network, criticized Manto for the dishonor that he believed "Thanda Gosht" brought to the Muslim community: "we Muslims are so dishonorable that the Sikhs did not even spare one of our dead girls"(155). Manto's writings fought against patriarchal thinking that spoke of rape victims of inter-communal riots of 1947 using sexist language of ownership, "one of our dead girls". This shows how the mentality that perpetuated the gendered violence during Partition still existed in post Partition India. Manto's feminist agenda is made obvious by how his literary work challenges the fake sensibilities of Indian men like Husain who spoke of women like property that upheld their communities "honour".

A psychoanalytic reading of "Thanda Gosht" would suggest that Ishr Sian cannot have an erection because he is so disturbed and unsettled by what he has done. He has been rendered impotent and even he cannot understand why: "Like a wrestler who is being had the better of, he employed every trick he knew to ignite the fire in his loins, but it eluded him" (20). His mistress Kalwant Kaur unsheathes his *kirpaan* (dagger) out of anger at his infidelity and plunges it in his neck: "blood sputtered out of the deep gash like water out of a fountain" (20). "Thanda Gosht" has shock value that relies immensely on the dark and horrific presentation of Ishr Sian's death. His "beard and chest" (20) are "drenched in blood" (20) and a "thin line of blood" (20) runs into his "mouth" (20). Manto uses excessive blood, sweat and shivers in this dystopian story to imagine

the horrors of Partition. He does not hush up the ugliness of the fathomless crimes men committed and shows us how Ishr Sian's crime castrates him. Manto's work in "Thanda Gosht" was denounced for its "shocking verisimilitude" (Nagappan, 122) and he was charged for "obscenity" (Nagappan, 122). Manto should write in a way that preserves the purity of the male gaze. He must not write about acts of violence against women and imagine the depraved responses of rapists because it offends the sensibilities of those who consider it "obscene". Harveen Mann also criticizes "Thanda Gosht" as misogynistic because it fails to represent individual agency of the rape victim and uses her trauma to show how ugly Partition violence was. Mann equates a woman's voicelessness to argue that Manto has not provided her agency. Mann's criticism of "Thanda Gosht" is problematic because it leaves no room for writers to show the difficulties of women who were unable to speak. It suggests that male writers or any writers cannot write about or protest the rape of women during Partition unless they give them a voice. We cannot demand that writers should provide every character with a voice because this would not allow writers to represent the experiences of women who were silenced and were unable to speak. Who will imagine the responses of women who were simply not allowed to exercise any form of agency? Manto does not ignore the struggles of women who were so disempowered that they did not have a "voice" to resist their circumstances.

Through his representation of intra-community violence and inter-community violence against women in both "Khol Do" and "Thanda Gosht", Manto exposes the opportunism of some men who preyed on all women that were vulnerable regardless of their religion or new nationality. Hence, Manto does groundbreaking work to expose the structures of patriarchy and misogyny that propelled violence against women during Partition.

### **III. The use of marginalized working-class women**

“Mozail” and “A Girl from Delhi” are powerful examples of Manto’s work in which he subverts social codes of marginalization and male domination by using female characters who reside outside the domestic, patriarchal sphere of the Indian family. In “Mozail ” and “A Girl from Delhi”, Manto’s female characters, Mozail and Nasim Akhtar, reside outside the patriarchal, domestic sphere where women were either wives, mothers or daughters in Hindu, Muslim or Sikh families. Mozail is a Jew who lives on her own and does not conform to norms of middle class morality whereas Nasim Akhtar is a prostitute. Both Mozail and Nasim do not depend on men in patriarchal families and this provides them relative freedom. Prostitutes are liminal characters since they fall “betwixt and between nearly defined categories” (Susan Niditch quoted by Susan Ackerman, 112). Prostitutes oscillate around these allowable categories for women as they are “neither an unmarried virgin, nor a non-virgin wife”, (Susan Niditch quoted by Susan Ackerman, 112) and Niditch argues that prostitutes are seen as “liminal” within their societies and “acknowledged as individual[s] not constrained by the customs and conventions of the social order” and hence are “tolerated”(Susan Niditch quoted by Susan Ackerman, 112). Nasim and Mozail are removed from the Indian domestic sphere, and their outsider status allows them to respond to Partition violence. Using counter normative methods of resistance, they jump out of buildings and kill male rioters. Manto breaks taboos through the roles he imagines for Nasim and Mozail and writes about women that most writers did not represent. Through his work he shows how women who resided on the margins, such as Mozail and Nasim, could be tougher and more resilient than women who resided within patriarchal families.

Manto shows us how his female characters who live outside the boundaries of “respectable” women have an advantage in that they are not financially or socially dependent on men for their economic or cultural status and hence can defend themselves in ways that female

characters who reside in the patriarchal, domestic order cannot. Manto uses women on the outside to show us how advantaged these liminal characters are and he provides us a lens to see how disadvantaged women on the inside are. Nasim Akhtar in *A Girl from Delhi* and Mozail from *Mozail* exert an almost farcical form of agency that allows them to transgress post-Partition society's roles for women. Alternatively, Manto depicts female characters who belong to the domestic, patriarchal sphere such as the unnamed Muslim girl in *Thanda Gosht* and Sakina in *Khol Do* as devoid of any ability to exert agency. It is almost as if Manto suggests that women who reside within the domestic order cannot exert the kind of agency Nasim and Mozail can. They are left to negotiate very dire circumstance. Ironically, in Manto's work it is the women who are not prostitutes who come to be represented as commodities exchanges, rescued and reclaimed.

In Manto's short story "*Mozail*", a working class Jewish woman who works as a salesgirl in a department store in Bombay exerts agency when she beats a Muslim mob at its own game and saves two Sikhs in the process. A Sikh man, Tarlochan, falls in love with Mozail, but she rejects him. Later, Tarlochan is engaged to a dutiful Sikh girl from his village Kirpan Kaur. Kaur's home is attacked by a Muslim mob, and Mozail saves her by giving her Jewish robe to Kaur to wear. She also convinces Tarlochan to remove his turban and calls him "Karim" (a Muslim name) in front of the rioters, so that he is mistaken to be a Muslim, and then the two can escape peacefully. The story ends with a naked Mozail being harangued by the bloodthirsty Muslim mob. She slips and falls down a flight of stairs and in her dying breath saves Tarlochan's life by telling the mob: "This is my lover. He's a bloody Muslim, but he's so crazy that I always call him a Sikh" (70) Mozail refuses to cover up her naked body as Tarlochan tries to hide it with his turban. She says: 'Take away this rag of your religion. I don't need it.' (71) This kind of imagination and representation of working class women's roles in the Partition (by providing them a strong voice

and positioning them outside domestic domains) places them in positions of war like strategists that are far from patriarchal and gendered modes of agency other writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa provide to their heroines. Mozail is ambitious, intelligent and breaks the virtuous Indian housewife stereotype. This enables her to save another Indian woman from exploitation and abuse. She fights against the constraints of society and Urdu literature critic Fahmida Riaz accurately assesses Mozails character as:

“Mozail in this story is a free spirit..she is intelligent, far-sighted, decision-maker for her own life, strong of heart and mind and not at all sentimental - far more sensible and practical than most of the men around her. In Indian parlance, she is Shakti incarnate, as she rises to save two lives. She can clearly see the dreadful hoax religion was turned into in these ghastly days of communal rioting and rejects it in her last breath.”(80)

Manto constructs Mozail as someone empowered by her sexualization whereas Kirpal Kaur, Tarlochan's Sikh wife who is “sister of the rough and ruddy Khingar Singh” is described as “soft, delicate and winnowy”. We are told that she has “grown up in the village” but does not have “that hard, tough masculine quality that is common to average Sikh village girls, who have to do hard, physical work”. She has “delicate features” and “her breasts were small, still in need of a few more layers of creamy fat”, is “fairer than most Sikh girls are” and her “body” is as “smooth” as “printed linen” and she is “very shy” (60). Manto is fixated with Kirpal Kaur's pubescent, virginal body and his description reads as a pornographic description of a young potentially underage girl with small breasts. Kirpal Kaur is portrayed as vulnerable and in need of protection. On the other hand, Mozail is described as “quite mad” and “dishevelled” looking. She wears “thick. Unevenly laid lipstick that sat on her lips like congealed blood”. She has “big breasts” and looks “thick” and her “lips” look like “thick beefsteaks” (10) When she sees Tarlochan for the first time she throws her wooden sandals at him and before he can recover, “Mozail was over him, pinning him down. Her trussed up dress revealed two bare, strong legs which had him in a scissor like grip”. (10) she makes Tarlochan take her to the beach, cinema, dinner but “whenever he tried to go beyond hands

and lips she would tell him to lay off” and “all his resolve would get tangled” (61). Manto’s writing suggests that women in the domestic sphere, like Kirpal Kaur, were fragile, helpless and unable to defend themselves. Mozail manipulates her position as a woman who does not conform to “respectable” norms of behavior to distract the rioters from attacking Tarlochan and Kirpal by walking in front of them stark naked. Tarlochan asks her to “put on some clothes” (68) to which she responds “I’m fine the way I am” (68). When a policeman stops Mozail and Tarlochan, she “winks” at him, “offers him, a cigarette” and flirts with him so that he lets them break the curfew that has been imposed on the streets. Manto depicts women who did not conform to norms of middle class morality as a writing strategy to show the limitations on women in society - a powerful woman has to reside outside the domestic sphere.

‘A Girl from Delhi’ features Nasim Akhtar, a Muslim courtesan, who is very fearful of the religious rioting that targets Muslims on the streets of Delhi. Nasim jumps on the “adjoining roof” to escape a mob that comes to abduct her (97). She takes a train and ends up at a Muslim refugee camp in Pakistan where the Ustadh sells her jewellery and rents a new *kotha* in Hira Mandi, Lahore’s famous red-light district. He wants to invest in musical instruments to restart Nasim Akhtar’s career she says:

“No, Khan sahib, my heart is not in that sort of thing anymore. I don’t even want to live in this neighbourhood. Please find me a small place in some nice, normal locality. Delhi is behind me. That life for me is finished. I just want to live like a normal woman.” (98)

Nasim moves to a normal “respectable” locality, becomes religious and wants to marry a man and conform to the norms of middle class morality. An old woman named Jannatey becomes her close friend but Nasim does not know that Jannatey is a procuress, enticing young girls and then selling them into prostitution. Jannatey sets up Nasim’s marriage but the day after her wedding Nasim overhears her husband “haggling over her price” (100) with two other courtesans from Hira Mandi while Jannatey mediates the bargain. Nasim packs her meagre belongings and escapes to

the *kotha* where Ustadh Achhan Khan was employed. Manto shows how Nasim tries to enter the domestic, patriarchal sphere of marriage and family but finds that she is safer living in the subcontinent's red light district. In both pre-Partition India and post-Partition Pakistan, Nasim is preyed upon due to her beauty making the reader interrogate whether the new nations were actually safe havens for the women who escaped to them? In both "Mozail" and "A Girl from Delhi", Manto imagines working-class female characters who provide counter-narratives that stand in tension to official narratives that would never record the continued abuse of women, like Nasim and Sakina, in their new and 'safe' nations. This enables Manto's literary work to make a disturbing criticism of the agenda of new governments that was only concerned with the rapes of the female citizenry as long as it incited its male citizens to support their nationalist agenda. So for instance, Pakistani and Indian governments highlighted the rapes carried out before Partition by members of the opposite communities but ignored the same commodification and abuse of women that occurred in intra-community gendered violence that occurs in their own new nations post-Partition. In doing so, Manto exposes the structures of patriarchy and misogyny that propelled Partition violence against women. Mozail and Nasim have the freedom to exert agency because they have no "respectable" place in society and are not burdened by the oppressive gender roles enforced in traditional, patriarchal families.

**Conclusion:** In his work "Mottled Dawn", Saadat Hassan Manto provides us a range of different women characters to show us how different women experienced Partition differently. He examines the Recovery Operation and its problematic effect on some abducted women in his short stories "Toba Tek Singh" and "The Assignment". In his short stories "Khol Do" and "Thanda Gosht", he imagines the experiences of women who were completely disempowered when they faced sexual violence during Partition. He raises the controversial topic of intra-community violence against



women that we do not find in official historical documents and exposes how patriarchal structures endowed men with privilege that allowed them to prey on all vulnerable women regardless of their religion. He examines the limitations placed on women who abide by norms of middle class morality by creating literary representations of women who reside outside the norms of what is considered “respectable”. Women who reside on the outside are safer and capable of exerting more agency than women who lie on the inside in Manto’s short stories “Mozail” and “The Girl from Delhi”. Hence, Manto provides us a different literary representations of how different Indian women experienced Partition in his short story collection “Mottled Dawn”.

**Conclusion:**

*Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *Cracking India* and *Mottled Dawn* provide literary representations of women's responses to the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent. All three texts provide female characters that negotiate the different oppressions they face. In *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Laila negotiates her restricted physical movement when she grows up under *purdah* in the enclosed space of the *zenana*. She utilizes her Western education and exposure to India's political movements to learn how to challenge gender expectations and oppressive customs enforced by her conservative *taluqdari* family. Laila undermines the gender roles some family members try to impose on her and chooses to marry out of love instead of opting for a traditional arranged marriage. Her family disapproves of her husband Ameer since he belongs to a lower socioeconomic class and they disown Laila. Laila exerts agency as she chooses to be poor and free over being rich and oppressed.

In *Cracking India*, Ayah negotiates the patriarchal forces that manifest themselves in her workplace. She protects herself from sexual harassment and mediates arguments about communalism between her many male admirers. After she is abducted by the Muslim mob, she negotiates between her limited choices and decides to return home to her family in Amritsar and leave her husband, Ice-Candy Man, who had abducted and raped her. Ayah does this despite Godmother's efforts to convince her to remain married and forget what happened in the past. Ayah rejects the advice of Godmother, who belongs to a higher socio-economic class than her and exerts agency when she leaves Ice-Candy Man. Mother is a victim of domestic abuse but negotiates the

limitations placed upon her in a patriarchal family to manipulate Father into giving her money. Mother also performs rehabilitation work during Partition and uses her privilege to help abducted women cross the newly constructed borders safely.

In *Mottled Dawn*, Manto provides a wide range of female characters. The Muslim “daughter” from “The Dutiful Daughter” resists the National Recovery Operation and does not return to Pakistan despite her mother’s desperate search for her. Both Mozail from the short story “Mozail” and Nasim Akhtar from the short story “A Girl From Delhi” exert agency as they kill male rioters and jump out of buildings. Manto shows us how women who resided outside the traditional family structure were more capable of exerting agency and defending themselves. Manto also provides literary representations of women who are completely disempowered and left to accommodate horrific circumstances in “Khol Do” and “Thanda Gosht”.

In my project, negotiation is an important tool used to examine how writers destabilize the binary of accommodation and resistance in their imagination of women’s responses to Partition. Hosain, Sidhwa and Manto use different methods to depict female resistance, negotiation and accommodation during the political upheaval of Partition. These writers provide their female characters with different methods to push back against oppression. A comparison of their strategies provides a multi-faceted critique of the competing forces that influenced women’s responses to Partition. Class structures, physical location, patriarchal ideology and ethnic identity all influenced the responses women had to Partition. For instance, Laila is able to break free from her oppressive *taluqdari* family because she has the privilege of a Western education and a college education. She has access to political debates about the Independence Movement and she is protected from Partition riots because she lives in Lucknow which was much safer than Punjab or Bengal. Ayah, unlike Laila, does not belong to an upper-class background and hence does not have the same

privileges that Laila does. Ayah is more susceptible to sexual violence during Partition due to her Punjabi ethnicity and her physical location in Punjab where Partition violence was highly escalated. Hence, Laila's eventual escape from her family due to her love marriage in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is victorious while Ayah's last presentation in a refugee camp in *Cracking India* is painful. Unlike both Laila and Mother, Ayah is a working-class character who has to give up the protection of a patriarchal family to earn her living. This also makes her more vulnerable to sexual violence than Mother and Laila. Manto's characters are all working-class but experience Partition differently than Ayah.

Through his depiction of Sakina in "Khol Do" and the nameless girl in "Thanda Gosht", Manto provides literary representations of women who were silenced and were unable to speak as a result of the violence they endured during Partition. Manto also depicts women such as Mozail and Nasim Akhtar who do not follow norms of middle class morality and have no "respectable" place in society. Manto shows us how Mozail and Nasim exercise more freedom in their choices because they do not face familial oppression due to traditional roles in patriarchal families. Hence, working class women who reside outside the norms of middle class morality such as Mozail and Nasim are more capable of exerting agency than those working class women who do adhere to norms of propriety such as Sakina and Ayah. Ayah does not have the protection of a patriarchal family in *Cracking India* and so she occupies a less traditional role before Partition than Sakina from "Khol Do" in *Mottled Dawn*. Interestingly, Sidhwa allows Ayah to resist and leave her rapist husband whereas Manto does not allow Sakina to negotiate her circumstances. Sakina occupies a more traditional role as the daughter in a patriarchal Muslim family and after facing sexual trauma during Partition, she only accommodates to gender violence and, unlike Ayah, does not exert any agency.

Laila, Aunt Abida, Mother, Ayah, Sakina, Mozail and Nasim's struggles suggest multiple ways of thinking about how women responded to Partition. Many of these female characters engage in different kinds of counter normative behaviors that are influenced by the oppression they face. The commonality between these different literary representations is that patriarchy was the system that caused their oppression however they were all oppressed in different ways during Partition. For Laila and Aunt Abida, who are upper-class and removed from Partition riots due to their physical location in Lucknow, patriarchal forces manifest themselves through oppressive traditions that led to emotional abuse. For Mother, who is protected from communal mobs due to her Parsi ethnicity, patriarchal forces manifest themselves in the form of domestic abuse. For Ayah, patriarchal forces make her vulnerable to inter-community sexual violence during a communal riot. For Sakina, patriarchal forces make her vulnerable to intra-community sexual violence near a refugee camp in the new state where she was expected to be "safe". Meanwhile, Mozail and Nasim are safer because they do not occupy "respectable" places in society and are not held back by traditional roles that make them dependent on men. In these novels, it is the *intersection* of class, ethnicity, education, religion, economic occupation, economic dependence and physical location that influences the strategies of resistance and negotiation *available* to women. Despite the different contexts of these women, patriarchal forces influence each of their lives as male characters use the privilege that patriarchy endows them to attack any woman who is vulnerable. The violence they commit is *independent* of their political beliefs which shows us how they opportunistically used Partition to prey on women.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Ackerman, Susan. *When Heroes Love: The Ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David*. Columbia University Press, 2012. Print

Ahmad, Aijaz. "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"". *Social Text* 17 (1987): 3–25. JSTOR. Web.

Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Durham: Duke UP, 2000. Print.

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-31. Web

Chand, Sarvar V. Sherry. Manto's "Open It": Engendering Partition Narratives. *Economic Political Weekly* 41.4 28 Jan 2006: 3 -10

Chatterjee, Partha. "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*. Eds. KumKum S

Daiya, Kavita. "Honorable Resolutions": Gendered Violence, Ethnicity and the Nation. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 27.2 (2002): 219–247. Web...

Dalrymple, William. "The Great Divide". *The New Yorker*. 29 June 2015. Web. November 2015

Didur, Jill. "A Heart Divided: Education, Romance, and the Domestic Sphere in Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column". *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory*. University of Toronto Press, 2006. 94–124. Web.

Didur, Jill. "Cracking the Nation: Gender, Minorities and Agency in Bapsi Sidhwa's "Cracking India". *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory*. University of Toronto Press, 2006. 67–93. Web.

Elmer, Jonathan. *On Lingering and Being Last: race and sovereignty in the New World*, New York : Fordham University Press, 2008. Print.

Flemming, Leslie. "Riots and Refugees: The Post- Partition Stories of Saadat Hassan Manto". *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 10/1/1977, Vol. 13, Issue 1/4, p. 99-109 JSTOR. Web

Flemming, Leslie. *Another Lonely Voice: the Urdu Short Stories of Saadat Hassan Manto*. Berkeley : Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California, 1979. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972. Print.

1

Postcolonial Feminism in Partition Narratives in Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Saadat Hasan Manto's *Mottled Dawn*

Feminist Interruptions in Partition Stories: Exploring Gender and Politics in Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Saadat Hasan Manto's *Mottled Dawn*

Expressions of Feminist Agency due to Political Identity Formation in Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Saadat Hasan Manto's *Mottled Dawn*

Ayesha Sadaf Khan

Professor Ambreen Hai, Honors Project Adviser

3

**Introduction:**

In August 1947, the British Raj finally ended their three hundred year presence in India, partitioning the subcontinent into two independent states: Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. The succeeding Independence and Partition of British India was a cataclysmic event with rivers of blood and mass graves of corpses marking the birth of the two new countries. The Partition of the Subcontinent has been defined by acclaimed historian Ayesha

Jalal as “a defining moment that is neither beginning nor end, partition continues to influence how the peoples and state of postcolonial South Asia envisage their past, present and future.” (Jalal, Prelude)

Marked by one of the largest migrations in human history, 14 million Indians were displaced across the newly constructed Indian borders (Global Security) after the Partition, with many thousands never making it across. Across the Indian subcontinent, religious communities of

Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims that had previously coexisted peacefully, attacked each other in a horrifying outbreak of religious violence. This mass genocide was defined by massacres, bloodshed, looting, arson and forced conversions but perhaps the most unpalatable and savage legacy of India’s Partition is the terrifying violence that ensued against women. This included mass abductions and sexual violence as seventy-five thousand to one hundred thousand women were kidnapped and raped (Aftab, 2007) with many being disfigured or dismembered. This sexual

violence against women by Indian men is well documented with Nisid Hajari writing about it in *Midnight’s Furies*:

“Gangs of killers set whole villages aflame, hacking to death men and children and the aged while carrying off young women to be raped. Some British journalists who had witnessed the Nazi death camps claimed Partition’s brutalities were worse: pregnant women had their breasts cut off and babies hacked out of their bellies; infants were found literally roasted on spits.”

4

The scale of the atrocities committed against Indian women was unprecedented and unexpected. The question behind why India’s deeply syncretic culture unravelled as a result of the ensuing political movements and why women were so unjustly punished for a split which they had done little to cause has spawned a large body of literature that aims to reimagine women’s roles during

the traumatic time of Partition. Women living through the Partition have been recorded as statistics of abductions and rapes in official historical documents. This runs the risk of devaluing their diverse roles during Partition in order to preserve the honor and supremacy of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh men. The Partition of the Indian subcontinent was borne of a nationalist vision which resulted in official narratives written from a masculine lens. The goal of this project is to look at South-Asian postcolonial texts that reimagine women’s voices and roles during Partition that have been erased in official accounts. These reimagined voices provide a human subjectivity



around what really happened to women and in doing so arouse empathy, sympathy and admiration for them. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin write in the chapter titled 'Speaking For Themselves' in

their book *Borders and Boundaries*:

"what seems to have stepped in..to record the full horrors of Partition is literature, the greater part of which was written in the period immediately following the division of the country. In one sense, it can be considered a kind of social history not only because it so approximates reality .. but because it is the only significant, non-official contemporary record we have of the time, apart from reportage." (7)

The power of Partition literature resides in how fiction can be used to build on the subjectivity of individual characters, such as Indian women, to reimagine their lives within the constraints of that historical moment. Through an exploration of Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Manto's *Mottled Dawn*, I examine the multiple ways in which women are represented including the varying forms of oppression and violence they

5

suffered in 1947 and the multiple ways in which they pushed back against the oppression and violence they faced. My goal is to identify how writers have reimaged feminist agency shown by Indian women while suffering the atrocities of 1947 that have been ignored or erased by official narratives of Partition written from a masculine perspective.

*Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *Cracking India* and *Mottled Dawn* are ideal for this project because these texts depict the multiple forms of oppression faced by women occupying different social locations in India. Laila from *Sunlight in a Broken Column* belongs to an upper-class Muslim *talugdari* (tax-collectors for the British) household located in Lucknow. Lenny, Mother and Godmother from *Cracking India* belong to upper middle-class Parsi families located in Lahore which employs a working class Ayah. Sughra, Sakina and Mozail are Muslim and Jewish

working class women occupying different geographical settings in Manto's sketches and short stories in Partition collected together in *Mottled Dawn*. This project will compare how these different writers writing for different audiences in different time periods present women's varying

struggles during the Partition. Between Laila, Ayah, Mrs. Sethi, Godmother, Sakina, Sughra and Mozail we find literary representations of both male and female writers who are creating characters from upper class, middle class, working class, Muslim, Parsi and Hindu families. By contrasting the agency or lack thereof of women in these different socio-economic and religious contexts, these writers are able to explore different methods women employed to push back against oppression. By focusing on language and expression - specifically the presence and absence of voice and deviance within the codified norms of family, caste, religion and marriage -

and by paying close attention to their ascent into womanhood and their sexuality, we can locate resistance and explore how these novelists are asking us to rethink women during the Partition as

6

just passive victims. The manner in which these characters responded to the Partition can help us provide a sense of the sheer diversity of psychological experience of women and the different ways in which they demonstrated agency in a fragmented and divisive atmosphere whose separatist mentality, nationalistic ideals and religious intolerance regressed into carnage overnight.

The fictional representations of these women are important because they provide an alternative to the masculinist, nationalist perspective preserved in official, historical records of Partition - they steep us into emotional insight.

This reimagining of women's roles complicates the narrative in multiple ways. Firstly, it draws attention to how even in literature, the same forces of class and ethnicity that made some Indian women much more susceptible to Partition's sexual violence, also play out in the roles provided to female characters in the texts I study. Secondly, the modes of resistance available to and displayed by upper-class characters such as Godmother in *Cracking India* and Laila in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* are very different to the opportunities for agency displayed by or even available to working class women such as Ayah in *Cracking India*.

. When exploring feminist agency in fictional Partition narratives, this project will explore how class affects the violence meted out to women's bodies in Partition narratives and how wealth and ethnicity influenced upper-class women's social locations and protected them from the atrocities described in these novels. In official records, upper-class women did suffer from sexual violence during India's Partition on a much smaller scale than lower-class women. My project will look into how some writers shrouded the rape of upper-class women in silence while opting for their lower-class female characters to suffer from sexual assault in their writings. Violence against lower-class bodies seems much more acceptable for these writers to reimagine.

68

the domestic, patriarchal sphere of marriage and family as other postcolonial writers of Partition have done?

When critiquing the ideologies that permeate Godmother's saving of Ayah and the narratives gendered descriptions of Partition and India, we must pay attention to what Rajeswari Rajan terms "alertness to the political process by which said representation becomes naturalized and ultimately coercive in structuring women's self representation" (129). In *Cracking India*, the

positioning of women in either their birth families or their married families becomes "naturalized" with Ayah's abduction from the Sethi household becoming a spectacle of how working class women who deviated from these domestic, patriarchal spheres were punished. Ayah

is never extended an invitation to return to the Sethi household as Lenny's nanny after her rescue

by Godmother raising a very important concern of how Sidhwa chose not to provide this third option for Ayah. This could be because the Sethi household did not have the power or resources to disregard the construction of religious borders that made it impossible for Ayah to continue working in their house. However, Sidhwa's silence on Ayah potentially rejoining the Sethi household shows us how she too, along with the characters in her narrative, has "naturalized" the

effect on women of the “political process” so much that she constructs the female characters in her novel to only envision lives as approved by modes of male power and in doing so the masculine, nationalist Partition structures “women’s self representation”. Hence, it is problematic

that Godmother’s display of agency encourages deeply misogynistic societal notions of the roles available to women after they are raped. Additionally, we must also look deeply into Sidhwa’s decision to return Ayah home. Jill Didur describes the recovery operation which returned abducted women to their families as one where “the agency of ‘abducted’ women had to be elided

69

and their identities (re)constituted in the domestic sphere” (66). Hence in “the newly hatched national imaginary in the civil sphere, ‘abducted’ women had to be returned to the nest of the modern (male) citizen-subject.” (44) The question of “recovery” is deeply embedded in unexamined assumptions about the interconnection between nationality and patriarchy. Sidhwa makes Ayah return home to her birth family after her rescue from Ice-Candy Man at the end of *Cracking India*. This, albeit a much better future than staying married to Ice-Candy Man, is still questionable as the text provides only two patriarchal solutions for Ayah’s future and does not reimagine a life after rape as one independent of India’s patriarchal and domestic spheres and hence does not engage in denaturalizing the “political process” (Rajan, 129) which coerces “women’s self-representation”.

My intention in this criticism is not to take away from Sidhwa’s work to preserve women’s voices through literary imagination about India’s traumatic Partition. Instead, I am uneasy with how Sidhwa recreates the decolonization of the Indian subcontinent and the resulting

violence that ensued through Partition by allowing privileged upper class women (like Godmother) to use the volatility of her political environment and demonstrate acts of feminist agency in social, political and domestic realms. However, tragically the working class and ethnically disfavored (like Ayah) are not able to demonstrate this form of agency due to their economic disempowerment and working class status that along with their gender puts them at a double disadvantage. To reclaim their narratives, one must make the distinction of their heavily disprivileged status and then reimagine their stories beyond deeply embedded ideological notions

that heavily sexualize, silence and disempower them. This relegates them to a disadvantaged

74

the stories of Indian women that history never sought out and official records too often wrote from masculinist nationalist perspective.

‘Khol Do’ (title in Urdu collections) or ‘The Return’ (title in *Mottled Dawn*) is a horrifying story of cross-border violence in which a Muslim family, Sirajuddin and his daughter Sakina, become victims of a riot on a train taking them from Amritsar, in the new India, to Lahore, in the new Pakistan. Sirajuddin and Sakina are forced apart and the story recounts Sirajuddin’s desperate efforts to be reunited with his daughter. He pleads with a group of Pakistani Muslim volunteers to help recover Sakina. Then one evening he finds her in a refugee camp hospital and assumes she is dead. The conversation that follows is chilling and horrific representing the trauma on women’s bodies during these riots and the inability of many men to process or acknowledge what had occurred:

‘I am her father’ he stammered. The doctor looked at the prostrate body and felt for the

pulse. Then he said to the old man (Sirajuddin) pointing at the window, ‘Open it’ The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord that kept her shalwar tied round her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs. ‘She is alive. My daughter is alive,’ Sirajuddin shouted with joy. The doctor broke into a cold sweat. (10)

Sakina has clearly been subjected to repeated assault by the Muslim volunteers who had been sent to rescue her and hence numbly lowers her shalwar when the doctor asks her father to open the window. Her lack of resistance in the above lines becomes a metaphor for the surrender of humanity to misogynist cruelty. Sakina is disconnected from the social relevance of language due to her trauma and the doctor, aware of the misunderstanding between himself, Sakina and Sirajuddin responds by breaking “into a cold sweat.” This sketch of Sakina’s trauma is iconic because Manto constructs a Muslim female character, whose family escaped to Pakistan in search of safety, who has been raped by Pakistani, Muslim volunteers. This is a sharp rejection of

78

In Manto’s short story “*Mozail*”, a working class Jewish woman living in Bombay acts as the agent of change by beating a Muslim mob at its own game and saving two Sikhs in the process. Mozail’s physical description is heavily sexualized and the story unfolds under the backdrop of communal carnage in Bombay. A Sikh man, Tarlochan, falls in love with Mozail but

she rejects him and deserts him. Later, Tarlochan is engaged to a dutiful Sikh girl from his village

Kirpan Kaur. Kaur’s home is attacked by a Muslim mob and Mozail saves her by giving her Jewish robe to Kaur wear and by convincing Tarlochan to remove his turban, so that he is mistaken to be a Muslim, and then the two can escape peacefully. The story ends with a naked Mozail harangued by the bloodthirsty Muslim mob. She slips and falls down a flight of stairs and

in her dying breath saves Tarlochan’s life by telling the mob: “This is my lover. He’s a bloody Muslim, but he’s so crazy that I always call him a Sikh” (70) Mozail refuses to cover up her naked body as Tarlochan tries to hide it with his turban. She says: ‘Take away this rag of your religion. I don’t need it.’ (71) This kind of reimagination and re-representation of working class women’s roles in the Partition (by providing them a strong voice and positioning them outside of

domestic domains) that placed them in the positions of war like strategists are far from the patriarchal and gendered modes of agency other writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa provided to their heroines. Mozail is ambitious, intelligent and has desires for men break the virtuous Indian housewife stereotype that also enables her to save another Indian woman from exploitation and abuse. She fights against the constraints of society and acclaimed Urdu literature critic Fahmida Riaz accurately assesses Mozail’s character as:

“Mozail in this story is a free spirit..she is intelligent, far-sighted, decision-maker for her own life, strong of heart and mind and not at all sentimental - far more sensible and practical than

most of the men around her. In Indian parlance, she is Shakti incarnate, as she rises to save two lives. She can clearly see the dreadful hoax religion was turned into in these ghastly days of communal rioting and rejects it in her last breath.”(80)

79

‘A Girl from Delhi’ features Nasim Akhtar, a Muslim courtesan, who is very fearful of the religious rioting targeting Muslims happening outside her *kotha* (brothel) on the streets of Delhi. She desires to start a new life in Pakistan and so when a mob arrives to abduct her, she escapes to Pakistan with her music instructor Ustad Acchan Khan by jumping out of her *kotha* into the street next door. The Ustad rents a new *kotha* in Hira Mandi, Lahore’s famous red-light district and when he wants to invest in musical instruments to restart Nasim Akhtar’s career she says:

“No, Khan sahib, my heart is not in that sort of thing anymore. I don’t even want to live in this neighbourhood. Please find me a small place in some nice, normal locality. Delhi is behind me. That life for me is finished. I just want to live like a normal woman.” (98)

Nasim moves to a “normal” locality, becomes religious and desires to be married until an old woman named Jannatey becomes her close friend. Nasim does not know that Jannatey is a procuress, enticing young girls and then selling them into prostitution. Jannatey sets up Nasim’s marriage however the next day Nasim overhears her husband “haggling over her price” (100) with

two other courtesans from Hira Mandi while Jannatey is mediating the bargain. The story ends with Nasim packing the meagre belongings she brought from Delhi and escaping to the *kotha* where Ustadh Achhan Khan was employed. Manto’s work in ‘A Girl from Delhi’ raises important

questions about the moral communal values that regulated the lives of women. Nasim’s desire to transform her life is a noble goal not possible within post-colonial societies of the subcontinent that were still invested in the commodification of women. In both pre-Partition India and post-Partition Pakistan, Nasim is preyed upon due to her beauty making the reader interrogate whether the new nations were actually safe havens for the women who escaped to them? Both ‘Mozail’ and ‘A Girl from Delhi’, use working-class characters of female prostitutes and

80

courtesans (that would never feature in historical records) to provide counter-narratives that stand

in tension to official narratives that would never record the continued abuse of women, like Nasim and Sakina, in their new and ‘safe’ nations. This enables Manto’s literary work to make a disturbing criticism of the agenda of new governments that was only concerned with the rapes of its female citizenry as long as it incited its male citizens to support their nationalist agenda. So for

instance, Pakistani and Indian governments will highlight the rapes carried out before Partition by

members of the opposite communities but will ignore the same commodification and abuse of women that occurs in intra-community gendered violence that occurs in their own new nations post- Partition.

Manto constructs his female subjects as brave and intelligent and by constructing these intense flashbacks towards their anguish in *Mottled Dawn* he arouses empathy for women facing the horrors of Partition and disgust for the perpetrators of sexual violence against women in the Indian subcontinent. The testimonial style of his Partition narratives allows readers to work through traumatic memories of the violence and by using characters such as working-class prostitutes, who would never feature in official narratives of history and by providing no

judgement, sentiment or emotion in his sparse narrations, Manto manages to break free from the sense-making structures of historical explanation that other writers such as Sidhwa comply with in their work. This allows him to interrogate the logic behind violence by dismantling the relationships of cause and effect used to account for the horrific treatment of women in the subcontinent.

81

.

#### Works Cited (Preliminary List):

Aftab, Tahera (30 November 2007). *Inscribing South Asian Muslim Women: An Annotated Bibliography & Research Guide* (Annotated ed.). Brill. p. 224. [ISBN 978-9004158498](#).

Needham, Anuradha. Multiple Forms of National Belonging: Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column", Anuradha Needham . *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* Volume 39, Number 1, Spring 1993 . pp 93-111

82

Didur, Jill. "A Heart Divided: Romance and the Domestic Sphere in Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column". *Unsettling Partition. Literature, Gender, Memory*. University of Toronto Press, 2006.

Butler, Judith. "Subjects of Sex, Gender, Desire". In *Gender Trouble*. NY: Routledge, 1990. pp .1-34

Hajari, Nisid. *Midnight's Furies*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2015

Jalal, Ayesha. *Pity of Partition (Prelude: Manto and Partition)*

Jalal, Ayesha. "On the Postcolonial Moment". *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work Across the India-pakistan Divide*. Princeton University Press, 2013. 151–186. Web..

McClintock, Anne. "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family" *Feminist Review* 44 (1993): 61-80

Khan, Shahnaz. "Muslim Women: Negotiations in the Third Space." *Signs* 23.2 (1998): 305-336

Didur, Jill. "Fragments of Imagination: Re-thinking the Literary in Historiography through Narratives of India's Partition." *Jouvert* 1.2

Chand, Sarvar V. Sherry. Manto's "Open It": Engendering Partition Narratives. *Economic Political Weekly* 41.4 28 Jan 2006: 3 -10

Bhabha, Homi. "The World and the Home," *Social Text* 31-32 *Third World and Post-Colonial Issues* (1992): 141-153

Global Security. Partition - August 1947. Available at:  
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/indo-pak-partition2.htm>

Hai, Ambreen. "Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*" *Modern Fiction Studies* 46.2 (2000) 379-426

Hajari, Nisid. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. Print.

Jalal, Ayesha. *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times and Work across the India-Pakistan Divide*. Princeton University Press, 2013. Web.

Jameson, Fredric. "Third-world Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism". *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88. JSTOR. Web

- Jalal, Ayesha. "Manto Liked to Defy Norms". *The Hindustan Times*. Feb 6, 2016. Web. March, 2016
- Mann, Harveen. "Women in Decolonization: The National and Textual Politics of Rape in Saadat Hassan Manto and Mahasweta Devi" *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* June 1998 vol. 33 no. 2 127-141. Jcl.sagepub. Web
- McClintock, Anne. "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family" *Feminist Review* 44 (1993): 61-80
- McLane, John. "India" *Nations and Nationalism: A Global Historical Overview (Volume 2: 1880-1945)*. Ed. Guntram Herb and David Kaplan. Library of Congress, 2008. 804. Web
- Menon, Ritu and Bhasin, Kamla. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998. Print
- Mitra, M. "Contextualizing Ayah's Abduction: Patterns of Violence against Women in Sidhwa's Cracking India". *Ariel - A Review of International English Literature*. Volume 39. Issue 3, July (2008) 23-44. Web of Science. Web.
- Nagappan, Ramu. *Speaking Havoc. Social Suffering & South Asian Narratives*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005. Print.
- Needham, Anuradha. "Multiple Forms of National Belonging: Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column". *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* Volume 39, Number 1, Spring (1993): 93-111 JSTOR. Web.
- Stanley, Liz and Wise, Sue. *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research*. Boston : Routledge & K. Paul, 1983. Print
- Tal, Kali. *Worlds of Hurt: reading the literatures of trauma*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1996. Print
- Pandey, Gyanendra. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print
- Riaz, Fahmida. (2012). 'His woman is a human being'. *The News* (italicize the news). Available at:<http://jang.com.pk/thenews/may2012-weekly/nos-06-05-2012/manto/humanbeing.asp>
- Scarry, Elaine. *A Body in Pain*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. Print.
- Sharpe, Jenny. *Ghosts of Slavery. A Literary Archaeology of Black Women's Lives*. Minneapolis" The University of Minnesota Press, 2003. Print.
- Yashpal, *This Is Not That Dawn. JhootaSach* Mumbai: Penguin Group, 2010. Print



