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# **WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF BAPSI SIDHWA AND NAMITA GOKHALE: A CRITICAL STUDY**

A  
DISSERTATION TO BE SUBMITTED TO  
SAURASHTRA UNIVERSITY, RAJKOT  
FOR THE AWARD OF  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**  
IN ENGLISH

**Supervised by:**

**Dr. Jaydipsinh Dodia**

Associate Professor  
S. H. Gardi Institute of English &  
Literary Studies,  
Saurashtra University,  
Rajkot, Gujarat.

**Submitted by:**

**Ms. Seema R. Gida**

Sr. Lecturer & Head of the English dept.  
Lt. Meenaben Kundalia Arts & Commerce  
Mahila College,  
Rajkot  
Gujarat.

**2006**



**STATEMENT UNDER UNIVERSITY ORDINANCE Ph.D. 7**

I hereby declare that the work embodied in my thesis entitled as **“WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF BAPSI SIDHWA AND NAMITA GOKHALE: A CRITICAL STUDY”**, prepared for Ph.D. degree has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University on any previous occasion.

And to the best of my knowledge, no work has been reported on the above subject.

And the work presented in this thesis is original and whenever references have been made to the work of others, they have been clearly indicated as such and the source of information is included in the bibliography.

**SUPERVISOR:**

**Dr. Jaydipsinh Dodia**  
Associate Professor  
S.H. Gardi Institute of English and  
Comparative Literary Studies,  
Saurashtra University,  
Rajkot, Gujarat

**Ms. Seema R. Gida**  
Research Student  
S.H. Gardi Institute of English  
and Comparative Literary Studies,  
Saurashtra University,  
Rajkot, Gujarat

## Acknowledgements

It is extremely difficult to select a topic for research, and it happens so in case of almost all the research scholars. Especially in the field of literature it is doubly difficult and painstaking to find a relevant topic if not an absolutely untrodden one for one's research. After much permutations and combinations, I could lay my hands on two prominent south Asian women writers namely Bapsi Sidhwa and Namita Gokhale. Both of them are contemporary writers and can very well be related to the present day situation and dilemmas; which makes things more authentic. Moreover both the writers have dealt with women characters with a realistic sting. I have limited my research to the critical analysis of the women characters in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa and Namita Gokhale. I myself being a woman could relate to the characters in a better way and enjoyed their journey through the crests and troughs of life. It is a research by a woman on women characters portrayed by women writers.

The aim of this research is to study the women characters portrayed by Bapsi Sidhwa and Namita Gokhale from different perspectives and patterns. It also aims to study the similarities and the dissimilarities between the two writers. Both have exhibited a realistic touch, have portrayed roller coaster ride of their women. Many traits of women are evident in their works. Both the writers have portrayed the life of a woman in the metros as well as a small place. I am deeply indebted to both Bapsi Sidhwa and Namita Gokhale who not only responded to my letter/emails in time but also provided me with some useful critical notes on their novels.

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Jaydipsinh.Dodia for guiding me in my research. He has always been there whether it is to suggest a method or a layout or suggesting a new angle for the research; he has done things humbly and with ease. I have yet to come across a person of his calibre and poise. He continued guiding his PhD. students including

myself even during the period of his Sabbatical leave. His systematic guidance and unfailing support has made this work a reality.

The blessings of my parents are with me in fulfilling the long cherished dream. My husband Sanjay's practical suggestions have helped me immensely in my work. My sisters Nayna, Geeta and Sheela have stood by my side and even both my nieces Janvi and Bharti's support cannot be undermined. I am equally thankful to my colleagues, the Librarian, the Computer Programmer Lt. Meenaben Kundalia College, Rajkot and Librarian Saurashtra University, Rajkot for helping me in getting the books that I needed for my research work. Words are inadequate to express my thanks to Principal B.R. Dhakan who has been a source of inspiration for me. She has always encouraged me to go ahead in all my academic ventures.

February 25,2006  
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Seema R. Gida

## CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>CHAPTER I</b> INTRODUCTION	<b>1 - 36</b>
<b>CHAPTER II</b> PARSI WOMEN AND TRIBAL WOMEN: PORTRAYED IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S NOVELS <u>THE CROW EATERS</u> AND <u>THE PAKISTANI BRIDE</u>	<b>37-66</b>
<b>CHAPTER III</b> SPIRITED WOMEN: A STUDY OF BAPSI SIDHWA'S NOVELS <u>THE ICE-CANDY MAN</u> AND <u>AN AMERICAN BRAT</u>	<b>67-99</b>
<b>CHAPTER IV</b> TOWARDS EMANCIPATION: A STUDY OF NAMITA GOKHALE'S <u>PARO: DREAMS OF PASSION</u> AND <u>GODS, GRAVES AND GRANDMOTHER</u>	<b>100-134</b>
<b>CHAPTER V</b> IN SEARCH OF ELUSIVE LOVE: A STUDY OF NAMITA GOKHALE'S <u>A</u> <u>HIMALAYAN LOVE STORY</u> AND <u>THE BOOK OF SHADOWS</u>	<b>135-178</b>
<b>CHAPTER VI</b> CONCLUSION	<b>179-186</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>187-210</b>

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Today it would be difficult to say whether it is Bollywood or Indian writing in English that is the biggest cultural export because such is the spread and power of Indian writing in English. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a surge, and it gained momentum with Salman Rushdie's The Midnight's Children. Earlier as in all other fields men were at the centre and it was so in the field of creative writing. Even some women writers used pseudonyms to conceal their identity. But with the passage of time, in the post modern age women are at the fore in almost all areas and so also in the field of creative writing they have acquired prominence. Moreover south Asian writing gained momentum in the past few decades. Especially 1980s saw a spurt of writers more specifically Indian writers writing in English. Writing in English acquired a fashionable stand and we have a full flight of writers writing in English. Few people realize; however, that South Asian English literature dates back to the late eighteenth century when Sake Dean Mohamet published his Travels (1794). Many vernacular Indian literatures developed in this era too. Indian English fiction however is very much a twentieth century phenomenon. By then English had become the language of political debate and the bridge between the Raj and the representatives of undivided India. Novelists such as Ahmed Ali, Mulk Raj Anand, G. V. Desani, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, were determined to forge their own voices, to provide a very different view of India to colonial writers. As a writer however, R.K. Narayan, towered over the others and his subtle, beautiful tales about the small town life remain timeless. South Asian writers began creating new linguistic paradigms for the English language and won literary prizes. Many of them have been widely translated. But V. S. Naipaul is the only English novelist of Indian extraction to have been a contender for the Nobel Prize. Today, South Asian fiction in English is the wonder of the literary world. South Asian writers are creating new linguistic paradigms for the English language and are constantly winning or being short-listed for major international literary



prizes. This year alone, the 1999 Booker shortlist included the distinguished Indian novelist, Anita Desai.

Across the Atlantic, a first collection by a young short story writer, Jhumpa Lahiri, won the 1999 O. Henry Award. *The New Yorker* named her as one of the twenty writers of the 21st century; a similar list by the *Observer* named the young Amit Chaudhuri. In fact South Asian English fiction is just very good and its immense salability today has spawned more and more talented writers. Even Pakistani English fiction, though greatly overshadowed by the sheer number of Indian novels, is emerging on its own. By 1980, the South Asian English novel had started to make its presence felt worldwide. There was also new literary dialogue in western academia, which recognized that some of the best English writing was coming from Britain's erstwhile colonies. In 1977, Anita Desai won the Winifred Holtby Award and the Royal Society of Literature Award.

In this era Bapsi Sidhwa, became the first Pakistani English writer, living in Pakistan, to receive international recognition since Ahmed Ali in 1940. The ribaldry of Sidhwa's first novel The Crow Eaters (1980) was rare for South Asian fiction. Hers was also the first major South Asian novel about the Parsee community to which she belongs; she also used the South Asian English dialogue of her characters extremely well to increase the novel's comedy. To date, Ice-Candy Man (1988) about the partition riots remains her most powerful and polished work. It was also the first Pakistani English novel to employ a narrative written in Pakistani English and is the only one to focus on the partition riots, which irrevocably changed and brutalized this region. Alongside Khushwant Singh's famous Train to Pakistan (1966) Chaman Nahal's Azadi (1975) and Shauna Singh Baldwin's What the Body Remembers (1999) also focuses on the traumas of Partition.

The feminist consciousness permeates the fiction of many South Asian writers ranging from Pakistani Bapsi Sidhwa, Rukhsana Ahmad to Indians Shashi Deshpande, Sunetra Gupta and Arundhati Roy. Roy's remarkable first novel The God of Small Things (1997) won the Booker Prize and was a book

of extraordinary accomplishment. She even was awarded a Sahitya Academy award for her recent book, which she declined. The erudite, multi-lingual Vikram Seth earned comparisons with Tolstoy for his gargantuan novel A Suitable Boy (1993) and Vikram Chandra was showered with praise for his epic Red Earth and Pouring Rain (1997). The concept of the great South Asian epic also lies at the heart of the Pakistani-born Adam Zameenzad's fourth novel, Cyrus, Cyrus (1990), a bawdy, ambitious work, revolving around a man's search for dignity and salvation across four continents. First there was the word, and then came the story. And since then endless tales have been told and retold. Weaving those skeins into a tapestry are many feminine hands authoritatively wielding the pen or the word processor. It is not that writing has suddenly happened to Indian women authors; they have been writing for a while. As author-journalist Sagarika Ghose says:

From Ismat Chughtai, Krishna Sobti, Kusum Ansal, Kamala Das, Mahasweta Devi, Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Indian women writers have been writing for decades.<sup>1</sup>

The major voices among the Indian women writers in English are Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Namita Gokhale, Anees Jung, Eunice de Souza, and Kamala Markandaya to Imtiaz Dharker, Nisha Da Cunha, Urvashi Butalia, and Geeta Hariharan. Then came Arundhati Roy followed by Margaret Mascarenhas, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Jaishree Misra, Anita Nair, Brinda Charry, Esther David, Anita Pratap, Ameeta Rathore, Bulbul Sharma, Radhika Jha, Arundhati Subramaniam and Gayatri Majumdar, Taslima Nasrin, Kamila Shamshie, Geeta Mehta and others. The floodgates show no sign of closing. So where are all the women writers coming from? Did The God Of Small Things open the doors? Are more women storming the publishing houses? Whatever the answers to these questions, what is beyond doubt is that more and more books by women authors are hitting the bookshelves. What is encouraging is that they are eliciting a more positive response from the publishing world. Sagarika Ghose observes:

What is new is the media and market explosion. The media has suddenly woken up to 'attractive faces' and so it seems as if women writers have suddenly emerged when in fact they have been writing quietly for years. 2

Market economy seems to be the dominating factor. The author of Mixed Marriages And Other Stories, Meher Pestonji seems uncertain:

I don't think women writers are suddenly 'happening' in India. It's more that publishing has come of age with international publishers like Picador, Penguin, and HarperCollins setting up shops in India. So, more writers — women and men — are getting published. Whatever the future holds for writers of our subcontinent will affect male and female writers equally.3

Jaishree Misra, author of Ancient Promises and Accidents like Love and Marriage, believes that,

There is probably some truth in the idea that women get more easily published now. There's more acceptance generally about their sale ability, more respect for their skills and crucially, they have more readers now than ever before.4

An emerging Indian woman writer Manjula Padmanabhan agrees:

There's a new market for women's writing — perhaps because women have more of their own money to spend and can choose to spend it on reading other women.5

Manjula Padmanabhan's view is revelent to the present situation of women in India. With the economic independence the whole scenario has changed; it has brought a lot of change in the system. Relationships are changing; man-woman relationship has taken a new dimension. Nisha da Cunha, author of several fine collections of short stories, cuts a mid path and opines:

I would think that it is a combination of both —  
Indian women writers are happening and  
publishers have woken up to them. Nowadays,  
there are many more publishers who are ready to  
indulge and experiment with authors. 6

Namita Gokhale, writer and publisher, however does not share the perception that the publishing world has woken to Indian women writers finally. While it is sometimes argued that Indian writers in English do not take sufficient interest in matters of public interest and policy, it is not a charge that one can carry too far. Would one exhort dancers and painters too to play a proactive role in public debates? While it is true that, compared to certain western countries or compared to writers in some other Indian languages, the Indian English writers tend to intervene far less frequently in public debates, this must be put against the perspective of the very short history and the small number of practitioners who constitute the world of Indian writing in English. And then, against a Vikram Seth or a VS Naipaul who keep a lower profile, there is also a Sagarika Ghose or a Namita Gokhale or even an Indrajit Hazra or a Rajkamal Jha who are deep in the business of news and opinion.

For centuries children have gathered around their grandmothers' knees to listen to tales. Women have been unofficial storytellers to generations. But when it came to documenting literature, men historically dominated the role of authors, said leading women writers at a seminar organized by a Delhi based NGO, *Interventions For Support, Healing & Awareness*. Top women writers including Mridula Garg, Shobha De, Manju Kapur, and Urvashi Butalia---director of Kali for Women, a women- specific publishing house---agreed that

the age of the woman writer has indeed arrived. Women are talking about sex, about men, and are expressing their feelings in no uncertain terms.

In a way, contemporary Indian writing owes a debt of substance to these women writers who have taken off from the literary launch pad and are soaring comfortably in the world of serious readers. Their settings are usually the everyday world of a middle class family, as many of these new women writers are themselves housewives and mothers. Shobha De, who writes six to eight hours a day on an average, says that the 'chaos of domesticity' provides the trigger for her writing process. Award winning bilingual author Mridula Garg began writing after marriage. Though she says she enjoyed her children, she did not find her life fulfilling enough till she put pen to paper. Explaining the sudden success of these ladies Dom Moraes once said in an interview:

Their themes are really feminine, close to the home and hearth. "But times are changing. Though women writers have managed a spectacular absorption of these domestic situations to ignite their literary fire, their writings these days often go beyond 'hearth and home' many modern-day women authors are now expressing themselves freely and boldly and on a variety of themes. Though there may still be cases of the occasional male envy, these new writers are not holding back in expressing the point of view from a feminine eye without adopting feminist postures. 7

We will focus on the women writers' writing in English and discuss some prominent south Asian literary women writers writing in English, in alphabetical order.

Anita Desai, an eminent writer, was born on June 24, 1937 in India to a German mother and an Indian father. She grew up during World War II. She has taught at Mt. Holyoke and Smith Colleges and is a member of the Advisory Board for English in New Delhi. She currently teaches at MIT. She is married and has four children. Her recent novel Fasting, Feasting has been listed for Booker prize. Her other works include: Journey to Ithaca, Baumgartner's Bombay, In Custody, Clear Light of Day, Games at Twilight and other Stories, Bye-Bye Black Bird, Cry the Peacock, The voices in the City, Fire on the Mountain, Where Shall We Go This Summer?

Anita Nair was working as the creative director of an advertising agency in Bangalore when she wrote her first book - a collection of short stories called Satyr of the Subway. She sold it to Har-Anand Press. The book won her a fellowship from the Virginia Centre for Creative Arts. Her second book was published by Penguin India, and was the first book by an Indian author to be published by Picador USA. She lives in Bangalore. Her other works include: Malabar Mind, Ladies Coupe and so on.

Arundhati Roy was born in 1961 in Bengal and grew up in Kerala. She was trained as an architect at the Delhi School of Architecture, but abandoned the field and became better known for her complex, scathing film scripts. Her first book The God of Small Things, which was published in 1997. The half-million pound advance on this book, more than Vikram Seth's for A Suitable Boy, shot her to fame again. Her other non-fictional works include: Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire, The Cost of Living, End of Imagination and Algebra of Infinite Justice.

Attia Hosain was born in Lucknow in 1913. She studied in La Martiniere school and Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow, and learnt Persian, Urdu and Arabic at home. She became a journalist and writer of short stories. In 1947 she moved to England with her husband and children, and produced a women's Programme on the BBC for several years. Attia Hosain died on 25 January 1998. Her novel Sunlight on a Broken Column focuses on the traumas of partition.

Bapsi Sidhwa is an internationally acclaimed Pakistani writer. She has to her credit four novels, short stories and essays. She is a Parsi by faith living in Pakistan. Her works include: The Crow Eaters (1990), Ice-Candy Man (1988) The Pakistani Bride, (1990) An American Brat (1993) and a collection of short stories. She is well known for her novel The Ice-Candy Man, which chronicles the partition. The Crow Eaters narrates the Parsi life and ways, it can be considered as a Parsi saga. Her art of story telling is marvellous. She has an excellent sense of humour. Bapsi Sidhwa will be discussed at length later on.

Bharti Mukherjee is undoubtedly the grand dame of Diasporic Indian Literature. Born in Calcutta, India, in 1940, she grew up in a wealthy traditional family. She studied in a Bengali-medium school for the first few years, and learnt English when she traveled with her family for three years in Europe at the age of eight. She attended the universities of Calcutta and Baroda. She earned her master of fine arts and Ph.D. in English from the University of Iowa. She married Canadian author Clark Blaise in 1963, immigrated to Canada in the mid-1960s. She was teaching English at McGill University in Montreal when she began writing fiction. She won the National Book Critics' Circle Award for best fiction for her work The Middleman and Other Stories. She has taught creative writing at Columbia University, New York University, and Queens College, and is currently professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley. She has two sons. Her other works are: Desirable Daughters, Leave it to me, Tiger's Daughter, Wife, Jasmine.

Esther David comes from the Bene Israel Jewish community in India. She grew up in Ahmedabad, where her father Joshua, a hunter-turned-veterinarian, founded the Ahmedabad Zoo. She was trained as a sculptor and lectures extensively on art history at the School of Architecture, School of Interior Design and National Institute of Fashion Technology. She is currently working for the development of art in underprivileged areas in Gujarat. She writes in both English and Gujarati, often focusing on the history and culture of

the dwindling Jewish community in India. She is a columnist for the Indian Express and also writes in Gujarati journals.

Githa Hariharan grew up in Bombay and Manali. She continued her studies in the US and worked with public television there. Returning to India in 1979, she has worked in Bombay, Madras and New Delhi, initially as an editor in a publishing house, and later as a freelance writer. She is married and she has two sons, and she lives in New Delhi with her family. Her first book The Thousand Faces of Night won the Commonwealth Prize for the best first novel. In response to a lawsuit by Githa Hariharan, the Indian Supreme Court decided in 2000 that the mother was also the natural legal guardian of a child. Her other works are: The Art of Dying, When Dreams Travel, and The Winning Team.

Gita Mehta was born in Delhi, into a well-known political family. Her father, Biju Patnaik, was a freedom fighter and a long time political leader of Orissa before his death in 1997. She was educated in India and at Cambridge. She lives in New York, London and Delhi, and spends at least three months of every year in India. Her works include Raj, Karma Cola, and A River Sutra.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in 1967 in London, and grew up in Rhode Island. She has traveled several times to India, where both her parents were born and raised. She graduated with a B.A. in English literature from Barnard College. Eventually, Lahiri did enter Boston University, and received an M.A. in English, an M.A. in Creative Writing, and an M.A. in Comparative Literature and the Arts, and a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies. She currently lives in New York City. Three of Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories have appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1998. Her debut collection, Interpreter of Maladies, came out in early 1999, and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The Namesake is her other work.

Kamala Markandaya's strength as a novelist comes from her sensitive creation of individual characters and situations. Her prose style is mellifluous



and controlled. She is a pioneer member of the Indian Diaspora, and her best novel, The Nowhere Man (1972) foreshadows many diasporic issues with which we are preoccupied today. Kamala Purnaiya was born into a Hindu-Brahmin family in a small town in Mysore in 1924. She was a journalist and social worker. In 1948, she left India to get married to an Englishman named Taylor. Markandaya is the author of ten novels: Nectar in a Sieve (1954), Some Inner Fury (1955), A Silence of Desire (1960), Possession (1963), A Handful of Rice (1966), The Coffer Dams, The Nowhere Man (1972), Two Virgins (1973), The Golden Honeycomb (1977), and Pleasure City (titled Shalimar in the American edition, 1982/1983).

Kamila Shamsie was born in Karachi in 1973. Her first novel, In the City by the Sea was described as riveting in several reviews, and won the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. Shamsie was born into a literary family. Kamila Shamsie studied at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, where the seeds of her first novel were sown in a short story she wrote for a class. She went on to a graduate Programme in creative writing at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Shamsie currently teaches creative writing at Hamilton College in New York. Broken Verses, Kartography and Salt and Saffron, are some of her works.

Kiran Desai was born in India in 1971, and educated in India, England and the United States. She is the daughter of Anita Desai. She now travels between the three countries, and says she feels 'no alienation or dislocation'. She spent four years writing her first novel, and says it is not at all autobiographical. She is currently a student in Columbia University's creative writing course. Her works include: Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard and The Inheritance of Loss.

Lavanya Shankran attended Bryn Mawr College and has worked in investment banking in New York and consulting in India. She lives in Bangalore, where she is currently at work on her first novel, A Red Carpet.

Manju Kapur teaches English at Miranda House in Delhi. Her first novel, Difficult Daughters, received the Commonwealth Award for the Eurasian region. Her other work is A Married Woman.

Maniza Naqvi was born in 1960 in Lahore, Pakistan, and now lives in Washington DC and works at the World Bank. Her work is in the areas of peace, poverty alleviation, demobilization of militaries and building good governance at community levels in post conflict countries. Oxford University Press published her first novel, Mass Transit, in 1998. It is set in Karachi, and focuses on the departures and arrivals; the orientations and disorientations; the integrations and disintegrations of migration and immigration, through the lives of three families. Her recent novel, On Air weaves its plot around the theme of loss, love, desire and death.

Manjula Padmanabhan is an artist, illustrator, cartoonist, playwright and novelist. She has illustrated 21 children's books, and has had a long running cartoon strip. Her short stories are marked by a wry sense of humour. Padmanabhan's latest book, Getting There is a semi-autobiographical novel about a young woman illustrator in Bombay. Manjula Padmanabhan was born in Delhi, grew up in Sweden, Pakistan and Thailand, and now lives in Delhi. Her works include: Kleptomania, Hot death and Cold Soup.

Meher Pestonji is a freelance journalist, has participated in the campaign to change rape law in the '70s, the struggle of slum dwellers' housing rights, children's rights, anti-communalism campaigns and detailed reporting on the SriKrishan Commission instituted to investigate the Bombay riots of 1992-93. Mixed Marriage and Other Parsi Stories is her well-known work.

Meena Alexander was born in Allahbad, India, on February 17, 1951, the eldest of three children. She moved to Sudan when she was five, and attended school in Khartoum. She was a precocious child, learning to read early and publishing her poetry (in Arabic translation) at age fifteen in Sudanese newspapers. She went to England for higher education and later

returned to India to teach in Delhi and Hyderabad. She moved to New York in 1979, married, and got a job as an assistant professor of English at Fordham University. She teaches in the writing program at Columbia University, and lives in New York. In 1999 the City University of New York awarded her a distinguished professorship. Her works include: Raw Silk, Night-scene and the garden, Stone Roots, House of Thousand Doors.

Nabaneeta Dev Sen, born in 1938 is one of the most beloved Bengali writers today. Her publications are diverse, ranging from children's literature, humor, fiction and poetry to literary criticism and autobiographical essays. She was formerly married to Amartya Sen, who later went on to win the Bharat Ratna and the Nobel Prize for Economics (1998). They have two children, Antara and Nandana. Among her honours, she has received the Padma Shree (2000), the Sahitya Akademi, the Kabir Samman, the Rabindra Puraskar and the Samskriti Award. She is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Vice President of the Indian National Comparative Literature Association. She has delivered the Radhakrishnan Memorial Lecturer at Oxford in 1996-97. She has been a Visiting Professor at many universities.

Namita Gokhale born in 1956 was a 17-year-old college girl when she met her future spouse, Rajiv Gokhale, the son of the law minister in Indira Gandhi's cabinet. They were married in 6 months, and moved to Bombay where Gokhale worked as a film journalist. In the late 70s, she edited *Super*, a film magazine, along with her husband. Her first novel, Paro: Dreams of Passion, created a stir by its frankness in the early 80s, and pioneered the sexually frank genre, which made Shobha De famous. It deals with the satire of Delhi's upper class. Gokhale was stricken with cancer of the uterus while finishing *Paro*, and barely survived. A few years later her husband, who had been drinking heavily, died of cirrhosis of the liver. While bringing up two daughters, she has written four books and continues to work as a journalist. Namita Gokhale lives in Delhi. Her works include: Paro: Dreams of Passion (1999), Gods, Graves and Grandmother (2001), A Himalayan Love

Story(2002), Mountain Echoes, The Book of Shiva, The Book of Shadows (2001) and Shakuntala: A Play of Memories (2006).

Nayantara Sahgal was born in 1927 into a political family: her uncle, Jawaharlal Nehru, was India's first prime minister; her mother Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was the country's first ambassador to the U.N.; Indira Gandhi was her first cousin. She was educated in Lucknow and Wellesley College (BA, 1947). She served as India's Ambassador to Italy for a short while when Indira Gandhi was thrown out of power in the elections after the Emergency. Sahgal's unique upbringing informs her fiction and her political writing, beginning with her memoir Prison and Chocolate Cake (Alfred A. Knopf, 1954). Her novels, which are often set against the backdrop of pivotal events in Indian history, include A Time to Be Happy; Her novels Rich like Us and Mistaken Identity are published in the U.S.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair studied at Calcutta and Cambridge, where she received her doctorate in linguistics in 1982. She currently teaches English at IIT, New Delhi. Her works include the poetry collections The Hyoid Bone and Technobrat.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was born in Germany of Polish parents and came to England in 1939 at the age of twelve. She graduated from Queen Mary College, London University, and married an Indian architect. Silence, exile and Cunning: the fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala. Her works include Heat and Dust, To Whom She Will (1955), The Nature of Passion (1956), The House Holder (1960), Get Ready for Battle (1962) and A New Dominion (1973).

Shama Futehally was born in Bombay in 1952. She studied English at the universities of Bombay and Leeds. She taught English and Cultural History for eight years in Bombay and Ahmedabad. She moved to Delhi and spent most of the last few decades there. She was married to an IAS officer, and had two children. She had two anthologies of short stories, and her first novel, Tara Lane, won great critical acclaim. She had also written a collection

of children's stories with Githa Hariharan, titled Sorry, Best Friend, and translated Urdu ghazals. Shama Futehally died on 3 Dec 2004.

Sara Suleri was born in Pakistan before Partition. Her father, Zia Ahmed Suleri, was a well-known journalist who was the editor of *The Pakistan Times*, and was jailed for his disagreements with the Bhutto regime. Her Welsh mother renamed herself to Surraya after marriage. Sara Suleri has four sisters and a brother, and much of her personal writing wanders between the intimate family relationships and the political times through which they lived. Her first book, Meatless Days, is a nuance memoir that she described in a 1990 interview as an intermingling of her own history with that of Pakistan. Her other works include: The Rhetoric of English India, Boys will be Boys: A Daughter's Elegy. etc.

Shashi Deshpande is the second daughter of the famous Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Sriranga. She was born in Dharwad in Karnataka, South India and was educated in Dharwad, Bombay and Bangalore. Deshpande has degrees in Economics and Law, which she finished with a Gold Medal. After marriage, when she was living in Bombay she did a course in journalism and started working. She is a winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel, That Long Silence. Her other works are: Moving On, The Intrusion and other Stories, Come up and be dead, Roots and Shadows, The Dark Hold No Terrors, If I Die Today, Come Up and Be Dead, The Binding Vine and A Matter of Time.

Shauna Singh Baldwin was born in Montreal and grew up in India. She is the author of English Lessons and Other Stories and coauthor of A Foreign Visitor's Survival Guide to America. Her short fiction, poetry, and essays have been published in literary magazines in the U.S.A., Canada, and India. Her works include: The Tiger Claw, What the Body Remembers.

Shobha De has had diverse careers as a model, a copywriter, and the first editor of Stardust and Society. She has published seven novels, which have been extremely successful. The erotic content of her novels has been

somewhat controversial, with some reviewers being contemptuous of her work while others suggest that she is countering the taboos held by many women writers. Khushwant Singh was an early supporter of her work, but recently said that she is running out of ideas. She is married, with six children, and lives in Bombay. Starry Nights (1991), Socialite Evenings (1988), Sultry Days (1993), Sisters (1992), Second Thoughts (1996), Strange Obsession (1992), Snapshots (1995), and Selective Memories: Stories from My Life (1998). It is said of De that she has been the queen of the written word. She has to say: "I disagree that I am marketing the Shobha De personality".<sup>8</sup> It can be said in her defense that she has never defrauded or deceived her public; of late, there has been a basic decency in all her writing; she has always had the courage to defy conventional norms; her writing is devoid of sentimentality and that through her fourteen books and prolific journalism, she has devised a new style of celebrity journalism.

Taslima Nasreen is a Bangladeshi writer who has published poetry, essays, a syndicated newspaper column, and novels. She has received awards in India and Bangladesh for her work. She sprang into international consciousness when her novel, Shame, which depicts Muslim persecution of Bangladesh's Hindu minority, brought forth a death threat from Islamic militants. She had to flee from Bangladesh and lived in Sweden for some time. To "Times of India" she spoke: "For me secularism is a state where no religion exists. I don't believe in God."<sup>9</sup> Though she condemns men, she has male friends and they have always stood up to her at the time of crisis.

Uma Parameswaran was born in Madras and grew up in Jabalpur, where her father was a Professor of Physics. She went to college in Nagpur, where she got a bachelor's and master's degree in English. She was a Fulbright Scholar and received an M.A. in Creative Writing (Indiana University) and a Ph.D. in English (Michigan State University, 1972). She has lived in Winnipeg, Canada since 1966. She is married to a mathematician and has one daughter. She is currently a Professor of English at the University of Winnipeg. Her areas of research are English Romantics, Post Colonial Literatures, Women's Literature, and South Asian Canadian Literature.

Yasmine Gooneratne holds a Personal Chair in English Literature at Macquarie University, New South Wales. Born in Sri Lanka, educated at Bishop's College, Colombo, she graduated from the University of Ceylon in 1959, received a PhD in English Literature from Cambridge University in 1962, and in 1981 received the first (and up to date, only) higher doctoral degree of Doctor of Letters (D. Litt.) ever awarded by Macquarie University. From 1989 to 1993 she was the Foundation Director of her University's Postcolonial Literatures & Languages Research Centre. In 1990 she was created an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to literature and education. Yasmine Gooneratne married Dr Brendan Gooneratne, physician, environmentalist and historian, in 1962. They have two children, a son and a daughter, and live in Sydney. Her works include: Masterpiece and other Stories, A Change of Skies.<sup>10</sup>

Bapsi Sidhwa, born on August 11, 1938, in Karachi and brought up in the city of Lahore. Initially she found it difficult to publish her work but later on became one of the well-known writers. She is an important author of Pakistani origin who writes in English. An active social worker among Asian women, she represented Pakistan at the Asian Women's Congress in 1975. Author of The Ice Candy Man, which won the 1991 Liberator Prize in Germany, she also received a writer's grant of US \$105,000 from the Lila Wallace Readers Digest Fund. Sidhwa was a solitary and lonely child. Her parents were advised by doctors not to send her to school. She spent her time daydreaming and listening to stories told by servants. She writes about servant's lives with such sympathy because she came to know their world, as a child, better than the society her parents moved in. A governess taught her to read and write and introduced her to Little Women, which made a great impression. She spent her teen years reading voraciously. During this period she had a series of operations as a result of which the problem with her leg more or less vanished. For a while she joined Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore and did her BA from there, but says she was very unschooled in life and had no perception of gender discrimination for this she blamed herself and thought there was something wrong with her. But later on she became the Queen of

words and wrote very good novels. She is married with three children and divides her time between the US where she teaches and Lahore where she lives. She married for a second time Noshir Sidhwa. She is of Parsi Zoroastrian background, and has depicted Parsi life, customs, and the Zoroastrian religion in great detail in most of her works. She is also the recipient of many awards, including the Sitara-e-Imtiaz, Pakistan's highest honor. Before she became a writer, Bapsi Sidhwa spent about six years in India where she moved after her first marriage at the age of 19. Though, that marriage resulted in a divorce after which Sidhwa returned to Pakistan, she feels that the experience of having lived in India became crucial to her writing in both, The Crow Eaters and Ice-Candy Man. Living in Bombay, that big city, then visiting it very frequently after divorce, was very important to her writing. The interaction with the larger [Parsi] community really opened new vistas of life; the interaction with a big city developed new horizons. Earlier this year, Sidhwa traveled to London for production of a stage play, 'Sock 'em With Honey' which was based on parts of her most recent novel, The American Brat. These are the feelings that society brings out in women in Pakistan and accounts for the terrible sense of inferiority that so many girls have. In her case it was accentuated by polio. Sidhwa was nine when Partition took place. She has memories of fires and flames and people chanting and roaring. She recalls, in her most well known novel The Ice-Candy Man even the girl narrator, Lenny also suffers from polio. The novel has a biographical glimpse. Sidhwa was born in Karachi, Pakistan, but her family moved shortly thereafter to Lahore. She currently resides in Houston, Texas (where she has lived for the past several decades) and maintains a rigorous schedule of conference speaking. She has previously taught at the University of Mt. Holyoke, University of Rice. As a vocal proponent of women's rights in South Asia, she has also infused her works with strong female characters. Sidhwa is currently editing an anthology of stories about Lahore and is writing the book version of Deepa Mehta's film "Water". Literature in Pakistan has evolved its own identity, but has also become the socio-cultural document of an era of hope and hardships. She is the world's only Pakistani, Zoroastrian, and woman novelist. Through her first novel, Bapsi Sidhwa discovered a love for writing. The Bride took four years to complete because, she wrote it then re-wrote it.



But the experience was so joyful and rich that soon after completing The Bride, she started working on her second novel, The Crow Eaters, a lively and humorous story about the Parsi community of Pakistan. Success didn't come to Bapsi Sidhwa without a lot of hard work. She wrote her first two novels in Pakistan where no one was publishing in English at the time. So, after receiving many rejections, Sidhwa decided to self-publish and self-distribute The Crow Eaters. It was very frustrating to visit publishers and request them to, read the book. Publishers would show little interest, often criticizing the title of the book. The process was so discouraging that Sidhwa stopped writing for about five years. In 1980, after receiving a copy of Sidhwa's self-published The Crow Eaters, Britain's Jonathon Cape decided to publish it. Sidhwa believes that as a writer, all of her work has some degree of autobiographical elements. She based the parents' characters in The Crow Eaters on her own parents. In Ice-Candy Man the child protagonist, Lenny, is reminiscent of Sidhwa's own childhood. Like Lenny, Sidhwa too suffered from polio as a child due to that, she was not sent to school and had frequent visits to the hospital. She speaks of her city, Lahore fondly:

I can write a lot more in Lahore than I can write anywhere else... Lahore does have a very romantic atmosphere and it does release some type of a creative energy.<sup>11</sup>

Bapsi Sidhwa's latest project is a collection of short stories for which she feels she may just have to return to Lahore to complete.

She has memories of her childhood days and describes one incident. When her Muslim cook came charging out of the kitchen, swearing and cursing at a group of men, until they went away, sheepishly. They had come to loot the house thinking it a Hindu home. In an earlier interview, (Shamsie, *Dawn*, Karachi, 3.4.1987) she said the scene was to provide her with "the nucleus of the plot for Ice-Candy-Man and some of its characters" (Shamsie, *Dawn*, Karachi, 23.3.1989). Sidhwa's childhood was difficult. She contracted polio at two, which paralyzed her leg and affected her entire life. She has

used the experience to great advantage in her third novel Ice-Candy-Man about Partition, which is narrated by Lenny, a canny, Parsee child. In an interview (Shamsie, *Dawn*, Karachi, 20.1.00) Sidhwa said:

I started writing Ice Candy Man using the first person narrative voice of a child; I had to at once distance myself from the character of Lenny. Had I not done so, I would have been too self-conscious to write the circumstances of my life, but Lenny is a very different child. She is feisty and shrewd, when I was quiet and docile. I have based some characters, like Mother, Father, and Godmother, on people I've known intimately, but I've put them through all sorts of fictional situations.<sup>12</sup>

The earlier parts of Ice-Candy-Man are perhaps closest to autobiography. This multi-lingual, multi-cultural background is pivotal to Sidhwa's work. In 1989 Sidhwa was Assistant Professor on the MFA Writing Programme at Columbia University, in 1991 a Visiting Scholar at the Rockefeller Foundation Study Centre, Bellagio, in 1997 a Professor of English and Writer-in-Residence at Mount Holyoke College, and in 1998-1999 a Fannie Hurst Writer-in-Residence at Brandeis University. From 2000 to 2001 she held a Postcolonial Teaching Fellowship at Southampton University, England. Her novels have been translated into several languages.

The Parsis adopt the flavour of whichever country they are in. She was brought up in an environment of segregation in childhood; partly because of her handicap and partly Lahore had few Parsis. Hence she lived in a closet, mostly with the servants. It was only after her marriage she went to Bombay and was exposed to the vast world of the metropolitan city as well the Parsis. This was an enchanting experience. . More than marriage it was mingling with the community at large created new vistas for the writer. But she did not stay for long in Bombay instead returned to Pakistan and remarried a Parsi businessman in Lahore, Noshir Sidhwa, her present husband. Life was quite

idle playing bridge and doing voluntary work. Life in Lahore was uneventful compared to the life in Bombay. She was a Parsi in Pakistan and a woman. All these aspects helped her in writing; though initially they were hurdles. Sidhwa gives her view pertaining to the life in U.S.A. and the writing skills:

As a woman, it has given me a tremendous amount of freedom. The sense of being able to just take off, on your own, without having to have company. In Pakistan and India, we tend to move in bunches and do things together, and you're always part of a family, or a group. Here, you don't carry so much "baggage" with you when you take off. No, it wasn't that hard really. Phillip Lopate at the University of Houston suggested that I teach, to which I replied, "How can I teach with just a bachelor's degree from Punjab University?" And he said, "You've published two very good novels -- that is like getting several PhDs! You're qualified to teach Creative Writing." I went into it with a lot of hesitation because I didn't have role models. But, I did it and I have enjoyed it. 13

Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the first Pakistanis to write novels in English. She gives her views pertaining to writing. She believes in the viewpoint that well began is half done sort of thing. According to her if things are set right in the beginning, automatically things fall in line. She tells:

The first paragraph of any novel sets the tone, voice and mood. A book's DNA is contained within these first few words. The subconscious has worked it out, and one paragraph gives birth to another. There are so many lines and threads, which enrich a story. 14

Sidhwa had finished two novels, The Bride and The Crow eaters, but had no ready publishers. In 1978, she decided to play the publisher herself and went public with The Crow eaters. Fame followed immediately. The Crow eaters were published in India in 1979. A British edition of the same novel came out in 1982, and an American one in 1983. The Bride, which was actually the first novel that Sidhwa had written, was first printed in Britain, in 1983 -- the story based on the incident of a runaway bride that Sidhwa said she had to tell.

She has a natural inclination to see humour even in tragedies -- which critics generally agree is the mark of a brilliant storyteller. At another place, she is quoted as saying that being a member of a minority community in Pakistan; she could see things more objectively than others.

Bapsi Sidhwa was born in Karachi and brought up in Lahore on either side of the partition in 1947. That she belonged to a minority may have helped her being easily 'ignored' or disowned by the vocal majority in Pakistan who are prone to view most honest attempts at writing as attempts to violate their faith in purity. She might even have been mistaken for an Indian writer in her home country -- something that could perhaps still be established by a survey of casual readers in Pakistan. Sidhwa lets her own nightmare to be expressed through Lenny; views on Sidhwa are: Bapsi Sidhwa, a Parsi Pakistani national, has depicted the horrors of the traumatic events of the partition leading to arson, death and destruction. The secure world of the girl- child narrator suddenly loses its charm as she quietly, unobtrusively marks from innocence to experience. In Ice- Candy Man, Sidhwa lets her own nightmare to be expressed through Lenny:

Bapsi Sidhwa, a Parsi Pakistani national, has depicted the horrors of the traumatic events of the partition leading to arson, death and destruction. The secure world of the girl-child narrator suddenly loses its charm as she quietly

unobtrusively moves from innocence to experience. 15

Bapsi Sidhwa is Pakistan's leading diasporic writer. She has produced four novels in English that reflect her personal experience of the Indian subcontinent's Partition, abuse against women, immigration to the US, and membership in the Parsi/Zoroastrian community. As all success stories must be explained in terms of personal qualities and circumstances that shaped these qualities, much effort has been spent on identifying the traits that distinguish Bapsi Sidhwa from other writers of the time. She is a born storyteller. Sidhwa's views on writing skill are depicted thus:

She has a "natural inclination to see humour even in tragedies" -- which critics generally agree is the mark of a brilliant storyteller. At another place, she is quoted as saying that being a member of a minority community in Pakistan, she could see things more objectively than others. In the ultimate analysis though, it is her subjectivity, her sensitivity to the subject she has chosen to write on, together with her love for being precise yet subtle in her description of certain situations that she has written about, that makes the internationally acclaimed mix. It is true of her, and true of all writers of 'merit'. The precision comes after a writer works at her or his craft, and should usually include a course on how to write on a subject without necessarily stirring a public controversy. 16

Namita Gokhale is a voice to reckon with in the post Rushdie era of Indian writing in English. The author is well-known for her works like Paro: Dreams of Passion in which she talks of love, lust and death in equal measure. Her personal experiences have shaped her works. Her eventful life

has provided her with a vast canvas for her work. Gokhale's other books such as A Himalayan Love Story (2002), Gods, Graves, and Grandmother (2001), and The Book of Shadows (1999) also have strong female characters that deal with love, lust, death, and often the supernatural. Gokhale is a journalist in Delhi whose work focuses on women's issues and literary criticism. Her first book Paro: Dreams of Passion published in 1984; exhibited the stark reality of the contemporary society.

Namita Gokhale spent her childhood between New Delhi and Nainital, in the foothills of the Himalayas. Together with her husband Rajiv Gokhale, whom she married when she was eighteen, she published the film magazine *Super* from Bombay in the late seventies. Gokhale wrote her first book, Paro: Dreams of Passion in 1984. This satire upon the New Delhi and Mumbai elite received much recognition and caused uproar due to its explicit depiction of sexuality. During the writing of her second book, Gods, Graves and Grandmother (1994), Gokhale fell seriously ill. Shortly afterwards her husband died. The experience of love and passion, illness and death, has shaped Gokhale's work. For the author the act of writing implies not only a therapeutic act, but also a general expansion of the limits of experience: Every book that is written sincerely involves a certain amount of the paranormal, because the aim of the author is to harness a way of seeing beyond her own limitations and increase the limits of the reader's experience. Her novel The Book of Shadows (1999) tells the story of a young woman lecturer whose fiancé has killed him. His sister makes her responsible for the incident and deforms her by throwing acid on her face. The young woman learns to handle her pain in a remote house in the Himalayan Mountains, where the violent fate of its former inhabitants is played before her inner eyes. This grotesque and vividly narrated work has been compared to Isabel Allende's "House of Spirits". She in her own words describes the novel as "Strange". Gokhale's most recent novel, Shakuntala: The Play of Memory (2005), first appeared in Hindi translation before the English edition was published. The plot is inspired by the over thousand year old drama "Shakuntalam", written in Sanskrit by the Indian poet Kalidasa. The story is of a young woman who learns through a blind priest about the mystery of her former life, which she must now come to

terms with. It plays with the recurring theme of memory and desire. More than one critic has compared it to Hermann Hesse's "Siddhartha". Once again, Gokhale links a woman's tragic love story to religion, the history of the country and philosophy.

The author has also written two books of essays. The Book of Shiva (2001) is an erudite and impassioned examination of the Hindu God of death and regeneration. Mountain Echoes (1998) is a book of oral biography featuring the reminiscences of a generation of older women from the Kumaon Himalayas. Her other novels include A Himalayan Love Story, a haunting novel about romantic love and fatalism. She has also retold the Indian epic The Mahabharata for young readers, to be published in 2006. In addition to her literary lure, she works as a publisher and literary critic for important Indian newspapers. Gokhale spends her time between New Delhi and the lake district of Kumaon, in the Himalayas. She is currently working on a new novel, a generational saga titled Things to leave behind, which examines continuity and change in the Indian subcontinent. The movers and shakers of our society are often on page three but not often between the foreword and the footnote. Namita Gokhale has managed the rare feat with rare dignity; She says:

Everybody has two novels in him". One is "the story of life as it is", the other "life as it might have been". She would know. After all, she has not had only good things happening to her. She has had her brush with adversity, and much of the pain emanating from the loss of near and dear ones has provided her with fuel to pen together some stories, some novels, and some essays. Ranging from "Paro" to "Gods, Graves and Grandmother" to "Dreams of Passion" and "Siva", affable Namita Gokhale has always found writing "a catharsis" and storytelling quite "a therapeutic exercise". Now, she attempts to use this "therapeutic

exercise" to put together an anthology that is a refreshing change from the dumb page three personalities one is saddled with first thing in the morning. Writing in imprint One's "Love Then Loathe Them", she says, "Living in the age of celebrity, we seem to know everything about the maharathis who overshadow our everyday lives with theirs, and yet, paradoxically, on examination we know very little.... This anthology seeks to view them outside the trivialization of the Page Three phenomenon and the co modification of the PR firms, beyond the narrow perspectives of ideological prejudices and political correctness. Why they are who they are? Who made them so?" Well, this compilation talks of nine icons, nine heroes sought to be exposed to the public glare, divested of any pedestal, sans any false bravado. Why nine? The publishers answer: "Critics, academics, writers and journalists... were happy to take on the powerful abrasive politicians and moody celebrities, but sounded almost frightened when we mentioned Arundhati Roy. All we wanted was a candid profile which, without ignoring her literary achievements or her commitment to social issues, would have a good-humored go at her penchant for generating controversies. 17

There is something about the Kumaon hills embracing Nainital, Almora and Ranikhet which breeds good soldiers, scholars, politicians and litterateurs. You have Pants, Pandeys and Joshis. There was Govind Vallabh Pant and now his son K.C. Pant and his wife ILA. And there is Murli Manohar Joshi. There is Shivani, a Hindi novelist, and her daughter Mrinal Pande, a journalist and TV personality who writes both in Hindi and English. And there is Namita Gokhale (Pant) who lost her husband before she was 40, is the



author of four books in English, writes a regular *agony aunt* column for newspapers and has had many close encounters with death. She remains as attractive and vivacious as she was earlier. Namita and Rajiv fell in love, as they say, madly. Namita wasn't the one to waste too much time being courted; she proposed to him, he accepted. And six months later they were married. As Indira Gandhi remarked at the wedding ceremony, it was like a marriage of two dolls. It was a stormy relationship, a roller-coaster relationship that rose to ecstatic heights and descended to depths of despair. It was much the same in their joint ventures. For a couple of years they tried to run a film magazine *Super* in Bombay. It flopped. The two years in Bombay gave Namita a new dimension in life. He impressed on her the need for a writer to keep making notes for stories and novels. Namita did precisely that. Back in Delhi Rajiv tried his hand at business. He made his lakhs as quickly as he lost them. They entertained lavishly in the most expensive restaurants in town, blowing up large sums of money. They were often in financial trouble. Rajiv began to drink heavily.

Namita had enough material to start writing a novel. In 1984 her first novel Paro: Dreams of Passion was published. It was an instant success in India and abroad. It was a love story with erotic overtones. With this novel Namita was well and truly launched. She began to collect material for her second book The Himalayan Love Story. While she was putting it into shape, she was stricken with cancer of the uterus. Rajiv rushed her to Bombay. For weeks her life hung by a single thread. Namita never looked for sympathy: it was only her inner resources, her "survival strategy" that helped her pull through the ordeal. However, this brush with death took deep roots in her psyche. She had more experience of death. Her mother-in-law died in her arms; her sister-in-law Sunanda Bhandare, Judge of the Delhi High Court succumbed to cancer, and finally her husband Rajiv died in Singapore of cirrhosis of the liver, leaving Namita to take care of their two teenage daughters.

It was understandable that after love death became Namita's obsession. Obsession with love and death resulted in two books: Gods,

Graves and Grandmother written after she beat cancer and the non-fiction Mountain Echos. They did not do as well as she hoped but her latest The Book of Shadows (Viking Penguin) made the top of the Indian bestsellers list. In some ways her last novel sums up Namita's mental pre-occupation. It has love, death and lust in equal proportions. It is set in an isolated bungalow in the midst of a forest in the Kumaon hills. Ghosts of people who lived in it, some murdered, some eaten up by wild animals, continue to haunt it. They make love, get drunk, get inebriated with curry laced with *bhang* (marijuana) and indulge in sexual orgies. Seeing Namita's ever-smiling face and listening to her animated, machine-gun speed chatter one would not suspect the tortured soul within. Despite tragedies in her personal life, she finds:

A lot of magic in everyday life which is to be discovered," she asserts. "Failure is more important than success" and "suffering is a great incentive to growth. It reveals and re-defines character. Happiness makes us lazy and flabby." You ponder over these statements and understand why Namita Gokhale loves life as much as she loves death and what has made her so gutsy. 18

In an interview to *The Tribune*, she reveals her views about her debut novel "Paro: Dreams of Passion":

Well, every novel has a life of its own, a sort of autonomous existence. "Paro" reached out to a lot of people, and I'm grateful that people still remember it so many years later. Yet I do feel that I've grown as a writer. 19

She was very young when she wrote 'Paro: Dreams of Passion' yet it was described as not just blatant but extremely bold. Gokhale says:

The shocked and scandalized reaction, which “Paro” received in India, took me completely by surprise. I was very young then, and did, of course, react to that, in the sense that I set out to write a very stark and depressing book, to show the critics that I was a serious writer. But I don’t think I have ever been inhibited in my writing, whatever the subject. 20

Commenting upon her subjectivity in her fictional discourse, Namita Gokhale states:

It’s strange, but often I write about things before they happen to me or to those around me. I used to get terrified by these coincidences until a very intelligent woman explained to me that writers are intuitive and often carry a field of prescient energy. Otherwise every writer I know cannibalizes experience, it’s inevitable. 21

She manages her husband’s consultancy work and along with that she is also into publishing and writing and travelling. She tells how she manages everything so tactfully:

I know I am attempting to do far too many things, but the more you do the more you manage to fit into a day. I do try to prioritize, to remember what’s really important, rather than fall into a pressure routine. I am a late riser but I often work until late at night. 22

She further tells about her nature:

I would love to be a carefree, fun-loving person but I suspect I'm more of an anxious, irritable sort of person in private. The really Namita Gokhale tries very hard to be sincere and is probably a bit silly.<sup>23</sup>

She was one of the persons responsible for organizing the rather grand get together of Indian writers living abroad. She shares her experiences:

I was the project co-coordinator for the International Festival of Indian Literature. It wasn't only about diaspora Indian writers, for we were trying to bring about a creative interaction between the Indian English writers and the vernacular writers in major Indian languages. I think it worked in that there was a lot of dialogue and interaction. Nishit Saran and I were working on a documentary on the festival for the PSBT (the Public Service Broadcast Trust). Nishit died tragically in April. The film shows the level of inspired content the festival generated. I put in everything I had into the festival, for I think there was an artificial divide between the different categories of Indian writers, which is now slowly being bridged. If the writers benefit, then the readers naturally do too.<sup>24</sup>

So many writers (especially those writing in Hindi, Urdu) die unsung because they live in small towns and cannot reach out. In this context, she gives her opinion about the importance of how a writer goes about marketing his books:

Yes, media hype is needed to sell books, although a good book can sometimes make it by word of mouth. As I said before, every book has a life, a

*kundali*, of its own, which has very little to do with purely literary merit. 25

She has her own views about professional creative writing. She shares her views about livelihood by creative writing:

Not in India, no. Even elsewhere, they say you can make a fortune by writing, but not a living. It's a very insecure and uncertain way to survive but it has glorious compensations. 26

Gokhale gives her frank opinion regarding languages, as is her way of revealing, when people would hide their feelings and support English language; she is in favour of Hindi.

Though I am basically an English writer, there are certain words certain feelings, which you can express with one word in Hindi, but you need several statements in English. There is always a feeling of incompleteness when one's books are only in English. 27

Gokhale is quite frank in revealing, whatever aspect it may be. Though in her novels she thrashes men. She reveals favourable her views on men:

If Mumbai's Big B translates into Brawn, Biceps and Bachchan, Dilli defines it as Brain Power. The Delhi male is intellectually stimulating, points out Namita Gokhale, writer. Good company, great talker, and a wide range of interests: he can hold forth on Bush, Bill Gates, the Bull Run and Bollywood with equal expertise. 28

Regional writing and writers have in the recent past been relegated to the fringes of popular literary consciousness, to the places where the vernacular press and small bookshops sans glitzy interiors reside. Given these realities — or at least these perceptions — one imagined that this group of people might be at least faintly disgruntled and would think the festival provided a forum for them to vent their angst. According to Namita Gokhale's views on men it is clear that she does not have an aversion towards them. But she is portraying them with shade darker, to show a temporary phenomenon prevailing in the society.

Namita Gokhale, author and festival coordinator, has a different view pertaining to the success of the book. She states:

Of course, there is bound to be a lot of hype and drama surrounding the international and diasporic writers, but given their stature that is only understandable.” But this hype does foster a sense of isolation among regional writers, which might reflect in the discussions. “There might be anger in the dialogue but that's the point of it. 29

According to her a good work of art is judged when one delves deep:

A good book, like a parcel from grandma, has something for everybody—the more we find ourselves mirrored in the book, the better we grade it. Part picaresque, part myth and part fiction, against a backdrop of two religious philosophies—Buddhism and Hinduism—punctuated by the travels of a lusty Greek, this novel all but promises the moon. Her journey in search of her self is more of an escapade, meandering and retracing its own course, making loops for memories to hang on to. The book owes

its beauty to the descriptions of age, time and seasons. The backdrop of spread of Buddhism, the angst of Brahmins, the wandering of Greeks and the pan-Indian kaleidoscopic environ are dealt with adequate poetic flourishes. It is in describing the koel's song and the drumbeats of gathering clouds that the metaphors come rolling smoothly like snooker balls. 30

Namita Gokhale in a conversation gave her views: She has conducted literary seminars and Indian consciousness is there in her work. She uses different voices to present the perspective, voice keeps on changing as time passes, it is possible to recognize motifs, patterns in her fictional works. Her heroines have an obsession with painting nails and removing nail paints, they wish to wipe out memories and repainting them to start life again.<sup>31</sup>

Tradition, transition and modernity are the stages through which the woman in Indo Anglian novel is passing. The image of women in south Asian novels has undergone a change in the last three decades. Throughout this period, women writers have moved away from traditional enduring, self-sacrificing women towards conflicted female characters search for identity. Independence brought with it displacement and disillusionment, material pursuits reign supreme due to commercialism and consumerism, resulting in heart breaks, discord, separations and broken households. Interpersonal relationships are undergoing cataclysmic changes. Woman has globally acquired the rebel attitudes, always not particularly towards the man and his world but the disordered state of values as well as the degeneration of the system. She has become conscious of her potential. The modern woman has become more aware of her latent talent; she is mentally and physically set to take tall strides with the fast changing ways and values of life. Women empowerment, emancipation, liberation, resistance, cannot discard the imbalance disturbing the very fabric of the society. It is a woman's nature and nurture, which makes her aspire, yearns for a man's companionship, comradeship, in spite of her extraordinary achievements. Herein lies the

constraint, as the modern man is not modified towards the metamorphoses; hence woman cannot enter the new phase harmoniously and flourish.

In this postcolonial age woman cannot be colonized, she is not only the bearer but also a companion to walk along the road of life. A woman's psychology and physique makes her seek security and if a man understands her needs, she is capable of giving tremendous leading to a happy family.

Don't walk in front of me  
I may not follow  
Don't walk behind  
I may not lead  
Walk beside me  
And just be my friend 32

This proverbial decoration piece suggesting the twin positions of man and woman had occupied a place with modern European drawing rooms of young couples. Let this situation take place in the postmodern age leading to a cordial relationship between man and woman.

The modern age has different views and perceptions regarding relationships; in this electronic age, relationships are important but the modus of maintaining the relationship has changed and it is necessary to fit into this modified matrix. Deepak Chopra has to say:

We must change the narrative. We are at the crossroads. We have arrived at a stage where a combination of ancient habits of tribalism, racism, patriarchy and prejudice, juxtaposed with modern capacities and technologies form a devastating cocktail.<sup>33</sup>



Today's life is at the crossroads, and we have to make amends with the situation. A healthy combination of the old with the new will make life harmonious and relationships meaningful.

In this dissertation my humble endeavour will be to study women characters in Bapsi Sidhwa's The Crow Eaters, The Pakistani Bride, Ice-Candy Man, An American Brat and Namita Gokhale's Paro: Dreams of Passion, The Book of Shadows, Gods, Graves and Grandmother and A Himalayan Love Story.

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## CHAPTER 2

### PARSI WOMEN AND TRIBAL WOMEN: PORTRAYED IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S NOVELS THE CROW EATERS AND THE PAKISTANI BRIDE

The Crow Eaters is Bapsi Sidhwa's second but first published novel. The Pakistani Bride is her first written and second published novel. The Ice-Candy-Man is her third published novel and followed by An American Brat. Through her various marginalized narrators and through the experiences of the many marginalized characters in her first three novels, Sidhwa gives voice to hitherto silenced groups of India and Pakistan and in doing so tells other versions of her country's history. Through her first novel, Bapsi Sidhwa discovered a love for writing. She took almost four years to complete The Bride. Though it took four years, it was an experience which she says she enjoyed so much that soon after completing The Bride, she started working on her second novel, The Crow Eaters, a lively and humorous story about the Parsi community of Pakistan. The title of the book is translation of a derogatory term used for Parsis who are stereotyped as being excessively loud and talkative.

Success didn't come to Bapsi Sidhwa without a lot of hard work. She wrote her first two novels in Pakistan where no one was publishing in English at the time. So, after receiving many rejections, Sidhwa decided to self-publish and self-distribute The Crow Eaters. It was very frustrating to peddle one's own books as she did in Lahore. She would go from bookstore to bookstore requesting to read The Crow Eaters. Bookstore owners would show little interest, often criticizing the title of the book. The process was so discouraging that Sidhwa stopped writing for about five years.

In 1980, after receiving a copy of Sidhwa's self-published The Crow Eaters, Britain's Jonathon Cape decided to publish it. It was at that time when Sidhwa felt encouraged enough to pick up her pen and write again. "Though

the first two novels brought her recognition, it was her third novel, Cracking India (also published as Ice-Candy Man), that earned Bapsi Sidhwa international acclaim and acceptance as one of the most promising English novelists from South Asia, placing her among the likes of Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, and R.K. Narayan.”<sup>1</sup>

The Crow Eaters renders a commentary on different aspects of Parsi community. Bapsi Sidhwa narrates the beautiful story of a resourceful and accommodating community tucked away in the forgotten crevices of history. Bapsi Sidhwa's extraordinary sense of humour is reflected in this novel. Faredoon Junglewalla, the protagonist, has to face some confrontation with his old mother-in-law Jerbanoo. This confrontation between the son-in-law and the mother-in-law serves the writer's purpose of fun and comic situations throughout the novel. Novy Kapadia puts it:

The Crow Eaters, first published in Pakistan in 1978, describes the social nobility of a Parsi family, the Junglewallas, during the British Raj in the early twentieth century. In just one generation they increased their business from a single general merchant store in Lahore to a chain of stores, in several North Indian cities and license for "handling all traffic of goods between Peshawar and Afghanistan." It also traces the attempts of Parsis, migrating from the west coast and settling in the more salubrious climate of North Indian cities, in the late nineteenth and the turn of this century. This is the hallmark of Bapsi Sidhwa's work, deceptively perceptive, she accurately depicts historical facts interwoven with satirical fiction and lampoon, which aptly recreates the Parsi milieu and yet makes for delightful reading.<sup>2</sup>

Bapsi Sidhwa is a Pakistani Parsi woman novelist. Her family has settled in Pakistan after Partition of India. The authenticity of Bapsi Sidhwa's work is evident in her experience in Karachi, and Lahore where she continues to live. Her family, the Bhandaras, a leading business family of Lahore for generations, had migrated there in the last century. So Bapsi Sidhwa belongs to the third generation of Parsi settlers in North Indian cities and was reared on tales both, fictional and otherwise, on the entrepreneurial skills of the elders of her community. Hence her description of the exploits of Faredoon Junglewalla and his family is not mere fictional or factional or historical but mingling of all of them with autobiographical elements.

Faredoon Junglewalla, the protagonist, is a shrewd man who exploits his relations with the British officers and others to his maximum benefits. The novel begins with a note of praise for him:

Faredoon Junglewalla, Freddy for short, was a strikingly handsome, dulcet-voiced adventurer with so few scruples that he not only succeeded in carving a comfortable niche in the world for himself but he also earned the respect and gratitude of his entire community. When he died at sixty-five, a majestic grey-haired patriarch, he attained the rare distinction of being locally listed in the 'Zarathusti Calendar of Great Men and Women.'<sup>3</sup>

Bapsi Sidhwa has specially designed this novel to capture the quintessential Parsi ethos and diaspora. It describes the social mobility of a Parsi family. There is also generation gap between Faredoon Junglewalla, his wife Putli, and his son Behram, and his wife Tanya. Behram like Tanya does not believe in old traditions of their community. But at the same time it is very

difficult for Faredoon, Putli and Jerbanoo to be uprooted from long-practiced traditions of their community. The Parsi milieu in the novel does not mar the comic effect of the novel. On the contrary, it makes the novel both entertaining and educative, as the Parsi elements add to its texture.

Throughout the novel, Ms. Sidhwa's prose is boisterous and florid, and The Crow Eaters never fails to entertain. She writes with an earthy zest and affection for her characters that makes us hope for subsequent novels continuing the Junglewalla clan's story. 4

The Crow Eaters depicts the Parsi mind, their social behaviour, their customs and traditions and their rituals. For Bapsi Sidhwa this novel has been a labour of love because of a deep-rooted admiration for her diminishing community and an enormous affection for it. The writer firmly believes that the incidents in The Crow Eaters do not reflect at all upon the integrity of a community. On the contrary, the reading of this text enriches one's knowledge of the Parsi community. The writer herself is much pleased with the portrayal of her own community in the novel. In spite of her good intentions behind the portrayal of the community in this novel, she had to encounter her own community's hostility. Some members of her community did not appreciate her idea of portraying her community in her fictional discourse. At Lahore when the book was about to be released, she had to face many problems. Bapsi Sidhwa in her interview with David Montenegro says:

The book launch took place at an international hotel in Lahore and since there are not so many books written in English it was quite a function ... And there was a bomb threat, which subsequently I realized was from a Parsi who felt very strongly about the book. It took me some time to realize the

turmoil the book had created within the community. They thought I was revealing secrets that I had no business giving out... they felt I was damaging the image... they felt threatened by it, although it was written out of great affection.<sup>5</sup>

Some Parsis misunderstood Sidhwa for depiction of the Parsi milieu in The Crow Eaters, which is at times branded as a commentary on the Parsi community. Her own community felt offended, though she did not intend to do so.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Crow Eaters* is a delightful comic novel. It is a lyrical novel, a modest lesson on the underside of history, a gentle reminder of the world we have left behind, figuratively and literally.<sup>6</sup>

Besides their limited status as a minority community, another reason for the supreme respect and regard the Parsi had for the Britishers, was due to the social code of their Zoroastrian religion. The followers of Zarathustra have been always loyal to the ruler and are instrumental in maintaining sound harmony between state and community, based on mutual support. What all the Parsis wanted from the Britishers was religious anatomy and protection. The loyalty of the Parsi community towards the British ruling authorities is reflected profusely in The Crow Eaters.

Fareed Junglewalla, the central character in the novel, takes every opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to the British ruling authorities. After settling down in Lahore, he wears his finest face and most befitting manner. A typical attitude of the Parsi community. They adapt to the ways of the land. In the beginning of the novel Sidhwa has mentioned that Fareed Junglewalla's had become a name to reckon with. Most of the characters portray humour, once again a typical attitude of the Parsis.



Ruthlessly truthful, deeply perceptive, she tells her story with rare courage, frankness and good humour. The Crow Eaters will certainly endear her to every reader who comes across the book. A veritable tour de force. 7

Bapsi Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride is based on an actual incident involving a Pakistani girl who becomes Zaitoon, the sixteen years old protagonist, in the novel. This real story was narrated to her when Bapsi Sidhwa and her husband Noshir had been invited to a remote army camp in the Karakoram Mountains, and there she heard the story of a fine young Punjabi girl who had run away from her tribal husband. Her husband could not bear the incident of losing his honour. The girl survived for almost two weeks in the lofty mountains. But then on finding her, her husband killed her on the spot. Bapsi Sidhwa says:

The girl's story haunted me: it reflected the hapless condition of many women not only in Pakistan but also in the Indian subcontinent. Telling it became an obsession. I thought I'd write a short story; after all it had barely taken 30 minutes to narrate. Before long I realized I was writing a novel. It became The Bride, or The Pakistani Bride, as it is titled in India.<sup>8</sup>

Zaitoon, the protagonist in the novel, is an orphan child. She loses her parents at the time of partition. Qasim, who has left the isolated hill town, his birthplace, and makes a home for the two of them in the glittering, decadent city of Lahore, adopts her. As the time passes on Qasim makes a fortune but grows increasingly nostalgic about his life in the mountains. Zaitoon is brought up well in Lahore. She has better socio-cultural background. She learns dancing and turns out to be a well-behaved and cultured girl. But unfortunately

Qasim promises her in marriage to a man of his tribe. Qasim's friend Nikka and his wife Miriam request him to change his mind if it is possible. However Qasim sticks to his commitments saying that he has already given his word.

Qasim sticks to his word to Misri Khan, his cousin, whom he has promised Zaitoon in marriage to his son Sakhi. When there is so much of cultural difference between the tribal people and the people living in Lahore on plains, it is beyond doubt that Zaitoon's marriage to Sakhi will be an unhappy affair. It is difficult to say how long cultured and beautiful Zaitoon's relationship with uncultured and cruel Sakhi will continue. Even at the Railway platform at the time of the departure of Qasim and Zaitoon, Miriam once again tries to dissuade Zaitoon from leaving Lahore. She tells Zaitoon:

You are ours. We'll marry you to a decent Punjabi  
who will understand your ways. Tell your father  
you don't want to marry a tribal. We'll help you.<sup>9</sup>

At this stage Zaitoon is helpless. She cannot tell her father Qasim that she does not want to leave Lahore. Even Miriam's all efforts to change his mind are in vain. It is personal misfortune of Zaitoon that she has no voice of her own. Infact she raises her voice later on when she found the jawan interested in her; but was silenced by Qasim. The major theme of The Pakistani Bride is the marriage in which the fusion of two totally different cultures is quite difficult, if not impossible. Secondly, the treatment to women in Pakistan also forms a part of the theme of the novel. It also focuses on the harsh lives of handsome people hidden away in the granite folds of the Karakorams. As the novel unfolds, one realizes how savage and brutal these handsome people are. They have different maxims for their honour. The plight of a woman in such tribal areas of Pakistan is horrible. Once a woman marries a tribal man, there can be no escape except death. In a tribal family, if one's wife is not happy, she cannot think of divorce

because it will raise a question of the tribal husband's honour. Strangely enough for the so-called honour sometimes-entire tribal community is united to do away with the woman who tries to free herself from the clutches of her brutal husband. Both Qasim and Zaitoon meet Carol and the Major Sahib on their way to Qasim's native-land. Carol is an American girl married to Farrukh but she takes absolute liberty even with the Major Sahib in absence of her husband who is kept busy with excursions by the Major Sahib. The Major helps them to reach Misri Khan's place where Zaitoon's marriage is to take place. After marriage, Zaitoon realizes how crooked, jealous, brutal and savage her husband Sakhi is. Bapsi Sidhwa details his barbaric behaviour with Zaitoon on the very first night of their marriage thus:

Sakhi surveyed his diffident bride with maintaining excitement. Here was a woman all his own, he thought with proprietarily lust and pride, a woman with strangely thick lashes and large black eyes that had flashed in one look her entire sensuality. But, even as he thought this, the corroding jealousy of the past few days suddenly surged up in him in a murderous fusion of hate and fever. He tore the ghoongat from her head and holding her arms in a cruel grip he panted inarticulate hatred into her face. 10

Thus, her husband the way she should be treated in normal course of human behaviour does not treat Zaitoon. Sidhwa further narrates Zaitoon's experiences with her husband on the first night of her marriage:

Zaitoon looked at him wildly, terrified as he dragged her up and roughly yanked her red satin shirt over her head. Her arms flew to cover her breasts. He tugged at the cord of her shalwar and the silk fell to her ankles. Before she could raise

her trousers Sakhi flung her back. He crouched, lifting her legs free of the silk. Fiercely kicking out, Zaitoon leapt over the charpoy. She screamed. She backed towards the straw and mud-plastered wall, and screamed. Leaning against it, covering her chest and crotch with her hands, she screamed. Sakhi stood across the room, incapacitated by the shrill animal noise, and she screamed and screamed, 'Abba, save me', she shrieked. 11

Zaitoon, being a cultured girl, fails to adjust with her tribal husband who has his own maxims for everything. Later on Zaitoon is humiliated and treated as an animal. Her integrity is suspected, though she is a pure woman. Zaitoon's waving at the army people leads her to a lot of difficulties. This made her husband furious and wild. Sidhwa narrates:

Skimming the boulders in vast strides, Sakhi seized her. He dragged her along the crag. 'You whore,' he hissed. His fury was so intense she thought he would kill her. He cleared his throat and spat full in her face. 'You dirty, black little bitch, waving at those pigs....' Gripping her with one hand he waved the other in a lewd caricature of the girl's brief gesture 'waving at that shit eating swine. You wanted him to stop and fuck you, didn't you! 12

The novel ends with the feelings of surprise, hope and new alliance, bringing hope and solace to the tortured soul. Though the man loved the girl but to him his honour was more important hence he lost her. Mustaq has to say:

Mustaq recalled the girl's finger's pulling torn strips of cloth over her bare skin. She would be alright, he mused. In a few hours, he would quietly stow her away in the vehicle taking Farukh and Carol to Lahore. Let Carol take care of her! She could hide in the States! Or perhaps Ashiq could propose marriage after a decent interval – she would be as securely hidden in his village. Of course, the old Kohistani who had brought her here must never know she was alive ... a pity ... he had appeared to love her. Still he was to blame for imposing his will on something that bound to end in disaster.<sup>13</sup>

## I

Bapsi Sidhwa's major characters are dynamic. Some of her minor characters are more or less flat. Faredoon Junglewalla's mother-in-law Jerbanoo is a major woman character in the novel. The other women characters are Freddy's wife Putli, Billy's wife Tanya, Freddy's daughter Yasmin, Yazdi's beloved Rosy Watson, an Anglo Indian girl etc are other women characters in the novel.

Jerbanoo, Freddy's mother-in-law, is another interesting woman character in the novel. She struggles constantly with her son-in-law who does not hesitate to kill her for getting insurance money. In England, Jerbanoo disrupts all the social conventions around exasperated Mrs. Allen by defecating on a newspaper in the center of the landing. Once ejected out of Allen's residence, she proceeds to make herself at home in Junglewalla's hotel rooms at Oxford Street. She comes to balcony for the purpose and she is absolutely unconcerned about drainage. Sidhwa comically presents the dialogues between towel-wrapped Jerbanoo and the English man:

Come on, what's going on up here? You washing clothes or something?'

Jerbanoo glowered. 'You not poke your nose into me mister, I not poke my nose into you!'

14

The Englishman is not contented with her answer. He threatens her to get a bobby to find out what is going up. Jerbanoo further says:

You want to know?' she asked, and her voice despite its malice rang with authenticity. 'I tell you! I wash my bottom. I no dry-clean like you dirty Englishmen. I wash my bottom! 15

Sidhwa has created Jerbanoo's character as a deliberately exaggerated caricature figure. She serves the writer's purpose of giving comic touches to the novel.

Bapsi Sidhwa has portrayed Jerbanoo's character quite tactfully. She is not the woman who would relish in being confined to only the four walls of the house. But she keeps moving and she knows much about the personal lives of many Parsi families.

Jerbanoo visits England with her son-in-law and daughter Putli. She has wonderful expatriate experiences in London. She finds totally different world there. Sidhwa describes:

Jerbanoo touched, tampered and tinkered with everything poking her inquisitive nose into cupboards, drawers and larder, drawing things out for inspection. Often she summoned Mary from her work to inquire. 'May-ree! May-ree! What is this? 16

Freddy's pregnant wife Putli, his widowed mother-in-law Jerbanoo and his infant daughter Hutoxi are with him in his journey. On the way many adventures take place; some are frivolous and others are serious. More specifically his adventure to protect Jerbanoo from the buffalo is remarkable.

Putli is Faredoon Junglewalla's wife; she is a saintly figure. She adapts to what she considers new-fangled customs, when she and her husband are invited to the formal tea parties, on the gracious lawns of the government houses. Her husband Freddy, for whom it is an opportunity for maintaining public relations, cajoles her to these functions. The typical Parsi woman's mindset of Putli has a different value system. Sidhwa narrates:

Deep-rooted in the tradition of a wife walking three paces behind her husband, their deportment was as painful to Putli as being marched naked in public.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Putli's character is tradition-bound. She does not like to change with time. Sidhwa makes her character life like. Using Putli as her mouthpiece, the writer tries to focus on Parsi orthodox women and their attitudes towards life. Her daughter Yasmin represents the new generation. Putli is unable to digest the ways of her daughter. Sidhwa portrays Putli as a meek lady from all perspectives and she takes time in adopting the change, old ways die-hard for her. She is a dutiful woman. She never fails in her duty as a wife, though many things expected by Faredoon are not liked by her; like going to the parties. Secondly she is a good mother and even a good daughter as she tactfully keeps the balance between Jerbanoo a strong headed woman, who happens to be her mother and Faredoon her husband. Novy Kapadia remarks:

Putli, the earlier generation Parsi, is scandalized by Yasmin preceding her

husband down the steps and into the carriage and her seeming relationship of equality with her husband. Initially adapting the manners and customs of the ruling colonial power was gradual and Putli's inability to understand change is seen as the generation gap. However the scope of the novel is large, it shows the reality of a whole family and its network of relationships, spreading out to encompass a wide variety of human beings of different ages. Bapsi Sidhwa portrays the changing generations in the Junglewalla family.<sup>18</sup>

The next generations of Parsi women like Tanya slowly discard the traditional dress. For instance Tanya wears a sari, which is more revealing. Women these days wear saris, which are transparent, as materials like georgette and chiffon; which reveal more than concealment- the trend of the society. Sidhwa narrates:

She became daring in her attire and tied her sari in a way that accentuated the perfections of her body. She took to wearing a little make up and outlined the astonishing love liners of her lips.<sup>19</sup>

Tanya is also a dynamic woman character. She does not care for others' likes and dislikes. Her husband Billy also supported her in every possible way. Though Billy is supportive, he has to tell her regarding her behaviour with men she has to be cautious. He is very thrifty and when once Tanya during her pregnancy wanted to eat a pomegranate; Billy went all the way to the market to get it for her. Billy has to tell:



Tanya, he said one day, don't look straight into people's eyes. I know you don't mean anything- but men misunderstand. They get bad ideas.<sup>20</sup>

So possessive was Billy towards Tanya, it may be his caring attitude or it may be the orthodox male attitude and the conventional male outlook prevailing among the Parsis. Sidhwa narrates:

A way of life was imposed upon Tanya and Billy by the locality in which they lived, by their independent bungalow, and by their new possessions. They made friends with modern couples equally determined to break with tradition. It amounted to no more than a fanatical faith in the ways of English society in India, and a disciple's knack at imitation. They were not of the masses, this young crowd. If their wealth did not set them apart, and their ability to converse in English certainly did. They were utterly ashamed of traditional habits and considered British customs, however superficially observed, however trivial, exemplary. They entertained continuously at small, intimate, 'mixed' parties where married couples laughed and danced decorously with other married couples. Mixed parties as revolutionary as departure from Freddy's all male get-togethers at the Hira Mandi, and Putli's rigid female sessions, as is a discotheque from a Victorian family dinner. The parties were fashionably cosmopolitan, including the various religious sects of India: Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, the Europeans, and the Anglo Indian<sup>21</sup>

Rosy Watson is another interesting woman character in *The Crow Eaters*. She is an Anglo-Indian girl. Yazdi loves her so much. But Yazdi does not know anything about Rosy's personal life. The moment he comes to know from his father that Rosy is a sex-worker, he withdraws himself totally from her. Sidhwa narrates:

And Rosy Watson? He asked, what kind of English does the whore speak? `Yazdi glowered at his father. How dare you slander a girl you haven't even met! ` `Met? I have not only met her, I have fucked her. She is a common little alley cat. It might interest you to know, Mr. Allen though her breasts are like fried eggs. ` Yazdi blanched. `You haven't met her.... you are lying! ` `Why don't you find out from Alla Ditta? Ask him...he might be able to arrange a rendezvous for you at the Hira Mandi as well! 22

There are also some similarities and dissimilarities between Jerbanoo and Putli. The generation-gap is obviously seen between them. Both of them have almost similar feelings about the rules of the land. Sidhwa narrates:

Putli and Jerbanoo had almost identical fantasies about the land of their rulers. Their thrill was imaginative. They envisaged an orderly kingdom under the munificent authority of a British monarch based on their knowledge of the gigantic statue of Queen Victoria, cast in gunmetal and protected by a canopy of marble, in the center of the garden in Charing Cross in Lahore. Her gun-metal Majesty had austere features and imposing rolls of flesh. She had a crown on her head and was carrying an orb and scepter. Her steel-trimmed flowed voluminously about the throne. 23

Sidhwa's portrayal of women in *The Crow Eaters* is based on her own observation of Parsi women representing her own community. It is a first hand experience. The writer's capacity to provide humour and laughter makes the novel a beautiful Parsi saga.

## II

K. Nirupa Rani observes:

Sidhwa's men have distinct personality traits but her women are not extravagant-they are ordinary, devoid of feelings. In their limited orbits they are socially active and lead only a superficial existence. Commenting upon Sidhwa's women. Even though they are active, they are flat characters. In a novel like *The Pakistani Bride* where there is ample scope for the writer to explore, Sidhwa could not go deep into the psyche of her female protagonist, allowing methodical narration. They are more familiar to Sidhwa and are within her range of experience. 24

Bapsi Sidhwa's second novel *The Pakistani Bride* has quite a few memorable women characters. Zaitoon, Nikka's wife-Miriam, Carol, Sakhi's mother Hamida.

Zaitoon is the central character in *The Pakistani Bride*. She is introduced for the first time as a young girl, along with her Muslim parents, Sikander and Zohra, on the Indian side of Punjab province; as they along with millions of others are forced to flee because of 'Partition' of India. Zaitoon's mother Zohra is killed before her eyes, soon afterwards, her father is also murdered by the attacking Sikhs. It is then that she blindly runs into Quasim and immediately starts calling him 'father'. Zaitoon's decision power and

extraordinary ability to adjust herself accordingly to the situation is revealed in her immediate response to massacre. Qasim adopts her as a daughter. Farrukh Khan observes:

Through Zaitoon's fight and escape from the inhospitable environment and Kohistani men, Sidhwa seems to make a statement with regard to women's plight in a country like Pakistan. The path to "freedom", in this case of a personal nature, can come about only after a "partition". And as with the Partition of India, those in power would use whatever means they have in their disposal to prevent the person or a nation of attaining statehood/selfhood. Sidhwa articulates that women, though jealously coveted by their men from outsiders are more at risk from the very people who are supposed to "guard" and "value" them. Zaitoon's story runs parallel in a number of ways to the nation's turbulent history. Just as the Muslims of this country felt stifled and suppressed in India, Zaitoon knows that it is almost impossible for her to survive in the Kohistani community. 25

The treatment given to women by the Kohistani tribal men is suffocating, here Sidhwa has portrayed that the life in the hills is difficult while that in the plains is easy. The honour of the tribesmen is more important than the feelings of their women. Novy Kapadia has to say:

The Bride is a damning indictment of the Kohistani community in particular and the Pakistani society in general with regard to its brutal treatment of women. The women are marginalized and have, in a number of cases, no say in decision-making processes or actions, which may ultimately seal

their fates. Qasim is offered a bride at the tender age of ten, not because he has done anything significant or heroic to deserve that honour, but for the mere fact that Resham Khan had been unable to make payment on the loan he had taken from Qasim's father. And so Afshan is sold into marriage to compensate for her father's failure to come up with the money. This is not a pre-arranged settlement. But is done to prevent a blood feud. The amount of money is not significant; it could have been ten rupees or a thousand rupees, the daughter was available anyway. This "transaction" reveals the status of a woman as nothing more than a bargaining commodity, whose role as such has already been decided. 26

Nikka's wife Miriam and Sakhi's wife Hamida are typical tribal women characters. They don't have any individuality at all. For instance her son Sakhi for no fault of her own beats Hamida. Men practice double standards as far as their treatment towards women is concerned. For instance Nikka and Qasim go to Hira Mandi, which is the red-light area of Lahore. Bapsi Sidhwa presents, the very men who uphold their women's privacy above everything and would not hesitate to even kill a man who would dare even to look indecorously at their "honour". Strangely enough Nikka is able to pay for someone's honour to dance naked in front of a whole group of drunken men.

The major women characters like Zaitoon, Carol and Miriam are confined within the narrow framework of rules imposed by the patriarchal society. These major women characters are not supposed to play any role in taking important decisions, even though their feelings and their whole being might be at stake. On arriving in the hilly region Zaitoon was filled with mixed emotions; Qasim comments:

At once her heart was buoyant-and at the same time filled with misgiving. Would he like her? In a country where lightness of complexion was a mark of beauty, her own deep brown skin dismayed her. But the jawan liked her. His eyes left no doubt of it. She fell to dreaming. Surely her future husband would like her young face and her thick lashes. She felt alternately fearful and elated.<sup>27</sup>

After her first encounter with Sakhi when he also shows concern and his hand touches hers, she experiences the feeling of elevation and ecstasy; otherwise she had mixed feelings towards Sakhi and moreover she was afraid of the new surrounding. Zaitoon showed the symptom of withdrawal after the displacement from the plains to the hills. The ways were totally different than that of her childhood days, the food was totally bland and the geographical changes were too much to digest for Zaitoon. "Sakhi's hand tenderly pressed her breast. Zaitoon craved the touch." <sup>28</sup>

She further experiences a feeling of elevation as her carnal desires are fulfilled for the first time as she was brought up in a closed environment. Moreover girls are trained from childhood in such a manner that anything pertaining to their physical self is to be concealed and protected; so under such circumstances Zaitoon was totally unaware of the pleasure of proximity, which she encountered with Sakhi. Her feelings are reported:

In dreams Zaitoon had accepted her lover's hands on her breasts not as a preliminary caress but as the final surrender to carnal intimacy. Brought up in a sexual vacuum she did not think of sex as good or bad-it merely did not exist. Neither Miriam, nor Qasim, nor any of the women she visited ever mentioned it. She floundered unenlightened in a morass of sexual yearning. Once, snuggled up to Miriam she had rocked her hips and Miriam had

snapped, stop it! `Zaitoon had been surprised, and hurt by the rebuke that put an end to her innocent pleasure. She had felt rejected. Sakhi's fingers slid lower, probing the curling hair. For the first time she became aware of wet, burning sensation, almost a painful inflammation, between her thighs. She had been discomfited by it before and had hugged her chest to ease her ache. taboos, unconsciously absorbed, had prevented her from exploring lower and she had not really known any relief. His fingers were rough but it was a roughness she hankered after- she discovered now the natural center of her love. Sakhi's breath was infinitely sweet in her ears and her own breath weaved carefully in and out, intent on listening to the new notes pulsing in her body. She was dimly aware of Sakhi removing her shalwar and her nakedness was suddenly the most natural thing in the world. 28

Comparisons are inevitable in life and when we compare the two characters like Zaitoon and Carol. Indira Bhatt remarks:

Carol's life so far has been a hopeless drift but Zaitoon with her dauntless courage and faith serves as a brake and deflects the direction of her life. Carol from the free world of fair and just social order can think in terms of her individuality but Zaitoon has no such notions; she simply does not wish to be a role-model of Hamida, always cowering, frightened to death and at the mercy of the cruel code of honour of men. She instinctively chooses to be herself even like the eagle bird with broken wings trying to fly into the sky. Sidhwa

uses the image of the crippled but flying bird to emphasize the condition of Zaitoon. Such a bird cannot be easily caged or tamed even if it is maimed. Her fight is against both man and Nature, which she can vanquish through her sheer will-power," the strength of nature, a force, perhaps of God, within one 29

The character of Carol is also a pathetic one as she is unhappy with her husband and is attracted towards Farrukh. She wishes to marry him at any cost. She tells her parents that she has finally decided to marry Farrukh. They think that her husband would convert her to Islam and force her to live in a harem. Carol considers herself an agnostic, and Farrukh puts no pressure on her to adopt his religion. Finally her family is reconciled to the marriage, and the young couple leaves for Lahore.

On reaching the hills, Zaitoon's initial feelings were of fear, she found life fearful, the food was bland and she missed the life in the plains. On clinging to his father Qasim, she said: "That jawan at the camp, Abba, I think he likes me. I will die rather than live here".<sup>30</sup>

On hearing this statement from Zaitoon; Qasim was furious as his honour was at stake. He rebuked the child. The might made the girl quiet and she suppressed her feelings; accepted the situation, which was awaiting her fate.

Sidhwa has portrayed the character of Zaitoon differently from other women characters. Her triumph can be appreciated well only when she is compared with other women in the novel like Afshan, married to Qasim; Miriam who is always in purdah; Shahnaz, the high class courtesan; Sakhi's mother Hamida; Carol and the beggar woman of Lawrence Garden Makarand Paranjape rightly puts it:



Zaitoon is a symbol not only of woman fighting oppression in Pakistan but of the human spirit struggling against all physical odds to survive and maintain its integrity. Zaitoon represents khudi or the mental and spiritual strength of human kind, indefatigable, indomitable, and irrepressible. She represents the triumph of mind over matter, of spirit over flesh. It is only such strength, the book tells us, that can withstand destiny, which can overcome every conceivable type of oppression. Even God is compelled to seek human consent by such strength of spirit. After all, those who are weak, dispossessed, powerless and suppressed—what other strength do they have to struggle, to fight, not to give in against overwhelming odds, even to win, except the will, the spirit, the resolve to fight? It is this that the novel celebrates through the struggle of an obscure girl against oppression.<sup>31</sup>

Miriam had affection for Zaitoon, and when Qasim arranged for her marriage, she was shocked, as she believed that a girl brought up in the plains, couldn't adjust to the ways of the hills. Life in the hilly region is difficult, so also are their ways. Miriam as a mother is duty bound towards her daughter and speaks with fervour, to Qasim to discontinue with the alliance:

It was almost six years since Nikka's release from prison. As he listened to his wife expostulate with Qasim, he showed weariness, a reluctance to impose his will as forcefully as of old.

Miriam blew her nose into her shawl. She wiped the damp left on her fingers on the strings of the

charpoy. She had no control over the tears that slipped down her face.

"Sister, I gave him my word," Qasim spoke gently.

"Your word! Your word! What has your word to do with the child's life? What? Tell me!"

Qasim did not reply.

Miriam glanced up and noticed Zaitoon's intent face at the balustrade.

"Brother Qasim," she coaxed, "how can a girl, brought up in Lahore, educated -- how can she be happy in the mountains? Tribal ways are different, you don't know how changed you are" And as rancor settled on Qasim's compressed lips, she continued in a rising passion, "They are savages. Brutish, uncouth, and ignorant! She will be miserable among them. Don't you see?"

Qasim stiffened. A beggar, his limbs grotesquely awry, manipulated his platform to Qasim's feet. He grimaced defiantly. "Paisa," he demanded in a hoarse inhuman whisper. "Babooji from the hills, paisa." Attuned to the whims of alms-givers, he sensed the futility of his plea and wheeled himself away before he was kicked.

Qasim tried to control his fury. "Sister, you forget I am from those hills. It's my people you're talking of."

"But you've been with us so long, you're changed. Why, most of them are bandits, they don't know how to treat women! I tell you, she'll be a slave, you watch, and she'll have no one to turn to. No one!"

Qasim flushed. He glared at Nikka while directing his icy remarks at Miriam.

"How dare you," he said. "You've never been there! You don't understand a thing. I have given my word! I know Zaitoon will be happy. The matter should end."

I know she won't! Oh dear, how I love her. She's like my daughter...I've reared her...

"But she is my daughter!" Qasim cut in with biting finality.

Miriam flashed into hysteria. "Is it because that Pathan offered you five hundred rupees -- some measly maize and a few goats? Is that why you are selling her like a greedy merchant? I will give you that, and more," she said with contempt. "Nikka will! How much more do you want? We will buy her!"

Qasim now looked at her directly, his face white with anger, his eyes malevolent.

Miriam felt the chill impact of his fury and an anguished stab of futility broke her voice. She continued in a crazed whisper. "Why not marry her to my husband here? Yes, I'll welcome her, look after her. We have no children and she'll be my daughter. She'll bear Nikka daughters and sons."

Nikka vainly tried to cut in. "Look!" she said, "I have grey hair. I'm getting old. She will comfort our old age."

Sidhwa further narrates:

Miriam, Miriam, you don't know what you are saying! You are overwrought," Nikka soothed her.

Qasim was in an angry sweat, ashamed and touched.

Sister Miriam, it is not for the goats and maize, please believe me. It is my word -- the word of a Kohistani!

Nikka was dazed by the trend the conversation had taken. "It's the suddenness of the news that is upsetting us so much. I'm sure it's not as bad as we imagine. After all, Zaitoon is Qasim's daughter, and he will do his best by her...look, bibi, why don't you ask the girl yourself...see what she has to say? That is, if Bhai Qasim agrees...?"

Qasim remained silent. Heedless of the impatient honk of a truck, a horse-cart rumbled by. The warning jangle of Tonga bells, shrill cries of tea-stall urchins taking orders, all the clamor of the dense place, combined to spin a cocoon of privacy around the charpoy. 32

This elaborate conversation between Qasim and Miriam is laced with many colours and overtures. Qasim is keen on marrying Zaitoon to Sakhi the tribal man. He has given his consent and for him his word is more important than the girl's feelings and future life. He is totally in oblivion as regarding the girl's view and her lifestyle in the mountains of Karakorams after her marriage. It is typical of a father to not bother of small aspects. While Miriam on the other hand being a woman can see through the consequences of the future. Moreover she is affectionate for Zaitoon as she has taken motherly care for her. She argues passionately with Qasim, her motherly feelings come to the fore and foresightedness of a woman. But as she was unable to convince Qasim, regarding his decision; she finally agreed and gave the girl a warm farewell:

Then Miriam, knowing Zaitoon's mind was made up, stroked her head and said `Bismillah` - `God bless you`. She gave her a gold necklace embedded with coloured glass, a dozen gold

bangles and her red wedding outfit. Miriam stroked Zaitoon's arm as if she were a blind woman leading a loved one. She could feel the girl quiver with excitement. Are you happy, child? She asked. 'Yes', said Zaitoon, and at once felt embarrassed. God give you a long life; keep you always happy and smiling. Miriam caressed her head. She too, had married at sixteen. Bless you', she said, and Zaitoon, suddenly tearful, hugged her close. They clung together weeping, the girl lost in the folds of Miriam's burkha. Zaitoon did not need to say, 'Than you for everything, ' or, I'll miss you. She sobbed, whimpering 'I'm leaving my mother....' 34

These feelings shared by two women portray the bond, which the women share between themselves. It also portrays the helplessness of women in decision-making. Without uttering too many words, they do tell a lot about their feelings towards each other.

Afshan, Qasim's wife was younger to him. Initially they did not share a healthy relationship but with the passage of time their marital life acquired stability. To quote Qasim's fatuation, we have an incident when once she was washing near the river, seeing her figure he was attracted.

Qasim had often filled the containers while she washed and she looked on him as a younger brother. Dousing her face, she suddenly blinked and opened her eyes. Qasim was staring at the white undulation where her shirt parted. Her breasts and the taut nipples were clearly visible through the wet cloth. 35

Miriam was a good caretaker, she explained to Zaitoon when she reached adolescence. Miriam played her roles as a wife and a mother well. She

was a good cook; housekeeper and a caring and loving mother to Zaitoon. She took good care of Zaitoon when she approached puberty. To quote her words:

She also told her that any day now she might find blood on shalwar. she was to tell no one and come straight to her. We all bleed. It's to do with having babies and being a woman... of course you won't have babies –not till you're married- but you're growing up. Zaitoon too distracted by her garbled talk to understand anything.<sup>36</sup>

From Miriam, Zaitoon learned many things and they shared a friendly affectionate bond with each other. In this novel though Miriam is a foster mother, the role of mother is of importance. Otherwise motherhood does not play a prominent role in the lives of the modern women.

From her Zaitoon learned to cook, sew, shop and keep her room tidy: and Miriam, who spent half her day visiting neighbors, took Zaitoon with her, Entering their dwellings was like stepping into gigantic wombs; the fecund, fetid world of mothers and babies.<sup>37</sup>

It is observed that all the women characters play a subservient role in the novel, *The Bride*. Miriam and Zaitoon share a friendly bond; both these women help each other rather than encroaching upon others. Here the role of the mother is of little significance; though Miriam tries to be dutiful but her approach and feelings are not taken care of by the men folk and their strict code of conduct. Sidhwa has portrayed real incident with real characters. The end of the novel appears to be quite optimistic, which is a trait of Sidhwa to change macabre into a loving situation. Thus in Bapsi Sidhwa's first published novel *The Crow Eaters* the women characters are not very prominent except the character of Jerbanoo who has a voice, but still not a very significant one.

Putli is a woman of very low profile and so is Tanya, Putli's daughter-in-law. The tribal women portrayed in *The Pakistani Bride* also share the same plight up in Lahore, has no say in choosing a husband for her. Even an elderly lady the mother-in-law of Zaitoon, Hamida is unheard. They don't have individual freedom at all. The terms are rigidly drawn. Miriam, the caretaker to an extent is above to coax her husband. The role of motherhood is also not very prominent. All these women try to fight the rigid customs but are restricted by the patriarchal dominance. They don't have a significant role to play. Cultural impact is observed to an extent. In short, in *The Crow Eaters* and *The Pakistani Bride* Bapsi Sidhwa has tried to portray the fate of women representing the Parsi women living in Pakistan and the tribal women living in Pakistan.

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## CHAPTER 3

### **SPIRITED WOMEN: A STUDY OF BAPSI SIDHWA'S: THE ICE CANDY MAN AND AN AMERICAN BRAT**

Bapsi Sidhwa's third novel Ice-Candy Man was published in 1991. In America, her publishers Milkweed Editions published it under the title of Cracking India. Using a child narrator named Lenny, the novelist presents the Kaleidoscopically changing socio political realities of the Indian sub-continent just before the partition. This extremely sensitive story takes up the themes of communal tensions, using religion as a way to define individual identity, territorial cravings political opportunism, power and love, and brings them together in a very readable narrative.

Ice-Candy Man was filmed as a motion picture by Deepa Mehta with the title "Earth 1947". The movie does not include many incidents and characters of the novel but it has been successful in retaining the spirit of the novel.

Ice-Candy Man comprises thirty-two chapters and gives us a glimpse into the events of turmoil on the Indian subcontinent during partition. Historical truth is the backdrop of the novel.

The partition has attracted the attention of quite a few novelists particularly in English. Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan (1956), Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961), Manohar Malgaonkar's A Bend in the Ganges (1964) and Chaman Nahal's Azadi (1975), Amitav Ghosh's The shadow Lines (1988) and Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters (1998) present the Indian perception of the traumatic experiences. The Pakistani novelist Mehr Nigar Masroor's Shadows of the Time (1987) presents the Pakistani version of the partition. Both the versions are free from any sort of religious bias.

These novels have been written more in agony and compassion than in anger. Bapsi Sidhwa is a significant voice in today's Commonwealth fictional world. Of her four novels, Ice-Candy-Man is the most serious and popular one. Effectively using the persona of a child narrator, it critically presents the changing socio political realities of the Indian sub-continent just before partition. Her humorous tone, subtle characterization, irreverence to established traditions and absence of histrionics, imparts a very specific charm to this novel. Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy Man or Cracking India also focuses on the traumatic experiences of people at the time of partition. The novel depicts the Pakistani view of partition as well as the Parsi view of partition.

The narrator in the novel is an eight years old Parsi polio-stricken girl. This is one of the novels written by a Parsi writer on the theme of partition. It was first published in London under the title - Ice-Candy Man. In 1991, its American edition was published with a new title Cracking India, keeping in mind the fact that the Americans would misinterpret the term 'Ice-Candy' and confuse it with drugs. In one of her interviews to the "The Times of India" Sidhwa mentions that she was most upset when title of her novel Ice-Candy Man was translated into "*burf ka gola*".

The novel opens with beautiful Ayah surrounded by her thirteen admirers. The group of her admirers consists of the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs among others. These admirers of beautiful Ayah are: the Falletis Hotel cook, the Government House gardener, a sleek and arrogant butcher, the zoo attendant and Sher Singh. One of these admirers is the Ice-candy-man who plays different roles in the novel. His role is a key to all events. Sometimes he quotes national leaders and does a poetic mould confessing that he belongs to Kotha. When Ayah becomes a victim of riots, it is Ice-candy-man that saves her and rehabilitates her in Hira Mandi. Finally Rodabai, Lenny's Godmother, manages to send her to her native-place Amritsar. Ice-candy man forcefully marries her and also changes her name from Shanta to

Mumtaz. He loves her so much that he turns out to be a mad fakir in his love for Ayah who has already left for Amritsar to be with her parents leaving love-torn Ice-candy man to his fate. Even after Ayah has left Lahore, Ice-candy man appreciates her beauty:

Because of my family connection my wife and  
I live in the old quarter of the Mandi. They  
have accepted her. For my sake... and for the  
sake of her divine gifts! She has the voice of  
an angel and the grace and rhythm of a  
goddess. You should see her dance. How she  
moves! <sup>1</sup>

Ayah's charming personality and beauty exercises a type of hypnotic influence on Ice-candy-man. He says that he loves her so much and he will take care of her. Ayah's beauty fascinates Ice-Candy man profusely. Appreciating her beauty, he declaims another poetic outburst:

She lives to dance! And I to toast her dancer's  
grace! Princes pledge their lives to celebrate  
her celebrated face! <sup>2</sup>

Ayah uses her captivating charm to obtain easy gains – cheap doilies, cashew nuts, extra serving of food and many other things. She successfully uses her charm as a strategy of survival and manipulation till the violence of partition victimizes her. Bapsi Sidhwa uses the 'woman-as-victim' paradigm, the victimization of the woman is a result of a collective action viz. the communal riots that followed the partition. The maid in the Parsi family of Lahore - Ayah suffers the impact of partition the most. The communal riots give Ice-candy man the opportunity to engineer her abduction. The most tragic aspect of Ayah's abduction is that her favourite child Lenny's truth-infected tongue sets it off. It is Ayah's personal misfortune that people who love her most

betray her. Unfortunately her husband, who becomes instrumental in admitting her into a brothel commodifies her body. Lenny's Godmother, Rodabai, with the help of the Recovered Women's Camp, liberates Ayah. Ultimately she is able to return to Amritsar where her family lives. The novel ends with these words:

Until, one morning, when I sniff the air and miss the fragrance, and run in consternation to the kitchen, I am told that Ayah, at last, has gone to her family in Amritsar... And Ice-candy-man, too, disappears across the Wagah border into India.<sup>3</sup>

The traumas of partition as narrated in the novel are horrible. Merciless butchering, naked women's parade, arson, cutting off women's breasts, rape, massacre and looting belongings that were frequent in the days of the partition, earn the attention of Sidhwa in this novel. The Indian version of the partition portrays the Muslims in general and Jinnah in particular as the villains responsible for the vivisection of the subcontinent. Bapsi Sidhwa's attempts to put forward the other version i.e. Pakistani version of partition. Pleading for Jinnah and Pakistan, Bapsi Sidhwa says:

And I felt, in Ice-Candy Man, I was just redressing, in a small way, a very grievous wrong that has been done to Jinnah and Pakistanis by many Indian and British writers. They've dehumanised him, made him a symbol of the sort of person who brought about the partition of India...whereas in reality he was the only constitutional man who didn't sway crowds just by rhetoric.<sup>4</sup>

Sidhwa tries to justify Jinnah and the Pakistanis in their role in the partition of India. This is how Ice-Candy-Man presents the Pakistani view of partition. More specifically, the loss of communal harmony is the worse consequence of partition. The Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs used to live in an atmosphere of communal harmony before the partition but when the partition movement begins, this deep-rooted communal harmony disappears. Jagjeet Singh, with a furtive group of the Sikhs visits a Muslim village Pir Pindo in darkness to warn them of an impending Akali attack. In Pir Pindo men, women and children are killed. Similarly the Sikh families are attacked in Lahore. The neighbours of the Sethis, Mr. and Mrs. Singh and Sher Singh leave Lahore after Sher Singh's brother-in-law is killed. In the same way the student fraternity of King Edward's Medical College is disrupted. Prakash and his family migrate to Delhi and Rahul Singh and his pretty sisters are escorted to a convoy to Amritsar. In Lenny's household the gardener Hari is circumcised and becomes Himat Ali. Moti becomes David Masih. This is how different people resort to the politics of compromise and survival at the time of the crisis. The Masseur's mutilated dead body is found in a gunnysack. The event of partition results into a series of images and events depicting human loss and agony. The demographic change in Lahore upsets Lenny. She observes:

Lahore is suddenly emptied of yet another  
hoary dimension: there are no Brahmins with  
caste-marks-or Hindus in dhoties with bodhis.  
Only hordes of Muslim refugees.<sup>5</sup>

In furious communal atmosphere, nothing but only insanity prevails everywhere as ordinary men lose their rationality. Ice-candy man describes atrocities on women and states that the dead bodies in the train are all Muslims. He says to the Government House Gardener:

I'll tell you to your face-I lose my senses when  
I think of the mutilated bodies on that train  
from Gurdaspur... that night I went mad, I tell  
you! I lobbed grenades through the windows of  
Hindus and Sikhs I'd known all my life! I hated  
their guts... I want to kill someone for each of  
the breasts they cut off the Muslim women...  
The penises!<sup>6</sup>

Now Ice-candy man becomes revengeful. The revenge becomes the major motivation for him and his friends. This may be one of the reasons why he abducts the beautiful Ayah and keeps her in the brothels of Hira Mandi. By portraying this unusual event, Bapsi Sidhwa wants us to realize that even the passion of love is powerless against religious bigotry. The power of religion is tremendous, even Gokhale has exhibited the power religion can exercise on men in her novel Gods, Graves and Grandmother. This is the reason why Ice-candy man abducts the woman he loves. He ill-treats his beautiful beloved Ayah to avenge himself. It is in this sort of surcharged atmosphere that the Akali Leader, Master Tara Singh, visits Lahore. While addressing a big congregation, he shouts:

We will see how the Muslim swine get  
Pakistan! We will fight to the last man! We will  
show them who will leave Lahore! Raj karega  
Khalsa, aki rahi na koi! <sup>7</sup>

Master Tara Singh's address is greeted with the roar of 'Pakistan Murdabad! Death to Pakistan! Sat Siri Akaal! Bolay se nihaal!'<sup>8</sup> the Muslims, in turn shout: We'll play Holi-with-their-blood! Ho-o-o-li with their blo-o-o-d!<sup>9</sup>

Bapsi Sidhwa gives a realistic picture of the traumatic event of partition in Ice-Candy Man. Since both the communities have already

taken their positions, the festival of Holi becomes a blood-soaked festival. The type of communal harmony that prevailed before the Baisakhi of the year got shattered in the blood bath of Holi festival during partition. Horrible scenes are observed on both sides of the border. Marauding gangs of the Akalis subject the Muslims of Pir Pindo village that fell on the Indian side of the border to mass slaughter. On the other hand, the Hindus and the Sikhs of Lahore undergo a similar harrowing experience. The tragedy reaches climax when a trainload of corpses from across the border reaches Lahore. Ice-candy man's relatives lie dead in this heap of dead bodies. Iman Din's entire family has been butchered in Pir Pindo. Rana alone has survived to tell the gruesome tale.

At this stage of absolute disorder of communal amity, the Parsis of Lahore maintain a safe distance and act as the Messiah of the Hindus and the Sikhs trapped in the burning city. Lenny's mother and her aunt play a humanitarian role and protect the lives and property of the Hindus. She explains the reason why they have smuggled the rationed petrol thus:

We were only smuggling the rationed petrol to help our Hindu and Sikh friends to run away... And also for the convoys to send kidnapped women, like your Ayah, to their families across the border.<sup>10</sup>

Even Ayah is rescued by Lenny's Godmother and sent to her parents in Amritsar. Thus, inspired by a feeling of humanism, the Parsis shake off their passive neutrality and become the agents of leading-process. This humanitarian act on the part of Lenny's mother, her aunt and her Godmother is highly appreciable. Another major issue pertaining to the Parsi paradox during the period of the Indian struggle for independence, whether they should support Swaraj or they should be loyal to the Britishers, is depicted in Ice-Candy-Man. The incident of



the Joshan prayer to celebrate British victory at the fire temple in Lahore is neutral manifestation of the Parsi community. The Parsis fear the partition of India and consequently are in a fix as to which community they should support. The Parsis's meeting at their temple hall in Warris Road is significant. It expresses the insecurity of the Parsis not because of communal antagonism, but the apprehension of their status at the departure of the British. Col. Bharucha, the President of the Parsi Anjuman Lahore, considers home rule as a struggle for power, and warns his fellow Parsis:

Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power: and if you jockers jump into the middle you'll be mangled into chutney!<sup>11</sup>

Col. Bharucha does not wish that his community should be involved in partition movement. He wants his Parsi community to keep itself aloof from India's movement for freedom. As a spokesman of his community, he feels total insecurity for the Parsis. He says:

If we're stuck with the Hindus they'll swipe our business from under our noses and sell our grandfathers in the bargain: if we're stuck with the Muslims they'll convert us by the sword! And God help us if we're stuck with the Sikhs!<sup>12</sup>

Thus, taking a position is a problem for the Parsi community at the time of the partition. Dr. Bharucha tactfully advises his community:

I hope no Lahore Parsee will be stupid enough to court trouble. I strongly advise all you to stay at home-and out of trouble.<sup>13</sup>

Bharucha`s advice is not acceptable to all the Parsis of Lahore. It may raise a question of their integrity as well as a question of their loyalty to the land where they live. That is why Dr. Mody who promptly says opposes his advice: “Our neighbours will think we are betraying them and siding with the English”.<sup>14</sup>

At this meeting in Lahore one Parsi gentleman Mr. Toddiwala asks the community people to formulate their attitudes and actions based on self-interest: “Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land!”<sup>15</sup>

The Parsis decide to be neutral in the tug of war among the three major communities of India. They are rather perturbed because of absolute communal disharmony among them. The horrors of communal riots are unimaginable for the peace-loving Parsi community.

A minor thematic subtext in the novel is the slow awakening of the child protagonist to sexuality and pains and pleasures of the grown up and to the particular historical disaster that overwhelms her world. That is why the narrator starts the narration with these words, “My world is compressed.”<sup>16</sup> This statement made by Lenny can be interpreted in different ways but it is beyond doubt that the sentence contains the essence of the major theme of the novel.

Bapsi Sidhwa's An American Brat chronicles the adventures of a young Pakistani Parsi girl Feroza with an enormously satisfying story and characters. The extended family of Feroza Ginwalla, a lively and temperamental girl, agonizes over the decision to send her to America for a three-month holiday. This act of apparent audacity arises from concern over Feroza's conservative attitudes, which stem from Pakistan's rising tide of fundamentalism. Feroza's mother Zareen is also much worried about the conservative attitude of the girl. She says:

She objected to my sleeveless Sari-blouse! Really, this narrow-minded attitude touted by General Zia is infecting her, too. I told her: 'Look, we're Parsee, everybody knows we dress differently.' "When I was her age, I wore frocks and cycled to Kinnaird College. And that was in '59 and '60 - fifteen years after partition! Can she wear frocks? No. Women mustn't show their legs, women shouldn't dress like this, and women shouldn't act like that. Girls mustn't play hockey or sing or dance! If everything corrupts their pious little minds so easily, then the mullahs should wear burqas and stay within the four walls of their houses! <sup>17</sup>

The narrow-mindedness of Feroza becomes a problem for her parents - Zareen and Cyrus. She becomes more orthodox than her mother Zareen, though there is a big generation gap. Feroza's mother Zareen is perturbed that her daughter has adopted a Parsi- like orthodoxy in her attitude and outlook, thereby making her a misfit in her community. On the other hand, Cyrus Ginwalla, the father, is worried about another kind of loss of identity. He fears that his susceptible young daughter would fall in love and marry a non Parsi-boy. He thinks that the only solution to this problem is to send Feroza for a holiday to the U.S.A. He thinks that travel will broaden her outlook and get this puritanical rubbish out of her head. Feroza is sent to America for the purpose, an uncle only six years her senior, is her guide, friend and the bane of her existence. Her relationships and adventures shape her alternately hilarious and terrifying perceptions of the United States. Her expatriate experiences are wonderful. Feroza is of course the central character in An American Brat.

After coming to America, the shy Feroza who at Lahore hesitantly talked to young men, now flirts with Shashi, an Indian Student at the University of Denver, where she studies Hotel Management. Later on she falls in love with an American - David Press who is a Jew. She becomes confident and self-assertive. Her love affair with David Press comes to an end because of her mother Zareen's interference. The novel ends with Feroza becoming in her mother's words an 'American Brat'. She does not meekly return to Lahore for an arranged marriage with one of the three nice Parsi boys chosen for her. The novel thus ends ambivalently. Feroza, despite an estranged love affair with David Press and general feeling of depression, prefers the struggle for freedom and self-fulfillment at the U. S. A. instead of the settled family life at Lahore. At this stage Bapsi Sidhwa stresses the fact that the expatriate experiences go a long way in changing the protagonist's attitudes. If Feroza had stayed back in Pakistan, her views would have been different; may be she would never think of an inter-caste marriage.

In An American Brat Bapsi Sidhwa highlights the sensitive-issue of inter-community marriage between the Parsi and non-Parsi. On the theme of marriage, she maintains a clever balance, implicitly opposing the rigid code but not appearing overtly rebellious.

The theme elaborately examined in An American Brat is the controversial issue of prohibition of inter-community marriages among the Parsis. In making this issue the central concern of the narrative, Sidhwa reveals her awareness of an issue that has serious ramifications and consequences for the very existence of the Parsi community. Bapsi Sidhwa has hinted at the problem of inter-community marriages in all her novels. Marriage of his son with Portia Roy, a non-Parsi girl. The younger Parsis revolt against such artificial restrictions. Later Parsi novelists also show that the racial rigidity to inter community marriage is gradually getting eroded. Firdaus Kanga in his novel Trying to Grow shows that the protagonist Brit's family allows his

sister Dolly to marry a Muslim, Salim. Initially, Brit and Dolly's parents resist the marriage as to them; the Muslims are the enemies of their community. When Dolly refuses to change her stand, the parents give their consent.

Bapsi Sidhwa hints at the problem of inter-community marriage in her first novel The Crow Eaters. In this novel Yazdi, the second son of the successful businessman Fareedoon Junglewalla, is sensitive and aggrieved at the conspicuous commercialism and sycophancy of the Parsis. His father does not allow him to marry Rosy Watson, his childhood Anglo-Indian sweetheart. Bapsi Sidhwa shows through Fareedoon's speech the rationale behind the traditional Parsi opposition to any inter-community marriage. Bapsi Sidhwa locates the theme of inter-community marriage in a non-Parsi context in her next novel, The Pakistani Bride. The two inter-community marriages depicted are between the white American Carol and the Pakistani Muslim Farrukh and between the girl from the plains Zaitoon and the tribal from the hills, Sakhi. Both Carol and Zaitoon are victimized and the marriage causes them intense agony and unhappiness the novelist shows that marriage outside the community can be self-damaging thereby seemingly endorsing the traditional Parsi constrain of inter-community marriage. Thus it is beyond doubt that Bapsi Sidhwa does not favour those who wish to marry outside their community.

Bapsi Sidhwa's fourth novel, which differs from the first three of her novels prominently, deals with the theme of marriage. Soon the locale shifts from Pakistan to America and the young heroine finds herself going through a maze of experiences, which she would not have been permitted if she were in the care of parental home, though in America she is left to the care of her uncle who is probably not very senior to her. The writer very beautifully reveals all the facets of Feroza's personality. Man woman relationships are freely and frankly discussed, monetary importance in life is also depicted in the novel and how the emigrants are received. The women characters are very well portrayed in the novel Feroza, Zareen and her mother Khutlibai.

Zareen is oscillating between both the generations and she even partly agrees to Feroza's views but is weighed down by the opinion of the elders and the conservative Parsi community, which outwardly looks modern.

In An American Brat the theme of marriage is examined in detail and in Parsi context. Feroza's horizons widen when she joins a larger university in the Cosmopolitan city of Denver. She moves into an apartment with two American girls and sheds many of her social inhibitions in their company. Her newly acquired confidence and sense of freedom culminates in her falling in love with a Jewish boy, David Press, at Denver. When Feroza announces that she wants to marry David, her family in Pakistan is both agitated and shocked. The mother Zareen flies to Denver to dissuade Feroza from taking a step that would lead her being ex-communicated and expelled from the faith. The parents think that such a marriage would bring shame to the family honour. The family's opposition to Feroza's impending marriage represents the predominant traditionalist view of the Parsi community to such inter-community marriages as these. However, the author depicts the growing discontent with such ancient traditions among the younger generation of Parsis.

Zareen, when she sees David and finds him a suitable match, has doubts about the rigid code. She expresses the author's own uneasiness with the ancient tradition. Zareen begins to understand the logic of the younger Parsis' opposition, she says:

Perhaps the teenagers in Lahore were right. The Zoroastrian Anjumans in Karachi and Bombay should move with the times that were sending them to the New World... The various Anjumans would have to introduce minor reforms if they wished their tiny community to survive.<sup>18</sup>

Feroza's decision to marry David Press, a Jew, disturbs her mother very much.

Zareen is now trapped in a paradox. She finds David admirable and appealing. Yet she is also aware that such a marriage would deprive her daughter of her faith, heritage, family and community. Zareen recalls the warning from the Athornan Mandal and the notice from the Bombay Zoroastrian Jashan Committee. As a mother she fears that the marriage would be a problematic affair for her daughter. The novelist narrates Zareen's anxieties:

Zareen knew what she must do. However admirable and appealing David was, however natural to the stimulating and carefree environment, he would deprive her daughter of her faith, her heritage, her family, and her community. She would be branded an adulteress and her children pronounced illegitimate. She would be accused of committing the most heinous sacrileges. Cut off from her culture and her surroundings like a fish in shallow waters, her child would eventually shrivel up. And her dread for Feroza altered her opinion of David.<sup>19</sup>

Feroza's affair with David makes her mother restless. Even Feroza and David sense the change in her mood. They realize how fragile their happiness is and how vulnerable they are. Zareen is fully determined to divert Feroza from David at any rate. She uses the tactics of If you can't knock him out with sugar, slug him with honey, to thwart the marriage. She makes every possible effort to change her daughter Feroza's mind. She wants Feroza to change her decision to marry David Press at any rate. She is mentally prepared to get it done by hook or crook.

She pretends to agree to the marriage but insists on the rituals and ceremonies, which she knows, will frighten David, a very private and reserved person. The relationship disintegrates and Zareen's play particularly triumphs. As a Parsi writer, Bapsi Sidhwa does not take a rebellious stance against the dominating ideology of her community. However, Sidhwa is no conformist. She does not endorse the traditional Parsi code on inter-community marriage. Instead, through Zareen and Feroza's reactions, she hints at the need for change. Zareen realizes that by denying her daughter freedom of choice in marriage, she proves to be extremely rigid. Similarly Feroza is heart-broken after David's departure. However she does not compromise and remain firm in her resolve not to submit to the dictates of Parsi laws against inter-community marriages. She expresses her convictions towards the end of the novel thus:

There would never be another David, but there would be other men, and who knew, perhaps somebody she might like someone enough to marry him. It wouldn't matter if he was a Parsee or of another faith. She would be more sure of herself, and she wouldn't let anyone interfere.... As for her religion, no one could take it away from her; she carried its fire in her heart.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Feroza's stay in America certainly affects her fundamental attitude. She journeys through her own community's Parsi culture, her country, its Islamic culture and the Western culture of America. The orthodoxy of Feroza's community becomes a big hurdle on the path of her opposed marriage to David Press. Indira Bhatt rightly puts it:

Surprisingly the Parsi community that prides itself as westernized and liberated community



is in fact not so liberal. Bapsi Sidhwa portrays Parsi community's traditional dictum of double standards - one for the man, another for the woman especially when it is the question of inter-faith marriage. Man's inter-faith marriage is acceptable and his wife of the other faith and their children are accepted into the Parsi fold. But if a woman marries a non-Parsi, she is an outcast and debarred from community and even from their temple- Agiari. The Parsis are fundamentalists to the core and the priests are not prepared to move with the times even when the community is dwindling. To such a community family background belongs Feroza, the protagonist of An American Brat. It is this paradoxical situation of social life of the community where women are treated as equals and religious attitude of the elders where women are considered inferior that Bapsi Sidhwa portrays.<sup>21</sup>

Feroza's mother doesn't care for her daughters love. For her, her concern for the community is more important than her daughter's love. Feroza's conservative mother Zareen ironically realizes that by denying her daughter freedom of choice in marriage, she is doing great injustice to her. David's departure breaks Feroza's heart. She is in a helpless state, as she feels emotionally let down.

As far as the Indian expatriates in the U. S. A. are concerned, they are quite adept in adapting to the new environment and making themselves safe and secure there. The instinct of adaptability is profusely observed in the expatriate Indians. Shashi plays the role of a beggar tactfully to get money in America. Shashi's brother Deepak and his pregnant sister-in-law Mala come to America with a purpose. If the

child is born in America, they will have an advantage of the child's American citizenship. Feroza's first experience of the U.S. is her encounter with the immigration official that badgers her and tries to get her to admit that she has come to America to get married and the uncle is not an uncle. At this stage she is so upset that she starts weeping and shouting that she will go back to her own country. Manek, her uncle warns her to be silent and manages to convince the immigration official of their true relationship assuring him that she would go back to Pakistan the moment her visa expires. Bapsi Sidhwa exposes Feroza to the cruel and harsh realities of life when she lands in America. Feroza is exposed to the ways of the New World for the first time in her life. Bapsi Sidhwa makes Feroza's arrival at New York a little unrealistic only to show to Feroza that the new world is not so simple as her third world country Pakistan.

Bapsi Sidhwa highlights the theme of expatriate experiences in Feroza's initiation to the U.S.A. Her check-up at the customs, incredibility at the lights, museums opulence and shopping at New York have been portrayed imaginatively in the novel. Her innocence as well as ignorance comes to light when she gets lost on the fire stair at the Y.M.C.A., in a museum at Boston and her confusion when confronted by a sex maniac at the Y.M.C.A. bathroom. Her first visit to the first world as a citizen of the third world country exposes her to wonderful things. Novy Kapadia observes:

Creditably during this initial phase of the novel, Sidhwa does not emerge as an apologist for the first world or the USA. She chronicles the glamour and efficiency of the USA but also delineates the seedy and violent aspects of life in a post-industrial, consumerist and technology dominated society.<sup>22</sup>

Feroza's uncle Manek also exposes her to the other side of New York. He tells her about looks out, runners, drug-dealers, elegant transvestites, male prostitutes and pubs of poverty. Feroza is also shown the port authority bus terminal in New York. Bapsi Sidhwa narrates it:

The interior of the terminal appeared stark in the neon lighting, and from its squalid center sprang a fetid stench that made Feroza reel. She sensed the terminal was the infested hub of poverty from which the homeless and the discarded spiraled all over the shadier sidewalks of New York. Ragged and filthy men and women were spreading scores of flattened cardboard boxes to sleep on in the bus terminal.<sup>23</sup>

Feroza's uncle Manek succeeds in adjusting with the American way of life. He wants his niece Feroza to imbibe the progressive and stimulating culture of the U.S.A. Strangely enough, Manek enjoys the company of liberal women in America but when it comes to marriage, he returns to Lahore and agrees to an arranged marriage. He chooses a simple and straightforward girl, Aban to whom divorce is an ill-omened word. In short, in this novel Bapsi Sidhwa depicts expatriate experiences, cultural clashes and theme of inter-community marriages and their impact on the lives of characters.

## I

In Ice-Candy Man, there are quite a few significant women characters like Lenny, the child narrator, her Godmother Rodabai, her Ayah Shanta, her mother, slave sister, her electric aunt etc. Sidhwa's purpose to portray several women characters in this novel is to look at

it from the feminist point of view. Some of the strong women characters in this novel want to forge their independent identity.

Lenny is an eight-year-old Parsi girl, who narrates the story of her changing world with sophistication and wonder. Sidhwa deliberately chooses a marginalized narrator who is a child, a female, a Parsi and a victim of polio. By making Lenny the narrator of the novel, the writer also wants to focus on the nature of surrounding reality from the feminine perspective.

Sidhwa relates through the eyes of her child narrator the partition story from different perspectives. At the time of partition, Lenny herself is not directly affected. She lives in a safe and predominantly woman's world around her. She spends most of her time with either her Ayah or her Godmother. Lenny is not exposed much to the world of men except for her encounters with her cousin, who is exploring his newly discovered sexuality.

Lenny observes that Ayah has quite a few admirers representing different communities. Her beauty captivates a number of Hindu, Muslim, and Christian and Sikh men. At the outset it seems that Ayah capitalizes on her beauty. But later on, Ice-candy man and his gangsters abduct her. Lenny loves her Ayah so much that she cannot do any wrong to her. But unfortunately, her truth-affected tongue becomes instrumental in Ayah's abduction.

Lenny belongs to an upper class Parsi family but she has live contact with people representing different classes. She, as a shrewd observer gives a comprehensive account of life in Lahore at the time of partition. Robert L. Ross rightly puts it:

Lenny's naiveté, her privileged position, and her religious background lend her version of partition a quality that orders novels about

this tempestuous period in Indo-Pakistani history lack. The momentous events leading to partition and the aftermath are constructed incrementally through the child narrator's point of view, as she repeats overheard adult conversations, tells of strange sights, and sometimes even misrepresents or misinterprets situations.<sup>24</sup>

Lenny has to tell a serious story of India's partition and its fatal consequences. As a child narrator, her sensibility is potential enough to discuss serious theme. Sylvia Clayton, an eminent literary critic, states:

In this rich, original novel Sidhwa contrives, without fake naiveté, to tell the story through the eyes of a sharp, inquisitive eight-year-old girl Lenny, who has a crippled foot and is cared for by a beautiful young Ayah. Lenny is established so firmly as a truthful witness that the mounting unease in Lahore, the riots, fires and brutal massacres become real through the child's experience. The colossal upheaval of partition, when cities were allotted to India or Pakistan like pieces on a chess-board, and their frightened inhabitants were often savagely uprooted, runs like an earth tremor through this thoughtful novel.<sup>25</sup>

Bapsi Sidhwa has given autobiographical touches to the portrayal of Lenny's character. During her childhood, she herself suffered from polio. As a child, Lenny's hypersensitivity is deep rooted. She cannot understand how and why the communal harmony which is observed among people, disappears at the time of partition.

Rodabai, Lenny's Godmother, is another important female character in the novel. She helps Ayah at the time of adversities when Ayah tells her that Ice-candy man does not mistreat her now, she advises her to forget what has happened in past. Mumtaz tells her that she cannot forget what happened. At this stage Godmother says to Lenny:

That was fated, daughter. It can't be undone.  
But it can be forgiven... Worse things are  
forgiven. Life goes on and the business of  
living buries the debris of our pasts. Hurt,  
happiness... all fade impartially ... to make  
way for fresh joy and new sorrow. That's the  
way of life.<sup>26</sup>

She is endowed with profound understanding of human nature. The most remarkable example of her extra-ordinary self-confidence, authoritativeness and ability to handle the unfavourable situations is profusely exhibited in her dealing with the Ice-candy man. He pleads to Rodabai: "I am her slave, *Baijee*. I worship her. She can come to no harm with me."<sup>27</sup>

On hearing these words of Ice-candy man, she roars in anger like a tigress:

No harm?' Godmother asks in a deceptively cool voice - and arching her back like a scorpion its tail, she closes in for the kill. 'You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks, and goondas and say she has come to no harm?'<sup>28</sup>

Rodabai is not at all happy with the way Ice-candy man behaved with Ayah once upon a time. She wants to teach him a lesson. She further takes him to task:

Is that why you had her lifted off let hundreds of eyes probe her - so that you could marry her? You would have your own mother carried off if it suited you! You are a shameless badmash! Nimakharam! Faithless!<sup>29</sup>

Rodabai does not spare Ice-candy man when she gets a chance to scold him. She turns a deaf ear to the words uttered by him. It is she who comes to Ayah's rescue, and helps her in every possible way at the time of her adversity.

Another interesting woman character in the novel is Ayah who is extremely beautiful and surrounded by her admirers. She is a close companion to Lenny. She is a Hindu and her real name is Shanta. Ice-candy man engineers her abduction, keeps her in Hira Mandi and forcefully marries her. But she never gives him her heart. Lenny's Godmother helps her to go to Amritsar where her family lives. On the whole, her character is quite impressive because she is an embodiment of feminine beauty. She represents the Indian earth and her admirers represent different communities living in India.

'Please. Please persuade her... explain to her... I will keep her like a queen... like a flower... I'll make her happy,' he says, and succumbing to the pressure of his pent-up misery starts weeping.<sup>30</sup>

But all his efforts are in vain. He turns out to be a mad fakir. He takes patrolling to Warris Road and Rosy-Peter's compound with the hope of seeing Ayah. Occasionally he recites Zauq:

Why did you make a home in my heart?  
Inhabit it. Both the house and I are  
desolate. Am I a thief that your watchman  
stops me? Tell him, I know this man. He is my  
fate.<sup>31</sup>

Now, whenever he meets Ayah near the Recovered Women's Camp on Warrish Road, he cannot face her. He feels extremely sorry for what he has done to her. Like a mad poet, he goes on repeating a couplet by Faiz as if it is a prayer. He murmurs: "There are other wounds besides the wounds of love- Other nights besides passionate nights of love"<sup>32</sup>

Ice-candy man plays different roles throughout the novel. At a time he may be selling candies, later on he turns out to be a bird catcher. He also becomes a messenger between Allah and people. He speaks to Allah on telephone. He also plays a role of a politician at the time of partition.

Another character that is leading the life of a bonded slave, forced to suppress herself in every interaction with Godmother, is her younger sister who is called Slavesister. She is only a flat character in the novel. She is not at all allowed to exercise her discretion or her will in any situation. She is treated shabbily and frequently humiliated by her real sister Rodabai. Slavesister's humiliation in the presence of others is shocking. Sidhwa has deliberately created her character to convey an important message that the exploitation, manipulation and suppression of one individual by another are not confined to male-female relationship. But it can and does exist between female-female relationships. Introducing her electric aunt Lenny says:

My electric aunt is a resourceful widow  
addicted to quick decisions and swift results.  
The speed at which she moves from spot to



spot-from dawn to dusk- have earned her a citation/she is called, in moments of need and gratitude, bijli: a word that in the various Indian languages, with slight variations, stands for both electricity and lightning.<sup>33</sup>

Lenny further says that her electric aunt is also addicted to navy blue colour. she and her son share a bedroom which has a navy blue curtains, navy- blue bedspreads and navy-blue linen dollies on the dressing table.

Muccho, is Moti`s wife and Pupoo`s mother. She is a woman with a temperamental defect. We never know when she loses her temper. Lenny narrates:

They cannot physically restrain Muccho. Handling a woman not related to them would be an impropriety. Her husband, Moti, dares not interfere either. Muccho would make his life intolerable. Submissive in all other respects, Muccho`s murderous hatred for their daughter makes her irrational.<sup>34</sup>

Muccho does not treat her daughter Papoo well. She rather illtreats her daughter. She says to Papoo:

Wait till I fix you, yoy shaitan! You chogail! Muchho screams vindictively. "You`ve got a jinn in yoy... but I`ll knock it out or I`m not your mother! Just you see what I have in store for you. I`ll put you right! You`ll scream to the dead. May you die!"<sup>35</sup>

Muchho does not train Papoo and then scolds her so much. Even Lenny says that she hates Muchho. She further says that she cannot understand her cruelty to her own daughter. Lenny is afraid that someday Muchho will kill her own daughter Papoo. Moti-the sweeper and his wife Muccho, and their untouchable daughter Papoo, become even more untouchable to other high caste people. They are entrenched deeper in their low Hindu caste. The portrayal of Muccho and Papoo highlights the fact that the women of low caste have to face a major social discrimination in the Indian subcontinent.

Lenny's mother confirms to the traditional image of a fidel, faithful and serving wife. She is very simple and docile. She submits to the moods of the man. She is wedded to social causes.

Rashmi Gaur rightly remarks:

The women characters of Ice-Candy-Man draw our attention to the facts of victimization of women and their compulsions to define their lives according to the pre-fixed gender roles. They also expose the patriarchal biases present in the archetypal social perceptions. Lenny, the child protagonist, recognizes these social patterns and exhibits the vivacity to transcend them. She also records the multi-child ensures that the surrounding world would be seen through a feminine eye. The novel presents women as a "twice oppressed category on stage: firstly, as human beings suffocated by violence and secondly, as women burdened by the bond and impositions of a patriarchal society."<sup>36</sup>

Bapsi Sidhwa as a writer has a constructive approach towards women's predicament. Women may not simply fit a place in the society

but they should fit in it. They should never lose an opportunity for their betterment.

## II

Bapsi Sidhwa has portrayed some memorable women characters like Zarin, Feroza, Aban etc. in An American Brat. They play their role in their limited span of life.

Zareen, Feroza's mother, is portrayed as a typical Parsi woman, but at the end of the novel she realizes that by denying her daughter freedom of choice in marriage she and the educated custodians of the Zoroastrian doctrine are not less rigid than the Fundos in Pakistan. She plays a major role in separating her daughter Feroza from her lover David. Even before she flies to America from Lahore for the purpose, she is mentally prepared to get the work done by hook or crook. She goes to America with ten thousand dollars in case some bribe is to be given to David for his withdrawal. Her strong will power enables her to set the thing right though it is difficult to separate genuine lovers from each other.

Zareen makes David feel that he and Feroza have been too cavalier and callow in dismissing the dissimilarities in their backgrounds. Her attitude towards him distresses and humiliates him. She even tries to convince her daughter Feroza to change her mind. She says that it is not a matter of Feroza marrying a non-Parsi boy but her entire family is involved. She tries to describe how much pleasure the interaction with new Parsi in-laws would bring the family. She is of the opinion that if Feroza marries a Parsi boy, it will lead to "more wedding feasts, more cozy friendships, more bonding within the community and more prestige."<sup>37</sup> She says to Feroza:

You are robbing us of a dimension of joy we  
have a right to expect. What will you bring to

the family if you marry this David? His family won't get involved with ours. But that doesn't matter so much... What matters is your life- it will be so dry. Just husband, wife, and may be a child rattling like loose stones in this huge America!<sup>38</sup>

Before she leaves America, she has achieved her goal to bring Feroza's relationship with David to an end. She has to do so as she is a typical Parsi woman who will not allow her daughter to violate the basic norms of Zoroastrianism. Sidhwa explains the reason why she dissuades Feroza to marry David:

Zareen wanted to spin a protective shield of love around her daughter, defend her from accusations of polluting the genetic structure of their race and dirtying the spiritual genes, if there were such things, and the purity of their religion: mighty charges no young girl could withstand, not even if she professed to be irreligious.<sup>39</sup>

Ironically, Zareen wishes that David were a Parsi. In fact she finds him suitable for Feroza but the only problem is that he is a Jew. At this stage she becomes Sidhwa's mouthpiece and expresses her own unease with the ancient tradition. She begins to understand the logic behind the opposition of the young Parsis to the prohibition of interfaith marriages. Sidhwa narrates:

Perhaps the teenagers in Lahore were right. The Zoroastrian Anjuman in Karachi and Bombay should move with the times that were sending them to the New World. Bunny's image materialized before her with startling

lucidity as her niece tossed her ponytail and said, "For God's sake! You're carrying on as if Feroza's dead! She's only getting married. Of course. And to a nice boy. Zareen was sanguine. The various Anjumans would have to introduce minor reforms if they wished their tiny community to survive."<sup>40</sup>

At this stage Zareen is in a fix. Her idea about David begins to change and she finds him admirable and appealing. At the same time she is fully conscious that such a marriage would deprive her daughter of her faith, heritage, family and community. Zarin recalls the warning from the Athoran Mandal and the Notice from the Bombay Zoroastrian Jashan Committee. The notice runs thus:

#### **NOTICE**

PLEASE NOTE THAT ACCORDING TO THE PARSEE, ZOROASTRIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, PERCEPTS, TENETS, DOCTRINES, HOLY SCRIPTURES, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS, ONCE A PARSEE-ZOROASTRIAN MARRIES A NON-ZOROASTRIAN, HE OR SHE IS DEEMED TO HAVE RENOUNCED THE FAITH AND CEASES TO BE A PARSEE-ZOROASTRIAN FAITH FORBID INTERMARRIAGES, AS MIXING PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL GENES IS CONSIDERED A CARDINAL CRIME AGAINST NATURE. HENCE, HE OR SHE DOES NOT HAVE ANY COMMUNAL OR RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OR PRIVILEGES.<sup>41</sup>

The notice shows us the concern of the parents for their children. It in fact becomes a manual of life style for them that include the parents, children and the future generations.

Feroza is a central character in An American Brat. At her early days in Pakistan, she grows to be a conservative child. She objects to her mother's way of dressing. She firmly believes that even Parsi women in Lahore should not dress differently. Her father Cyrus is worried about a Muslim boy who visits Feroza to persuade her to play the role in the drama. He thinks that his dear daughter might succumb to the Islamic conservatism one way or the other and forget her own Parsi tradition.

She is sent to America, which changes her so much so that the shy girl does not hesitate to flirt with an Indian student Shashi. She falls in love with David who does not belong to her community. Her mother, Zareen, objects to her affair with a non Parsi boy as it will ultimately lead her to the depravation of her family, faith and everything. She is bold enough to face her mother on this crucial issue, but David finally withdraws because he is unable to resist the traditional Parsi marriage ceremony as proposed by Zareen.

In fact, David also belongs to a traditional Jewish family. Even his parents are not happy with his idea to marry a Parsi girl. He says to Feroza:

My parents aren't happy about the marriage, either. It's lucky they're Reform Jews, otherwise they'd go into mourning and pretend I was dead. We have Jewish customs, you know. My family will miss my getting married under a canopy by our rabbi. We have a great dinner and there's a table with twenty or thirty

different kinds of desserts, cake, and fruit.  
Then there's dancing until late at night. <sup>42</sup>

Towards the end of the novel we realise that exotic charm that Feroza has evoked in David's mind is gradually fading. Sidhwa has created the character of David to show that in practice, the infusion of two different ancient religions, traditions, and culture namely Zoroastrianism and Judaism is rather difficult.

Zareen, Feroza's mother, is portrayed as a typical Parsi woman, but at the end of the novel she realises that by denying her daughter freedom of choice in marriage she and the educated custodians of the Zoroastrian doctrine are not less rigid than the Fundos in Pakistan. She plays a major role in separating her daughter Feroza from her lover David. Even before she flies to America from Lahore for the purpose, she is mentally prepared to get the work done by hook or crook. She goes to America with ten thousand dollars in case some bribe is to be given to David for his withdrawal. Her strong will power enables her to set the thing right though it is difficult to separate genuine lovers from each other.

Before she leaves America, she has achieved her goal to bring Feroza's relationship with David to an end. She has to do so as she is a typical Parsi woman who will not allow her daughter to violate the basic norms of Zoroastrianism.

Ironically, Zareen wishes that David were Parsi. In fact she finds him suitable for Feroza but the only problem is that he is a Jew. At this stage she becomes Sidhwa's mouthpiece and expresses her own unease with the ancient tradition. She begins to understand the logic behind the opposition of the young Parsis to the prohibition of interfaith marriages.

Towards the end of the novel we realize that exotic charm that Feroza has evoked in David's mind is gradually fading. Sidhwa has created the character of David to show that in practice, the infusion of two different ancient religions, traditions, and culture namely Zoroastrianism and Judaism is rather difficult. On the other hand Feroza does not wish that religion should interfere with her matrimonial affair. At the end of the novel An American Brat Feroza emerges as a dynamic girl who has already made up her mind not to surrender to social taboo of inter-faith marriage prevailing in the Parsi community.



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## CHAPTER-4

### **TOWARDS EMANCIPATION-A STUDY OF NAMITA GOKHALE'S PARO: DREAMS OF PASSION AND GODS, GRAVES AND GRANDMOTHER**

Paro: Dreams of Passion is Gokhale's first sensational novel, which created a stir and set a genre of its own. Here the author has portrayed stark reality of life; she has set her characters on a roller coaster ride. The book depicts frankness par excellence, explicit depiction of sexuality is present. The character of Paro goes to any height in fulfilling her desire and finally falls to the deepest depths. This way she succumbs to death. Her freak-outs lead her to a trap. This novel deals with erotic overtures, and obsession with love. Paro is essentially the story of an irresistible and passionate, though outrageous, woman of the same name. From the beginning, Paro has been presented as a proud, audacious and self-confident, ambitious woman. Her fatal flaw was vanity; she loved self-dramatization. Here the narrator has had an instinct for truth and made it a point to see things as they were and not as they should have been. It deals with the theme of human predicament. This is an excellent debut novel. The book is like a sensuous, seductive stream of consciousness of a woman (the narrator) who comes of age, in a metaphorical sense, in the world of Bombay and its corporate corridors. It is laced with lusty relationships, shrewd observations and the feelings of being a woman and lost in such a world. The writing is perfect, immaculate and very Indian in evoking sights, smells and feelings. At the centre of the novel is a seductress, Paro herself, who is the alter ego of the narrator, Priya. That way the novel is a story of two women Paro and Priya. A brilliant novel and one most cherished by all. Paro is a heroic temptress, alluring and rapacious, the stuff of legend. Wandering through the world of privilege and Scotch whiskey that the rich inhabit, she is observed constantly by the acid Priya, eternal voyeur and diarist, who identifies strongly with the heroine of her favorite novel, Rebecca, and vicariously follows the melodrama of Paro's life. Priya herself is

in love with her boss, the irresistible BR, sewing-machine magnate and 'the Housewife's Friend'. Paro, inevitably, marries him, to Priya's fury. But BR is merely one among a whole string of admirers; Paro has seduced many. Here the novelist tries to tell that the modern life is a life of angst and it is the outcome of their way of life. There is interplay of reality and fantasy; there lies its strength. The transparency of the novel is a positive factor. The characters deprived of intellectual and emotional vitality and emerge as stock figures. The book suggests that life of hedonism is not a solution to the challenges life provides with. It conveys the underlying meaning that the protagonists of the novel take an otherwise view of life when disturbed by the problems of life. Eventually, as in all moral tales, Paro succumbs to life and circumstances, but not before the reader has been wildly entertained by social comedy without parallel in Indian writing. Paro the heroine of the novel marries B.R., the sewing machine magnate. He was a handsome man. But their marriage does not last long. After their separation both Paro and B.R. engage in different affairs. On the other hand Priya marries Suresh. She does not like him but due to societal norms continues with him. But after her miscarriage due to Paro's revengeful behaviour, Paro had gifted them with an art picture, which was scary, and on seeing the picture Priya aborted. In desperation she also tries to move away from wedlock but again returns. It exhibits the human values, man-woman relationship of the postmodern society. Woman's tall strides remain insatiable without a companion.

Then talking about her second novel, set in the backdrop of semi-urban Delhi, the book effectively moves between the everyday details of poverty, ignorance and illiteracy and the supernatural realm of the temple which forms the focal point of Gudiya's life ... A racy and engrossing book. Gods Graves and Grandmother is the story of Gudiya and her ancient grandmother, who, along with Gudiya's mother, have fled from small town scandal and disgrace. This magical book, with its insidious readability and surreal humor, wears its many complexities lightly. It will continue to haunt its readers for a long time. She quotes:

I am deeply interested in religion and I am a very religious person myself. But then at the same time I can see the absurdity of religion and all the trouble that it causes.<sup>1</sup>

It was understandable that after love death became Namita's obsession. Obsession with love and death resulted in two books: Gods, Graves and Grandmother written after she beat cancer and the non-fiction Mountain Echos. Despite tragedies in her personal life, she finds 'a lot of magic in everyday life which is to be discovered, she gives a frank opinion that Failure is more important than success and suffering is a great incentive to growth. It reveals and re-defines character. Happiness makes us lazy and flabby. You ponder over these statements and understand why Namita Gokhale loves life as much as she loves death.

If you have run out of luck, lost everything you owned and are reluctant to work for your living, there is a formula for survival in comfort. All you have to do is to find a big *peepal* tree (for good reasons botanists call it *ficus religiosa*) and set up your abode under it. Smear its trunk with saffron paste, put a grey stone against it, and next to that keep a garland or two of marigold flowers and a platter of copper with a few coins in it to encourage others to do the same. Then blow a conch shell and ring bells to announce the advent of a new incarnation of one of the gods of the Hindu pantheon. You will be in good business: plenty of money in offerings, no accounting for it to anyone, no taxes. And much respect from the community. This can only happen in India. It is a satire on the society.

This is the theme of Namita Gokhale's latest novel Gods, Graves and Grandmother (Penguin). In her story a family of *kothawalis* (prostitutes) once living in a large *haveli* and patronized by rich *zamindars*, merchants and even the *sahib log* lose all their money and find themselves on the road to destitution. Ammi is too old to be of service to her clients but still has a melodious voice to sing *bhajans*. Her daughter, who has all that a courtesan needs to have, suddenly loses all her hair and elopes with a fellow who does not mind having a bald mistress. Her daughter is still *Gudia* (doll), too young

to be deflowered. So the destitute grandmother and granddaughter arrive in Delhi, find a hospitable *peepal* tree, set up a makeshift temple and a hut to sleep in. In no time business picks up. Now they have an ample-bosomed flower seller, three leper beggars at a respectable distance, a *shastriji* who can chant appropriate *mantras* in Sanskrit and, most important of all, a *pehalwan* (wrestler) who makes a handsome living collecting *raakhi* (protection money) from shopkeepers and helps landlords to evict recalcitrant tenants and tenants to grab landlords' property at a big fee. He also has a clout with local politicians. The slab of stone becomes the centrepiece of a huge marble temple. When Ammi dies, she is buried as a saint. This adds to the sanctity and income of the temple. Gudiya grows into a beautiful girl. She is not happy studying in a school run by a kind Parsi lady who tries to adopt her as her daughter. She fantasies becoming a film star and assumes the name Pooja, the daughter of a wealthy *zamindar*. Then falls in love with a handsome but good-for-nothing clarinet player, member of a band leading wedding processions. Decked in a colorful pseudo-military uniform and riding a white horse, he appears to her as Prince Charming, god Kalki of the future. She is more than willing to lose her virginity to him when he takes her behind a cluster of bushes. Instead of Gudiya, alias Pooja, it is Kalki who disappears to try his luck in Bollywood.

Gods, Graves and Grandmother is a satire on present-day India. Namita Gokhale has skillfully strung different episodes like beads of a rosary to portray the seamier side of Indian life and morality. This is a gripping and enthralling book that wears its many complexities lightly. It will continue to haunt its readers long after they have put it down. From these great heights Gudiya's world plunges into the depths of almost complete penury when she arrives in Delhi with her ancient grandmother, Ammi, fleeing small-town scandal and disgrace. Just when all seems lost, Ammi works a miracle: a slab of green marble stolen from a building site, and five rounded pebbles from a garden... Namita Gokhale's Gods, Graves and Grandmother is a steamy and often lugubrious "Indian" novel about devotion (sacred and profane, genuine and fake), abjection, grandmothers, singing and pickling. After Midnight's Children and Small Things, pickling has become quite an Indo-Anglian topic.:

“Midnight’s Children paved a way both conceptually and narratively for the other writers. Gokhale’s second published novel, deals with the theme of love and death, as Namita Gokhale had herself faced a personal tragedy in her life, which is reflected in this novel. The grandmother has been portrayed as a woman of great resource and skill. This novel of 240 pages is a good reading and reflects an autobiographical impact. Even this novel has been enacted in the play form.

## I

Paro is the main character in the novel, she is a woman of guts, a woman who has no control whatsoever over her senses, a pure naturalistic perspective has been portrayed by the writer in portraying the character. Paro believes in enjoying, self-discipline is an alien aspect to her. It depicts the sybarite culture of the upper middle class society of the metros like Delhi and Bombay. The postcolonial life has a drastic impact on the middle class society and that of the metropolitan cities of India-the glimpse of which is evident in this novel. Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children has influence on Gokhale’s Paro: dreams of passion as many other novels by Indian writers share this feeling. Paro knows the art of taking she can do that efficiently. Paro is everywhere, everybody’s thirst to be. Paro’s relations are known through her, which Priya comments:

There’s this guy-I’ve forgotten his name but his wife is this dame Paro.They’re stinking rich and she’s really beautiful.<sup>2</sup>

The impact of Paro’s personality was deep rooted on everybody; she had established herself in that manner. She was aggressive in her motives and mannerisms were of superior being, she was different from others. Paro has been portrayed as a woman without free will, but governed by the physical laws of nature. Her behavior leads her to a bad end.

Women writers exhibit different ideology-some show blended voices, some show feminine voice while others display the modern women and the new woman concept recently coined in the world of literature. Namita Gokhale employs a` language of performance`Gokhale has revealed the life of the women of the upper middle class of the post colonial India, their escapades, sexual acrobatics, their world view within the framework of a novel. Paro was a woman of extreme guts, but she also required someone to talk to, to confide in and here she found a companion in Priya. She talks to her of her childhood experience:

He raped me in a grove of pine-trees, he sadonised me in the woods behind the chapel. I still have the watercolor I was painting when that happened; it shows the landscape exactly as it was the day my life began to get fucked up. You know birds, butterflies, blue skies, and the works. It hangs in my bedroom. I look at it and weep.<sup>3</sup>

These are Paro`s revelations, the stories revolving around her school days, her drawing teacher`s behavior and her attitude which is exemplary of her boldness and free will. This incident reveals mixed opinion as though she is weeping; she has that picture hanged on her bedroom wall. She further tells:

I was good. You know, I wanted to be P.M. of India, you know.” I nodded in understanding.” But we had this art master-Marcus something. I loved painting, you know. I was good at it. I suppose I was very sexy-looking for a schoolgirl. Anyway, there I was busy with my landscape, trying to get the right cerulean blue for the sky and the fucking Vandyke brown for the trees. It was during the dussehra vacations. My folks were abroad so I stayed back at the hostel. There was no one else



around. He was quite young, this art master, and very good-looking in a longhaired way. Anyway, he tells me, "You look like a wood nymph." Then he starts getting sexy.... you know.... and I don't know what's happening but I sort of like it. And then suddenly he's on top of me, right there in between all those pine needles, and fucking me right and left. And there are crows going "Caw, Caw" in the trees. After a while I liked it. I liked it one hell of a lot. <sup>4</sup>

These views from the heroine of Gokhale's sensational novel, Paro very well explains to us the concept of free will and naturalism. To satisfy her aspirations Paro married a business tycoon B.R. She was beautiful and had the charms to attract a man and B.R. was flat for her. Their marriage was arranged on a grand scale and may be it made some of the girls in B.R.'s office little depressed and jealous of Paro. Even Priya took this marriage with a pinch of salt. "Ivy, Mary and I loved him (B.R.) madly; and all of us hated Paro." <sup>5</sup> She further adds:

Ivy, Mary and Anita were all heartbroken. I wasn't listened coldly to all their excited chatter about the continuing search for the Right Gift. <sup>6</sup>

Priya hesitantly went for the wedding of B.R. and Paro as she herself wanted to see her, she elaborately dressed in her best-red chiffon sari which she had worn for the first time when she had met B.R., she carefully did her hair in a low bun. She minutely expresses the marriage ceremony and the behavior of the newly wedded. The post modern society woman after her bash and economic independence is once again subdued and aspires to be man's subordinate. Chiffon and georgette saris are once again in vogue, symbolizing feminineness.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw B.R. and Paro walk into the room. Rai Bahadur rushed to receive them. She was wearing a silver tissue sari, and was positively glittering with diamonds. They were strewn like dewdrops over her chokers, pendants, rings, bangles, sequins, tall as she was; she was balancing on the highest stiletto heels I had ever seen in my life. Even her payals were encrusted with incredibly real-looking diamonds. Her lipstick was pale silver, and silver eye shadow gleamed over her hard eyes. `Hi, Dadyyji, `she said throatily, planting a kiss smack on Rai Bahadur`s forehead-she had to bend over slightly to reach him her audacity and self-confidence took my breath away. This was not how brides behaved in my world. All the brides I had ever encountered kept their heads-which were so perilously downcast as to appear anatomically endangered-well covered with their sari pallavs. But she stood proud and straight, and led the way, with B.R. and her parents trailing after her. Her father, I knew, was a brigadier and her mother too looked an average member of the upper middle class. Both had polite vacant smiles fixed uneasily to their faces, and they appeared in every way too mundane and ordinary to have bred so exotic a creature as the shimmering bride before them. She circulated through the room with an assured catlike grace. One mehndied hand carelessly held on to, horror of horrors, a glass of gin! The other was graciously bestowed on B.R., who followed in her wake, a slightly glad look in his fine eyes. They came to the corner where I stood. A paternal Rai Bahadur again hovered around me. At the sight of

B.R. my heart, my stomach, my legs, all turned to unset jelly.<sup>7</sup>

These words give us a glimpse of the showmanship of the high-class society, their shallow life pattern, the pomp, the attitude of the elders, and the man-woman relationship. It also reveals Priya's fatuation for B.R. in whose office she was working. Paro's life is full of superficiality but men consider her behavior as that of finality. Whatever she says, whether pertaining to food, exercise, or any other field, is accepted as a final verdict. Paro engages in whimsical social extremes. Life is made up of small things and one who can enjoy the subtleties of life is a rich person. But the life of the neo rich class is different, colourless, tasteless and emotionless. Priya has to say about her, after her ordeal with yoga, food became her obsession especially salad days came into practice.

Cooking is unhealthy, unnatural, and unhygienic, she would declare with all the fervor of a convert. She further said oh Priya what about the aesthetics, and then squiggled little squares and threw it over everything and announced enthusiastically to everybody that lunch was ready.<sup>8</sup>

Men accepted whatever she did, she had that convincing capability and skill. She was too powerful outwardly for anybody to ignore but in her personal life there was vacuum. Even during intimate moments she is capable of dramatizing, superficiality is ingrained in her life. For an emancipated woman like Paro; could not continue with one man and marriage was not a permanent feature for Paro. Priya comments:

This is the Paro who is recently liberated from marriage and convention: she is still convinced that she is young and desirable as she was. Her massive breasts, like the enlarged pores of her

skin, have grown ponderous with age. Even her fingers have become fatter-but this coarsening of body has also somehow catalyzed a startling vitality of mind, a vigor that is as crude as it is real. Life has not tired her-she is undiminished, she has grown. She is still obsessed, loudly and clamorously, with questions that the rest of us answered, or decided not to answer, at some period around adolescence.<sup>9</sup>

Paro had many suitors namely B.R.,(her ex husband) Lenin, Avinendra, Sambhunath Mishra and so on. Once Lenin confided about Paro to Priya; according to him Paro was a symbol of emancipation. She could not make herself comfortable with one man and was running helter and skelter for love and affection and acceptance. Listening to Lenin's comment Priya feels:

Lenin would confide in me about Paro's behaviour. He was completely dependent upon her emotionally, and I wondered sometimes whether it was a mother fixation or something psychological like that. They looked a little ludicrous in juxtaposition-Paro, massive, towering, dressed in large handloom prints and chunky jewellery, with daubs of kohl under her eyes, her frizzy hair hennaed a deep shade of red; and Lenin, in his crumpled kurta-pyjama, trailing behind her as she stormed in and out of cars, houses, lobbies, like a leaf in a summer aandhi.<sup>10</sup>

Paro was may be not a good daughter, a good wife, or even a good mother. She had hardly time from her friends and from taking care of her physical self. Physical aspects of life played an important part in her life-in return creating a vacuum. Paro's life is totally superficial as per her free will-

this trait is a significant of the postmodern society. "She was, of course, an indifferent mother."<sup>11</sup>

Paro was Priya`s alter ego and when once B.R. confided in Priya regarding Paro she defended her; the characters of Paro and Priya are intertwined. She said: "Perhaps you hurt her too, by all your womanizing."<sup>12</sup> He answered to her statement:

Men are very insecure creatures; they need a lot of love. And they need beautiful women. Unfortunately beautiful women are seldom designed to provide love.<sup>13</sup>

It is rightly said that Bold woman fascinates him, Beautiful woman attracts him Intelligent woman interests him and sympathetic woman gets him.

This way Paro could attract many men, but could not get anybody for herself and that was her fate. To Priya`s query Paro answered she could manage to make everybody dance to her tune was not an emotional blackmail but according to her: "It`s part of being a Beautiful Woman. It`s a full time occupation."<sup>14</sup>

This statement from Paro throws light that she was fully aware of her behavior, and for sure it was a vindication on her part towards men. She could very well manage to uphold this system against the societal norms. But such an offbeat behavior disturbs her. As she does not get what she wants, which disturbs her, frustrates her. After a dramatic suicide bid by Paro when she was with Lenin, she was saved at that time she commented: "I am so glad I survived" <sup>15</sup>

These words reveal to us her as a weak person, a person who is lured by things. She further adds:

I did this once before you know it was when I married to Bubu, on night I returned suddenly from visiting Mummy in Delhi, to find no one at home. Bubu was in our bedroom, screwing our neighbor's daughter. I wouldn't have minded, but she saw me and began screaming, "Aunty's here Aunty's here" I went to the bathroom and took a Swiss army knife and scratched myself up. I hardly bled at all. When I came out of my bathroom she had already left. I showed Bubu my wounds and he laughed. It was just a little nick, after that I decided I would pay him back in his own coin. I mean –every one was in love with me, and who you think could ever love that guy? <sup>16</sup>

These words obviously throw light on Paro's personality as well as that of B.R. who here symbolizes men. It is of course not proper on Paro's part to harm herself physically so as to punish the other person. But behind such an act lie the impulse and the hurt given by her husband. Paro represents the dreams of passion, glamour and emancipation while Priya is a contrast to this. Men hurt women without realizing the consequences. Men are mostly responsible for the imbalance in the man-woman relationship. Though Paro is untiringly on a sexual spree, she yearns for male companion, emotional security, as since long society has nurtured in woman the concept of the femininity, subordination, and emotional security. She also wants a male to provide her emotional support and she wishes to surrender completely. Paro is also a product of this social tradition. But her flings suggest as she had relationship with Bucky Bhandpur to prove her individual independence, romantic affection for Lenin was attention-seeking mechanism, but her servile attitude towards Shambhunath Mishra depicts the psychological bondage of women. Priya observes:

The whole thing puzzled me. I could not understand the situation. I could well ascribe the

worst possible motives to her of having a liaison with such an influential figure for all the implicit and unsuitable gains she could derive from her position as his mistress. What left me totally stunned was her absolute and unconditional emotional surrender.<sup>17</sup>

Paro was obsessed with everything, she thought it her right on whatever she liked or wanted. When rejected was depressed. She was with Lenin and could not understand the practical realities of life. Infact she never wanted to learn things also and drank to forget the situation.

Paro was a child of privilege. I couldn't remember her ever passionately wanting anything; she took the luxury and adulation that surrounded her for granted, as part of the perks. But now, with a despondent Lenin by her side, she had her first experience of deprivation, of the indignities of need. She didn't know about queues, and ration cards, and bus routes; and I don't think she even tried to learn; she only shut out that world, slugging down gin after gin and surviving in stubborn hope.<sup>18</sup>

In the end when Paro is unable to attract men by her physical charms, she finds life meaningless and ends her life by slashing her wrists. The sexual spree comes to a tragic end. This way Paro and Priya represent two binaries of life. The sterility of her rebellion and emotional vacuum, solitude left her with no choice. Paro destroys her and is even defeated in the process. While Priya drags on with no concrete purpose. Gokhale exhibits to the reader:

Unhappy but exemplary wives, the beauty of devotion and sacrifice, the small discontents and

great joys of conjugal love, dreams of youth, the resignation of maturity.<sup>19</sup>

All these aspects she narrates and weaves the story of two women namely Paro and Priya. The character of Priya, the narrator of the story is somewhat reasonable but at times crossing the boundaries laid down by the society. Her behaviour totally does not fall within the societal matrix. She also exhibits the naturalistic perspective. The novel begins: "I am writing about them because I saw myself in her."<sup>20</sup>

This statement very well explains that the characters of Paro and Priya are intertwined. Priya had an affinity for B.R. in whose office she was working, infact all the girls were attracted by his charms. He was short but had all the charms to attract women. Priya talks about their relationship:

And I think of the sea at Marine drive, the first time that he kissed me-vast, ugly and compulsive. I yielded almost immediately to the pressure of his plastic lips; but a part of me held back, observant and detachedly clinical. I stared instead at the coy moon hiding behind the white clouds, and watched the restless ocean regurgitate its teeming refuse back onto the black sullen rocks. I remember the touch of his hands, and his suddenly gentle tongue, and empowering smell of his cologne, and the hardness between his legs, and the murmured words of love. My heart was pounding wildly, and I quite forgot there was a world outside.<sup>21</sup>

This frank revelation on Priya`s part depicts her nature and the concept of free will. Moreover she oscillates between the two diversities of life, somewhat falls within the matrix of worldly ways. She further tells: "A single pubic hair began itching beneath my blue nylon panties."<sup>22</sup> She also tells: "This book too is a vindication."<sup>23</sup>



This story is being written as a vindication on her part, too much of anything is not good. Paro and Priya are too obsessed with men and sex, which again disturbs their life. Priya is also calculative; she marries a man from compulsion and not her own choice. Men have always been at the centre, at the fore and women veiled, crushed knowingly and unknowingly. In this process women are hurt and they pour the hatred when their turn comes, which Priya does. Hence this book is a vindication. She tells about Suresh her husband:

I realized that my only weapon in an indifferent world was Suresh, and I decided to groom him patiently until my ministrations bore dividends.<sup>24</sup>

She further adds:

I would awake disoriented in our small all-purpose hall-cum-dining-room, suffused with shame and contempt for the poverty and meanness around me. I would vow to rise from that mire; I would dream of grace, of beauty, and harmony and I would resolve to brush my hair a hundred strokes every night before I slept.<sup>25</sup>

The class to which Priya belongs, the grace and the aristocracy is alien to her. Hence in such a mental state Suresh's money decided the proposal. The life style of the rich class is different from that of a common man, but with the passage of time this barrier has narrowed and what was in the periphery has acquired the centrespaces. After this shuffling naturally each has its own aspects with them and finally a new life style has emerged. Hence the neo rich class, the upper middle class is the fusion of old and the new ways creating fissures. Thus Namita Gokhale's women exhibit traits of both the cultures, and a new culture comes into existence. "The car decided me."<sup>26</sup>

Gokhale has portrayed the women in her novel Paro: dreams of passion as aspiring for comfort and luxury. They can even forgo their moral, ethics and values to acquire the luxuries of life. This trend is observed in our day today lives also as marriages are dwindling, live in relationships are gaining momentum. This is an indirect effect of consumerism and globalization. Moreover common man has become aware and this awareness is affecting them negatively. Paro and Priya are victims of this onslaught affecting the middle class to an extent. Cultural co modification is observed; Priya lives in two zones simultaneously. The Indian woman has begun to realize that marriage in most cases acts as a deterrent. It is not a loving and equal partnership. Marriage cuts a woman off from the mainstream of life and prevents her from achieving her goals. Hence Gokhale's women are deviated from the mainstream life pattern. They don't fall in the concept of a 'new woman'. Though Priya dislikes Suresh, her husband she is comfortable with him and returns to him. She is Indian She is happy and satisfied after talking with him. She quotes:

I am an Indian woman, I told myself, and for me  
my husband is my God. So I got down to  
telephoning him.<sup>27</sup>

This sentence by Priya reveals the attitude of a woman, her aloofness, her identity, her comfort, her solace, and her domesticity. Everything is revolving around her husband. Women in present age aspire for economic freedom and freedom from the four walls of the house but still she yearns for a companion. Priya's statement also signifies this view, as the novel has its roots in the contemporariness.

Priya confesses her feeling with B.R. the society in which now Priya and Suresh were living did not advocate one to one relationship, or believed in competitiveness rather than companionship. When she was in Bombay she came in contact again with B.R. and she could not resist her earlier attachment, she comments: "My petticoat was already wet with anticipation."<sup>28</sup> She further adds:

We moved to bed, and he entered me. He lavished so much tenderness upon me that I was overwhelmed with gratitude wouldn't have minded dying in those moments of perfect bliss.<sup>29</sup>

These views signify that physical relationships do play a prominent part in the life of Priya. It also confirms the role of free will in the life of Priya and the concept of naturalism, in fact these characters become pathetic and deserve the sympathy of the reader. Initially the reader finds these characters of Paro and Priya with contempt and hatred but later on they become sympathetic. They are the women who have no control over them, and allured by circumstances. Moreover it can be ascribed that these women are prey to the shine and style of the rich class. Their money, their ways trap them in such a way from where to retreat is impossible. They succumb themselves in this spree, of the modern society and give themselves as the '*aahuti*' in the *yagna* of post modern society.

I would meet B.R. almost every evening and have dinner with him, with wine, candlelight, roses and all the trappings of a covert romance. We would make love in anonymous hotel rooms. I would punctuate his appointments and draft short memos of passion in his absences. We would copulate with a love that was both urgent and tender; he would examine every pore and crevice of my body with the wonder of a treasure that has been washed back from the sea.... It was a second youth, a middle aged revival of dreams. I had indeed never even dreamt of such passion, and I kept delaying the inevitable return to Delhi and Suresh's clumsy hateful arms... Bombay held me in thrall. Those were the happiest days of my life.<sup>30</sup>

About herself she says that she loved Bombay, it brought a new lease of life for her, but it could not continue. Gokhale's women believe in taking and suffer. She refers to B.R. as:

Sex had become, to him, more than a sport, it was a duty, a vocation, a calling. I sensed that it was with sex alone that he reached out to the world, and it was with sex that he shut out thought, emotion and feeling. Women could, perhaps, sense this immense sexual generosity, and came to him for succor and healing. And he allowed himself to be used as a lamp-post, or as a letterbox for women to send messages to their husband's through. I do not think he ever refused a woman; it was as though he were bound, by his code of honor, to ravish every female that he encountered.<sup>31</sup>

These views from Priya inform us about the need of men and women, and though she talks about B.R. she conveys to us that men indirectly govern woman's behavior. Any woman who comes to B.R. is allured by his charms of course but also her husband's has sent her behaviour. This applies to Priya same may apply to others. While on the other hand for B.R. sex is just a play, for fun and he makes him available to one and all a typical attitude of men towards sex. These views from the narrator of the story affirm the attitude of male and female towards sex; here the society and the physical anatomy of man and woman play a role. When women try to behave like men, they again suffer. Paro is a victim of this attitude. In the novel there are other women characters also but they do not play a significant role.

They do not play a prominent role but their relationship with Paro and Priya is significant as well as their relationship with other male characters. Dollybhabhi's character in isolation is not very important but it has a role as

Priya`s sister-in-law. She is Priya`s brother Atul`s wife. Lenin`s sister commented about Paro`s relationship with Lenin as:

I am sure she has done some tantric magic on him, otherwise why should my brother even look at that old hag? <sup>32</sup>

There was Paro`s servant Maryamma, who was almost lost in the missing of her brother. Priya and Dolly don`t get along well, but for the sake of the relationship Dollybhabhi tries to fulfill her duty. Priya condemns her showmanship:

I`ve asked Pappaji to get us some underwear and all from London-you know, Atul likes only flowered underwear from there. <sup>33</sup>

These words throw light on the trivialities of the rich class and the effect of the conglomeration of two cultures, the old has its marks combined with the new.

But Priya and Atul, her brother share a familial bond, she even is attracted by her niece and nephew and wishes to shower her affection on them. This way there are a few occasions on which Priya behaves her own self; otherwise she is possessed with passion.

However Paro: Dreams of Passion is a novel of two ladies, Paro and Priya. other characters do not occupy a significant place. They are the two binaries. Priya is moderate but at times exhibits a behavior displaying the act of naturalism. According to Ira Pande, it can be interpreted as: "Rejection of culturally imposed sexual repression (vindication), working class girls' ambition to liberate themselves, pursuit of hedonism, or aesthetic, philosophic and psychological dimensions." <sup>34</sup>

These views can be attributed in isolation or all of them at a time to the novel. Bharucha has to say: Paro: Dreams of Passion can be “a novel of Protest, a novel which constructed new shelves in a new structure, or is pronouncing that the world is a suffocating place with masked questions and pain”.<sup>35</sup>

To borrow the term from Ira Pande Paro and Priya can be called as “Bitch Heroines” while Sharad Srivastava is little moderate and calls them as an aberration of the concept of a `new woman`. A highly flavored tale of the passions and jealousies of a group of middle- class Indians, this book is a succulent tale told by the observant Priya who records her own loves and failures and those of her friends. The repeated pursuit of hedonism whether in food and drink or sex enslaves the victims of the senses to devise further means of gratification. Hence the enslavement of the individual by any strong passion is a precondition to his destruction. The artistic impulse stems from the artist's desire for a psychological release, hence it implies towards autobiographical element. The novel also appears to have other dimensions to it, aesthetic, the philosophic, and the psychological. Aesthetic-the form of the novel, philosophic-hedonism the two-way destruction, and the psychological- as phantasizing. It's short and sparkly.

## II

The character of the grandmother occupies a place in the title of the novel, as she is a woman of talent and a brave lady. She does not fall prey to the difficult circumstances but with her foresightedness carves a home for herself and her granddaughter-Gudiya. She gathers a piece of marble and some stones, takes one steel thali, and puts some money and a ten-rupee note. She sings bhajans to a better tune and attracts a huge crowd of disciples. She becomes a living saint. The philosophy of life for her was: “There is a cycle to saving things, to preserving them, and then to devouring them, letting them go.”<sup>36</sup> then Gudiya raises her voice: “Our temple grew in fame and fortune.”<sup>37</sup>

This way the grandmother created a living for herself -a space for herself with her knack and ability to maneuver things according to her advantage. This was the grandmother's new avatar. She had set herself on a pedestal. People would exclaim good remarks for her, respect her in a saintly way. Riyasuddin Razvi commented: "Your grandmother is a learned lady; I hope you grow up the same."<sup>38</sup>

The character of the grandmother is quite daring, vivacious, enterprising, skillful, but yet it is an aberration of the 'new woman' in the words of Sharad Srivastava. Her first acid test took place when she had to tackle Sunder Pahelwan. She with her innate resourcefulness dealt with him and became friendly in the process. She quotes to him:

Seize our money Pahalawanji, but spare our self-respect. I am the widow of a Brahmin, my husband was a priest, guard your tongue or else a virtuous woman's curses may follow you!<sup>39</sup>

This way she could tackle the situation as she had the art to talk convincingly to the people. The people who came to demolish the house were punished, as the electricity taken illegally, from the street pole burst on the head of the departmental chief. Then the scorpion bit a man who spit in the direction of the temple, while Shambhu found a wallet full of money outside his tea stall. This way God cursed the ones who opposed while those who respected Him were kept under His benign care. Ammi could create a favorable situation with her expressing power. Gudiya comments about their situation: "Everyone knew that the Will of god was guiding us. We felt invincible, all of us, in our separate ways."<sup>40</sup>

She would talk of masculinity and femininity, the harmony of Shiv and Shakti here the binaries are once again discussed. She quoted: "Even the holy peepul tree can be bound in matrimony to a young bough of the margosa; such is the nature of life."<sup>41</sup>

Gudiya and the grandmother shared many secrets, like Gudiya, she also aspired for a life of fantasy. Once she told Gudiya:

When I was of your age Gudiya, I wanted to be a film star. There were only silent films in those days, no sound. I wanted to be like Zubaida or Jaysree. But look at me now- a holy woman! Truly, no one can understand the ways of God! <sup>42</sup>

The character of Gudiya is the narrator of the story. It also has autobiographical overtures. She belongs to the third generation in the novel. The novel has been titled by the name of her grandmother and the Indian society is pestered with false beliefs and anything pertaining to God will attain faith and those who do not respect the holiness are punished. The author emphasizes the gullibility of the Indians regarding God, anything profane can also occupy a saintly place in the guise of the name of God or Goddess. Gudiya has recorded all her observations, emotions with utmost care, she has portrayed all the subtleties with a feminine exactness. All trivialities have been narrated in the novel.

The novel begins in a pensive tone and creates a sort of vacuum. She quotes: "When my mother went away, my grandmother and I were left to fend for ourselves."<sup>43</sup> She further raises her doubts regarding religion:

I was still a stranger to the paraphernalia of religion, brought up as I had been, ignorant of God or Divinity, and I puzzled to make a sense of the unfamiliar tableau as the flickering lamp cast new shadows on my grandmother's trusted face.<sup>44</sup>

Then she again confides regarding ghosts and her grandmother taught her to scare away the phantoms. She learnt many lessons from her practical and well-versed grandmother popularly known as `Ammi`. She has her hazy memories of the past. Then it was decided that she should be sent to school



and admission was sought in st. Jude`s school. She elaborates on her school picture and talks about the principal:

The principal of st. Jude`s was a pale Parsi lady with gentle eyes that hid behind thick spectacles and the kindest face I had ever known. Roxanne Lamba took an immediate fancy for me and singled me out for her attentions.<sup>45</sup>

As a child she has memories of her grandmother, mother and she even at times misses her Shambhu, Magoo, Phoolwati, Lila-the women around the temple. She reminisces one of the incidents:

High on the upper branches I could glimpse Shambhu and Magoo, naked, hidden by the leaves, leering at me as they performed obscene and unspeakable acts. I tried to close my eyes, but they were closed already and I could not shut out the vision. And then again, in those branches, suspended against gravity, I saw my sad beautiful mother, and she too was naked and she too was enjoined in the unspeakable act with Riyasuddin the beggar.<sup>46</sup>

These acts had a strong impact on Gudiya, which is evident in her later life. Then as they were settling, some other disturbances also had an effect on Gudiya. But her grandmother managed things efficiently. This way she had created an aura for herself. Many miracles happened, she tried to do and undo things. Gudiya disliked that because of the situation, her Ammi had distanced herself from her; but once when she got an opportunity to be with her she raised her feelings and Gudiya could repose her confidence in her. After her mother's departure, now her only blood relation in the universe, her grandmother is also being distanced.

There was a rustle of something that may have been lizards, or even snakes, but I was not at all afraid, for I was alone with my grandmother at last.<sup>47</sup>

These words throw light how the young child's emotions work, as she has been abandoned by her mother and now her only relative in the universe- her grandmother is also being distanced. But she had people like Phoolwati and Lila with her-the ladies faithful to her grandmother. She further has to say:

Grandmother's increasing abstraction, her detachment, and her inexplicable remoteness had affected me much more than I betrayed. Outwardly I was a happy and normal child although I could already see from the looks on male eyes that things were changing and that my mother's fabled beauty and grandmother's legendary charm had their genetic renewal.<sup>48</sup>

She remembers her grandmother:

I missed my grandmother, but she was there with me, in the act of pickling and in the act of remembering and the act of surviving.<sup>49</sup>

Gudiya could come to terms with all the difficulties of growing, entering the period of youth room teenage were amicably solved by Phoolwati- she showered love care and understanding on Gudiya which she deserved the most in her present situation. But still parents role she could not play very efficiently, otherwise Gudiya might not have landed herself with Kalki. Soon Gudiya developed consciousness regarding her physical appearance, she could experience the changes and in the process disliked her name, which appeared like wood-lacked emotions. She wanted other names like may be Shabnam, Samina or Sharmila. She quotes:

I continued to oscillate between my two worlds. My existence veered between the St.Jude`s Academy for the socially Handicapped and the Mataji ka Mandir as our residence was now commonly known.<sup>50</sup>

This way she was searching a place among this ambivalent twin positions. This is the trait of the postmodern society. it was decided that she should discontinue her studies very much against the will of the principal of the school. Soon after her grandmother passed away, leaving her alone in the world. She experiences different feelings:

My life had always possessed a haphazard and unreal quality, and now when I contemplated my grandmother, contorted into an extraordinary death-pose by the indefatigable Pandit, my last link with reality snapped. This was not my Ammi; in fact, she had not been my Ammi for quite some time now. Yet continuity and cohesion my life had ever contained had been gifted by her. What was to become of me? <sup>51</sup>

Her grandmother was to be buried in the temple sacrament and pandit Kailash Shastri deftly managed the crowds, he handed them flowers and leaves from the garlands they had brought for Ammi. He managed things efficiently even in the time of crisis. The funeral took place amid great piety and ritual, Ammi was buried in the back courtyard. Gudiya raises her feelings at this juncture:

I could cease to be Gudiya now, perhaps I could even start to be Shabnam or Samina or Sharmila.all that was known and familiar and sure had passed, and the future held in its palm every possibility and impossibility.<sup>52</sup>

This way a new beginning awaited Gudiya; a new avatar was awaiting her like her grandmother, when she acquired sainthood. Gudiya and Phoolwati shared good moments; they were very friendly to each other and comforted each other. They would even share pranks. They went on a shopping spree as Phoolwati had acquired a new status after handling Shambhu's business. They enjoyed the trivialities of life, the happy moments together. "Together, we combed the streets of Karol Bagh and Lajpat Nagar."<sup>53</sup>

This way time passed. In fact this change of name does not signify positivity as it suggests change of identity, otherwise Gudiya inspite of all odds stands firm under the care of Phoolwati. It is against feminism; she very well leads her life without Kalki. she was taken care by Mrs. Lamba, but life at her place was suffocating for Gudiya and she returned to Phoolwati the decorum at the former's place was stifling. She had now acquired the temple a new order of stability and permanence under the care of Panditji. Then in a query to what she aspires, she replies:

I want to marry a rich man! A handsome, fair,rich young man with a motor car and a chikna white skin and a big dog and a chokidar to guard his kothi-with an upstairs and a downstairs and a spiral staircase...<sup>54</sup>

This way she poured out her heart's desire. She enjoyed the food made by Phoolwati which was spicy while that at Mrs. Lamba's residence was plain and bland which she disliked. She relished a chapatti and pickle even made by Phoolwati. Like Gokhale's other heroines, even Paro of the "Paro" fame; there is reference towards food in her other novels too. As food is the primary thing in life, Gokhale portrays the need for her heroines in spite of their extraordinary ways. Gudiya quotes:

She kneaded the dough with deft, efficient movements and soon the delicious aroma of

chapattis cooking on the girdle filled the room. It smelt wholesome and good.<sup>55</sup>

On one of her trips she happened to meet a young man and was impressed: "He was so handsome that I could feel my insides quiver."<sup>56</sup> She further said: "My insides were all a flutter. I could hardly breathe. I thought that he would kiss me; but he didn't."<sup>57</sup> Then something unusual happened:

He ripped open my kurta and fondled me with fierce passion. He pummeled my breasts until I cried with pain, and then moved his attentions downwards. When he entered me I let out a cry of pain.<sup>58</sup>

This time I experience the full glory of sex.<sup>59</sup>

Gudiya was infatuated by the opposites sex. She also says towards the end of the novel:

I looked into the many mirrors that crowded the room. I could barely recognize myself. I imagined I saw many faces staring back. Which of them was me? The reflected images echoed the question through the wilderness of mirrors, until the beautician broke into my reverie, asking what shade of nail polish I wanted to use. I settled on Midnight Magic, a frosty magenta lacquer. After I had been kneaded and pounded with cream and unguents, and my hair oiled and deoiled and artfully styled into a cascade of flowing curls, I returned to Phoolwati's house.<sup>60</sup>

The above statement from Gudiya suggests her lack of control, concept of free will is observed. It also signifies that things allure a girl brought up in the streets easily. Further on questioning in the school she comments:

I am going to become a ...I paused as my mind scanned the pinnacles of becoming. I am going to become a film star and marry the prime minister's son.<sup>61</sup>

Kalki entered in the life of Gudiya and though she was aware of his limitations but could not avoid him, she confesses: "I understood well that there was something both noble and base about Kalki".<sup>62</sup>

When Lila touches her on hearing about her pregnancy, she was overwhelmed:

As I felt her knobbly fingers and tough old wrists kneading my shoulders in embrace, strength and renewal flowed through my body like a rising sap. I felt invulnerable and unafraid, and I laughed at myself for my fears and uncertainties.<sup>63</sup>

Then she is shown to be quite strong and even believes in giving, this aspect is quite different compared to Paro, the heroine of the other novel. Tells to Kalki: "I'll get you the money, Kalki. I'll sell my stridhan for you."<sup>64</sup>

This gesture on the part of Gudiya is symbolic of self-uprightness and demonstrates herself as a subject to an object. Kalki stands for the object and she as the subject- the male order. But inspite of the many good gestures on the part of Gudiya; she does not fall in the category of a `new woman` but an aberration of it. In support of this viewpoint, it is observed that in Kalki's absence she does not succumb to the circumstances but adapts to it. To quote her views:

I missed him, but I sensed in his absence an opportunity for growth, for escape, which I was determined not to miss. I loved Kalki, but love is not life, and the imperatives of survival pulled elsewhere.<sup>65</sup>

These views on the part of Gudiya reveal her strength as a woman. Though Kalki allured her and for time being but again comes out of this situation victoriously. It suggests positivism. She is a strong person, like her grandmother. Otherwise the young generation finds it difficult to adapt to the situation.

The character of Phoolwati has been demonstrated as a fierce, strong, practical, loving, affectionate and caring. She and Lila were the women around `Ammi`. Lila was almost a non-entity but Phoolwati was a faithful lady and presence is felt almost throughout the novel. In the novel initially she has been portrayed as a funny, cartoonish character but later on develops a personality of dignity, stability and goodwill. She takes care of Gudiya after her Grandmother's demise, showers motherly affection and care. She was always by Gudiya's side and shared all her turmoil's, giving a hug she said:

Yes you are, you are a woman and we women need to stick together. Now that you are an adult, not a girl, we can be friends.<sup>66</sup>

After the death of `Ammi`, Gudiya was taken care by Phoolwati and when once she was sick was taken to Mrs. Lamba's house, at that time Mr. Lamba tried to clarify things, then she answered reproachfully:

Arre sahib, don't worry about your money on our account. We may not be rich like you, but we do have our izzat. By the grace of god, our Gudiya is not short of money.<sup>67</sup>

She even was readily telling things straight forward to people, told the Pandit: "Achh, Panditji, Ram Ram! I trust you will never be wanting in the execution of your duty."<sup>68</sup> She would chidingly talk about Sunder Pahalwan:

This Sunder Pahalwan is becoming a real nuisance, all the time, its Phoolwati this, Phoolwati that. I don't know why he is always pestering me.<sup>69</sup>

This way Phoolwati was totally devoted to Gudiya's care. She always stood by her side, understood her emotions, even when she was desperate for Kalki it was she who helped her. The character of Phoolwati comes out with flying colours, she does not remorsefully sits after Shambhu's death but takes acumen of his business and also takes Sunder Pahalwan's assistance. She cooks good and tasty food- feeds Gudiya and even herself though she had several digestive problems.

As mentioned in the above mentioned paragraph, Lila is not a very significant character in the novel portrayed by Gokhale. She is totally devoted to 'Ammi' and she takes care of her needs, is always at the back and call off her. Massages her feet and is with her. She almost becomes half dead after 'Ammi's death. She was ready to convey some messages from 'Ammi':

I am here today because the spirit of our late revered Mataji herself has instructed me..."and here her voice changed and became uncannily like Ammi's, "not to forget her she speaks from the hereafter. She has described heaven, swarga, to me. She says it is a very nice place; the weather is very pleasant, not hot and dusty like our Delhi. the people are all very beautiful, tall and fair and graceful, rather like our Gudiya.the air is clear and the food is good, although of course they don't need to eat anything there. It's only for taste, if you get what I mean, sometimes a mango, sometimes a mithai.she has told me to remind you-this is her message-that everything is transient, everything passes, everybody dies, but it makes no difference because life continues..<sup>70</sup>

These words further remind us of Lila's devotion towards Ammi. She was a woman of simple ways and faith.



Mrs. Lamba is the Principal of St. Jude's school for socially handicapped. She is a Parsi by faith, and belongs to a rich family. She was affectionate by nature and had a special liking for Gudiya. They were the owner of sharp blades. Mr. Lamba was over particular man. Her full name was Roxanne Lamba, she liked Gudiya very much and after her Ammi's death when she fell sick, called a doctor, took care of her fondly, she even was superstitious by nature and followed certain ways, she placed an eagle feather under the pillow of Gudiya: "Shikasteh, Shikasteh, Shaitan, Ahriman Ahriman gajasteh Karu Kerdar."<sup>71</sup> She consoled Gudiya by comforting words: "Remember that you can tell me everything. Don't think you are alone because your grandmother is gone."<sup>72</sup>

Malvika Mehta is a minor woman character in the novel. She was a graduate with social work and was deputed at St. Jude's school. She does not play a prominent role. She was prim and proper, well dressed and appropriate outwardly. Outward appearance and glamour is the emblem of the present age but this plastic beauty does not have a long lasting impact. In contrast to Malvika, Phoolwati and Lila acquire a prominent place. In one of her counseling sessions, Gudiya observes her:

She was extremely good looking. She had creamy white skin, jet-black hair, cut in a short, extremely succulent lip. She was dressed in simple clothes that I suspected of being very expensive something about her looks; her clothes and her air of total control aroused my instant and unprovoked hostility. She represented everything I most wanted to be and almost, but not quite, was.<sup>73</sup>

These are the women characters in Gods, Graves and Grandmother portrayed by Namita Gokhale. All the women characters play a prominent role and men are on the periphery. Of course the Pandit has a role but yet the women portrayed are more powerful. The character of Gudiya is little off beat and that of the grandmother is off beat but still falls in the matrix of a post modern woman, who is self sufficient, capable and does not succumb to

circumstances. Compared to her debut novel, this novel appears to be more matured and somber in its approach. Paro and Priya fail to systematize their lives, while Ammi cleverly sets her disentangled life systematic. Though Gudiya is not totally successful in making her life systematic yet she is better off with the help of Phoolwati. In her second novel theme of love and death is prominent where as in Paro: Dreams of Passion it is physical passion at the fore. When women try to use their body as a weapon, they don't succeed but it gives a bad taste and brings sadness in their lives. But along with dissimilarities there are many similarities also. Both the novels are set in the metropolitan cities, both have women as their major characters and men are on the periphery, both exhibit free will concept, both define the concept of a 'new woman', in both the novels women show physical attraction towards the opposite sex and even use their body as their strength. Namita Gokhale tries to convey the message that there are things above passion through her main characters- Paro, Gudiya and Ammi in the above two novels.

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## CHAPTER 5

### IN SEARCH OF ELUSIVE LOVE: A STUDY OF NAMITA GOKHALE'S A HIMALAYAN LOVE STORY AND THE BOOK OF SHADOWS

Unrequited love is the classic theme that forms the backdrop for the novel, The Himalayan Love Story, that tells a rather unusual story. A young girl yearns to fulfill her sexual desires, only to find that the source of her childhood affections is not really the person with whom she will spend the rest of her life. Neither does she finally end up marrying somebody that she fancies. But then life carries on and Parvati, our heroine, seems doomed to betrayal and other such things in life. Finally her life takes a turn when her husband dies and she is left with the task of bringing up her daughter. An old flame revisits the hill village and his one encounter with her tells him that it is a hope betrayed. Mukul Nainwal, the only local boy to have broken out of the shackles of a rural upbringing and having made it good, finds that he cannot absolve himself from some of the responsibility that his bonds with Parvati tie him down to. Even as he tries to help her daughter and do his mentor proud, he is torn between his loyalties. What follows is, on the whole, a pleasant surprise.

The story is told in two parts. The first part is Parvati's story. She tells us about her deprived childhood in a reasonably civilized part of the Himalayan foothills. Her father dies young; her mother becomes tubercular and is sent to a sanatorium. Her uncle takes charge of her. He is the headmaster of a school at Nainital. He lives in a hideously named house, "Wee Nooke", and under its roof, history teacher Salman promptly seduces the adolescent Parvati. He then disappears to America. Parvati enters into a platonic friendship with two pupils of the school, Lalit and Mukul. She is eventually married off to Lalit, who turns out to be a homosexual and will not sleep with her. The object of his affections is Mukul, who has meanwhile fallen in love with her. Instead of being sensible and sleeping with him, Parvati has

an affair with her husband's younger brother. Following Lalit's sudden and convenient death of TB, she is delivered of a girl child, Irra. She then, apparently, goes mad. Several years later, her uncle dies and leaves all his property to Mukul. He, during these years, has achieved some measure of success in that he has become a petty bureaucrat in a minor branch of the UN, and lives in Hong Kong with his Eurasian wife. But he still thinks he may be in love with Parvati. He tells the second part of the story, as he describes his return to Nainital to claim his property and satisfy his curiosity. He finds Parvati insane and Irra now assumed to be his responsibility. Mukul's situation is grotesque and would be tragic if he did not reveal himself to be insufferably pompous. Gokhale describes his dilemma and how he solves it with delicate, precise irony. On the whole, despite the unavoidable Mills and Boon touches in the plot, the novel is likeable. Writer Namita Gokhale's description of her characters makes them come alive and you almost expect to meet them as you take a sharp curve on a hilly road. This is a story of Parvati, young, beautiful and domed, and Mukul Nainwal, the local boy who made good who returns to the Nainital of his youth to search for the only woman he has ever loved. Told in the voices of these two exiles from life, this spare, sensitive book is a compelling read.

With this haunting novel about romantic loss and fatalism, Namita Gokhale confirms her reputation as one of India's finest writers, and one with the rare gift of seeing and recording the epic in ordinary lives. A story of fierce sexuality and unrequited love, A Himalayan Love Story is Himalayan in scale and setting.<sup>1</sup>

While Gokhale was gathering material for her second novel A Himalayan Love Story she was stricken with the cancer of the uterus, and barely survived. As in her previously published novel Gods, Graves and Grandmother; Gudiya is the narrator, similarly here also a girl child is the narrator in the beginning of the novel, the whole novel is chapterised with different chapters and headings. There are many similarities with Gudiya and

Parvati. Her first sensational novel also has the heroine's name beginning as Paro. This story is in search of an elusive love as the former was towards emancipation. While in her other novels like Gods, Graves and Grandmother the heroine Gudiya survives-a positive note; while Parvati lands herself up in an asylum but of course she survives in her daughter Irra. The first chapter has been narrated by Parvati in the novel and is rightly titled as the dance of the honey bees-as the bees dance in a haphazard manner as they catch their prey so also Parvati's life is running in a curved manner as the path to the hills is in curvature; her life is at obtuse angle. Here she is the narrator of the story. Parvati succumbs to destiny, falls prey in the hands of destiny. Gokhale portrays stark reality without a veil or a covering she shows the reader things as they are and not as they should be, she is too frank in revealing; or it can be said that she believes more in revealing than concealing.

A work of startling originality by one of India's most daring and talented writer is The Book of Shadows an ambitious book investigates the nature of reality, love and faith. Scarred by her lover's suicide and an acid attack that has left her permanently disfigured, Rachita Tiwari has sought refuge in a remote house in the Himalayan foothills. In this rambling house, built by a foolhardy missionary over a hundred years ago, she lives alone, painting and repainting her nails a bright red, careful not to look into mirrors. As she retreats into herself, battling for her sanity and fearful of a world she no longer trusts, a different dimension claims her and the tremendous history of the house is played out before her.

Bitiya is a young university lecturer from Delhi, whose face has been disfigured in an acid attack,. Her fiancé had committed suicide by hanging himself and, blaming Bitiya for his death, his sister takes revenge by throwing acid in her face. In this extract from The Book of Shadows by Namita Gokhale, the main character moves between different levels of unexplored consciousness as she tries to grasp her new reality.



In the flat light of my hospital room, of my clean white hospital room which still smelt of construction, my hospital bed which did not creak, this new environment so disconnected from the final moment in that month of insanity - in this room without shadows, I felt contrition. Not regret at Anand's death - I hadn't killed him, of that I was sure - and not even anger at his sister's revenge. No, I felt contrition. Love, touch, joy, passion, the hard reality of my best friend's husband secure in my welcoming womb, the elation of being alive, of riding life-these were the culprits.<sup>2</sup>

My uncle in Bangalore had bought the house when we were very young. My sister and I had played in the garden in the summers, we chased the butterflies, plucked the hydrangeas, killed wood bee ties and buried them near the stems of the climbing roses that clambered over the veranda. When evening fell and the shadows lengthened we would retreat into the security and safety of the house. An Englishman who had never lived here had sold the house to my uncle in an inordinate hurry. Lohaniju came with it: Lohaniju who told us stories; Lohaniju who held us tenderly when we stumbled on the steps or were stung by the nettles that grew high and wild on the tennis court. There is a young girl in my memories; she is thin and shy, she is hiding behind a curtain in this very bedroom, behind the curtain in her parents' bedroom, and as she watches them fornicate, as she watches them at their loveless joyless task, her mother's eyes heavy with resentment, she feels someone else watching them with her. She does not know who this is, but it is a calming soothing presence, it holds her hand, it gently strokes her forehead, it instructs her to shut her eyes and pretend nothing has happened. When she shuts her eyes she can see a garden in bloom, a sweet-smelling garden in which a beautiful woman in a blue dress is walking, holding an enormous bouquet of flowers. It is the garden outside this house. When she opens her eyes again her mother is tugging at the drawstring of the petticoat she wears

under her sari, and the girl waits until they have left the room before she emerges from her hiding place. I suppose that girl was me.

A haunting novel--part ghost story, part romance--set in the foothills of the Indian Himalayas. Bitya's beauty has been ravaged by an acid attack; hurt and humiliated, she returns to her childhood home in the foothills of the Himalayas. As she retreats into herself, her face covered by a gauze veil, Bitya becomes transfixed by the voices that sing out from the foundations of the old house. The English missionary, the doomed homosexual lovers, the Catholic priest, the erstwhile companion of Aleister Crowley and his sensual mistress--and the ghost of the house itself, solitary and sad, controlling and articulating these colliding realities. After a century of silence, something compels the ghost to speak--words that the injured woman now inhabiting the house will hear, words that will give her back to herself; among her<sup>3</sup>

"It is hard to know what to make of Namita Gokhale's 'Book of Shadows'. Reminded frequently of Isabel Allende's acclaimed 'House of Spirits', the tale is of a similar ethereal ilk. Bitya, a young University lecturer from Delhi has been left permanently disfigured from an acid attacks by her former lover's sister. Veiled to hide her disfigurement, she retreats to her childhood home in the Kumaon hills at the foot of the Himalayas to reflect on her life. She lets the house soothe her soul and her housekeeper Lohaniju entertains her with stories. A spirit who also narrates chapters filled with the salacious details of the former owner's lives haunts the house.

Built by an English missionary, William James Cockerel, in 1868 the house is thought, by the superstitious locals, to be situated on a bad spot. It witnesses a sequence of owners, each more bizarre than the next. The English missionary, who meets an untimely death, is followed a Captain

Walter Wolcott of the English Army. Somewhat of an aesthete, he takes up with Dona Rosa a clairvoyant wandering through India. Besotted with each other they spend much of their time having sex. Not good sex, but grotesque, ugly, hideous sex.

One day three travelers, Nicholas Mann, Nicholas Kurtz and Veera, visit the characters in the book, Wolcott and Dona Rosa. They become besotted with the rampant couple and sexual orgies follow. One orgy culminates in the death of Kurtz who is killed by the spirits of the mountain. Gokhale hardly spares any of her characters from death. Wolcott is burnt - "death by fire. It is an absolute condition". This makes the English Army take over the house with Osborne, the Colonel Regiment being the next owner. His tenure is even more fleeting and ushers in the homosexual lovers Munro & Marcus who are disciples of the occult.

Gokhale uses mysticism quite liberally. Using the magic of the Himalayas as the backdrop, the book vibrates with the spirits of the hill folk, black panthers, three dead Sherpas allowed to die by Allister Crowley mentor of Captain Wolcott and the spirit of a young girl killed before the house was built, among others! At times it seems Namita Gokhale has given free reign to her imagination. Munro and Marcus undertake satanic rituals resulting in the slaying of an innocent young child described as an "an evolved soul, wandering through time, born only to cause hurt and pain to its mother and light the fire of unforgiving revenge in its Rajput father, and to set in motion an incomprehensible karmic cycle that would destroy everything". And yet this is only in the middle of the book. Namita Gokhale has a masterful grasp of the English Language and a vivid imagination that lets her spare no one in this story. Not even the benign Catholic priest Father Benedict's. He takes up residence at the haunted house, befriendng the spirit who lives behind the curtain with whom he shares many thoughts and experiences. The reader is never told who the ghost might be. The ghost describes itself as "suspended in time & space, without a body, without a context, ignorant of the reasons & circumstance that have led to this strange exile, this cruel isolation".

Although it may isolate, the ghost is hardly ever without owners to haunt. Father Benedictus perishes trying to exorcise the ghosts of the dead Munro & Marcus from the house leaving the house to be occupied by Bitya. Personally, I found that Bitya's problems faded into memory as the antics of the other owner's were described and I must admit that I cared little about what happened to her. Although uncharacteristically it is not quite as vile as you might expect. Is Bitya modeled on the author herself? Intelligent, articulate, lonely and afflicted by great pain and loss, it would not be surprising if the author had used her own experiences for this character.

What saddened me most about this book is Namita Gokhale's ability to see the macabre in everything. She beautifully describes butterflies as being unresolved spirits and in then in the next instant their unheard screams as they are pierced with pins for mounting into display cases. Unlike Isabel Allende who can maintain the floating ethereal sensation that her prose evokes, Gokhale sends her readers' feelings crashing down at every turn. Where Allende savors sweetness, Gokhale relishes the grotesque. Her writing is like a sharp pencil etching out each character and briefly highlighting each shadow in turn. I couldn't help but wonder, though, if it is time for the author to exorcise her own ghosts and move out of the shadows into the light now.<sup>4</sup>

**Rachita Tewari**, a 34-year-old college lecturer, is running away from the memory of her fiancé and the calamity she has suffered at the hands of his sister who has mutilated her face by throwing acid on it. Interwoven with insights into her life and the cause of her present misery, this story of claustrophobia and terror is propelled with dark as well as bright shadows of pathetic, sinister, and perverse figures that are associated with the central persona of the house in Kumaon hills. In her world no one individual can

touch another's existence; all seem to be intangible spectators and living ghosts like her servant or the dog.

Rachita is the protagonist of Namita Gokhale's "The Book of Shadows" a chronicle of displacement, strangeness and exile, of forbidden passions and family histories told in a sensual, descriptive style, which lends energy to her tense psychological drama with all its intimacy, and haunting elusiveness. It is an original and ambitious piece of work and wide-ranging with a laudable cosmopolitan edge.

Written in quietly confident prose, which fits in well with the peculiar atmosphere of the novel, and taking for her theme the fashionable subject concerning ghosts, there is an increasing feeling of distance from humanity, though at places it unfortunately gets a little insufferable. The voice of calm urbanity is given a note of something altogether bleak.

Though Gokhale never overcomplicates her story, her accumulation of detail and changes of perception result in a complex picture of the flawed nature of men and women and their inability to come to terms with the reality.

And though living in a climate of fear, dreams and truth, the protagonist would never respect herself if she were to run away from the experience of isolation she has sought. Though pain remains unvanquished and constant, she knows that a "firm hold on anything, even reality, hurts less than a timid half-way encounter. Pain is a precondition to life, a prelude to joy." One cannot be deterred by fear at some moments in life, and it is this irreducible moment in Rachita's life when she has to make the existential choice of confronting the shadows that make up her life. She is part of a complex web of relationships with others, through whose eyes events are filtered. Such mannerisms at places stick in the throat, making the densely packed novel increasingly hard to swallow.

At the core of the novel is the house into which she retreats, feeling that it "belongs to me, as I belong to this house. I live here alone in the hills, watching the day turn to dusk, awaiting the dawn." The house and she

become "one spirit"; it has taken her in again, soothes her hatred and "hushes" her sorrow. This old house built by a missionary a hundred years ago, is the repository of her youth and "the custodian" of her dreams.

The pace of the novel may flag at times in its larger concern with the house, but there are plenty of interesting moments in the evocation of a period that takes in mentalities as well as the Himalayan landscape, and deftly connects the two.

Anand, her fiancé, has committed suicide, which is the provocation for the acid attack on her. She had supposedly given in to the "subtle persuasions of her best friend's husband, a betrayal too grievous to be accepted by Anand. She is now in the hills to heal, to hide, to forget, and maybe to forgive. She needs "solitude and soliloquy" to come to terms with what had happened, to forget Anand's indulgent act of suicide, "ignore his stupidity" and restore to her life some sanity. Here far away from Delhi, she remembers her past and all that the house once was — the narcissus growing on the hillside, the smells, the dogs: "These were not strangers around me, they were familiar cohabitants of the same space. It was as though we had escaped the confines of our life-scripts, stumbled upon some interstice of experience, some simultaneity of narrative."

Rachita longs to escape from her present state of mind into her childhood when their garrulous servant Lohaniju used to tell them interminable stories. She wants to forget the alien language and seek refuge in the servant's soft and consonated Pahari. Like the house, he too has taken her in to become a solace to her sorrows. She spends her days in the mountains reading poetry, drowning her in the childhood pleasures of comics but takes care to paint her nails so as to not fall into "physical and emotional disrepair". The Book of Shadows - a fashionably slim book at the backdrop is also fashionable. Wooded Himalayan foothills with a view of distant snow-peaks, mist-shrouded tracks, and a stream down a ravine, a pool below, and Ruskin Bond territory.

She dreads dreams and reality and remains wakeful, overtaken by shadows and voices from her past, tenaciously gripping her and almost tyrannizing her. Anand's anger, the familiar sight of his tongue hanging out from the corner of his mouth, and her pain are trapped in her mind. Only a Bhotiya dog named Lady keeps her company, the last link with the living world that keeps her from falling apart.

The novel thus sets the tone for the ghost stories to follow, along with a number of love stories involving a missionary, William Cockerel and his frail wife Fanny. A first person narration by a ghost with panthers, eroticism, and violence thrown in, along with perceptive remarks on poetry, creative writing, literature and philosophy make up the numerous sub-plots of the novel.

The journal written by William Cockerel throws light on the role of the missionaries and their rather orientalist views on the nature of the natives who are taken to be lethargic and immoral. He imagines the natives as shadows hovering around him and wonders if they were really human or only shadows belonging to some other "unchastened un-Christian world".

Rachita reads his journal, which, in fact, not only documents the history of the house, but also the progressive breakdown of a man facing an alien culture and climate.

In the face of such reading she tries to keep a close watch over her sanity and comes to the conclusion that "most of what is real within us is not conscious, and most of what is conscious is not real". Trapped within herself she feels the shadows closing in on her, the shadows of Captain Wolcott and his mistress Dona Rosa, and the other residents of the house. Their story is told through the eyes of the ghost, the disembodied narrator and the oldest tenant of the house, who is so charged by the passion between the two lovers that he cannot help entering the body of Wolcott, though the experience of it is inadequate in enabling him to reach and penetrate the essence of his beloved Dona Rosa. The other narration about the perversions of the two disciples of Crowley, Marcus and Munro, and their excursions into black magic, forbidden sex and the final sacrifice of a child, which unleashes the spirits of the

mountains in the shape of panthers resulting in their physical mutilation and horrifying death, is in itself a juxtaposition of Kumaoni folklore, superstitions and the inherent evil in human nature.

And in the midst of these shadows, Rachita finally realises that to be oneself, one must remain in control of our scripts. We must make and remake ourselves, possess and repossess our world, cast and recast our lot in every precious moment. Above all, we must know what to hold on to, what to discard, in this radical flux which is life. She now knows that she had traveled to the edge of this universe and has now returned, and that the world was good.

Her world, which had turned into anarchy and chaos, had finally reintegrated into something more than the sum of its parts. The act of going away to another place will symbolically transform people like Rachita Tewari from the sufferers of an indifferent fate into the protagonists of their own lives in charge of their destinies and responsible for their survival.

Although the novel is conventional in its content, it is Namita Gokhale's most technically ambitious and successful fiction. There is fluidity in the various perceptions, which make up the narrative, enabling her plot and subplots to engage and convey with conviction. But she resists any easy solutions and neat endings — her character's fate remains open to the unexpected aspects of her new environment and she does not know if she will return to the outside world again, which is full of change where one does not know if memories will endure.

Strange disturbing memories, pleasant and horrifying, will not allow a final tie up into a greater whole. This is a compelling story, leaving deeper layers of consciousness disturbed by analysis and remaining forever entangled with the shadows from the past.<sup>5</sup>



The Book of Shadows is to an extent an autobiographical novel, moving in and out of shadows. It also lays emphasis on the house, the role it plays in the life of the woman. In the beginning of the novel itself Namita Gokhale admits “this is the novel which has its core in truth.” hence it can be considered as an autobiographical novel. It can be assumed that Namita Gokhale herself took a retreat to revive from her state of pain both physical and emotional. It is a novel of nostalgia, pain, death, memories and the real and the unreal.

## I

The character of Parvati has been portrayed in such a manner that it acquires sympathy of the reader. A girl without a father, an uncle the only male support and the mother not very understanding towards the girl's feelings. All these aspects create a sympathetic attitude towards Parvati. She is young, full of aspirations and desires but without resources, has to create her own space. But she fails to do so effectively and lands herself up in an asylum. The novel begins:

“I have always recognized that I carry emptiness inside me, although I did not at first understand it.”<sup>6</sup>

This statement from the narrator of the novel reveals an uncertainty on the part of her, Gokhale's most of the characters suffer from uncertainty and fall prey to wrong decisions taken during crucial circumstances. To confirm this view we have an opinion from a review, which condemns the opening sentence which is contrary to the title of the novel; what is observed in the beginning is present throughout the novel and even remains till the end of the novel. The novel opens with a sentence from the heroine Parvati:

I have always recognized that I carry emptiness inside me, though I did not at first understand it. The sentence immediately tells one, if the title has not already done so, that the story to follow

will involve a failed romance and will be what some reviewers describe as "sensitively told."<sup>7</sup>

Let me keep one of them," I begged, just one!" but mother was adamant; we could not afford it. "Then let me try them on," I said, just to see how they feel. The request was indignantly turned down, although she did soften, and promised to knit me a tasseled scarf after the Shahji's wife had paid for.<sup>8</sup>

The girl child is not having a father figure and the mother is also not very supportive; moreover they suffer from financial crisis. She comments when they could not afford a soft woolen sweater. Such was their plight; the girl was brought up under such circumstances, which had an impact on her personality.

This novel trails the lives of Parvati and Mukul, who grow up together in the Himalayan town of Nainital. One becomes trapped in an unhappy arranged marriage and finally ends up in a mental asylum, while the other flees the restrictive and conservative hill tribes to live in Hong Kong, returning in middle age to fulfill the last "wishes of his former teacher, and to search for an unrequited teenage love. It is a wistful tale, beautifully written. Though Parvati had become a motif for Mukul, he could not accept her haggard and shabby appearance, outward appearance plays a significant role and quotes:

What seized me most was the sight of the faded nail polish on her toenails.<sup>9</sup>

It would be different if you were a boy, she would say angrily, and then you could earn and provide for me in: my old age. But all you are going to do is get married to some no-good, and take my gold champ kali necklace off with you as dowry. It's double curse, to be first be

born a woman, then get straddled with another female to provide for!"<sup>10</sup>

The girl was not appreciated for studying, even her mother would complain. Such were the views of her mother; Gokhale has portrayed this novel within the backdrop of the Kumoan hills. But the mother and the daughter share a bond, the blood relation is seen when the daughter appreciates her mother's culinary skill:

There were a hundred ways in which my mother knew how to cook potatoes- aloo ke gutke, aloo ka pani, aloo tomato, aloo matar and so on.<sup>11</sup>

I was expected to cook for Lalit's family. Here I was able to display my culinary prowess, and took some satisfaction from the praise all of them heaped on me. Parvati bhabhi was considered an accomplished and dashing new addition to the extended family.<sup>12</sup>

Only my culinary skills had not abandoned me.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover Gokhale has highlighted their simple ways of life- simple ways of life of the people in the hills as compared to the life in the cities. It also emphasizes the need for food and how it plays an important role in one's life. The importance of food is once again highlighted in Parvati's life; she with her culinary skills could occupy an important place at her in-laws place and even in her husband's heart. They were interested in bee keeping and Parvati had learnt a lot about it, the subtitle of the first part of the novel is also pertaining to honeybees she explains:

Male bees are usually short-lived, they never collect pollen, nor have they any other responsibilities in connection with providing for

their young. Female bees do all the work of nest-keeping and provisioning.<sup>14</sup>

This statement from a small girl indirectly suggests their fate also. Moreover Gokhale employs sexual overtones in describing and in narrating her characters. The language has double meanings. Moreover she is obsessed with lust and this is evident in many of her descriptions. It also demarcates the role of men and women, this trend continued for a long time and now it has changed somewhat even in the lower and upper middle class of the society, almost throughout the cross section of the society. This small girl is full of aspirations and her thought processes are:

A sharpened pencil gave me an immense sense of satisfaction, and I used to collect the pencil shavings in a cardboard box, certain that I would someday find practical use for them...I am going to build a palace, a palace of pine cones. We can even live there. It will be warm and cosy in winter, and if I paint the cones golden everyone will think we are rich.<sup>15</sup>

Such were her views and dreams, this statement throws light on the nature of women as they are basically meant to provide beauty and comfort and again it reveals the attitude of preserving. These views suggest that the girl aspires for richness, she dreams of being rich and living a comfortable life in a palace. Once while collecting pinecones she came across an old lady, she was very old and her appearance was also frightening for a small girl of an impressionable mind; and furthermore the old lady addressing the girl said:

You silly girl, you're young and pretty just now, but remember, soon, very soon, you'll become just like me!<sup>16</sup>

She further said: "I am a tree; I am not a flower any more."<sup>17</sup>

These statements suggest the importance of beauty for women and they are important as long as they are beautiful and can create. It also signifies the concept of naturalism. The girl witnesses the things between man and woman, which leave her awestruck; and she exclaims:

My world was shattered. People were not as they appeared. There was another life behind their masks. My mother and our tenant stood before me in flesh, their true nature unmasked.<sup>18</sup>

This incident had a strong impact on the life of the girl; she even faces such a situation in her life later on, such an act of elders left a deep impression on the mind of the small girl. Soon her mother died of tuberculosis and she was shifted to her uncles's house at Wee Nooke, here she shouldered the responsibility of the house as it happened to be a bachelor's house. She comments:

The Parvati who lived with her mother in Jeolikote had receded deep into the past, and a merry young creature had set up camp inside me.<sup>19</sup>

She further has to say:

I was preoccupied with my physical self. I blotted my lips with geranium petals to make them red and bought myself an eyebrow pencil to augment my scanty brows. I even tried to induce a beauty spot on my right cheek, using a combination of black ink and eyebrow pencil, but my terror of Masterji prevailed and I washed it off before the world could witness the transformation.<sup>20</sup>

These words signify that a small girl is turning into a woman, she has become conscious of her physical self, and she wants to appear beautiful. This is the beginning of her getting physically attracted, and it is all the more easy as there is no one to take care of. It was during this time that she got attracted to a young teacher, who taught her history, rather than history more of a story of growing up. Salman the male teacher and Parvati were left alone in a vulnerable situation. She remembers the incident:

I was caught completely unaware by the devastating bliss. Eating a sweet squelchy gulabjamun, biting into a fresh fragrant apple, clambering up a khumani tree, with the blue sky above and the hard pliant branch beneath my legs pretending I was riding a horse- nothing in my meager experience of physical pleasures had ever predicted such ecstasy.<sup>21</sup>

Together we explored the past. In some unspecified future.<sup>22</sup>

As I succumbed to the rhythm of Salman`s body within mine I knew paradise.<sup>23</sup>

I had left Wee Nooke a girl and I returned a woman ... We were playing a shadow game, and the most precious ingredient of our passion was that the both of us sensed that it was not permanent.<sup>24</sup>

These thoughts from a young girl-Parvati lead us to think on the man-woman relationship, proximity, the childhood images, the pleasures of a physical union and its repercussion in the future life. This sojourn with Salman came to an end and the other men who came in her life were Mukul Nainwal and Lalit Joshi. She considered Salman as a mere shadow in her life and

Mukul Nainwal took his place, on closeness with Nainwal she comments: “I enjoyed flirting with Mukul Nainwal. His absolute adoration and the transparent ploys he employed to be with me were balm to my soul.”<sup>25</sup>

Such was the state of the girl’s mind and she was married, not to the person of her choice but a Brahmin Lalit Joshi, to make complications worse Mukul and Lalit were friends. She narrates her experience of a bride:

After the sexual bliss I had known with Salman, my wedding night with Lalit sent us both into the deepest depression. The decorum of the occasion demanded languishing looks, a tender appraisal of the bride by the eager bridegroom, and then, hopefully down to business.<sup>26</sup>

Once again life takes a topsy-turvy turn for Parvati and she and her brother-in-law Raju experience physical proximity. Such was her state of mind after experiencing the elixir of life, and her husband Lalit was a homosexual who could not satisfy her primary instincts. Parvati is more a prey to circumstances; it acts as a spurt in her life:

We were both lonely, our needs possessed us and we made uncompromising, and uncomplicated love.<sup>27</sup>

The new Parvati, this confident and happy woman had mysteriously become, could even cope with Lalit. We did not mock or question it, but timidly went along with the tide of happiness. He earned for me, I cooked for him; we had been friends in our childhood. We could be lovers, confidantes and allies.<sup>28</sup>

Then the sound of the water dripping from the tap and the winter rain on the roof, and my daughter's cries as she entered the world, the ripping tearing pain of parturition; and again the dripping of the tap.<sup>29</sup>

But life had something else in store for Parvati and soon Lalit passed away after being diagnosed of tuberculosis. Then life at Wee Nooke was altogether different. She was carrying and she could experience emotions. The character of Parvati as viewed by others does not hold much significance except that of Mukul. In the first chapter titled the dance of the honeybee, Parvati is the narrator of the story. Gokhale has used the technique of a columnist in her writing, as she happens to be a newspaper columnist and an editor. None of the women characters impressively portrayed; some of them acquire the reader's sympathy. When Mukul Nainwal visits Nainital after he was assigned the responsibility of handling and managing Wee Nooke after the death of the headmaster, he visits the place. On his way he comes across many familiar things and situations. He becomes quite nostalgic; he remembers his former days with Parvati and quotes:

Parvati and I were standing naked on the muddy floor of the lake. Her body was as beautiful as I had always known it would be. Her breasts were not small and hard like Adeleine's but generous and yielding. Her nipples were large and aureole, her hips ripe with promise of infinite maternities.<sup>30</sup>

Then I saw the beloved tree of my youth, under whose branches I had briefly known the textures of Parvati's hair, and the smell of her skin, which was the smell of magnolias...



GGIC, Ji, she would invariably reply. This would provoke us to uncontrollable mirth, and we would laugh until our stomachs ached.<sup>31</sup>

This way Mukul was totally lost in the past and reminisces their life with Parvati in Nainital. She sees Parvati in her daughter Irra; he could find many similarities in appearance and even manners resembled Parvati. Mr. Mukul remembers his life with Parvati and how her mother took things casually:

My mother never questioned me about it. It was a wound, which I nursed with devotion, a hurt that was to mingle in time with another rejection, my alienation from home and India. It never ceased to trouble me that I made good not here but elsewhere, until my love for Parvati and for my homeland combined into a single dull pain, the constant grieving pain of jealous and jilted lovers.

32

Mr. Mukul Nainwal's first impression of Parvati, in his own words:

Her hair was pulled back from her face into two tight braids, which were rolled over her forehead. She had a perfect neck, long and elegant, not in the least scrawny, and a way of peering inquisitively forward that at once alerted me that she was related by blood to Hiranand Headmaster.

33

Soon he was enamored by his beauty; and satisfied himself by thinking of her and imaging her; to quote him:

I would look with jealous eyes at the orange marigolds, for they were not the colour of her sari,

and search with tender devotion for the yellow variety. This ecstasy continued until the next time I met her. She was in a green sari now, and what with the green of the lake, and the green of the trees, and the omnipresent green paint on the doors and roofs and flowerpots of Nainital, I shifted the focus of my love to her skin, which I decided anew, was the exact shade and texture of a young magnolia bloom. ....Bite me again, I said. She looked at me quietly, and then bit me so hard that I screamed with pain. She seemed not to notice and bit me once again with unnatural force. I was crying by now. The pain she caused made that moment almost unbearably intimate and I began to tremble. My engagement ring I told her foolishly. I had touched her lips, and read about passion.<sup>34</sup>

He was totally allured by his beauty, he liked her tongue; he further has to say about her when while touching her tongue, she bit him and was totally allured by this so called elusive love and imagined to be with her, they went for a movie and such freak outs attracted him all the more towards her, he would dream of her private parts. He also has some negative aspects of Parvati in his memory especially regarding her nature:

I had always known, of course, that Parvati was prone to depression: her playful gaiety alternated frequently with long, silent spells, when her eyes would darken and take on an even more terrifying beauty than when she was happy. I could remember her sitting in the garden till shadows lengthened, staring at her palms. I used to timidly try to cajole her out of the inwardness. She would extend a white hand, and point dolorously at the plunging headline. The palmistry books that were

so popular then construed this as a sure sign of imminent insanity.<sup>35</sup>

Parvati had become a motif for Mr. Mukul and even everybody else, at such a time her presence back from the asylum was not accepted positively, she his past and not her present. Mr. Mukul still has affection for Parvati, when she came to her once again he observes:

Her face was battered and blue and bruised, yet a smile played upon her lips, a smile of mysterious interaction with sorrow and acceptance. She was my Durga, my Kali, and my Saraswati.<sup>36</sup>

The character of Parvati has been portrayed in a way, which creates sympathy for her pathetic situation, and her helplessness leads her to an asylum- the most tragic situation. The only hope is that Parvati survives through her daughter Irra.

Adeleine was Mukul Nainwal's wife. She had a Burmese father and an English mother. Her father was a colonel. According to Mukul she was a woman without emotions especially towards him. He says: "I longed suddenly for Adeline's unemotional presence."<sup>39</sup> He had to say about Adeleine's nature:

Adeleine is a very level headed woman, with a strong sense of order and propriety. She taught me the merits of dull comfort over passion, and gradually I was able to forget Parvati.<sup>37</sup>

She does not play a prominent role in the novel but her presence has made a difference as she has married Mr. Mukul who happens to be connected with the heroine Parvati. She has been portrayed to be a materialistic woman. Mr. Mukul was her second husband.

Marie was the daughter of Adeliene and now Mukul happens to be his father as he has married Adeliene. She was Mukul's step daughter and he has to say about her:

I have a stepdaughter Marie. She and I are scarcely on the best terms. She is a brittle modern creature, unburdened by any sorrow.<sup>38</sup>

Irra was a caring girl. When Mr. Mukul Nainwal visited their residence, she inquired for tea though she was engrossed in watching with her binoculars. She politely answered his question:

I wish to be a doctor; I don't care where I live as long as I join the medical line. Perhaps I could go to America. I have been to Lucknow twice.<sup>39</sup>

Irra appears to be quite caring; when Mr. Mukul had a fall she was quite helpful nursing and applying some *palak* leaves on his bruised body. This action overtook Mr. Mukul with the emotion of a father; a father feeling arose in him. Irra had a sense of hospitality; as when Mr. Mukul Nainwal came to their residence she asked him politely though she was engrossed in watching with her binoculars answered to his question and asked him for tea: "Miss was ill today, and there's no one at home. Shall I get you some tea?"<sup>40</sup>

Sheela was the big doll of Irra who was always beside her. It was a walkie-talkie with blonde hair and countenance.

Munnibee was the Muslim servant lady staying at Wee Nooke, a factotum before Parvati's arrival. She used to help the masterji in Wee Nooke.

Pasang Rampa was the sales girl and Tibetan by origin. In whose contact Mukul Nainwal comes in his second visit, and is allured by her charms. She describes about herself:

My name is Pasang Rampa, my family they come from U Tsang province. We had a house near Lhasa. Then the Chinese, they came. The Dalai Lama came to India. My family, they fled in terror. I studied in India. I have one sister. We went to boarding school in Dharamasala. My sister, she works in a Chinese restaurant in Chandigarh. My old mother, she is in Chandigarh just now. She came from a very big family. She talks a lot about life in Tibet.<sup>41</sup>

The narrator is describing a time spent with the woman; he quotes their behavior:

The woman beside me is lying naked, her eyes fixed on the ceiling. She is slender and vulnerable. Her breasts are taut and firm and pointing upwards to the rafters with the calm confidence of twin roes in forest full of ferns. The night is jungle; my sexuality is a jungle. I am lost in the dark, I suspect that she is crying but when she moves over to kiss me her lips are curved in a timid smile.<sup>42</sup>

But we are silent shadows, we make no sounds as we glide in and out of each other, and her face is like a mask, exalted and resolute. Somebody in the room begins to moan, it has to be one of us. I watch amazed as my whole life flashes before me. I am dying, I do not exist, I have left myself to enter her. And it is over.<sup>43</sup>

Neera, happened to be the wife of Mr.Pooran.Neera as viewed by Mukul:

Flesh bulged from underneath her tight black blouse, which seemed to thrust her breasts almost to her chin. She wore a violently patterned nylon sari, and had very small hands and feet, chapped and somehow raw-looking. Black button eyes gleamed in an apple-red face. Her dark curly waist-length hair was damp and uncombed. There was a towel draped around her shoulders, and she kept tossing her hair about to get the moisture out.

44

Abha, Pushpendra – Masterji's nephew's wife; who was very beautiful for Mr. Nainwal.

"The beautiful Abha evidently also had artistic proclivities."<sup>45</sup>

Parvati's mother: is described by Parvati in the novel, both of them share many similarities in life. She was married at a tender age of thirteen into an affluent family but soon was widowed.

In the novel other women characters are not prominent, and the story revolves around Parvati. The mother and the daughter do not share a strong bond but however there is some affection between the two. When Parvati doubts her mother having an affair, she reproaches herself. Irra also has affection for her mother and takes care of her. But motherhood has not been glorified here. Nor it portrays healthy man- woman relationship. It portrays the septic of the society. Both Parvati and Mukul don't have fond memories of their parents, both were deprived of father's love-one's father had departed from the world and the other's departed himself, as Mukul's father had left his mother to become a sanyasi and never returned. Both did not have a positive impression of the mother figure in their lives. Parvati's mother was caring but being alone had an affair with the shopkeeper and Parvati was a witness at a young and impressionable age, to their romantic sprees. Similarly Mukul's

mother also did not have an impact on his life; otherwise a boy is naturally inclined towards the mother but here the situation is different. The nurturing was such, which could not lay emphasis on the mother-son relationship. His memories of her are that of shabbiness and the smell of the cow dung. He describes her with adjectives like tall, broad, slow and stupid. The novel has too frank revelations; Mukul comments that while having discussion with the headmaster: in the end Mukul leaves behind his past, his passion and aspires for the present, which is yielding comfort. He returns back to Adeleine leaving behind Parvati and Irra..Mukul, Parvati and Irra all are in search of elusive love but none of them could acquire their dream and Parvati is worst hit among all. She finally lands herself in an asylum.

The novel has many connotations suggesting English influence and ways; this sentence also suggests the particular nature of the headmaster. There are a few more instances revealing English influence:

He would take off his topi and perch it on the hat stand near the door...Yes, my boy, it was the English who brought the chimney to our houses! .....I was an international Civil Servant in the Crown Colony of Hong Kong. .... Amidst this pathetic residue of colonial glory, we made a forlorn foursome the inert fireplace.<sup>46</sup>

This sentence is spoken by Mr.Mukul when they went to the club; it reveals the memories of the English and their traces-which is a typical postmodern trait. Another aspect evident in Gokhale`s writing is the obsession with painted nails and proper nail polish! all her heroines have painted nail polish. Thus the novel ends in a pessimistic tone like her previous novel Paro: Dreams of Passion.Mukul Nainwal is unable to do much for Parwati and her daughter Irra though he wishes to but things are too much entangled; finally he returns to Hong Kong, to his emotionless wife Adeleine.His last thoughts before leaving were:

The forests of pine began way to Sal and teak. I thought of Hong Kong, of Adeleine and her daughter, Marie, and my job at the international Relief Organization. I thought of Parwati and Irra, and the other lives I was abandoning. They assumed in my mind a formal, official shape. There was nothing I could do for them. Country conditions do not permit, I noted mentally as I closed the file.<sup>47</sup>

In true sense Mukul's journey back to the hills proves to be fruitless and it denotes his search for elusive love. This novel has not created a deep mark on the reader; and moreover it deals with pessimism, which is difficult to digest. Parvati's journey is somewhat difficult as she treads on a cobbled path.

## II

Rachita Tiwari (Bitiya) is main character or the protagonist in the novel. The novel begins:

This house belongs to me, as I belong to this house; I live here alone in the hills, watching the day turn to dusk, awaiting the dawn. This house, which knew me as a child, has taken me in again.<sup>48</sup>

These lines throw light on the house of her younger days is once again giving her shelter, though she is alone, though the world has rejected her house belongs to her and has absorbed her. It also suggests that she is optimistic as awaiting for the dawn though at present it is dusk time-the beginning aspires hope. Later on in the novel she tells:



I have come to the hills to heal, to hide, to forget ...  
My face, that familiar index of my being, has dissolved into absurdity and abstraction. The avengers of my vanity have broken me, humbled me with these small depredations of skin and bone and tissue, leaving me less than I was.<sup>49</sup>

These feelings reveal the importance of outward appearance in the life of a human being and also exhibit the naturalistic perspective. Once the flesh is gone all beauty fades and one is just a junk of bones. Furthermore she says regarding her outward and inner beauty:

It's all too easy to fall into physical and emotional disrepair, I am not going to let that happen to me. I change my nail polish every two days. The ritual of the acetone and the cotton wool and the two clear quick strokes of colour is immensely reassuring. It works better than the tablets, which give me frequent headaches. Sanity is like a nail polish, it chips easily, it has to be restored and renewed. Too constant use can cause a yellowing of the nails.<sup>50</sup>

She narrates her experience:

One night, as I was brushing my hair in the dressing room, had curious experience. I was overtaken by the sensation that my feet were not where I had expected them to be. The ground below me had lost its authority; it no longer exercised the inevitable pull of gravity. It was as if I was receiving no information from my peripheries, as though my center had been displaced. The mooring of personality had abandoned me. I was

as floppy as a rag-doll, but in the hands of what monstrous child I could not say.<sup>51</sup>

Bitiya is so engrossed to forget the past but it presents itself often and she is moving in shadows. She comments:

The past exercises a tenacious hold over the future; sometimes it tyrannizes the future into repetitive patterns. I came to the hills to obliterate the past, to seek refuge in the immediate present. Here was my past stalking me again.

I shall busy myself in the ordinary. I will go for walks, and read, and paint my nails red. I will wait for these clouds to pass, these shadows to retreat

52

She further has to say about herself:

I feel trapped in this house. Although I am living all alone in these eight rooms I feel crowded, I feel closed in by presences. I am trapped in my room, with shadows closing in. my nail polish is chirped and I don't feel like repairing it. Rachita Tiwari, touching thirty-four, forgotten as a person by the world, remembered only as a sensational story. Even Lohaniju knows me only as Bitiya.<sup>53</sup>

Such views Rachita is having and she is pitying herself; not Anand. The above words signify her loneliness, nostalgia, displacement and the presences of others who had occupied the house earlier and are not present today. The physical pain inflicted upon her is more of psychological pain also and she has to say:

Nothing connects. When I look at a book I see signs, symbols, and strings of words. They do not flow into each other-they do not accommodate into

order, they do not make sense. Chaos reigns. Everything has gone, only pain remains unvanquished, a raw constant pain that is almost a stimulus.<sup>54</sup>

Pain is a precondition to life, a prelude to joy. It is a teacher, not a tormenter. Lack of stimulation leads only to lack of sensation. Better, then the pain. Why can't I understand this in daily life <sup>55</sup>

I discovered a prism lying in an old box in a drawer in the desk upstairs. When I looked through it, the world changed. Every reality got broken and translated into colour. One afternoon a very strange thing happened, strange even in the scale of other strange things that are constantly occurring wherever I look. Instead of the familiar and predictable range of violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red, a new colour appeared on my prism. It was a completely unexpected colour, a colour I had never seen before amber is the closest I can get to describing it, but it was not amber, it was a composite of bathed in that beautiful glowing light, as I saw the table and the chair and the fire place refracted in this puzzling but entirely pleasing new reality, I felt somehow safe and secure and familiar, as though I was retreating or retiring to a place I already knew and recognized. I sat with the prism held close to my eyes, lost in the splendor and surprise of this new world. Everything was as it should have been nothing around me changed, but that glowing amber light conferred a mystery and glory to everything it touched.<sup>56</sup>

Rachita is trying to look for colours, and trying to look forward in life after a torturous attack on her, the physical assault had impaired her moral psyche also; but still she is aspirational. She further tells:

Choice is the joker in life's pack of cards. Life is a constant series of choices. Some you make and some are inevitably made for you.<sup>57</sup>

She further philosophizes life and highlights the physique of man and a woman and the man-woman relationship:

A man's body is a most peculiar construct. A woman's body contains symmetry of purpose –the breasts, which are the conduit of the life force, and the womb, the matrix of life. A man is an idiot on two legs, with a tap of semen between the testicles; his life force is stored in a vulnerable exterior container. I was not enamored of Wolcott's body and in particular I found his organ, engorged with blood and lust, a most inadequate vehicle to reach and penetrate the essence of my beloved Dona Rosa. The whole process was senseless. Yet I was possessed, I could not exalt in the joys of my own domain.<sup>58</sup>

The woman has been glorified and woman's body is also glorified, as it believes in accepting, consoling, providing warmth, she talks of physical relationship and then even shows contempt for I by saying that open spaces are a welcome change. She further reverberates to her own life and talks of beauty:

In the end it was a great relief to get out, to return to open spaces.<sup>59</sup>

I scurried back to my spot behind the curtain, my special place, my safe place, the place where I belonged.<sup>60</sup>

Excessive beauty is unbearable to the inner logic of life. It breeds death and despair and deep discontent.<sup>61</sup>

Beauty is a form of intelligence and grace, and Dona Rosa's magic lay sheerly in her beauty."<sup>57</sup>

She had died of typhoid and her last dream had been of great beauty and the privileges that came thereof, the life of the grand ladies who arrived at the shop with their backs and their bosoms bussed up in lace and luxury. And indeed the recording angel had granted her this wish.<sup>62</sup>

Above statements from the heroine of the novel suggest that she is aspiring for space, for freedom, amidst cordial relationships, she favours a healthy man-woman relationship. But her later statement signifies that she is scared of beauty, of goodness. Victimisation has left a deep scar on her mind. This also has significance with her heroine of the first published and controversial novel Paro: Dreams of Passion; even Paro is obsessed with outward beauty and one day when that fades she is a miserable person. The above sentence throws light on the postmodern culture, its craze for glamour; it is purely a consumerist culture. Even Paro, of the Paro: Dreams of Passion fame is portraying this trait. Beauty is only skin deep that one has to realize. She talks about things mystical and thus refers to one of the characters (Crawly) as going against time, space and dimension. She again mentions about shadows; shadows play a prominent place in her life, her very life has assumed a shape of shadows. "The room was dark and full of shadows, and I wondered how his human eyes could read in that dim light."<sup>63</sup>

She further has to say:

Human affairs are an amazing web of trivialities, convoluted by interpersonal alignments into a weft

and woof of longing and despair. Life as humans live it has a pattern that is quite tedious. They falter in their dreams, awake, defecate wastes from their bodies, engorge some food then they fritter away their days in a series of unnecessary and uncoordinated movements towards some elusive and imaginary goals. Tired, they engorge themselves again and then attempt to capture and penetrate each other in a simulation of passion. Then a return to the rhythm of sleep, and dreams that are not dreams but the clutter and refuse of unassimilated daytime images. What was I doing in such a world? <sup>64</sup>

Here she says that reality is elusive and whatever appears is not always true. Man fumes and frets and wastes time in frivolities of life. She then talks of love, which takes the form of lust and describes the two binaries prevalent in nature.

And there in that field of flowers he entered Dona, he lifted up her blue dress and gently swathed his body in hers. There was joy and triumph and damnation and hell in our union, our bodies shook and shuddered as we watched the blue sky with the keeling hawks, and around us the turning earth where we did not any longer belong. <sup>65</sup>

Satiated, they had forgotten the hungers of the body, and a larger joy had flooded their consciousness. <sup>66</sup>

Walcott Veera were entwined in each other's arms, the tufts of hair on their naked forms twisted and wet, their lips dry, their eyes blank. And Laura, my Dona, was curled up in an embryonic pose, her plump and pretty arm extending like an umbilicus

towards the fire. Her brow was calm and her lips ruminative, her body had that peculiar stillness I associated only with her. In her belly the seed of our union slept expectantly. The fire gasped and guttered, and I knew with horror and regret exactly what I had to do.<sup>67</sup>

It is said that something in this woman changed at that moment. Her eyes flashed fire and before he knew what was happening her husband stood transformed into a buffalo. A spring of fresh water flowed magically near his hooves. The villagers had seen all this happen. They knew then that she was stripped naked and drove her out of the village. Even her children did not protest.”<sup>68</sup>

Such frank revelations portray the philosophy of naturalism, and it oscillates between shadows and reality like a pendulum. She talks of mysteries happening around her; talks of the past this woman was considered as a scourge of male spirit and hence Lohaniju was very careful with her. But finally she comes out of the shadow and there is a note of positivism. According to her life had provided her with situations, she had to brave the circumstances. She is at times even superstitious.

My life, as you can see, is a series of conditioned responses, and as usual I had found a suitable literary handle to hang on to, an echo that dismissed the need for primary and original reaction. A scavenger of the secondary sources, as it were.<sup>65</sup>

The meditations of the frost, the abandon of the snow, and now the presence of the bears, of these noble and ponderous creatures, gave me great joy. They brought ease and quiet and gentleness to this house. They led me back where I belonged;

I had strayed too far into the petty chaos of your world.<sup>66</sup>

The scene reeked of melodrama and high histrionics. It was like a term paper on some conventions of the Gothic. The chain of causality between lightening, black cats, and cruel hysterical laughter, as also rusty clocks and antique furniture, the signature of the genre, was at work. I resented being roped into such a predictable script, and resolved to make my escape.<sup>67</sup>

Proprioception is the science of the sense of self. My center, my identity, my selfhood had for a while abandoned my cage and run away to cower in dusty corners of other abandoned memories and perceptions. Dona Rosa and the rest are not real, they do not belong any longer to this clear and unquestioning morning, and they are emanations of the past, insubstantial, evasive, ambiguous. I am alive; a skin encapsulated being who belongs in alien ably to the world of the living. I feel as though a scab has fallen from an old sore. In the shadow world between the living and the unloving, even sickness is an indication of a possible restoration to health.<sup>68</sup>

There are some colonial impacts, even in her other novel The Himalayan Love Story such references are observed. Here when Lohaniju mentions:

It's a made-in-England clock, Bitiya; it belonged to an English missionary and his wife ... I belong to this house, and this house belongs to me.<sup>69</sup>

Lohaniju again repeats these lines, as in the beginning they are spoken by Rachita. Some autobiographical incidents are observed when she



mentions; it was understandable that after love death became Namita's obsession. Obsession with love and death resulted in two books: Gods, Graves and Grandmother written after she beat cancer and the non-fiction Mountain Echoes. They did not do as well as she hoped but her latest The Book of Shadows (Viking Penguin) made the top of the Indian bestsellers list. In some ways her last novel sums up Namita's mental pre-occupation. It has love, death and lust in equal proportions. It is set in an isolated bungalow in the midst of a forest in the Kumaon hills. Ghosts of people who lived in it, some murdered, some eaten up by wild animals, continue to haunt it. They make love, get drunk, get inebriated with curry laced with *bhang* (marijuana) and indulge in sexual orgies. Seeing Namita's ever-smiling face and listening to her animated, machine-gun speed chatter one would not suspect the tortured soul within. Despite tragedies in her personal life, she finds "a lot of magic in everyday life which is to be discovered," she asserts. "Failure is more important than success" and "suffering is a great incentive to growth. It reveals and re-defines character. Happiness makes us lazy and flabby." You ponder over these statements and understand why Namita Gokhale loves life as much as she loves death and what has made her so gutsy. In an interview with *The Tribune*, Gokhale has to say regarding the autobiographical elements present in her work:

How much has your personal life affected your writings?

It's strange, but often I write about things before they happen to me or to those around me. I used to get terrified by these coincidences until a very intelligent woman explained to me that writers are intuitive and often carry a field of prescient energy. Otherwise every writer I know cannibalizes experience, it's inevitable.<sup>70</sup>

You are currently completing a novel. Tell us about it.

This is a book about a core of past-life memories, which I have fictionalized. I don't want to talk about

it, as I have not really let go of the book yet, I'm still working on it, or perhaps it's still working on me.<sup>71</sup>

"Why don't you write a novel? She said, as though she was suggesting that I bake a cake, or get my hair permed. You know, sort of bleed the pain and let it all hang out? I told her that I was in no pain, I was merely in retreat, but the thought had found a harbour in my expectations."<sup>72</sup>

Today I distinctly heard an inner voice speak. It whispered from the debris of clamorous emptiness that is my center. It said to me, Hang on. Just hang on, okay?<sup>73</sup>

Sometimes in life the search for order falsifies. Dissociation is as important as association.<sup>74</sup>

All of us have experienced moments when the ordinary becomes extraordinary.<sup>75</sup>

She reverberates in the past but in a positive way; she remembers her past life, her associations, her college life, she as a lecturer, and she as viewed by her students, her dealings with her students. She remembers her student Zenobia Desai, who was her least favorite. Then she again goes back in her mysterious thinking but cautiously returns back to the present, the future with hope.

In long ago days when I taught in college, when I was a popular teacher and a desirable young woman engaged to an aspiring genius, I had taught a paper on the novel. The novel introduces order into disorder, it culls selectively from random and diverse sources, it conspires with the author's consciousness to play dice or God with the

universe, as the fashion may be. The novel is a lying, deceitful mechanism, it leads its readers into an unnatural addition for order and resolution and other such compulsive fictionalizing.<sup>76</sup>

Towards the end of the novel she says:

“I think I know that I will remain.”<sup>77</sup>

“That cool sparkling pool of strength that had been my refuge when I was a child appeared before me. It was surrounded by ferns and flowers, and a sea of yellow butterflies danced in the sky above. Tremulous but unafraid, I stepped out of the armour of caution I had worn so many years and proceeded once again to that familiar place, to the landscape of certainty and sure action. It was not an illusion.”<sup>78</sup>

The golden rose Dona Rosa had given me had transmuted into rose flesh, into shaded petals of glowing pink, into promise and hope and regeneration. It would wither and fade and die. It would bloom again.<sup>79</sup>

This sentence signifies that she wants to live, survive and remain; it denotes hope. It denotes continuity of life. As compared to her other novels, The Book of Shadows is portraying hope after despair; like shadows was a temporary phenomena. The sun has to rise and it's gonna rise. Though at present she is living in a twilight zone. This book for surely portrays Gokhale as a more matured writer in the sense she accepts the situation after a recluse, a retreat. This book has a different orientation as present, past-looming large even in the present and the present with a positive future. This aspect is different from her other works, even in her previous novel The Himalayan Love Story she ends with a pessimistic note. Hence The Book Shadows has rightly acquired a reputed place on the stands.

Dona Rosa is another woman character in the novel, she is referred to as an energetic person. She is referred to as a queen of dissimulators. Later on Laura assumes the place of Dona Rosa. She is described as having rose red lips, defined as of rose-red lips, she of wandering heart, beguiling eyes and bewitching smile.

Dona Rosa looked beautiful and beguiling and very womanly. I have a weakness for women, for the feminine principle really, it is nothing I am ashamed of.<sup>80</sup>

Rita, is the colonel's wife. Her character has been portrayed as more feminine, motherly and she is very religious as she mentions about Christ's blood when Munro and others are feasting. She also mentions about resurrection while suggesting bringing back the child to life.

Veera, was a brave lady. She was massaging Walcott. She reverted to her nature of bitch and strumpet.

Saruli is the woman character whose first born child has died mysteriously and she is in a shock and still nursing the child.

All these women characters do not occupy a prominent place except Dona Rosa who occupies a few pages of the book, and her appearance is there for quite some time. Still she does not leave an impression on the mind of the reader. In this novel the writer has set all the characters towards an elusive search for love as the heroine herself returns to her former house, her pristine days in search of an elusive love only to return to the present. Similarly through mysterious portrayals she depicts her characters search for elusive love and finally they elope. What is a real remains and she ends her novel with this matrix.

Every human being has two novels inside—the story of life as it is and the story of life as it might have been.

When I was writing my latest novel, *The Book of Shadows*, I didn't realize that this was a book about pain. It's only after I finished the book that I saw its purpose. In the book, Rachita, the connecting link of the story, feels a lot of anger. I had lost my husband some years ago. And although on the surface I looked peaceful, there was a lot of anger inside me. That's what I fuelled Rachita with. It was the kind of anger that makes you demand: "Why should this happen to me?" I felt angry with my husband. Why did he have to die? I don't know how I worked it out while writing the novel. But, in the end, I felt more sorted out, exorcised of a lot of pain. It was cathartic, in that sense.

The book is also about death. As if I'm trying to find out what death is all about. The ghost in the novel serves that purpose. With him, I explore the soul's outward journey. Initially, I had thought that at the end of the novel, Rachita would go back to the city, perhaps have a plastic surgery (she has acid thrown on her face by her lover's sister) and live on. But somewhere along the way, I realized that this wouldn't happen. She would live on in that house in the hills. This is symbolic of my living on in the world of—well, I won't say psychic, because I mock the obviously psychic—let's say, in the world of the spirit. In a sense, it is also about rebirth.<sup>81</sup>

Gokhale's other books such as A Himalayan Love Story (2002), Gods, Graves, and Grandmother (2001), and The Book of Shadows (1999) also have strong female characters who deal with love, lust, death, and often the supernatural. Gokhale is a journalist in Delhi whose work focuses on women's

issues and literary criticism. Her first book Paro: Dreams of Passion, which was published in 1984, is said to have 'pioneered the sexually frank genre' that would later characterize Shobha De's work. Gokhale draws deeply from Hindu mythology and philosophy, and although some of the symbolism in Shakuntala can be easily understood, others are vague. The metaphorical use of incidents and dialogues maybe lost on a reader not fully familiar with Hindu philosophy.

Thus the above two novels try to portray women in a situation struggling for emancipation, freedom, appreciation and love. They want to create space for themselves. But unfortunately the world proves to be a cruel place; and they have to make a compromise with the situation. That is the fate of Parvati and Rachita. Parvati continues to live through her daughter Irra, while Rachita survives herself, awakes from her slumber and continues to lead her life inspite of her sojourn away from her routine life in the metropolitan; she takes a retreat into the house in the Himalayan foothills. She survives all the odds and continues to live.

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## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusion

Both Bapsi Sidhwa and Namita Gokhale have portrayed some memorable women characters. There are some similarities as well as some dissimilarities as far as the women characters of these women novelists are concerned.

Bapsi Sidhwa's vision in portraying women characters in *The Crow Eaters* is comic as she portrays the vitality of life in Freddy's mother-in-law Jerbanoo, his wife Putli and his daughter-in-law Tanya. Jerbanoo's character provides us with a lot of fun throughout the novel. More specifically her encounter with her son-in-law Freddy is quite humorous. Some minor women characters like Rosy Watson, Hutoxi, are also significant. The novelist's insight in presenting the marginalized Parsi women like Putli, makes the novel both entertaining and educative.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* throws light on the repression of women in the patriarchal Pakistani society. In fact it is a true story narrated to her when she and her family camped in the remotest regions of the Karakoram Mountains. Sidhwa fictionalized this story and made it more complex. Keeping in view the male members' treatment of Zaitoon and her mother-in-law Hamida, one can understand how cruel the tribal men can be to maintain their so-called tribal code of honour.

The protagonist Zaitoon is trained as an obedient Muslim girl. After her marriage with an uncultured tribal man, Sakhi, in the northwest regions of Pakistan, she realizes how unfortunate she is. She represents those women who are facing quite a few problems these days in Pakistan. By portraying Zaitoon's character, Bapsi Sidhwa emphasizes the fact that in matrimonial affairs, the cultural backgrounds of the bride and the bridegroom must be kept in mind. Unfortunately, in our Indian society, there are people who believe that

horoscopes of the bride and the bridegroom should match or at least their temperament should match. Zaitoon's marriage fails because she and her husband represent two totally different cultural backgrounds. One is born and brought up in Lahore; the other is born and brought up among the tribal people in the Karakoram Mountains. Her husband Sakhi beats Zaitoon for no fault of hers. Even Zaitoon's mother-in-law Hamida is beaten by her own son. Sakhi's treatment of his wife Zaitoon and his mother Hamida gives us a glimpse of the plight of women in Pakistan, because this novel is not based on Sidhwa's mere imagination but it is based on her real observations regarding the status of women in Pakistan.

Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man has powerful women characters like Lenny's Godmother and Ayah who want to forge their independent identity in a patriarchal society. The women in this novel are not only conscious of their desires, but also eagerly assert their independence by handling all types of situations. The feminine qualities of compassion and motherhood are profusely exhibited in women characters like Lenny's mother and her Godmother.

Lenny's Godmother is a dynamic woman character who can find a way out of unfavourable circumstances, any time. The way she reacts to Ice candy man's behaviour with Ayah is really daring, and praiseworthy. She takes Ice candy man to task for whatever he has done to Ayah. Even Lenny's mother emerges as an active woman at the time of partition and helps many needy women, to escape safely during partition.

Ayah is an impressive character who becomes a victim of fanatics. Her character represents those women who had to face horrible situations at the time of communal riots. Even today women have to pay a very heavy price whenever communal riots break out in India. Innocent women who have nothing to do with communal disturbances, are kidnapped, abducted and raped, they fall prey to the fanatics. Bapsi Sidhwa wants to convey the message that humanism is more important than communalism, women may

be belonging to any religion but after all they are also human beings, why should they suffer for no fault of their own?

In *Ice-Candy Man* we come across the oppression and exploitation of Rodabai's younger sister by Rodabai. Though Slavesister is obedient, Rodabai treats her shabbily and humiliates her frequently. It is unfortunate that she is not allowed to exercise her discretion or her will in any situation. By creating Slavesister's character, Bapsi Sidhwa wants to convey an important message, or warning that the exploitation and suppression of one individual by another are not confined to the male-female relationship but in several cases woman turns out to be woman's enemy. The female protagonists play a major role in *Ice-Candy Man*. Hence it is a feminist text in the true sense of the term.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*, like most diasporic writing from the Indian subcontinent, is deeply rooted in social and political complexities that characterize Asian societies today. In *An American Brat* the theme of marriage is examined from Parsi point of view. Feroza, the protagonist, falls in love with David Press, a Jew in America. Her family in general and her mother Zareen in particular are mentally prepared to go to any extent to prevent her from marrying a non-Parsi boy. Feroza believes that underneath the religious and cultural differences, she and David Press are alike but unfortunately her mother does not think so though at time she finds David admirable and appealing. Through portrayal of Feroza's character, Bapsi Sidhwa highlights the fact that the Parsi Community has different norms for men and different for women.

If a Parsi man marries a non-Parsi woman, he is acceptable to the community. But a Parsi woman is not acceptable to her community if she marries a non-Parsi man. It makes us think why this community like many other communities in India and Pakistan practice double standards. The novelist also emphasizes the fact that marriage is purely a personal matter. It has nothing to do with one's religion. Feroza at last declares boldly that she will carry the fire in her heart. This means that in case of her marriage with

any Christian, Hindu or Jewish boy, her faith will be intact. Inter faith marriage will never disturb Feroza's faith in Zoroastrianism

Bapsi Sidhwa like Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga and other Parsi novelists portrays her community as a protagonist in her novels. All the novels of Sidhwa exhibit the consciousness of the Parsi community to which she belongs. That is why their fictional discourses turn out to be ethnocentric discourse; for these writers it is a matter of pride to belong to an ethnic identity in the works of these writers. The Parsis without being concerned with sectarian politics lead a peaceful life contributing to the progress of the given country. However, all minority groups tend to experience anxiety, when they live in a dominant situation. Ethnocentric discourse is produced because of a lot of anxiety about their community. Except Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride all other novels focus on the Parsi community in many ways.

All the novels of Sidhwa exhibit the consciousness of the Parsi community to which she belongs. That is why their fictional discourses turn out to be ethnocentric discourse; for these writers it is a matter of pride to belong to an ethnic group like Parsi Zoroastrianism. Hence there is a lot of assertion of ethnic identity in the works of these writers. The Parsis without being concerned with sectarian politics lead a peaceful life contributing to the progress of the given country. However, all minority groups tend to experience anxiety, when they live in a dominant situation. Ethnocentric discourse is produced because of a lot of anxiety about their community. Except Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride all other novels focus on the Parsi community in many ways.

Apart from Indianness in Gokhale's works, we also find historical aspects. The names of the heroines like Paro and Parvati are historical names. Sidhwa and Gokhale have frankly revealed the realities of life. Of course Sidhwa is a little somber in her revelations, even Namita Gokhale has mellowed down in her later novels like *The Book of Shadows and Gods, Graves and Grandmother*; compared to her debut novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion*. Here the character of Paro goes to any length to satiate her desires;

she does not hesitate to take any revolutionary steps in her journey towards freedom. She appears to be vindictive and hateful towards men; and devoid of affection. It seems men are indirectly responsible for women's behaviour; as B.R.- sewing machine magnate, to whom Paro had married was a man without principles and did not hold the institution of marriage with respect. Due to such behaviour from her husband Paro became vindictive. The character of Priya can be compared with Paro. It suggests the life principle of binaries. This novel is set within the backdrop of metropolitan life of Delhi and Bombay. Here the writer has proved to be very realistic as in the present times-the situation in the metropolitan cities is very grim. Women are exploited, consumerism has created its own problems and women are allured by the shine. They even go for live-in-relationships. They are in such a mental state because of cultural erasure. The new generation wants to move ahead speedily, comfortably and without any baggage. Hence without responsibility, without duty one cannot acquire stability or happiness. It indicates that the society is under flux. Paro is a woman who has affairs with many men. But in reality she yearns for a man's love and security; though outwardly she appears to be strong. This we come to know through her behaviour; when rejected by Shambhunath Mishra. The portrayal of Paro's character is quite significant. She represents the new woman living in cosmopolitan cities of India on her own terms.

Gokhale's heroine Parvati in A Himalayan Love Story, shares the same fate; like Sidhwa's Zaitoon. We can draw similarities between Zaitoon of The Pakistani Bride and Parvati of A Himalayan Love Story. The name of the novel leads the reader to falsehood. There is no grandeur except the kumoan hills as the backdrop. Otherwise life of Parvati is pathetic and tragic. She survives through her daughter-Irra. Apart from Parvati, the characters of Irra, Marie, Pasang Rampa, and Neera are there. For all the ladies except Irra physical aspects are of more importance rather than inner beauty. Here a contrast between Irra and Marie can be developed. Adeleine the Eurasian lady is also portrayed to be emotionless. In Zaitoon's case it is a story of displacement, here the case is quite similar.

The novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* also has a realistic touch about it. Here she has very well brought out the shrewdness, smartness of `Ammi, the way she adopts the survival strategy. Even the novel highlights the social behaviour and the religious fervour prevailing in the society. The protagonist maneuvers things to her advantage. Kalki allures Gudiya- who belongs to the younger generation. The writer has portrayed the difference between the older and the younger generation of the Indian society. The older group is more practical than the younger group who exhibit their weaknesses. This is the story of displacement, but instead of being displaced, they have created their own space. Here the minor characters like Phoolwati and Lila are portrayed as dutiful, powerful women who can handle any situation. Lila is duty conscious towards Ammi and faithful; even Phoolwati is fully aware of her duty and takes care of Gudiya in Ammi`s absence as a real mother. Here we can draw a resemblance with Miriam in *The Bride*. The role of motherhood is somewhat significant with these two characters.

The Book of Shadows is Gokhale`s autobiographical novel. Like the heroine Rachita, she also oscillates in the shadows in her life. But the novel ends in optimism; though initially it exhibits escapism. The characters are in search of love. This is one of the major drawbacks of the postmodern society. Rachita withdraws herself in a remote house in the Himalayas. She wishes to be in the past, in the pristine days as her present is disturbing. She takes time to come to terms with reality. The writer has also used ghosts to narrate her story. Rachita has been disfigured by an acid attack and this physical harm is less in comparison to the psychological trauma she undergoes. She retreats to her childhood home to get mental peace and solace.

Both the writers are contemporary writers; hence they have dealt with the present problem from that perspective. The locale of Sidhwa`s works deals with the city of Lahore, mountains of Karakoram and the city of NewYork. While for Gokhale it is the Himalaya Mountains, cities of Bombay and Delhi. Both Sidhwa and Gokhale are very frank in the portrayal of their bold and powerful characters. Bapsi Sidhwa with her wit and humour is able to change the macabre into a likeable reading. While Gokhale`s characters

know how to handle grim situations. Life in the hills is difficult compared to the plains; hence their ways are also harsh and cruel not befitting civilized men. Gokhale has portrayed the concept of `naturalism` and `freewill`. She appears to be pessimistic at times, as otherwise it is the Indian psychology to make amends with circumstances. She firmly believes that she has portrayed Indian characters and Indianness is there in her works. Invariably Gokhale's heroines paint and repaint their nails off and on; which implies that they wish to wipe out memories and hope for a better tomorrow. From high-class lady like Paro, ambitious Gudiya, dominating Phoolwati, and simpleton I Parvati all paint or henna their nails. It seems Namita has obsession for removing and painting nails. It is also significant that the modern society people use various colours and bold colours to hide their vacuum. Gokhale further wants to throw light on the fact that discipline is on the diminishing in the modern cosmopolitan society and men and women do prefer sobriety and simplicity but they prefer a pompous and glamorous life. So in that way also colours are symbolic of hope.

Both the writers exhibit autobiographical elements. Sidhwa's wide exposure has helped her to pen her experiences into a fictional work. Lenny in Ice-Candy Man is modeled upon Sidhwa herself. The novel The Pakistani Bride is based on a real incident. The Crow Eaters is a saga of her community. An American Brat deals with theme of marriage, the concept of inter-caste marriage is still a taboo among the Parsis. Moreover; it also deals with the hardships of displacement, as Sidhwa herself has shifted from Lahore to the States. When Gokhale wrote her first novel Paro: Dreams of Passion, she had just married and was at her peak. Namita Gokhale has had many experiences (good and bad), which has provided the canvass to pen her feelings- and she did it through her novels. In Gods, Graves and Grandmother, she has exposed the evil trends in society, the role of religion, death and as a subplot wove the story of Gudiya and Kalki. In A Himalayan Love Story, she has narrated the story within the backdrop of the hills, which is her first love and Parvati suffers as the writer also suffered after a brush with death, and devoid of husband's support. Rachita, the heroine of The Book of Shadows is moving in and out of shadows as the writer herself.



Through their fictional works Bapsi Sidhwa and Namita Gokhale have touched the pulse of the society. They have diagnosed the problem of the contemporary society. In a true sense they are the representatives of the contemporary society. Though women soar high, with academic qualifications, and economic independence; they have vacuum within themselves. To maintain the equilibrium of life; along with the juxtaposition of reform, relationships should also be revived. Then only a healthy and harmonious man woman relationship will flourish.

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Sidhwa Bapsi. Ice-Candy Man into a film” The Earth 1947” by Deepa Mehta