Chapter IV

The Will of Men: Culture and Religion as Potent Tools in Cracking India


(Amrita Pritam calls Waris Shah to speak from his grave and turn the book of love’s next affectionate page. Once, a daughter of Punjab cried and he wrote a wailing saga. Today, millions of daughters cry to him, Waris Shah Rise! O’ narrator of the grieving; rise! Look at your Punjab today, fields are lined with corpses, and blood fills the Chenab.)
These often quoted heart rending lines by Amrita Pritam, addressed to the Sufi poet Waris Shah, depict precisely the tale of most horrible act of violence, brutality, massacre, molestation, abduction and gang-rape ever committed in the history, during the partition of British India into two independent nations (India and Pakistan).

One of the profound ironies of the period is that while a rhetoric and ideology of non-violence prevailed in the political push for freedom from colonial rule, a bloodbath accompanied the actual attainment of this goal. In the months immediately preceding and following the creation of ‘free’ nation-states, untold numbers of murders, kidnappings, rapes and arsons were committed by ordinary citizens of all the major religious groups (Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs) caught up in the turmoil. The communal violence was unprecedented in its reality, unleashing a maelstrom that was so horrific that some aspects of its history have been occluded. How did people who lived together for centuries turn upon one another; how did average people become murderers, kidnappers, rapists and arsonists? It was an event of shattering consequence. The border line was marked between the two countries with the blood of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. It also marked the boundaries between two communities—Hindu and Muslim. The border line entrenched the heart of the people as well. The geographical divide of India, into two states, brought displacement and death. In a short span of few months nearly twelve million people crossed the border, leaving their ‘home’ behind, to enter in their ‘home’ where there was no ‘home’ for them.

During the communal clashes, at least one million people were killed, thousands of women were abducted, raped, numerous were impregnated and forcefully converted to the other religion. Thousands of families were divided, homes and villages were abandoned. Shops, houses and other buildings of other religion were destroyed or set on fire. Ten to fif-
teen million people were forced to leave their homes as refugees. Many people died of malnutrition and diseases. Hunger, thirst and exhaustion killed others. Throughout the country, millions of innocent people were affected by Hindu-Muslim riots, incited by religious hatred and uncontrolled fury. India, a land where numerous ethnic and religious groups, with various castes and creeds had been residing for ages under its fold, fell prey of communal frenzy. Two communities i.e. Hindu and Muslim became wide apart. As In *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia writes, “Yet, all around us there was a different reality: partitions everywhere, communal tension, religious fundamentalism, continuing divisions on the basis of religion.” (7)

People became blood thirsty of their neighbours, women were kidnapped, molested or forced to prostitution, countless women and children were dislocated or brutally murdered; thousands of whom were slain or strangled in the hands of their own fathers, brothers and husbands to avoid the prospect of their being dishonoured or stained. Innumerable number of women jumped into wells or forced to jump to escape rape and physical brutality. In *Borders and Boundaries*, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin remarks: “Very large numbers of women were forced into death to avoid sexual violence against them, to preserve chastity and protect individual, family and community “honour.” (42) Speaking about the intensity and rapidity of the violence, in *Remembering Partition*, Gyanendra Pandey writes, “The violence was likened to a tidal wave that engulfed Sikhs and Hindus ‘minorities’ scattered in the ritual areas of Rawalpindi and Multan divisions.” (25)

Amidst the greatly worsening violence, mass-migration for the safer places began, Hindus and Sikhs to India, and Muslims to Pakistan. Community became the mark of the nationality, Hindus and Sikhs as Indians and Muslims as Pakistanis. With the declaration of India’s Partition into India and Pakistan, skirmishes between the two communities took the
form of riots, mass killings, kidnapping, raping and molestation. Women and children were the soft targets for the rioters. As such, they were victimized in huge number. Innocent children were sent to their untimely death. With every passing day, the ditch between Hindus and Muslims was widening. Many major cities of the both parts, India and Pakistan, began to burn in the fire of communal hatred. Minorities migrating towards their unknown fate were the main target of the rioters. A onetime majority community became minority.

During the tumultuous time of India’s independence, insanity overpowered sanity, reason was lost to madness. Looting, burning, kidnapping, raping, stabbing and killing were committed in a large number by the communal frenzied large mob. The feeling of fraternity collapsed, the communities split, the neighbours became each other’s bloodthirsty. Man became savage, started committing horrible atrocities. But who were responsible for igniting the spark of this communal violence and carnage? In Train to Pakistan, Khuswant Singh writes: “Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped.” (1) The brutality committed against women and children is unmatched in the history of human race. Women, no matter what their ages were, were victimized. They were the worst sufferers not only in the hands of the male members of the opposite community but also in the hands of their own kin who killed them to preserve the family honour. Innumerable numbers of women were abducted, molested, gang-raped, forced to conversion and sold to prostitution. The communal violence was retaliated with more violence tarnishing the tolerant tradition of both Hindu and Muslim communities. In Cracking the Nation: Gender, Minorities, and Agency, in Bapsi Sidhwa’s Cracking India Jill Didur writes: “At the time of Partition, the patriarchal construction of women's identities, and in particular, their sexual purity as symbolic of community honour and integrity, made them subject to particularly gendered and humiliating acts of aggression as India and Pakistan
sought to establish their sovereignty.” (49) Revealing causes and agencies of the gradually intensifying hostility amongst the people of different communities, Urvashi Butalia, in *The Side of Silence*, writes: “Strong revivalist movements such as the Arya Samaj, the Singh Sabha and others have already found fertile ground in Punjab. Now, Swayamsevak Sangh, the Muslim League Natinal Guards, the Akali Sena. All of these played no mean role in heightening tension between the different communities.” (90)

The Partition of India inspired several authors to depict the atrocity and mass exodus that took place pre- and post period of India’s Partition. There is a long list of the novels written that have dealt with the Partition of India, and the onslaught of terrible violence. *Pinjar* by Amrita Pritam; translated into English by Khushwant Singh as *The Skelton* (1950). It depicts the agony of the people who were victimized in the Partition violence. *Pinjar* is the story of Puro, a Hindu girl, engaged to Ramchand, who was abducted by Rashid to settle an old score with her family. When she manages to escape back, her parents refuse to accept her. Puro has to return to Rashid again. During the time of India’s Partition, Ramchand’s sister Lajo is kidnapped by thugs. Puro rescues her with the help of Rashid. Now, Ramchand is ready to accept her but Puro decided to live with Rashid. The novel is a saga of feminine struggle and helplessness. *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khushwant Singh, who was himself an eye witness of the Partition holocaust, is written on the theme of India’s Partition and the aftermath of the Partition. The novel reveals the congenial life of the villagers of Mano Majra situated on the border of India and Pakistan. In the village, Sikhs and Muslims lived peacefully sharing each-other’s joys and sorrows of life, pain and pleasure. When India is divided into two parts, rumours and suspicion caused a big divide between the Sikhs and Muslims that resulted in mass killings, molestation, abductions and lootings. After the evacuation of the Muslims from the village, a band of Sikhs from outside come there and provoke the Sikh villagers to sabotage the train boarded with Muslim passengers on it. A Sikh thief, Jugga whose
Muslim beloved, Nooran was also amongst the passengers, sacrifices his life and saves the lives of the passengers. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hosain is a revelation of the implication of Partition on woman’s psyche. The novel shows the Pakistani perspective of India’s Partition and the aftermath. The novel is an observation of the Muslim society through the eyes of its protagonist, Laila. Laila’s crisis has been depicted against the backdrop of the Partition crisis. *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) by Manohar Malgaonkar portrays the brutality, mass killings, and communal frenzy associated with the Partition that mostly affected the lives of common man. *Tamas* (1974), by Bhisham Sahani, is a saga of communal violence and hatred during the days of Partition upheavals. Sahni delineates the communal politics of the leaders. Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975) portrays the problems of the refugees during the partition period of mass migration. The mass killings, massacre, molestations, smouldering, looting have been depicted by Chaman Nahal. *Midnight’s Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie, a novel that depicts the events associated to pre & post independent India. Through its narrator, Saleem Sinai, the aftermath of colonialism has been portrayed. *Shadows of Time* (1987) by Mehr Nigar Mashroor portrays the events of communal riots with Pakistani perspective. *Shadow Lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh is written against the backdrop of the communal violence that occurred during the Partition of India, and reveals the bitter experiences of the Partition days and the riots that took place in Calcutta and in Dhaka. All the novels are focused on the Partition of India and present the violent history that took a heavy toll of life.

*Cracking India* happens to be Bapsi Sidhwa’s most popular novel and is arguably the most important and representative of the Partition novels written by any Pakistani author. In *Entree: The Fiction of Bapsi Sidhwa*, R.K. Dhawan and Novy Kapadia write: “Told in the present tense and first person through the voice of a young girl named Lernny, eight years old at the book’s beginning, the history of the Partition struggle becomes second-
ary, the human struggle foremost." (20) It deals with the Partition horror and the life of Lenny, a limping Parsee girl, an Ice-Candy-man, a Muslim and an Ayah who is a Hindu. Lenny, the Ice-Candy-man and Ayah’s lives are governed by the events of Partition and its consequences. A number of other characters are affected by the 1947’s communal troubles. *Cracking India* “. . . experiments with the reality of the time to create a timeless reality . . . History undertaken by the fiction writer and explored as material, refers always to the particular in which there is an attempt to present history as sensory detail. . .” (Mitra 182)

Sidhwa succeeds in elaborating the intercommunity life from Parsi angle. The novel is divided into thirty two chapters, glisten with the sub-continent, teeming with political, social, and religious import.

Ayah aka Shanta, a significant woman character who is appointed by Mrs. and Mr. Sethi to look after their handicapped girl Lenny, is a chocolate brown and short woman at the age of eighteen years. Lenny is the narrative persona; her narration begins with her fifth year of age, and it comes to an end after her eighth birthday. Due to her disability, Lenny feels herself different from other children, and thus feels solitariness; to fill up life’s emptiness, she spends her day with her lovable companion, Shanta and her friends. Shanta has friends in all communities; Imam Din, the Ice-candy-man, Masseur, Yousaf, Hari, and Moti, Sharbat Khan, Chinaman and several others are all her admirers; everyday, all these friends arrange meeting, and make gossips at Queen’s Park.

By the news of killings by Hindus, Muslims of Lahore bursts into flames of revenge; they start attacking Hindus, and Sikhs; on fearing this, Hari, the gardener, converts to Islam, and becomes Himmat Ali. The whirlwind of Partition perturbs the unity and affection of the friends also; in the wake of communal riots, Shanta is abducted and her lover, Masseur is bumped off by her once-time friend and admirer, Ice-Candy-man; on the one hand, he de-
ceives Shanta and makes her a dancing girl at Hira Mandi, a brothel house; while on the other, he goes down the aisle with her. What is remarkable about him is his transformation; he repents and goes to India in search of Shanta, indeed, in search of his love, and his beloved. Jagdev Singh rightly observes: “. . . the Ice-Candy-man is willing to leave the land that he so much cherishes, for the sake of his Hindu beloved, is not only an example of self-sacrifice but also symbolic of a future rapprochement between the two warring communities- the Muslims and Hindus.” (CI 175) The story of Ayah and the Ice-Candy-man is important for the angle from which it looks at the Partition because it is invested with symbolic mode.

The narrative is also different in that it is a woman-centric one, with its focus on Ayah, her abduction, and later recovery and rehabilitation which is possible only with the intervention and sustained efforts of other sympathetic women. The novel depicts how the Partition and its trauma affected women–both, those who were victimized by its violence and those who fought on their behalf. Interestingly, the novel’s focus on women parallels a development in Indian historiography, because it was not until the 1980s that women found a proper representation in the Partition history. Cracking India is written with a feminist perspective, an endeavour of depicting the naked cruelties and ruthlessness meted out to women during the partition riots. In Ice-Candy-Man: A Feminist Perspective, Subhash Chandra writes:

Bapsi Sidhwa turns the female protagonists into the moral centre, while most of the male characters either remain apathetic or indulge in destructive violence and disintegrative action. The analysis of Ice-Candy-Man reveals that the female characters are unselfconscious of the biological essentialism of their sex, they cut loose the constraints imposed by the gender which is a social construct (and can therefore be deconstructed) and which has come into
existence through centuries of biased, motivated and calculated orchestration of the aggressive patriarchal postulates. (115)

This narrative attains authenticity as Lenny belongs to the Parsee community which was a very neutral community. In *Parsi Perspective in Ice-Candy-Man*, Rashmi Gaur writes: “Sidhwa has captured the turmoil of the Partition days from a Parsi perspective . . .” (63) Parsis emigrated from Persia to evade religious persecution. The Parsis were non-discriminatory, without abiding themselves with freedom movement of India, and with any ethnic group during the crisis period of Partition. The Parsis were thus able to remain intact from being the target of communal frenzy of the mobs in the Partition turmoil. It is evident from the interview of Sidhwa by Feroza Jussawalla which brings forth this fact:

When I was a child living in Lahore at the time of Partition, my maiden name was Bhandara, which sounded like a Hindu name. After most of the riots were over, a gang of looters came in carts and our house thinking it’s an abandoned house. They were quite shocked to see us and my mother and everybody there. At that time our Muslim cook came out and said, “What do you damn people think you’re doing? This is a Parsi household,” and they said “we thought it was a Hindu household,” and they went away. (Jussawalla and Dasenbrock 200)

*Cracking India* in a way is an eye witnessed account of what was happening during the period of Partition, witnessed by Sidhwa. Lenny is a self portrait but with some reservation. The narrative technique reveals the devastating effect of violence in the life of people who were the direct victims of it. Partition is successfully captured through the eyes of Lenny. The novel shows the ferocity of the Partition as affecting, traumatizing, altering and radically transforming the child narrator. At eight, Lenny is already on the threshold of experi-
ence, but it should be remembered that in her case, her stepping into the world of experience is accelerated by the fact that her most impressionable years coincide with the communal upsurge that happened around the time and event of the partition.

The device of the child narrator enables Bapsi Sidhwa treat a historical moment as horrifying as Partition without morbidity, pedanticism or censure. The highlight of the novel is that the author throughout maintains a masterful balance between laughter and despair. The subtle irony and the deft usage of language create humour which does not shroud but raucously highlights the traumas of Partition. (Kapadia 77)

Various dreadful dreams disturb Lenny’s psyche. She dreams about the Salvation Army that turned into German soldier. Large scale of human lives was lost because of Nazi violence. Sidhwa has dexterously prepared the innocent child narrator for impending violence and human loss. Such violence experiences in her reverie are a sort of encounter with the brutal realities of human life, on the part of the novelist, so as to make her sensitive enough:

That night I have the first nightmare that connects me to the pains of others.
Far away I hear a siren. Tee-too! Tee-too! it goes, alarming my heart. The nocturnal throb and shrieking grow of the Salvation Army next door. Its tin-sheet gates open a creak to let out a long khaki caterpillar. Centipetal legs marching, marching, it curves, and as it approaches Electric-aunt’s gate it metamorphoses into a single German soldier on a motorcycle . . . The siren’s tee-too tee-too is now deafening. My heart pounds at the brutality of the sound . . .

The soldier, his cap and uniform immaculate, dismounts. Carefully removing black gloves from his white hands, he comes to get me. (CI 31)
Such constant bad dreams cause much trouble to Lenny’s psyche. She sees the slaughtering of the innocent children. Such brutal killings suggest the prospects of the future cruelty and impending mass killings because of the Partition crisis and the influence of the communalism in the country. She sees in her dream that she is being torn and cut into pieces.

Lenny sees herself before a lion’s cage:

“I am jolted out of my troublesome reverie when I realize that Ayah is talking to Sher Singh, the slender Sikh zoo attendant, and I have been rolled before the lion’s cage. There he lies, the ferocious beats of my nightmares, looking toothless and innocent . . . lying in wait to spring, fully dentured, into my dreams. (CI 19)

Though Lenny’s dreams and associated horrors are unrealistic, they are highly symbolic of the imminent fate of the two nations in the future, India and Pakistan. She dreams that the zoo lion is out of the cage, piercing his sharp teeth into her stomach:

—my daydreams turn into quaking daydreams; and these to nightmares in which the hungry lion, cutting across Lawrence Road to Birdwood Road, prowls from the rear of the house to the bedroom door, and in one bare-fanged leap crashes through to sink his fangs into my stomach. My stomach sinks all the way to the bottom of hell. (CI 33)

In a dream, while Godmother has been stroking her head, she feels that she is being dismembered: “Godmother sits by my bed smiling indulgently as men in uniforms quietly slice off a child’s arm here, a leg there. She strokes my head as they dismember me. I feel no pain. Only an abysmal sense of loss—and a chilling horror that no one is connected by what’s happening.” (CI 31)
The patriarchal authority has been bias towards women in every social stratum. Sometimes, in the name of traditions, sometimes in the name of customs, women have been deprived from their basic rights of life. Lenny is a polio-stricken girl. This sole physical disability makes her vulnerable in the eyes of the patriarchy. Because of this, she is denied proper education like other children of her age. Doctor Bharucha says: “She’s doing fine without school, isn’t she?” . . . She doesn’t need to become a professor . . . She’ll marry—have children—lead a carefree, happy, life. He advises thereby sealing my life fate. ( CI 25 )

Sidhwa foreshadows massacres and violence hidden in the womb of time. The nightmares of Lenny later prove the nightmares of the Indian subcontinent’s history. Lenny suffers terrible violence in her nightmares, thousands of innocent children like her suffered the brutality and barbarity committed mostly against women and children during the Partition.

People leading their lives together in complete peace and harmony for centuries, sharing their joys and sorrows, indulged in thoughtless deeds of communal and religious violence against each other. The Muslims and Hindus lived peacefully before the seeds of partition had germinated. More especially, “the roots of communal amity in rural Punjab go so deep that the members of the two communities are ready to sacrifice even their lives for protecting each other.” ( Singh 169 ) There was complete social, cultural and religious harmony among the various communities and religions. This geniality is evoked by one of the women interviewed in Borders and Boundaries by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin who said:“Roti-beti ka rishta nahin rakhte the, baki sab theek tha. (We had no relation of mutual marriages and eating together, but there were overall good relations.” ( 12 )

This amiable relationship amongst the people of diverse communities is revealed through Ayah whose wooers belong to different communities and religions. For instance, Ice-Candy-man reads Urdu newspapers and the Urdu digest. He can read the headlines in the
Civil and Military Gazette, the English daily. He gives news to Lenny and her Ayah about the world. He informs them about the deadly weapon V-bomb developed by the Germans that can reduce the British into ashes. In an interview entitled *Grief and Survival in Ice-Candy-Man* with Alok Bhalla, Bapsi Sidhwa tells about the cordial relationships amongst the admirers of Ayah:

> My descriptions of the friends around the ayah were not consciously crafted. They were written quite intuitively, quite unselfconsciously, because they seemed to be truthful—they had an inner human logic. The ayah, at the centre of a circle of friendship amongst men of different religious communities, helped me to create an image of a complex social and cultural mosaic that made up Lahore of those days. By bringing together men of such variety around her, I also wanted to suggest that she was a part of a complex culture. (226)

But the things were going from bad to worse everywhere in the country. As when the Ice-candy-man informs Lenny and Shanta about Subash Chandra Bose’s efforts of liberating India from the British with the help of Japanese, he addresses him as ‘a Hindu Patriot’ that implicit the occurring breach between the two major communities, and in another instance a new admirer of Ayah, Sharbat Khan cautions Ayah: “These are bad times- Allah knows what’s in store. There is big trouble in Calcutta and Delhi: Hindu-Muslim trouble. The Congresswallahs are after Jinnah’s blood….”(CI 84)

And a second time he tells Ayah:

> Funny things are happening inside the old city . . . Stabbings . . . Either the police can’t do anything- or they don’t want to. A body was stuffed into a manhole in my locality . . . It was discovered this morning because of the smell: a
young, good looking man. Several bodies have been found in the gutters and
gullies of the Kashmiri, Lahori and Shalmi . . . They must have been dumped
there from different neighborhoods because no one knows who they are. ( CI
84 )

Through these events that were taking place at the various places of the country
Sidhwa draws the hovering trouble that was haunting the soul of the people of all the com-

munities and religions.

The real India lived in the heart of the rural India which was far away from the dis-
ease of communalism. The novel reflects a peaceful co-existence of the Hindus and Muslims
in the villages. The people of Pir-Pindo and Dera Tek Singh live together in complete peace
and harmony. These two villages in the novel represent the religious harmony prevailed those
days amongst the village people in undivided India. Festivals, folklores, sports and cultural
gatherings took place without the bondage of race and religion. All the communities enjoyed
harmonious relationship throughout the country. The three major communities Hindu, Sikh
and Muslim were socially related to one another that strengthened their mutual relationships.
Nevertheless amidst this tranquillity permeate the clouds of fear of impending trouble. Dur-
ing one of his visits to the village Pir-Pindo when Imamdin was sitting with his village folks
including some Sikh peasants from the neighbouring village like Dera Tek Singh, Jagjit
Singh, Dost Mohamad, a Sikh granthi and some other Muslim villagers, the village mullah
expresses his foreboding about the disturbances occurring in various parts of India. He says:
“I hear there is trouble in the cities...Hindus are being murdered in Bengal...Muslims in Bi-
har. It’s strange...the English Sarkar can’t seem to do anything about it.”( CI 64 )

The village mullah’s apprehension is not for the community to which he belongs to
but for the Hindus and other communities. Till then the villagers were very certain of their
age old brotherhood and were still not ready to believe that this conflict would affect the tranquillity of the villages. The Chowdhary of Pir-Pindo very confidently says: “But all that is in the cities . . . It won’t affect our lives.” (CI 64)

But Imamdin discloses the reason of his sudden visit to the village. He says. “I’ve not come all this way without a reason. I don’t think you know how serious things are getting in the towns. Sly killings; rioting and baton charges by the police . . . long marches by the mob . . .” (CI 64) He further tells them of the trouble between Hindus and Muslims; and between Sikhs and Muslims as well, spreading in various parts of the country. This revelation by Imamdin causes a wave of concern amongst the villagers. The Sikh granthi tries to reassure them reminding of their lineage with Jats: “Brothers, our villages come from the same racial stock. Muslim or Sikh, we are basically Jats. We are brothers. How can we fight each other?” (CI 64)

Hindus, including Sikhs and Muslims peasants were economically inter-dependent. Majority of the Muslims villagers were poor in comparison to their Sikh and Hindu counterparts. They provided financial support to each other whenever needed particularly at the time of crops; and on the occasion of the marriages of someone’s son or daughter. The Chaudhary of Pir Pindo says:

But our relations with Hindus are bound by strong ties. The city folk can afford to fight . . . we can’t. We are dependent on each other: bound by our toil; by Mandi prices set by the Banyas—they’re our common enemy—those city Hindus. To us villagers, what does it matter if a peasant is a Hindu, or a Muslim, or a Sikh? (CI 65)

Imamdin’s premonition of upheavals eases a little. He is sure that the presence and support of their Sikh brothers will shield them from any sort of communal threat, and they have nothing to worry about. The words of Jagjeet Singh instil confidence into him and oth-
ers who pledges if need be they will protect Muslim brothers with their lives. The Chaudhary declares that he is ready to take an oath of the Holy Quran that they will guard their Sikh brothers with no regards for their own lives. Till then nobody has any idea that the bubble is going to burst and burst in a deadly manner.

The story before partition violence is the same everywhere. With every passing day, the void between the people of different communities was enhancing. The seeds of distrust had begun to germinate even amongst the elite class of society. In Post Colonial Women Writers, Sunita Sinha writes: “The atmosphere is permeated with tension and unrest, which rears its head, every now and then.” (249) Lenny’s parents host parties. One evening, they invite their Sikh neighbour Mr. Singh and his American wife and Inspector General of Police Mr. Roger. Their talk begins with a joke cut by Lenny’s father. Then their talk centres round Gandhi’s demand of Swaraj. The Muslim League was demanding for a separate state for Muslims, combining Muslim majority provinces: Punjab, Sindh, Kashmir, the North West and Bengal. The English has a clear assumption of what might take place after India gets its independent. It is apparent from the hot talk between Mr. Singh and Mr. Roger. Mr. Roger says:

Rivers of blood will flow all right! He shouts, almost as loudly as Mr. Singh.
Nehru and the Congress will not have everything their way! They will have to reckon with the Muslim League and Jinnah. If we quit India today, old chap, you’ll fall at each other’s throat! (CI 71)

The imminent division of two major communities—between Hindus and Muslims is first hinted in the remarks by Mr. Roger:

My dear man, he intones, Don’t you know the Congress won’t agree on a single issue with the Muslim League? The Cabinet Mission proposed a Federa-
tion of the Hindu and Muslim majority provinces. Jinnah accepted it; Gandhi and Nehru didn’t! (*CI 71*)

Mr. Singh even becomes furious and tries to stab Mr. Roger’s eyes with a fork when Mr. Roger declares Akalis as a bloody bunch of murdering fanatics. This incident reveals the heightened political tension spreading among all the classes of society. The leaders were struggling for power. There was an atmosphere of fear and suspicion everywhere.

The common people have their own concerns. They always try to keep themselves aloof from the political game of gain and loss. Ayah’s remark that all the political leaders are not fighting for them but they are baking their own breads that is causing trouble for them. Whatever was happening, it was because of the growing void between the leaders of the Muslim League and the Congress. A chain of events accompanied and followed it. Moreover religious fundamentalism was adding fuel to the fire. The spark of communalism was smouldering the peaceful life of the people.

There were reports of occasional clashes between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Targeting of people of opposite community by mobs became frequent. Lawlessness began to spread everywhere. As the collapsing of the British rule began to appear possible, the demand for a separate state for Muslims increased along with the expansion of fanaticism and barbarity. The Parsis who had remained neutral to the situation, started feeling the impinging of communal separation of two major communities, Hindu and Muslim. Lenny’s mother gives her an account of the anxious letters from her sisters and sister-in-laws in Bombay and Karachi about the rumours of all sorts about the situation in the Punjab.

The novel contains enough information about the political leaders. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Mohamad Ali Jinnah were the prominent leaders who were fighting against the English to set the country free from the shackles of British slavery.
They were striving to make the Partition a fait accompli. The roles of these leaders have generated a lot of debate. Gandhi was a mass leader. Not only did Hindus, Sikhs respect him but also a large number of Muslims respected him and were staunch follower of him. There is reference to Mahatma Gandhi in the novel as well. Sidhwa tries to play dawn the contribution of Gandhi, a great national hero who single handily ousted the English from the country. Gandhi, a man who imparted the lesson of truth, Non-violence and peace is portrayed as a monger who does his fast to make headlines all over the world. Fasting was a weapon used by Gandhi as part of his philosophy of Ahimsa or Non-Violence. Sidhwa uses the word dieting instead of fast, and portrays Gandhi as a dietician merely to understate him. Gandhi, who tried the whole life to assimilate and reflect the true values of humanity for the promotion of the greater good of man, has been portrayed by Sidhwa as a clown and a demon, and a lover of women. 

Sidhwa in the novel repeatedly conveys a very unwavering message that the Partition has been seen, in literature, as an upshot of the reluctance of the Muslims to work towards a consolidated India. In this plan of action, Gandhi and Nehru emerge as the heroes and Jinnah as the villain. 

She gives the Pakistani version of events faithfully about the stark dramas and horrors of riots and massacre of 1947. *Cracking India* is a political novel as well, intended to undermine the contribution of Indian leaders in India’s struggle for freedom, and to show the role of Jinnah as positive and secular, thus, endeavours to resurrect Jinnah’s personality. She considers Indian authors on Partition as bias and unfair towards Jinnah’s contribution in freedom movement. In an interview with David Montnegor

And I felt, in Ice-Candy Man, I was just redressing, in a small way, a very grievous wrong that has been done to Jinnah and Pakistanis by many Indian
and British writers. They've dehumanised him, made him a symbol of the sort of person who brought about the partition of India...whereas in reality he was the only constitutional man who didn't sway crowds just by rhetoric and tried to do everything by the British standards of constitutional law. (532)

Sidhwa exaggerates the role of Jinnah in the struggle against the British and tries to belittle Gandhi’s contribution and sacrifice. Her endeavours appear to prove Indian political leaders bias towards Jinnah. In A Passion for History and Truth Telling, Ralph J. Crane writes:

Sidhwa is also, as a Pakistani writer, writing against Indian views of the past, against predominantly Indian versions of partition which have increasingly been challenging British interpretation of those events. And as a Parsi, she even appears, on occasions, to write against Pakistani interpretations of history. (50)

The novel deals with the most crucial period in the history of Indian sub-continent when struggle for India’s freedom was at its peak. The political leaders were not able to arrive to any amicable solution because of the difference of opinions. It was a time of political impasse. Amidst the clouds of suspicion, anxieties and hovering threat of communalism, the personal lives of the political leaders become the centre of gossips among the people. It is the month of April. Lenny goes with Ayah to the Queen Park where Ayah’s admirers assemble for friendly talk. Their friendly talks suddenly take communal colour when the gardener, their primary source of information from the British Empire’s local headquarters, informs them that Gandhi, Nehru and Patel were behind the dismissal of Lord Wavell. Calling them bastards, Masseur says: “So they sack Wavell Sahib, a fair man! And send for a new Lat Sahib who will favour the Hindus!” (CI 99)
Their talks centre to Mountbatten and his wife. Their gossips begin to meddle the personal relations of Nehru and Lady Mountbatten. The butcher, who was listening so far, squawks and says: “That non-violent violence-monger—your precious Gandhijee—first declares the Sikhs fanatics! Now suddenly he says: Oh dear, the poor Sikhs cannot live with the Muslims if there is a Pakistan! What does he think we are—some kind of beast? Aren’t they living with us now?” (CI 100)

Sidhwa’s attempt to denigrate Gandhi only embitters one’s taste. She portrays him as a crafty politician. In an interview, in her defence, Sidhwa tells David Montenegro:

I was just redressing, in a small way, a very grievous wrong that had been done to Jinnah and the Pakistani’s by many Indian and British writers. They've dehumanized him, made him the sort of person who brought about the partition of India, a person who was hard-headed and obstinate. Gandhi totally Hinduized the whole partition movement. They excluded the Muslims there. He brought religion into the congress party. And Jinnah, who was one of the founders of the party, found he had to edge away from it because it was changing into a Hindu party. (50)

Her stance is undoubtedly different from that of her Indian counterparts, and nowhere has more radically shown than in her portrayal of the ‘chief players’ of the Partition—the triumvirate of Jinnah, Gandhi and Nehru.

The political differences took turn into communal rivalry. As the struggle for Pakistan reached its peak, the great leaders of India’s freedom struggle became the target of mockery of Muslims. In Remembering Partition, Gyanendra Pandey writes:
Mahatma Gandhi was a ‘celestial quack’, ‘Pandit’ Nehru a ‘hypocrite’, ‘Sardar’ Patel a Hindu Mahasabhite, but it was Abul Kalam Azad, long-term president of the Congress (until mid-1946), renowned for his Islamic learning, so-called ‘Maulana’ Azad- in reality, as League propagandists had it, no ‘Maulana’ at all- ‘renegade’ Azad who was guiltiest of all. (29)

When the Government House gardener blames the English for what was occurring as they are the master of intrigues from the past, and they are adept of conspiracy, Butcher remarks:

Haven’t the Hindus connived with the Agrenz to ignore the Muslim League and support a party that didn’t win a single seat in the Punjab? It’s just the kind of thing we fear. They manipulate one or two Muslims against the interests of the larger community. And now they have manipulated Master Tara Singh and his bleating herd of Sikhs! (CI 100)

But this brief exchange illustrates the growing tension and bitterness amongst the people of various communities through the group of Ayah’s admirers, composed of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.

The people were living out the ‘two-nation theory’ whether they accepted the theory or not. The novel shows lives being ruptured, changed beyond recognition and shattered beyond all hope as a result of this theory working its way through the mindset of communally inclined people; dividing whole village communities as well as city folk into neat groups of ‘them’ and ‘us’, and most viciously spreading intolerance and violence in its wake. *Cracking India* does depict this aspect of its narrative; that of innocent people living out a theory they knew nothing about but otherwise, it defines a very different Partition experience altogether. Sidhwa has attempted to give a Pakistani perspective to the Partition of India. Sidhwa not on-
ly tries to resurrect the image of Jinnah but also seeks to demystify the images of Gandhi and Nehru. Jinnah in the novel is highlighted as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity. In order to substantiate this image of Jinnah, Sidhwa quotes Sarojini Naidu, the Indian poetess:

... the calm hauteur of his accustomed reserve masks, for those who know him, a naïve 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. (CI 171)

As against this paean in Jinnah’s name, the sublime image of Gandhi created by British and Indian historians is totally subverted when he is seen through the eyes of the eight-year-old narrator, Lenny:

... 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, shrivelled, old. He looks just like Hari, our gardener, except he has a 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. (CI 94)

Unlike most of the Indian historians who credit Gandhi for ousting the British from India, in Cracking India Sidhwa reduces him to the role of an eccentric diet-faddist, who advises every woman to flush her system with enema. According to Masseur, Gandhi is only ‘a politician’ not ‘Bapu’ or ‘Mahatma’ and “It’s his business to suit his tongue to the moment.” (CI 100) Similarly, Nehru is described as just a shrewd politician who, in spite of all the efforts of Jinnah, “will walk off with the lion’s share.” (CI 141) The politically conscious Ice-
candy man calls him “a sly one ... He’s got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English’s wife out of his other what-not ... He’s the one to watch!” (CI 141)

Although Sidhwa would like one to believe that she is not partial in her depiction of Gandhi as she is not a part of any of the contending communities, yet these claims of hers do not automatically make her dispassionate and detached. And again it would perhaps not be wrong to say that Sidhwa succeeds in providing an alternate version of history but not an objective one. In the novel, she seems to be manifesting that she has merely replaced one bias by another. And this prejudice is revealed not only in the way she portrays the contemporary political leaders of the subcontinent, but also evident in her depiction of Partition violence, where her sympathies are totally on the Muslim side.

Sidhwa portrays the vulnerable psyche of the children through the experiences of Lenny who represents the innocent and humane survival on personal as well as social level. Lenny observes the unease and riots very keenly. Being a child, she is free from any prejudice against any religion or race and hence, her narration becomes very realistic. She observes the humane and the satanic facets of human psyche in the cruel reality of the world around her. She hears many disturbing talks. She comes to know that India is going to be broken and she is baffled. The political situation seems to be perplexing to the little girl. She gradually becomes acquainted with what elders are already acquainted with that is the religious identity and the differences amongst the people of different religions: “One day everybody is themselves—and the next day they are Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all compassing Ayah—she is also a token. A Hindu.” (CI 101)

About Ice-Candy-Man’s political observations she says,
Sometimes he quotes Gandhi, or Nehru or Jinnah, but I am fed up of hearing about them. Mother, Father and their friends are always saying: Gandhi said this, Nehru said that. Gandhi did this, Jinnah did that. What's the point of talking so much about people we don't know? (CI 38)

This view of Lenny indicates the perplexed situation of Indian politics and Partition. The use of a girl-child as a narrator-protagonist enables the author to simultaneously present a critique of several issues from multiple angles. Lenny’s narrative voice is not unidirectional; the very ambivalence of her narration enriches one’s understanding of the presence of multi-layered meanings in the novel. The narrative encapsulates with compelling sensitivity and empathy of Lenny's initiation in the adult world marked by a highly diverse and disparate cultural climate.

The episodic structure of the novel describes within the framework of the larger theme of Lenny's growth and attainment of some understanding of human situations, the personal, political ideological pursuits, anxiety, pain, stupidity, suffering, joy possessing the epoch before and immediately after the Partition of India in Lahore. The shrewd but sensitive dealing of the past by a small girl with its geography of scars and history of pain does at times raises doubts about the credibility of the projection of the child's point of view. Peeping into a child's point of view one can see a mature woman’s perceptions or authorial omniscient point of view permeating and overlapping, and as a result, a volitional blend of innocence and experience. The lameness of Lenny becomes suggestive of the handicap, a woman writer faces, when she decides to wield the pen, because writing, being and intellectual exercise is considered a male bastion, outside the routine of a woman's submissive domesticity. Her recuperation symbolizes the overcoming of the constraint on the intellectual activity of writing by Sidhwa. By making Lenny the narrator of the novel, the novelist lends weight and validity to
the feminine perspective on the nature of surrounding reality and “distills the love-hate relationship of the Hindus and Muslims through the consciousness and point of view of Lenny.” (Singh 166) Sidhwa reiterated in an interview with Hindustan Times that the experience of Lenny in Ice-Canady-Man much similar to her own experiences gained during the partition, she says:

Of all the books, Ice-Canady-Man was very personal. I had to create a distance between Lenny and myself. I have given her incident from my life, the body in the gunny bag. I grew up hearing the shouting mobs. I didn’t have a cousin or an ayah or an Ice Canady man, but I knew enough people to be able to write about them. Even if you are writing about centre space, it is coloured by your experience. (Hindustan Times, January 30, 2000)

It is a well known fact that violence is fuelled by rumours. But no other novelist has given such a systematic and graphic description of rumours inflaming violence like Sidhwa. She graphically describes how the rumours of rape, murder, arson, loot etc. from India harden the attitude of Muslims in Pakistan and how in an atmosphere of tension, they react with anger. We hear the rattling of Ice-Candy-man’s bicycle, who appears in sweat and dust to report the butchery: “A train from Gurdaspur has just come in, he announces panting. Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts!” (CI 159)

 Possessed by the spirit of revenge, people become violent causing panic even among their friends belonging to other religions. For Sidhwa, there is a correlation between rumours and surcharged tensions. Every fresh wave of rumours goes on to increase the quantum of tension, increasing the existing rift between communities. Tension culminates into mob-violence which spreads like wild-fire and grips villages and cities alike. The communal ten-
sion between the two warring communities Muslims and Hindus increases. When Lenny goes to Pir-Pindo, a village near Amritsar with Imam Din, She finds the village mullah telling his fellow villagers about the violence being occurred in various parts of country. Imam Din informs the villagers “... how serious things are getting in the towns. Sly killings; rioting and baton charges by the police ... long marches by mobs ...” (CI 64)

The atmosphere of political tension and religious violence aggravates the situation. As the reports of riots in Calcutta and Delhi reach Lahore, Muslims become furious. Sharbat Khan, the Pathan, admirer of Ayah, tells her, there are big troubles in Calcutta and Delhi, "Hindus-Muslims trouble." He also tells her how Jinnah’s life is under threat by the Congress men. Ayah on her part is critical of all political leaders, as she says “What's it to us if Jinnah, Nehru and Patel fight.” (CI 84) Sidhwa gives a sordid account of this devastation unleashed by the divide and displacement of millions of people.

The life of the Parsis was deeply affected by the horrors of the events occurred on the eve of Partition; they felt marginalised not only at the time of pre-Partition but even after Partition; the novel depicts their fear in the aftermath of Partition; the use of words like power and rule is meaningful in this context; commenting upon the freedom struggle, Col. Bharucha, a Parsi, says: “It is no longer just a struggle for Home Rule. It is a struggle for power. Who’s going to rule once we get Swaraj? ... Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power: and if you jokers jump into the middle you’ll be mangled into chutney!” (CI 45) Parsis realized that their life in the divided country would be in peril.

The partition came at a heavy price. Massive population exchanges occurred between the two newly formed states in the months immediately following Partition. Within few months, millions of people, both Hindus and Muslims migrated to their respective countries, their new home. Massive violence and slaughter occurred on both sides of the border. It took
a heavy toll of life. Women and children became easy victims of the communal frenzy. Thousands of women were abducted, raped and mutilated. Women’s breasts were amputated in large number; they were paraded naked through public and religious places, and tattooed in their bodies with nationalistic and religious slogans. A great number of people were forced to convert to Islam; some others preferred to convert to Islam and Christianity in order to save their lives and property and to avoid themselves from being uprooted. In The Other Side of Silence, Urvashi Butalia writes: “As always there was widespread sexual savagery: about 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own.” (3) In Borders and Boundaries, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin write:

By the time the exodus was finally over, about eight to ten million people had crossed over from Punjab and Bengal– the largest peace-time mass migration in history– and about 500,000 – 1,000,000 had perished. The exchange, at least as far as Punjab was concerned, was as nearly equal as can be imagined: the total non-muslim population of Punjab in 1941 was 4,357,477, the total Muslim population, 4,286,755. (35)

It is the body-be of a male or female, that endures the suffering. But, when sanity is lost and insanity overpowers man’ sensibility, body is violated; it is mutilated, molested and ultimately deformed to deconstruct the structure of the society. It is dismembered to humiliate the other group. Body is not merely a physical body, but a metaphor for the missing between the two fighting communities. The mutilation of body serves as a message for the community to which it belongs as it was done with Masseur’s body who was brutally murdered: “. . . they look at Masseur as if he is not a person. He isn’t. He has been reduced to a body. A thing.” (CI 186) As far as the body of a woman is concerned, it is treated as the physical boundary of her nation and community intruding of which appears to gratify the in-
vader’s feeling of victory over her religion. In such circumstances, insanity surpasses sanity and takes the form of heinous brutality. The physical and mental torment endued by Ayah and Hamida are symbolic of what had happened to women during the period of partition. The role of religion and culture is highly dominant in this part of the world where the patriarchy is dominant over the matriarchy. The whole set up of the society is thoroughly discriminatory towards women who are victimized in the name of culture and religion. Religion is an agency that is exploited to suppress the individuality of women. The woman of the other community is raped, stabbed, brutally harassed and killed to avenge the stained honour of one’s own.

Rape is a weapon employed as a tool of humiliation. Brutality committed to Ayah or Hamida is brutality committed against feminism. No opportunity is missed by the patriarchy in violating the boundaries of woman’s honour. The physical and mental torments endued by Ayah and Hamida are symbolic of what had happened to women during the period of partition. Innumerable number of women and young girls were the victims of communal rivalry who were forcefully abducted, molested and raped, and some of them were forced into conversion. Ayah’s abduction by Ice-Candy-man led mob has portrayed by Sidhwa symbolically representing the beastly behaviour and conduct of the communalized mob. Hamida is the type of those Muslim women who had to undergo such brutal experience in the hands of Hindus and Sikhs whereas Ayah is the type of those Hindu women who suffered the same in the hands of Muslim. Sidhwa visualizes the brutality committed against Ayah:

They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet—that want to move backwards—are forced forward instead. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like the dead child’s screamless mouth. Her violet sari slips off her shoulder, and her breasts strain at her sari-blouse stretching the cloth so that the white stitching at the seams shows. A sleeve tears under her arm. 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 grimaces (CI 194-195)

In *The Geography of Scars and History of Pain*, Vanashree Tripathy writes:

A poignant drama of personal loss and agony of young Shanta intrudes in the larger scenario and transmutes the whole tone of the novel. The awful profligacy, the ugliness, sordidness and deceit converge into an agony and ecstasy that transcend physical and rational levels and expose us to secret logic of human desire and depravity— (133)

The trauma suffered by women and children during the Partition of India was drastic. Experiencing the traumatic event caused severe emotional and psychological harm as well, particularly to children and women whether they were directly affected with it or not. In *The Other Side of Silence* Urvashi Butalia writes: “Many children, partition survivors, developed severe psychological problems, and found they could not live in families.”(254) The child narrator hears a hideous wail of a woman who was a victim of the communal fury. Sidhwa brings forth the pathetic conditions and vulnerability of the fallen women in a camp. Lenny’s truth and consequential brutality meted out to her Ayah proves to be traumatic for her. It was devastating blow to her psyche:

For three days I stand in front of the bathroom mirror staring at my tongue. I hold the vile, truth-infected thing between my fingers and try to wrench it out; but slippery and slick as a fish it slips from my fingers and mocks me with its sharp rapier tip darting as poisonous as a snake. I punish it with rigorous
scourings from my prickling toothbrush until it is sore and bleeding. (CI 196
)

Thousands of the victimized women were kept in various camps after their rescue. Since they were dishonoured and stained, these unfortunate ones were left by their families as they were ‘fallen women’. Lenny, the child narrator hears these women wailing and crying. She learns that her new Ayah was herself a ‘fallen woman’. She was kidnapped by the Sikhs and taken to Amritsar. Godmother tells Lenny:

“. . . Once that happens, sometimes, the husband–or his family–won’t take her back.”

“Why? It isn’t her fault she was kidnapped!”

“Some folk feel that way–they can’t stand their women being touched by other men.” (CI 227)

It was the truth; a catastrophic truth that played havoc in Ayah’s life, but it also shook Lenny’s belief in truth. She feels herself as “monkey-man’s performing monkey, the trained circus elephant, the snake-man’s charmed cobra, an animal with conditioned reflexes that cannot lie . . .” (CI 195)

Sidhwa has skilfully inserted the story of a Muslim boy Ranna into the main narrative, counterbalancing his ordeal of escape with that of Ayah. The brutality and massacre committed by Sikhs, in the village Pir-Pindo, against Muslims, proves that both sides were equal participants in the carnage. Ranna was able to survive by hiding himself under the heap of dead bodies. Like Ranna, thousands of innocent children of both sides of fighting communities became the victims of communal violence and inhuman brutality, and they were left orphaned and abandoned for further struggle of life: “His rags clinging to his wounds, straw
sticking in his scalped skull, Ranna wandered through the lanes stealing chapattis and grain from houses strewn with dead bodies, rifling the corpses for anything he could use. He ate anything. Raw potatoes, uncooked grains, wheat flour, rotting peels and vegetables.”( CI 218 )

The ethnic cleansing, genocide massacre and mass migration had substantial effect on the demographics of the various regions in both sides of India and Pakistan. Lahore, a religiously mixed and varied, and culturally variegated city, lost its glorious heterogeneous identity:

Beadon Road, bereft of the colourful turbans, hairy bodies, yellow shorts, tight pajamas, and glittering religious arsenal of the Sikhs, looks like any other populous street. Lahore is suddenly emptied of yet another hoary dimension: there are no Brahmans with caste-marks– or Hindus in dhoties with bodhis. Only hordes of Muslim refugees. ( CI 187 )

Lahore was completely devastated. The destruction wrought in Lahore was horrendous. The Hindu and Sikh houses and buildings were destroyed, burnt down and then looted in large scale. Mob of scavengers plundered the remains of the Hindu and Sikh houses. As Sidhwa depicts how Rosy-Peter’s compound and the house opposite to Lenny’s became wilder, Mr. Singh’s bungalow and the Hindu doctor’s house were deserted. The abandoned houses and properties of Hindus and Sikhs in Lahore had started to decay rapidly. It was not the annihilation of Lahore in particular, but annihilation of an entire community.

The brutalities and bestiality committed during the Partition were the worst and the most gruesome, unheard ever before in the history of mankind. It appears that at that time humanity had died. The measure of savagery even towards innocent children was socking. In
Cracking India, Sidhwa visualizes the amount of brutality that occurred during the communal carnage:

A naked child, twitching on a spear struck between her shoulders, is waved like a flag: her screamless mouth agape she is staring straight up at me. A crimson fury blinds me. I want to dive into the bestial creature clawing entrails, plucking eyes, tearing limbs, gouging hearts, smashing brains: but the creature has too many stony hearts, too many sightless eyes, deaf ears, mindless brains and tons of entwined entrail . . . (CI 144)

The brutal savagery reveals the shocking and horrifying account of what children and elders had to undergo. There was an extermination of innocent and helpless people by the communal frenzied mobs. The child narrator in Cracking India narrates such an incident of brutality witnessed by her:

My eyes focus on an emaciated Banya wearing a white Gandhi cap. The man is knocked down. His lips are drawn away from rott ing, paan stained teeth in a scream. The men move back and in the small clearing I see his legs sticking out of his dothi right up to the groin–each thin, brown leg tied to a jeep. Ayah, holding her hands over my eyes, collapses on the floor, pulling me down with her. There is the roar of hundred throats: “Allah-o’Akbar!” and beneath it the growl of revving motors. Ice-candy-man stoops over us, looking concerned: the muscles of his face tight with a strange exhilaration I never again want to see. (CI 145)

The dawn of India and Pakistan’s freedom from the British rule proved fateful especially for women who had to pay a heavy price for no crime of their own. Abducted women were treated as commodities and were shared with friends and relatives as gifts. In the appal-
ling massacre, young women were the worst sufferers, who were abducted, molested, raped and sold as prostitutes as well. Some of the most unfortunate ones lost their whole family; some others were discarded by their families since their honour was stained. Their helplessness, vulnerability and agony appear as representing the overall suffering femininity: “Hai! Hai! Hai! Reflecting the history of their cumulative sorrows of their Muslims, Hindu, Sikh and Rajput great-grandmothers who burnt themselves alive rather than surrender their honor to the invading hordes besieging their ancestral fortresses.” ( CI 285 )

The historical background of the two communities shows the uncongenial relationships between Hindus and Muslims. There had been a wide gulf in thought, faith, religious belief and way of life that were the root causes of communal divide between these two major communities. The seeds of communal divide had been sown centuries ago before the ultimate outburst of violence that took place in India’s Partition. It started at the advent of Islam in India. Islam came to India through the invaders like Muhammad bin Qasim, Mahmud of Ghazni, Mohammed Ghor, and Khiljis, Tughluqs, Lodis and Mughals.

Forced proselytization by the Muslim invaders also made Hindus harbour a grudge against Muslims from generations. Numerous social and religious differences between Hindus and Muslims made them wide apart. The wide economic gulf between the two communities has been responsible in broadening the divide. Muslims have been treated as untouchables by Hindus; and Hindus as Kafirs by Muslims. The mutual distrust created borders between Hindus and Muslims. Inter-community, intra-community mistrust and hatred entrenched the boundaries between the people. The communal and racial divide, and loathe against each other was wide spread. The way Lenny and Ayah were rudely treated by an Englishman shows the inherent bitterness amongst people of different classes, communities and races. Wagging his fingers he said” “Let her walk. Shame, shame! Such a big girl in a pram!
She’s at least four!” (CI 12) Even the revealing of the leather straps and calipers by Lenny to convince her inability to walk had no influence on him. “So what?” he says, resurrecting his smile. “Get up and walk! Walk! You need the exercise more than other children! How will she become strong, sprawled out like that in her pram?” (CI 12) The divide between various cultures is apparent here—one is colonized and the other is colonizer.

The portrayal of the Congress, the Muslim League, Nehru, and Jinnah is a common mode found in the Partition novels. The emotional trauma of the religious minorities such as Christians, Parsees and the Jews poses a great dilemma. Though uninfected by the communal frenzy, these too were victims of the Partition of a country on a purely religious basis. Demonstration of the dilemma of an uninvolved community is the important feature of Cracking India that makes it unique among other novels written about the cataclysm.

Being herself a Parsi, Sidhwa has tried to show the basic goodness of her community towards suffering humanity. Lenny’s mother and Electric-aunt endanger their own lives; lend Hindus and Sikhs a hand at this crucial time of human history where none believed none. But, it is a fact that Parsis, belonging to one of the minority communities, took a tactical stance in the aftermath of Partition of India. As the followers of an immigrant community, they were always tactful about those matters that could cause any sort of embarrassment and difficulty for them. Colonel Bharucha: “We must tread carefully… We have served the English faithfully, and earned their trust …So we have prospered! But we are the smallest minority in India… Only one hundred and twenty thousand in the whole world. We have to be extra wary, or we’ll be neither here nor there . . .” (CI 27) Though Parsi-perspective appears to be opportunistic, they had their own apprehensions as a miniature community. Most of the Parsis remained aloof from India’s struggle for freedom, as they thought it merely a conflict for power amongst various communities in India. Partition of India was a premonition of dis-
aster for the Parsis. There was an undercurrent of horror in the community with regards to its fate. The horror of impending serious danger in the form of India’s partition was haunting the Parsis’ soul. Colonel Bharucha tells: “Who is going to rule once we get Swaraj? Not you,” (CI 45) The Parsis in India were a well off and prosperous community. The thought of any probability of another uprooting was agonizing for the one time uprooted community. Colonel Bharucha adds: “If we are stuck with the Hindus they’ll swipe our businesses from under our noses and sell our grandfathers in the bargain: if we’re stuck with the Muslims they’ll convert us by the sword! And God help us if we’re stuck with the Sikhs.” (CI 46) The reason behind this anxiety and suspicion in the Parsi-psyche can be understood from their past history of survival. When Islam got hold of Persia, they sailed towards East to avoid persecution. They reached at the west coast of India. They waited there for four days. The Grand Vazir of the local ruler Jadi Rana appeared before them with a glass of milk filled to the edge. It meant that his land is full and prosperous and outsiders with a different religion are not allowed to disturb the harmony of the state. But, their forefathers carefully stirred a teaspoon full of sugar into the milk and sent it back. It meant that the Parsis would get absorbed into his country and sweeten the lives of his people. In this way, they were granted permission to live there. The Parsis thereafter maintained a neutral stance to avert any further possibility on the existence and safety of their community. In The Ice-Candy-Man: Partition Revisited, V.L.V.N. Narendra Kumar writes: “The Parsi attitude, rendered through Lenny, Godmother and other characters like Colonel Bharucha is that of a neutral disinterest. As they are not so much affected by the social, political or even economic consequences, they are near perfect observers.” (161) But the opinions, that Colonel Bharucha and the other Parsis like him hold, are not the whole truth about the Parsis. As in Parsi Perspective in Ice-Candy-Man, Rashmi Gaur writes: “The worsening situation and rising communal discord forces them to
shun passive neutrality and work actively, though surreptitiously, to help their friends and acquaintances.” (68)

In her woman-centric novel, Sidhwa portrays the character of Lenny’s mother entirely as a submissive woman, always busy in fulfilling her domestic obligations. Though she is servile to her husband, she is highly liberal with her children, allowing them to cope with the modern lifestyle. Though she belongs to a progressive Parsi-community, she leads the role of the ‘second’. The novelist has typified her as traditional subordinate and docile woman. But, during the Partition crisis, she is shown completely different than before-the humanitarian trait of her character is revealed. Lenny notices that her mother slips out of the house, accompanied with Electric aunt. She learns that the go-down next to Ayah’s quarter is full of gallons of smuggled petrol, Lenny ferrets out the arsonists of Lahore. But, her mother discloses the secret task being done by them: “We were only smuggling the rationed petrol to help our Hindu and Sikh friends to run away... and also for the convoys to send kidnapped women, like your Ayah, to their families across the border.” (CI 254) The circumstances awaken her essential nature transforming her into an assertive woman. Lenny’s mother defies the bondages of her domesticity, crosses the patriarchal boundaries and exhibits her individuality. She endangers her life to serve the humanity making herself free from the restraints of patriarchy.

In Female, Suppression and Marginalization, Pallavi writes: “She learns to think beyond the realm of her own life . . .” (129) She strives for the rescue and help of Partition victims that shows the presence of humanitarian spirit among such people amidst the fire of communal violence.

While Lenny’s mother epitomizes the submissive woman, Godmother is depicted as an assertive woman who is authoritative and commanding with sharp wit and profound understanding of human psyche. It is her formidable persona that she becomes instrumental in
the rescue of Ayah. It is she who admits Ranna to a hospital. In *Ice-Candy-Man: A Feminist Perspective*, Subhash Chandra writes:

Godmother’s personality sparkles with razor-sharp wit, her infatigable stamina, her boundless love for Lenny, and her social commitment. Her sense of humour, her deer-like agility, in spite of her old age, and her power to mould, modify and order not only individuals but even the system, when she so desires, earn her respect and admiration of people around her. (179)

Godmother represents the strength inherent in womanhood that needs to be realized by them.

Lenny’s relationship with Godmother is that of a daughter and a surrogate mother. Godmother’s influential personality provides Lenny a sense of security that ties her emotionally and physically with her Godmother: “The bond that ties her strength to my weakness, my fierce demands to her nurturing, my trust to her capacity to contain that trust—and my loneliness to her compassion—is stronger than the bond of motherhood. More satisfying than the ties between men and women.” (CI 13)

Sidhwa gives the message that Parsis have played an important part in the pre-Partition society, and have contributed well in strengthening the social fabric, even in the critical time of division. Though, Parsis had been almost neutral in politics, communal discord, riots, arson, and other horrific events, yet it would be unfair to set aside their role in the politics of the subcontinent. Most of the Parsis considered politics mundane and gross, but a few of them got an honourable place in the society and politics; Dadabhai Naoroji, Sir Pherozeshah M. Mehta and Sir Dinshaw Edulji Wacha were the top class Parsis of the time. History affords no parallel to the role of Parsis in India. There is no record of any other commu-
nity as infinitesimally small as Parsis, playing such a significant role in the life of a country so large.

In *Cracking India*, Sidhwa tries to establish the Pakistani perspective that Hindus were favoured by the British over the Muslims in the Partition of India. She regards it the favour of Nehru over Jinnah by the British. She is of the view that the allocation of Kashmir, a Muslim populated state, to India was merely because of Nehru’s being a Kashmiri. She assesses the so called discrimination against Jinnah vis-a-vis Nehru in her characteristic manner:

Nehru wears red carnations in the buttonholes of his ivory jackets. He bandies words with Lady Mountbatten and is presumed to be her lover. He is charming, too, to Lord Mountbatten. Suave, Cambridge-polished, he carries about him an aura of power and a presence that flatters anyone he compliments tenfold. He doles out promises, smiles, kisses-on-cheeks. He is in the prime of his Brahmin manhood. He is handsome: his cheeks glow pink.

Jinnah is incapable of compliments. Austere, driven, pukka sahib accented, deathly ill: incapable of cheek-kissing. Instead of carnations he wears a karakuli cap, somber with tight, gray lamb’s wool curls: and instead of pale jackets, black achkan coats. He is past the prime of his elegant manhood. Sallow, whip-thin, sharp-tongued, uncompromising. His training at the Old Bailey and practice in English courtrooms has given him faith in constitutional means, and he puts his misplaced hopes into tall standards of upright justice. The fading Empire sacrificed his cause to their shifting allegiances. (*CI* 169-70)

*Cracking India* is an epoch-making tale of the horrors of partition, wherein the lofty ideal of patriotism was cruelly bartered for communal frenzy that resulted in an involuntary
divide, social and political absurdities, and human devastation on very large scale. The author’s sensitive portrayal of the political disturbances and social loss, which all the Indians faced in 1947, is commendable. This was the socio-political landscape in which Sidhwa’s characters found themselves in. Through Lenny and Ayah, one is able to witness how the Partition was perceived and interpreted by people within the Indian society. Sidhwa’s characters were evidently not able to grasp the gravity of the political condition their country was in. As India entered into the agreement called the Partition, glaring and antagonistic diversity emerged, creating disunity and inciting violence among people of various cultures and religious beliefs. Socio-political equations altering kaleidoscopically in the pre-Partition India are deftly presented by the novelist; growing communal tensions among the people pertaining to different religion, in which religion is used as a definition of individual identity, political opportunism and power are taken up as the leitmotif of the novel. The scene is set in Lahore alongside the aftermath of Partition; the use of history is deliberate, but the lesson tucked in the story is unwavering. In an interview to Julie Rajan, Sidhwa opines:

If we are not going to learn lessons, we are doomed to repeat our evils. Historically people have gone on fighting each other for religion, for land, for women, for position, for greed—and those elements prevail still. Man’s nature has not changed—but one can try, and hope it will. (www.monsoon.mag)

As an author, Sidhwa plays a proselytizing role; so, in her writing she attracts the attention of her readers to diverse problems of the society, as women subjugation, religious chauvinism, unjust oppression meted out to females, and prejudiced evaluation of historical events, like the 1947 upheaval, and so forth, which are the major concerns of her novels. The novel is a study in socio-political, socio-economic and socio-psychological dimensions of human sufferings resulting out of the passion to monopolize power resources with a view to
sway the fate of those who were destined to lead the life of marginalized. In spite of psycho-biological similarities, the politics of discrimination dumped a large section of society in the slumber of ignorance and injustice.

*Cracking India* is one of the most authentic, moving and a very essential novel on the Partition of India. It makes alive the grotesque experiences of refugees, mass murders, and exploitation on both individual and collective level. As a politically motivated novel, the whole story moves around the mega event of Partition and its aftermath. The shifting patterns of communal conflict present both the humane as well as the satanic survivals in the unsympathetic world. In *Ice-Candy-Man: A Reassessment*, Reena Mitra remarks: “Reams have been written on the Partition—in resentment, in anger, in affliction, in erudition or as a cathartic exercise, or again, even as an attempt to exorcise ghosts, phantoms of the agonizing past that refuse to be ignored. Bapsi Sidhwa’s account of the holocaust is a tale with a difference—” (180) The survival in this novel is not confined to any individual Hindu or Muslim. It examines the survival critically on the personal and social level with reference to the major characters in terms of its socio-political-religious contexts of Partition and the British Raj. Sidhwa has written her novel on Pakistani as well Parsi point of view. From the Parsi point of view, the Parsi dilemma centres round the question of assimilating themselves into the native culture and consequentially risk their identity as a community. Amazingly the Pakistani point of view, the Parsee angle, the child narrator and the focus on women’s experience all contribute to the uniqueness of the novel.