

# “The Will of Men”: Victimization of Women During India’s Partition

By Mattie Katherine Pennebaker, Texas A&M University

The late 1940s were a volatile era for the Indian subcontinent both politically and religiously. The British Raj disbanded its colony because of economic turmoil and population decline in England caused by World War II. In addition, Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, once united against the imposing colonial power, were divided both religiously and geographically. The movement towards a divided India polarized these sects. Unfortunately, the women of these diverse groups were among the greatest victims of religious and cultural persecution. Religious, ethnic, or political conflict between men on the subcontinent was often performed through acts of violence on the bodies of women. In the following study, I shall analyze how “the will of men” subjugated Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu women during partition, resulting in a profound inequity in gender relations in the tense geographic area known as 1947 Pakistan -- specifically the Punjab area. I seek, also, to explore women’s complex roles in this religiously fragmented society as dramatized in Bapsi Sidhwa’s acclaimed novel *Cracking India*.<sup>1</sup>

In order to better understand the victimization of women during partition, it is pertinent for the student of women’s studies to explore the gender’s position in a patriarchal-colonial society prior to the annexation of Pakistan. By examining both the vulnerability of Muslim and Hindu women in the British Raj’s Punjab in 1947, one can discern the gender roles for women in that era.

Purdah, or “the seclusion and segregation of women was a cultural norm on the Indian sub-continent, amongst both Hindus and Muslims.”<sup>2</sup> Purdah, beginning at puberty, controls the interaction between females and males.<sup>3</sup> Many degrees of Purdah exist -- from wearing a head scarf to living sequestered in the family home. Two basic types are practiced on the Indian sub-continent even today, according to Dushka Saiyid -- one which allows women to move about encased in cloak-like garb disguising the entire body and face. Only a net over the eyes permits visibility. This covering is known as the burqa. The other form of Purdah physically confines women within the home. These forms of Purdah were enforced all over northern India during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries -- the Punjab being no exception. “Purdah, more than any other social institution, is an important indicator of the role women are expected to play in society.”<sup>4</sup> Because the practice of Purdah at that time required women to be confined to the home, it

is apparent that women's exclusive role in society was that of procreation and domestic chores. Saiyid suggests,

the fact that it was felt necessary to keep them away from interaction with males who were outside the circle of immediate family meant that both sexes were not trusted to maintain the moral order of the society if allowed to mix freely.<sup>5</sup>

Because women were considered the more vulnerable of the two sexes, they were confined at home to prevent them from succumbing to desires of the flesh that would result from interaction with males.

What is known as "purdah" on the Indian sub-continent is understood as "hijab" in the Muslim world.<sup>6</sup> In Arabic, hijab means curtain. According to Saiyid, this term is used in the Koran both metaphorically and literally. One well-known location for instructions for hijab is located in sura 33, verse 59 of the Holy Koran. Saiyid asserts that "the instructions are for the women of the 'Believers' to distinguish themselves from the non-believers by observing hijab."<sup>7</sup> One translation explains:

O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognized and not annoyed. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.<sup>8</sup>

It is important in connection with this passage to understand that for both Muslim and Hindu women, the practice of purdah or hijab restricted them to the home and forced them to cover their bodies in order to protect them from possible disgrace at the hands of strange men. As time went on, these practices were the subject of heated debate. For instance, the All-India Women's Conference in March 1918 in Bhopal conducted a serious debate on purdah. A resolution at the conference concluded that for the emancipation of women, purdah should be relaxed and that Muslim women should only have to observe it to the extent required by their religion. Saiyid asserts, "by the second and third decade of this century the observance of purdah was relaxed in its severity, at least in the cities of Punjab."<sup>9</sup>

Even though the practice declined somewhat, it remained central to both cultures. Women's bodies were seen as the property of the men of their family and the religion they practiced. This concept proves quite significant in the context of the religious atrocities committed during partition. Women's bodies constituted a religious, geographic, and familial symbol. Defilement of the woman of a family would be the greatest dishonor the family unit could endure -- and thus violence enacted on women during partition was tantamount to a sacrilege against one's religion, country, and family.

In *Cracking India*, Ayah, Lenny's nanny, is a character Sidhwa develops to portray this sexual tension among Hindu women and "outside" men. Lenny describes Ayah's figure as having a "rolling bouncy walk that agitates the globules of her buttocks under her cheap colorful sari and the half-spheres beneath her short sari blouses" (13). Ayah's sexuality attracts men of varying occupations and religions including the Fallattis

Hotel cook, the Government House gardener, the butcher, Masseur, the “Chinaman”, the Pathan, and Ice-Candy-Man (81). According to Lenny, “Ayah’s presence galvanizes men to mad sprints in the noon heat” (41) As a lower caste servant for a Zoroastrian family, Ayah is not subject to the strict laws of Purdah required of the upper caste Brahmins. This position enables Sidhwa to portray in her novel more interaction between a Hindu woman and men of other beliefs. However, it also serves to register the extent of Ayah’s decline in the final third of the novel. Once she was able to consolidate all religious groups, “Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee, are, as always, unified around her”; however, partition turns Ayah’s sexuality against her (97). The men who once competed for her attention eventually reject her. The victimization of this character will be explored subsequently.

In contrast with Ayah’s alluring nature, Lenny’s godmother appears quite asexual. According to Lenny, “She wears only white khaddar saris and white khaddar blouses beneath which is her coarse bandage-tight bodice. In all the years I never saw the natural shape of her breasts” (13). Practices like purdha and hijab desexualize women’s bodies in order to shield them from sexual violence. In the novel, Lenny’s godmother neutralizes her own sexuality by binding her breasts, which also shields her from physical harm but, along with her religion, age, and social status in the community, enhances her power. Although many Western thinkers believe these practices of veiling women to be repressive, Sidhwa suggests otherwise. Lenny’s godmother suppresses her sexuality to become dominant over her husband and other men in the community like Ice-Candy-Man. Conversely, Ayah, who accentuates her sexuality, is kidnapped and defiled during partition.

The historical background leading up to and following the partition of India is quite intricate. However, a brief analysis of the events preceding partition will shed some light on the extreme religious tension that developed in this embroiled region. The Indian Mutiny or Sepoy Rebellion from 1857-1858 increased the domination of the British Raj under Empress Victoria (1877). Sidhwa personifies British colonialism with the statue of Queen Victoria in Queen’s Park and the marching of British troops, which Lenny calls “a slick red and white caterpillar” throughout the city of Lahore (27). The British established a Victorian model of government which was socially and politically conservative. The Raj brought huge economic change to the subcontinent, including improvements in transportation and communication, the opening of coal mines in Bihar and Bengal, and construction of irrigation canals in the Yamuna, Ganges, and Indus valleys. The expansion of irrigation in Punjab led to the development of canal colonies settled mainly by Sikhs and Muslims.<sup>10</sup>

While the British Raj stimulated economic growth to the Indian subcontinent, the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs largely detested colonial domination. Sidhwa recounts a dinner party hosted by Lenny’s parents at which a guest, Mr. Singh, exclaims, “Hindu, Muslim, Sikh: we all want the same thing! We want independence!” (71) Indeed, political groups formed in India to ensure that each religious group was involved in British control. The Indian National Congress (1885) and the All-India Muslim League (1906) were both

established in order to work with the British on political and social issues. Unfortunately, as partition became imminent, the groups simply could not agree. The India National Congress, made up largely of Hindus, was founded to formulate proposals and demands to present to the British. Fearing Hindu domination in politics, Muslims created the All-India Muslim League to balance Hindu votes in the Congress.

As conflict among the three groups ensued, the British began to feel the impact of World War II. The economic and human loss proved too great for the crown to continue maintaining its colonial holdings. In 1945, the Labor Party came to power in England and subsequently pushed Parliament to abandon the Indian sub-continent. Meanwhile, Gandhi launched the “Quit India Movement” (1942) in order to turn the native population against the British. Ali Jinnah, head of the All-Muslim League, was opposed to many of Gandhi’s methods--especially the “Quit India Movement.” Talks between Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah proved ever more difficult as the British planned to relinquish India to its native inhabitants.<sup>11</sup>

The “Two Nations Theory”, established during this politically volatile time, proposed that India be divided among Hindus and Muslims. Jinnah encouraged this theory propounded by a group of students at Cambridge University in England. These students issued a pamphlet in 1933 entitled “Now or Never,” which opposed the idea of federation, denied that India was a single country, and demanded partition into regions, with the northwest receiving national status as a “Pakistan.” The students explained that the term “Pakistan” is composed of letters taken from the names of their homelands: Punjab, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Iran, Sindh, Tukharistan, Afghanistan, and Balochistan. These students called this area the “land of the Paks.”<sup>12</sup> The All-Muslim League supported a divided India, while Congress continually opposed it. On March 23, 1940, the All-Muslim League created the Lahore Resolution (or Pakistan Resolution) which advocated a religiously divided India. According to historian G. D. Khosla:

the Muslim League demand for Pakistan was based on the idea that Hindus and Muslims constitute two separate nations, each entitled to a separate and exclusive homeland where they would be free to develop their culture, tradition, and religion and polity.<sup>13</sup>

On June 3, 1947, British Prime Minister Clement Attlee introduced a bill in the House of Commons calling for the independence and partition of India. By July 4, 1947, the House of Commons passed the India Independence Act, which created two independent dominions on the sub-continent.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the summer of 1947, communal violence mounted, assets were divided, boundary commissions were established to demarcate frontiers, and British troops were evacuated. On August 14, 1947, Pakistan and India achieved independence. Ali Jinnah subsequently became the first governor general of the Dominion of Pakistan.<sup>15</sup>

Power-playing and politics among this collection of political leaders is purposefully vague and confusing in Sidhwa's novel simply because it was confusing to the people of India at the time. Lenny complains of Ice-Candy-Man's political comments,

Sometimes he quotes Gandhi, or Nehru, or Jinnah, but I'm fed up with 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? (38)

Because Lenny is a child during partition, the reader receives information filtered through an immature perspective. Although the politics of the novel are ambiguous, especially for Western readers not familiar with India's partition, her childishness also uncovers truths unseen by the adult world. For example, when Gandhi visits Lahore, Lenny's encounter with him reveals his true stance on partition and its effects on the people in the region. Lenny asserts,

It wasn't until some years later -- when I realized the full scope and dimensions of the massacres -- that I comprehended the concealed nature of the ice lurking deep beneath the hypnotic and dynamic femininity of Gandhi's non-violent exterior (96).

Lenny's direct encounter with one of the key figures in determining the fate of India's people reveals his evil -- his responsibility for the thousands of deaths during partition.

It is significant to mention, in conjunction with politics, that Lenny and her family are Zoroastrian and thus somewhat removed from the religious violence and tension that ensues. Colonel Bharucha exclaims at a community meeting of Zoroastrians, "Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land...We will cast our lot with whoever rules Lahore" (48). This statement suggests that Zoroastrians, an extremely small religious community, accepted whatever ruling power dominated them. Interestingly, no Zoroastrian women in Sidhwa's text are victimized because of religious persecution during partition. Thus, her book is a penetrating analysis of the atrocities that major religions of the world inflict upon one another.

Historians have seen India's partition in the context of a horrific political upheaval between the British Raj, the Congress, and the All-India Muslim League. Unfortunately, the greatest victims of partition, women, have been left without a voice -- largely ignored in light of political events leading to partition. According to scholars Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin,

the story of 1947, while being one of the successful attainment of independence, is also a gendered narrative of displacement and dispossession, of large-scale and widespread communal violence, and of the realignment of family, community and national identities as a people were forced to accommodate the dramatically altered reality that now prevailed.<sup>16</sup>

The division of India led to a great exodus of Hindus and Sikhs to India and Muslims to Pakistan. The end of British dominion and the creation of two separate, religiously identified states became a recipe for violence among the people. According to Khosla,

the two-nations theory brought the problem of minorities into greater prominence than ever before, and partition, instead of offering a solution, made it even more difficult and more complicated. No matter where the line of demarcation was drawn, there would be Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs on either side of it, in a majority or in a substantial minority; and, whatever the geographical boundaries of Pakistan, large numbers of Hindus and Sikhs would, overnight, become aliens and foreigners in their own homes.<sup>17</sup>

All over the now divided territory, people were in frantic flight in fear of religious violence and persecution. Homes, crops, and animals were abandoned as people fled to the cities in search of safety in large numbers.<sup>18</sup>

Bapsi Sidhwa includes in her novel a section entitled "Ranna's Story," which effectively utilizes third-person omniscient narration in order to describe the invasion of a Sikh village. Lenny, the first-person narrator, is not able to describe such horrific events because she is confined to the city of Lahore. However, she is able to document widespread riots, arson, and looting which erupted throughout the cities of the Punjab by the first week of March 1947, starting with the central districts of Lahore, Amritsar, Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Sheikhpura, Gurdaspur, Sialkot, Montgomery, Lyallpur, Gujranwala, and the Jullundur Doab and spreading out into the countryside. One of Lenny's most profound coming-of-age experiences is watching the city of Lahore burn while a man is murdered. Family businesses were singled out: Hindu and Sikh businesses were burned and looted in West Punjab, while Muslim property was destroyed in East Punjab.<sup>19</sup> Because of the onslaught of religious fanaticism, many Hindu and Sikh families traveled by train or walked the distance to cross into India. Many Muslim families made the same journey into Pakistan. The partition itself and the days immediately following the actual decree are called the "August Anarchy," a phrase which emphasizes the chaos that ensued among native people. According to Menon and Bhasin, the Boundary Commission gave detailed accounts of the train massacres between August 9 and September 30. The authors assert,

by August 13 it became impossible for passengers to reach Lahore station because they were attacked en route; between August 12-18, it became a veritable death-trap, and in the rural areas, by August 15, nearly every east-bound train passing through Montgomery and Lahore was stopped and attacked.<sup>20</sup>

Obviously, the Partition of India in 1947 amounted to undeclared civil war, a dispute over borders, boundaries, culture and religion. Caravans of families were attacked simply because of their religious affiliation. When the exodus concluded, about eight to ten million people had crossed over from Punjab to Bengal. According to Menon and

Bhasin, this was “the largest peace-time mass migration in history -- about 500,000-1,000,000 had perished.”<sup>21</sup> Sidhwa documents this mass exodus as well. Lenny says “wave upon wave of Muslim refugees flood Lahore -- and the Punjab west of Lahore. Within three months seven million Muslims and five million Hindus and Sikhs are uprooted in the largest and most terrible exchange of population known to history” (169).

The countless rapes and kidnappings of women and young girls are perhaps among the most sordid tales of partition. These females, some with children in their arms, were reportedly abducted, raped and molested, passed from one man to another, bartered and sold like cheap chattel.<sup>22</sup>

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

When the convoy left Lyallpur we all joined it. The military had robbed us of everything before we left our house. First they took away our arms, then our valuables. On the way, I was separated from my people. I saw men being murdered and women being raped on the wayside. If someone protested he was killed. One woman was raped by many men. I was also raped by three men in succession. A man, at last, took me to his house and kept me there for eight days....He subjected me to physical torture, forced cow bones into my mouth so that I should be converted to Islam...He put my hands under the *charpoy* legs and sat down on it to say prayers while I suffered agonies of pain.<sup>23</sup>

This young woman recounted the acts of violence perpetuated against her because of her religion. Her being forced to eat cow bones signifies an obvious mocking of her Hindu beliefs. Also, the rape itself represents a perverse form of conversion. By these actions alone, one can see that this undeclared civil war was rooted in religious hatred. Only when the British evacuated did Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs turn on each other and women’s bodies became the battleground on which these factions clashed.

This woman’s account of the atrocities committed against her is quite similar to Ayah’s sordid tale. Ayah is also kidnapped and forced to marry Ice-Candy-Man, a Muslim, while she is Hindu. The fact that Ayah is forced to prostitute her body and coerced into having sex with Ice-Candy-Man indicates that women’s bodies have historically become territory in which men act out their aggression. Whatever love Ice-Candy-Man has for Ayah is smothered by his complete subjugation of her. He changes her name from Shanta to Mumtaz, a Muslim name. Also, Ice-Candy-Man and Ayah continue to live in a *kotha* (brothel) even after their marriage. She is adorned completely in the attire of a Muslim woman. Ice-Candy-Man successfully strips Ayah of her identity as a woman and as a Hindu. Although she eventually escapes her maniacal abductor and partially regains her identity and power as a woman, the reader is left with the idea that, even with her family in Amritsar, Ayah will be marked by her defilement during partition, if not physically then clearly emotionally.

Perhaps Ice-Candy-Man's abduction and defilement of Ayah may be seen as a gesture of contempt against India, Hindu men, and Hindu property. Menon and Bhasin suggest,

The most predictable form of violence experienced by women, as women, is when the women of one community are sexually assaulted by the men of the other, in an overt assertion of their identity and a simultaneous humiliation of the Other by "dishonoring" their women. In this respect, the rape and molestation of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women before and after Partition probably followed the familiar pattern of sexual violence, and of attack, retaliation and reprisal.<sup>24</sup>

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

One of the cases that I treated was of a woman from village Chund Bharwana who was the wife of a railway porter. One of her hands was chopped off above her wrist and then she was thrown into the fire, as a result of which her lower portion got burnt.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps one of the most gruesome injuries cited by doctors was the amputation of breasts of women. One doctor in particular said that "six such cases of chopped-off breasts were brought to the refugee camp and all of them proved fatal."<sup>26</sup> This macabre act of disfigurement is sordidly depicted in *Cracking India*. Ice-Candy-Man reports to his friends that a train from Gurdaspur has arrived in Lahore filled with murdered Muslims. Ice-Candy-Man shouts, "Everyone is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts!" (159). However, this act of violence against Islamic women only spurs him to perpetrate violence on Hindu and Sikh women. He exclaims, "I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women" (166). And, of course, Ice-Candy-Man satiates his appetite for revenge by kidnapping Ayah and forcing her to marry him, while also prostituting her body. Perhaps, as he claims, Ice-Candy-Man truly loves Ayah, but his mercurial identity and con-artist habits suggest otherwise. His ability to change from popsicle salesman to prophet to poet persuades the reader to believe that truth is a very shifting quality for this character.

Many women died trying to avoid sexual violation, preserve their chastity, and protect their religious and family honor. Scholars of India's partition have noted numerous ways in which women took their lives. Some jumped into the nearest well or set themselves ablaze. Sometimes the act was accomplished alone, sometimes all the women in a family committed mass suicide. Menon and Bhasin assert, "many women and girls saved their honor by self-immolation. They collected their beddings and cots in a heap and when the heap caught fire they jumped onto it, raising cries of 'Sat Sri Akal!'" There

is also a story of ninety women of Thoa Khalsa who jumped into a well on March 15, 1947, in order to preserve their chastity and the religious honor of their families.<sup>27</sup>

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

The forgoing depictions of violence against women are shockingly savage. These acts of brutality indicate what women's bodies symbolize for these religiously diversified groups. The appalling physical injuries inflicted on these women suggest that in this time and place the female body became territory to be fought over, conquered, and subsequently "branded" by the assailant through rape or disfigurement. According to Menon and Bhasin, acts of raping women in public in full view of their relatives, or "tattooing and branding the body with 'Pakistan, Zindabad!' or 'Hindustan, Zindabad!' not only marked the woman for life, they never permitted her [or her family and community] the possibility of forgetting her humiliation." In the context of Partition, "it engraved the division of India into India and Pakistan on the women of both religious communities in a way that they *became* the respective countries, indelibly imprinted by the Other."<sup>28</sup>

By marking a half moon on the breasts or genitalia of a woman, the male assailant extended the violation of her body to future generations. The amputation of a woman's breasts desexualized her -- in effect denying her the role of wife and mother. In fact, amputation literally denied her the ability to nurse and thus be a nurturer. She was transformed into a freakish figure, an outcast, a barren woman. Sudir Kakar, in his studies of civil unrest, states that the amputation of breasts "incorporates the (more or less conscious) wish to wipe the enemy off the face of the earth."<sup>29</sup> According to Stasa Zajovic, in analyzing the recent mass rape of women in Bosnia Herzegovina, "the female womb becomes occupied territory."<sup>30</sup>

The violence against women cannot be separated from the larger hostilities that erupted among Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. Violence between these sects extended to defiling religious symbols and artifacts. Pigs and cows were slain in front of mosques and temples, non-Muslim men were circumcised, and Hindus were forced to consume beef.<sup>31</sup> Because consumption of beef is proscribed for Hindus, as is pork for Muslims, these acts of religious hatred were, indeed, horrifying. Sidhwa's character, Hari, is forced to change his religion. Lenny remarks, "Hari has had his *bodhi* shaved. He has become a Muslim. He has also had his penis circumcised" (172). All these acts of sacrilege extended to raping and physically disfiguring another's women. Menon and Bhasin assert, "The preoccupation with women's sexuality formed part of the contract of war between the three communities."<sup>32</sup> The attempt to preserve the chastity of one's own women became

so great that a new form of terror erupted among the religious groups. Men turned against their own wives, daughters, and sisters, murdering them before they could be dishonored through rape and disfigurement.<sup>33</sup>

The practice of sati, the immolation of widows on their husbands' funeral pyres, is well known among those who study Hindu religion. Because dishonor and defilement was such a great fear among women and their families, many women committed suicide or were murdered by their own kin. A Sikh woman, Taran, recounts her story:

We would listen stealthily and overheard them saying that all of us should be locked up in a room and burnt alive. Our own families were saying this--- they had seen what some Muslims had done to the women, raped and killed them. The ones who escaped and came back were in such bad shape--disfigurement, mistreated. They felt it was better to kill their women than have them go through this.<sup>34</sup>

Sidhwa alludes to the horrifying practice of female self immolation in "Ranna's Story." Prior to an invasion of a Sikh village, it is planned that the women will set themselves ablaze. The narrator details the scheme: "The women and girls will gather at the *chaudhry*'s. Rather than face the brutality of the mob they will pour kerosene around the house and burn themselves" (214). Ironically, the attempt fails, resulting in even greater carnage.

One Sikh father, Charanjit Singh Bhatia, tells the story of his uncle who murdered his own daughters and himself to avoid their being married off to Muslim neighbors. Bhatia comments, "That was a terrible time, people were made to do terrible things."<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, this story illuminates the notion prevalent at this time that death was actually a better fate than conversion through marriage. Menon and Bhasin affirm, "This response that chose real, but honorable, death over the symbolic death that marriage and conversion entailed seemed not just preferable, but almost prescribed for Hindus and Sikhs."<sup>36</sup> One Sikh man, Dr. Virsa Singh, was known in Amritsar for murdering many women during Partition in order to preserve their honor. Miridula Sarabhai recounts his tale:

Virsa Singh claimed he had shot 50 women personally. First he shot his own wife because the Muslims came to get them. Once he had done this, all the women in the neighborhood gathered around saying 'Viran, pehle mannu maar, pehle mannu maar' (Brother, kill me first).<sup>37</sup>

Because Dr. Virsa Singh could not bear to see his wife and daughters fall into the hands of the Muslims, he saw himself as their savior from Muslim domination even if death was the only means of escape. This ideology seems inherent in Sikh concepts of bravery and warfare.

Women are the silent victims during civil war, religious unrest, and political violence. Fortunately, both Pakistan and India eventually established an Abducted

Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill which required that abducted women and children be returned to their families.<sup>38</sup> Refugee camps were established in both countries to secure safe transfer of the women back into their native culture. Sidhwa places one of these refugee camps near Lenny's home, where, at night, she hears the cries of these abused women. Hamida, herself a recovered woman, consoles Lenny and states, "poor fate-smitten woman...what can a sorrowing woman do but wail?" (225) Lenny is tormented by the cries of this woman. The narrator cries, "My heart is wrung with pity and horror. I want to leap out of my bed and soothe the wailing woman and slay her tormentors. I've seen Ayah carried away -- and it had less to do with fate than with the will of men" (226). In this passage, the narrator supports Menon and Bhasin's argument that men, with their savagery, were responsible for the abject plight of women during partition. One social worker commented on the predicament of women in the camps:

They looked like human skeletons -- the women and children! They looked as if they belonged to another time. Those who were young had also become old by being used. I feel like crying when I remember the sight. They had been completely ruined.<sup>39</sup>

These women were cleaned and fed but some were forced to have abortions because the government did not want them giving birth to children who were a product of religious hatred and civil violence.<sup>40</sup> When cultural and religious brutality subsided, women continued to suffer nevertheless. Because of their defilement, some women were rejected by their families. Hamida, Lenny's new ayah, depicts a woman who has been besmirched and subsequently discarded by her family. Lenny's godmother informs Lenny that Hamida was kidnapped by the Sikhs. Godmother states, "she was taken away to Amritsar. Once that happens, sometimes, the husband -- or his family -- won't take her back....Some folk feel that way -- they can't stand their women being touched by other men" (227).

In *Cracking India*, one is able to observe the artistry with which a gifted novelist interlaces the drama played out on the vast scale of history with the drama enacted in ordinary human lives. Memories of the horrors of Partition have faded, but the boundaries of Pakistan and India continue to be disputed even today. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women will never totally recover from the atrocities committed against them in 1947. Near the conclusion of the novel, Lenny's godmother consoles Ayah for the horrors she has been forced to endure: "That was fated daughter. It can't be undone. But it can be forgiven...Worse things are forgiven. Life goes on and the business of living buries the debris of our pasts. Hurt, happiness...all fade impartially...to make way for fresh joy and new sorrow. That's the way of life" (273-274). Godmother's words resonate with the inherent pain and transcendent hope of woman. Perhaps her message constitutes Bapsi Sidhwa's consolation to the women of India and Pakistan who, like Ayah, lost their spirits because of the "will of men."



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the novel use Sidwaha, Bapsi, *Cracking India*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Saiyid, Dushka. *Muslim Women of the British Punjab*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1998, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Papanek, Hanna. "Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 25 (1973), p. 289.

<sup>4</sup> Saiyid, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Saiyid, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> Pickthall, Muhammad Marmaduke (trans.). *Al-Quran Al Karim*. Islamabad: Islamabad Research Institute, 1988.

<sup>9</sup> Saiyid, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> Hasan, Mushirul (ed.). *India's Partition*. Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 230.

<sup>11</sup> Hodson, H.V. *Britain, India, Pakistan*. New York: Atheneum, 1971, p. 200.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Khosla, G.D. *Stern Reckoning: A Survey of the Events Leading Up To and Following the Partition of India*. Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 219.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>15</sup> Hodson, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

<sup>16</sup> Menon, Ritu and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Khosla, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>19</sup> Menon and Bhasin, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Khosla, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>24</sup> Menon and Bhasin, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Menon and Bhasin, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>28</sup> Menon and Bhasin, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Anthias, Floya and Nira Yuval-Davis. *Women-Nation-State*. London: Macmillan, 1989, p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> Parker, Andrew and Mary Russo. *Nationalisms and Sexualities*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1992, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> Khosla, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>32</sup> Menon and Bhasin, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Menon and Bhasin, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>38</sup> Khosla, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>39</sup> Menon and Bhasin, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.