



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.2., 2017 (April-June)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

CRACKING INDIA: THE NARRATIVE OF VIOLENCE AND SEGMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Bapsi Sidhwa, the distinguished internationally renowned writer, is Pakistan's most prominent and leading English fiction writer. Born in Karachi in 1939, Sidhwa and her family later moved to Lahore which later became the background of her major novels. Sidhwa's novels are social and historical documents that cover the contemporary realities of life and various cultures. Her odyssey as an author of fictional writing has been steady. Her novels are all about the life and cultures of her native subcontinent. *Cracking India* aka *Ice-Candy-Man* is Bapsi Sidhwa's third novel is a fascinating account kaleidoscopic presentation of the communal violence and brutality that occurred at the time of India's partition. Through the child narrator Lenny, a Parsi girl, Sidhwa realistically captures the trauma of the partition. Sidhwa showcases the abduction and molestation of women, brutal killing of innocent children, arson, pointless brutality committed by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The author exposes the naked cruelty and ruthlessness of the communalism with gory details of massacre in such an atmosphere when insanity reigned over sanity, shattering the age old mutual relations between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. In *Cracking India*, Sidhwa has redefined the events of partition with Parsi perspective. The paper is an endeavour to explore the turbulent period of partition.

Key Words: Violence, Victimization, Massacre, Harmony, Abduction

Cracking India is an authentic saga of the tragic disaster of India's partition, one of the most defining moments in India's history. Perpetration of violence against innocent people was beyond imagination. Mass exodus, mass killings, mass abduction, mass raping of women and young girls shook the humanity. In *Remembering Partition*, Gyanendra Pandey writes: The character of the violence – the killing, rape and arson – that followed was also unprecedented, both in scale and method . . ." (2) Millions of people were forced to shift to the safer places, Hindus to India and Muslims to Pakistan, thousands of women were abducted, raped and disfigured brutally. A large number of women were force to conversion. Thousands of innocent children met their untimely death in the hands of rioters. Innumerable number of houses were looted and burned to ashes. It was a nightmarish experience for those who witnessed these barbarities and survived. In an interview with Feroza Jussawalla, Bapsi Sidhwa recalls those events:

When I was a child living in Lahore at the time of Partition, my maiden name was Bhandara, which sounded like a Hindu name. After most of the riots were over, a gang of looters came in carts into our

house thinking it's an abandoned house. They were quite shocked to see us and my mother and everyone there. At that time our Muslim cook came out and said, "What do you damn people think you're doing? This is a Parsi household," and they said "we thought it was a Hindu household," and they went away . . . this was vivid in my mind. (*Jussawalla 200*)

Sidhwa was a Parsi as such *Cracking India* is an impartial portrayal of the horror and trauma observed through the eyes of Lenny, an eight year old polio stricken Parsi girl, living in Lahore with her parents. Lenny is a keen observer of the events that occur around her and presents the appalling details of human loss and dislocation. Sidhwa projects the upheaval, acrimony and growing hatred between people of the fighting communities:

People are holding out to him their knives, choppers, daggers, axes, staves and scythes. And in the clamor, nose to the grindstone, Sharbat Khan sharpens one blunt edge after the other.

The crowd swells as more and more people get to know that Sharbat Khan is back. Children, sent by their mothers and grandmothers, run up with an assortment of kitchen knives and meat cleavers and circle the crowd trying to squeeze in . . . (*CI 160*)

With the spread of rumours the situation was worsening with every passing day. People fell in the grip of paranoia. Rumours fuelled the communal atmosphere. Sidhwa writes: "a few days later, in Lahore, we hear of attack on Muslim villages near Amritsar and Jullundur. But the accounts are contrary and the details so brutal and bizarre that they cannot be believed." (*CI 117*) Fear encapsulated with rumour released great degree of anxieties among Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistani part of Punjab. Sidhwa writes: "Things have become topsy-turvy." (*CI 157*) With the brewing of communal troubles in Lahore, Hindus and Sikhs are forced to leave Lahore. Mr. Singh says: "Sethi Sahib, we have just received orders from our leaders . . . We are to leave Lahore forever . . . We have worked out plans for a complete Sikh evacuation. We'll form our own armed escort. I'll take our buffaloes . . . And whatever essentials we can pile into a truck. Each family is allotted a truck." (*CI 156*)

The occasional clashes between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims gradually became frequent. People of the rival community became the target of the organised violence. The provocative speeches of the political leaders added fuel to fire. Master Tara Singh's speech, outside the Assembly Chambers in Lahore, incites his henchmen: "We will see how the Muslim swine get Pakistan! We will fight to the last man! We will show them who will leave Lahore! *Raj karega khalsa, aki rahe na koi!*" (*CI 143*) Things began to worsen day by day. Chaos and confusion reigned everywhere in Lahore. Communal frenzied mob took over the situation setting fire to the house and buildings. Lenny watches the Hindu houses of Shalmi burning and narrates the ferocity of the arson attack:

I stare at the *tamasha*, mesmerized by the spectacle. It is a gigantic fireworks display in which stiff figures looking like spread eagled stick-dolls leap into the air, black against the magenta furnace. Trapped by the spreading flames the panicked Hindus rush in droves from one end of the street to the other. Many disappear down the smoking lanes. Some collapse in the street. Charred limbs and burnt logs are falling from the sky.

The whole world is burning. The air on my face is so hot I think my flesh and clothes will catch fire. I start screaming, hysterically sobbing. (*CI 147*)

Uncontrolled butchering began in India and new made state Pakistan. Trains, boarded with refugees, were ambushed and the passengers were brutally murdered. Ice-Candy-man's kin coming from Amritsar to Lahore are brutally murdered: "A train from Gurdaspur has just come in," . . . "Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts!" (*CI 159*) The partition of India took a heavy toll of life. Millions of people crossed border within few months. Countless weak, ill and old people died of hunger and exhaustion while migrating to the new homeland in the hope of new life.

Major part of the narrative focuses on Ayah, an eighteen year old attractive girl. She is the centre of attraction for men of all religions. About her sensuality, Sidhwa writes: "And, as if her looks were not stunning enough, she has a rolling bouncy walk that agitates the globules of her buttocks under her cheap colourful saris and the half spheres beneath her short sari-blouses . . ." (*CI 13*) Ayah's admirers create a "composite

culture that India is." (Singh 170) This composite culture is disintegrated and collapsed with the increasing suspicion between the people of different communities. Ayah is abducted by the communal frenzied mob led by Ice-Candy man. She is raped and sold in Hira Mandi, forced to conversion, forcefully married by Ice-Candy man. She is recovered by the efforts of Godmother and sent to her parents living in Amritsar.

Ranna and Hamida's plight is a sort of counter-balance with that of the Ayah's. Ranna's village Pir Pindo is attacked by the Sikh mob. His relatives are all killed but he escapes the massacre. Sidhwa raises the issues of the fallen women in the novel. Hamida is such a woman who was kidnapped and later recovered. Hamida and Ayah are the women epitome of victims of male savagery. In *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia writes: ". . . there was widespread sexual savagery: about 75,000 women were thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own . . ." (3) Sidhwa throws light on the sad plight of those women who suffered sexual brutality during riots but their families also refused to accept them.

Sidhwa's *Cracking India* reveals the Parsi predicament. They remained neutral in India's struggle for freedom as a strategy to show their loyalty towards the ruling power. As India was at the verge of partition and the emergence of a new state Pakistan became a certainty, the community was in quandary—should the Parsis be settle in India or Pakistan. A young Parsi asks Colonel Bharucha: "If the Muslims should rule Lahore wouldn't we be safer going to Bombay where most Parsis live?" (CI 48) The Parsis are peace loving, always keep themselves away from the power politics. This policy is fostered for preserving the existence of this miniscule community that is in danger of extinction because of the low birth rate and interfaith marriages in the community. Colonel Bharucha says: "As long as we do not interfere we have nothing to fear! As long as we respect the customs of our rules—as we always have—we'll be all right! Ahura Mazda has looked after us for thirteen hundred years: he will look after us for another thirteen hundred!" (CI 48)

In *Cracking India*, Sidhwa has portrayed woman as sufferer and saviour. Ayah and Hamida stand for those women who were victimized and oppressed while Godmother and Mrs Sethi stand for those women who risked their lives in the ferocious period of communal riots, rescuing and rehabilitating these unfortunate women. *Cracking India* has been written from Parsi and Pakistani perspective, mainly representing Pakistani point of view regarding the communal violence during the partition of India, as such *Cracking India* is a politically motivated novel as well.

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