CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF BAPSI SIDHWA’S ICE CANDY MAN AND JYOTIRMOWEE DEVI’S THE RIVER CHURNING

Ice Candy Man

Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel Ice Candy Man defines an altogether different partition experience. The novel speaks from a Pakistani’s point of view through the eyes of Lenny. The novel is set in the background of Lahore at the time of partition. The narrative centrals on two character namely Ayah and the narrator herself. The narrative articulates the traumatic effect on Women during partition. Lenny is a girl stricken with polio. The characters that surround her are Ayah, Slave sister, Electric Aunt, Godmother, Old husband and Ice-candy man. As India is partitioned, Lenny observes the change in the surrounding area and the people around her. She observes the transition of Ice-candy man, the Muslim street vendor. His transition from an ice-cream vendor to a bird seller and a pimp is significant in the novel. Ice candy man, like many other men is attracted by Ayah’s magnetic beauty. Ayah is Lenny’s nanny, who was hired to look after Lenny. Her circle constitutes thirteen members including the cook, the gardener, the Sepoy, the butcher, the wrestler, the zoo attendant, the masseur and the ice candy man. They all belong to different religions and represent different faiths. As partition of the Indian subcontinent becomes imminent, acts of communal violence, arson, looting and murder unfolds in the city of Lahore. There followed a subsequent
exodus across the borders. During the communal strife, there was a significant disruption among the community of friendship in Ayah’s circle too. Masseur, whom Ayah evidently chooses as her suitor is murdered and his body is found, with his head severed, in a gunnysack on the street. It is found later that Ice candy man was the murderer.

As partition drew nearer and the violence accelerated in Lahore, there came a day when a mob of Muslim men arrive at the doorstep of Lenny’s house thinking that it was a Hindu family. The mob demanded for Hindus in the house. Imam din, the Muslim cook tries to save Ayah by swearing on Allah that she has left for Amritsar. Ice candy man with his friendly demeanour approaches Lenny and extracts the whereabouts of Ayah. Knowing that Ayah is hiding inside the house, the mob enters the house and drags Ayah out. She is eventually abducted and gang raped. Ice candy man puts her in a brothel and makes her a prostitute. He also later converts her into a Muslim and marries her. Finally with the intervention of godmother, Ayah’s residing place is identified and she is rescued and rehabilitated. She ultimately joins her family in Amritsar.

Ice Candy Man is considered unique for its representation of the partition truth viewed through the Parsi child living in Pakistan. It is an alternate perspective on the partition of the Indian sub continent. The author herself opines in an interview with David Montenegro that:
The main motivation grew out of my reading of a good deal of literature on the partition of India and Pakistan (...) what has been written by the British and the Indians. Naturally they reflect their bias. And they have, I felt after I’d researched the book, been unfair to the Pakistanis. As a writer, as a human being, one just does not tolerate justice. I felt whatever little I could do to correct an injustice I would like to do. I have just let facts speak for themselves and through my research I found out what the facts were. (Sidhwa 2000)

Being a Parsi, Sidhwa was able to see the history of the partition from a neutral perspective and thus she feels she could do justice to the history. As a Parsi, she was able to see things objectively. Her narrative is entirely different from her Indian counterparts’ and radical enough to portray the leaders in her own uniqueness. The Indian authors depicted Gandhi and Nehru as their heroes playing a vital part in the Independence of the country. Jinnah was nearly a villain who indulged in breaking the country. According to Sidhwa, in *Ice Candy Man*, the image of Jinnah is resurrected and celebrated as a champion whereas she demystifies the images of Gandhi and Nehru. Jinnah is portrayed as an ambassador of communal harmony and to substantiate Sidhwa quotes the Indian poetess Sarojini Naidu:

(...) the calm hauteur of his accustomed reserve masks, for those who know him, a naive and eager humanity, an intuition quick and tender as a woman’s, a humour gay and winning as a child’s – pre-eminently
rational and practical, discreet and dispassionate in his estimate and acceptance of life, the obvious sanity and serenity of his worldly wisdom effectually disguise a shy and splendid idealism which is of the very essence of the man. (ICM 161)

Gandhi for Sidhwa is an image not very sublime. She feels that it is the British and the Indian historians who worshipped Gandhi as Mahatma. For the eight year old narrator Lenny, Gandhi is someone equal to her gardener Hari, who is semi-naked and highly obsessed with flushing the bowels. When Lenny is taken to visit Gandhiji she is entirely shocked to see a man who is not at all impressive. Lenny says:

(...)Mother hauls me up some steps and into Gandhiji’s presence. He is knitting. Sitting cross-legged on the marble floor of a palatial veranda, he is surrounded by women. He is small, dark shriveled, old. He looks just like Hari, our gardener, except he has disgruntled, disgusted and irritable look, and no one’d dare pull off his dhoti. He wears only the loin cloth and his black and thin torso is naked (ICM 86).

Sidhwa reduces Gandhi to an eccentric diet-fadist. The masseur calls Gandhi, a politician, not bapu or Mahatma. He says, “It’s his business to shoot his tongue to the moment” (ICM 91). Sidhwa not only demystifies the image of Gandhi, but she is also angry with Nehru. For her, Nehru is a cunning politician who enjoys the efforts of Jinnah and walks with “the lions share” (ICM 131). The Ice Candy Man calls Nehru a sly one. He ridicules Nehru of his
candid affair with Lady Mountbatten. He remarks, “he’s got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English’ wife out of his other, what not... he is the one to watch” (ICM 131).

From these instances from the novel, it is clearly understood that Sidhwa is contrary to her Indian counterparts. She provides the version of history from the other side. While most of the Indian writers have sympathy towards the Hindus, Sidhwa being a Parsi is sympathetic to the Muslims as well as the Hindus providing a neutral tone in her narrative. Though being a Pakistani she remains unbiased in telling the events of partition.

It is important to note how Sidhwa presents the communal tension that emerged during the adverse periods of partition. She is sharp and poignant in describing the horrific events that set ablaze the nation. Sidhwa had already picturised the tensions of partition in her early works like *The crow eaters* and *The Pakistani Bride*. She brings out the massacres, displacement and the consequent effects in these novels, but *Ice Candy Man* is one novel where there is a tighter focus on the turbulence of partition and its effects on the lives of the people, especially of those belonging to the Parsi community.

Sidhwa was herself a witness of the communal holocaust. She herself has said that in an interview with Montenegro:

I was a child then. Yet the ominous roar of distant mobs was a constant of my awareness, alerting me, even at the age seven, to a palpable sense of the evil that was taking place in various parts of Lahore. The glow of
fires beneath the press of smoke, which bloodied the horizon in a perpetual sunset, wrenched at my heart. For many of us, the departure of the British and the longed-for independence of the subcontinent were overshadowed by the ferocity of partition (Sidhwa, 2000).

She develops the intensity of the partition gradually from her first novel and achieves the density in Ice Candy Man. Astonishingly the Parsi identity wanes slowly in the novel and the partition theme gradually develops stronger with its characters integrated in the environment.

Unlike other Partition Novels, like *Train to Pakistan* and *A Bend in the Ganges*, which has third person narrators, Ice Candy Man has a first person narrator looking at the effects of partition which were painful and traumatic. Lenny is able to understand the fuming tensions in a city like Lahore, but the happenings in the countryside which are more horrific are revealed through Ranna’s story by the author. Sidhwa adopts a technique which balances the city and country experience of the partition. Lenny’s growth in the world of experience is coincided with the growth of communal upsurge during the event of partition. To get a closer view of the event of the partition, Sidhwa deliberately installs the Gurdaspur train incident and the mayhem that followed in the village Pir Pindo. Ranna’s story gives a pictorial description of how madness struck people and how vengeance became an overturned factor which wiped out the whole of Pir Pindo. The Sikh attack on the Muslim village in Punjab is vividly described by Sidhwa through Ranna’s story. She tries to
depict the atrocities committed by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs without any bias, but her sympathy leans towards Muslims and this may be because she has witnessed the victimization of Muslims in the hands of Sikhs in a larger proportion. In an interview with David Montenegro Sidhwa says, “The Sikhs perpetrated the much greater brutality’ during the 1947 sectarian violence.” Sidhwa’s observation was similar to other historians like Nicholas Mansergh who had recorded that:

there was a widespread feeling, which in the light of after-events must honestly be recorded, that in the Punjab the Sikhs were spoiling for a fight, and whatever happened elsewhere, there serious trouble was hardly to be avoided (2000, 56).

Dominic Lappierre and Larry Collins, the famous historians in their *Freedom at Midnight* also have made a similar observation like that of Sidhwa’s. In the chapter entitled ‘the greatest migration in history’, Lappier and Collins record:

Captain R.E. Atkins and his Gurkhas spent weeks escorting refugee columns, taking Sikhs into India, then bringing a horde of Moslem back over the same route (...) Protecting those chaotic columns, spread out over miles of road and field, was a staggering problem. They were likely to be attacked almost anywhere along their march. As always, it was the Sikhs whose attacks were the most formidable and the most savage (1976, 220).
Some historians believe that the Sikhs were the victims who were massacred in large numbers by the Muslims, but it can never be concluded that one community committed the greater atrocities and the other was subjugated. According to Talbot, the counterpart of Sidhwa’s novel from the non-Muslim perspective is also equally a harrowing account of the attack on the Sikh minorities of Sayyedpur contained in novels like Tamas. There are no actual recordings of the atrocities of one group on the other, but it is only through the articulation of writers one can understand the proportion of groups victimized. Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man* shows the plight of women who were barbarically consumed by the fires of violence.

Sidhwa not only captured the happenings at Pir Pindo, but she also projects the city of Lahore that was messed up completely during the partition riots. The whole of the city was wrecked by the hellish fires that never seemed to end.

When Lahore was burning most of the Hindus and Sikh families left to India. They left behind their belongings which were rampantly looted. Their houses were ransacked and burnt. Hundreds of homes were turned empty and desolate. The fate of others who escaped the fires was even worse than the massacres. Women especially were used for recreational purposes. They were abducted and sold to the brothels. Ayah also faces this fate when she was abducted by the Ice Candy man.
Ayah and her abduction

Shanta is the Hindu Ayah who took care of the handicapped Lenny. Sidhwa shows Ayah as a sexual symbol who draws the attention of motley of men. She is portrayed as a girl with a bountiful body which becomes the discerning factor for her abduction. Early in the novel she is shown as an object of male desire. Her admirers are from different communities which was secular in the initial stage. Lenny remarks:

The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down, they look at her. Stubhanded twisted beggars and dusty old beggars in crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships (ICM 12).

When there was a tenuous change in Lahore on the eve of partition, the mood and tenor of Ayah’s circle also changes from its harmonious beginning to disgust and hatred towards each other. Ayah maintains a calm relationship with these men and avoids misunderstanding in the name of religion. Masseur and ice candy man remain her most favoured suitors, both of whom belong to the Muslim community.
Ayah’s circle gathers in Queen’s park and discusses political issues of the day. The atmosphere of Queen’s park also changes gradually, when communal tensions become predominant in the city of Lahore. People start huddling in communal groups. Ayah’s circle alone remained unaffected by the communal polarization. Ayah had Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Parsi unified around her. This healthy friendship did not remain the same for a long period. Soon there was more communal colour painted and heated arguments came into existence. The jokes were no longer funny, but cruel. The venue was also shifted from the park to the wrestler’s restaurant. Sidhwa shows the initial camaraderie in the group shifting to grudging pledges of strength amongst these friends when bloodshed overtook Lahore. There was chaos in the minds of Ayah’s circle. The gurdaspur incident saw a train load of dead bodies which shook ice candy man. He cultivated the thought of vengeance and felt like chopping the Hindus. The Hindu gardener in turn felt insecure and planned to leave Lahore. He touchingly says, “I have sent my family to Delhi(...) as soon as the sarkar permits, I will join them (...) when our friends confess they would kill us, we have to go(...)” (ICM 151).This citation explains the state of Lahore where Hindus felt insecure and plan for migration. It also clearly indicates that the amount of hatred that overtook the healthy friendship that once prevailed among these people.

Lenny was a witness to this conversation and through which she understood the mounting tension around the city. Ayah’s group indulged in acrimonious debates on the political scenario abusing the chief players of
partition like Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Iqbal, Tara Singh, Mountbatten and others. Lenny happens to hear all these names and understood the raging controversies over the partition in politics and policies.

She was also confused with the word ‘partition’. She wondered if anyone could break a country and worries about her daily life. She says, “And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris road? How will I ever get to godmother’s then?”(ICM 101) This confusion in Lenny states her sensitivity and intuitions about partition. Her increasing perception of religious differences and social hierarchy is also remarkable which makes to understand the growing religious differences. Lenny remarks:

And I become aware of religious differences. It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindus, Sikh, and Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah no longer my all encompassing Ayah – she is also a token. A Hindu. Carried away by a renewed devotional fervor she expands a small fortune in joss sticks, flowers and sweets on the Gods and Goddesses in the temple (ICM 93).

The most loved city of Lenny is found going into the hands of communal fires and she witnesses the city turning into a bone of contention between the Hindu and Muslim communities. There is the division of provinces and the unequally doled out lands create more chaos. Lahore becomes a place of greed for the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. It finally was given to the Muslim majority.
Another town which was a bone of contention was Gurdaspur. It was about to go to Pakistan but finally decided for India. This stirred trouble and the situation goes out of control. Uncontrollable butchering continued and it was aggravated with the arrival of a train from Gurdaspur to Lahore. The train carried thousands of dead Muslims brutally slaughtered. Not only there were dead men but there was also gunny bags full of chopped women’s breasts. This was a spine chilling episode which evoked the inner beast in the Ice candy man. The train full of corpses also had his relatives, whom he was expecting at Lahore. There were no bodies of young women in the train, which clearly explains that they all were abducted or used for perverted sexual acts.

Meanwhile, Ayah’s group gradually gets distorted. The Hindus and the Sikhs were unable to face the ice candy man after the horrendous genocide. Ice candy man was too enraged and preoccupied with the thought of avenging his enemies (Hindus). He says, “I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train (...) that night I went mad, I tell you: I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I’d known all my life! (...) I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women.” (ICM 156)

It is the Gurdaspur train incident which changes Ice candy man completely. Revenge becomes his only motivation and he transforms into a communal fanatic, who kills his rival masseur for supporting Hindu-Muslim unity in the face of all odds. He also turns into a man who abducts Ayah, the woman he loves. The reason for abducting Ayah is obvious that she was a Hindu. Ayah is subsequently gang-raped and then condemned to lead a life of
prostitute in Hira Mandi. When Ice candy man gets a hint that efforts were being made to recover Ayah, he promptly marries her, believing to save her. It was sexual jealousy that played a prominent role in Ayah’s violation. Ice candy man desired Ayah, but she loved Masseur. Nothing bothers him until the riots, but when communal passion gained prominence, he took the opportunity to settle his personal scores by killing his rival and degrading the desired woman. As Kudchedkar pertinently says:

It is difficult to explain his [Ice-candy man’s] behaviour in terms of psychological plausibility. There is no doubt that he ‘loves’ Ayah in his own way; he [later] follows her across the border into India. That he should yet wish to injure her in revenge for her preference for Masseur is plausible. But that he should prostitute her and take her to himself is scarcely credible in a society where a woman once touched is tainted forever. His own sense of ‘honour’, if not devotion to her, would prevent it. (1998,69)

**Gendered violence and Women’s bodies**

In patriarchal societies such as India, women’s bodies are construed as being nothing more than the receptacle of a man’s honour, and the act of violation emphasizes precisely the role of women as objects in male constructions of their own honour. Women’s sexuality symbolizes manhood. Its desecration is a matter of such shame and dishonour that it demands revenge. This cruel logic of violence ultimately sees women as the victims dealt with
violence as a consequence. Inevitably they become the objects of atrocities at
the time of civil strife. Victories against the enemies were inscribed, marked
and celebrated on the bodies of women. This was as true of the partition of
India in 1947 as civil strife anywhere else in the world. What distinguished the
events of 1947 was the sheer scale of atrocities committed against women,
especially in Punjab. According to Urvashi Butalia, “the figures [of women
raped, abducted, tortured] range between 33,000-50,000 Hindu and Sikh
women and 21,000 or so Muslim women” (1995,81). Ayah was just one among
those thousands of victims.

The Muslim mob on the door step of Lenny’s house come in search for
the Hindus and Sikhs present in the house. Hari, the gardener who happened
to be a Hindu, is spared because of his conversion to Islam. He changes his
name from hari to Himat Ali. Hari had obviously converted to escape the
violence. His conversion to Islam is here marked by his taking a Muslim name.
But this change in name does not convince the mob. They wanted a more
authentic evidence of his conversion. “Let’s make sure,’ a man says, hitching
up his lungi, his swaggering gait bent on mischief. ‘Undo your Shalwar Himat
Ali. Let’s see if you’re a proper Muslim’ ” (ICM 192).

As Hari /Himat Ali was recently circumcised and is also able to recite the
Muslim prayer Kalma, his life is spared by the mob. The circumcised or
uncircumcised penis becomes a sign of religious identity upon the other’s male
body. The public exposure of his penis becomes a mode of ascertaining true
Hindu/Muslim identity, which already is a masculine identity. As kavita Daiya points out, “The visual marking of his sexual body in ritualized ways, and the performance of the kalma are thus signifiers of a masculine Muslim identity that is less religious and more ethnic for hari/Himat Ali” (2008, 8).

This kind of violence was quite common during the partition days. The partition violence is also replete with incidents of castration and both voluntary and forced conversion of men, women and children. To address the anxiety of the masculine other’s proper religious address, like the man in the mob reveals that men were forced to strip naked in order to check whether they were circumcised or uncircumcised was seen to be the ultimate, fool proof test of whether they were Muslim or Hindu/Sikh. The other community also adopted the same method to check the religious identity.

The incident of Hari’s identity checking ritual exposes the stark reality that women never inhabited that identity of a proper religious subject. Women’s bodies were not marked in ritual ways. Kavita Daiya says that “Women’s bodies are not marked in a ritual way for women are never “properly” ethnically identified except through their relations with men (Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh)” (2008, 8). The signs of women’s ethnic difference appear at the sartorial level through dress, makeup and jewelry. During partition, the violence saw many abducted women, who were raped by men from the enemy community were marked with religious symbols on their bodies. The symbols were either ‘Om’ or the Crescent moon. Ironically, these symbols did not signify the
women’s conversion, but it only represented and clearly pointed out their otherness or their own identity. The identity of otherness marked in their bodies revealed only shame. They symbolized their bodies as conquered and violated by the religious community which branded the symbol.

The difference in impact on male and female sexuality in these violent processes is apparent in the abduction process of Ayah. The mob swarms through the house and find Ayah. What followed was not a test of Ayah’s ‘proper’ identity, like Hari’s but she is dragged out and subsequently gang raped. Lenny describes the scene of abduction in sheer disbelief:

(...). They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her Arms stretched out, and her bare feet – that want to move backwards – are forced 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 shoulders, 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.

The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimace (ICM 195).

The abduction of Ayah gives a visual spectacle whose terror makes Ayah unable even to scream. The way in which she was held and dragged is an
evidence of patriarchal upper hand. The choice and rights that were privileged to men were deliberately snatched from women like Ayah. Unlike Hari, Ayah was not given a chance to prove her religious identity. She was manhandled in such a way that she cannot speak a single word. Her lips, her throat and mouth were all sealed to make her voiceless by the abductors inhuman behaviour. Her body does not produce any religious identity, but it is seen by the abductors as a place to be conquered. The way they push her inside the cart and feel triumphant of her abduction, reveals that they all want her body to fulfill their sexual desires in the first place and later celebrate on the body by tattooing it with religious symbols or by mutilating her breasts. Fortunately Ayah does not encounter such violation after being raped by the abductors, but she is made a prostitute in Hira Mandi, where once again her body becomes a prime object of foul play.

Ayah’s fate is not the only deed of communal violence documented in the novel. There are more vivid accounts of what happened both in the city and remote villages after the partition. The Gurdaspur train incident, clearly details the violence played on Women’s bodies by cutting their breasts and the Pir Pindo riot gives a graphic descriptions of how the women of the village were wiped out. Through Ranna, the Muslim boy’s eyes, Sidhwa describes the worst kind of violence perpetrated on women’s bodies and children. On his way to Pakistan from India, Ranna witnesses babies snatched from their mothers, smashed against the walls and their howling mothers brutally raped and killed. Ranna’s sister, Khatija, who was eleven years old had to undergo a brutal
attack and Ranna witnesses the event with utter shock and disbelief. The narrative says, “Khatija, run stark naked into their courtyard. Her long hair dishevelled, her boyish body bruised, her lips cut and swollen and a bloody scab where her front teeth were missing” (ICM 202). There were similar incidents of violence committed on young women of Pir Pindo. On his escape from the village, Ranna also saw the Sikhs with Muslim women in the mosque, brutally raping them and severing their head after the act. Inside the mosque, a Sikh man irritably shouts at a woman:

Stop whimpering, you bitch, or i’ll bugger you again!’(...)

Other men laughed. There was much movement. Stifled exclamations and moans. A woman screamed, and swore in Punjabi. There was a loud cracking noise and the rattle of breath from the lungs. Then a moment of horrible stillness (ICM 203).

These spine chilling accounts of violence on Women’s bodies explain thecrudeness of the partition consequences. Though communal in its source, it is believed by feminists that it is the upper hand of the patriarchy that played its politics on women’s bodies. Ayah’s body becomes a subject for unbearable violence. First she is gang raped and later thrown into the brothel, where the only concern for men was her body. This defilement of her body eventually leads to an emotional blankness in Ayah, not giving heed to love and care. Even though, the Ice candy man expresses his love by marrying her. She was not in a position to make an erasure of her defilement and lead a normal life
with Ice-candy man. What she wanted was freedom from the clutches of Ice-candy man.

**Victimization of Women**

According to Menon and Bhasin, the Boundary Commission gave detailed accounts of the train massacres between August 9 and September 30. The authors assert:

by August 13 it became impossible for passengers to reach Lahore station because they were attacked en route; between August 12-18, it became a veritable death-trap, and in the rural areas, by August 15, nearly every east-bound train passing through Montgomery and Lahore was stopped and attacked (1998, 37).

Obviously, the Partition of India in 1947 resulted in an undeclared civil war over borders, boundaries, culture and religion. Thousands of families were attacked simply because of their religious affiliation. When the exodus came to an end, about eight to ten million people had crossed over from Punjab to Bengal. According to Menon and Bhasin, this was “the largest peace-time mass migration in history - about 500,000- 1,000,000 had perished” (1998, 37). Sidhwa documents this mass exodus in the novel too. She says:

Wave upon wave of Muslim refugees flood Lahore and the Punjab west of Lahore. Within three months seven million Muslims and five million
Hindus and Sikhs are uprooted in the largest and most terrible exchange of population known to history (ICM 169).

The countless rapes and kidnappings of women and young girls are perhaps the most sordid tales of partition. These women, some with children in their arms, were reportedly abducted, raped and molested, passed from one man to another, bartered and sold like cheap chattel.

A young woman of twenty-two recounts her flight from Pakistan with a foot convoy from Lyallpur:

When the convoy left Lyallpur we all joined it. The military had robbed us of everything before we left our house. First they took away our arms, then our valuables. On the way, I was separated from my people. I saw men being murdered and women being raped on the wayside. If someone protested he was killed. One woman was raped by many men. I was also raped by three men in succession. A man, at last, took me to his house and kept me there for eight days....He subjected me to physical torture, forced cow bones into my mouth so that I should be converted to Islam...He put my hands under the charpoy legs and sat down on it to say prayers while I suffered agonies of pain. (Khosla 230)

This young woman recounted the acts of violence perpetuated against her. She feels that it all happened because of her religion. Her being forced to eat cow bones signifies an obvious mocking of her Hindu beliefs. Also, the rape itself represents a perverse form of conversion.
Women’s bodies became the battleground on which these factions clashed. The woman’s account of the atrocities committed against her is quite similar to Ayah’s sordid tale. Ayah is also kidnapped and forced to marry Ice-Candy-Man, a Muslim, while she is Hindu. The fact that Ayah is forced to prostitute her body and coerced into having sex with Ice-Candy-Man indicates that women’s bodies have historically become territory in which men act out their aggression. Whatever love Ice-Candy-Man has for Ayah is smothered by his complete subjugation of her. He changes her name from Shanta to Mumtaz, a Muslim name. Also, Ice-Candy-Man and Ayah continue to live in a ‘kotha’ (brothel) even after their marriage. She is adorned completely in the attire of a Muslim woman. Ice-Candy-Man successfully strips Ayah of her identity as a woman and as a Hindu. Although she eventually escapes her abductor and partially regains her identity and power as a woman, the reader is left with the idea that, even with her family in Amritsar, Ayah will be marked by her defilement during partition. If not physically, then emotionally she has to undergo the pain.

Ice-Candy-Man’s abduction and defilement of Ayah is a clear gesture of contempt against India, Hindu men, and Hindu property. Menon and Bhasin suggest:

The most predictable form of violence experienced by women, as women, is when the women of one community are sexually assaulted by the men of the other, in an overt assertion of their identity and a simultaneous
humiliation of the ‘other’ by “dishonoring” their women. In this respect, the rape and molestation of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women before and after Partition probably followed the familiar pattern of sexual violence, and of attack, retaliation and reprisal (1998,41).

By dishonoring another’s wife, daughter, or sister, one ridicules his religion, cultural, and personal honor. In many written accounts, it says that women were forced to strip and parade naked through the marketplace. Other accounts tell of women being forced to dance naked in gurudwaras (Sikh hostels) and being raped in front of the men of their family. One doctor at a refugee camp in Jhang testified:

One of the cases that I treated was of a woman from village Chund BharwanaWho was the wife of a railway porter. One of her hands was chopped off above her wrist and then she was thrown into the fire, as a result of which her lower portion got burnt. (Menon & Bhasin,42)

The most gruesome injuries cited by doctors during the riots were the amputation of breasts of women. One doctor in particular said that “six such cases of chopped-off breasts were brought to the refugee camp and all of them proved fatal.”(Menon & Bhasin,42) **Ice Candy Man** also depicts such macabre act of disfiguring the women. Ice-Candy-Man reports to his friends that a train from Gurdaspur has arrived in Lahore filled with murdered Muslims. Ice-Candy-Man shouts, “Everyone is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There
are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women’s breasts!” (ICM 159)

However, this act of violence against Islamic women only spurs him to perpetrate violence on Hindu and Sikh women. He exclaims, “I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women” (ICM 166). Ice-Candy-Man fulfills his hunger for revenge by kidnapping Ayah and forcing her to marry him, while also prostituting her body.

Many women died trying to avoid sexual violation, preserve their chastity, and protect their religious and family honor. India’s partition has witnessed numerous ways in which women took their lives. Some jumped into the nearest well or set themselves ablaze. Sometimes the act was accomplished alone, sometimes all the women in a family committed mass suicide.

In the novel, acts of violence against women are not limited to acts of religious hatred and xenophobia. Lenny’s mother, a Zoroastrian, is a victim of the will of men as well. Lenny states, “Although Father has never raised his hands to us, one day I surprise Mother at her bath and see the bruises on her body” (ICM 224). Thus Sidhwa reminds the reader that victimization and abuse of women also occur in the daily course of domestic life.

The forgoing depictions of violence against women are shockingly savage. These brutal acts indicate what women’s bodies symbolize for variant religious groups. The appalling physical injuries inflicted on these women suggest that in this time and place the female body became territory to be
fought over, conquered, and subsequently “branded” by the assailant through rape or disfigurement. According to Menon and Bhasin:

acts of raping women in public in full view of their relatives, or “tattooing and branding the body with ‘Pakistan, Zindabad!’ or ‘Hindustan, Zindabad!’ not only marked the woman for life, they never permitted her [or her family and community] the possibility of forgetting her humiliation.” In the context of Partition, “it engraved the division of India into India and Pakistan on the women of both religious communities in a way that they became the respective countries, indelibly imprinted by the other.(1998, 43)

By marking a half moon on the breasts or genitalia of a woman, the male assailant extended the violation of her body to future generations. The amputation of a woman’s breasts desexualized her, denying her the role of wife and mother. In fact, amputation literally denied her the ability to nurse and thus be a nurturer. She was transformed into a freakish figure, an outcast, a barren woman. Sudir Kakar, in his studies of civil unrest, indicts that the amputation of breasts “incorporates the (more or less conscious) wish to wipe the enemy off the face of the earth. According to Stasa Zajovic, in a different context, analyzing the recent mass rape of women in Bosnia Herzegovina, says that ‘the female womb becomes occupied territory.’

Sidhwa also incorporates the horrifying practice of female self immolation in ‘Ranna’s Story.’ Prior to an invasion of a Sikh village, it is
planned that the women will set themselves ablaze. The narrator details the plan: “The women and girls will gather at the Chaudhry’s. Rather than face the brutality of the mob they will pour kerosene around the house and burn themselves” (ICM 214). Ironically, their scheme fails, which results in much greater carnage.

**Ayah’s Defiance**

Women were the silent victims during civil war, religious unrest, and political violence. Fortunately, both Pakistan and India eventually established an Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill which demanded the return of the abducted women and children to their families. In order to have a safe and secure transaction, Refugee camps were established in both countries. Sidhwa places one of the Refugee camp near Lenny’s home, where, at night, she hears the cries of those abused women. Hamida, herself a recovered woman, consoles Lenny and states that, “poor fate-smitten woman...what can a sorrowing woman do but wail?” (ICM 225) Lenny is tormented by the cries of this woman. The narrator cries, “My heart is wrung with pity and horror. I want to leap out of my bed and soothe the wailing woman and slay her tormentors. I’ve seen Ayah carried away -- and it had less to do with fate than with the will of men” (ICM 226). Menon and Bhasin argue that men, with their savagery, were responsible for the abject plight of women during partition. One social worker commented on the predicament of women in the camps:
They looked like human skeletons — the women and children! They looked as if they belonged to another time. Those who were young had also become old by being used. I feel like crying when I remember the sight. They had been completely ruined (1998, 81).

Though these women were cleaned and fed, some were forced to have abortions as the government did not want them giving birth to children who were a product of religious hatred and civil violence. When cultural and religious brutality subsided, women continued to suffer nevertheless. Because of their defilement, some women were rejected by their families.

Ayah’s abduction is highlighted as the most prioritized event in the novel. It has a profound effect on Lenny, who feels guilty for being the reason of her abduction. The absence of Ayah makes Lenny void within and no replacement filled it up. In a state of despair, she says, “Ayah less and sore-tongued I drift through the forlorn rooms of my house (...)” (ICM 185). This might be because; Ayah had endeared herself to almost everyone in Lenny’s family. Her loss was irreparable, as she had become an integral part of the Sethi household. The entire family took interest in the recovery of abducted ayah. Because of Ayah’s abduction, the family sympathized with the hapless women of the camp.

The novel focuses on the rehabilitation camp to bring forth the vivid realism. Along with the mass abduction and the rape of the women by the opposite community at the time of partition, there was also an earnest effort in rescuing and rehabilitating these women, not only by the authorities or
families, but also by ordinary people who were moved by the plight of the victims of partition violence. In this respect Women played a key role in the recovery operation, as stressed by Sidhwa in the novel. Lenny’s mother and Electric aunt stand an example to those women, who helped the victims to cross the border. Lenny’s mother and Electric aunt smuggle the rationed petrol to help Hindu and Sikh friends to run away and to send kidnapped women to their families across the border. Mrs Sethi is also shown as to risk disharmony at home for the greater cause of helping Hindu women who had been victims of violence. Both the ladies, belonged to the Parsi community, and it would have perhaps been more convenient for them to remain detached or aloof to avoid any danger, but they purely motivated by their altruistic intentions set out to help the victims. Rodabai, Lenny’s godmother plays an important role in rescuing Ayah from Ice-candy man. Without these women, Ayah would have been irrecoverably lost.

At the end of the novel, Ayah shows a considerable defiance, unlike many other women in her situation, who accept their fate. It was customary for women caught up in partition violence to blame it all on fate. Menon and Bhasin thus record the words of a woman named Gyan Deyi as saying:

(...) This was all fate... To leave one’s country is fate. Now this [India] is my country, this has become my place. I am settled here (...) If a country is destined to be divided, it will be. What-ever is written will happen. Have I ever wanted to go back to Pakistan? No, one needs great strength
for that and I am not strong enough. It’s a dream I cannot afford to have (1998,86).

Another widow of Punjab named Durga Rani expressed similar sentiments when she said:

I have just blurted out everything to you today; everything that was boiling inside has just come out. Well, we got what was in our ‘kismet’. We must not have done good deeds in the past. But I thank God every day. I say, “many many thanks to you for giving me food to eat, clothes to wear.’ Most of my life is over; the remaining few days will also pass.” (1998,88)

The novel also has such a character, Hamida, who is an echo of this collective sentiment of resigned acceptance of relentless fate. After Ayah’s abduction, Hamida becomes a replacement for Ayah in Mrs Sethi’s house, who was recruited from the adjacent rehabilitation camp for recovered women. She herself describes the camp as a place for ‘fallen women’. This self definition of her as ‘fallen’ is an evidence of how she is perceived by the society and the home she has left behind. The definition also shows her own construction of herself and the parameters by which she reconstitutes her life and herself in a new environment. Such women after their defilement shrink into a confined environment and expect a life untouched by society and family. Hamida is of the thought that, she will not be accepted by her husband and her four children because of her defiled status. She is also one of the stereotypes that
belief in overriding philosophy that the mortals are, puppets in the hands of fate. She tells Lenny that her Kismet is no good. Though being a minor character in the novel, Hamida is significant, as she is the representative of the tragedy of women violated during partition. More importantly, she is also the representative of the failure of the new nation states to address as well as redress their post-partition problems. Sidhwa herself said to Alok Bhalha, “Hamida is a sort of composite figure (...) [for which] I drew upon all the stories of horror that were floating around me at the time” (Sidhwa, 233).

Ayah on the other hand was a broken-hearted woman, and the life had gone out of her eyes. When Lenny accompanies godmother to meet Ayah at Hira Mandi, she is shocked to observe the beauty and radiance gone out of her eyes. But she remains inflexible in her refusal to spend her life with Ice-candy man. She tells Rodabai in a voice that was “(...) harsh, gruff: as if someone has mutilated her vocal words (...). I will not live with him (...). I cannot forget what happened (...). I have thought it over... I want to go to my folk... whether they want me or not” (ICM 261-263). She leaves Ice-candy man and stays in the women’s camp near Lenny’s house for a short while and eventually the narrative tells us that she joins her family at Amritsar. Ayah is very differently conceptualized in the novel. She is portrayed as a rare woman victimized by partition violence who defies her fate. Unlike other victims, she showed some defiance in choosing her life at the end. She did not succumb to the acceptance of fate or Ice-candy man’s importuning, poetry-spouting and pestering. Lenny’s godmother makes a timely intervention in helping out Ayah to reach her family.
The River Churning

Contextualizing the desertions of abducted and raped women within the social production of a discourse of honor and of women’s sexual purity; The present study tries to examine the Bengali perspective of Jyotirmoyee Devi’s Epar Ganga Opar Ganga /The River Churning. Jyotirmoyee Devi does not raise the issue of women’s bodies subjected to a gendered form of communal hostility; she rather analyzes how women’s bodies are made the preferred sites for the hieroglyphics of power diffused throughout everyday domestic life. She critiques the over-emphasis on chastity and tabooed social contacts among Hindus that led to their abandoning the women abducted and/or raped during the communal riots. In doing so, her work sunders the silence surrounding the sexually-victimized women that has operated as an effective denial of their citizenship. Her writings address the representational deficiency in the social and cultural historiography of the 1947 partition of Bengal of the large-scale gendered violence.

Jyotirmoyee Devi’s writings address the ellipses of history, and especially women’s histories that are inseparable from the histories of nation-formation. She critiques the political process that encouraged forgetting and tries to restore women to national history. The novel makes a nexus of the rejections of abducted and raped women to the social production of a discourse of honour, in the context of women’s sexual purity.
Overlapping deeply in a program of Hindu cultural nationalism in India dating back to the nineteenth century, the discourse of women’s purity was deployed by elites to counter issues of foreign domination. Significantly at the interface with the colonizer, religious, and cultural outsider, women’s sexuality, in the late nineteenth century, was made a critical site of symbolic economies involving the nation. From this period of early nationalism and high imperialism emerges the figure of the chaste upper-caste, upper-and middle-class Hindu woman. And in her role initially as Wife, and later as Mother, it was a figure destined to function as the supreme emblem of a consolidated Hindu nationalist selfhood.

In the partition struggle, “women were the worst sufferers, for they had ‘no say’ in the decision relating to the partition of the sub continent” (S.P. Sree 72). Women neither expressed any special desire to inflict shameful atrocities on men or women belonging to the rival religion. Jyotirmoyee Devi, succeeds in presenting in this novel, the agony underwent by women during the pre-Indian Independence and post-independence partition violence.

Jyotirmoyee Devi’s writing marks a negation of the patriarchal discourse of colonialism/ nationalism by exposing the brutal isolating practices that ritualized forms of purity demanded. The compelling question that animates Jyotirmoyee Devi’s is not so much how state-intervention affected the lives of women, but rather: What happened after that? It focuses on the reception, or non-reception, of women in the community to which they had returned on the
basis of the religion of their fathers/ brothers/ husbands. Some of the questions that resonate through the narrative are: why women who were abducted, raped and dislocated by Partition displaced repeatedly after their ‘recovery’ to boarding schools, or to hostels for single/ working women? What makes their reinstatement in their original families impossible? How does the symbolic burden placed on a woman by cultural nationalism produce an immediate effect on the female body? What is the status of the individual detail, and does the specific case matter?

Answering to these questions the narrative elaborates with the sad tale of a girl, Sutara, who lost her parents and sister in the pre-partition violence in the Noakhali village. Sutara had to live a lonely life as she had been spurned by her own brothers and close relatives due to the influence of the Patriarchy which was awfully loaded against the likes of women. The event of partition clashes, witnessed women to be the sufferers. Sutara was left alone in a hostel like an orphan. She had to fend for herself.

The life of Sutara Dutta was happy and normal until the communal clash that broke out in Noakhali. She spent her happy life with her friends and playmates, Fatima, Sofia, Hasina, Sakina, Aysha, Bina, Alaka, Durga and others. Her father was a teacher in the village school. Her eldest brother lived in Calcutta with his wife. The two younger brothers also lived with their elder brother, to pursue their studies in Calcutta. Her married elder sister had come for Diwali and they all were expecting their brother’s arrival, which was delayed
due to communal trouble in the city. In their village everything was fine until the fateful night when fires engulfed the Hindu portion of the village. The attackers assisted by the local servants Rahim and Karim came to their house and in the struggle that ensued Sutara lost her consciousness. She was raped and her modesty was violated while she was in a state of unconsciousness. When she regained consciousness, she found herself in her playmate Sakina’s house.

Tamijuddin Saheb, the headmaster of the school, where Sutara’s father was working as a teacher, rescued Sutara. He and his family members took good care of her and nursed her back to good health. The novelist highlights and criticizes the raging caste system and its principles. In this novel, she makes a holistic approach in understanding the dilemmas of women subjected to violence not once but twice, sexually and socially. Sakina’s mother was worried more about Sutara’s health than the caste rules of Sutara. She, irrespective of religion, wanted Sutara to take nutritious food to gather her strength back. In a loving way, she says, “you must eat well, my dear, to gain strength. You won’t be able to get up otherwise. Later do some penance because people might object to your having had food cooked by me.”(TRC 10)

Sakina’s mother is a mouth piece to the novelist, through whom; she makes a stark criticism of the society, which always treated women in an unfair and shabby manner. She questions men by saying:
you want to partition the country, go ahead: you want to fight over it – do it by all means. But why don’t you leave the women alone? Does your religion allow you to dishonour women the way they are doing? Does the Koran approve of it? You are educated section of the community – teachers, lawyers. Mukhteers – why are you keeping quiet? Shame on you! (TRC 14)

The passage indicates the state of women, and interestingly, a woman defies the wrong deeds that happen in the society. Being a woman, Sakina’s mother does not step back in condemning the atrocities inflicted on women folk irrespective of the religion. She also condemns the impotency of the educated, who failed to protect or stop their women being defiled.

Tamijuddin Saheb’s answers reflect the writer’s feelings about the lopsided Hindu ethos which was hostile to women. He tries to persuade other Muslim men to abstain from abducting women, but he is shocked to hear them argue in an unexpected way. He says to his wife:

I appealed to them, said leave the girls alone, don’t we too have women in our homes? Do you know what they said? They said, can you tell us of a single instance when woman have not been molested, pushed about? Look at the stories in their puranas – what about the abduction of Sita? What about Draupadi? I tried to tell them that these are not good examples. They scoffed at me, saying these things happen. We know(…)

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the people who argued in this way were all educated, religious. They do their namaz, go to mosque, and observe roza. (TRC 14)

Sutara underwent homesickness. She waited eagerly for her brother from Calcutta. There was no concern from her brother’s side. Even in reply to Tamijuddin Saheb’s letter there was no enquiry about Sutara’s well being in their house. Sakina’s mother even doubted whether they were going to accept her back. Sakina’s family entertained the idea of keeping Sutara in their own family as a member. But there was more pressure mounting on them, as it was clear that they had to face the accusation of abduction of a Hindu girl. Tamijuddin Saheb ultimately took Sutara to her brother’s place in Calcutta.

In her brother’s-in-laws’ house, she received a very cold hostile reception. The lady of the house had an antagonistic view on Sutara. When Sutara tried to touch her feet, she stepped back saying, “No, no, don’t touch me now. You have not changed your clothes” (TRC 31). The conservative behaviour of the lady instantly perplexed Sakina. Such conservative ideas in ladies afraid of losing their caste, force them to get rid of the minimum decency available in them. They do not care to exhibit insult and humiliation in the pretext of caste rules. Sutara had to undergo all these social inhumanities inflicted on her for no fault of hers. From the day she entered the house, she was repeatedly put under such unbearable hindrances. She was never allowed inside the kitchen or permitted to touch the drinking water pitcher. She was literally rendered a virtual untouchable status owing to her molestation by the attackers and her
subsequent stay in a Muslim family for six months. Luckily Sutara receives some kind of affection from Amulya Babu, her brother’s father-in-law. He paid some attention to the necessity of her studies. The members of the family finally use her studies as a perfect excuse to bundle her off to a hostel, justifying that she could study undisturbed there.

The lady of the house also gave a potent rationalisation for driving Sutara off to a hostel that the marriage of Sutara’s brother’s daughters would be at peril if Sutara stayed with her brother. She says, “Sanat wants to take his sister with him. Then what? Will she ever be married, I ask you. One has got to think of everything. Having such a sister will jeopardise the marriage of his own daughter. Don’t you think so?” (TRC43)

The older ladies in the house were the ones who tortured Sutara the most. Sutara had to face the worst kind of ostracism from them. They were willing to permit eatables prepared by Muslims to be consumed by the members of the family, but were not at all ready to show an iota of love and affection to Sutara, whose sin was that she spent six months in a Muslim household. Instead they tried to justify her unfortunate position by attributing it to her karma. When Subha questioned if she too would be thrown away if she was abducted, the elderly ladies answer is a slice of their thought process:

God bless you, my child, don’t even utter such evil things!...It is the will of God and the karma of her previous birth. People get into danger because of work done in an earlier life. That girl has no future, neither in
this life nor beyond. She is destined to suffer, who can save her? Do not equate yourself with her, for god’s sake. The times are truly ominous (TRC 46).

Even the magisterially wise, Amulya Babu could not muster enough courage to make the cruel intent of the ladies to change into assertiveness. He failed to make them realize their follies. His own soliloquy says, “A Social group is like the wheels of jagannath, trampling individuals underfoot heartlessly. What were a few individuals to it, no better than insects. It did not stop for anyone, it had no time” (TRC 48).

The novelist underpins the fact that, even people like the wise Amulya Babu were not able to stop the social evils, and hence there is not much hope for society. The novelist also throws her criticism that people baulk when it is their turn to put precept into practice:

one could pretend to be objective, kind and generous and give long moral lectures as long as they are concerned about others. But even the wisest of judges would turn blind to logic if it involved his self-interest, if it had to do with something happening within his own home (TRC 48).

Even during summer vacation, Sutara was not allowed to stay at her relative’s home. Her callous brothers and family members requested the principal to keep her in the hostel. She had no companion, except the girls, who were orphaned just like her. The novelist accounts of such ill treatment prevailing not only in Sutara’s home but also in many other girls’ home too.
They were all orphaned only because of the partition violence. Sutara’s exiled life continued even after her post graduation studies. Though she got a job as a lecturer in Delhi and found a suitable status in the society, for her family she almost ceased to exist. Sometimes she paid visit to their house uninvited as she was compelled to get some books. As Gaythri Spivak says, “the women’s only practicable mode for signification is by the negation of a negation.”

Jyothirmoyee brings to limelight the crude ostracism subjected on Sutara. The worst of its kind takes place during Subha’s marriage ceremony. Innocent Subha invites Sutara to her wedding. No other senior member of the family made a mention of Subha’s marriage to her. They never bothered to invite her. At the wedding, Sutara was heaped with humiliations. For some guests, she became an object of wonder and gossip; and for some, she was the cause of anger and the object meant for condemnation. Sanath, her brother was put into embarrassment by the guests, who voluntarily abused him for bringing her to an auspicious occasion. Though the younger women liked her company and wanted her to stay with them for the night, the senior ladies adamantly antagonised her stay, considering it unholy. She was fed like a servant and driven away as quickly as possible.

The novel does not show any antagonism between men and women. The novel accepts the gendered character of the violence during the night of the riot, and highlights the role of women not as “victims of a patriarchal culture but in policing one another and as active reproducer of repressive masculinity.
(and femininity) against women” (S.P.Sree 78). These feelings are apt to Sutara’s life. During her brother’s daughter Reba’s marriage, she was deliberately checked not to attend the marriage. The invitation was posted late, so as to delay her in making arrangements for the journey. Her sister-in-law further accompanies a letter stating: (...) exam time – you may not get leave. After all you have just joined and it is so far away (TRC 70).

The partition violence was unveiled only to be incorporated into the temporal structures of relationship. The erasure of Sutara from the family’s collective mind was virtually complete. The novelist portrays her character, who is subjected to violence not only from outside, but also within the domestic arena. As per the words of Homi Bhabha:

> the possibilities of which they could never have for seen, as they lacked the survival skills – their circumstances demanded. The “intricate invasion” of history into the “recesses of the domestic sphere” interrupts their lives and the “borders between home and world become confused; and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other (1990, 9).

When compared to Sutara’s family, the Muslim family that rescued her at the village was more humane and compassionate. When Sakina’s mother came to know of Reba’s marriage, she understood that her family neglected Sutara and that her brother was not in a position to settle his sister’s marriage. Her words to her daughter Sakina were:
Do bring her to our country. Her brothers will never be able to get her married. They won’t. Let me see if we can do something...this unfortunate girl will live the life of an orphan. Let her come, we will accept her. I know Hindus are not likely to take her since she spent about six months with us. If her parents had been alive things would have been different. (TRC 97)

She entertained the hope of marrying Sutara to her son Aziz after converting her into Islam. When Sakina made the proposal to Sutara, she was unable to reconcile herself to such a proposal. She thought: why had Sakina made such a proposal? (TRC 94) after what the communal violence had done to her family, it was really difficult for Sutara to think amiably about such proposals. Ultimately it was her cousin Promode who comes forward to marry her against the wishes of the older family. There was poetic justice in his proposal after all ostracism Sutara faced from his mother and other senior ladies of the family. Jyothirmoyee Devi situates Sutara within the women-as-nation paradigm, but in her writings the fallen women is the symbolic representation of the nation.

Sutara recalls the confusion that she had over her parents fear and she was unable to understand, why they were asked to hide inside the house. When the fire reaches their house, Sutara recounts how they were intercepted by the family’s Muslim servant and few other unknown faces. The attack was too confusing to be understood for Sutara. She only saw her mother rushing to
the cowshed, where the cows were mooing desperately. Sutara followed her mother, when suddenly she heard her sister scream and fall to the ground. Her mother in a desperate attempt frees herself from the attackers’ grab and rushed to the pond at the back and jumped into the water.

In the light of the spreading fire everything was now visible. One of the ruffians went after mother...But Didi [Sutara’s sister] did not stir. Was she dead? What happened to Didi? Sutara couldn’t tell. She wanted to reach mother and began to run, but stumbled and fell. Then everything went blank. (TRC 8)

The incident of the attack stops here in the narrative and it never continues in the course of the novel. The blankness that Sutara associates with these events is rehearsed throughout the novel. Sutara is unable to know whether her family members are alive or dead. She is also seen with full anxiety and a loss of sense of time. Though there was light of fire spread all over the place, Sutara was unable to understand the moment. As Jill Didur says, ‘Sutara is unable to ‘know’ if her sister is alive or dead, thus displacing the connection between sight and knowledge” (2006, 143). The disjunction between sight and knowledge is repeated throughout the novel. After she regains consciousness in Tamijuddin Saheb’s house, Sutara loses count of the days and nights. Her disorientation states her anxiety that sprouted from an indefinable source and more significantly she is accompanied with a loss of memory that eventually disturbs her mentally and physically.
She had not recovered from the tremendous shock she had received. It had shaken her to the core. The exact nature of the blow which had stunned her physically and mentally was unknown to her – she was only aware of something terrible having crushed her existence out of shape.

She could not clearly remember what had happened, but the dreadful memories of that night kept returning like a nightmare. Did she fall to the ground or was she pushed down? What happened after that? Who rescued her and when? For how long had she been running a fever?

After recovering, she takes a walk and sees the ruins of her family’s property in the distance and is haunted by “invisible scenes in her mind, which she could not get rid of” (TRC 19). The entire event of partition and its mayhem is paradoxical to Sutara’s experience of memories being haunted that she cannot remember. The novelist in this respect tries to capture Sutara’s experience in modernist accounts of the birth of the Indian nation – state.

The major part of the novel is occupied by the aftermath experience that she undergoes after her encounter with the partition violence. Her return to her family cause disruption, which clearly illustrates the unsettling effect Sutara’s subject position, has for patriarchal history in the post-partition socio political context. Jill Didur says, “The Patriarchal discourse of contamination that legitimates Sutara’s treatment by her extended family is simultaneously displaced and made visible by her refusal to confirm the source of their anxiety.
regarding her return.” (2006, 144) From the first letter, Sanat, her brother sends after learning about his Parent’s death during the sectarian violence, he laments and grieves over their parents, but never showed any anxiety towards her. The narrative states, “Sanat lamented the death of his parents, briefly mentions his sister. If she wanted to return, they had to think of how to bring her over. But the letter displayed no particular anxiety toward her” (TRC 16). 

Eventhough the nation-state in the novel has a stake in recovering Sutara, Jyotirmoyee Devi paints a neat picture of the dominant Hindu community as being at odds with how to (re)integrate Sutara into the domestic sphere. This resonates the tension that existed between the community and state in cases of recovery of the women abducted during the partition. Urvashi Butalia explains the conflict that was pervasive at the time of partition between the two constituencies:

For the community it was the women’s sexual purity that became important, as also her community and/or religious identity. For the state, because the women the state was rescuing were already in a state of sexual ‘impurity’ having often lived with their captors, this problem had to be pushed aside, and their religious identity made paramount. (1993,18)

Measures were set in place to repurify the abducted women through various means like, separating the women from the illegitimate children, the invalidation of forced intermarriages and conversions, and provision for
abortion, euphemistically known as medical treatments. In order to successfully overcome the resistance especially from the Hindu community in reintegrating their women, the ministry of relief and rehabilitation had issued a pamphlet, which quoted “Manu [the creator of Manavadharmasatra] to establish that a woman who had sexual involvement with someone other than her husband became purified after three menstrual cycles, and hence her family could accept her back” (Butalia 18). The idea behind such measures was to erase the discursive evidence that reminded the community of the women’s experience with the ‘other’ and portray the Women’s involvement with the ‘other’ as mere passive. These measures were designed to facilitate as what Das calls, a “‘social forgetting’ of ‘abducted’ women’s experiences” (1991, 70). In the case of a woman interviewed by Das, it was apparent that the entire community avoided discussing her experience with the other. As Das points out:

by refusing to elicit speech on her experience in the village where she was ambushed, and allowing her to socially ‘forget’ her experiences, the society allowed her to be treated as a woman whose life could unfold itself in accordance with a traditional telos (1991, 70).

When such practices allowed the woman to avoid Sutara’s fate, it came at the price of her silence. Gandhi and Nehru also made repeated appeals encouraging the extended families to reclaim their recovered female relatives. They mentioned that the polluted and abducted women are their own daughters. There prevailed an importance to create an aura of purity around
recovered women. More than recovery, repurification was considered as a national goal to achieve. Both the abductees and the abductors were given a simple suggestion to repurify themselves. The former were asked to submit to the Recovery Operation’s Infrastructure and the latter to admit their guilt. Gandhi’s post-prayer speech that came as an article in the Times of India on 8 March, 1947, states:

It had been conveyed to him, he added, that there were Muslim women even now kept perforce in Hindu homes. If that were true, and if of course such women were still living, he would expect every one of them to be restored to their homes. (Times of India 1947)

There was a deep chaos among the abductors belonging to the Hindu community, who held Muslim women against their will in their homes. The abduction of Muslim women was considered to threaten the purity of the Indian nation-state by bringing their abductors’ honour under scrutiny. So a complete access was given to the abductors to repurify themselves by releasing the abductees. By returning the abducted Muslim women, Hindu and Sikh men were told to regain their lost purity. Despite the government’s efforts, many women were permanently stigmatized and marked polluted. This is certainly the experience of Sutara in the novel. She was not let to enjoy the privilege of repurifying herself, as privileged to the patriarchy, even though her sexuality is unspoken in the novel. Jyotirmoyee Devi designs a narrative, which
deliberately abandons the word ‘rape’ to veil the bodily trauma experienced by women during the sectarian violence. As Mookerjea-Leonard states:

Not to read/dismiss Jyotirmoyee Devi’s syncopated, circumlocutive writing as reticence or, as residual prudery of a post-Victorian novelist, because the use of the Bengali equivalent for ‘rape’ is not rare in her writings, especially in her essays. Rather, the veiling of the bodily trauma through language constitutes a counter-discourse to the economy of display of woman (2003, 41).

The narrative repeatedly brings out the gaps in Sutara’s story. The conflict between the community and the state over Sutara’s reintegration is resolved by portraying her as a passive victim, polluted by the Muslim Other, thus wrapping her fate as an outcast. Sutara’s failure to recall her experience with the ‘other’ and her recovery by the state and rejection by the community projects as a loss that disrupts the perception of her present.

Though the codes are set by patriarchy, it is enforced by the agency of women in the community. This is an astonishing fact that continues through the course of novel through the senior ladies of the family. The women play a major role in the community, who seek to maintain their own patriarchal patronage by distancing their identities from women considered polluted. The women of the older generation become the instigators of Sutara’s alienation from the family. They continuously uphold the rituals of purity, marginalizing Sutara’s connection with the family. The narrative offers a peep into the
demarcation between the protected and therefore pure women and abducted and therefore polluted women. The older ladies of the family felt that, the stigma attached on Sutara’s honour will lead into consequences affecting the marriage of their daughters. The women, who were protected from the violent happenings of the partition, feared being tainted by the stigma attached to abducted women. This ideal compels even the younger women of the family to abstain from Sutara.

Although Subha invites Sutara to attend her wedding, she and her sister Probha comply with the humiliating treatment she receives from Subha’s mother and her peers. For instance, when Subha’s mother insists that Sutara eat separately and leave the wedding as quickly as possible, the narrative states, “the two sisters heard the order without comment” (TRC 63). Later when Amulya babu enquires why Sutara is eating alone, the narrative reports, “Bibha and Boudi [Sutara’s cousins] had no answer but the seniors came to their rescue”(TRC 63). Sutara’s presence at the wedding precipitated disruption and embarrassment to the family. This hurts Sutara to the extent that she never attends the other wedding in the family. It is clearly understood that the role of women is vital in maintaining the rituals of purity and because of which the abducted /polluted women like Sutara are deeply affected to stabilize a home.

As Butalia concludes in her discussion of Women’s agency during partition: “our understanding of agency too needs to take into account notions
of the moral order which is sought to be preserved when women act, as well as the mediation of the family, community, class and religion” (1993, 24).

The structure of the patriarchy determines women as the torch bearers of tradition, purity and honour, women themselves contributed to the perpetuation of these practices in order to maintain their patriarchal patronage at the expense of such women like Sutara.

The novelist ironically characterizes the head of the family Amulya Babu with an internalized disciplinary behaviour. He appears to be a kind-hearted person, who reluctantly complies with the women’s treatment of Sutara. In an instance, when his sister explains that the Hindu code of daily rituals does not allow such woman like Sutara to be accepted back and let her enter into the kitchen and the store, Babu attempts to put up some resistance by citing instances of the family having eaten food at the local Muslim restaurant. But his wife blames such deeds as things done by men. Similarly, at Subha’s wedding, Babu was completely irritated at the sight of Sutara being ill treated by his family women. Amulya Babu was the only person in the family randomly kind to Sutara. The women on the other hand suggested that, their act of maintaining such codes only served the purpose of uplifting his honour and dignity in their community. But Babu defers to their judgement and reconciles himself with the thought that it is impossible to shoulder everyone’s burden.

Sutara’s contact with the Muslim community outside the bounds of her family’s domestic sphere is the reason for the treatment that she received
inside her family. Her status quo in the community was at great peril, which was yet another threat to survive without the protection of the community in a society structured according to the gender. The temporary solution to cope with this threat in the family and in the society was to send her to boarding school. The family sits together and after a long discussion, they arrive at this solution.

I think this is the best thing for the time being,” said Bimal at last. ‘Let her pass out of school, and then we’ll see what can be done.’

About what could be done, none of them was quite sure. But the crisis was stalled for the time being. Spend some money. Send her to boarding school (TRC 49).

The boarding school is best used by Bibha’s family as a place of absorption for their unwanted niece. It allowed them to conform to the restrictive codes of conduct expected by the community sphere. The polluted house of theirs, after the entry of Sutara, is now felt to be pure. They again did not want their house to be polluted and so Sutara was kept away from the house as much as possible. This is evident during the holidays, when Sutara and many of the other girls at the school do not return home for a visit. “The boarding house was kept open for some orphaned girls who were exiles, fugitives, with no place to go to”(TRC 56). It did not mean that these girls do not have any relatives or friends, but the fact is that they were unwelcome in their homes. The school was in a tactical alliance with the community and state, that it did not permit a frank discussion among the girls regarding their
background. Because it was a taboo, Sutara learns about other women’s experience of losing their family and being ostracized only later when she worked as a teacher at Yajnaseni College. It is at this point that, she realizes the patterns in which she and the others were treated. She also learns that Muslim women too had had to face the same trauma. Jill Didur says, that the novelists “focus on the treatment of abducted and polluted women precludes the idealization of any nation and instead shifts the reader’s attention to the intersections and contradictions among patriarchal, community, and state concerns”(2006, 150).

Sutara’s exclusion from the pool of marriageable women in the nation, because of her polluted status, leaves her in a state of alienation from the nation-state and community. The exclusion is justified by members of the community as a necessary evil to maintain homogeneous and stable representation of the nation-state. During the conversation between Promode and his friends about the plight of the abducted women, his friend Ajay remarks that these women are ill-fated and they do not deserve to live. He comments, “Will you stop this please? Let them die first, let them be ‘wiped out.’ we have got our government, that is the main thing”(TRC 118). What Ajay means about wiping out is to erase the entire history of the sufferings of the abducted women, which in today’s context, in order to protect the patriarchal community and state alliance has been fulfilled.
Sutara is in direct conflict with the Hindu-centric codes that makes her struggle hard to be independent. Independent here is referred to making her own home without depending on her brothers. The contradictions that Sutara experiences, is accounted in the narrative when she gets a teaching job at the college and settles into a new lodging. The narrative emphasizes that:

Although Sutara found a place to stay, it was neither a home nor a household and least of all a nest created by a woman’s love and care. But it was a room, a room of her own, and hers through her hard-earned money. Did that make it a home? She knew, only too well, the bitter truth that she would never have a home. But at least her brothers would no longer have to finance her. She would be a burden no more. Did that mean she was now independent? Do women ever become independent? Does anyone worry about her? (TRC 69)

Though Sutara achieves this independence and makes herself self-reliant, marriage was something that was not even considered a possibility, which otherwise would have been a definite possibility for a man in her position. This gender degradation is inappropriate to the liberal notion of independence in the feminine context. Jill Didur rightly points that:

Despite attempts by the state to promote the reintegration of ‘abducted’ women back into the gendered space of the domestic sphere, in many instances the community’s perceptions of these (Hindu) women’s
‘contamination’ left them ostracized from the society as a whole and relegated them to a life of silence as permanent refugees (2006, 151).

Sutara stands as a silent victim of such a perception. She is in a way banished. Her banishment prevents her from identifying with any sense of community or nationality. As an outcast, she is unable to share the sense of belonging women’s citizenship derived from its naturalized referent in the domestic sphere of the Hindu extended family and community. The Indian citizenship has become an empty promise for Sutara. The identity of the all encompassing person, an Indian and the secular liberal and pluralist assumptions it implies are exposed as elite patriarchal rhetoric that was used to prop up the production of Sutara’s alienation in the first place.

Jyotirmoyee Devi’s narrative presents with a direct allusion to the epic Ramayana, where Rama doubt’s the fidelity of Sita after her rescue from Ravana. Sutara is also put in a similar situation of Sita’s, but the only difference is that the Ramayan’s Sita offers to walk through fire to prove her faithfulness to Rama, whereas Sutara is unable to undergo a similar test of her purity because of her inability to remember the events of the attack on her family and herself. This precludes the possibility of deflecting the aspersions concerning her honour. Unlike Sita, who asks Mother earth to swallow her up in the ground to end her exile, women like Sutara who survived the partition violence remain in exile untill their deaths. The novel declines to offer any conclusive evidence of Sutara’s pollution or purity and rejects the idea of death
and reincarnation as the ultimate solution to the women’s bad experience in their life. The novelist makes a symbolic representation of the nation through the fallen woman.

Promode’s proposal to marry Sutara brings a hope of light in her life. She feels that she can go back into the domestic sphere of the nation. The proposal comes at a time when Promode was planning to leave the country. His proposal was out of a mixed sense of affection and guilt for his family’s ill treatment towards her. He was also filled with pity for her. He proposed saying, “I hope you won’t say no. we talk of you often, Subha and myself. We like you so much. I don’t know about love, but we felt so sorry for you. Can you try to like us?” (TRC 129) Promode’s plan was to live as an expatriate. He wanted to live in exile making a patriotic sacrifice. His plan was to marry Sutara and take her out of the country instead of challenging her treatment by the state and community. Promode’s proposal returns Sutara from exile in her own so-called homeland. The marriage can bring Sutara back into the domestic sphere of the nation, but the narrative resists this sense of a closure. Sutara wonders at Promode’s motives. She wanted to ask him if he was doing it out of pity? Charity? She was in a state of confusion unable to understand if promode was really in love with her. Did he have kindness towards her? These questions are left unanswered at the end of the novel. The novel ends as Promode leaves Sutara in the Boarding house where she has been living. The narrative concludes with an entirely different feeling in Sutara. The narrative says, “Today, suddenly, she realised that she was at the end of a long nightmare
even though she had not really been aware of living...for the first time she felt she was not a respected college professor, but a young, dreamy girl” (TRC 133). She gazes out across the college courtyard and looks at the eucalyptus trees, which reminds her of the other polluted women. She feels heavy at the thought that she has to leave behind these women after she gets married. These women were not portrayed as victims without agency but, rather, as strong and resilient women. Many such women, according to Menon and Bhasin’s report “who were recovered can still be found in rehabilitation centres and shelters even today, in Punjab and Haryana” (1998, 4). Those who manged to elude the recovery process were often able to rebuild their lives and integrate into the communities and families they found themselves in after the violence and migration. As Mookerjea-Leonard comments, “Re-contextualizing Sutara within bourgeois domesticity, Jyotirmoyee Devi immediately undermines the happy-ending by returning to the themes of solitude of socially excluded women.” (2003, 44)

The novel offers reference to a composite Hindu-Muslim culture in an ironic tone, such as the location of Sutara’s college in Old Delhi near the Red Fort and the Promode’s proposal to Sutara in Qudsia bagh, a garden named after Emperor Muhammed Shah’s wife serve to underscore Sutara’s treatment by her extended family.

Adopting an entirely different form of analogical reasoning, cultural nationalists mapped the symbolic purity associated with the inner, or private,
domain onto the actual bodies of women. The chaste woman's bodies were considered as the bearer of an essential Indian/ Hindu identity. The partition period witnessed the transformation of a woman into a symbol of the honour of the nation and the religious community, and most importantly to the untainted household. A process of myth-making was infused placing a message that feminine sexual purity was endowed with the status of the transcendental signifier of national virtue.

The partition riots of 1946-47 and the destabilization of community alliances that they entailed treated women's bodies as a site for the performance of identity. According to the same patriarchal logic that resulted in the mass rape of women from the ‘other’ religious community, the ‘purity’ of Hindu and Sikh women became a political pre-requisite for their belonging in the new nation. The Hindus in India perceived Partition as the loss of territory of ‘ancient Bharata’. The newly independent India's ‘national honor’ demanded the repossession of national property (Hindu and Sikh women) from Pakistan. The horrific events around Partition like migration, mass killings, and abductions ignited the state to act quickly upon the problem and hold responsibility for the restoration of its citizens. To enable this, the Indian state staged an Inter-Dominion Agreement with Pakistan in November 1947 and commenced the recovery mission in early December that year.

The violence on the part of the state during the recovery mission often led to the uprootment of women’s settled in their new homes. The process of
repatriation objectified them as only bodies marked by religious affiliation and placed these bodies under the protection of the state. Also, the presence of abducted Muslim women in Hindu and Sikh homes challenged the state's claims to legitimacy in the field of international politics and it was therefore necessary to ‘return’ them to Pakistan.

Women's bodies were narrativized, entailing a political process that kept playing them out as something else. They were important only in so far as their recovery and their return to the place where they ‘belonged,’ a belonging actually determined by the state.

The repudiation of abducted wives, daughters, mothers, and sisters was a dramatic demonstration of the fact that nationalist discursive constructions of Hindu femininity held abundant scope for violence. It is not a simple historical issue in South Asia. The Hindu nationalist/ political discourses have used the discursive figure of the ‘chaste woman’ as a marker of Hindu ‘difference’. As Menon and Bhasin caution:

The rise of religious and cultural nationalism in all the countries of South Asia is cause for concern, in general, but especially for women because of its tendency to impose an idealised notion of womanhood on them. Such ideals are usually derived from an uncorrupted, mythical past or from religious prescriptions, and almost always circumscribe women's rights and mobility. When the question of ethnic or communal identity comes to the fore women are often first to be targetted; the
regulation of their sexuality is critical to establishing difference and claiming distinction on that basis (1998, 254).

Since the woman’s body constituted the specific site for the exercise of native control, women’s lives were thoroughly probed into and detailed upon. The single largest area of discursive production and regulation was women’s sexual purity over which a strict supervision was exercised, and its place established by defining it as the prerogative of the husband or the future husband. Beyond this, the national patriarchy also attempted to manage, by way of regimentation, the entire space of women’s cultural and social lives. The Manavadharmasatra was understood to decree the policing of women’s sexuality, which was to be harnessed and legitimized through marriage.

It was the Hindu woman in her identity as the Wife (and later, the Mother) for whom, the home becomes her preserve and her functions were the continuation of her husband’s line, nurturing the future (male) citizen-subject, and the reproduction of male labour-power needed for the newly emergent peripheral capitalist economy.

Through the initial accentuation of the chastity of Hindu women as a marker of the superiority of Hindu culture, together with the later expulsions of women in contact with the ‘other,’ the woman’s body functioned as a frontier safeguarding the nation and the community’s collaborative interests. In her study of the role of gender in the consolidation of a Hindu identity, Sangeeta Ray also notes the scripting of difference on the body of woman by way of
engraving it in a set of regulated social and cultural practices that purport to maintain a historical continuity with the past, which the ‘other’ presumably lacks:

The raped female body encompasses the sexual economy of desire that is denied the mythologization of the purity of one's own ethnic, religious, and national gendered subject. The inevitability of rape leaves women with the "choice" of committing suicide so that she can be accommodated within the narrative of the nation as legitimate and pure citizen. Those who survive rape are refused entry into the domestic space of the new nation. ... The purity of the family mirrors the purity of the nation, and the raped woman cannot be the vehicle of the familial metaphor that enables the narration of the nation (2000, 135-136).

The novel unfolds in the background of a blaze of communal violence, arson, murder, and rape in the Noakhali and Comilla districts of east Bengal subsequent to the Great Calcutta Killing in August 1946. Sutara Datta loses her parents in the communal fury: her father is murdered, her mother attempts suicide and is eventually untraceable, and her sister is abducted. Sutara herself loses consciousness in the course of an attack. What is to be keenly observed is the structure of the novel in four parts, out of which the last three parts, the ‘Adi Parva’ (The Beginning), the ‘Anushashana Parva’ (The Disciplining), and the ‘Stree Parva’ (The Women Chapter) derive their names from books of the Mahabharata; the first short section is titled ‘Sutara Datta.’
The second, third, and fourth sections plot Sutara's continuous migrancy; hence, the locale for the second is a village in Noakhali, the third Calcutta, and the fourth Delhi. Further, towards the end of the fourth section, the author hints at a future possibility of Sutara's passage to England with Pramode. Within these larger changes of location there are smaller displacements too: Sutara is transferred from her original home to that of her neighbors' at Noakhali; from the residence of her extended family to the boarding school at Calcutta. Small or large, each of the transitions also bears a permanent character, i.e. Sutara never returns to the original site, whether it is her parents' home, her Muslim neighbors at Noakhali, or to her brothers and extended family at Calcutta. Her perpetual movements advance the feeling of homelessness, and each site becomes a new place of exile.

The gender dynamics in the novel operate not on the basis of an antagonism between men and women. While Jyotirmoyee Devi deems the fetish of women's bodily purity as the cardinal cause of Sutara's miseries, she also indicates that its perpetuation was guaranteed by women who, as Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias caution, “actively participate in the process of reproducing and modifying their roles as well as being actively involved in controlling other women” (1989, 11). As preservers of domestic sanctity, women were authorized to take crucial decisions in assessing other women's rectitude. In the narrative, Bibha's mother and aunts endorse the continuity of patriarchy and abuses at Sutara's existence for reasons of her contact with the forbidden that disrupted her caste and religious practices. Bibha's mother monitors, with
a reproving vigilance, the social and intimate contacts between family members. She orchestrates Sutara's alienation both from her brothers, and the extended family, in the name of safeguarding the future for Bibha’s daughters. When her efforts to isolate Sutara is defeated by her idealist son, Pramod’s decision to wed her, she reproaches Bibha for restoring her orphaned sister-in-law to her extended family in Calcutta.

Bibha’s mother, perhaps the most vocal of all, is by no means the only character in the novel to voice such sentiments. Sutara’s stay with mlechchha (impure) Muslim family realizes the worst fears of pollution in the upper-caste Hindu household and her body seems to undergo a process of losing her original caste, and as a result, she is treated as a low-caste ‘untouchable.’ As the term ‘untouchable’ suggests, she cannot inhabit the same space as the other members of the family. While she is unwelcome in her native community, Sutara cannot enter into a meaningful relationship with her Muslim neighbors through marriage despite the kindness and sustenance she receives from them, because engaging with Muslims flags a betrayal of her parents’ deaths, her sister’s abduction, and her personal experience of violence. At Subha’s (Bibha’s sister) wedding elderly women who have no clue to the exact nature of the events during the night of the attack, make suggestive gossip about her past, and a well-wisher warns the family that guests, especially the women, would probably refrain from participating in the wedding dinner for fear of the contagion of Sutara’s contaminating presence. Only after Sutara escapes the supervision exercised by the patriarchal family and community and migrates to
a new space of economic independence is it possible for her to establish some genuine social solidarity, a sisterhood with refugee women from West Punjab.

Jyotirmoyee Devi also illustrates the modalities of women’s participation in social processes “as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/ national groups; as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; as signifiers of national differences” (Yuval-Davis and Anthias7). Thus, the women ensure the continuation of the ideology of purity developed in the name of an abstract national good. The question that begs itself here is that, while the national patriarchy has a stake in controlling women’s sexuality ranging from material questions of property to more abstract ideas of national/community purity, why do women participate in segregating other oppressed members of their own sex? The answer lies, not in false consciousness, but perhaps in that (chaste) elite women benefited from these dissociative practices in the form of privileges patriarchy offered, for instance, a greater access to the public sphere, in exchange for endorsement of its views; they were even considered ethically superior, to say nothing of the experience of their empowerment.

The initial withering away of Sutara’s matrimonial possibilities, based on the single event of sexual abuse, which Bibha’s mother euphemistically refers to as ‘other problems,’ illustrates how sexual violence, in a twisted way, involves a process of de-gendering the body. In her essay “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” Hortense Spillers in a different context,
says that to have gender is to have a relation to privacy and dignity, especially, to sexual dignity, and that African-American women, in the specific context of slavery she studies, do not have a gender in that sense, because they have no access to privacy. In view with Spiller, it can be argued that rape de-genders the woman’s body in the default ideology. It is significant that between Sutara’s restoration to her extended family in Calcutta and her finding employment in Delhi, she has little textual presence by way of speech. Although her condition constitutes the problematic, and she is constantly acted upon, she rarely speaks. Her silence can be understood as a resistance but also as a metaphor for her loss of social agency. Sutara’s silence is socially structured and policed by the family and also by the state which prohibits the biographical exchanges between students at the residential school she attends.

In reinserting Sutara back into the script of middle-class domestic sexual economy, the novelist re-genders her, by way of establishing a claim for a different destiny for gender, and eventually, makes the details of people’s lives matter once again. Unlike Veena Das’s suggestion that marriage was a strategic practice of the community through which some repatriated women were rendered invisible through absorption within the family, the Promode’s wedding proposal to Sutara can be interpreted as something that is neither a community game plan nor a fairy-tale ending, but rather, as an individual act of will. Promode and Subha, Bibha’s brother and sister, witness Sutara’s repeated disgrace and disenfranchisement within their family. Sutara’s entry into middle-class respectability marks a definitive break from the fixation with
purity and routine rejections but at once weakens the radical possibilities of a life as a single, independent woman. Re-contextualizing Sutara within bourgeois domesticity, Jyotirmoyee Devi immediately undermines the happy-ending by returning to themes of the solitude of socially excluded women.

Separated from middle-class domestic life, Sutara with her colleagues and friends working in the college and residing in the dormitory constitute a community, a women's community that disregards regional differences and sustains a group-therapeutic function through a mutual support system. Although by distancing Sutara from the collective, Jyotirmoyee Devi declines to advance it as fully as she might have, however, despite the ambiguity, she recognizes the potential of feminine solidarity.
**Conclusion**

Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man* identifies the accidents and errors that produced the nations and identities that dominate the public imagination of South Asians today and offers a new look at the ambivalent relationships of secularism and communalism, gendered embodiment and national culture, that had marred the nationalist histories. Sidhwa presents the materiality of sexed bodies as a site inscribed with the violence of nationalist histories, even as she challenges the homogenizing historical and anthropological narratives of sexual and bodily violence as always linked to communality figured as nationality. Sidhwa thus locates the site of a fleeting articulation that Partition discourse has obscured and finally lost. Cracking India draws also a gendered view of the precipitation of and outcomes from the implementation of Partition, narrating the costs of the political and ideological process on women.

The study contends that the rejections of women, on the other hand, cannot be explained using the language of insanity and catastrophe, or as an unleashing of the vulgar self. The rejections of abducted Hindu/ Sikh women were motivated and even ideologically rationalized by a long and complicated history of the patriarchal fetish on women’s sexuality. A revisiting of the past tracks the violence involved in the translation from the discursive to the visceral.

Jyotirmoyee Devi’s writings indicate that they offer possibilities for reconsidering the exclusive nature of community membership, the discursive
violence sanctioned in the name of tradition, the recuperation of expelled bodies, and gendered citizenship as well as the exigency for women's histories not subsumed under grand titles of national history. In writing about women's oppression, Jyotirmoyee Devi exposes the silence surrounding uncomfortable social issues. In populating her works with women who refuse to annul the self by suicide subsequent to the event of rape, and who instead choose to survive; her woman-centered narrative differs from the 'master' narrative that recommends women choose death to dishonor. Jyotirmoyee Devi refuses to abrogate the violated woman on grounds of shame and ritual purity.

Jyotirmoyee Devi's work suggests that the lionizing of 'ideal' Hindu womanhood in the nationalist discourse, the responsibility on “the gendered and sexed female body to bear the burden of excessive symbolization” (Ray, 135) played a pivotal role in the responses generated towards the women-victims of Partition. According to Veena Das, “the violence of the Partition was folded into everyday relations and that the events of Partition came to be incorporated into the temporal structure of relationships” (2000, 220).