CHAPTER III

CASTING SHADOWS OF OPPRESSION

“If thou more murmur’st, I will rend an oak
And peg thee in his knotty entrails till
Thou hast howled away twelve winters.”¹

The Tempest, Act I, Sc.II. 294-296

Colonialism is the result of a set of people showing their dependence on a supposedly stronger force and blindfold reverence towards their colonial masters. The West constructed the East through certain imaginative strategies that exoticised, estranged and emptied it of its reality. Colonialism manipulated the colonized subject’s consent to rule, by colonizing their minds and making them accept almost unconsciously the colonial order of things, by persuading people to internalise its logic and speaking its language, to accept as natural the superiority of the coloniser in terms of race and language. Shakespeare’s Caliban used to curse Prospero at his every command, yet he was scared to disobey him.
because Prospero’s ‘art is of such power’ that it would control his mother’s god Setebos.

“Caliban: “His art is of such power,

It would control my dam’s god Setebos

And make a vassal of him” 2

(Act 1. Scene2 Lines 373-5)

Prospero continued to rule over Caliban not by fooling the savage, but by threatening to destroy him. Colonialism distorted and dislocated the colonised psyche, eroded his very being and subjectivity. He was turned into an object, stamped with an otherness, making him non-active and non-autonomous, non-sovereign and non-participating, so that he could be understood, defined and acted upon by others, not by himself. But the colonial strategy to turn him into a type and de-civilize him failed, since colonial education also taught him to aspire for freedom, protesting against and in defiance of the coloniser.

Caliban (summoned by Prospero):

“This island’s mine by sycorax my mother,

Which thou tak’st from me…”
For I am all the subjects that you have,

Which first was mine own king, and her you sty me

In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me

The rest o’th’island.”³

(Act 1. Scene 2 Lines 330-2 &340-4)

“You taught me language, and my profit on’t

Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you

For learning me your language!” ⁴

(Act1.Scene 2.Lines362-4)

Since the West could not ontologically obliterate the Orient, they captured it, treated it and described it, and often radically altered it and put it to political use by turning its human details into transhuman arguments. This annihilation of identity and individuality led the colonized into perpetual classification, into a collectivity and an eternal thingification or object hood. He was slowly trained to see himself as detached from everything around him, with a drained subjectivity, and an increasing inclination to an outside supportive force. This was crucial to the colonial subject-formation.
Any definition to Indianness needs to underline the strong and poignant influence of colonialism on the land, as much as the attributes that encompass all diversities that are present among the Indians in India and also elsewhere beyond the national boundary.

The ‘nation’ is a psychic territory as much as a geographical one. Diasporic writers, having left their nations of origin return to it through imaginative expression. The impact of being an exile is not only that of a place –literal or metaphorical, exterior or interior, it is that of a community and an attendant form. In the decades before 1950, for Colonial writers, exile was a matter of having left Britain, and bearing the white man’s burden of never letting the sun set on the Empire. Migration of peoples is perhaps the definitive characteristic of the twentieth century, and in crucial ways diasporic identities have come to represent much of the experience of postcoloniality. The idea of ‘post-colonial literary theory’ emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing.

The term Commonwealth Literature emerged in the 1960’s. Commonwealth Literature is a term of art, an increasingly impalpable and metaphysical conception. It brings the co-existence of literatures of English speaking nations and in those which English is only a learnt language, but
the geographical and political limitations of the term is quite obvious, because a looser form of description signified a collection of national literatures united by a membership of the British Commonwealth. Several attempts were made to find a politically and theoretically more appropriate term for such literatures, which postulated a common condition across all former colonies.

The term ‘New Literatures in English avoided the inclusion of any reference to colonialism. It provided, moreover a European perspective in areas like India or Africa, and compared the literatures to ‘old’ literatures in English. The term “Third world literature” makes no sense since the collapse of the Soviet Union and “Literature of developing nations” buys into an economic paradigm which most postcolonial scholars reject. “Anglophone literature “excludes the many rich literatures of Africa, for instance written in European languages other than English.

‘Post-colonial Literature’, however seems to be the only answer to the many presumptions for and against the strategic placing of people who suffered of colonialism and writing against the influences of the imperial rule. Thus ‘Post-Colonialism’ has become a scholarly hold-all into which a great many concepts got thrown in, the assumption being that world literatures could be seen through a common lens because the whole world
in one form or the other had been influenced by the commercial and territorial takeovers of European colonialism. It is less restrictive than ‘Commonwealth Literatures; it shares with ‘New literatures in English’ because it can even relate to the English Literature of the Philippines or of the United States as well as the ‘Maori’ writing in New Zealand, or that of both Blacks and Whites in South Africa.

Post-colonial literature refers to the literature written by people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations. The coterie of present-day authors comes from a generation of baby-boomers of the subcontinent-people who were born in the two decades following independence, and in the aftermath of a number of epochal events: India’s non-violent reclamation of the motherland and metamorphosis from a British colony to a post colonial sovereign nation; and the partition of south Asia and the subsequent relocation of Hindus and Muslims across that divide. In the decades since, another fundamental change has occurred. A vast increase in migratory dispersals from the sub-continent to ports of call around the globe has resulted in the formation of a vast South Asian Diaspora.

Each of the last four decades has formed distinctive approaches to what we call Post-Colonial literatures; each has re-named this body of literature in line with its own new reading strategies. The sixties and the
seventies saw the recognition given to writers like, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Wilson Harris, Witi Ihimaera, Patrick White, Raja Rao and R.K Narayan. These were people from the erstwhile Commonwealth whose writings blew us away.

During the eighties we were introduced to the nature of Orientalist discourse, about what Edward Said and Frantz Fanon expounded, about the way Orientalism and Colonialism brainwashed whole generations of English-educated members of colonised countries into denigrating their own cultural heritages. The re-reading process started in this decade saw the impact of Colonialism, not only on colonial and commonwealth literature, but also in the traditional canon, such as Shakespeare’s, The Tempest, Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe Melville’s Moby Dick, Bronte’s Jane Eyre and so on.

In the nineties we come across the concept of hybridity in such texts as Gauri Vishwanathan’s Masks of Conquest in 1989, Aijaz Ahmad’s In Theory and Partha Chatterji’s The Nation and Its Fragments, in 1992, and Homi. K. Bhabha’s Location of Culture in 1994. Homi Bhabha developed the term ‘hybridity’ to capture the sense that many writers have of belonging to both cultures. Bhabha sees both colonizer and colonized undergoing a splitting of their identity positions. Post colonial studies have
been preoccupied with issues of hybridity, creolisation, mestizaje, in-betweenness, diasporas and liminality, with the mobility and cross-overs of ideas and identities generated by colonialism.

It is commonly argued that the term is misleading since it implies that colonialism is over when in fact most of the nations involved are still culturally and economically subordinated to the rich industrial states through various forms of neo-colonialism even though they are technically independent. The term ‘Postcolonial’ is also very tricky because it draws some very arbitrary lines. South African writers Athol Fugasrd and Nadine Gordimer are not often included as postcolonial writers, although they wrote against apartheid and have lived and worked far more in Africa than say, Buchi Emicheta, who migrated to England as a very young woman and has done all of her writing there. A host of fine Indian writers are also neglected because they do not write in English. Of those who write in English, Anita Desai is included though she is half German, Ngugi wa Thiong’o is also included though he writes primarily in Gikuyu. Bharti Mukherjee rejects the label Indian American though she is an immigrant from India, Salman Rushdie prefers to be called a multinational hybrid, and Hanif Khureshi is more English than Pakistani in his outlook and many Caribbean born writers living in England are now classified as Black British.
The term ‘Post-Colonial’ is used to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This continuity is inevitable because of the unending preoccupation throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.

In the spheres of politics and economics and moreover that of mass media, Britain like other dominant colonial powers of the nineteenth century, has been relegated to a relatively minor place. Nevertheless, the British texts, which still act as the touchstone of taste and value; and R.S English (Received-Standard English), which asserts the English of south-East English as a universal norm, continues to dominate cultural production in most of the post-colonial countries.

A major feature of imperial oppression is control over language. Language was the medium through which the colonial form of imperialism was perpetuated. The emergence of ‘English’ as an academic discipline also produced the nineteenth-century enterprise of Empire and colonization. It led to constructed values such as civilization, humanity, etc., which conversely established as their antithesis, the concepts of ‘savagery’, ‘native’ and ‘primitive’
‘Displacement’ and a ‘crisis of identity’ plus an alienation of vision is yet another feature of imperial oppression. An account of this is seen in historical impressions of the Canadian free-settlers, as of Australian convicts; Fijian-Indian or Trinidadian-Indian indentured labourers; West-Indian slaves or forcibly colonized Nigerians. This alienation could be effective. It traced a gap between experience and language used to describe, because the language till now used was inadequate to describe a new place, or is systematically destroyed by enslavement, or is rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power. In any case, imperialism resulted in a profound linguistic alienation.

Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe have needed to transform the English Language to suit the new contexts in which it was used. This becomes necessary to overcome the gap resulting from the linguistic displacement of the post-colonial language by English.

The theories of style and genre, assumptions about the universal feature of language, epistemologies and value systems, that are part of the European theory, are all questioned by the practices of post-colonial writing and the varied cultural traditions. To address these different practices, it became necessary to bring forth the ‘post-colonial’ theory. Consequently several indigenous theories also emerged to accommodate
the differences within the various cultural traditions as well as to compare
the features shared by these. This inadvertently led to the development of
specific national and regional consciousness.

In the case of countries like the United States, Canada, New
Zealand, and Australia where alien cultures came to settle down and
overwhelmed the indigenous population, writers were forced to adapt to
different landscapes and climates, and dealt with a sense of displacement
due to a lack of ancestral contact with the alien country. Whereas in
countries like India and Nigeria, which were invaded and colonized,
writers though they did not suffer geographical displacement, took up the
medium of English which guaranteed wider readership. The writer brings
here an alien language into his own social and cultural inheritance.

Different post-colonial literatures often offer recurrent structural
patterns revealing underlying cultural sensibilities. One such recurring
structural pattern is that of ‘exile’- the problem of finding and defining
‘home’; physical and emotional confrontations with the ‘new’ land and its
ancient and established meanings; dispossession, cultural fragmentation,
colonial and neo-colonial domination, post-colonial corruption and the
crisis of identity. These recurrent structural patterns in different literatures
show the shared psychic and historical conditions across the distinguishing
differences between each society. The theme of ‘exile’ is present in all such writing since it is one manifestation of the ubiquitous concern with place and displacement in these societies as well as the transportation of language from its place of origin and its effect on the new land. Post-colonial theory also deals with the problems of transmuting time into space, with the ‘present’ struggling out of the ‘past’ and attempts to construct a ‘future’.

Language, the medium through which imperial oppression was maintained, demanded from post-colonial writing the seizing of the language of the centre and replacing it in a discourse adapted to the colonized place. This is done by (1) the denial of the privilege of English and (2) the reconstitution or remolding of the language of the Centre. The latter involves the influence of the vernacular tongue and the complex of speech habits which characterize the local language, on English; it even involves the evolving and distinguishing local English of a monolingual society trying to establish its link with place. The processes of abrogation and appropriation continually strive to define and determine their practices in the ‘gap’ created between the two worlds resulting from the linguistic displacement of the pre-colonial language by English.
Thus the key feature of colonial oppression is the control over the means of communication rather than the control over life and property. This is manifested by the imposed authority of a system of writing.

Colonial and post-colonial writers have all passed through a phase typified by a consciousness of exile. The post-Independence writers, either witnesses of the ghastly events of partition, or who could relate to and identify themselves with what had happened, found food for imaginative recreation in the atrocities inflicted upon, and the blood-curdling experiences of, the victims of the riots that followed Partition.

In India, writing in English was quite popular during the pre-partition period itself. Novelists like R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, G.V.Desani, and Raja Rao were determined to utter their own voices, to provide a very different view of India to the colonialists. The writings, which appeared in the nineteenth century, had a strong Victorian philosophy and much of it had to do with communicating western ideas in pursuit of reforming the Hindu thought and bringing into it a stricter ethic and a more scientific habit of thought. Those writers used English as their medium of communication, which was a large and implicit recognition of the influence of British civilization in India. But by the 1930s the novel in English found its separate and impressive Indian existence. It flourished
after Independence and soared to new heights as Indians spread far and wide and created a new genre of South-Asian English writing. Expatriation resulted in self-exile and a displacement from national culture; thus biculturalism and displacement became popular configurations in the theme of exile.

“It may be said that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are united by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge-which gives rise to profound uncertainties- that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost, that we will, in short create fictions, not actual cities, or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands.”

Salman Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands.

Today’s post colonial, post-partition Indian authors learned history in its aftermath, and now craft stories of India and her history with exceptional skill and remarkable artistry. In doing so, they look back on the non-violent quest for decolonization and the courage and integrity of their
south Asian forefathers; at the pains, the heartache, and the bloodshed of both colonization and partitioning of the newly freed nation; and at the rich, legendary and ancient history of the sub-continent. Reflections of this contemplative backward glancing are seen throughout the novels, short stories, poetry and drama pouring forth from these gifted artists. Owing to imperial conquests, for some time, the literary voice of India remained in a state of relative quietude. Today we see signs of healing and development, of rebirth and regeneration. Similar post colonial evolutionary development, evidence of both the suffocated voice and the artistic and literary renaissance can be seen in other newly de-colonized areas, such as the Republic of Ireland and South Africa.

Pakistani Literature is new compared to Indian Literature. Before creative writing could begin the nation had to forge a sense of its own identity. The new state came into existence accompanied by violence and attracted a large number of refugees, estimated at fifteen million. Absorbing this huge mass proved a monumental task. Besides having to provide housing, employment, education and distribution of wealth and opportunities and having to allow for social and cultural adjustments, the new state had to provide for a sense of belonging and national identity. Pakistan was anything but a homogenous entity at the time of its formation. Other than being Muslims, the citizens had very little in common;
establishing a Pakistan identity among the divided population was the primary task of the new state. English, when it was officially and formally taught in the mid-nineteenth century reversed a writing convention practised in the region since the evolution of the Kharoshthi alphabetic script (C. 300 B.C)

South-Asian English dates back to the late 18th century when Sake Dean Mohamet published his *Travels* (1794). Today South-Asian English Literature has spawned more and more talented writers from Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Zulfikar Ghose and Michael Ondaatje of Srilanka, though V.S. Naipaul remains the only contender for the Nobel Prize. Novelists such as Ahmed Ali, Mulk Raj Anand, G.V. Desani, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao were determined to forge their own voices to provide a different view of India to Colonial writers. India is a country, which was never settled in by European migrants or slaves or migrant labourers despite being colonised for over a century. Here the English language arrived as an inevitable consequence of British domination and the eventual decision early in the 19th century to make English the medium of higher education and government. Here it was the British who underwent exile not the indigenous people, and English is one important minority language among a welter of Indian languages and dialects.
The best Pakistani English writing came from those who migrated to the west. Hanif Kureishi and Zulfikar Ghose achieved recognition with their novels. Bapsi Sidhwa became the first Pakistani writer living in Pakistan to receive international recognition since Ahmed Ali in 1940, for her hilarious comedy, *The Crow Eaters*. Nevertheless she too migrated to the U.S some years later. Her *The Ice-Candy-Man* was the first novel to employ a narrative written in Pakistani English, and is the only one to focus on the Partition riots in Pakistan which irrevocably changed and brutalized this region.

In *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), Ahmed Ali tried to capture the true expression of Indo-Muslim culture by incorporating its sounds and poetic images which resulted in a somewhat stylised prose. G.V. Desani in *All About H. Hatter* (1948) tried what Salman Rushdie called his puzzling leaping prose. He calls Desani’s linguistic strategy the first effort to go beyond the Englishness of the English language. Rushdie himself in *Midnight’s Children* (1981), broke down the normal rhythms of English to incorporate the particular nuances and cadences of bilingual South-Asian English. This opened the doors for countless others like Bapsi Sidhwa and Adam Zameenzad and Arundhati Roy. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala with her belonging-yet-not belonging relationship to India and her sparse tight prose and dialogue captured the nuances of the Indian society and proved
to be a major breakthrough. Vikram Seth with his *A suitable Boy* (1993) earned comparisons with Tolstoy and in 1997 Vikram Chandra was showered with praise for his epic *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*.

In Pakistan, English became the vehicle for some of the best creative work written in the country. Just as works like Shahid Hosains editions of first voice: *Six Poets from Pakistan* (1965) had started to appear, the role of English in education and government was downgraded which was followed by the loss of democracy and a curb on development. As a result, many of the best writers migrated to the west.

Hanif Khureshi, son of a Pakistani father and an English mother, provided a new narrative and a totally new perspective of Asians and the immigrant experience. He became very popular with his film script, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which deals with the themes of homosexuality and race relations in Britain. Zulfikar Ghose came up with complex themes and fairy tale features in his three-part novel, *The Incredible Brazilion* (1972/75/79) about South America, a continent he says which has a definite resonance with South Asia and *A New History of Torments* (1982) and *Don Bueno* (1983), both set also in South America. By 1980 Bapsi Sidhwa came into the arena, when South-Asian English Literature had started to make its presence felt world-wide. Alongside Khushwant Singh’s
Train to Pakistan and Chaman Nihal’s Azadi and Shauna Singh Baldwin’s What The Body Remembers Bapsi Sidhwa’s TheIce-Candy-Man remains one of the very few South-Asian English responses to directly confront that traumatic bloodbath.

In days bygone urban excess and rural dispossessed were exported as indentured labour, Japanese wee taken to Brazilian plantations, Tamils to tap Malayan rubber, Chinese to railroads of North America, Afghans to the camel tracks of Australia, Japanese, Portuguese, Indians, Filipinos and Italians to the cane fields all over the world. This phenomenon continues even today with all its exceptional characteristics in the guise of guest workers and expatriates. The mechanisms are the same, the doctrine of divide and rule persists and the pattern of varying psychic upheavals continues to be registered in the genre of diasporic literature. Milton Murayama’s All I am Asking for is my Body, or Carlos Bulosan’s America is in the Heart, K.S. Maniam’s The Return, David Dabydeen’s Coolie Odyssey, Satendra Nandan’s Voices in the River, Faith Bandler’s Wacvie, Hanif Khureshi’s My Beautiful Laundrette, Naipaul’s writing, Amitav Ghosh’s The Circle of Reason, Leila Sabbar’s La Negresse a l’enfant, Aras Oren’s work Abdelkebir Khatbi’s Love in Two Languages: all are typical works that bring forth the diagnostic pangs of diaspora.
Under the monuments of diaspora we can yet assemble such disparate works as *Bye Bye Blackbird, The Golden Gate* and *Wife*. Vikram Seth’s *Bridge* and his detailed signs of the social and physical landscape constitute monuments that simultaneously connote belonging and distance, continuity and mortality of the individual.

Within the broad category of diaspora, there are important distinctions to be made. For the migrant worker, life away is not much different from life at home: drudgery and struggle, like Desai’s Punjabi peasants, it’s the middle class and beyond who have the free time and the tourist outlook who feel otherwise. Nevertheless class and even caste boundaries become permeable like for Dev, when one is overseas trying to make money and the worker too is subject to the invasive dynamics of identity management under crisis, like the millenarian collectivity of the various immigrant groups of *The Circle of Reason*.

The naturalistic detail and the loaded satire in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Wife* leaves out the complexities of class, profession, education, expectations of and by women within and across cultures, the pushes and pulls that have created before and after circumstances which overwhelm a fragile personality and the fact of modern global mass culture. The protagonist in the novel Dimple Dasgupta’s narrow world of recipes and TV commercials doesn’t really change
from Calcutta to Connecticut; she is merely displaced from a wider class and cultural context in which such things can be kept in proportion or concealed. Already stressed by her lack of inner resources, and unable to confront the impositions of an alien culture, Dimple in America is bombarded more completely with commodities so that she swaps one soapy role for another (dutiful wife/romantic lover/madwoman in the attic) in a quest for the means to rebel against her own co modification. The Hindu woman is nauseated by Western decadence, commercialism and materialism, and is gradually transformed into a tormented, confused individual who murders her husband.

Vikram Seth’s *The Golden Gate* is very much a diasporic narrative seen from the point of view of Pom who has gone to Stanford to get a PhD and moves in the yuppie circles of second –generation Japanese artists, Hungarian economists, Jewish atheist activists, women lawyers and gay advertising executives from Italian wine growing families and high-tech researchers in Silicone Valley The society, like the poetry is poised, self-aware, even slick.

Subramani’s stories in the *The Fantasy Eaters* describes this world with quiet and edgy eloquence that again contemplates various forms of invasions: the population movements of history, incipient madness, the insurgence of dream into everyday life, of violence into monotony.
V.S. Naipaul returns to India, his alien homeland, and while justifying a view of Indian history as a series of inevitable invasions of which his own touristic exploration is the end-point, he is invaded by irrational surges of rage, fear and loathing until he flees India so as not to flee himself.

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Circle of Reason* is driven by motifs of abrupt incursion and expulsion—Western ideas, refugees, terrorists, illegal immigrant workers, the invasion of the body by germs, the apparent impregnation of a woman by the fuselage of a warplane dropping out of the sky. Only temporary spaces of control and stability are possible in this erratic world of global movements.

The lasting impression of the monstrousity and horrific duress, the killings, rapes, kidnappings, looting, and banditry which was all part of the 1947 Indian Partition, lingers in the memory of the south Asian populace who continue to suffer from the psychological wounds. These horrors do not find voice in history books and national records, but remain haunting the minds of those who had to part with their kin, friends, and neighbours, their deepening nostalgia for homes they had thought their own for centuries; the anguish of devotees removed from their places of worship, and the harrowing experiences of countless people who boarded trains in
anticipation of reaching their land of dreams, but of whom not a man, woman or child survived. The destruction of families through murder, suicide, broken women who refused to return home and went into self-exile, and kidnappings caused grievous post-partition trauma.

In response to this tumultuous period, a body of fictional explorations arose, attempting to define the inner turmoil and social complexes, plaguing the subcontinent. For the large part most of the South Asians are still experiencing the enduring hurt from the era because emotional and psychological issues from the past remain to be addressed or even considered.

Ironically the split between India and Pakistan only served to heighten each other’s hostilities. For the past fifty years, the two countries remain entrenched in bitter animosity, fighting three wars in 1947, 1963, and 1971, and during the last decade fighting low intensity wars over Muslim-occupied Kashmir and the drawing of boundaries in the high Himalayas. With the reverberations of the horrors of Partition and the danger and tragedy of creating artificial boundaries, still in the air, people live in the constant fear of being uprooted. India and Pakistan remain the two eternal cousins who cannot live with each other or without each other.
It is an exile which none can come to terms with, rendering insecurity with a menacing manifestation, shrinking individuals.

Over the years the corpus of Partition Literature has grown into large dimensions. Like Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, with the Albatross round his neck, the writer of the Sub-continent exorcises the spirit of agony through imaginative recreation even after several decades. The blood-curdling experiences of the victims of the riots that followed Partition, have found a place in the writings of some brilliant creative writers who have dealt with this theme in English and in regional languages. What distinguishes these writers from the contemporary political commentators is their ability to transcend religious, regional, and territorial prejudices in their creative moments.

Three broad patterns of communal relations are discernible in these novels: the first is of considerable communal amity; the second of subsequent discord among the various sectors; and the third of reconciliation, which shows the characters of the two communities reassessing the differences of the past with an objectivity that helps them bury the hatchet deep and strive for harmony, which celebrates the Hindu-Muslim bond of unity. The changes in the patterns of communal relations from harmony or lull in the pre-partition period to hostility during the
Partition and later on to reconciliation in the post-Partition period form an overall evolutionary pattern of progress.

The novelists, though are persistent in their depiction of Hindu-Muslim unity, are not unaware of the shallowness among the elites of both communities. The rural urban divide that emerges in these novels reveals this superficiality. While the rural areas are characterized by the intensity of communal fraternity, the urban areas show the lack of warmth in this symbiotic relationship between the Hindus and Muslims. We come across innumerable characters such as Bhai Meet Singh, the Sikh priest of “Manomajra” and Iman Baksh, the Muslim priest and their relationship in Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan; the steadfast relationship between Sohne Shah, the Sikh headman of village Dhamyal and Allahditta, a Muslim of that village in K.S Duggal’s Twice Born Twice Dead (1979). In contrast, the relationship between Arun and Munir, the two friends in the city of Sialkot in Chaman Nihal’s Azadi (1975) are marked by differences of opinions on communal relations between Hindus and Muslims.

The conflict between the aspirations of dominance and apprehensions of being dominated by one another resulted in the demand for Pakistan. The metamorphosis of Mohd. Ali Jinnah from a nationalist Muslim to a Muslim separatist in Mehr Nigar Masroor’s Shadows of Time
(1987) is an appropriate example of this power struggle. The announcement of Partition and the consequent migrations across the Radcliffe Line plunge the two communities into a period of mutual hatred and intolerance even at the level of the masses. They too join the internecine conflict.

Thus the analysis of the changing patterns of communal relationships among the three warring communities show amity among them in the pre-partition era on one-hand; and on the other a growing impatience and mistrust between them on the eve of the partition, culminating in the pattern of reconciliation, in the breaking of dawn of understanding; in the distant horizon during the post-partition era.

The first three novels of Bapsi Sidhwa are set in Pakistan, and in each there is a strong sense of place and community, which she uses to examine particular aspects of Pakistan’s post-colonial identity. However in An American Brat, which heralds a new direction in her fiction, she shifts the predominant locale of her work from Lahore to various cities across America as she explores the Parsi /Pakistani diaspora.

The action of The Crow Eaters commences at the turn of the century and continues through to the eve of independence and Partition. It actually begins a lifetime earlier-towards the end of the 19th century, and as the
story progresses, prepares the reader for the end of a significant chapter of Indian history- the birth of Pakistan.

The Bride begins more or less where The Crow Eaters left off. It tells the story of a young Punjabi girl whose parents are slaughtered in the riots which accompanied the partition of the sub-continent. Thus the novel commences at the beginning of the first chapter of Pakistani history. Whereas The Crow Eaters draws to a close with the horrors of an imminent partition, these horrors are the starting point of The Bride.

In The Ice-Candy-Man’, Sidhwa dramatically recreates Lahore during the tumultuous months of partition. Partition is the shaping force in this novel, which chronicles the exodus of Parsees to India explaining their world-view, customs, religious practices and politics. Sidhwa truthfully voices the isolation and aloofness from which her community suffers.

Sidhwa has successfully treated the marginalized communities in Pakistan, in her three novels. In The Crow Eaters, the hero is a Parsi, and through Freddy, his family and their Parsi friend, the culture of this minority community is imaginatively recreated. In ‘The Bride’, Sidhwa chooses to treat another marginalized ethnic group of Pakistan, the Kohistani tribe. A description of the harshness of tribal life in the opening chapter, and the brief descriptions of life in Jullundur, where his tribal
customs set Qasim, a tribesman of the Kohistani hills, apart from the people of the plains, emphasise his marginalized position. In ‘The Ice-Candy-Man’ Sidhwa chooses a much marginalized narrator- a female Parsi child, crippled with polio.

By marginalizing her protagonists, Sidhwa effectively makes them detached observers of the events played out by the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as history moves inexorably, step by step. To understand the whole one must understand the constituent parts. Her novels focus primarily on the Parsees, but through their contact with the other groups the whole is gradually glimpsed bit by bit.

Qasim’s marginalized position in The Bride is reinforced when he witnesses the brutal attack on the refugee train. Despite the horror of the attack, which he himself only just escapes, his detachment is objectified. By choosing Lenny as the narrator in The Ice-Candy-Man Sidhwa suggests that the atrocities of 1947 are best seen through the innocent eyes of a child, who has no Hindu, Muslim or Sikh axe to grind, and who is thus likely to present a more objective view of what she sees.

In The Crow Eaters there is always a strong sense of place and a sense of community. Lahore is vividly brought to life through a wealth of local detail. Along the way there are many clear historical signposts. The
date, is introduced on a number of occasions, and references to Partition or independence recur throughout the novel. Subtly, through minor figures, Sidhwa writes back against the traditional pictures of the Raj—by implying that Colonel Williams accepted bribes and by showing Freddy arranging visits to dancing girls in the Hira Mandi for Charles P. Allen. The British Raj is thus transformed from the proud father of so many British versions of history, to the somewhat seedy progenitor of Sidhwa’s version of Pakistan history.

In *The Bride* however the horror of ‘the chaotic summer of 1947’ (P. 14) is only a starting point of the novel rather than its subject. The date is introduced and a clear time-scale is adhered to, in the novel. There are also references to real historical figures like Sir Bindon Blood (P. 116) who failed to subjugate the mountain tribes at the turn of the century; and Margaret Mead (P. 222), whose anthropological fictions of Samoa are now infamous. The important shaping presence of the now-departed British Raj is also evident in this novel

“India required a deft and sensitive surgeon, but the British, steeped in domestic preoccupation, hastily and carelessly butchered it. They were not deliberately mischievous-only cruelly negligent! A million Indians died. The earth sealed
its clumsy new boundaries in blood as town by town, farm by farm, the border was defined…” (pp.14-15.)

In The Ice-Candy-Man there is a strong sense of place, of Lahore, like Delhi in Anita Desai’s Clear Light of Day (1980), where the fires of partition burn, and there is a strong sense of the political situation of the time, a strong historical consciousness. Making her narrator, a small child, allows Sidhwa to restrict her world to a small geographical area of Lahore. This compressed world of a child’s vision is populated by a relatively small group of people, which like the focus on the Parsi community in The Crow Eaters or the focus on the Kohistani tribals in The Bride, provides a useful microcosm representative of the population mix of Lahore, prior to partition, through which Sidhwa can convey a wider history of the period. The British Raj too enters her world when Mrs. And Mr. Roger come to dinner and her tutor Mrs. Pen is an Anglo-Indian married to an English man.

An ethno-religious minority in India, the Parsees live in small communities mainly of the west coast of the sub-continent, especially in Bombay. In Pakistan, both Lahore and Karachi are home to Parsees. Parsees are of Persian descent, ‘pars’ or ‘fars’, an ancient Persian province, now in southern Iran. The Parsis were forced to leave their homeland about 1,200 years ago, threatened by Arab invasion and a possible Islamization
of their religion. Followers of prophet Zarathustra; their religion known as Zoroastrianism is said to be founded around 2000 B.C

“The religion founded by the prophet Zarathustra is a monotheism, with the sole God Ahura Mazda (“Wise Lord”) being the creator as well as the judge on the day of the Last Judgement. Ahura Mazda rules over the good spirits (Spenta Mainyu) created by him, which are opposed in this world by the evil spirits (Angra mainyu). The ethics in Zoroastianism demand active defence of the good, which explicitly includes truthfulness, righteousness and charity. Earthly renunciation and asceticism are condemned by Zoroaster (in sharp contrast to Hinduism and Buddhism) because they indirectly support the evil in its battle.”6

Novy Kapadia, The Parsi Paradox in ‘The Crow Eaters’

Though an extremely minority community, there is instilled in them a strong sense of group identity and active participation in the social, cultural and economic life of both India and Pakistan. Their unity and willingness to think above social ranks for the betterment of their community is noticed in the relatively lesser number of Parsis living below the poverty line.
The depiction of community in its fluid state lies at the heart of Bapsi Sidhwa’s novels. The Parsees, at the time of the partition, had the advantage of detachment from any of the issues which provoked the other communities. The Parsee community would rather not be involved in the tension not only because of its status as a minority group, but also that in some ways they superseded the political tension. For the Parsees, the question was of survival, of establishment and acceptance of identity as a community. The inhabitants of the cozy Parsi world, anglicized to a greater extent than their counterparts in the Sub-continent, feared that independence and the subsequent departure of the British might leave them stranded in an alien setting- their community in tatters. Being a rootless people, the Partition came as a reverberation of their own deep set apprehensions. The insecurity of the Parsees was not because of communal antagonism, but the apprehension of their status at the departure of the British. They feared the partition of India, and were in a fix as to which community they should support. In The Ice-Candy-Man, Col. Barucha, the president of the community in Lahore, advocates status quo. He warns fellow Parsees to shun the anti-colonial movement and nationalist agitation spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi. His reasoning is based on expediency. If there is Home Rule, political glory, fame and fortune will be acquired by the two major communities.
'… If we’re stuck with the Hindu’s they’ll swipe our businesses from under our noses, and sell our grandfather’s in the bargain: if we’re stuck with the Muslims they’ll convert us by the sword! And God help us if we’re stuck with the Sikhs!…' (The Ice-Candy-Man p.37)

But the instinct for community is so strong that they will stabilize it once again. The Parsees were all along loyal to the British. They were careful to adopt a discreet and politically naïve profile. Col. Barucha cautions his community in The Ice-Candy-Man:

We must tread carefully…We have served the English faithfully, and earned their trust…So, we have prospered! But we are the smallest minority in India…Only one hundred and twenty thousand in the whole world. We have to extra wary, or we’ll be neither here nor there…’ ‘We must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare!’ (The Ice-Candy-Man p.16)

This attitude has stemmed from the Zoroastrian religious belief of loyalty to a ruler and a close relationship between state and community.
Later Col. Barucha also reminds his fellow men of the wisdom of their forefathers in integrating themselves into the social fabric of an alien country like India after they were exiled from Persia.

The story goes that, when the Parsees were asked to leave Persia by the Arabs, thirteen hundred years ago, they sailed to India. But they were not allowed to disembark.

‘…they waited for four days, not knowing what was to become of them. Then at last the Grand Vazir appeared on the deck with a glass of milk filled to the brim’…”It was a polite message from the Indian Prince, meaning: “No, you are not welcome. My land is full and prosperous and we don’t want outsiders with a different religion and alien ways to disturb the harmony!” He thought we were missionaries’(The Ice-Candy-Man p.38 )… Our forefathers carefully stirred a teaspoon of sugar into the milk and sent it back. The Prince understood what it meant. The refugees would get absorbed into his country like the sugar in the milk…And with their decency and industry sweeten the lives of his subjects…”The Indian Prince thought: what a smart and civilized people! And he gave our ancestors permission to live in his kingdom!’ (The Ice-Candy-Man p.39.)
In *The Crow Eaters*, Sidhwa portrays the dying businessman, Faredoon Junglewalla protesting vehemently against the nationalist movement and exhorting his offspring to remain loyal to the British Empire. Col. Barucha, though is of the similar opinion, is later seen courting a different attitude, when he blames the British for bringing polio to India. Dr. Mody however felt it necessary to join the freedom movement, He says, ‘Our neighbours will think we are betraying them and sliding with the English’ (The Ice-Candy-Man p. 37)

Mr. Todywalla, the banker even goes to the extent of stating that they should support the Indian community which appears to be in a dominant position and is likely to rule after independence.

Lenny, the narrator in *The Ice-Candy-Man* is Parsee and acts well as the spokesperson of her community. When in the beginning of the story, she dreams of the Nazi soldier coming to get her, and ‘men in uniforms quietly slicing off a child’s arm here, a leg there.’ (The Ice-Candy-Man p.22.) she says…’I feel no pain, only an abysmal sense of loss and a chilling horror that no one is concerned with what’s happening.’(The Ice-Candy-Man p.22)

Lenny’s apparent lack of fear, in the symbolic vivisection of India, cruel as the dismemberment of a child, is suggestive of her community’s
indifference on account of its aloofness from religio-political convulsion. Sidhwa finds voice in Lenny while giving out her views and perceptions of the events she witnessed and the ever disheartening consequences. She maintains a tone of neutrality throughout the novel, a policy the community adopts as a whole. But towards the end there occurs a sea-change from this bald passive neutrality to active neutrality in the discord swirling around them. The Parsees are seen acting as messiahs of the Hindus and Sikhs trapped in the burning city, during the communal conflagration. Lenny’s Godmother rescues Ayah, and sends her to Amritsar. Inspired by a feeling of humanism, the Parsees shake off their neutrality and become agents of a healing process.

The final resolution is one of adaptability and compromise, ruling out the wishes of many to either migrate to London or Bombay, where there was more among the community than in Lahore. ‘As long as we conduct our lives quietly; as long as we present no threat to anyone, we will prosper right here…’ (The Ice-Candy-Man ,p.40)
NOTES


