

# Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988) and Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) – Partition, Mainstream Historiography and Counter Narrative

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## Abstract

The contemporary socio-political and economic predicament of postcolonial Indian subcontinent and the rather haphazard partition of this geopolitical space are inextricably bound together. Therefore no citizen of the subcontinent possessing even a rudimentary understanding of history can shy away from the trauma of partition and the pleasure of independence on contemporary lives. The ceaseless and at times the rather violent zeal to establish themselves on the part of these divided nation-states to be at the helm of global political and economic affairs emulate the all pervasive influence of the partition in our contemporary times. For instance the current border dispute between the nation-states that previously were a part of undivided India is rooted in the rather unmeticulous nature of partition. In such a complex scenario, the partition of India is more than a mere historical fact, it is in fact embedded in the very identity of the citizens of the postcolonial nation states. This conglomeration of the pains of partition and the pleasure of freedom has served and continues to serve as a compelling leitmotif in imagination of ourselves as belonging to nation states that were a part of undivided India. And it is this very contextual backdrop that has engendered a substantial body of fiction on the subcontinent, fiction that is startling in terms of its diversity of focus, style and treatment of partition. Most of these fictions chart out an alternative account of partition, accounts that are embedded with the trauma undergone of numerous voiceless and faceless but conscientious individuals. This paper therefore endeavours to delve into the portrayal of partition in Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and at the same time argue that partition novels like that of Singh's aptly contest the official body of knowledge created about the partition of Indian Subcontinent by articulating the voice of the common masses in fiction.

**Keywords:** Partition, Official History, Counter- Narrative.

## Introduction

The partition of the Indian Subcontinent and the creation of two different newly independent nations namely India and Pakistan after a long struggle for independence from British Colonialism is a phenomenon that has

been shaping the predicament of the countries of the Indian Subcontinent- India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The partition has continued to affect not only the administrators of these nation-states in the form of border conflict, terrorism and illegal immigration but also at the same time has also impacted the common masses in a very psychological manner. For instance the large scale displacement of members of Sikh and Hindu community from Pakistan and the members of the Muslim community from India and the accompanying violence and the subsequent trauma of experiencing violence from close quarters have constantly shaped the identities of the citizens of these divided nation states. However, the mainstream historiography of partition has often relegated the plight of the common individual who is uprooted from his/her place of belonging and their subsequent psychological trauma to spheres of darkness. Mainstream historiographers have often analysed the partition as a physical phenomenon, they their narrative of partition therefore is derived from official letters of colonial administrators and the writings of the leaders of the freedom struggle and also from historical accounts of colonial administrators who lived and worked in India during that time. As such the mainstream historians often have a tendency of ignoring the life stories of common individuals who are caught in the quagmire of violence and conflict. In such a scenario of gross absence of the concerns of the common individual in the mainstream historiography, fictional narratives of partition novelists like Khuswant Singh, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Sadat Hasan Manto, etc. often emerge as site from the common individuals concerns during the partition get reflected. As such these fictional accounts pose a challenge to the mainstream historiography by emerging as a counter history.

### **Official Histories of Partition- Narratives and Counter Narratives**

Official histories of India and Pakistan subscribe to the 'two nations' theory and argue that the Pakistani nation was the inevitable crystallization of the desire of the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent to remain a distinctive community, separate from the Hindu population around them. A characteristic and particularly passionate articulation of this theory is to be found in Aitzaz Ahsan's *The Indus Saga and the Making of Pakistan*. According to Ahsan, the Indian subcontinent is made up of two civilizations, Indus and Indic (or Gangetic), and 'Indus has been one large, independent, politico-economic zone for the past countless centuries (...) [It has had] a rich and glorious cultural heritage of its own (...) [and is] a distinct and separate nation' (Ahsan 18).

Indian mainstream historians like Bipin Chandra, Sumit Sarkar and A.K Bannerjee, on the other hand argue that the partition was a planned strategy for tearing the two communities apart, disrupting the bonds that had joined them together for centuries. According to this perspective, the Partition of the Indian subcontinent was the logical conclusion of the 'divide and rule' policy of the British by which they had insidiously played off the Hindus against the Muslims in India (Roy 14).

Many British historians on the other hand of course saw the whole issue of partition differently. British imperialists in particular prided themselves on their fostering of the unity of India during British rule, and

blamed primordial divisions among the Indians themselves for the division and bloodshed that marked the last days of the empire (Roy 14).

Therefore, it is evident that in the official record of partition of Indian and Pakistan, the life stories of the victims and survivors of the violence that accompanied the partition is grossly missing. Historiography with its sheer emphasis on official records and ideological affiliations has portrayed a rather hazy picture of the partition where the key actors are diplomats and nationalists leaders. Literature, therefore in such a scenario emerges as a counter narrative to the official historical narrative of partition. For instance historians like Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose, in their book on South Asian history argue that

The colossal human tragedy of the partition and its continuing aftermath has been better conveyed by the more sensitive creative writers and artists – for example in Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories and Ritwik Ghatak's films – than by historians. (Bose 164).

As such partition literature emerges as a body of work from which the voices of the common man resuscitate, and often tussle with the official narrative of partition of Indian subcontinent. The academic preoccupation of this essay as such is to delve into the portrayal of partition and its effect on the lives of the ordinary individual caught in the quagmire of diplomatic and political contestations.

### **Train to Pakistan (1956): Violence, Trauma and Partition**

Train to Pakistan is a vignette – the depiction of a sleepy little village called Mano Majra, situated on the declared border between the still-to be-formed nations of India and Pakistan, suddenly waking to unprecedented violence and horror on the eve of the Partition. The action covers only a few weeks and deals mainly with the predicament of a quite innocent and completely apolitical people caught up in the whirlwind of the Partition. The story revolves around a tiny village Mano Manjra which lies on the border of India and Pakistan where the inhabitants live in peace and harmony unaffected by the term partition or the bloodshed which is taking place all over the country. There are only seventy families in the village of Manu Majra and Ram Lal is the only Hindu resident living there. It has equal number of Sikhs and the Muslims .They are living there since their ancestors time and are in a close knit relationship of brotherhood .The peaceful and harmonious nature of the village is described in the following lines: ...there is one object that all Mano Manjrans even Lala Ram Lal-- venerate. This is a three foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keeker tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the deo to which all the villagers--Hindu, Sikh, Muslims or pseudo-Christian-repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing (Singh 10). Where on one hand there were riots murder bloodshed chaos and confusion going in the country but in spite of all that the residents of the Mano Manjra were residing in harmony and peace with each other. But on coming to know of the communal riots going on in Bengal and Punjab there arouse an atmosphere of tension among the people

of Mano Manjra. Singh has shows in these lines the attitude of people at that time towards each other: Muslims said that Hindus had planned and started the killing. On the other hand, the Hindus, put the blame on the Muslims. Both sides indulged in violence.

People belonging to both sides were shot and stabbed, speared and clubbed, tortured raped (Singh 9).

In the novel, the violence that erupted at the time of the Partition is represented in a very unusual way. There is no detailed description in the novel of the train journey undertaken by the refugees – in terms of neither the practical difficulties faced nor the dangers involved. More importantly, we are also not shown the violence happening; for there is not even a reported description of the incidents in the novel. We are just informed about the end result of the violence: the trainloads of corpses that arrive at Mano Majra. What is detailed by Khushwant Singh is the aftermath of the violence, that is, how then train loads of the dead are successively disposed of; how it changes everything in the village; and how another similar event is prevented from happening. The train, in fact, has a completely different symbolic value in Singh's text inasmuch as it represents an otherwise insulated village's tenuous link with the outside world. Trains running to and from Mano Majra are shown to regulate the life of the village and its inhabitants. Thus, the disruption in the railway schedule after the Partition functions in the novel as a sign of social chaos, as the following passage makes clear:

Early in September the time schedule in Mano Majra started going wrong. Trains became less punctual than ever before and many more started to run through at night. Some days it seemed as though the alarm clock had been set for the wrong hour. On others, it was as if no one had remembered to wind it. Imam Baksh waited for Meet Singh to make the first start. Meet Singh waited for the mullah's call to prayer before getting up. People stayed in bed late without realizing that times had changed and the mail train might not run through at all. Children did not know when to be hungry, and clamoured for food all the time. In the evenings, everyone was indoors before sunset and in bed before the express came by – if it did come by. Goods trains had stopped running altogether, so there was no lullaby to lull them to sleep. Instead, ghost trains went past at odd hours between midnight and dawn, disturbing the dreams of Mano Majra.(Singh 91-92)

This is just the prelude to the nightmare that the villagers of Mano Majra have to undergo in the next few weeks in the wake of the Partition. There is a succession of violent and unprecedented events that follow each other rapidly in the summer of 1947, leaving the villagers totally helpless and disoriented. Bhai Meet Singh, the priest of the Gurudwara, very aptly sums up what the villagers go through towards the end of the novel. Updating Iqbal (a communist agent just released from jail) on the recent events in Mano Majra, the Bhai tells him: What has been happening? Ask me what has not been happening. Trainloads of dead people came to Mano Majra. We burned one lot and buried another. The river was flooded with corpses. Muslims were evacuated, and in their place, refugees have come from Pakistan. (Singh 191-192).



Another traumatic event in the novel is the eviction of the Muslims from their own village, this event is accorded a place of primacy in the narrative. Certainly, it is the most poignant part of the whole book. It is pathetic the way Chacha Imam Baksh comes to the Sikh assembly and asks their verdict on the sudden decision of the local administration to evacuate the Muslim villagers of Mano Majra in the faint hope that they will ask him and his fellow Muslims to stay. He is reassured, only to be disappointed, for everybody understands the purport of the lambardar's words when he says:

Yes, you are our brothers. As far as we are concerned, you and your children and your grandchildren can live here as long as you like... But Chacha, we are so few and the strangers coming from Pakistan are coming in thousands. Who will be responsible for what they do? (Singh 147)

The Chacha accepts his fate, though with a heavy heart, but his daughter Nooran simply refuses to leave the place of her birth. She is fierce in her assertion of her rights as opposed to the emotional outburst of her father in the Sikh gathering. Chacha tells her that if she does not leave by herself, then she will be 'thrown out'. And in fact, that is exactly what happens to the Muslims in Mano Majra, for they are 'thrown out' by their fellow villagers. By themselves and as a community, the villagers are naïve and ignorant people with very little political awareness and with even less knowledge of what was happening in India at the time. Independence and the Partition had not affected their lives till then, just as the struggle for freedom had made no difference in their day-to-day affairs. They could not even understand what the fuss about Independence was all about. As the lambardar asks a startled Iqbal (who, after having caused a good deal of confusion in the village as to his religious identity, was trying – unsuccessfully – to share communist thoughts with the elders of the village):

Freedom must be a good thing. But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes? [And then goes on to reply himself] No... Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians – or the Pakistanis. (Singh 62)

When such a community of people who seem to have no dealings with the political life of the nation whatsoever are suddenly thrust into the vortex of a political cataclysm, it is but natural that it would not register on them at first. As Singh shows in the novel, it is through the medium of the refugees that the people of Mano Majra first come to know of the violence just outside the confines of their little world, a violence that was spilling over and now spreading into the heart of their own village. But they were ignorant of the

extent of the savagery that was now rampant all across the western and eastern borders of India (the areas where the migrations took place, where there were whole-scale exchanges of population). That they were ignorant even after having burnt a trainload of corpses is because of the fact that though they were shocked and stunned by such a happening, they had taken it to be an exception and could not believe it to be the rule. That is why the Sikh officer's merciless, sarcastic words at the time of the Muslim evacuation come as a blow to the villagers. When Meet Singh expresses his discomfort with the idea of being entrusted with the custody of the evacuated Muslim villagers' property, saying that it might later lead to misunderstandings between friends, the Sikh officer replies, You are quite right, Bhaiji, there is some danger of being misunderstood. One should never touch another's property; one should never look at another's woman. One should just let others take one's goods and sleep with one's sisters. The only way people like you will understand anything is by being sent over to Pakistan; have your sisters and mothers raped in front of you, have your clothes taken off, and be sent back with a kick and spit on your behinds. (Singh 157-8)

This is actually a blow that is even worse than the evacuation of the Muslims. At least the evacuation was for something good, the villagers of Mano Majra thought – their friends and neighbours reaching safety; while what the Sikh officer was talking of was a scenario devoid of all sanity and humanity. Gradually, the novel records the progressive darkening of their vision as they are stripped, one by one, of all their illusions. And nowhere does this transpire better than in the actual act of the evacuation of the Muslim inhabitants of Mano Majra. To begin with, the Muslims of the village of Mano Majra thought they were going to the neighbouring Chandannagar camp only for a few days, locking their houses and leaving their cattle under the care of the Sikhs. But soon they learn that though they will be staying at the Chandannagar camp for a few days, afterwards they will have to proceed to Pakistan. The truth now strikes them that they have been moved to go to Pakistan, and not (as they had earlier thought) to halt and then come back to Mano Majra once the storm has blown over. But an even greater shock awaits them, and this is the realization that they cannot take their belongings with them, and that they can only take what they can carry in their hands. What is more, they are forced to leave everything not under the care of their fellow villagers, as they had thought, but in the custody of Malli (a dacoit of the neighbouring village) and his gang and a few refugees, and everybody knew what these people would do with their belongings. Still, a pretension is kept up by the police that their goods will be returned to them in due course, and so, a mock list is made of the items left behind. Both the Muslim and Sikh officers involved in this operation know, of course, that the Muslims are going to Pakistan forever (if they do not get killed on the way, that is); and that nothing will remain of their belongings, which will either be looted or destroyed. Hence in a matter of hours, the world of the Muslims in Mano Majra falls apart forever. They are stripped of all their hopes, begin to realize that they are about to lose everything, and yet are powerless to do anything about this. It is unique the way this ironic building up of loss is dramatized in the novel, showing the utter helplessness of ordinary people overwhelmed by historical forces that are simply beyond their control, or even their comprehension.

But the most poignant part of the entire episode is of course the farewell, or rather the lack of it. As the narrator says:

There was no time to make arrangements. There was no time even to say good-bye. Truck engines were started. Pathan soldiers rounded up the Muslims, drove them back to the carts for a brief minute or two, and then on to the trucks. In the confusion of the rain, mud and soldiers herding the peasants about with the muzzles of their sten guns sticking in their backs, the villagers saw little of each other. All they could do was to shout their last farewells from the trucks... The Sikhs watched them till they were out of sight. They wiped the tears off their faces and turned back to their homes with heavy hearts. (Singh 159)

The chapter in which this happens is not only a very crucial one in the novel, but also a representative one, for what is shown as happening here was actually happening all around in the Punjab and Bengal in 1947. As Iyengar perceptively comments: 'What is recorded with such particularity was but a speck in the dust-whirl that was the Partition' (Singh 51). This episode, in fact, effectively dramatizes what the narrator himself records on the very first page of the novel:

Hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the Northwest Frontier abandoned their homes and fled toward the protection of the predominantly Sikh and Hindu communities in the east. They travelled on foot, in bullock carts, crammed into lorries, clinging to the sides and roofs of trains. Along the way – at fords, at crossroads, at railroad stations – they collided with panicky swarms of Muslims fleeing to safety in the west. The riots had become a rout. By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people – Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs –were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding (Singh 9).

### **Women and Partition in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988)**

The representations of women in the writings about Partition by both male and female authors mainly focus on exploring the sexual trauma, sufferings and painful experiences of women during the Partition. Narratives about Partition like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1973) and Shuana Singh's *What the Body Remembers* (1999) ,to mention a few, portray women's experience of the violence and migration through their "anguish, trauma, pain and ambivalence" (Purohit 434). Women's experience in these writings is generally depicted as that of victimhood. There is no scope for denying this aspect but often there is a tendency to explore the depiction of

women's experience in these writings in monolithic terms while overlooking other possible ways of engagement and representation. Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) is one such work which draws attention towards the differential history of women's experience of the Partition. In this essay, we will try to look at how the women engage with a multitude of experiences in the light of their representation in the aforementioned novel which resists any single bracketing. This representation is not necessarily one of victimhood.

*Ice Candy Man* primarily puts emphasis on its narrator Lenny's Hindu Ayah referred to as Shanta in the novel, her abduction by a rowdy group of Muslims, led by one of her former Muslim suitors, Ice candy-man, and her eventual escape from his clutches. Shanta's story seems emblematic like other thousands of women who were abducted and raped by men of the warring communities during the horrible days of Partition which unleashed worst kind of violence and barbarism. Besides Shanta's story, the novel also contains many other significant female characters whose stories reflect a multilayered view of women's experience of the Partition which has been often overlooked or paid less attention to. While Shanta's story puts focus on the abduction of women as the most horrific symbol of violence, other incidents involving women give an idea of how the sexual violence was already prevalent in the society and thus what occurred during the Partition, as Sudhir Kakar mentions, was not an isolated occurrence but a "re-contextualization or a re-calibration of an already familiar phenomenon" (Kakar 154).. The way male members interact with Shanta and other women and as later happenings prove; sexual predation does underlie the social attitudes of a largely patriarchal society. In some ways, this becomes a precursor to the eventual violence which was committed on women's bodies during the gory days of Partition. Be it the representation of Shanta, Hamida or the servant-girl, Papoo, the novel portrays the composite picture of women's experience of violence brought about by Partition. In this regard, Jill Didur argues, "the undercurrent impulse of society towards sexual predation gets exacerbated and manifested in violent ways in the Partition as in the case of Ayah(Shanta) and Hamida's abduction and rape in the novel" (Didur 50). It is in this context, one can argue that Shanta's body becomes the site for enactment of horrific violence. Even after suffering immensely at the hands of male oppressors, Shanta's portrayal does not allude to a stereotypical image of a woman numbed into total submission in the face of the magnitude of oppression she has faced. It is because as the rest of the story unfolds in the novel, she displays defiance and courage by insisting on getting away from the man she does not love. She is firm and decisive about taking her own path even in extreme adversity as she defiantly tells Godmother: "I want to go to my family...I will not live with him" (Sidhwa 245). Shanta's defiant attitude towards Ice-candy-man eventually forces him to repent for his bad behaviour and actions. Ultimately, even in dangerous circumstances, he follows Shanta to Amritsar so that he can correct his previous deeds. The narrator Lenny herself is a female child of privilege, born into an upper-middle class Parsi family. While her perspective is that of the upper-class, her close affiliation with Shanta allows her to come across a cross-section of the people in her society: cooks, gardeners, masseurs and ice-cream sellers. Lenny engages socially with a wide variety of people, and one



thing she does notice is the element of sexual objectification. A woman's body is subjected to sexual oppression gaze but ironically, a woman is also expected to carry alone the burden of morality and propriety. Through the events demonstrating sexual objectification of women, Lenny becomes conscious of her own sexuality. As she recounts: The covetous glances Ayah (Shanta) draws educate me. Up and down, they look at her. Stub-ended twisted beggars and dusty old beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men marked in piety, shove aside their By Basharat Shameem pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes. (Sidhwa 3) Lenny's cousin is an illustration of this sexual predation, as he repeatedly attempts and even cajoles Lenny to respond to his coercive sexual advances. He wants to exercise the violent power of his sexual fantasies on Lenny as he nonchalantly remarks to her that he will "show [her] someday" what rape means (Sidhwa 244). Yet Lenny's attitude towards her nameless cousin is of total assertiveness. Corroborating further the fact of the inherent norm of sexual predation and violence in the name of social norms in the society is the story of Papoo in the novel. A little older than Lenny, Papoo is the sweeper's daughter who lives with her family in the servant quarters. As the readers come to know, her mother Muccho regularly "maltreats her daughter" even to the level of physical harm as once she is hospitalized for two weeks after a presumed beating by her mother results in a concussion (Sidhwa 21). Despite her mother's ill-treatment, Papoo displays resilience as Lenny comments that Papoo, "unlike other servants' children ... is not browbeaten into early submission" (Sidhwa 56). But as Lenny observes, her fighting temperament and eccentricities will be short-lived. Though "it is not easy to break her body," she is broken in "subtler" ways (Sidhwa 56). The rebellious Papoo is finally "broken" when her family drugs her with opium and marries her off to a dwarf, middle-aged man while Lenny is left "imagining the shock, and the grotesque possibilities awaiting Papoo" (Sidhwa 199). This draws attention to ways the society gave consent and acceptance to the subjugation and sexual enslavement of women. This becomes too evident when sees Papoo's mother having internalised this norm in herself in the way she becomes responsible for her daughter's misery. Not only this, the whole society celebrates this bizarre marriage which is nothing but a period of sexual enslavement and violence for Papoo who has got no say in her life. This systematic social objectification of women acts as a major reinforcing point for the enactment of brutalities on women during the Partition violence. The text also offers representations of other women which are somewhat antithetical to the images of victimhood of Ayah and Papoo. Against the backdrop of the victimhood of these women is set a different facet of womanhood in the form of Lenny's mother and her aunt, Godmother whose engagement with the experience of Partition defies any presupposed categorisation. As described earlier, despite belonging to a religious minority, Lenny's family belongs to the privileged upper class in pre-Partition India, mixing socially with other upper class Indians and with representatives of the British ruling class. Seemingly the powerful matriarch, Lenny's mother, Mrs. Sethi has a number of servants to take care of her children and her household; but behind the closed doors of the marital bedroom, she is under her husband's thumb. Behind the veneer of class snobbery, she lives in servility to her husband which at times results in physical assaults. As Lenny describes her parent's troubled

relationship; As 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!" Where does he go in the middle of the night? To whom? 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. (Sidhwa 224). But as the bloody events of Partition finally unfold, we see Mrs. Sethi setting aside her conventional role-play of being a submissive wife. Appearing now as an empowered figure in public, she engages herself in humanitarian efforts and the community building to assist women who have been victimized by Partition violence. She oversees efforts to help Hindu and Sikh families cross the border safely to India, and to recover and provide shelter to the kidnapped women as communal frenzy engulfs Lahore and the rest of India. In fact, under the prevailing circumstances which are already pitted against women, it is a risk-filled job undertaken by Mrs. Sethi ; she could invite the wrath of revenge-hungry people, but significantly, this fear and her own previous domestic servility does not deter her from being proactive on a front traditionally occupied by males. Lenny's aunt Godmother emerges as a counterfoil in a space where the female victimization and male-violence are in proliferation. She is depicted as a vibrant figure possessing a personality with wit, authority and social commitment. She commands respect and rules imperiously over "her docile old husband and her slave sister" (Sidhwa 11). The second half of the novel, which focuses on Shanta's "recovery," is characterised by the dominance of Godmother who is all-powerful in her role as rescuer and in her dealing with the Ice-candy-man. Lenny recalls: The long and diverse reach of Godmother's tentacular arm is clearly evident. She set an entire conglomerate in motion ... and singlehandedly engendered the social and By Basharat Shameem 5 moral climate of retribution and justice required to rehabilitate our fallen Ayah(Shanta). (Sidhwa 285) As the communal violence exacerbates, Godmother acquires more assertive character. She not only facilitates Shanta's escape from the prostitution centre of Hira Mandi and rehabilitation of other suffering women, she also rebukes Ice-candy man, denigrating him as a "shameless badmash" for his ill treatment of Shanta and thereby, drawing him towards repentance (Sidhwa 260). Through her such efforts, she appears to put up the female front to counter the intense machismo brought about by the violent acts of Partition. Setting aside her biological essentialism, Godmother bespeaks of an authoritative presence in the face of the hostile atmosphere where women have become vulnerable and easy victims of male violence. But the question now arises about the two strands of representation of women in the novel: Does one attribute the depiction of victimhood or empowerment of women to the class they belong to? But then, attributing the oppression on women to class only would might tend to be simplistic; as male authority often cuts across the lines of class, at least, in the world that this novel portrays. As shown in the novel, within the upperclass family of Lenny, we have the marginalized figure of Slavesister, the sister of Godmother who is often humiliated and treated shabbily by Godmother and despite being the member of this upperclass, she has to constantly live in the servitude of others. And then, we have Mrs. Sethi whose own life alternates between public empowerment and domestic submission. In her study of the various accounts of survivors of Partition violence, Urvashi

Butalia "acknowledges the absence of class markers in these accounts, and adds, that violence did not recognize class divisions" (Butalia 135). In examining the representation of women in the novel, we can see that Sidhwa's representative canvas alerts us to the fact that women's experience in the context of Partition can not be often analysed in monolithic terms of being presented only as victims of violence. They are, at the same time, engaging with other realities of experience which go beyond the Partition. It is this aspect which often gets overlooked.

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