



UNIVERSITY  
OF WOLLONGONG  
AUSTRALIA

**Kunapipi**

---

Volume 31 | Issue 1

Article 7

---

2009

# An unexpected turnaround

Richard Lever

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

---

## Recommended Citation

Lever, Richard, An unexpected turnaround, *Kunapipi*, 31(1), 2009.  
Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol31/iss1/7>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:  
[research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

---

## An unexpected turnaround

### **Abstract**

For three long years I was beastly treated, and heavy irons on my legs I wore  
My back from flogging was lacerated, and oft times painted with my crimson gore  
And many a man from downright starvation, lies mouldering now beneath the clay  
And Captain Logan he had us mangled, all at the triangles of Moreton Bay  
Like the Egyptians and ancient Hebrews, we were oppressed under Logan's yoke  
Till a native black lying there in ambush did deal this tyrant his mortal stroke  
My fellow prisoners be exhilarated that all such monsters such a death may find  
And when from bondage we are liberated our former sufferings will fade from mind  
(from the convict ballad, 'Moreton Bay', c. 1830, anon)

RICHARD LEVER

## An Unexpected Turnaround

For three long years I was beastly treated, and heavy irons on my legs I wore  
 My back from flogging was lacerated, and oft times painted with my crimson gore  
 And many a man from downright starvation, lies mouldering now beneath the clay  
 And Captain Logan he had us mangled, all at the triangles of Moreton Bay

Like the Egyptians and ancient Hebrews, we were oppressed under Logan's yoke  
 Till a native black lying there in ambush did deal this tyrant his mortal stroke  
 My fellow prisoners be exhilarated that all such monsters such a death may find  
 And when from bondage we are liberated our former sufferings will fade from mind  
 (from the convict ballad, 'Moreton Bay', c. 1830, anon)

I was getting a good rub-down from Mrs Plum when the summons came. I like this body of mine, so does Mrs Plum. She devotes a lot of a time to my back, which she says is as smooth and as broad as an *Injun's*.

The prison has this effect on the body. You get squared up in it. There are few outer chains and bars here; they are internal, in the muscles and joints, and behind the eyes. Which is why we do good business here, with convicts and soldiers alike: I massage the prison out of them. I have freed more prisoners with these hands than have the hands of time.

'It's a woman's lot to suffer at the hands of men,' I said to Plum.

But Plummy was not to be consoled. In losing me — were it to come to that — she would lose a close attachment. She would still have her husband of course, but he didn't do much for her. This place can be very lonely.

So rub on, Mrs Plum. Rub on and don't stop, for when you stop it means the hour of my execution has come.

A hollow knock at the door. On cue Plum's hands stopped. 'Come!' she said.

And who should have come by with the summons? None other than my 'little gaoler', as I used to call him. Christopher Chambers, a boy convict who was the Captain's runner — and my little go-between on the side. A squirt with an imaginary key twirling on his finger. A glint in his eye and his teeth. His hair was soft and golden. He would stand in the doorway as if he owned this room, casting his eye imperiously around. This was an act to shield himself against our trembling lovemaking, which left him vulnerable and beautiful. He knew I knew this about him, so he must push me away and play the pimp with me. But he couldn't look at me for too long, not in the eye, otherwise he might've found himself in love, and his whole world would have collapsed.

Tonight the tough act was gone.

‘What do you want?’ said Plum, rousing on him.

‘A summons from the Captain,’ Christopher said.

‘Yes!’ I beamed. ‘We know it already. The Captain’s walls have ears even when you’re not there. The game is up.’

‘Little savage,’ said Plum.

‘It wasn’t me, Reggie. Honest.’

‘Of course it wasn’t you! Would you cut off your nose to spite your little face?! It’s all right, Plum,’ I went on, softening tempers as is my way. ‘He’s all right. We’re all a bit upset at the moment. Besides, we know it’s someone blabbing with the chaplain. I suppose it was inevitable.’

‘I’ll find out the rat, Reggie. Honest. And whoever it was’ll pay for it.’

We fell silent. Plum went on squeezing, a little roughly I might add. I observed Chambers. Even now, with this crisis happening, and with his fear, he couldn’t help but gaze at my body, my hair wet on my shoulders, the steam and the scent of the oil intoxicating him.

Our eyes met. *Yes, see me*, I thought. *See you*. He lowered his gaze, then remembering himself drew something out of his pocket and held it out to me. One of Captain Logan’s dreaded red pennants of death.

I was suddenly angry. ‘Give that to me!’

‘I can’t,’ he said, trembling.

‘If the Captain dares order me over with one of those,’ I said, ‘I shall answer him with it personally. I am after all a free person, not a common criminal.’

Still he resisted, so I leapt off the massage table and stood before him in all my glory, shedding towels like swans’ feathers.

He clutched the pennant to his breast like a crucifix. I grabbed his hands and easily prised the thing free.

‘There! That wasn’t too difficult, was it? Now Plummy ... let’s make me look beautiful.’

\* \* \* \* \*

I confess I’d had my fantasies too (for fantasies abound here where living is forbidden) of who else would walk through that door, by mistake, to find me naked on the table, or near enough to it. The Captain himself. *Oh I am sorry*, he would say, and me with innocent shock grasping a towel to my breast; the Captain, visibly embarrassed, even blushing, the hardest man in this place, turning away and retreating out the door, but just before he leaves he looks back and sees my ... behind — and pauses. My shocked innocence gone, now it’s innocent welcoming — but not coquetry, he would detest that. No, mine is natural expression with the heart visible. So he comes back into the room, closing the door behind him ...

Occasionally the Captain’s wife Letitia appeared in my fantasies. She, for whatever reason, would come here to the Female Factory and lose who or whatever it was she was looking for in the twists and turns of the building, and would get

a little grimy and frightened in the process, and finally stumble upon the Captain and me, together. And so spellbound is she, she herself joins us, admiring my beauty, admiring her husband admiring me.

*Let love in, I say. Let love in.*

But the body will out. I mean the prison-house body. The Captain is strapped into his uniform each day like a warhorse. Dressed to kill, or at least to flagellate, to rip the skins off other men, most of whom go about fully naked most of the year. Now that's when you know you're on a human farm, when you see those naked bollocks bobble about as the men go about their various jobs.

\* \* \* \* \*

Christopher escorted me out of the Factory. Complete stillness in the Settlement, the night clear but dark. We passed the soldiers' barracks, then the prisoners' barracks, and now we approached a deeper darkness that was the river and the world beyond. Instinctively I took the boy's arm as we turned into the path running alongside the river and I felt the cool touch of the air.

Presently we came to the Captain's office. Two sentries stationed outside gave a friendly hello. See, that's the spirit, none of that nasty game-playing and bullying.

Christopher was told to wait outside while I was ushered in.

\* \* \* \* \*

'A little late for chats,' I said, not intending to be arch.

'Sit down,' said Captain Logan.

I did so and gave the red pennant of death a little wave. When he didn't react I placed it on the seat beside me and crossed my legs.

He himself did not sit. He wanted to pace, and what a pacer! — his steps full of deliberate purpose even in those few square yards, like a Napoleon, a caged Napoleon, his broad feet swelling the sides of his polished boots.

The man's mind, clearly, was elsewhere. So much for love! He was troubled, or at least thinking deeply about something but it was nothing that had me at the centre otherwise I would've felt it, an animal-pulsing between us.

I cleared my throat ... and was ignored.

He continued to pace on those legs that had stood in American forests waiting to ambush the Injuns and the colonial scum, those legs that had trudged through the muddy war in Europe, those legs that had carried him up the tallest mountain six leagues south of the Settlement, those legs —

'I have given' — at last he spoke! — 'I have given all,' he said gravely. 'Discipline is the lifeblood of service. They don't know it yet. They don't know it. Without discipline you're nothing. Discipline is ... love.'

'It can be!' I said.

‘Discipline is the gift of our nation,’ he went on, so handsome. ‘We are nurtured through discipline, regulation, control. These are precious. They are the very foundation of our sense of who we are, our belonging. I give them this gift and this is how they repay me.’

‘You sacrifice so much and receive so little in return.’ I had no idea what he was talking about.

‘I’m being replaced, Regina,’ said he. ‘Word has come from the Governor.’

‘No!’

The floorboards were like the hull of a ship expanding and contracting under his rolling gait. The contraction of his brow as he took things in, worked things out.

‘The tide of public opinion has turned,’ he said. ‘The press. The emancipists. The Colonial Office. The very Governor is now against me.’

‘Bastards,’ I muttered.

‘First they said use severity,’ he went on. ‘Use the iron fist. Then *We cannot condemn zeal* they said when the complaints started to come in. Now all of Sydney Town is up in arms and what do they say? *Serve king and country and get the hell out now that it’s convenient*. Well, yes, I’ll go. I’ll do your bidding, retire gracefully, hide the blood that I spilt in your name. But from now on I’m outside your system. Get yourself a new lamb to sacrifice. I won’t be it any more.’

‘There’s something French about it,’ I said. ‘It has the French reek.’

‘India! They’re sending me and the family to India. What on earth are we going to do in India for God’s sake? Letitia and the children!’

‘A petition, Sir. Signed by all the staff under your command, saying how much good you’ve done here.’

He suddenly turned to me. ‘You were recommended to me.’

Recommended? By who? What for? The job or ... the other?

‘Matron Plum speaks very highly of you,’ he went on.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘my position under Mrs Plum is very important to me. The Female Factory has made me what I am today.’

He looked me up and down. I welcomed the attention, but it went on and the silence and the probing became uncomfortable. I lowered my eyes as I felt a blush coming on. I hadn’t blushed since 1828.

Something he saw in me must have made him recollect his situation. He frowned and turned away.

‘I had such plans for this place,’ he said. Then after a pause he announced grandly: ‘Well, there will be no more punishments, not while I’m here. No more flogging. No more detentions for soldiers or lock-ups for drunkenness. Let the men make their way to your Female Factory. Satisfy as many of the men as you like.’

I froze. I was determined not to betray anything.

‘Oh don’t think I don’t know,’ he said, wagging a finger. ‘I know everything. Everything!’

I should have been devastated. Instead I found myself captivated. I wanted to be on his side. He was so inside himself, so intense.

‘Let the men seek their pleasures with you,’ he continued. ‘Let them become ... whatever it is they become with you. And they will eat, too. As from tomorrow, the food ration will increase. Let there be bountiful helpings. Let them eat the fruits of what I’ve done. I’ve done the hard work, and now you’ll see the paperwork is coming, Regina. The legalities, the secretaries. I set this whole place up, from beginning to end, and now ...! Well, let them have it. I shall enjoy myself, and the men will too. Let my replacement do the hard work and build what he can. The day of Logan is over!’

I was with him, literally on the edge of my seat. *Yes!* I wanted to say. *Take it with you. Go, be free, fly triumphant.* He was away inside himself, climbing those peaks, marching those miles through the mud of Europe, slinging his musket in the American wilds —

‘Let them deal with all the problems I’ve overcome,’ he declared. ‘They think it will be easy, but every day is a battle, every day. The mind must seize the world and lash it to itself or the whole thing will topple. Let them have it and let it all go to rack and ruin. They can go to hell!’

‘Amen!’ I clapped. ‘Amen!’

He stopped and looked at me. I mean really looked at me. I felt a thrill, as if he were going to take me in his arms. Yes, was on my lips. Yes, a thousand times. Then, with his teeth biting down on his lower lip, he swung a chair underneath him and straddled it like a horse. I could never have imagined Logan sitting on a chair in this lairy fashion, and never in the company of a wo—

Oh dear.

I met his frank gaze with hurt defiance.

‘So that leaves you and me, Regina,’ he said. ‘Or should that be ... Reginald?’

I began searching my handbag for a hankie.

‘I won’t ask you to show yourself to me,’ he said. ‘Though I truly wonder how you escaped my notice before. How you’ve managed to keep going all this time.’ He looked at me in some wonderment.

Then he stood up. ‘You can keep that red flag if you like. As a memento of our meeting tonight. Besides, I won’t be needing such things anymore.’

I didn’t move from my chair. He knew about me, but he was going to let me go! He wasn’t going to drive me out of town like the others, or put me in prison or have me beaten up. I regained my composure, but now I found, as I was taking my leave, that I did not know how to look at him. I felt I had no eyes even though I was seeing clearly. I felt that he was on the inside of me, more inside myself than I was, that I was nowhere, and that forever more it would be this way, that he would be my centre and I would be his satellite, floating around in the emptiness of myself.

He was smiling — not I perceived because of any victory over me. He was pleased for overcoming the need to enforce the law. He was free of it, free! And now he started laughing. How could that be? I had never seen him laugh, no one had. And not mean laughter but joyous, joy and release that he was sharing with me. It was all right. I would go back to the Factory and have a tipples with Mrs Plum. Tomorrow we'd start the day with a good breakfast, and the picture I had in mind was the bountiful one Logan had put there: no more punishments, no more rations. Ham and eggs for breakfast and lots of strong tea, followed by a little bit of work. I felt like writing letters to my kin. The convict girls would need a lot of organising too.

'Stay out of that chaplain's way,' he added as his laughter subsided. 'He said I'd burn in hell if I didn't ship you in chains back to Sydney. He wanted to have a good look at you too, in the name of the Church. Well, let him look up other women's skirts. I told him you were mine and he should look after his own affairs.'

The way I left the office was something I'll never forget. He wished me good luck.

Naturally in the weeks following, I saw the Captain on a number of occasions, but these were all in public: and he looked like he always did — stern, feared, hated. Until, that is, the day he was going on an exploration trip. It was a bright morning. He had a whole team of men, bullocks, supplies. He was mounted finely on his grey mare, leading the way out of the compound like a general. I came out to watch, with many others. As the team approached, Logan saw me, ignored me, then, when he came past, he glanced down, our eyes met, and he winked at me.

The Captain never returned from that mission. He was far from the Settlement, way up where the river is small, at the foot of the mountains. He became separated from his men and was killed by Blacks. He wasn't 'separated' though: I'm sure he went off on his own. The country was his, and so he would ride off into it alone and find for himself whatever it was destiny meant him to find, far beyond the safe ring of other men.

As for me, the moment I walked out the office door my status leapt. I who had been befriended by the Captain, I who had brought laughter to that office, I whom it seemed fate was ready to destroy, walked not only untouched but blessed back into normal life. When I left the office, I wanted to make a smart comment as I passed the sentries, who were staring at me like I'd just done the most extraordinary thing they'd ever seen. But I found I couldn't speak, couldn't make light of what had just happened.

And there still was the boy Christopher, staring with his mouth open. I tapped him on the tip of his nose with my finger and said, 'No more favours for you, honey bun,' and tucked the Captain's red flag into my handbag. I felt like sitting in the garden for a while. I wondered if it were possible to build a home here and what use I could make of my life.

Meanwhile the Captain's replacement has tightened the screws and I'm up to my elbows in cons.

ASHA SEN

## Re-Visioning Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* in a Post-National Age

The current inter-disciplinary status of postcolonial studies is perhaps most accurately reflected in research on connections between historical discourses on women and gender from the Indian subcontinent and their contemporary literary representation. In 1986 Fredric Jameson earned the wrath of several critics when he put forth his claim that all third-world literatures necessarily 'project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society' (69). Feminist critics like Josna Rege pointed out the problems with Jameson's theory by showing that:

Recent feminist research on the colonial construction of Indian nationalism has demonstrated the extent to which 'traditional' conceptions of Indian womanhood have been bound up with the nationalist project. Women's experiences in the postcolonial period have shown, again and again, that their interests are incompatible with the interest of the nation-state. (367)

Although, precisely for this reason, fewer women writers have chosen to adopt the allegorical form than men, Indian authors like Nina Sibal (*Yatra* 1987) and Gita Mehta (*Raj* 1991), and Pakistani women novelists, Sara Suleri (*Meatless Days* 1989) and Bapsi Sidhwa (*Cracking India* 1991), are among those who have written novels that fictionalise the birthing of the modern nation-state. This article explores the benefits as well as the limitations of this form in one such woman-centred text, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, even as it attempts to provide a rationale for the apparent gender bias implicit in the form.

Nowhere is the conflation of women's bodies with religious, national, and familial honour more apparent than in the events surrounding the partition of 1947. Official records estimate that approximately twelve million people lost their homes and were displaced because of the division of the country into India and Pakistan; one million lost their lives, and about 75,000 women were raped and abducted (Butalia 3). Women's bodies once again became the means by which history was written as women were alternately 'desecrated' or 'protected' as a way of (dis)honouring manhood, families, and newly born nations. In September 1947 the Prime Ministers of Pakistan and India met in Lahore to declare that, 'women and girls who have been abducted must be restored to their families, and every effort must be made by the Governments and their officers concerned to trace and recover such women and girls' (Butalia 110). This declaration culminated in the Abducted Persons Recovery and Restoration Act of 1949 (Butalia 114).

Because the Abducted Persons Act defines an abducted person as a male child under sixteen or a female of any age, it suggests that woman have no agency if they have been abducted. Urvashi Butalia confirms this notion when she writes that, '[t]heoretically at partition every citizen had a choice of which country to belong to. If you were an abducted woman, you did not have that choice' (111). As Butalia shows, the Act was clearly patriarchal in design with India and Pakistan acting as coercive parents bringing their abducted 'women/children' back home. In their eyes the idea of woman as a symbol of the honour of family, religious community, and nation took precedence over her agency as an individual citizen with equal rights.

Like the postcolonial countries India and Pakistan, the postcolonial novel also emulates its European ancestor and continues to use the metaphor of the family as a microcosm for the nation-state. *Cracking India*, for instance, is centred around the development of a child narrator who defines herself against the colonial and national narratives embodied in the adult subjects that surround her. As the narrative unfolds, she finds herself to be both complicit with and resistant to these adult narratives; thus, even as she tries to deconstruct them, she finds that she is already implicated in them. My article asserts that the act of (de)colonisation is not completed in Sidhwa's text because in the novel the child's vision continues to be implicated in colonial and nationalist discourses. Although *Cracking India* begins by trying to criticise these discourses, it ultimately cannot bypass the race and gender biases present in both of them.

In the novel the partition of the state of Punjab functions as an allegory for the division of India and the birth of Pakistan. The novel, based partly on Sidhwa's own childhood, tells the story of Lenny, a young Parsi girl's coming of age in Lahore against the backdrop of Indian independence and partition. Lenny is surrounded by a world of adults whom she loves dearly: her parents and her beloved Godmother; her servant Ayah; and Ayah's flock of admirers that include the sensitive Masseur and the villainous Ice-candy-man. Other adult figures include Lenny's Electric Aunt and Godmother's Slavesister and Oldhusband, while Lenny's older Cousin and her younger brother, Adi, also play important roles in her story.

Bapsi Sidhwa was nine at the time of the partition of India — Lenny is eight at the time of her narration — and in an interview with David Montenegro, Sidhwa remembers the fires and the riots and stumbling across the body of a dead man in a gunny bag (518), all of which are faithfully reproduced in the novel. The author's own upper middle-class position is not very different from that of Lenny's family and 'many of the women in [the novel] were [in fact] inspired by [her] work with destitute women in Pakistan' (P. Singh 298). In 1999 *Cracking India*, which was published in the subcontinent as *Ice-Candy Man* (1988), was made into a film called *Earth* by Deepa Mehta. As many critics have pointed out, *Cracking India* is important in that it is the first and only book written by a Parsi about the partition of the country.

The Parsis came to India from Iran after the Arab invasions of the seventh century. Although Mumbai Parsis such as Dadabhai Naoroji were involved in India's freedom struggle, Lahore Parsis, like the Christians, remained neutral in the partition of the country (Mann 72). Mumbai, India, has the largest geographical concentration of Parsis, but they make up only a tiny portion of Pakistan's population. In her 1989 interview with Montenegro, Bapsi Sidhwa says that at the time of partition there were about 300 Parsis in Lahore, the city where Lenny lives. That number dwindled to 92 in 1989 (523). In the same interview, Sidhwa says that, 'Parsis in Pakistan are known for their honesty and integrity. But no matter how well you are treated — the Parsis are generally lionised in Pakistan — it is the Parsi attitude to themselves that distances them from others. This sense of alienation is very hard to overcome' (296). Although Sidhwa does not elaborate on the reasons for Parsi alienation, Tanya Luhrmann in her anthropological study on the Mumbai Parsis, *The Good Parsi* (1996), describes the way in which the Parsis saw themselves as the natural inheritors of the Raj. Having done so well under the British, they were dismayed to find themselves with much less political power in the post-independence years. Luhrmann writes that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a cluster of symbolic markers of identity came to characterise Parsis. These included truthfulness, purity, charity, progressiveness, rationality, and civilised masculinity. Combined together, these attributes defined the Parsis as the worthiest community in Indian history. In the 1920s and 1930s, when Hindu-Muslim politics made it clear that small minorities had no place at the centre of power, a self-denigrating tone emerged in Parsi literature as Parsis began to lay much of the blame for their political impotence on weaknesses within the community (Luhrmann 45).

The Parsis, like other religious minorities such as the Christians, Jains, and Buddhists, tend to be written out of dominant nationalist discourses, which foreground either Hindu or Muslim nationalism depending on which country the writer comes from. Over the years in both India and Pakistan the primarily secular visions of Nehru and Jinnah have been replaced by the increasingly fundamentalist philosophies of their successors. Among the Muslim community it came to be believed that, 'the intermingling with Hindu culture and the institutionalisation of British law ha[d] taken away many rights granted to women under Islamic law' (Weiss 132). In pre-independence years Muslim women's groups rallied around the cause of female education and in 1937 the British passed the Muslim Personal Law, which provided for such rights. After independence, the Muslim Personal Law of Shariah (1948) — which recognised women's right to inheritance — and the Family Laws Ordinance (1961) — which regulated marriage and divorce — were passed. However, Zia ul Haq's regime (1977–1988) saw the Islamisation of Pakistan. By the end of his regime, 'a set of laws had been put in place *which constructed an image of women as not having the identical civil liberties as men* and which justified such laws in the name of Islam' (Weiss 133) [italics

in original]. The passing of the Hudood Ordinances in 1979–1980 changed the law pertaining to rape and adultery and made fornication a crime. President Zia ul Haq also introduced the Qanun-e-Shahadat Order (Law of Evidence Order), which in some cases renders a woman's testimony equal to only half that of a man. In September 1981 women's groups came together to form the Women's Action Forum and to protest these laws (Human Rights Watch 21–25), and they were finally revised in 2006 by the women's protection bill.

In her 1989 interview with Montenegro, Sidhwa praises the fierce efforts of Pakistani women to fight against the Hudood Ordinances (524). Though it is set against an earlier period in history, her own book, *Cracking India*, is designed to awaken a feminist consciousness among her middle-class readership, both Parsi and non-Parsi, to the injustices done to women in the name of religion. Her book is also an attempt to write Parsis into a history of the Pakistani nation-state that seeks to exclude them by emphasising the importance of Islamic nationalism over any kind of secular vision. By going back to the origin of Pakistan, Sidhwa attempts to reaffirm the more egalitarian vision of its founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah.<sup>1</sup> She uses the familiar trope of a woman's body — in this case that of Jinnah's Parsi wife Ruttie — to represent the history of Pakistan. When Lenny's mother shows her daughter a photograph of Jinnah's wife, Lenny exclaims:

The woman in the photograph is astonishingly beautiful. Large eyes, liquid-brown, radiating youth, promising intelligence, declaring innocence, shining from an oval marble-firm face. Full-lipped, delighting in the knowledge of her own loveliness: confident in the knowledge of her generous impulses. Giving — like Ayah. Daring — like Mother. 'Plucky!' Mother says. (170)

The woman in the photograph embodies the best of Hindu (Ayah) and Parsi (Lenny's mother) qualities but perhaps foreshadowing the fate of minorities in Pakistan who face severe persecution today, hers is not a happy fate. Estranged from her husband, she dies at twenty-nine in 1929 after giving Jinnah a daughter, Dina Wadia. Jinnah was to die several years later, his health severely affected by the long hours put into his struggle for Pakistan. Akbar Ahmed points out that because a non-Muslim wife and a daughter who refuses to marry a Muslim — Jinnah's daughter married a Parsi against her father's wishes — are not palatable to an extremist Islamic nationalism, mother and daughter tend to be left out of such histories of the nation-state. He writes that, 'Professor Sharif al Mujahid, a conscientious and sympathetic biographer and former director of the Quaid-I-Azam Academy in Karachi, does not mention either woman in his 806-page volume (1981). Nor [do] the archives, pictorial exhibitions and official publications contain more than the odd picture of the two' (Ahmed 11). Moreover, it is Jinnah's sister, Fatima, not his wife who is remembered in Pakistan's national history as the *Madr-e-Millat*, Mother of the Nation (Ahmed 12).<sup>2</sup>

The fate of Jinnah's wife becomes representative of the liminality of the Parsi position, which is represented by Colonel Bharucha's story in *Cracking India*.

Colonel Bharucha reminds the Lahore Parsi community of the need for their ‘neutrality’ in the fight between the British, the Hindus, and the Muslims, by invoking the mythic story of the Parsis fleeing to India from Iran in the seventh century. The legend goes that the Parsis were greeted by an Indian prince who gave them a glass of milk in order to suggest that India was full and that there was no room for anyone else. The Parsi priests added a pinch of sugar to the milk to imply that they ‘would get absorbed into [India] like the sugar in the milk... And with their decency and industry sweeten the lives of [the Indian prince that receives them] and his subjects’ (47). The story’s tacked-on moral implies that the minority status of the Parsi community would make them accommodate themselves to the desires of the majority communities in India and Pakistan.

This neutral character of the community can be said to spill over into the character of the first-person narrator, Lenny. Jagolev Singh writes, ‘[t]he neutral attitude of the narrator character, Lenny, has its roots in the racial psychology of the Parsis’ (25), and Sidhwa herself speaks of Lenny’s ‘objectivity’ in the novel (Montenegro 519). However, I believe that the nationalist historiography presented in the novel is far from ‘neutral’. On the most obvious level, *Cracking India* is designed as a corrective to popular Indian and British representations of partition and independence that (mis)represent Jinnah, and so it is consequently, not bereft of ideology itself. Harveen Mann writes that,

[Sidhwa] misdates Gandhi’s Dandi march by more than a decade; attributes the 1948 accession of Kashmir to India to the Britishers’ partiality for Nehru over Jinnah and thus places it alongside Partition in 1947; and portrays Gandhi as favouring the country’s partition when the contrary was the case, as evidenced by his refusal of political office after Independence. (73)

These historical inaccuracies in the story undermine the ‘objective’ or ‘neutral’ vision of Lenny’s narrative, making her, like Saleem Sinai in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, an ‘unreliable’ and not an ‘objective’ narrator.

On a more subtle level, I believe that Sidhwa’s use of national allegory imposes limits on the feminist implications of Lenny’s narrative and ultimately validates a patriarchal narrative of the nation-state. My reading of the novel departs from the interpretations of feminist critics like Niloufer Bharucha<sup>3</sup> and Jill Didur<sup>4</sup> who emphasise the female nature of the bonding between Lenny and the women in the novel. Ambreen Hai, in her recent article ‘Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*’, discusses the limitations of Sidhwa’s feminism in the novel but does not explore the character of Lenny in much detail. My critique of the novel shares some of the concerns raised by Hai but goes beyond her analysis to focus on the specific ambivalences and male-identified biases found in Lenny’s narrative.

There are two different allegorical methods presented in the novel. The most obvious use of the national allegory and the one that has received the most critical attention is in the narrative treatment of Lenny’s Hindu Ayah’s body as a symbol

for the Indian/Pakistani nation-state. As my discussion shows, Sidhwa is both critical of, as well as complicit with, the literary form and its limitations. On the one hand, by depicting the abduction and rape of Ayah, the novel is an attack on the ways in which nationalist discourses sanctify and desecrate women's bodies; on the other hand, the end of the novel which validates the role of upper-class Parsi women rescuing their lower-class Hindu and Muslim counterparts from the savagery of Hindu and Muslim men only to house them in shelters for Homeless women, or to employ them as domestic servants, or to send them 'home' to the families and countries where they now reside, leaves intact the very same structures that the novel initially seems to condemn. The second use of allegory is more complex and is found in Lenny's self-aggrandising narrative that uses the events which surround her as props that take on meaning only in the context of her own child's world. Ultimately, the novel's allegorical treatment of Ayah and the public world of rape and riots are co-opted by the narrator's own sexual awakening and growth into maturity, and the allegorical treatment of the nation becomes instead the story of Lenny's struggle for power. My analysis shows that despite the feminist overtones of the novel, Lenny's coming of age is defined by her identification with and struggle to adopt the patriarchal values of the allegorical Indian/Pakistani nation-state.

At the outset of the novel, Ayah functions as the symbol of a secular India around whom all religions cluster. Although Ayah's religious identity is specifically Hindu, she never emphasises this until late in the novel when fundamentalist fervour starts affecting all the servants. As Ayah sits under the imposing presence of Queen Victoria's statue, the men who surround her — the Faletti house cook, the government house gardener, the masseur, the ice-candy-man, the zoo keeper's attendant — represent the different religions — Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism — found in secular India. This group coexists in peaceful harmony as its different members slip away after dusk, content to leave behind 'the one luck or the lady prefers' (29). Sharbat Khan, the Pathan, and the 'Chinaman' later join her circle of admirers and Lame Lenny, the Parsi girl through whose eyes Ayah emerges is, of course, her most ardent admirer.

The statue of Queen Victoria serves as an extension of the colonial power that defines the limits of Ayah's authority. In 1877 under the urging of Disraeli

an imperial assemblage was held to celebrate the addition of *Kaiser-I-Hind*, or 'Empress of India', to Queen Victoria's titles... The idea behind the title and ceremony was to represent the British rulers as the rightful heirs of the Mogul emperors. The monumental vision of the Raj produced in the imperial assemblage thus constitutes a forgetting directed at the ignoble scenes [from the war of 1857] out of which the Indian empire emerged. (Sharpe 150)

The allegorical role played by Queen Victoria's statue complements Ayah's representation in the novel. Ayah's allegorical character is reinforced by the fact that her real name, 'Shanta', is mentioned just once in the novel. When Ice-

Candy-man asks Ayah why she wears saris and not the Punjabi shalwar kameez, Ayah responds that Goan ayahs (who are Catholic and perceived to be more Western by the English and the English-influenced Indian elite) wear saris and are paid more by their employers than those ayahs who wear Punjabi dress. Consequently, Ayah adopts a 'foreign' mode of dress to win credit in the eyes of her Western-influenced employers and to be paid more. Half way through the novel, as the fight for independence progresses and British authority declines, the group symbolically moves away from the statue of Queen Victoria and still later the statue itself is removed and Ayah is abducted by Ice-candy-man and forced to convert to Islam.

By forcing Ayah, who is Hindu, to become a courtesan and by renaming her Mumtaz, Ice-candy-man seeks to wipe out her Hindu ancestry and claim her as part of his own lineage, as part of the 'kotha ... the cradle of royal bastards' (258), descendants of the illegitimate offspring of the Mughal emperors and their favourite concubines.<sup>5</sup> In the days of the Mughal empire, these offspring were granted 'royal indulgences' and were relatively well off as royal concubines or musicians, singers and poets. However, with the passing of colonial legislation and the decline of feudal princely states, many of these men and women were deprived of their occupations and turned to prostitution.

The rape/riot metaphor in much colonial literature like *A Passage to India* (1929) and *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966) takes on a new twist in *Cracking India* as colonial allegories of the civilised English man and the barbaric native get translated into Hindu and Muslim nationalisms that demonise each other. Ice-candy-man's actions provide a literal example of the way in which nationalist discourses both sanctify and desecrate women's bodies. Throughout the novel he has been the one to identify women's bodies with religious honour. For instance, his horror at the train with 'two gunny bags load of *Muslim* women's breasts' (159) [italics mine], his subsequent violation of the lion-tamer Sher Singh's Sikh relatives, and his abduction of Ayah out of revenge for the atrocities against Muslim women, suggest that he sees all the women as symbols of their religions. This makes his protestations of love for Ayah all the more unbelievable, particularly as Lenny's Godmother points out he kidnapped her in February but only married her in May after finding out that Lenny's mother had made arrangements to send Ayah home to Amritsar. Yet, by the end of the novel, Ice-candy-man has become so emasculated that Lenny's narrative would have the reader believe that his 'love' for Ayah has rendered him harmless. The domestic servants, Imam Dim and Yusuf, and the Sikh guard who 'protects' the women in the homeless shelter are taken in by his appearance. Lenny, too, in keeping with her endorsement of patriarchal values, admits that, '[h]e has become truly a harmless fellow. My heart not only melts — it evaporates when I breathe out, leaving me faint for pity' (288). It is noteworthy, however, that neither Lenny's mother nor her godmother nor Ayah herself appears to be taken in by Ice-candy's contrition. Moreover, if

one keeps in mind the fluidity with which he transforms himself from a seller of Popsicles to a bird-man who dupes naïve Englishwomen into buying his birds, to a 'saviour' who tricks Lenny into betraying Ayah's whereabouts, it would seem that Ice-candy-man's appearance as 'a moonstruck fakir who has renounced the world for his beloved' (288) should be read as just one more performative act designed to seduce a gullible public. However, the sympathetic treatment of Ice-candy-man at the end of the novel enables critics like Jagolev Singh to write, '[t]hat the Ice-Candy-man is willing to leave the land that he so much cherishes for the sake of his Hindu beloved, is not only an example of self-sacrifice but also symbolic of a future rapprochement between the two warring communities — the Muslims and the Hindus' (34). Hai is also taken in by the sympathetic treatment meted out to Ice-candy-man and writes, '*Cracking India* ends with Ice-candy-man now romantically and guiltily devoted to his victim, sorry for his part in the madness, continuing pathetically to follow her across the border' (409). However, the closure effected by this allegorical reading/ending completely denies the materiality of the obscenity done to Ayah as an individual and as a woman, and obscures the sinister quality that Ice-candy-man — her would-be rapist — continues to embody. Yet, it cannot be denied that the novel does end on an allegorical note. The Sikh guard considers the 'returned' Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh women to be his 'sisters' and 'mothers' thereby validating their societal role over their individual lives. Lenny, in a self-aggrandising move, joins in the choir of mourning women who 'beat their breasts and cry: 'Hai! Hai! Hai! Hai!' reflecting the history of their cumulative sorrows and the sorrows of their Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Rajput great-grandmothers who burnt themselves alive rather than surrender their honour to the invading hordes besieging their ancestral fortresses' (285). Ayah decides that she wants to return 'home' to India and Lenny's mother and Godmother help facilitate this return thereby enabling the narrative return to the integrity of India and Pakistan as two separate nation states. And so, Ayah, the violated woman, is effectively transformed into an allegory for the partitioned country.

However, the brutality of the treatment meted out to Ayah by men whom she considers friends and lovers, forces the reader to question the nature of the home she will return to. Beyond one brief mention that Ayah has family in Amritsar, *Cracking India* is completely silent about Ayah's 'home' in India. Given the fate of Lenny's new Muslim ayah, Hamida, who is disowned by her husband after her abduction, it is difficult to be optimistic that Ayah's family will welcome her back. Godmother alerts Ayah to the possibility that her family will not take her back, but Ayah remains adamant, and Godmother is not able to present her with another more palatable option. Instead, she is reduced to invoking fate to explain Ayah's current position, an argument that neither Lenny nor even Hindu Ayah will buy.

Godmother's and Mother's activism on behalf of the fallen women they help rescue is constrained as much by their class privilege as by their ethnic difference.

Like the middle-class social workers whom Butali interviews in *The Other Side of Silence*, they too are subjects of the state, who cannot envision a space for 'fallen women' outside of the confines of family and nation.<sup>6</sup> One cannot help but inquire whether Godmother would have been as accepting of 'fate' had it been her goddaughter Lenny who had been abducted and raped. Certainly the family's efforts to cure Lenny's polio as much as their Parsi heritage would lead us to believe that they did not see themselves as passive recipients of misfortune.

This critique of the activism of the Parsi women in the novel should not take away from the tremendous bravery of their acts and particularly from Lenny's mother's willingness to confront an unruly mob in order to protect Ayah. However, it is important to note that their activism does not transcend nationalistic and religious representations of these 'fallen women' in order to create a more inclusive solidarity that moves away from allegorical representations of woman, home, and nation-state.<sup>7</sup> While *Cracking India* does an excellent job in raising the consciousness of middle-class Pakistani women, it cannot really go beyond allegorical treatment of its lower-class subjects because of the author's own privileged and sheltered upbringing that, in Sidhwa's own words, limits her to a middle-class sensibility (Singh 295).

*Cracking India's* limited feminism is implicated in its allegorical desire for home, which denies Ayah any autonomy. It is possible that Ayah thinks of home as a pre-partition time and space where she was still inviolate and had nothing to fear but the implicit violence of Ice-candy-man's toes. Yet, as the narrative shows, even her imagined autonomy was ephemeral, dependent as it was on male approval of her beauty and wholeness. If Ayah's body is equated with home and India then Ayah's desire to go home can be read as a desire to return to a time and space when she, like India, was inviolate. However, as the statue of Queen Victoria and the aggression of Ice-candy-man's toes reveal, that time and space of imagined autonomy was, in fact, dependent on the benevolence of a colonial and a patriarchal gaze. Ayah's domestic servitude and her class-based dependency on her employers do provide her with a degree of protection. Lenny points out that, '[Ice-candy-man's] not the kind of fellow who's permitted inside. With his thuggish way of inhaling from the stinking cigarettes clenched in his fist, his flashy scarves and reek of jasmine attar, he represents a shady, almost disreputable type' (20). However, even as her Parsi employers guarantee Ayah some degree of protection within the walls of their home — protection that is rendered vulnerable when the rioters enter Lenny's home — Ayah's safety is dependent on their sense of propriety and not on her autonomy.

Unlike Ranna who is given a chance to tell his story, Ayah is rendered mute by her experiences. All she can utter is the pathetic refrain, 'I want to go back to my family' (273). In Sidhwa's novel home/nation and Ayah come to be seen as indistinguishable and she is effectively allegorised out of the text. In this way she is no different to other women in the story who are (dis)honoured because of their

symbolic value within a patriarchal value system. The mullah's daughter's cries of pain reduce the men of Ranna's community to little boys who sob unaffectedly and the muttered threat of a Sikh soldier that he would 'bugger' his female victim again suggests a male economy where homosexual desire is transferred onto the site of the female body. Ayah virtually disappears from the story after her kidnapping, suggesting that the novel's vision cannot conceive of a post-abduction life for Ayah as an individual and not as a symbol. Like the dishonoured women in Butalia's book *The Other Side of Silence*, who have no space from which they can tell their stories as women, Ayah too is so contained by allegorical representation that she has no space from which to speak as a woman. That privilege is reserved for the novel's narrator, Lenny.

Ultimately, the allegorisation of Ayah's body becomes the means by which a second story of Lenny's coming into selfhood is told. We are given Ayah's story from the perspective of Lenny and the materiality of Ayah's existence tends to get swallowed up as Lenny uses an allegorical narrative to bring herself into individuation. Lenny believes that her private life and the outside world are one and the same, the latter merely exists to inform the former. For instance, she and the other children mimic the fasts of Gandhi and his followers in an attempt to get their way with the adults around them. However, Lenny's allegorical conflation of two worlds is challenged when she lets Ice-candy-man into her family home only to discover that far from being the 'saviour' she thinks he is, he is a rapist and abductor who snatches Ayah from the safety of Lenny's private world. Yet, despite Lenny's rude awakening to the Ice-candy-man's true nature, she is not able to transcend her male-identified vision, and later in the novel when she and Godmother visit Ice-candy-man and Ayah, she accepts his popsicles and feels sorry for him.

Another example of Lenny's biased perspective takes place when at the outset of the novel Lenny and her ayah encounter an English man who tries to get Lenny to climb out of her pram and walk. However, when he is 'confronted by Ayah's liquid eyes and prim gloating, and the triumphant revelation of [Lenny's] callipers the Englishman withers' (12). It is easy to read this passage as an example of cross-class bonding between Lenny and her ayah. In fact, Fawzia Afzal-Khan writes, '[r]ight from the beginning, we see that Lenny and her Ayah form a bond that symbolically resists attempts by an outside, male world to subjugate them' (275). However, the reader should bear in mind that this interpretation is based upon Lenny's reading of the situation and that Lenny is not an entirely neutral narrator. In fact, Lenny is drawn to Ayah because of her awareness of the way in which men admire her. She writes,

the covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down they look at her. Stub-handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies, and cyclists turn their heads as she passes. (12)

Lenny does not stop to interrogate the male gaze that Ayah is subjected to. Instead, she revels in its adoration and is willing to be bribed by Ayah's followers in order that they may spend time with her ayah. In this way Lenny colludes with rather than confronts the patriarchal system that objectifies Ayah. She also learns from Ayah how to exploit this objectification to her own advantage. Lenny's obsessive lingering on Ayah's physical attributes also suggests that she is implicated in the male gaze of Ayah's followers and cannot look at her ayah in a non-objectifying way. In fact, when she fears that she will lose Ayah to her lover Masseur, Lenny 'start(s) sobbing. [She kisses] Ayah wherever Masseur is not touching her in the dark' (168). As Hai points out, 'the female narrator's fascination for her servant's body is catalyzed by her intense observation of male fascination for the same — as if both Lenny and Ayah's men were rivals for Ayah' (398).

Lenny's relationship with Godmother is imbued with a similar power dynamic. Lenny narrates:

Flying forward I [Lenny] fling myself at Godmother and she lifts me onto her lap and gathers me to her bosom. I kiss her, insatiable, excessively, and she hugs me. She is childless. The bond that ties her strength to my weakness, my fierce demands to her nurturing, my trust to her capacity to contain that trust — is stronger than the bonds of motherhood. More satisfying than the ties between men and women. (13)

It is easy to posit this relationship as an alternative to the male-defined relationships that make up the book. Sidhwa herself comments, 'Godmother has come to a stage in her life when she is not dependent on men... And she has come into her own as a woman' (Montenegro 531). However, Godmother's coming into her own as a woman comes at the cost of the emasculation of her husband, Oldhusband, to the point where he all but disappears from Lenny's narrative and Lenny is willing to fight the other male rival, Godmother's brother-in-law, Dr. Mody, for control over Godmother (in much the same way that she competes with Masseur for Ayah). Lenny's attitude towards the Godmother/Slavesister relationship is also problematic. Godmother's treatment of Slavesister is complicitous with patriarchal standards for had Slavesister been married like their middle sister, she would have not had to work as a servant for Godmother. However, Godmother's dictatorial treatment of her younger sister, Slavesister, does not diminish Godmother's value in Lenny's eyes. Nor does Lenny show any sympathy for the abject Slavesister, though there is enough textual evidence for the discerning reader to feel sorry for her.

Sidhwa's characterisation of Godmother appears to imply that autonomy as a woman is implicated in having the power to castrate those who are dependent upon you. I believe that it is this 'strength' that Lenny seeks. She is not content with the indirect machinations of her mother and her ayah whose autonomy is dependent on the whims of the patriarchy. She wants to be the patriarch herself. Despite, or perhaps because of, her physical disability which further marginalises her she over-identifies with her godmother's endorsement of patriarchal values. Niloufer Bharucha writes that the goal of feminism 'should not simply be to claim more

space for women under existing social structures but to deconstruct and transform the existing reality... The creation of female spaces entails going beyond the male-allotted spaces into the realms of true equality' (93–94). However, Lenny does not appear to want an egalitarian universe. Indeed, she cannot appear to conceptualise a space beyond the victim/victimiser binary. This is made most evident when she anticipates a time in the future, 'when [she] raised [her] head again, the men lowered their eyes' (96).

Lenny's desire for power is driven by the sense of lack that defines her being. Colonel Bharucha's story of the vulnerability of the Parsi community is reproduced in the tale that Lenny's mother tells her about the little mouse with seven tails. The mouse first has all its tails cut off and then retains one in order that it won't be laughed at by its peers. Both stories suggest a kind of subterfuge whereby minorities who lack power adopt strategies that enable them to retain their difference while living in accordance with the rules and regulations of the majority. Lenny clings to her deformed leg because she feels that it is the only thing that will guarantee her love and affection.

Her brother Adi's beauty wins him the adoration of everyone around them including Lenny's ayah who thinks him more beautiful than any little English 'baba'. Lenny, by contrast, always considers herself ugly and takes to heart her doctor Colonel Bharucha's comment that 'she is only a girl' and, therefore, will want nothing more than to marry and have children. She is also fully conscious of the distaste with which she is viewed because of her ethnicity and her gender. As a child she angers a Brahmin priest because her shadow contaminates his caste status forcing him to wash again and as an adult she notices how a Parsi priest cringes from taking her hand because he thinks she might be menstruating. Thus she is able to occupy the anomalous status of surrogate male, but only in a constrained space.

All these events cause Lenny to reject powerlessness and victimhood and to claim agency for herself. Thus, she uses her class-based privilege to subject the child bride Papoo's husband Toto Ram to her gaze and discovers that,

He is no boy! He is a dark, middle-aged man with a pockmark-pitted face and small, brash kohl-blackened eyes. He has an insouciant air of insolence about him — as though it is all a tedious business he has been through before. I cannot take my eyes off him as he visualises the women with assertive, assessing directness. There is a slight cast in the close set of his eyes, and the smirk lurking about his thin, dry lips gives an impression of cruelty. The women in the room become hushed. He shifts his insolent eyes to the ceiling, as if permitting the women to gape upon his unsavoury person, and then lowers his sehra. (199)

Toto Ram is so secure in his position of power that he appears to consciously participate in his own objectification as if he knows the women's gaze is powerless to displace his position of strength. This makes Lenny's agency indirect at best. She can see through Toto Ram's facade of importance to his real self, but cannot do anything about Papoo's marriage to this man. She is reminded once again that

her powerlessness lies in her gender and, this, in turn, promotes her to acts of violence against the men she knows as a means of coming into selfhood.

She claims agency in male-defined ways, by identifying with Ayah's male admirers, with Godmother's castrating gaze, and with the violence she sees around her. Although Lenny is initially afraid of the angry world outside — the zoo lion's roars, the turbulence of World War Two, which penetrates and disturbs her dreams — she actively participates in reproducing the violence that surrounds her. After witnessing the violence of partition riots, Lenny comes home and rips her doll apart. At another point in her narrative, there is a strange energy with which she reveals that, 'I broke plates, cups, bowls, dishes. I smashed livers, kidneys, hearts, eyes' (94). As communal violence progresses, Ayah's admirers turn on the low-caste Hari and rip off his dhoti. Lenny joins the crowd, her 'dread assuming a violent and cruel shape [she] tear(s) away from Ayah and [flings herself] on the human tangle and fight(s) to claw at Hari's dhoti' (126). Lenny's narrative normalises her actions suggesting that they are the natural reaction to the violent world she sees around her. However, this normalisation is problematic because on an adult level it justifies the fury of mobs and legitimises attacks on innocent civilians.

Lenny's complicity with patriarchal values is most evident when she betrays Ayah to Ice-candy-man. Bharucha writes, '[h]ere Lenny is like Mucho who betrays her own daughter into male bondage. A betrayal, the result of centuries of patriarchal conditioning, a misplaced faith in the integrity of men and a searing lack of confidence in and hatred of the female self' (138). Not only does Bharucha's claim present a more-than-adequate explanation for Lenny's actions, it also contradicts the critic's earlier assertion that, 'Lenny is not male-identified. She has strong female models with whom she has a woman-to-woman bonding' (136). As my discussion shows, female models like Godmother only inspire a desire for power in Lenny's relations with men. For instance, the castrating power of her gaze is felt by her Cousin whose masculinity is diminished by her comparison of him with the other men she sees. The seduction game the two of them play ends in Cousin losing the control he once enjoyed over Lenny and becoming her emasculated slave.

Although Godmother presents Lenny with her castrating ideal, Lenny also learns some of her tactics from Ayah and her mother. However, after Ayah's abduction, she understands how fragile her ayah's autonomy was. Similarly, even as Lenny is able to appreciate her mother's use of maternal ploys to soothe an unruly dinner party or crowd, she is also the silent witness to her parents' arguments and to the bruises on her mother's body. As Jill Didur points out, '[i]n general, it appears that Lenny's mother uses her agency in a consensual fashion — in the interest of maintaining her patriarchal patronage — and thus contributes to the perpetuation of elite patriarchal practice' (54). Lenny is fully aware of how much her own personal happiness as well as her mother's lies within her father's

control. When, after a period of estrangement, her father finally starts talking to her mother again, Lenny writes, 'Adi and I laugh and laugh and hug Father and our clinging mother, I feel deliriously lighthearted. So does Adi. Father has spoken directly to Mother' (239). Because of the precarious autonomy embodied in the figures of Ayah and Mother, they do not serve as adequate role models for Lenny. Yet, she is willing to adopt some of their feminine strategies in her power struggle with Cousin as long as she can finally occupy the position of power manifested by her father and Godmother.

Lenny's dreams suggest that she is aware that her ayah, her mother, and her godmother are complicitous in the patriarchal structure of things. Her sense of female ineffectuality is reflected in her dreams where she sees herself as the victim of male brutality even as the women she loves — her mother, Godmother, and Ayah — collaborate with soldiers in their amputation of the limbs of innocent civilians (31). Her dreams suggest Lenny's intermingling of private and public worlds as her fears of amputation because of her deformed leg coalesce with her fears of the violence of World War Two and Nazi Germany that are coming ever closer to her sheltered existence.<sup>8</sup> However, the theme of betrayal introduced in Lenny's dreams functions as a subtext throughout Lenny's narrative. When Lenny ponders over the meaning of Christ's betrayal at the Last Supper, her thoughts foreshadow her own betrayal of Ayah, reminding the reader that on an unconscious level Lenny may be aware that the women she loves are implicated in patriarchal structures that are ultimately unequal and that even their attempts at rectifying these structures only reinforce the status quo. However, this suspicion is never consciously articulated by the novel's narrator, Lenny. Consequently, I believe the novel ultimately endorses a patriarchal allegory, which denies both the materiality of Ayah's body and the feminist subtext of Lenny's narrative. Lenny's coming of age normalises rather than questions the gendered inequities present in colonial and nationalist allegories of home and nation. In this way it reaffirms the limitations of the allegorical form to adequately speak for women's experiences in colonial and postcolonial India and Pakistan.

Even though the form of national allegory has been used more often by male authors than by female ones, women writers such as Nina Sibal and Sara Suleri who, like Bapsi Sidhwa, use the form of national allegory to express female desires, find themselves similarly confronted with the limitations of the form. In *Yatra* Sibal presents the movement of her heroine Krishna from the private to the public world by showing how Krishna's betrayal by her husband leads her to become an independent single woman and finally to adopt a life of activism and leadership. However, by using an allegorical form, Sibal 'mystifies the woman as leader, typically by de-gendering and, then, canonising her' (Sunder Rajan 83). Thus, Krishna's independence comes at the expense of her womanhood. In *Meatless Days* even the community of women — her grandmother, mother, sisters, friends, and servants—Sara Suleri shares is not enough to sustain her from

the imperious demands of her home country and she ultimately escapes to the US in an attempt to become ‘ahistorical’ or ‘non-allegorical’. There, she learns of the untimely deaths of her mother and her eldest sister, Ifat — the first apparently an accident, the second probably a murder disguised as an accident — providing her with literal as well as metaphoric examples of the consumption of women’s lives by their nation-states. Although these few examples are by no means representative of all national allegorical narratives of the 1980s and ’90s, they provide important evidence of the ways in which the form imposes limitations upon a postcolonial feminist consciousness, making it necessary to reiterate the need for both writers and scholars to look for alternative, more woman-friendly presentations of postcolonial consciousness.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Jinnah’s support for women’s rights caused his words to be cited in the charter of the Women’s Action Forum, which formed in the wake of Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamisation program. Fatima Jinnah played an active role in Pakistani politics and always appeared by her brother’s side in public. Anita Weiss points out that it is ironic that while in 1965, Islamist leaders supported Jinnah’s sister, Fatima Jinnah’s bid for presidency, in 1989 they wanted a fatwa issued to prevent Benazir Bhutto from becoming president (133).
- <sup>2</sup> In a letter to *Dawn* (10th February 2002), Pakistan’s national English-language paper, Mohammad Aziz Haji Dossa writes, ‘To translate Jinnah’s concept for a tolerant society, General Musharraf should instruct, the reallocation of Plot E, adjacent to the Quaid’s Mazar, for the proposed Ruttie Jinnah Grove (Tree Mazar-3: *Dawn*: July 30, 2002). This area for the Ruttie Jinnah Park was resumed but later shelved by the administration... The government had second thoughts and the project of Ruttie Jinnah alcove was sidelined, because of the warped reasoning that Ruttie Jinnah, though a convert to Islam, was a non-practising Muslim’ (online).
- <sup>3</sup> See Niloufer Bharucha, ‘From Behind a Fine Veil: A Feminist Reading of Three Parsi Novels’.
- <sup>4</sup> See Jill Didur, “‘Cracking the Nation’”: Gender, Minorities, and Agency in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*’.
- <sup>5</sup> In the post-independence years the Heera Mandi has fallen on very bad days. A succession of Islamic governments has sought to assert their Islamic credentials by penalising the women who live and work at Lahore’s ‘Diamond Market’.
- <sup>6</sup> Bapsi Sidhwa’s feelings of self-consciousness about what is arguably her weakest novel, *The Pakistani Bride*, where she tells the story of a tribal woman helps shed some light on this aspect of *Cracking India*’s limited activism (Afzal-Khan 271). See Niaz Zaman’s ‘Bapsi Sidhwa: I am Pakistani’, and K. Nirupa Rani’s ‘Gender and Imagination in Bapsi Sidhwa’s Fiction’.
- <sup>7</sup> See discussion of social workers on ‘Women’ in Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition*, pp. 85–136.
- <sup>8</sup> In his critique of O. Mannoni’s book about the Malagasies, *Prospero and Caliban* (1956), Frantz Fanon writes that no-one should be oblivious to the literal policing that is going on in Madagascar and, consequently, Mannoni’s purely psychoanalytic approach to the Malagasy condition is limited in its interpretation (Fanon, 83–108).

Similarly, Lame Lenny's dreams of men in uniform dismembering parts of children while the women sit and watch is evidence of her psychic reaction to the ominous presence of British soldiers in India as well as the tension that affects all their lives through the outbreak of World War Two and later through the partition of India.

#### WORKS CITED

- Afzal-Khan, Fawzia 1992, 'Women in History: Bapsi Sidhwa's Oeuvre', *International Literature in English*, Garland Press, New York, p. 271.
- Ahmed, Akbar 1997, *Jinnah, Pakistan, and Islamic Identity*, Routledge, London.
- Bharucha, Niloufer 1996, 'From Behind a Fine Veil: A Feminist Reading of Three Parsi Novels', *Indian Literature*, 39.5, pp. 132–41.
- 1998, 'Inhabiting Enclosures and Creating Spaces: The Worlds of Women in Indian Literature in English', *ARIEL*, 29.1, pp. 93–107.
- Butalia, Urvashi 2000, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from Partition*, Duke UP, Durham.
- Chatterjee, Partha 1993, *The Nation and its Fragments*, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Dhawan, R.K. and Novy Kapadia (eds) 1996, *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa*, Prestige, New Delhi.
- Didur, Jill 1988, "'Cracking the Nation": Gender, Minorities, and Agency in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*', *ARIEL* 29.3, pp. 44–63.
- Dossa, Mohammad Aziz Haji 2002, 'Ruttie Jinnah Grove', Letters to the Editor, *Dawn*, 10th February, online: <http://DAWN.com>.
- Fanon, Frantz 1967, 'The So-Called Dependency Complex of Colonized Peoples', *Black Skin, White Masks*, Grove Press, New York, pp. 83–108.
- Hai, Ambreen 2000, 'Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46.2, pp. 379–422.
- Human Rights Watch 1999, *Crime or Custom? Violence Against Women in Pakistan*, Human Rights Watch, New York.
- Kumar, Radha 1993, *The History of Doing*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, pp. 74–95.
- Jameson, Fredric 1986, 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text*, 15, pp. 65–88.
- Liu, Lydia 1994, 'The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: *The Field of Life and Death* Revisited', *Scattered Hegemonies*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, U of Minnesota P, Minneapolis, pp. 37–62.
- Luhrmann, Tanya 1996, *The Good Parsi*, Harvard UP, Cambridge.
- Mann, Harveen 1994, '*Cracking India*: Minority Women Writers and the Contentious Margins of Indian Nationalist Discourse', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, pp. 71–94.
- Mehta, Gita 1991, *Raj*, Simon & Schuster, New York.
- Montenegro, David 1990, 'Bapsi Sidhwa: An Interview', *Massachusetts Review*,

31.4, pp. 13–21.

- Rani, Nirupa K. 1966, 'Gender and Imagination in Bapsi Sidhwa's Fiction', *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa*, ed. R.K. Dhawan and Novy Kapadia, Prestige, New Delhi, pp. 118–24.
- Rege, Josna 1997, 'Victim into Protagonist? *Midnight's Children* and the Post-Rushdie National Narratives of the Eighties', *Studies in the Novel*, 29.3, pp. 342–75.
- Sharpe, Jenny 1993, *Allegories of Empire*, U of Minnesota P, Minneapolis.
- Sibal, Nina 1987, *Yatra*, The Women's Press, London.
- Sidhwa, Bapsi 1991, *Cracking India*, Milkweed Editions, Minnesota.
- 1983, *The Pakistani Bride*, Johnathon Cape, London.
- Singh, Jagolev 1992, 'Ice-Candy-Man: A Parsi Perception on the Partition of India', *Literary Criterion*, 27. 3, pp. 23–35.
- Singh, Preeti 1998, 'My Place in the World', *Alif*, 18, pp. 290–98.
- Suleri, Sara 1991, *Meatless Days*, U of Chicago P, Chicago.
- Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari 1993, 'The Feminist Plot and the Nationalist Allegory: Home and World in Two Indian Women's Novels in English', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 39.1, pp. 71–92.
- Weiss, Anita M. 1998, 'The Slow Yet Steady Path to Women's Empowerment in Pakistan', *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*, ed. Yvonne Haddad and John Esposito, Oxford UP, New York, pp. 124–43.
- Zaman, Niaz 1996, 'Bapsi Sidhwa: I am Pakistani', *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa*, ed. R.K. Dhawan and Novy Kapadia, Prestige, New Delhi, pp. 107–117.