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## PARTITION- CRIME AGAINST WOMEN - A BAPSI SIDHWA'S PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Appala Raju Korada<sup>1</sup>, Dr. V. N. Vamsidhar Kilari<sup>2</sup>,  
Vutukuri Kavitha<sup>3</sup>

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### Abstract

Partition in any form anywhere is a crime against humanity and the women become slaves of those who are under the slavery. Bapsi Sidhwa through her five partition novels exposed what she has witnessed and felt the psychological trauma in the domestic sphere, especially the marriage institution, that restricts the growth and the multifarious abilities of her own individual. She paraphrased how women have struggled in the society with the backdrop of her own experiences.

**Key words:** subcontinent, marriage, inhumanity, sexual abuse, honor, partition, society, religion, etc.

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<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor of English, Jazan University, KSA.  
[rajukorada12@gmail.com](mailto:rajukorada12@gmail.com) , [akorada@jazanu.edu.sa](mailto:akorada@jazanu.edu.sa) ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1701-927X>

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor of English, Jazan University, KSA.E [vamcys@gmail.com](mailto:vamcys@gmail.com) ,  
[vkilari@jazanu.edu.sa](mailto:vkilari@jazanu.edu.sa)

<sup>3</sup>Research Scholar, Adikavi Nannaya University, India  
[vutukuri.kavitha90@gmail.com](mailto:vutukuri.kavitha90@gmail.com)

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## Introduction:

Bapsi Sidhwa is Pakistan's leading diasporic writer. She has produced five novels in English that reflect her personal experience of the Indian subcontinent's partition, abuse against women, immigration to the U.S., and membership in the Parsi community. She witnessed the blood-spattered Partition of the Indian Subcontinent as a young child in 1947. She felt the role of women in the domestic sphere, especially the marriage institution, restricts the growth and the multifarious abilities of her own individual. With reference to this, on one occasion, she says: "Whenever there was a bride game, I'd sneak off and write. But now that I've been published, a whole world has opened up for me."

The genuineness and openness in her first two novels, *The Pakistani Bride* and *The Crow Eaters* received a rejection from Pakistani readers. But she did not discourage herself and decided to publish *The Crow Eaters* in Pakistan privately. Since then, she has received numerous awards and Honors for her work. She also earned Patras Bokhri award for her novel, *The Pakistani Bride*, in 1985, which is the highest honour. And the other two recent novels *Cracking India* and *An American Brat* also won Pakistan's national Honors. For the novel *Cracking India* was declared as a New York Times notable book of the year, as well as it also got Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award in 1993.

Her life is the best example for adverse position of a woman in the society. In every phase of her life, she struggled and at last she attained the present position. So, her novels are the voices of these aspects:

- The most damaging effect of the partition on women,
- The chilling shrieks and moans of recovered women at this moment of time,
- Multiplicity and complexity of human experience,

- Violence, oppression and subjugation of women,
- Sexual inferiority (Sexual exploitation/abuse) etc.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* is a perfect example for woman's critical position in the society. The protagonist, Zaitoon, represents how women were victimized at the time of the partition moment. She lost her parents during the partition. She was adopted by Qasim and brought to Lahore. After the marriage with a tribal man Sakhi, Zaitoon's life was entangled with the problems of unquestioning obedience, unending labour and sexual abuse. She tried to come out from the harsh realities, restrictions and oppression present everywhere in the society. Her journey from tribal area to plain or urban territory symbolizes her struggle for survival and emancipation from the limitations. Zaitoon's life is an example for endless fighting and suffering against the situations which take everything granted.

Bapsi Sidhwa apparently shows how a woman is treated by the society- an object of sexual gratification that can be bought or sold and something of trivial importance. Women are victimized in the hands of men as well as by the society. Even the customs and traditions of different religions cage the women in many ways. There are so many massacres under the mask of tradition. In the novel the sudden attack of men on Qasim's wife and Zaitoon reflects incase of sexual assault and exploitation how the society and religion stand for nothing.

The way Sakhi physically hurt his wife and even his mother shows the very roots of the man's feeling of superiority over women. Man treats woman as property and material. Woman is just a matter of plaything and marriage is like a license to man to tease, to order and to bully. Qasim's father made his ten years old son marry a girl of fifteen years, as it was an offer made by the girl's father to redeem his debt. Qasim's father, too, felt it was an attractive offer and, in his

own words: "Any girl ... one was able-bodied – was worth more than the loan due." In this way it is one of the best illustrations of how the woman was treated by man only on physical terms.

Choice is not given to women in the patriarchal society. Before marriage, she belongs to her father's property and after the marriage, she is her husband's. She is forced to accept what her man decides for her. No one consulted Afshan and Zaitoon's consent for their marriage. Whenever choice is opened to men, they never hesitate to show their superiority over women. They never give women the status which they enjoy in society. They treat them as if they are their possessions and feel they have all the right to do anything to them. For example, Qasim strongly determined to give his daughter to the tribal boy, Sakhi. He threatened to kill her if she crossed him. In another instance is- in a fit of rage, Sakhi battered his ox. When his mother tried to save the animal from him, he beat her with a stick and said: "I'll teach you meddling women. You think you can make a fool, do you?" When his wife tried to stop him from beating his mother, he said: "You are my woman! I'll teach you to obey me."

When Zaitoon tried to escape from her husband, she was severely abused physically and mentally by him. He had beaten her almost to the point of death. Though she found no respect for women in the male-dominated society, she tried to rescue herself from the hell or the society full of filthy customs and restrictions and oppression of women, which are of course, present everywhere in the society. Her journey from tribal area to plain or urban territory symbolizes her endless struggle for survival and emancipation from the oppressive norms as limitations.

Carol, a typical middle-class American lady who was Farukh's wife, experienced repressed sexuality. She found herself in many embarrassing situations with men. In that society, husbands expect their wives to

be loyal to them. But this same norm does not apply to women.

Women are divided into two sections. The first category of women is domesticated and loyal to their men/ husbands, and the second category is prostitution, the women who are meant to entertain men for money. The lives of women were shut and caged. Their lives are wrecked by the inhumanity of men.

In her novel *Ice-Candy Man*, through the young eyes of Lenny, Bapsi Sidhwa elevates her thought as the earth will bleed when the adults crack India. The historical scene of the partition is apparently guessed and shown. The novel recaptures the gloomy reverberations (impact) of the traumatic experience of partition after forty years; she presents a brilliant close-up of communal violence during the times of partition and the aftermath of it, which tore apart the world of Lenin, a young Parsee girl growing up in the city of Lahore.

She strongly feels that religious and cultural differences are artificially created and deliberately fostered. They are of no use, and in fact they are meaningless. She clearly depicts the communal riots affect the Hindu-Muslim relations. Once the two religions were strongly tied and in their token of their amicability, love and affection, Muslims took part in Baisakhi festival along with the Hindus and the Hindus enjoy the festivals of the Muslims. They became enemies during the period of partition. The pattern of communal harmony was replaced by the pattern of mutual distressed, and suspicion and far with both the communities having taken up uncompromising positions the ensuing holy festival would become a blood-soaked festival.

In Sidhwa's works, there is no migration or partition without pain or loss. It was the uncontrolled airing of the unexpressed bitterness. While the Muslims of Pir Pindo that fell on the Indian side of the border were subjected to mass slaughter and rape by gangs of the Akalis, the Hindus and the

Sikhs of Lahore underwent a traumatic experience. The same thing happened to the Hindus from Pak regions. They were forced to escape to India. Some were converted to Islam and Christianity. The babies were snatched from their mothers, and shattered against the walls and their weeping mothers were viciously raped and slaughtered. Bapsi Sidhwa clearly shows how religion was pressed into the service of communalism. Everybody began to bore his personal identity as they crammed into a narrow religious slot. They become too religious and were carried away by a renewed devotional favour.

Lenny's nanny was kidnapped, raped and made a dancer in the Hira Mandi, the red light area of Lahore. It was a traumatic experience for her because all this happened but with the active complicity of Ice Candy man, one of her admirers. Though he married her later, she was emptied of life and despairing. When she was sent away to India on her own accord, Ice Candy man, now a truly harmless fellow and a man of refined sensibility, disappeared across the Wagah border into India, leaving the land he cherished for the sake of his Hindu beloved. It clearly depicts Bapsi Sidhwa's impartiality towards the two genders as the filthy-ruthless Ice Candy Man reformed himself and became broadminded. It's a kind of the transformation from caterpillar to butterfly.

She also speaks of the trauma that prevailed in the society in different ways. The colonialism and the fervent desire for freedom of the nation were the two significant issues during 1947 in India and it led to many massacres:

The earth is not easy to carve up. India required a deft and sensitive surgeon, but the British, steeped in domestic preoccupation, hastily and carelessly butchered it. They were not deliberately mischievous-only cruelly negligent! A million Indians died. (P.14)

India is forced to divide into two parts. Corruption and violence are very common.

Oppression and subjugation developed widely.

She raises her pen against archaic Hindu laws like child marriage, the caste system, the barbaric act of Sati, and the problems of young widows who spend the rest of their time in Indian ashrams to make compensation for the sins in their previous life during British rule etc. in her novel, *Water*. She apparently shows the ill-treatment of widows in Indian society: the widows are expected to show their heads, give up all their material possessions and clothe themselves in a plain white cotton sari; they live on just one meal a day.

Moreover, she describes Brahmanical tradition which recognized a woman as a person only when she is with her husband. Outside of marriage, the wife has no recognized existence, so, when her husband dies, she should stop to exist. However, the same thing didn't apply for the men. Men were allowed to re-marry, keep mistresses, or visit prostitutes. As one Brahmin man in the book justifies it:

Our holy texts say Brahmins can sleep with whomever they want, and the women they sleep with are blessed.

Coming to its story, Chuyia (Sarala) is a seven-year-old girl who has just lost her husband. She is put in the ashram in which Hindu widows spend the rest of their lives in renunciation. She befriends Kalyani who is forced into prostitution to support the ashram, Shakuntala, one of the widows, and Narayan, a young and charming upper-class follower of Mahatma Gandhi and of Gandhism. The story revolves around these characters and reveals the sobbing lives of these widows and Narayan's attempts to bring change among their lives and its consequences.

Through her writings, Bapsi Sidhwa stresses the necessity of changing allegiances after Independence and visions the changing attitude of men. Her writings have no boundaries. Whenever situation arises, she describes herself as a Punjabi-

Parsi-Indian- Pakistani. She doesn't stick to any particular nationality.

Bapsi Sidhwa, on the behalf of women, is angry with the attitude of men, and the age-old rigid convictions of the existed religions in the society, but she is not anti-religious or anti-male. She portrays the characters of both male and female in the society as natural as they are found in the Indo-Pak regions. She thinks that male domination over female is due to their ignorance and repression. Age-old convictions and other ego-centric privileges make them behave thoughtlessly and cruelly.

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