

Violence, Subversion
and Recovery:
Women Writers from the
Sub-continent and Around

(A Literary Confluence of Essays, Poems and Short Stories)

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FOREWORD

Lakshman Rekha is a misnomer, and should be called a Sita Rekha. Probably, it was Sita who drew the Rekha around herself. If such a Rekha is really needed, it is time for the woman to draw the circle around her man. The 3.5 billion women around the earth have their identity; they have their power. They should be able to place the men in their place. So, the men would have to identify themselves as Masculinists or whatever name they wish to use.

The worst mistake done by womankind was allowing man to take over her life and her family. The west has always called the woman the 'Second Sex'. It has always been 'Man and Woman', according to the Judeo-Christian beliefs. In the east, it has been woman first. *Sthri Purusha, Itthi-puma*, and when referring to parents, *Mata-pitu*. In Sri Lanka, it is *Ma-Piya*. Earth herself was Mother Earth, worshipped in South Asia for over 5000 years. Our women, in Sri Lanka, at least in our villages, have been always held in high respect. Mother was considered as the Buddha at home.

The female of the human animal has always been the first, more humane than the male, fitter for survival. Man as the First Sex was continued by the Western anthropologists, who brought forth the myth of hunter-gatherer and that man was the hunter and provided all the food. In our part of the world, with so much fruits and vegetables available for easy gathering, it would have been the woman who gathered and fed her family. They did not have to depend on hunting, as perhaps in the very cold climates: Even then, the woman could also catch the fish, and collect molluscs.

It would have been the woman who domesticated man, when she found it convenient to settle down in one location where there was plenty of food, water and shelter. In an ancient true ecovillage, living in perfect harmony with nature, there would not have been a duality of man-woman or nature-culture. What woman was to nature was changed by man who took over culture, destroying nature wherever he could.

It is also the woman who would have first discovered planting, encouraging her to further settle down in a convenient place. However, it is this planting of seeds by the woman, which would have led to another grave mistake by the human beings, which is now called agriculture. It would have happened as both woman and man felt their greed rising. Once the woman had planted a tree, she and her man would have felt that the tree belonged to them.

Then man would have coveted his neighbour's tree and later even his neighbour's wife. The woman allowed man to consider her as just one of his possessions, just like his home, or his cows and goats. This would have led to a woman needing protection, not from wild animals, but from other men. That is why man let his woman walk before him, not out of chivalry, but out of fear that if she walked behind him, another man could grab her.

The woman made the third mistake in her life, allowing the man to take over not just herself and her children, but her plants and her home. Matriarchy died then, and the first thing the patriarch did was to kill the Mother Goddess and install a God in his own image, with men as intermediaries. In almost every religion, woman has been pushed out or placed in a subservient position, there is a

sanctum sanctorum where women are not allowed. In Sri Lanka, the inner chamber where the Buddha's Tooth Relics is kept, is out of bounds for women, as they are considered "unclean". The absurdity is that these same Buddhists believe that the Tooth Relic was brought to Lanka, hidden in the hair of Hemamala, all the way from Kalinga in the 4th century. Among the Buddhists, the bhikkhus created a myth that only a male could become a Buddha. So, the women have to pray to be born as a man first. But I believe that the next Buddha, Maitri, could be a woman.

Once the woman became dependent on man, she had to use all her charm and skills to be kept by him. Even a domesticated animal would never demean itself to such an extent. The human female happens to be the only animal, who has to tempt the male, throughout her life. The man-dominated civilization became a disease, the worst epidemic faced by humankind, and there is no cure, no immunization process available to escape it, as we see from the ultimate death of all ancient civilizations. Only the women could arrest the epidemic and cure our civilization.

For some unexplained reason, women began talking and writing about women's literature. Since the woman is superior in every way, she should recall her early past. She should recall Enheduanna (2285-2250 BCE), the first known author in the world. In 8th century BCE, ten hymns in the Rigveda are attributed to Maitreyi, and she explored the Hindu concept of Atman (soul or self) in a dialogue with Yajnavalkya in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. There were also Ghosha, Lopamudra and others. Then we have the Theri Gatha (Verses of the Elder Bhikkhunis) written during the time of the Buddha or a little later, confirming that women are equal to men in spiritual attainment. In Sri Lanka, the oldest Pali chronicle, Dipvamsa, is believed to have been written by several bhikkhunis. Yet unfortunately, today, Joanne Rowling had to change her name to J.K. Rowlings, to sound like a man. We do not know if she had insisted on her right to keep her name Joanne, what would have been the fate of Harry Potter.

What women need to do, if they wish to have a separate identity, based on gender, is to produce creative writing to bring back the humane qualities of mankind, bring back loving kindness to all life on Mother Earth. We do not need *Durbashita Sahitya*, following on the evil path created by the male humans. What we need is *Subhashita Sahitya*, as we can understand from the *Subhashita Jaya Sutra* (victory through what is well spoken). "And that, monks, is how the victory through what was well spoken went to Sakka, the Deva-king." – *Subhasita-jaya Sutta, Sanyutta Nikaya 11.1.5*

It is pathetic, that even Buddhist monks have endorsed violence and called murderers as heroes, contradicting Buddha Dhamma totally. In our Pali chronicles, they devoted so much space for violence and murder, while the only person on record to have stopped a war, the chief minister of King Mahasen (277-304 CE), was completely ignored.

One major problem with developing a Subhashita literature is because of the demand created by man for pornography and violence, which is an issue which should be considered by all of us. Yet the difficulty would be because porn is big business. And today, porn is accessible by anyone anywhere on earth, even on their mobile phones. And there is enough of it free, which gives a taste for the porn user, who will then get addicted and will start paying for more and more. It is the same way young people get hooked on drugs, and how we all got hooked on tea. It is unfortunate that a few women too entered the market for porn, because there was big money in it.

It had taken 152 years for the sale of two million copies of 'A Tale of Two Cities', but 'Fifty Shades of Grey' sold 205,130 copies in one week, and Vintage had sold 3 million copies (in digital and print) in less than a month and it has been translated into 30 languages. There is lot of filthy lucre in pornography.

In the beginning, creative art forms would have evolved to release a creative urge, and then would have been appreciated by others, which may later on have led to developing such arts into a form of innocent, pure entertainment. It could also have been a means of transferring knowledge and experience. There would not have been any ulterior motives of personal material benefits or dominance.

Violence too has entered the pornography market, and that is why, we have to talk about pornography of violence too. Recently, in the north of Sri Lanka, in Jaffna, a girl on her way from school, was abducted, gang raped, and the incident had been filmed. It had been arranged by a porn film dealer somewhere in Europe. And the worst tragedy here was this girl would have been fortunate to have survived the war we suffered till 2009, became a victim after the war ended.

Violence is defined as behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage or kill someone or something. Pornography is printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement. The most popular English literature today could be classified as pornographic, if we stretch the meaning of pornography to cover violence.

The term 'Pornography of Violence' has been used by many writers. It was explained by Prof. Robert Knox Denton of the State University of New York, "emotionally arousing material that focusses on doing harm to people in a way that, perhaps tacitly, seems to condone that behaviour in order to gratify the author or reader".

"War is the pornography of violence" is a song by Brian Routh. It has a dark beauty, filled with the monstrous and the grotesque. The Bible calls it "the lust of the eye" [1 John 2: 16] and warns believers against it. War allows us to engage in primal impulses we keep hidden in the deepest, most private interiors of our fantasy life," wrote columnist Chris Hedges in Truth dig. That is why we find that "Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are human eyes." – **Proverbs 27:20**.

We learn less about what is good and beneficial to us and to mankind, but more often the evil and harmful acts and behaviour. 'Pornography of violence' has been with mankind for several millennia, writing novels, poems, biographies, making films, winning awards and hitting best-seller lists. Murderers were made into heroes, like Alexander. We call him Alexander the Great for murdering millions. If Hitler had won the World War II, he would have been called Hitler the Great, and many novels and films would have been made about his heroic acts in the concentration camps. As difficult as it may be to admit, we have grown up with and grown accustomed to violence as our model of "conflict resolution". Churchill was instrumental in defeating Hitler by murdering more people than Hitler did. And after the war, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

We have to use our media and creative arts to promote *Ahimsa*, or *Ubuntu*. As Martin Luther King Jr. Said, "Non-violence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time; the need for mankind to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence.

Mankind must evolve – for all human conflict – a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.” (**Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, Stockholm, Sweden, 1964**). It is only women who could achieve this.

If instead of Ashoka, it had been Ashoka’s first consort, Devi of Vedisagiri, or Asandhimitra, who ruled the Magadh kingdom, there would never have been a Kalinga war. A woman, and a mother would never have ordered the murder of 100 thousand husbands and children of other women, and another 150 thousand captured and enslaved. There may have been female warriors in history, but they would have been trying to act more like men, or outdo men, in their life of crime.

Pankisi is a village in Georgia, close to the Chechen border. Kists, who live here, are ethnic Chechens and Muslims, and they follow Sufi Dhamma, following the 19th century Sufi mystic and pacifist Kunta Hadji-Kushiev, who preached a doctrine of brotherly love and non-violent resistance. Through song and dance, they call for ‘Marshua Kavkaz’, peace in the Caucasus.

Marshua Kavkaz, “No more war! Peace to the world”, is the motto of the organisation established by the Kist women. These women sing and pray since singing, tiredness and sweat purify their sins and generate the energy necessary to confront challenges.

According to Makvala Margoshvili, leader of the female Sufi brotherhood of Kadrija, a lot of challenges are still ahead of her and the other Hadjists (the term derived from the name of Kunta Hadji-Kushiev, the Chechen Mahatma Gandhi, the founder of the brotherhood). They wish to promote Kist culture, draw people's attention to the plight of the Caucasus and to prove their people are not terrorists or savages as they are often portrayed in Russia and Europe. The key characteristics of their beliefs are condemnation of war, love of peace, respect for *adat* (traditional law), forgiveness, abstention from revenge, asceticism and modesty. Makvala Margoshvili is not the first Sufi woman, as Rabia al-Adawiyyah was a disciple of the 8th century sufi Hasan al-Basri. In her teaching, she had emphasised the power of love. We need more such heroines around the world, for they are the true heroines, not those who encourage men to kill their own brothers, or take up arms to murder their own children sisters and brothers.

A woman feels motherly love which a man could not feel. Man is not as sensitive. He believes in violence, always ready to use his hands and any weapons he can get hold of. He thinks it is too womanly to be sensitive towards nature and all things beautiful. When he sees something beautiful, he wants to possess it. And in possession, to destroy it. When he sees a beautiful flower or a beautiful woman, he wants to possess them. He wants to kill and preserve the lovely butterfly, to spread the leopard skin, or hang the beautiful antlers in his sitting room wall.

In the *Kuddaka Nikaya* of the *Tripitaka*, we hear of the Buddhist nun Subha, who was stopped by a young man who spoke of her beauty which had attracted him. “Your eyes are like those of a fawn, like those of a nymph in the mountains, seeing your eyes my sensual delight grows all the more...for there is nothing dearer to me than your eyes”. When the man refused to let her go, she plucked out one eye and handed it to him. “If you like it so much, you can have it,” she told him, and straight away his passion faded and he begged her forgiveness. It is an example of the courage of a woman.

Feminists talk of the problem of 'Man over Woman', and environmentalists of 'Culture over Nature', and the result of which was Ecofeminism. All these isms and concepts only try to hide the true problem, 'Inequality'. It is not all men who dominate all women, or dominate and destroy nature. It is only a few men and a few women, who believe they are 'more equal', who have the money and power, who exploit all other men who are less equal, and all women and all nature. It is the same 'more equal' men and women, who infect the minds of all others with the mental viruses named feminism, ecofeminism and all such isms, to draw their attention away from the real threat.

We read about the more equal men and women in Noor Zaheer's *'My God is a Woman'*. Zeenat trying to outdo men in her domineering and destructive ways, and Safia fighting her own battle, while most other women dare not step outside the Lakshman Rekha.

J.M. Adovasio, Olga Soffer and Jake Page, published *'The Invisible Sex: Uncovering the True Roles of Women in Prehistory'* (Smithsonian, 2007), where they say, "Most paleoanthropologists make the assumption that men, particularly, are the known representatives of hominid evolution." In this book, we find mention of the famous footprints discovered by Mary Leaky in Tanzania. One set of prints were larger than the other and the immediate conclusion was that it was a man and a woman. Based on these footprints from 3.6 million years ago, the American Museum of Natural History in New York created a diorama showing "the couple walking through the desolate landscape volcanic ash, the volcano still smoking on the horizon...the female head is turned: she looks slightly alarmed, the male is looking forward, resolute, his arm resting (positively or affectionately or both) across her shoulders". A most romantic scene. The height of imagination, unfortunately a male-dominated imagination. Adrienne Zihlman of the University of California at Santa Cruz has questioned the large-male small-female hypothesis, and suggested that the footprints could have been of a parent and offspring. A mother could have been leaving the volcano-threatened zone with her daughter. Probably, the man had already escaped, leaving the woman and child behind.

If *Gyna sapiens* had not surrendered herself to *Homo*, this world would have been a really wonderful place for all life forms, not just human beings. *Gyna* is more sensitive, more concerned about nature, about Mother Earth and all her children. There would have been less wars, and less demand for weapons of destruction. Because *Gyna sapiens* would feel the pain of a mother who has to see the murder of her child by another human being, she would have a greater respect for commonly shared resources and wealth, and would be frugal in her use, knowing she has to leave it for her children and their children.

It is time for women to claim their due place in society, as a separate being, *Gyna sapiens*, the superior animal, higher in the evolutionary ladder, more intelligent and fitter than *Homo sapiens* to survive, and to save our environment and our Mother Earth.

It is true we have a certain amount of domestic violence, and also sexual violence and abuse of children. The domestic violence is mostly because of the very high rate of consumption of alcohol specially among the daily wage earners and the lower income families. And among the estate labour, the men and women both have become addicted to alcohol. Governments are responsible for making alcohol a legal commodity, and earning huge incomes from selling misery to millions of families. If women really wanted to, they can stop the men from drinking alcohol.

One more issue where the relationship of men and women was seriously affected was the 30 years of war in Sri Lanka. It was a war which no one, specially, the women wanted, no one except power-hungry politicians and a few who could make money out of it. There have always been, power-hungry, blood-thirsty vultures preying on human misery. This war also brought the women out, showed their strength, courage and the capacity to stand pain and suffering. They had to face it when the terrorists took their children away by force, to be conscripted to their forces, to be trained as suicide cadres. Mothers had to encourage their teenage girls to get pregnant so that they could escape conscription. They had to watch as their fathers, husbands, and children were dragged away by the terrorists or the state forces.

That was in the north.

In the south, mothers had to watch as sealed coffins arrived from the warfront, and learn to manage their own lives in silence. They had to keep on dreaming that their husbands and their sons would some day return home, because they were 'missing in action'. It was always the women who held the families together, and who are still struggling to get back into normal life. They were the true heroines.

This is where man is responsible for all destruction of our environment, with every attempt at trying to control nature, in the name of culture and development. Men talk of "sustainable development", which is a contradiction of terms, which men are not prepared to accept, if we mean 'development' of material culture. The only sustainable development possible is in mental and social development, in the development of human values and loving kindness for all living things, not the destruction of our ecosystem.

The only acceptable reasoning is that woman is closer to nature because of her procreative and nursing powers, which are lacking in man. Thus, man is the inferior animal, distant from nature.

It is a distortion of facts to say that woman is doomed to mere reproduction of life, while man has to assert his creativity externally. It is a misconception that "man creates relatively lasting, eternal transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables – human beings." Nothing man ever made is lasting or eternal. They are all perishable, while creation of human beings ensures the continuity of the human race. Man is also inferior because for everything he creates, he destroys some part of nature.

Not only in an ecovillage, but even in a megacity, a woman can be really independent, she could live and take care of the children without any dependence on a male. She can step out of the Lakshman Rekha. She does not need a feminist movement for that. Then she can get mankind to live closer and in harmony with nature, without any conflict of nature and culture.

Sita Rekha
Daya Dissanayake

PREFACE

The problematic of reading women in the context of violence is very complicated. Studying violence or theorising violence might be an impossibility, but at the same time, studying violence through the question of woman and her body, woman minus her body and the discourse of woman as a singular entity, just as a human being is possible. It cannot be denied that woman is often refused her status of being looked at as simple as a human being minus all other identities or social conditions. One tends to wonder about what methodologies could justify the woman question with respect to violence. Is there a methodology at all?

One even wishes that a complication of concepts such as liberation, emancipation or empowerment *vis-à-vis* a woman be addressed on a linear scale. We call these keywords as concepts as they are far removed from practical reality. Is a woman ever liberated or emancipated or even empowered? Does the discourse of domesticity or body not touch the so-called empowered woman? Is she ever received as a singular entity of just being a human'?

The need is to examine a woman's life on a wider scale by employing inclusive framework, to bring normality into focus by refuting the stereotypes of womanhood. This becomes more problematic when it is read on an extended concern with violence. The discourse is reduced to body alone. How do we attempt to read the woman, in this context, beyond its dimensions of body?

This book is an attempt to read womanhood as humanhood. The articulation, self or otherwise, is through the context of violence. The experiences are those of the subject or as the 'objectified' in doing so. The attempt has been to shatter the glass ceiling, break boundaries to articulate silence. The narratives tear open the suppressed and refute the conventional way of writing/narrating history.

Rachel Bari
Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry

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March, 2019

**Rachel Bari
Ishmeet Kaur**

INTRODUCTION

Reading sub-continental women writing is a two-pronged affair. One, the woman is the subject of much writing, hence she is the “written” and two, she is the “writer”. Both are problematic areas. As the one, on whom the sub-continent manifests itself, albeit the written, she is the custodian of culture, and her body, the site of contestation. As the writer, she subverts the so-called “givens”, the normative within the society. It is through writing, perhaps that she is able to recover, even in the face of violence. The “text” liberates and it is this liberation that one attempts to elicit from the “written” and the “writer”: the text and the context.

The text and the context then, in this connection particularly, is violence. Violation is violence, be it in any form and to anybody. However, in the case of women, it takes on different dimensions. It might intrude in the form of myth, tradition, sanctity, chastity, family, honour, class, caste, sexuality, etc. for violence against women cannot be understood in an isolated context. When violation is violence, then the next obvious question would be to understand violation. The etymology of the word is from old French (14th century) *violation* and directly from Latin *violacionem* “an injury, irreverence, profanation,” from past participle stem of *violare* “to treat with violence, outrage, dishonour”.¹ All the words associated with violence are present.

Violence against women is not a recent phenomenon, it is an age-old one. But, what we miss out in reading violence is the process of both subversion and recovery which is simultaneous to violence. Whenever violence is inflicted on the powerless, the acts of both, subversion and recovery accompanies it. Though, these statements seem very general and may not be true in many particular cases, they do tend to bring to the fore the discourse on the three keywords (violence, subversion and recovery) and, therefore, a new definition of all the three evolves in the context of the “particular”, individual and different cases. Violence, is not singular, it is plural. Literally, there are several kinds of violence and procedurally, every act of violence is accompanied with suppression, subjugation, subversion and most importantly, an inability to exercise choice as it is forced. Violence against woman needs to be studied in a more socio-political context as reading it in isolated family spaces is not sufficient. As mentioned above, violence against woman cannot be understood in an isolated context either. Body has a very important subjectivity in the context of denying woman her identity as an individual. Thus, woman’s body becomes a space to depict masculinity by disrespecting it through rape and mutilation. In several events, particularly in the last seven decades, widespread violence across the world, particularly in the sub-continental region has increased manifold. Rashmi Sheila reports the rapidly increasing numbers of violence against women as follows:

In July 2016, the British government issued a report documenting cases directly related to violence against women in Afghanistan. According to the report, which looked at the first six months of 2016, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission recorded 5,132 cases of violence against women, which included 241 murders. Other similar studies conducted by the Women

1. etymonline.com. online etymology dictionary.

Rehabilitation Center (WOREC) in Nepal showed that 1,563 cases against women were recorded from April 2012 to 2013. Apart from that, it also pointed out that between 5,000 and 12,000 girls and women aged 10 to 20 are trafficked every year. (Sheila)

Women's lives need to be examined on a wider scale, with a more emancipating and inclusive framework where the approach highlights the unrecognised, everyday routine life of a more normalised form of invisible violence to physically visible and state-sponsored or mass violence. Cecilia Menjívar suggests three important considerations for discussing violence in her study related to women's lives in Eastern Guatemala, that may be successful in providing a conceptual framework to this study as well. She suggests that first, "the political economy of violence does not affect everyone in the same manner; violence weighs differently for those in dissimilar social locations" (Menjivar 112). Second, violence cannot be simply "observed, reported, and measured" (Menjivar 112) as if it is an event. It needs to be studied as a "process, one that is embedded in the everyday lives of those who experience it. Third, it may be society-specific as not all societies recognise the same things as violent, either in their origins or in their effects." (Menjivar 112)

Walking on a thin line, the examination of women's lives simultaneously need to be studied from a perspective of human rights and human dignity. It would not be wrong to suggest that women are denied basic dignity and respect within a family unit, a space where patriarchy operates the most, to the socio-religio-cultural setups in which the denial is conducted most systematically and strategically. Women have been the worst victims of impunity and their battle for justice has continued from time immemorial. Patrick Hoenig and Navsharan Singh express the case of impunity profoundly as follows:

When we hear about lines being crossed and rights violated we are repulsed and filled with expectation that the wrong will be righted. Impunity, understood as a systemic exemption from punishment and denial of redress, works as a double betrayal of our sense of justice: a violation has occurred and, what is more, it has not been rectified. (Hoenig 1)

This history of impunity continues as women continue to conform to the socio-religio-cultural norms along with the legal system which supports the dominance of women as embedded within its structure. Niveditha Menon cites a 1984 judgement of the Delhi High Court which stated that –

...the Fundamental Rights ensured to every Indian citizen by the Constitution, were not applicable in the family: these rights have to stop at the door of the home. Letting Fundamental Rights into the family, said the judge, would be 'like letting a bull into a China Shop.' (Menon 5)

She further suggests that these hierarchies are clearly established on gender and age as often the wife is younger to the husband and thus, it is easier to dominate a younger woman than the man. Many of these women remain mute victims of sexual violence.

In an attempt to understand the happenings in the sub-continental region, the recent developments have resulted in a rapid increase in sexual and mass violence followed by attempts at muting them. Therefore, it would not be wrong to suggest that violence has been accompanied by years of silences. More the violence, more the silences. Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kashmir, North East, Nepal and Punjab in India have been prone to increasing unrest, and thereby increasing mass rapes and sexual violence on women. It is also important to understand that none of these acts, be it 1947 partition

of India and Pakistan, the ever-continuing Kashmir conflict since then, 1971 India-Bangladesh separation, or the Swat in Pakistan, the years of insurgency of Nepal in 2006, the 1984 and 90s of Punjab, 1992 demolition of Babri Masjid, 2002 Gujarat riots, Muzaffarabad on 2013 and day-to-day increasing cases of lynching in the recent years particularly 2016-2017, have resulted in mass violence, where women have been simultaneous and direct subjects of exploitation with the support of the State. The legal institutions have also met with great failure in providing justice to innumerable women who were affected in many such cases. Unfortunately, the discourses and discussions on women and rape has remained an ignored subject for all these years. Questions of violence, humiliation, caste/Adivasi violence, violence on sex workers, violence inflicted on the transgender and marital rape have been least spoken about.

What is most worrying is the increasing cases of impunity and the tendency to ignore or silence around these subjects. Would the woman continue to remain a victim and a subject for dominance forever? What could be the measures for bringing in reforms or what is it that would systemically and institutionally bring a change in the perspective where justice is prioritised as a human right for women? This cannot be mentioned without addressing the perpetrators as progenitors of shame and the several attempts at silencing women on related issues of violence and exploitation. For men, it is in a way, escaping from shame who in order to hide his criminal act, silences the woman in the garb of notions of disgrace, dishonour and shame. V. Geetha explains how sexual violence has been reduced to discussions on shame and honour by reducing the element of individual mutilation of self. She suggests that:

...we need to render sexual violence as a crime that indicts the world and the perpetrator in no uncertain terms; in short, a crime against bodily integrity, personhood, why our very humanity. This is not because it is the most terrible thing that can happen to a woman, but because it is seen as a sexual crime, and confounded with questions of shame and stigma, and not as a tormenting of body and spirit. To communicate recognition of what women endure, therefore, we need to re-imagine personhood itself, in all its richness and with a keen feminist sensibility. (Geetha 298)

Thus, whatever little discourse is available on women and impunity, women is either reduced to body or a vulnerable object subjected to easy and sudden victimisation. In this entire discussion, questions of self in relation to identity and body together is often ignored. Therefore, it is important to read womanhood as humanhood. Moreover, self-articulation of experience by woman herself is essential for breaking silences. Though articulation in itself is a highly complicated process as this may be an extremely painful experience, tormenting and accompanied by revisiting the unbearable nevertheless, it may be extremely disastrous to leave the experience unattended to. This ignorance may be more damaging than addressing it. At times, articulating is healing. Women's narratives in terms of intervention and inclusion into history tears open the subdued and ordered way of writing/narrating history.

In a field work conducted regarding recording the narratives of the women survivors of 1984 anti-Sikh riots, there were mixed reactions from the respondents. While some women came forth most willingly to share their experience, others detested the use of camera. They reacted to the indifference shown by the State and the legal institutions aggressively, yet painfully and refused to give an interview. While, yet others offered their stories hoping that maybe someday justice may knock on their doors. Nevertheless, those who shared their experiences were disarrayed and mostly began by the betrayal of the state and a complete breakdown of institutional machinery. Much against their expectations, their friends, party leaders, police and doctors refused to help the Sikhs as the assassins of the then Prime

Minister Indira Gandhi were Sikh men. Despite several men who were killed, women were not just killed, but as the pattern is repetitive in the earlier and similar cases of mass violence, women were raped, attacked and left unattended to. Those who survived continued to live for the sake of their children. Life for such women remains full of pressures ranging from socio-political to psychological. Violence on/ against women is a form of displacement and dispossession wrecked on her body and psyche leaving her with splintered images of herself which comes forth in shards of broken memories. Many women reported of disturbed sleep patterns and psychological depression accompanied by their children facing the same. Many women lost their children to drug addiction and psychological imbalances.² Mass violence has a history of repetitive impunity. Harsh Mander sums up this idea of injustice in his essay on "Survivors of Mass Violence and the Idea of Justice" very emphatically in his work regarding the 2002 Godhra victims and survivor women. He says that the contiguous fight for want of justice by the survivors is rather empathy driven than what has happened to them, should not happen to others He says:

They fight for years in courts, battling all odds, most of all because of a deep sense of empathy for those who suffered and continue to suffer, in order to deter people in future from such crimes, by forcing them to recognise that they are not exempt from the reach of the secular law of the land. Their driving sense of responsibility is to later generations, so that they do not have to live with the fear and suffering of recurring mass crimes. (Mander 297)

The idea of retrospection can be meaningful only if there is a collective understanding of the past events. At the same time, retrospection is not possible without articulation by those who experience and witness the crime. Certain queries have haunted us in our discussion of similar concerns. One of the major concern is about recovery. We need to begin with the very question as to 'What is recovery?', 'Whose recovery?' and 'Is recovery really possible?' The answer to these questions is not simple and straightforward, rather it is extremely complicated and enmeshed. Any attempt to open up one layer leads to an entanglement another. Loss of innocent family members, spouse and children has haunted the survivors of war, violence and conflict for years together and without a recourse. Those who have lived these experiences will carry them to their graves. Attempts to remember them functions on various levels, on level of revoking the past to understand the present; to return to the events to commemorate and retrospect, and may be, also to have therapeutic impact. Memory and forgetting are simultaneous. Forgetting may be both voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary or intentional forgetting may be a mode of escapism from the traumatic past. On the contrary, sometimes voluntarily remembering is intentional and assertive of the past events, a mode of revoking the past, so that it is not ignored or silenced.

Hence, the narratives attempt a reconstruction of not only the nation but more importantly of "self". Women's narrative is a need to find coherence in a severed experience. It is a road to recovery. The amazing truth about the "written" and the "writer" is the distance travelled between the two. Healing and recovery takes place between these two points. Between declaring what a woman is, to what she lives and to what she writes is not a seminal but a 'menstrual' journey. The ellipsis in historical studies of violence will always have to be filled in with the human dimension, here more specifically woman. A woman writing is a woman speaking and when she does that, she defies, reinvents and subverts the notion of "her" as symbol. Violence, which is a private feminine space must cease to be one and impact the public masculinist realm, for violence causes trauma which brings in a break in the mind's capacity of

2. Narratives collected during a field study in 2014 at Tilak Vihar Widow's Colony, New Delhi for a project study on 1984 anti-Sikh programme.

experiencing time. There is a tear in the fabric of time, a loss of continuity, making the experience slip through and is processed late. The mind slows down in registering “that” moment/event and when it is recalled, it is done so with jagged lines which hurt and memory is broken. Writing becomes a purgation and a recovery for the individual and the collective. The memory of the trauma must transform itself into something else if it has to be cleansed. Women writing can be a balm to the silenced.

The book addresses similar concerns and provides various perspectives in different domains and regions across the sub-continent concerning notions pertinent to women, violence, subversion and recovery.

Chapter 1 – Reading Bapsi Sidhwa: Revisiting a Traumatic Moment in Historical Time by Sridhar Rajeshwaran is in three parts. Part I is an attempt at understanding events that changed the destinies of peoples living in a place which however fraught provided breathing spaces, Part II tries understanding the transformations that took place and how Bapsi Sidhwa has arrived at it in and Part III is in sync with the author’s own segmentation though it is not marked in her text separately but exists as a conspicuous shift in focus. This part is in the context of healing.

Chapter 2 – Dravidian Feminism and the Case of South India by Krishna Manavalli traces the emergence of Dravidian feminism in the 20th century Tamil Nadu as a way of challenging the notion of a univocal and predominantly Hindu India. Moving through the ideas of Periyar, the chapter focuses mainly on the self-respect women’s writings translated into English, and the dissenting voices of these South Indian women activists who wrote for journals. The chapter also makes a few references to their writings in the Tamil journals *Kudi Arasu* and *Kumaran*. It looks at both the ‘literary’ and ‘journalistic’ writings. The chapter highlights how self-respect women’s writing challenged the plural hierarchies – British, Brahmin and also lower caste – that affect their domestic and public lives. The writer attempts to ‘situate’ studies of Third World Women’s histories well in line with the views of the post-colonial feminist Chandra Mohanty.

Chapter 3 – Remembering Violence and Trauma: A Study of Nandita Das’s Firaq by Nishat Haider situates *Firaq* the directorial debut movie of Nandita Das, within ongoing debates in memory and trauma studies regarding the question of visual culture’s capacity, or lack of it, to represent trauma. Examining the memorialisation of Gujarat communal riots (in 2002) in *Firaq*, she makes an effort to map out trauma as a structuring yet elusive subject of representation by exploring the relationship between the experiences of terror and helplessness that have caused trauma, the ways in which survivors remember, and the representation of these memories in the language and form of their life stories.

Chapter 4 – Behaya: Female Sex Stories from Bangladesh by Kathryn Hummel is about the author’s sexual activity in Bangladesh forming a part of the stories she shares with her friends – Sadiyah, a survivor of marital domestic violence; Sampurna, a cisgender woman married at an early age, and Afreen, a female-identifying *hizra*.[#] Challenging static ideas of belonging, identity and the exchange of power but especially notions of *behaya* surrounding women’s sexuality in Bangladesh, her story-telling became a means of personal and cultural border crossing as she uses the method of arts-based ethnographic inquiry—including prose, poetry and photography—to negotiate the spaces between the ‘social, sexual’ identities of herself and her research participants employing the intertextuality that characterises contemporary ethnographic research and writing. The resulting narrative crosses academic and creative boundaries as it explores the relationships between women, their expressions of sexuality and culture; class and economic standing in Bangladesh.

Chapter 5 – The Politics of Rhetoric: Remembering and Re-narrating ‘Bodily Resistances’ in Rabijita Gogoi’s Plays by Namrata Pathak is about Rabijita Gogoi, a performance maker, theatre director and theatre skill builder from the North-Eastern part of India. Pathak speaks about the issues of representation which emerge in close connection with the construction of the Welfare State. The developments outside or within the domain of state practices, like social security, legislation, markets for consumer goods, election, capitalist economies, genealogical charts, theories of descent and so on sometimes produce social knowledge that is profoundly interventionist. The act of representing this interventionist knowledge depends on an intimate experience of a given region and partly on the assumptions of social actors (on the stage). Rabijita Gogoi’s plays deal with the obsession to represent the chances of danger and the treatments for changing the odds through a mastery/control of useful information and facts. There is a relevant connection between what is represented, why it is represented, and for whom it is represented. The observer decides what is significant, selects that major chunk of knowledge, and finally, exhibits it for mass consumption.

Chapter 6 – Shattered Lives, Shattered Dreams: A Study of Arupa Patangia Kalita’s ‘Arunima’s Motherland and The Cursed Fields of Golden Rice’ by Hemraj Bansal is the story of Assam which presents a horrific tale of violence between the Bodos and the Bengali Muslims. The state has witnessed this indigenous-Bodo conflict for decades now and violence, rapes, mass slaughter have repercussions on the lives of people of both the communities. In this fight for land ownership, there are also those families that become victims of either military or the militant factions in both cases, especially if someone from a family joins a militant group. Apart from it, such families whose sons or fathers join the militia are also ostracised by their respective communities. The Assamese novelist Arupa Patangia Kalita’s (b. 1956) “*Arunima’s Motherland and The Cursed Fields of Golden Rice*” depict the pain of such families.

Chapter 7 – Aporetic Portrayal of Kashmir and its Women in Manisha Sobhrajani’s ‘The Land I Dream of: The Story of Kashmir’s Women’ by Khemraj Sharma critiques Manisha Sobhrajani’s ‘*The Land I Dream of: The Story of Kashmir’s Women*’; and how the beauty of the land and its women has proved a curse for both, as they are facing extreme oppression, cruelty and violence. It also accentuates how women’s concerns form a plethora of complex issues with infinite boundaries which have remained undocumented; and the resilience of women in one of the world’s most factious regions. In the face of insurgency, the region and its people especially the marginalised gender are chasing a mirage wherein their problems seem an insoluble impasse.

Chapter 8 – Ethnic Discrimination, Political Violence and Hybrid Identity: The Complex Literary World of Jean Arasayagam’s Poetry by Zakia Firdaus. As a writer belonging to Dutch Burger origin and married to a Tamil the most assertive minority in the country while living in Sinhala-dominated southern part of Sri Lanka, her writing shows her engagement with multiple heritages that has influenced her identity. According to Neluka Silva, “it is an uneasy hybridity that is suffused with questioning of what these heritages mean and what sense she can make of them in the process of self-definition. Therefore, her writing carries the discourses of exclusionary unity, the discourse of ethno-nationalism and her own identity. This paper examines the question of ethnic discrimination, political violence and hybrid identity in Jean Arasayagam’s poetry with reference to selected poems.

Chapter 9 – Writing Women’s Experiences of Pakistani Survivors: An Interview of Anam Zakaria by Ammara Ahmed is a full-length interview of Anam Zakaria who interviewed women of 1947 survivors. Her interview evolves a technique and a method of reading as well as writing women’s experiences and life. Anam Zakaria is a writer and educationist based in Islamabad. She led the Oral History Project at the

Citizen's Archive Pakistan where she collected the narratives about Partition from first and second-generation Pakistanis. This project inspired her to write her first book – *Footprints of Partition*. The interview has been conducted by a Pakistani journalist Ammara Ahmad. The interview intriguingly presents perspective of reading narrative in the light of process of writing.

Chapter 10 – An Emerging Light from Darkness: Interview with Kalpana Gagdekar by Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry: Charanagar, a small community on the suburbs of Ahmedabad, was designated as a De-notified Criminal Tribe under the Criminal Act of 1871. Till date, the community members bear the brunt of being stereotypically stigmatized as petty thieves and local liquor vendors. A group of motivated youngsters in late 90s initiated the DNT's movement and an internationally acclaimed theatre group called the "Budhan Theatre." Now, many more children have been encouraged and the third generation since then seems to be prepared and coming forth to carry on the empowering movement and the theatre. One of the first generation's only woman theatre and film artiste narrates her life story of struggle and success that motivates many more children and girls. This is a full length interview of Kalpana Gagdekar who is a pioneer woman theatre artiste amongst the Budhan theatre group.

The book is also an attempt to create literature in order to initiate discourse on the concerns addressed in these essays. Five women poets contribute new poetry on various aspects of the woman's experience on various subjects like representing womanhood; mythical depiction of woman and re-imagining in the present; the emotion and passion central to womanhood, the woman experience in time of conflict and struggle, rape, shame and notions of liberty. Nandini Sahu, Anjali Mandala, Shikha Rai, Rachel Bari, Charanjeet Kaur, Shelly Bhoil, Tejoswita Saikia and Ishmeet Kaur have made effective contributions in this section.

In a similar attempt, short fiction has delved in imagination and recreated the woman's experience. Sometimes, fiction creates a space that is otherwise denied to human beings. Stories related to experience of women adorn the book. A very short piece articulates the thought pattern of a foetus that is lost to life in one of the most mob attack on a pregnant woman. Another story that bridges the gap of time through similarity of experience in the repetitive incidences of mass violence is a blow to the face of the State that supports such events. Experience of after-rape and woman experiences have been central aspects of the collection of short stories written by Urmi Rahman, Shweta Rao Garg, Ishmeet Kaur, Indira Nityanandam, Parvathi Aithal, Anandi Lakshminathan, Rachel Bari, Kiran S.N. and Tejoswita Saikia.

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Chapter
1

Reading Bapsi Sidhwa: Revisiting a Traumatic Moment in Historical Time

Sridhar Rajeswaran

Abstract

This paper is in three parts. The first part is an attempt at understanding events that changed the destinies of peoples living in a place which however fraught provided breathing spaces. Part II tries understanding the transformations that took place and how Bapsi Sidhwa has arrived at it. There has been an attempt here to also provide a framework by referring to larger events that had taken place in an elsewhere but an else-where which is historical time still, and which had impacted the happenings in the story being told, which though integral to the writer's discourse finds place only subcutaneously, as under the skin of the play of events Sidhwa etches. These need to be highlighted for a better understanding of the very text, the history which it seeks to interrogate in an art that punishes. Part III is in sync with the author's own segmentation though it is not marked in her text separately but exists as a conspicuous shift in focus. This part is in the context of healing. This attempt has also not relied heavily on theories or meta-theories but has sought to seek parallels in other synchronous moments and other voices from the worlds of history and art.

Keywords: Trauma, history, nation, gender, violence, partition.

Shall I hear the lament of the nightingale, submissively lending my ear?

Am I the rose to suffer its cry in silence year after year?

The fire of verse gives me courage and bids me no more to be faint

With dust in my mouth, I am abject: to God I make my complaint.

Sometimes you favour our rivals then sometimes with us you are free,

I am sorry to say it so boldly. You are no less fickle than we.

(Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, 1)

Iqbal's complaint to God foregrounds Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*, veritably underscores the mood and sets the tone for what is arguably a fine 'authentic' representation of that particular moment in 1947 when the Earth cracked, bore witness mutely, and a free but fickle God never complained.

There was a human witness to the terror, a child, a crippled child at that, from a compressed world, lined with rain gutters, that 'lies' between jails and silent walls of the Salvation Army building with dingy eyes on the one side and wide clean orderly streets that marked affluence on the other side,

but in fringes. This was a child who in her own life was ‘walled-in’. Mind-blocked by the gloom emanating from those wire meshed ventilation slits, her ear pressed to the wall, she had strained to listen to the silences of the dumb, her mind imagining the world of sadness that was their existence or non-life inside.

Little was she to realize that the apocalyptic images which her mind always conjured, in what may be termed a very fertile imagination of a precocious child with a propensity to lie, will make her wildest nightmares come true and like Hieronimo make her want to bite and chew her later day “truth infected” tongue (*Ice-Candy-Man*, 184).

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 sour and bleeding. I am so conscious of its unwelcome presence (the truth she uttered) at all times that it swells uncomfortably in my mouth and gags and chokes me...I throw up constantly. (*Ice-Candy-Man*, 184)

“The horror! The horror!” (Joseph Conrad, Part-III, *Heart of Darkness*, 119) of it all contained in the terrible vision, stayed frozen, locked tight in the inner recesses of the rent heart and fractured psyche that was crippled and the child familiar with the “use of prosthetics could never invent one for the trauma that spliced her soul.”

Her ordered worlds however insular collapsed. Her coherent cosmos was disturbed. She had a cause to blame herself too for she too was responsible for disturbing it. ‘She spake’ and her words triggered untold mystery to the closest person who was more than a mother to her. Everything had changed, changed utterly, in that awesome moment of a waking nightmare that unleashed bestial rage, in which she was gaze-caught – “hers a gaze blank and the other pitiless as the desert sun” (Jeffares, A. Norman (Ed.) “The Second Coming”, *Yeats’s Poems*, 294-5). There was a third gaze in the palimpsest, the Ayah’s. She had left behind – discarded – not merely a gaze but the very lens that makes sight possible.

her mouth slack and piteously gaping, her dishevelled hair flying into her kidnapper’s faces, staring at ...as if she wanted to leave behind her wide open and terrified eyes. (*Ice-Candy-Man*, 184)

“Those images that fresh images beget” (“Byzantium”, *Yeats’s Poems*, 363-364) need a catharsis, need the time for healing in a world gone mad and a world God had lost interest in or was indifferent to, for after all how could he complain when a country sought to get divided, its parts severed, wholes made partial, in his dual names of Ram and Rahim, Ishvar and Allah. The earth having borne “the ‘terror of terror’ in her wombs” (“Mother of God”, *Yeats’s Poems*, 364) could do nothing but only deliver her progeny, “flesh purchased with pain, love that makes heart blood stop, strikes a sudden chill in the bones and bid hair stand up?” (“Mother of God”, *Yeats’s Poems*, 364).

The child, alone on her mother Earth was left soullessly traversing the time zones of her immediate ephemeral past, and a dialectic stand-still present, with permanent holocaust images, she and her Earth were mutually witness to and experienced and which would forever stay. She had

become mute. She chose to become mute or spoke to herself in silences, or in a language which only people who have been victims and powerless spectators can feel, i.e., the language of understanding pain. She was haunted by the fact of her uttering truth and that doing so had made her complicitous with the victimizers. She had betrayed, betrayed a dear one. She thus had an onus to redeem herself, heal herself too, and heal the Earth of the wounds which she had in part created. Though Earth on her side would never blame a child, though God too would never blame her for what she did, guilt alone was her new shadowy companion casting shadows ahead even at noon, an image punctuated by the constant stern voice of irking admonishment, so unlike the Ayah's voice that was at best an affectionate reprimand. This child, unlike her Earth, was an indweller in it. She had lived walled-in, in a compressed world, alright but she had lived and should now continue to live in also that 'tight space' the space of gender, which she was responsible for marking, wounding. Thus she had to sing and when she did sing, sing not alone of Ayah and herself but of also the violated Earth, on whose violated body was carried out a million deaths, and twelve-fold its number in dispersals. She had to sing of the silently living, the dead, the dead-living, all henceforth trying to cut the time they were serving in the prison of their violent non-palatable memories. Zombies shuffling across the unfamiliar topos that once meant home to them, ironically locked tight in compartments of trains whose doors opened when they were instructed, to be dumped in unfamiliar terrains, each a prisoner in a cell without a number, all along having to in the bundles clamped between a broken rib and a clamped paralyzed hand, the memory that they were now the mutilated bodies that in gunny sacks were carted before them. They were perhaps no different from them barring the fact that the gunny sack had contained the dead and the ones now cramped inside, having lived through death, would never henceforth live or for that matter live their new progeny.

She had to sing their trauma too, a trauma that is unfortunately not theorisable in political terms. She will need to heal herself not in the cathartic joy poets have sung about but in the catharsis, which will arrive, if it does, when the wounds heal, the scabs form, scars fade and memory suffers willed amnesia and when she won't feel the absence of the truth infected tongue which she had chewed out of shape. The most important thing is the itch of healing that makes automatic fingers scratch healing wounds to make them fester, and all the miracle men and medicine men in the world who know this, advocate this, have not been able to prevent it when it happens to them.

How will she sing? "With dust in her mouth, she is abject." How will she sing with "a mouth that has no moisture and no 'breath'?" How can Iqbal's nightingale henceforth lament? Even if she does how can one hear? The echoing cries of pain and hurt are ever expanding and contracting inside the hollows of the ears. She is no ordinary nightingale any more. She is Philomel. She is Shanta-Philomel, raped by Tereus, her own Ice-candy-man, she needs the miracle of a voice to sing her distress. She needs to sing, "of what is past, or passing" ("Sailing to Byzantium", *Yeats's Poems*, 302-3). She is the rose that rose no more, blood red in tooth and claw, willfully cut when it slept, 'when the whole world was sleeping'. How do you rouse the dead? She has to sing of that moment of the many nameless made to pass unnecessarily into the unknown because they believed in their God. Soul alive may be no one knows, but now body-dead lifeless, no more life left for that tryst with destiny and perhaps of no consequence as body corporeally dead is transcendent of destiny at least in the one and only world we know, as we know it, the cause and effect material world, for which reason people engage in freedom wars and try impel the alien from their soil.

The nightingale should sing. It now knows what not to sing. To some extent she knows why she cannot sing. She cannot sing of Heer and Ranjha, or of Romeo and Juliet, stories told to her by a "always smiling bubbling with gladness... full of stories Gita" (*Ice-Candy-Man*, 43). These stories

were stories of “Gita’s steaming night-long ecstasy” (43) with her puffing Shankar headily mixed with the breath and fumes of her cooking which to her had intimated the dark fragrance generated by the masseur’s skillful fingers from underneath Ayah’s saree. The masseur is now but rotting flesh in a “gunny-sack dead,” (192) cut like the rose, cut like the lentil, cut by another knife perhaps but still sharpened on a Sharbat Khan’s wheel. She cannot sing of “beautiful Sohni – handsome Mahiwal” (43). A new wide Chenab now sporting water the colour of blood flows between them and further this is now no old Mahiwal. The new Mahiwal her own Ice-candy-man, unlike the lover does not cut flesh from his thigh but scorches in-between – the womb of Sohni. Embittered, jilted, his unrequited love makes him, the beast, the lion that has escaped the zoo of Sher Singh. The vision of terror he had seen had made a stone of his heart, transformed him

I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from
Gurdaspur... that night I went mad... I want to kill someone for each of the
breasts they cut off the Muslim women... The Penises! (136)

He chooses not only to skewer her but shares her flesh with all those who were her supposed friends. He hails from the Kotha after all and is convinced that “She has the voice of an angel and the grace and rhythm of a Goddess” (247). He is convinced that her friends with whom he has shared his wife, is his way of protecting her. He is the patron of arts and her mentor. He waxes eloquent in borrowed *shayaris*

She lives to dance! And I to toast her dancer’s grace!
Princes pledge their lives to celebrate her celebrated face! (247)

He showers her with gold but then it is money he has obtained by pimping her body. He gains currency only as a “mandi pimp in the red-light district of Hira Mandi” (246) but is able of assuaging his guilt by thinking he is a “gifted poet” (245) – Iqbal actually as he is the author as well as the narrator’s version of the evil other. He is after all Ice-candy-man. He has to live purposes to his tag. He recites Faiz,

Tum aye ho na shab-e-intezar guzri hai –
Talash mein hai sheher baar baar guzri hai!
You never came... The waitful night never passed –
Though many dawns have passed in the waiting. (245)

He is convinced that the cut Rose, his Juliet, his Sohni, is alive again in the sunshine of his Love.

Kiya mujh ishq ne zalim ko aab ahista ahista
Ke aatish gul ko karti hai gulab ahista ahista
Slowly, my love has compelled her, slowly –
The way the sun touches open the rosebud, slowly. (248)

In actuality he is nothing but a “shameless badmash! nimak haram! faithless!” (248) Godmother sums it up for him.

The nightingale should sing, even if it is a lament, and it is immaterial whether it's heard or not. The song has a story to tell, a story that needs to be told, and she told the story, the story of her Ice-candy-man in 1988. Somebody must have heard it and wanted to hear her story again and she told the Same story once more in 1991 but this was for the earth to hear. She called it Cracking India. Born on August 11th 1938, she was almost 9 years old when she was a "bearing witness" and 50 years old when she revisits the traumatic moment that had spliced a nation after a period of 41 years of Independence. It is useful to know that when Sidhwa was talking of healing the nation, an old wound started festering in 1989 and the ears were subject to similar reverberations in the dual names of God – Ram and Rahim and Ishvar and Allah. Come 1989, the nation was also echoing another disgruntled cry, contrapuntal, Mandal and this had to do with the third who had ushered in freedom. Together these events take us back to that moment in time when they were three sets of peoples who enabled the impelling of the colonizer, i.e., the Hindu, the other of the Hindu, the other Hindu – terms used just as analytical categories with no hegemonic implications. One wonders if these be the reasons, the second time around the story having a new name – Cracking India? Is it a new question that is posed as regards continuing to confine one to alien borders?

II

The book may be said to be in three parts. Part I describes an immediate world that is experiencing the lull before an impending new chaos. This event unfolds in the space of undivided India which would soon impel the white alien colonizer but while doing so will also reverberate to the painful cries of division of territories between new born nation states and the trauma of brutality and bestiality that was to follow this partition. Surprising in that the nation was swung into non-violent resistance by a physically diminutive man armed with the tools of ahimsa and satyagraha which were able to rock citadels that had made the very Sun not set over its killing fields.

The book also "unconceals" the seething cauldrons of class and caste distinctions and certain customs retrogressive that are woven into the fabric of a complex society but announced understandably only as contained within the matrix of the much larger terrain of the nation. They are under the skin of the events that she chooses to narrate. So is religion and the issue of certain maladies that have been exploited by religion for some strange reasons – what is referred to here is child (Papoo's) marriage. There is also a reference to the missionary zeal that is willing to look the other way round on issues where it is supposed to take a stand. Getting a black sheep into the fold gets a fillip when conversions take place due to considerations that are extra-territorial and not because of religious faith is also a point that has been accentuated. On all these the sacrifice of gender on the altar is the stern indictment of both, "the one that lacks all conviction and the other which is full of passionate intensity."

A point is in order here. After Gramsci, the sum total of the nation is always larger than the sum total of all its parts. One could ground this idea further in what may be said to be a deflected sensibility imbibed from the Frankfurt school to understand how spaces — private, public and of the nation – underscore existence, and how the nation is a cultural space and also at once the space of the Modern Nation State. This also helps in the reclaiming of spaces that have been over-written, fractured, suppressed or swept away by the earlier continual "grim prose of power" (Homi K. Bhabha, "Narrating the Nation" in *Nation and Narration*, 01-07). The task, in the context of reclaiming public and private spaces for a redefinition of nation spaces, thus becomes translatable into a problem of negotiation and inter-action. – Between an emergent ("private") moment and a dominant ("public")

one. – Between a cultural national moment – homologous to the “private” and a modern national one the moment of the “public”. The point is the emergent and the cultural national get inscribed onto/into sexual and social relationships, while the dominant and modern national are crystallised into political and economic institutions.

There are also the intimations of a chaotic larger world order from outside of the nation from beyond these said spaces that impinges on the lives and times of the people in dwelling there. This however finds only a couple of oblique references in the text, such as through the news the Ice-candy-man brings of the outside world, – “the Germans...have developed... a V-bomb that will turn the British into powdered ash” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 28) being one. Having said this, the news Ice-candy-man brings needs to be verified as it is also always suspect. Equally true is the fact that he could access it in two languages and thus it is dependent on how he is desirous of shaping it.

Ice-candy-man talks. News and gossip flow of his glib tongue like a torrent. He reads Urdu Newspapers and the Urdu Digest. He can, when he applies himself, read the headlines in the Civil and Military Gazette, the English Daily. (28)

The other reference is to the arrival of a German doctor into this world which though not made conspicuous can be intuited from the name Dr. Selzer which is a Jewish name, meaning an inhabitant of Selz. This “outside larger world” (term used only for convenience and is not a loaded term) had just witnessed its own engineered catastrophes.

Certain events that though had actually begun long back came to a breaking point during the *fin de siècle* period spilling into also the beginnings of the twentieth century. Three revolutions and a couple of World Wars were to utterly change the world order. The world wars *per se* were the culmination of many wars which preceded it. One revolution was the Easter revolution of 1916, which was marked by the failure of the Irish to impel the British Coloniser (Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*). The second was the Mass strike that led to the dethroning of the Tsar and the ushering in of a communist peoples government in Russia in 1917, labelled also as the Proletarian revolution (Rosa Luxembour, *The Mass Strike ... And The Junius Pamphlet*) and the third marked by failure was the 1919 German Spartacist revolution. Bismarck’s twenty years programme of shipbuilding, which put to use the abundant presence of steel in Germany, provided the fillip for self-conscious militarism. As the latter unfolded as if it were a play, Germany with its raw materials and renewed naval programme had everything to gain and blew a feud out of proportion that ultimately served as a catalyst since the war was anyway on the cards. There is then also the African Space and the certain Experiments with Truth conducted there by the Father of the Nation (Goolam Vahed, “‘African Gandhi’: The South African War and the Limits of Imperial Identity,” manuscript version, *Historia*) as regards anti-colonial resistances which also underpinned the larger nation spaces of undivided India. The pages of history are also replete with information on how these revolutions and the two world wars were not isolated incidents but events in a single catastrophic strain. An imperialist world war fought by players whose staling adventurism wanted them to perhaps shift from the game of monopoly wherein they had succeeded in dividing Africa in the year 1884 but then there was always the issue of the size of the slice and the source of the cut. The unproductive practices of colonial expansion and rule had reached a point where it was a dead-end. Freedom of the colonised lands was also on the cards and the process of the expropriation of the expropriated had reached that point where they were nearer to seeing victories in the combative space.

Though the book has only oblique and scattered references to the larger world order of chaos it is necessary to note that the war of resistance to British colonial hegemony and rule and the stratagems employed by warring factions had all been linked to world affairs. While Gandhi's alignment with the British may have been due to looking at them as a minor contradiction due to human life being of utmost significance to him, for Subhash Chandra Bose it was the impelling of the colonizer which still remained the major contradiction.

“... And not go mouthing the got-pit sot-pit of the English!” (*Ice-Candy-Man*, 29)

There were also cross cutting ties established by waves of Indian resistance movements prior to these events and its personages like Bhikaji Cama and her role in the Irish space are all points in study. I have specially referred to her as she too is a Parsi Zoroastrian, as is the author and her narrator, however independent or whorled they are into each other. It also must be remembered that the land across the Atlantic was also a space that was travelled to, to and fro, for support and succour both by the colonized seeking liberation as well as intellectuals even from the colonial imperial space who had held ideologically different view-points to imperialist agendas and there were linkages and spillovers across spectrums of multiple and multivalent thoughts, ideas and ideologies. Many of these ideas are part of the very episteme, part of the logos on which new edifices of thought are grounded. Such a background to the events that unfolded in Indian history cannot be eschewed as it is integral to anyone who wishes to look at a work that dares to take on history, in this instance Bapsi Sidhwa's work *Ice-Candy-Man*. Any re-presentation for validity should be authentic, if not less ambivalent and definitely not be point of view and never scurrilous and by no stretch of the imagination ever be slanderous.

It is in this context that Sidhwa fails. She makes certain unpalatable remarks as far as Mountbatten and Nehru are concerned, implicates them, makes them rather complicitous, the echoes of such complicity, that would reverberate in the Indian Nation State spaces also is left bare for inference.

For now the tide is turned – and the Hindus are being favoured over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favour Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri; they grant him Kashmir. Spurning logic, defying rationale, ignoring the consequence of bequeathing a Muslim state to the Hindus: while Jinnah futilely protests: ‘Statesmen cannot eat their words!’ (*Ice-Candy-Man*, 159)

The next line which follows it is important as there is finality in the words,

“Statesmen do.”

She also advances the reason for the Kashmir issue.

“They grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot, without which Muslim Kashmir cannot be secured.” (159)

and in contrast she appears more than salubrious to Jinnah.

And today forty years later, in films of Gandhi and Mountbatten's lives, in books by British and Indian scholars, Jinnah, who for a decade was known as

‘Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity’ is caricatured and portrayed as a monster.’ (160)

She uses Sarojini Naidu to reiterate her point:

the calm hauteur of his accustomed reserve, masks ... 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...a shy and splendid idealism. (162)

There are no issues with this at all. The problem is when she uses a protagonist, a central figure in her oeuvre, as a mouth piece

... But that Nehru, he is a sly one ... He’s got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English’s wife out of his other...(131) (next hyphenated word deliberately expunged by this author)

Who goes on to add,

“Nehru will walk off with the lion’s share ... And what’s more come out of it smelling like the Queen-of-the-Kotha!” (131)

This is in not good taste and definitely not central to her work and it reduces what may otherwise be deemed one fine authentic re-presentation. The very next line settles the issue of it being unnecessarily slanted. It is arrived at through a very loaded term and this is the voice of the narrator

“Ice-candy-man speaks with an assurance that is prophetic.” (131)

When one is at it, there is also the forced yoking of Nehru’s penchant for the rose on his coat lapel “Nehru wears red carnations in the button holes of his ivory jackets” (159) to her own loaded symbol of the Rose that is a palimpsest of Romeo and Juliet, Iqbal, and Ice-candy-man, with intimations of the nightingale, of her own Iqbal, and by extension Tereus, and the colour of blood, blood of man, of woman, of life and of fecundity and the sorrowful stories associated with it, in the context of the trauma of partition and the freedom at midnight. This should have existed at best as an unseen footnote.

Gandhi too finds space in her work but one does wonder if there is ambivalence in her depiction. She locates him in the area of suggesting a cure for a bad stomach –

flush your system with an enema daughter, ...sage council... use plain lukewarm water... feel like a new woman... Look at these girls ... I give them enemas myself...(87)

rather than as a person who was at least partly responsible for the independence of three Nation-States, though one (Bangladesh) had to wait till 1971 to be properly born. This notwithstanding the fact of her love and reverence for the man and his power as epitomized in the words,

It wasn’t until some years later – when I realized the full scope and dimension 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. (88)

One may argue that the first reference is through Lenny the narrator who is a child and the next, her response, is as an adult woman. Then one may also argue that Blake's Songs of Innocence were after all written after his life's experience. There is a third point which may remove my own ability being on the wrong side of gender to judge as it is a focus on femininity, a gender issue. To be fair to Sidhwa however on the issue of Gandhi by page 103 she seems to have resolved this issue for us with a certain finality.

Gandhiji too is off his feed we hear. There is a slaughter of Muslims in Bihar –
he does not want it to spread to Bengal.
It doesn't. (103)

To sum up then what is at stake is the issue of getting the very narration tainted. How may one take a coloured, carping re-presentation to be a valid representation if there are authorial intrusions that are mired in biases which even if forgivable also contain prejudices that don't serve a purpose? This becomes far more significant when an entitling like *Ice-Candy-Man* has a new avatar as *Cracking India* and the speaking voice was only Indian before the map-makers changed it and the cartographers plotted the lie of the land on the bodies of women. One must also recollect that the re-christening was done at a particular time when the old wounds were still festering. One now hears her own Iqbal's song with extra notes that she has added which are not contrapuntal but actually are discordant notes, to continue with the earlier metaphor. In her enthusiasm perhaps she warbled a few more notes which spoils the rendering, questions her right to speak at least in certain quarters, which other than this intrusion, is a fine authentic representation of far reaching consequences. It should be noted here that Deepa Mehta's film version *Earth 1947* glosses over this, even if it were to eschew the very third part, a major chunk of which incidentally is the attempt at healing wounds for the one and for the other give agency to the voice of gender, Bapsi Sidhwa's amazing stand-alone contribution. There are other deflected corrections she has effected in addition to this, like for instance salvaging the prestige of the very Parsi Community who in her text are definitely not chameleons.

Part II of the story or the song of the rose-nightingale is of the changed world. Much has been already said about it and there is no need actually to labour further on the point. The shift could actually be located in two very poignant citations. One where the narrator reverts back to her Iqbal

The times, have changed; the world has changed its mind
The European's mystery is erased. (111)

Which announces that the colonizer is about to leave and India was on the threshold of a new beginning. Equally important is the voice of Nur Jehan:

Mere bachpan ke sathi mujhe bhool na jana –
Dekho, dekho hanse na zaman, hanse na zamana.
Friends from our childhood, don't forget us –
See that a changed world does not mock us. (159)

This marks the transformation. What is interesting is also the movement from Iqbal to popular music, marking a shift from the interiority of personal spaces to the larger all encompassing world. The world order changes and spaces reel under the weight of events.

The great neutral house of the Parsis, a colonial trope for the nation, that could despite tension have a dinner hosted for fifteen in “neighbourly brotherliness” (*Ice-Candy-Man*, 60) which includes an Inspector General of Police (Mr. Rogers) and his wife, listening to sick syphilitichumourin the company of a fork brandishing Mr. Singh, is shedding unknown to itself its neutrality, with a gun coming home for self-security and petrol cans for aiding Hindu and Sikh friends to escape. The home of Godmother and Mini Auntie which is known as just another Parsi place achieves political undertones. The houses of Rogers and Singhs will soon be ghost houses in a deserted wasteland but only briefly, for they are only waiting quietly to heal at a more propitious time.

The quarters of Shanta and Papoo, children of a lesser God, however will find replacements at once. Sher Singh, who had little concern for poor Muslim inhabitants in his place, whom he evicted rather lewdly and indecently with the help of Ice-candy-man will lose all due to the same enabler who turns volte face.

Well, the tenants had their own back! Exposed themselves to his womenfolk!
They went a bit further...played with one of Sher Singh’s sisters... (156)

The lion kept locked in his den which he too was responsible for letting loose had gotten free and freed devoured him and his dear ones.

The outdoor park opposite to the assembly chambers with Queen Victoria was transformed completely. It had been a bearing witness to events in History as well as the requited and unrequited passions of two men, one a victim and another a victimizer, both of whom chose the body of a woman on which to map their love and lust. A body that is at once woman and nation as she is a correlate, a muse affiliate – Shanta, of peace, what irony! The other public space of Mozang Chunghi, will go through all the phases of friendship and bonhomie, suspicion and intrigue and culminate in the last supper for thirteen people.

This part ends with Hari having his bodhi shaved, penis circumcised, changing his dhoti for “the substantial gathers of the draw-string shalwar” (*Ice-Candy-Man*, 162), little acts which enables him in becoming Himmat Ali. It ends with Moti the sweeper becoming a Christian Mister David Masih – Some agency for him at least on paper in the context of caste. It ends with Shanta leaving her eyes behind but taking away the tongue of the little child.

It is useful to yet again recollect here that this is where Deepa Mehta’s film version of the text actually ends.

III

The Calm after the event is not a given. It is a calm that has to be achieved, relentlessly pursued. It is a calm that continues to spin the world into newer contradictions. The jail house that had silent screams now has an echo in shelter-homes thanks to an insidiously revelling patriarchy. If violent mobs had committed untold acts insane, the aftermath produced a far more infernal version of masculine lust. Women who had already lost everything, had fallen, and then been rescued, were in reality, only made available easily, under one roof, as resources for lust. Far more menacing were the acts of violence practised now on the hapless body – cold, unadulterated, pre-meditated with absolute

bankruptcy of humanity and compassion. This was the world that the Godmother at the helm sought to heal and heal she does.

Sidhwa also produces a balanced view. For every Shanta, there is a Hamida. It is no accident that the eye of Shanta left behind is injured to the eye of Hamida that stays constantly hurt and glossy.

When the eye is wounded, even a scented breeze hurts (*Ice-Candy-Man*, 193)

For every Hindu and Sikh house burnt there was a Muslim house that suffered the same fate. For every mandi pimping poet there was after all an Iqbal and a Nur Jehan. Plates were broken, dolls shredded to pieces, but both Lenny and Ranna live. There was crime but there was punishment. Injustice already done cannot be undone but cannot go unquestioned and it was questioned and culprits made to pay. There are so many powerful symbols in the text and so many personal stories, including that of the narrator, all showing and telling, what it is to grow up in a purposeless world. There is something larger too which happens due to the courage of some women. They catch the world by its fore-lock, put it on the anvil and beat it into shape with immortal symmetry.

It is in the light of these tremendous victories for gender that one feels chagrined and sore with the few stray angularities, that could have been easily avoided and which take away from an otherwise very balanced opus. Having said this, the times were such that in the process of trying to make arrive a catharsis which meant also trying to cleanse oneself of one's own inner self of a trauma, and of having been and being a witness and a participant, one lets certain inconsistencies slip in. When one has an ideological difference one tends to drag in the personal of the self. Here Yeats could be useful. He conscientiously eschewed references to events containing them in an art that at once intimated an event, as well as, was for all times and spaces, a lesson to posterity. However, to be fair to Sidhwa, Yeats's severe verse was much wanting in the context of gender. It is surely significant that just at the time when the indomitable Irish revolutionaries he had so mapped in uncharitable terms were ageing into unquiet and anger over injustice, he sought to work out his own sense of ageing in terms of unrequited and troublesome lust.

Sidhwa's women are real, the other of which the old poet, chose not to sing. They share the same feminine compassion. In such instances it is a mark of something more than itself, in that it signifies cross-class empathy on the part of these ordinary women of extraordinary courage, who had personally nothing to gain. Sidhwa needs no voices of support, Sidhwa's work speaks for itself.

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