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Politics, Power, Domination and Differences: Nation Building in Bapsi Sidhwa's
Cracking India

Abstract

Cracking India, the third novel of Bapsi Sidhwa, published in 1988, is an oral testimony of memory, storytelling, gossip and rumor, recalling the traumatic experiences of the Partition violence. The novel includes a style of narrative amalgamation of storytelling and autobiography that delineates the rigidity between social and political strands. The political aspects of the novel includes: the Pakistani view and identifies the issues of nationality, it confers how Pakistani view proffers the means of victimization through the communal riots; the Parsi community, the minority within a minority state, dispenses its trepidation over the genesis of the country and the probability of its survival in a newly erected country and the women who are the victims of Partition. *Cracking India* is a juxtaposition of both utopia and heterotopia. There are various ideological representations of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis and Christians in the undivided India. But, each place became a target of violence burning the cities in the eternal fire symbolizing heteropia.

Keywords: Differences, Domination, Nation, Politics, Power, Race, Women.

CI is the first person narrative of the perspective and experiences of a subaltern voice, Lenny, an eight-year-old Parsi girl, both a protagonist and a witness who evidences Partition and its violence perpetuated to nation, race and women. Her narration summons the problems of suppression and a struggle for survival of the nation, race and women. Lenny, a polio-attacked girl, lives in the

central position of Lahore. She is confined to her finite world. However, her world is widened with her growth and the growth of two different nations. Lenny says, "My world is compressed. Warris Road, lined with rats in gutters, lies between Queens Road: both wide, clean, orderly streets at the affluent fringes of Lahore" (CI 1). The novel ends with the line: "And Ice-candy-man, too, disappears across the Wagah border into India" (CI 277). Between these two words "My world" and "India", we record the complications of politics, power, domination and differences, which befit instrumental in the action of building the nations. The novel witnesses a distinctly divergent social grouping, consisting of individuals typifying diverse religions that did not have any stern religious identity in the beginning of the novel and were friendly with each other. On the one hand when this diversified group of people become instrumental in building up the personality of Lenny, on the other hand such diversified group of the nation became responsible for the partition and development of two different nations.

Life of Lenny and the life of the nation passes along turbulences since the rumor about Partition and displacement have started giving rise to realization of their respective religious and communal identities which was passive till then. Lenny observes changes in the attitude of people. People of the Parsi community were also worried whether they should stay at Lahore or dislocate to India. Communal riots, loot, murders, rape, mutilation, compelled Hindu and Sikh families to flee from Lahore. Nationalism exists with the support of its opposite elements - a set of binary oppositions. Lenny remembers "... the Radcliff Commission deals out Indian cities like a pack of cards. Lahore is dealt to Pakistan, Amritsar to India. Sialkot to Pakistan. Pathankot to India. I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that" (CI 140). Cities were dispersed neglectful of people who have been established to the place for years. Lenny asks:

Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is?
....It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves - and the next day they are Hindu,
Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. (CI 92-93)

The novel arrests the disputes of Pakistani perspective. They say that the Muslim minorities have experienced alienation from the main political course. The Gardener says that all Hindu leaders - Gandhi, Nehru and Patel - are frightened of the victory of the Muslim League and even they have great influence in London, Nehru and Mountbatten being very intimate Mountbatten will be in favor only to Nehru. Masseur probes who will be friendly with Jinnah. This gives an anxiety to

the minds of the people about the question of Pakistan. This represents the question of the subalterns and their roles which is neither identified nor recognized in the freedom movement.

The Inspector General Roger expresses:

That old bugger, Gandhi, is up to his old bag of tricks....That wily Baniya (Gandhi) is an expert on fasting unto death without dying....They (the leaders) even rejected Lord Wavell's suggestion for an Interim Government with a majority Congress representation! They are like the three bloody monkeys! They refuse to hear, or see that Jinnah has the backing of seventy million Indian Muslims! Those arrogant Hindus have blown the last chance for an undivided India... Gandhi and Nehru are forcing the League to push for Pakistan (*CI 61-63*).

These leaders create conservative ideologies in the subaltern group and treat them as mere commodities without allowing them any voice. Sidwa writes:

What's it to us if Jinnah, Nehru and Patel fight? They are not fighting our fight,' says Ayah lightly.' That may be true,' says Sharbat Khan thoughtfully, 'but they are stirring up trouble for us all. (*CI 75-76*). The off-duty sepoy says, "'Of course, yaar,' agrees the off-duty sepoy. 'Who are we to quarrel'? Let the big shots fight it out!'" (*CI 131*).

Ice-candy-man continues the argument saying that Nehru has a strong relationship with the Mountbattens especially with Lady Mountbatten. In another instance, Lenny recalls how the British have granted Kashmir to India simply because Nehru is a Kashmiri. Even Gurdaspur and Pathankot where the Muslims live in large numbers are given to India. Without these two places, it is impossible to form Muslim Kashmir. It is a deliberate attempt on the part of the British people to favour the Hindus. Lenny presents in her testimony the basic differences between Nehru and Jinnah. The highly romanticized personal appearance of Nehru has made him a favorite of all. Nehru wears red carnations in his ivory jackets. He closely moves with Lady Mountbatten. With his charming personality, he carries power and his very presence flatters others. He makes promises, smiles and kisses-on-cheeks. He is a handsome man in the prime of his Brahmin manhood. In contrast to the portrayal of Nehru, Jinnah is, as Lenny thinks, incapable of such compliments. He is incapable of cheek kissing. He does not wear red carnations but wears a Karakuli cap. He has past the prime of his manhood. He is "sallow, whip-thin, sharp-tongued, and uncompromising" (*CI 160*). Lenny also thinks that Jinnah is a man who strongly believes in

constitutional means and a man who has “misplaced hopes into tall standards of upright justice” (CI 160). Lenny has another reason to like Jinnah. Jinnah has married a Parsi woman. Contrary to the popular view that Jinnah is a religious fanatic, as portrayed in the Indian views, Lenny takes this fact as an example of Jinnah’s religious tolerance. She openly accuses the Indian view of Jinnah as an aberration of reality. Lenny considers that Partition was done as a favor of the British towards the Hindus and not the Muslims. She thinks that since Nehru is a Kashmiri, Kashmir was given to India, in spite of the fact that it is completely a Muslim dominated area. Lenny recalls:

“For now the tide is turned - and the Hindus are being favored over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favor Nehru over Jinnah” (CI 159).

It is this kind of favoritism, which becomes the sole cause for the misunderstanding of the many of the nationalistic terms and situation. It slowly and steadily leads to the false historiography of nationalism. To read the text as a representation of real history is to restore the repressive history of the nation to the central position. The marginalization of a nation’s political, cultural and social conditions is to be identified with a new reading of the historical texts. The violence necessarily grows out of the conditions of repression already exist in the Indian society. The implication behind the creation of ‘us’ and ‘them’ goes very deep into the memory of individuals.

The Pakistani perspective concentrates on the reappraisal of Jinnah’s character and the Britishers’ unfair nature towards him. It also focuses on the Indian abominations done against the Muslims of ‘the Punjab’. However, these Pakistani perspectives in the narration are expressed through Lenny. Before any communal violence, and talks of partition, Lenny was not much satirical of these Indian personalities like Gandhi, Nehru, and others. However, when the frightful tone of the novel changes, Lenny’s observation even changes. The notable distortion of Gandhi is dispensed with Lenny’s description of Gandhi’s visit to Lahore. The inconceivable facts about Gandhi had given Lenny the image of Gandhi as a man of illusion or apparition. Gandhi appeared to be a mythic figure to her. After meeting him in person, she wonders that Gandhi really exists. Suddenly Gandhi reaches out to Lenny and says that she is a “sickly-looking child”. He even advises her that, “An enema a day keeps the doctor away” (CI 87).

So far Lenny’s opinion remains negative about him. However, when Gandhi persistently looked at her, she realizes an unanticipated change in her attitude towards him. She thinks, “He is a man who loves women” (CI 87). When Gandhi touches Lenny’s face, she lowers her eyes in

shyness. Perhaps this may be the first time, where Gandhi is seen as a man with a dynamic feminine quality. The non-violent exterior of Gandhi has a hypnotic power. Apart from all the political reservation of Sidhwa, Gandhi is seen as a man who can cure the communal frenzy of the Partition days. Gandhi occupies the minds of the subaltern and their consciousness. The politics of Gandhi makes a powerful impression on the minds of the subaltern. Some of the minor characters in the novel criticize his political ways. The promise of nationalism to provide a nation to its people is not fulfilled. The subaltern elements were sacrificed for the sake of nationalism and further became fragmentary objects in the nation building process. Lenny and her inmates in her house listens to Jinnah's inaugural speech in the radio with the celebrations of the new nation. Jinnah in the Constituent Assembly asserts that they are all free and the State does not care for their religion, caste and creed. However, these promises of Jinnah were not kept.

It was the failure of the nation that the religious freedom was not given to the non-Muslims of the country. Ayah, a Hindu woman working as a servant in a Parsi family was forcibly converted into Islam and taken to Hira Mandi where Ice-candy-man marries her against her will. Forcible conversions become the system of the days. Moti and Papoo, who belong to the Hindu lower caste, convert themselves into Christianity to protect themselves from the wrath of Muslims. Hari, an orthodox Brahmin boy converted into Islam. Hari becomes Himat Ali. When the furious mob comes to Lenny's house to abduct Ayah, it also enquires Hari. There should be a clear, well-defined, and fixed meaning for the terms such as nation, nationalism and nation building process. The Partition violence were due to the inadequate understanding of the people. They were ignorant of their position and situation.

The past and the present guides further to the types of nationalism present in the novel. It appears that before the Partition, there were two different types of nationalism - Hindu nationalism and Muslim nationalism where the existence of the one was denied by the other. The undivided India comprised in it a Muslim majority state. The Muslim majority provinces of north-western and north-eastern India could be formed as a separate block. As the initial stages of the Partition movement, the separation of the country was not an agenda. The Pakistan movement as envisaged by Jinnah did not include the idea of separation. 'Pakistan' was to be a Muslim state within the geographical boundaries, to balance the Hindu dominated Hindustan. The aim of Pakistan meaning 'The Pure Land' was a Muslim answer to the Hindu oppression and Hindu capitalism. The subaltern characters feel that they are not secure enough under Hindu majority. This leads to the

inevitable formation of the two competing nationalisms. They appeared to be two distinct nations inhabiting one country, namely India. Of these two nationalisms, one is naturally seen as a dominant and the other is a subordinate. The dialectical relationship between the dominant and the subordinate is based on the inflectional movements of these two nationalisms.

The riots gets intense and deliberate against women. A kind of acclamation goes into the violence against women. The perpetrators of violence were pleased that they have disgraced the women of other religion and it becomes the mark of the courage, bravery and honor of the community. Ice-candy-man tells his friends about the train from Amritsar and the horrid scenes he has witnessed. He says, "I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women...The penises!" (CI 156). Dost Mohammad informs the villagers about the attacks of the Sikhs in the nearby villages, he recounts, "They are killing all Muslims. Setting fires, looting, parading the Muslim women naked through the streets - raping and mutilating them in the center of villages and in mosques" (CI 197). Ranna himself hears a woman crying, 'Do anything you want with me, but don't torment me...For God's sake, don't torture me!' (CI 200). Further, Ranna happens to see his own sister Khatija, "run stark naked into their courtyard, her long hair disheveled, her boyish body bruised, her lips cut and swollen and a bloody scab where her front teeth were missing" (CI 202). Muslim women were instructed to set fire to themselves when attacked by the Sikhs. It raises the question, "To whom or to what does a woman belong?" The representative figure for this question is Ayah. From the level of a Hindu servant maid in a Parsi family, Ayah is transformed into a subaltern figure of a prostitute. The relationship between the constitution of nation and the role of women in the process is reflected through her character. She loses her identity. Her abduction ushers the issue of the status of women in the building of the nation. Women cannot claim any space in a nation. Her homelessness drives her to Hira Mandi, "the Diamond Market" where she gets her identity of a "diamond" - dancing girl. The body of the woman becomes an object - political, patriarchal and ideological. They become dispossessed. Ayah is a semiotic signifier; the molestation of her body is equated with the molestation of India, as a territorial space. As a courtesan, she becomes a stock figure of the Muslim world. She desires to go back to her parents in Amritsar. Godmother finally rescues her and Ayah is sent to India as a rehabilitated woman. The Partition and nationalism have made her a victim of body politics.

In *CI*, the Parsi community is manifested as an enfeeble community which remains as a witnessing community to all the atrocities committed in the name of nationalism. Along with the

process of witness, the Parsi community shows its own views, attitude and crisis during the moments of transition. It shows the views of the minority community towards the Partition. The Parsis were caught between their historical past of wandering and settlement. Of course, some individuals vehemently participated in the freedom movement. However, the Parsis, in general, as a collective community, follow the non-committal attitude in all nationalistic movements. The promise lingers in the minds of the Parsis that they remain faithful to whoever rules the country. Col. Barucha, who is treated as the headman of the community in Lahore, is well aware of the situation. He explains the struggle is not for independence but for capturing power. He also clarifies that the Parsis cannot get power with the minority position. He says, “Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power: and if you jokers jump in to the middle you’ll be mangled into chutney” (CI 36). Further, Barucha advises the Parsis to stay out of trouble. Dr. Mody asks whether it is not a case of betrayal of neighbours. Col. Barucha answers that the Parsis cannot decide who their neighbour is.

The Parsis are afraid of two main reasons. The first fear arises out of the sociological condition and the second fear arises out of their religious condition. If they go to the side of the Hindus, they will definitely wipe out their business; if they go to the side of the Muslims, they will forcibly convert the Parsis into Islam. Col. Barucha continues, “Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land” (CI 39). He also warns the Parsis not to interfere with the political movement and they should respect the customs of their rulers. When somebody from the group asks, if Lahore is given to Pakistan, whether it will be safer for them to live under the Muslims. Col. Barucha answers him by saying that they have peacefully lived under the Muslim rulers for centuries. With all these apprehensions over the Partition, the Parsi people become a disabling community; the feeling of oppression does not make them as operative society in the political sphere. However, there are some exceptions in the Parsi milieu like Lenny, her mother and Godmother who are politically alive to the situation.

Conclusion

The novel describes the strategies of political and communal politics involved in the aching, multi-dimensional complex process of nation formation affecting the masses that were not responsible for the separation of the Indian subcontinent. Since the state formation process is so, the novel recaptures the various ideological in the process. Politicization of the religiosity of the subaltern group became an instrument. The Pakistani perception, the Parsi perception and the feministic

perception are all the metaphorical modes of expressing the politics, power, domination and differences at national level, racial level and gender level.

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