Vol III Issue II August 2013

Impact Factor : 1. 2018

ISSN No :2231-5063

Monthly Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Golden Research Thoughts

IMPACT FACTOR : 1. 2018

Welcome to ISRJ

RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595 **ISSN No.2230-7850**

Indian Streams Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

International Advisory Board

Editorial Board

Address:-Ashok Yakkaldevi 258/34, Raviwar Peth, Solapur - 413 005 Maharashtra, India
Cell : 9595 359 435, Ph No: 02172372010 Email: ayisrj@yahoo.in Website: www.isrj.net

Golden Research Thoughts

ISSN 2231-5063
Volume-3, Issue-2, August-2013

Representation Of The Traumas Of Parting India In Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India

Manoj Kumar

Abstract: Bapsi Sihwa's Cracking India, was originally published in 1988 as Ice-Candy-Man and was re-published as Cracking India in 1991. Born in 1938, Sidhwa was from a Parsee community and grew up in Lahore. Having witnessed the Partition when she was young, Sidhwa represents her own experience through the narrator's eyes in the novel. Cracking India is considered Sidhwa's semi-autobiography, in which she gives the eight-year-old narrator, Lenny, the same background as hers—a Parsee who grew up in Lahore and suffered from polio. The story of Cracking India is set in Lahore, a city which is now in Pakistan and close to the border between India and Pakistan. This location permits us to see the events that happened right in the center of the Partition.

Keyword:partition, violence, community, history, colonial powers.

INTRODUCTION:

this paper, I focus on exploring the connections between violence and the construction of nation, with a special emphasis on the artistic reconstruction of personal encounters with violence as represented in Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India. Cracking India is a semi-autobiographical text in which Bapsi Sidhwa recounts the events surrounding Partition through the lens of her childhood memories. As a critic writes in a review of the novel, Sidhwa's "gaze falls "upon the domestic comedy of a Pakistani family in the 1940s," yet also "somehow manages to evoke the great political upheavals of the age" (par 1). Though critics like Jagdev Singh in "Ice-Candy-Man: A Parsi Perception on the Partition of India," have focused on Lenny's (and Sidhwa's) Parsi status and her "tone of neutrality" in their readings of Cracking India, Sidhwa's continued writings and rewritings of these events indicate a need to expand the critical gaze beyond the figure of the child and her religious background to a larger understanding of the moment of Indian Partition. She does not write a semiautobiographical account to rework a narrow vision of Partition from a limited, childhood perspective; she instead continually revises the presentation of this experience, ultimately using the figure of the child to create an alternative history—that of Partition's intimate nature.through her novel, Sidhwa can "…intervene in male nationalist discourse and historiography via the belated remembering and retelling of this collective trauma" by voicing the "untold" traumas of women abducted and raped during Partition (383). Strange, then, that Sidhwa's text starts not with a more expansive vision of Partition, but instead by setting up the confines of the narrative. Sidhwa emphasizes Lenny's limited experience from the first page of Cracking India, beginning the text with the line "my world is compressed". The young narrator, who is with her caretaker for large amounts of time, recognizes Ayah's voluptuous figure as both maternal and highly sexualized. Sidhwa describes the masculine response to Ayah: "Up and down, they look at her. Stub-handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Her description of their gaze indicates not just lust, but an intense and powerful desire for ownership; their eyes move "up and down" with "hard, alert" stares that tinge these scenes with the threat of violence. Early in the text, Sidhwa focuses her narrative gaze on women's bodies in relation to community. In pre-Partition Lahore, Ayah is a "magnet" who attracts a crowd of diverse men in the park, while Queen Victoria, also imagined as a more violent kind of metal, has a body that can "impose" British power. At the moment of Partition, which occurs halfway through the text, Sidhwa again invokes women's bodies, including Queen Victoria's powerful skirts: Playing British gods under the ceiling fans of the Faletti's Hotel—behind Queen Victoria's gardened skirt—the Radcliffe Commission deals out Indian cites like a pack of cards. Lahore is dealt to Pakistan. Amritsar to India. Sialkot to Pakistan, Pathankot to India. In this moment, Queen Victoria is used both as a representation of colonial power that permits this division of India's provinces, and as a contrast between the image of "superpower supervision" that Joe Cleary references in his portrayal of cultural imaginings of Partition and its reality. After setting up the image of Queen Victoria as militarized mother, a representation of colonial power that is at once menacing and delicate, Sidhwa infantilizes the actual "power players" at the moment of Partition by contrasting them to the statue's imposing force. She emphasizes the idea of play twice, stating that they are "playing British gods" beneath the ceiling fans and also comparing their handling of the provinces to a card game. Though the outward structure of Sidhwa's text is one of order leading to disorder—the community is relatively happy and functional prior to independence and Partition, and after Partition both the community and the material structure of the city fall apart—Sidhwa disrupts this narrative, offering a vision not of rupture following the end of colonization, but instead of

continuation from one type of violently enforced community to another. These brief moments when she mentions the actual process of Partition align with Barbara Harlow's understanding of this act as the final scar of colonization. The trivial game in which provinces are handed out beneath the gaze of the monstrous mother Queen demonstrates that the horrifying violence which ensues must be understood as part of the process of colonization, not merely the result of the colonizers leaving the state to disorder. Though Pakistan has been officially created at this point in the text, Sidhwa'srepeated descriptions of the process of Partition continue, in part because the actual act of delineating the new border took place over an extended period of time.She also describes the colonial powers as playing favorites, creating borders in a careless manner that ignores the ethnic populations of certain provinces: "Nehru is Kashmiri; they grant him Kashmir. Spurning logic, defying rationale, ignoring the consequences of bequeathing a Muslim state to the Hindus, while Jinnah futilely protests: 'Statesman cannot eat their words!' Statesman do". Such conceptions of the moments of actual Partition indicate both the changing nature of the borders—at the moment of Partition Pakistan's borders have not even been fully delineated—and the impotence of masculine leaders in their attempts to unite the country. In contrast to Queen Victoria, whose image of domestic and reproductive bliss proved useful in representations of her power over the empire, Jinnah is continually described by Sidhwa in terms of his domestic and political failings which seem, throughout the text, to intersect. While Nehru's power to control the borders of India and Pakistan is attributed to his sexual relationship with Lady Mountbatten—Ice Candy Man exclaims "He's got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English's wife out of his other what-not"—Jinnah's wife, a Parsee idolized by many in Lenny's community, "died of a broken heart" (171). At this moment, the narration switches back to the present, and the fully-grown Lenny ponders that Jinnah is today "…caricatured, and portrayed as a monster" (171).

Sidhwa's depiction of this process aligns with recent critical assessments of partition, which argues that "The continuing effects of partition at political, cultural, and psychological levels extend far beyond the focus on Kashmir…They point to the fact that partition should be regarded as a process rather than a single historical event confined to August 1947". Sidhwa's use of the word "ice" is significant, as she often uses descriptions of "ice" or "iciness" to indicate something sininster that is hidden from view. When masculine constructions of Pakistani power fail, the maternal body is again invoked as the citizens of Lahore attempt to reconcile the arbitrary nature of the new border with their desire to legitimize those newly created spaces. Sidhwa quickly contrasts Lenny's vision of "British gods" at play with Slavesister's perception of the moment of Partition as a national birth. Lenny, who is also celebrating her own eighth birthday, comments, "A new nation is born. India has been divided after all. The image of Lenny stretching the dolls' legs focuses her attention on the seams at its center, indicating the intimate nature of this play. Discovering the sturdiness of its seams, Lenny rejects this doll and begins the process of selecting the other possible victims from a lineup on her bed. After casting aside her Indian dolls for seeming "unreal" and "too fragile," the girl selects "…a large lifelike doll with a china face and blinking blue eyes and coarse black curls," a fitting victim because of its "sturdy, wellstuffed cloth body and substantial feel" (148). In this moment, Lenny's selection clearly reveals her desire to displace the masculine act of violence she witnessed onto a decidedly feminine body, perhaps suggesting that this act of displacement is a response to both acts of violence she witnessed at the riots. Lenny's attempt to recreate the violent act can be understood on the simple level of reenactment—the child desires to perform the violent act that she witnessed only indirectly, to solve the mystery of what exactly happens to a split body, and perhaps also the mystery of Ice Candy Man's enjoyment—but her displacement also shifts the scene to both a feminine form and a domestic relationship.

These acts of violence occur in the text directly before Lenny becomes Pakistani, and both gesture towards a larger pattern of violence against feminine bodies that will occur in the post-Partition state. Early in the text, the discourses of femininity, particularly the terms of reproductive power, are deployed to consolidate community. At the moment of Partition, however, these intimate imaginings become markedly violent: community is not created through the female body in the form of a statue or a desirable, round nanny, but instead is confirmed through the rape and destruction of women's bodies. Thus, as the birthing body becomes a powerful icon for the nation, The first act of post-Partition violence that occurs in this novel, shortly after Slavesister's declaration of Pakistan's "birthday," reveals the shockingly violent ways in which the feminine form was reconceived as canvas for nationalist messages in 1947 Lahore. Ice Candy Man interrupts a quiet domestic evening at Lenny's home with the news that a train has arrived from Gurdaspur. Instead of the expected relatives, he explains, "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!" (159). Again, reproductive power is violently reconceived through the image of the spilling gunny-sack, here filled with women's breasts, a symbol of maternal and sexual power. The amputation of female breasts was one of the most iconic images of the communal violence following the division of India and Pakistan, "at once [desexualizing] a woman and [negating] her as a wife and mother; no longer a nurturer (if she survives, that is) she remains a permanently inauspicious figure…"

Ranna's story, which Sidhwa sets up in her acknowledgment to Rana Kahn as a true history, disrupts this personal narrative because it is the only part of the book that is not told through Lenny's perspective. Sidhwa even marks the change visually in the novel by including, in bold-faced type, the heading "Ranna's Story," before his portion of the book begins. Though the author clearly desired to incorporate the harrowing story of her friend's Partition experience, voicing Ranna's story also provides insight into specific kinds of violence against women that Sidhwa herself did not encounter in the urban area of Lahore. Ranna's narrative shifts the scene of the novel from the urban Lahore

to a rural location that Lenny visits several times throughout the novel. Strangely, the language of the family is also incorporated in these earlier parts of the novel to portray the relationships between the Muslim community to which Ranna's family belongs and their Sikh neighbors.

CONCLUSION:

In Cracking India, we see at first encounter a semi-autobiographical narrative describing a personal account of Partition. As the novel progresses, however, narratives of intimate violence against women's bodies emerge as the center of the text. Though our first image of violated female forms—the young girl waved as a flag and the gunny-sacks full of breasts—are not violations against characters in the text, after the moment of Partition such violations occur closer and closer to Lenny. Sidhwa's use of the young narrator, however, works against any attempt to understand these acts of communal violence as merely historical and political events, revealing not just the image of severed breasts, but of the intimate body in pain. It is important that these acts not be displaced from the body of the woman; though they may function, culturally, as an attack on the masculine, it is also an individual body that suffers so horrifically. Through Lenny's visceral reaction to this news, Sidhwa brings the narrative back to the domestic spaces and bodies that surround the eight year-old girl. Lenny describes this news of this brutal discovery on the train as"…unbearable. I don't want to believe it. For a grisly instant I see Mother's detached breasts: soft, pendulous, their beige nipples spreading" (159). In this moment, the act recaptures its intimate nature. We, as readers, never encounter the women to whom these breasts belong; all that remains of them is the horrible image of the gunny-sack. The young narrator reconfigures the specific shape of a pair of breasts through the figure of her Mother, emphasizing the corporeal, private pain of the nameless women whose breasts had been so horrifically mutilated. Sidhwa thus writes the trauma as both public and private. The bag of severed breasts is transformed into a public form of communication, a verification of nationalist power, and a way of inscribing the new national space onto the histories of women's bodies. Sidhwa proclaims that masculine violence cannot be represented only by physical scars, but instead must be understood as a larger process of educational, historical, and literary violence, committed when stories such as that of Ammijee and Ayah are silenced, when their "screamless mouths" are unable to describe the acts of violence they have witnessed and history is subsumed instead by the "shouts" of celebratory narratives of Partition. This interpretation of the history of Partition coincides with the cultural histories of gendered violence that emerge following the publication of Sidhwa's novel.

REFERENCES:

I.Burgess, Mary. "Book Review: Literature, Partition, and the Nation State." Modern Fiction Studies. 49.4 (2003) 876-878

II.Butalia, Urvashi, The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998

III.Graeber, Laurel. "The Seeds of Partition." New York Times. 6 October 1991, BR11.

IV.Hai, Ambreen. "Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism in Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India." Modern Fiction Studies. Volume 46 Issue 2 (2000): 379-426.

V.Mann, Harveen Sachdeva. "Cracking India: Minority Women Writers and the Contentious Margins of Indian Nationalist Discourse." The Journal of Commonwealth Literature 29.2 (1994): 71-94.

VI.Basu, Lopamudra. "The Repetition of Silence: Partition, Rape, and Female Labour in Bapsi Sidhwa‟s „Cracking India‟." South Asian Review. Ed .K.D.Verma. South Asian Literary Association. 18:2 (2007). 5-24.

VII.Butalia, Urvashi, The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India. Durham: Duke UP, 2000.

VIII.Didur, Jill. Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2006.

IX.Sahni, Bhisham. "Pali." Translating Partition. Eds. and Trans. Ravikant and Tarum K. Saint. New Delhi, India: Katha Books, 2001. 29-52.