

**Marginalization of Women in South Asia: Women Novelists'
Perspective**

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BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Perspective**

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Abstract

This thesis looks into the position of women in three significant novels written in English by South Asian authors, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*. It explores and evaluates the portrayal of women as minority or marginalized to show that disadvantages and oppression of women run through generations and this has its effect on all, including individuals, families and society. In this regard, I have concentrated on the various female characters and their experiences in the novels of South Asia. I have observed that South Asian society still relies on many conventional norms and values and women have to deal with the traditions. So my focus will be on the expectations of the male-oriented society and also on the approaches the women adopt to revolt against them. This will take into consideration the respective women's religions, castes and social statuses.

The first chapter of my thesis provides some background information on the authors and novels including comments on the position of female writers in South Asia. The following three chapters analyze the female characters in the above mentioned texts. This analysis will focus on how the image of a traditional South Asian womanhood is imposed on these females and their reaction to it. Here, I will attempt to describe why some characters submit themselves to the traditional norms they face and there are some who challenge the rules repeatedly. In all of the texts, the traditional notion of women's position has been questioned and challenged. It is shown how these women are reminded of those expectations and their reactions to these conventions. The female characters in the novels come from different geographical regions and have different social and religious backgrounds. The findings of these chapters will be then concluded in the very last chapter.

The thesis therefore focuses on the fact that there are some rules most likely to be broken and there are some which compel women in society to cross the line.

Chapter 1

Cultural and Historical Background

1.1 English in South Asia at the Time of Independence

The term South Asia refers to the contemporary political entities of the Indian subcontinent and associated islands. These are the states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and the island nations of Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The modern history of Indian subcontinent began officially in 1947 when it gained independence. At the same time West and East Pakistan (now Pakistan and Bangladesh) were created for the Muslim community with some thirteen million people fleeing from India to these two states. But the journey towards decolonization started almost a century earlier when the idea of India as an independent country was publicly pronounced for the very first time. It took several decades to gain national and international support that was needed for such an important political step. When it comes to the aftermath of the subcontinent's proclamation of independence, it was not an idyllic one. This post independence state brought many problematic issues along with it. The new country consisted of several states whose histories, traditions and cultures had hardly been common. The number of languages spoken in South Asia was very large. However many of them transcends the boundaries of the states. There was not a single language that would connect all the country. There needed a common language to communicate. The prevalent political situation urges the use of language left behind by the colonizers. English became the official language in 1833 (Forbes, 33). Since then it has become widely spread and the only language used by educated people all over the country. English was the first language of instruction at many educational institutions. This was designed to educate people who would work for the British. By offering the colonized college and university education; the British were trying to educate South Asians who would be able to work for them. The British imposed their language on the natives not simply to educate them but to have them as a translator who could interpret the language to them. By the time of independence, English has become one of South Asian languages (Forbes, 36). It was quite clear that English was essential "in order to get ahead in colonial and immediately postcolonial South Asia" (Spivak 1993-1994, 18).

1.2 English as a Literary Language of South Asia

By 1947 numerous fiction writings of English had emerged in South Asia. Primarily there was English fiction written by British authors for a British public. The aim was to entertain or educate them. Several British authors were inspired by South Asia-its culture, people, history and nature. They not only analyzed the experiences of colonizers but also tried to communicate the two cultures. But their effort to depict South Asia was never authentic. It was always the foreign writers' insights and their point of view which failed to portray real South Asia. Some of the texts written by British writers became widely known. Some of which are *The Jungle Book* written by Rudyard Kipling, or Paul Scott's tetralogy *The Jewel in the Crown*. Even nowadays the novels as well as their film adaptations are popular in worldwide. Gradually more and more South Asians started to write in English to complement the British view of South Asia. While British authors depicted the land and the people of South Asia from the point of view of an external observer or a colonizer, South Asians were able to portray it from the position of an insider. Ultimately this extended the insights of (British) reader. The South Asian authors wrote about the life experience in South Asia who knew the culture thoroughly as it was his own. The first South Asian authors started to appear as early as in the 19th Century. Later on the number increased and the authors were motivated by the increased number of readers both foreign and native.

1.3 Indo-Anglian Writings

The authors writing in English had contributed a lot to contemporary literary genre. It is because of their writing, South Asian writers did not take much time in adopting the new genre of novel. Writing a novel was as unusual for a South Asian writer, as writing in English. On the other hand, English was perceived as the language of novels. English has been since accepted as one of the many languages in which South Asian literature is being written. As a result Indo-Anglian literature has been acknowledged both in South Asia and abroad. Moreover international acceptance was more prominent when in 1913 Indo-Anglian poet Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature "because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West". (The Nobel Prize Foundation) The first major generation of South Asian female

novelist writing in English does not, however, come out until the 1950s. Authors such as Santha Rama Rau and Ruth Pravar Jhabvala start publishing their novels. In the following years, the number of English authors in South Asia does not increase significantly. This holds true for female as well as male authors. Several new Indo Anglian writers started publishing their writings. Even a large number English author of Indian origin was shortlisted for such prestigious literary prizes, such as the Man Booker Prize, the Commonwealth Prize or the Orange Prize. Many of them actually won the awards; Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and quite recently Kiran Desai. The latter two belong to the younger generation. The fact that both of them are female is symptomatic of the situation that many female writers emerged in the last few decades. Basically, at that time women were doubly colonized by the colonizer and the patriarchy. So they needed to find a way to define their position in the world and “literature ... was a powerful medium through which self definition was sought” (Boehmer, 225). It is notable that the aftermath of colonization and its impact is not a theme discussed only in the work of female but also in the writings of men. The end of the colonial era and the birth of the new nation being a crucial historical moment in the lives of all related to it. So, most of the contemporary South Asian authors dealt with the theme in their writings. The post-colonial situation of South Asia and South Asians is important to all of them. Being doubly colonized women authors take it a little further. So the process of double emancipation is quite interesting and worthy of further examining in this thesis.

1.4 Women's Education and Female Authors in Post-colonial South Asia

Contrary to the amount of information on the life of men in before and during colonial South Asia, there is few written evidence as to how women lived at that time. Besides, the overall majority of texts from the pre-colonial era are written by men. This excludes a possibility to depict the everyday life of women. Gayatri Spivak has stated the problem of writing the history of colonial women in her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” that ‘the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant’. Therefore the access of education was extremely limited to women until the second half of the nineteenth century. It means that the records of women's lives remain scarce until that time. The emergence of female authors using English in their writings is closely connected to women’s access to education. Their journey towards education was, however, longer and more complicated than that of men. Women had to deal with the prejudice of both the colonizers and of the South Asian males.

Stating ‘the concrete experience of the oppressed’ history books’ often constitute an autonomous subject without due recognition of the dual oppression of colonialism and patriarchy, and the further oppression of Western scholarship’ (Forbes, 3).

The attitude towards female education had for centuries been. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Woolstonecraft is a plea for the equal education of women. Woolstonecraft argues the traditional convention of women education. Such arguments made by Wollstonecraft in company with the prevailing atmosphere of female education in South Asia. She came to see the history of female education as conspiracy of male educators and writers. They tend to see women as less rational and weaker. She therefore vindicates:

“women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue”; “Men indeed appear to me to act in a very unphilosophical manner, when they try to secure the good conduct of women by attempting to keep them always in a state of childhood”. (Wollstonecraft, 8)

She further focuses on the fact that, women were educated just to acquire a husband. This did a little to develop women’s reason, understanding, sense of virtue, and physical strength. Wollstonecraft addresses this notion with disgust, saying,

“Nay the honour of a woman is not made even to depend on her will.”(Woolstonecraft, 11)

Partha Chatterjee holds the same view in “The Nationalist Resolution of Women’s Question” about the traditional position of a woman who has no access to intellectual practice. According to the Indian nationalists it was “necessary to cultivate the material techniques of modern Western civilization while retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of the national culture” (Chatterjee, 120). Application of the inner/outer distinction separates the social space into the home and the world. The male represented the world while the woman represented the home. The world is considered supreme and the home must remain unaffected by the activities of the material world. The question was pushed further by the British in India by promoting the idea that husbands and wives should be friends or companions in marriage. It reflected the well known Victorian patriarchal ideals of what Geraldine Forbes has termed as ‘companionate marriage’ which the British introduced in India in the nineteenth century and which most of the reformers embraced with great zeal. However it is noted that, we rarely see a woman in South Asian society in the nineteen

century sharing intellectual pursuits with her husband. Most of the time, she is busy with the household chores.

As for the part of South Asian women, they were not given any education at all. There existed discrimination between men and women in terms of receiving education. Rassundari Devi (1810-?), a woman from Hindu upper middle class, wrote her autobiography, *Amar Jiban* (my life) which is considered as first autobiography to be written in Bengali. Although the autobiography is merely a story about the life of an ordinary Indian housewife, one sees rebellion and struggle. Rassundari taught herself to read and write to “escape the grind of petty domesticity” and she asks: “Just because I am a woman does it necessarily mean that trying to educate myself is a crime”? The case was slightly different in cases of Muslim girls from upper class. It was for instance expected that Muslim girls will learn to read. Although in most of the cases the education was not institutionalized. However, the vast majority of women were denied an access to education. It was believed that receiving education on the part of women lead to an early death of one's husband. This popular belief is mentioned in William Adam's Report on the State of Education in Bengal where he claims that:

A superstitious feeling is alleged to exist in the majority of Hindu families, principally cherished by the women and not discouraged by the men, that a girl taught to read and write will soon after marriage become a widow(Forbes, 33).

Surprisingly it was mostly women who prohibited education to other women. There were some explanations to support this. Although it might seem totally irrational, it is easy to understand their fear of losing a man in the family. In most cases women lives were depended on a man. To threaten a husbands' life meant therefore to threaten the lives of all the women and possibly children who were dependent on him, i.e. mother, sisters, daughters.

It was only in the nineteenth century, that female education became an important issue. It was men who finally feels the importance of female education and tried to change the situation. And they were both British colonizers and South Asian men. Although the number of educational institution was not a significant one, gradually it increased to a larger number of institutions. Many Indian women were able to get high school diplomas during this time period. But one needs to be reminded of the “Bhadramahila” concept. The theory of Bhadramahila is noted in Partha Chatterjee's essay, “Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India.” This is a concept in which woman had to retain her respectable behavior and had to refrain from “mehsahib” like behavior. A “mehsahib”

was an English woman who of course followed a western style of living, eating, drinking and smoking and keeping the company of men. An educated Indian/Bengali woman could not do these things. By doing so she would not only lose her identity but the identity of her country. The women of India were the holders of their country's culture. Thus the Indian woman's voice was doubly controlled by the colonial and the Indian males. So although the education of the Indian woman was highly propagated by Indian intellectuals and the colonizer, it came with a price.

Access to higher education played an important role in creating Indo-Anglian female authors. Those who were educated in English language started their writing in English. At that time English was hardly a mother tongue of many South Asians. The female authors had the means by this time to voice their views, their feminine thought and opinion of something. It is not that there were no writings regarding the theme. But in most cases male authors misinterpreted the lives of women, not necessarily intentionally. The first wave of major South Asian female writers appeared only in the second half of the twentieth century. This was a time when literature gave voice to those who had been previously marginalized. And South Asian women had indeed been marginalized, both by the colonizers as well as by South Asian men. So this was one of the most important themes in the writing of contemporary authors. They kind of tried to drive away the marginalization, stereotype from the society through their writing. Present day female writers have not only access to higher education, but also opportunity to experience different cultures. Such authors are praised in abroad more than their home countries. Such is also the case of the three authors whose texts are being examined here. All of them depicted the post-colonial experience of South Asian women.

Chapter 2

The Expectations: The Daughter, the Bride, and the (house)Wife

The three narratives are quite different one from another in that they portray people from different geographical regions, different social groups, and different religions. But surprisingly these novels are common when it comes to depicting the position of women and the expectations that are placed upon them. It is apparent from all three novels that everybody, both men and women, have a fixed notion of what appropriate behavior is when it comes to women. From their early childhood, women become familiar with certain social norms that are imposed upon them not only by men but also by women. Interestingly enough, it is not only men that are trying to remind women of what their traditional roles are, but also women. Basically women conform to the norms and never hesitate to make sure that others are reminded of them. In some cases their trying level is even more rigorous than men. Not only that, they make the other women follow the rules as rigidly as they do. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft opines that the moment a baby girl enters into the world, she is considered docile, weak and dependent on men by its mother. Women are socialized into having a desire to be beautiful so they can attract men. Mothers shape and mould their daughters' characters in a way that they turn out to be emotional rather than rational. All of this is due to their upbringing; they rarely have any way of breaking out of this structure of teachings. Wollstonecraft argues:

“Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, *outward* obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives.” (Wollstonecraft, 19)

As for the novels, the readers get a more or less accurate idea of what is and what is not acceptable for a woman to do, to think, and to say. Though the female characters in the novels are different from one another, the expectations that are imposed upon them are quite

same. While reading South Asian novels with female characters, one can be surprised, how much expectations are connected to them. All of them are somehow bound to the idea of marriage. Not much else is expected from a woman than to get married in the best possible way. So it becomes natural for a woman to confine herself into learning the way to impress a man. For women the only means to gain power is through marriage, therefore physical beauty becomes their only fully developed faculty. In case of women education “Strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty” (Wollstonecraft, 13). An interest in beauty and ways of dress are not inherent to women. Rather she cultivates the choice to mould herself into marriage material. Wollstonecraft argues that a woman should not merely practice the art of beauty rather she should be educated in a way so that can claim herself as equal as men.

Most of the expectations expressed in the novels are in one way or another connected to marriage. Women are expected to do everything in order to be suitable and desired brides. Being a good wife is the responsibility not only to the man one is married to, or even to his family, but to the society as a whole. Marriage is a matter that concerns the society as a whole, not only the two persons that are directly involved. Marriage plays an extremely important role in the lives of women and wedding is probably the most important event in one’s life. Every important decision a person takes, is therefore examined in the light of what consequences it will have for their marriage. A convenient marriage is the ultimate goal in a woman's life. This is also the main responsibility of her parents, as it tends to appear in the novels. This chapter will examine the expectations that are placed on women in the three novels by their families, their husbands, and other people, especially women. It is notable that the expectation differs in terms of one’s social status. What is expected from a woman of higher social status is comparatively loose in case of middle class women and even more flexible for women of lower social status or class. There is no objection raised against their role of mistresses of middle class men. Their silence is confirmed as Spivak states in her article “Subaltern Cannot Speak”. Even though the subaltern enters all the texts, they are marginal to the narration and “not able to be heard” (Spivak , 292).

2.1 The Objectification of Women

There are several instances in *The God of Small Things* that describe the social changes that took place in India at the time of Independence. The changes in the caste system and the political changes seemed to influence modern India. Very few of them, however, had any

impact on women. The position the women had in society remained quite unchanged. Estha's account of Ammu's birthday can be considered an illustration of the changes in perception of male and female position. In his notebook he tells about the presents he and Rahel received from Ammu: "Then in the morning we had new cloths from Ammu as a back-present Rahel was a maharani and I was Little Nehru" (Roy, 158). While the boy's costume reflected the changes that India has experienced, the girl's dress is a traditional one. This is as though boys were encouraged to identify themselves with modern days' heroes, while the expectations placed upon girls were the same ones as in previous decades, or even centuries. Their main role is the one of an obedient, submissive housewife. As such, women are still considered property of their husbands (if married) and of fathers (if unmarried). Bim in *Clear Light of Day* says "I can think of hundreds of things to do instead. I won't marry. [...] I shall work – I shall *do* things. 'I shall earn my own living – and look after Mira-masi and Baba and – be independent. There'll be so many things to do" (Desai, 140-141). Tara, the younger sister of Bim holds completely different position than Bim, Tara does grow up to be a mother. She chooses to marry; her independence involves obeying her husband's wishes. Thus she expresses perfectly what position a woman had in her family. A woman is sometimes considered as a gift that her father has all the right to give away as he pleases. And it is precisely in this manner most women in the three novels are treated. Lenny, the child narrator of *Ice candy Man* is aware that the "world is compressed". This awareness is intensified when Col. Bharucha prophesies her future, "She'll marry, have children—lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams" (Sidhwa, 15). In *The God of Small Things* Ammu's husband is convinced that once married he can treat her as he likes. Without any trace of discomfort he announces to her Mr. Hollick's offer, as though lending his wife to strangers was one of his rights. Being a woman is similar to being a man's property; a property that he can give to whom he wishes to.

2.2 A Suitable Girl

In selecting a bride, the parents of the groom certainly consider things that are common to all. These are the girls' family background, economic position, general character, family reputation, the value of the dowry and other family matters. The three novels confirm these expectations. An unmarried woman's main task is to be as desirable a gift as possible. Parents

have one sole goal in upbringing a female child; to make her as valuable a bride as she can be. Also it is the responsibility of the family to prepare her for the marriage. The girl is expected to fulfill all the expectations that are placed upon her. Her appearance is important, but it is not the only requirement. Her character must be shaped so that it matches the prospective husbands' wishes. The girl is supposed to be meek. "Displaying a stubborn single-mindedness," the narrator in *The God of Small Things* claims, "in a young girl in those days was considered as bad as a physical deformity--a harelip perhaps, or a club foot" (Roy, 24). When it comes to education, it seems that when a girl had less education she was more likely to get married. Roy's Baby Kochamma was allowed to study only after she had developed a reputation that made her unlikely to get married. Rahel was only allowed to study since nobody cared about her getting married. Loomba argues the logic behind women education in following words:

As mothers to the nation, real women are granted limited agency. The arguments for women's education in metropolitan as well as colonial contexts rely on the logic that educated women will make better wives and mothers. At the same time, educated women have to be taught not to overstep their bounds and usurp authority from men. (Loomba, 182)

As far as the characters from Desai's, Roy's, and Sidhwa's novels are concerned, this seems to hold true. The few female characters from the three novels are only allowed to study when the purpose is supported by patriarchal issue. The case of Baby Kochamma who is allowed to study once it is clear that she probably will not get married anyway. There is no chance of her to overpower her husband in intellect. Women education brings the danger of becoming more self confident than is acceptable. Lenny in *Ice Candy Man* becomes aware of gender inequality in accessing education when Col. Bharucha prophesies her future, "She'll marry, have children—lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams. When the neighboring Misra girls are getting engaged, Tara and Bim discuss the girls' prospects for the future. Bim remarks about the girls' lack of time to study: "I don't know how those two girls are going to study and pass their finals with all this going on," she said. Tara replies, "I don't think it matters to them they're getting married afterwards anyway" (Desai 139). Getting married in traditional India was considered the high point of a woman's life. As a priority, school was apparently considered less important. In addition dowry plays an extremely important role in arranging a marriage. This can be seen on the examples of Ammu: "since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposals

came Ammu's way" (Roy, 38). In the beginning of 1960's a law was passed to abolish the dowry tradition in India. But the law has failed to abolish the age-old custom of dowry payment. The law was not very successful is reflected in case of Rahel whose marriage was never arranged. Usually, as marriage was seen as the ultimate goal in a young woman's life. The only reason for not getting married was that Rahel did not meet the expectations of a prospective husband. A girl who did not fulfill the expectations held by the society was not considered a desirable bride. Thus she falls in danger of finding no suitable husband and that's how becoming an old maid. This applies for Bim in *Clear Light of the Day* who resented the idea of getting a husband. It also applies for Baby Kochamma in *The God of Small Things*. She joined the Catholic Church and entered a convent what had "developed a reputation". She was unlikely to find a husband which made her father decide that "since she couldn't have a husband there was no harm in her having an education" (Roy, 26). When introducing Rahel, the narrator describes what detached her from a desirable future: "Rahel grew up without a brief.....without anybody to arrange a marriage for her. Without anybody who would pay her a dowry and therefore without an obligatory husband looming on her horizon" (Roy, 17). In a male dominated society, a woman is getting to be married anyway. Lenny as a narrator in *Ice Candy Man* learns that marriage of a girl is of utmost importance to their parents. Independence and self identity is for man. As a child she enjoys the love of her mother and the protection of her father. Her schooling is stopped by her doctor because she has polio. He said that she can marry and live a good life. There is no need for her to take the burden of study. This make her aware of the fact that Woman's duty is to look after the house, raise children and give comfort to her family.

Bim chooses an independent life refusing suitors like Dr. Biswas. One Day, he says "Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others - to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them" (Desai, 97). This is typical male point of view. But the fact is that Bim chooses to be independent, entirely out of her free will. Similarly, in *The God of Small Things* Baby Kochamma lost the eligibility of marriage at her free will. While, in the novel, Chacko's affairs with village women were considered natural by Mammachi whose "tolerance of "Men's Needs", Ammu had several restriction to even go outside. A man is never judged by his relationships to women. But a woman's bad reputation is in all three novels considered dangerous for the whole family. The option of marriage is the only option for any respectable woman. Not getting married was practically not an option at

all. An unmarried woman's destiny was to stay for the rest of her life in her father's home without any expectation for her future. There are no rights she can claim in return for her duties.

2.3 A Wife and a Mother

Female power is often undercut by the traditional role she is forced to play; the role of a wife and a mother. Simon de Beauvoir states in *The Second Sex* "In the bosom of the family, woman seems in the eyes of childhood and youth to be clothed in the same social dignity as the adult males. Later on, the young man, desiring and loving, experiences the resistance, the independence of the woman desired and loved; in marriage, he respects woman as wife and mother, and in the concrete events of conjugal life she stands there before him as a free being" (de Beauvoir, 45). Thus female development is traced through its formative stages: childhood, youth and sexual initiation. Beauvoir shows how, at each stage of her upbringing, a girl child is conditioned into passivity, dependence, inwardness etc. How creative a woman might be, she must accept a dissatisfying life of housework, childbearing and sexual slavishness. De Beauvoir claims that an adult woman performs three major functions: wife, mother and entertainer.

Marriage is the main goal of a young woman's life as well as it is the main goal of her father's life. But it does not change her life; it does only bring expectations she is to fulfill. Now they have to face expectations held by their husbands and their families. They are supposed to take care of their new homes and of their husbands. They are also expected to give them children as soon as possible. The expectation regarding a marriage only becomes fulfilled when the wife gives birth to a baby, preferably a son. Thus a woman increases her husbands' respectability in the society. In some cases, giving birth to a son can be the only expectation the wife has to face. Once fulfilling it, her marital duties are over. Comrade Pillai in *The God of Small Things* feels free to drop the question in his first conversation with Rahel upon her return to Ayemenem after a decade. His questions mainly illustrate the role a woman traditionally plays in a marriage:

"Any issues?" "No," Rahel said.

"Still in planning stages, I suppose? Or expecting?"

"No."

“One is a must. Boy girl. Anyone,” Comrade Pillai said. “Two is of course your choice.” (Roy, 130)

It is never considered to be the couple’s choice whether or not they want to have children. Marriage is the only plausible option for a respectable single girl and having a child is the only imaginable future for a married wife, unless she is barren. Yet still, being barren is considered ill luck and often the wife's fatal flaw. There are many prejudices women without a child must face. A Hindu barren woman is discouraged to visit a social event on the grounds of being childless. Jean-Antoine Dubois, a French missionary, states in his book ;Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies: The Classic First-Hand Account of India in the Early Nineteenth Century “A barren woman is made to feel that there can be no worse fate, and barrenness in the wife is a most terrible curse that can possibly fall on a family” (Dubois, 94). He further states, “In fact, a Hindu only marries to have children and the more he has the richer, and the happier he feels. All over India it is enough for a woman to know how to cook, pound rice, and give birth to children. These three things are expected of her, especially the last, but nothing more. It would even appear displeasing if she aspired to anything else. No Hindu would ever dream of complaining that his family was too large, however poor he might be, or however numerous his children” (Dubois, 94).

Even if a mother is barren, she is not excluded of her natural role that a mother of a child plays. Throughout the story of *Clear Light of Day*, Bim Das is the person who holds the entire Das family together. She has to nurse her brother Raja back to health, take care of her mentally-challenged brother, Baba, and keeps the house in order. Although Bim seems to have taken on the traditional role of a male within the family, her mind is still busy with how to look after others in the family, or in other words, how to sacrifice herself or her own life. Bim is depicted as the advisor, the protector and the decision-maker and the life-giver .Though she is not the biological mother of the family, she plays all the role of a mother.

At one point in the novel Bim proclaims, “I don’t understand the insurance business. Father never bothered to teach me. For all father cared, I would have grown up illiterate and – and *cooked* for my living, or *swept*. So I had to teach myself history, and teach myself to teach” (Desai, 155). This outburst illustrates exactly how she feels about her upbringing and the lack of preparation it gave her for her actual future responsibilities. It is not only her father who reminds her of the feminine duty she is to do, but later in her life her brother Raja also does not understand the talent Bim has.

The idea of being a life-giver is reaffirmed in the personality of Mira- Masi, the woman who took care of the children after their mother's. She emerges as another motherly figure. She later becomes an alcoholic, and Bim is there to take over the role of the mother. Both Bim and Mira-masi play all the role of mother though they are not the biological mother. So we may say that the role of woman as the mother of the whole family does not disappear at all but instead, it switches from time to time among these female characters in the novel.

There are other qualities that a married woman should possess besides giving birth to a child. Then she is considered as a good wife. A good wife should cultivate her good qualities, while disposing of her vices. As for her appearance, she is expected to keep her good looks for her husband. It is expected that she will be loyal and obedient to her husband, always at his disposal. Furthermore, even now as a married woman she has to ensure that her reputation, as well as that of her husband and family, remains intact. To meet this requirement she has to manage the household. She should be careful so that husband can act properly in society. The description of Lenny's mother, may give us an idea of what a desirable traditional wife is like. As a servile housewife, she limits her life to the four walls of her home. She follows her husband blindly, who is the decision-maker of the family. Lenny's mother is representative of those traditional women who are subordinates. They never express their desire to establish themselves as better human beings. Lenny's mother has no a purpose in life besides domesticity. She projects the womanly traits of being happy and content with her life and family.

There are several moments that offer subtle descriptions of traditional Indian gender roles in *Clear Light of Day*. One such moment describes the ideal traits of an Indian wife, in the context of Mira-masi. The children believed that she didn't embody these traits:

“What does make a wife? Why, they felt, a wife is someone like their mother who raised her eyes when the father rose from the table and dropped them when he sat down; who spent long hours at a dressing-table before a mirror, amongst jars and bottles that smelt sweet and into which she dipped questing fingers and drew out the ingredients of a wife sweet-smelling but soon rancid; who commanded servants and chastised children and was obeyed like a queen”.
(Desai, 110)

In return for playing well the role of the wives, the women are promised to be looked after. Tara, in *Clear Light of Day*, prefers herself to be looked after by a husband than to educate her and carry the burden of her family. She wanted to marry simply so that her husband could look after her and she could escape from all the problems of her parental home. In contrast to her sister, Tara is a wife and mother. She loves her daughter and is ever submissive to her husband. Although Tara seems to be a more independent woman, a conversation between her and Bakul is significant in revealing the *double displacement* Spivak talks about. After a small unlucky event, Bakul says, “And you won’t let me help you. I thought I had taught you a different life, a different way of living. Taught you to execute your will. Be strong. Face challenges. Be decisive. But no, the day you enter your old home, you are as weak-willed and helpless and defeatist as ever” (Desai, 16). Through these words Bakul claims to be the person who gave Tara a better and new life. Here his position is of the dominant male who directs the female subject. This means Tara has no identity without her husband’s authorization. Secondly Bakul’s words are suggestive of the fact that western way of life is more glamorous than South Asian way of life. So Tara’s voice is doubly silenced: both by her husband and by the colonial power. Spivak suggests that *the subaltern* cannot have a history of his/her own and cannot have a voice and that if the subaltern is a female, she cannot be heard at all because she exists in absolute silence:

It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (Spivak, 28)

Tara is dutiful and even protective of her husband. She falsely took the blame for Bakul when Bim mistakenly complains that she has left a peeled orange uneaten. In reality, Bakul has left the uneaten oranges, but Tara takes responsibility. Tara plays a helpless role with Bakul and conventionally thinks that she is weak, and “how entirely dependent on him [she is] for her own calm and happiness” (Desai, 150). In many ways Tara maintains the subaltern position and become silence by the system.

The patriarchal society does not perceive women beyond the roles of daughters, wives and mothers. Traditional male fantasies have created a particular image of women to suit their interests—submissive, servile, docile and rejecting of own happiness. A woman is simply a property belonging to her father or husband. This is reflected as normal in all the three

novels. It conforms to what Spivak also speaks about in her well-known article. According to her, whenever a woman is dare to act against her traditional role, the dominant masculine voice becomes so oppressive that the woman is silenced in various ways . If some female characters in these three novels intend to move outside the boundaries of the patriarchal system, they eventually become lost in the system. A woman can be modern and enlightened to the highest extent. Still she remains subjected to a man at whose disposal she live.

2.4 Die-vorced Women

Divorce is one of the great taboos when it comes to women's marriages. It is something that is unthinkable for any respectable woman to do. There is no good reason for a woman to leave her husband. A Woman who breaks such a taboo is never treated well by the society. She is condemned even by her family. A divorced woman has "no position in her parents' home" (Roy, 45). When Comrade Pillai learns that Ammu is divorced his voice is raised to a high degree: "Die-vorced?" "His voice rose to such a high register that it cracked on the question. He even pronounced the word as though it were a form of death" (Roy, 130). It was a form of social death. It was impossible to overcome the stigma it entailed. The twenty seven years old Ammu is well aware that after her divorce "for her, her life had been lived. She had one chance. She made a mistake. She married a wrong man" (Roy, 38).

Chapter 3

Women Following the Rules

When speaking about women in general all three novels treat them in a similar manner. They are considered as a homogeneous group of females that do not differ one from another. Thus the characters Bim, Tara, Mira-masi, Mother and the Misra sisters in *Clear Light of the Day* all demonstrate how maternity and matrimony shape South Asian women's lives. The same applies for a series of female characters who have survived in the chaotic times of 1947 in India in the novel *Ice Candy Man*. Also this is same for the factory women that visit Chacko in *The God of Small Things*. If they speak, they are ascribed one voice. This is as though they are all a prototype of another, unimportant woman. Similarly, in the play performed at Sophie Mol's arrival in *The God of Small Things*, the onlooking woman, though having different names form a "silent blue-aproned army gathered at the greenheat to watch"(Roy, 172). Here, too, they are deprived of individual personalities: "Nobody said Hello to Rahel. Not even the Blue Army in the greenheat (Roy, 173)".

Whenever a woman in all these three novels emerges as an individual, she is considered to be standing out from the collective mass of women. In such cases, the individual's characteristics contrast with the characteristics of the collective mass of women. Then there are female characters in the novels who are not reassured by the destiny of those who dare to differ. Instead they long to become a part of the nameless collectivity. Such women who chose to conform to the expectations placed on them as women, rather than individuals, will be central to this chapter. The focus will be on the criteria that they conform to, the motives behind the conformity and whether there is a pattern as to what kind of women decide to follow the rules. It is noteworthy that such women form a minority of the female characters in the three novels. They usually contrast with those characters that revolt against the norms that are imposed on them. These groups of female characters willingly adopt the norms and occasionally impose it on the others. For example a mother always tries to impose the norms on her daughter so that she could prove herself socially eligible to fulfill those expectations. Simone de Beauvoir also holds the same view about social conditioning. According to her, mothers are highly responsible for reminding their daughters, feminine traits of submission. She writes in *The Second Sex* that the girl-child is often made to do motherly tasks. The mother thus rids herself of many of her functions. By doing so the girl-child is deprived of

happy freedom, the carefree aspect of childhood. Not only by mother, is a woman made to fulfill the societal expectations but by other women as well. According to Simone de Beauvoir “To be feminine is to show oneself as weak, futile, passive, and docile. The girl is supposed not only to primp and dress herself up but also to repress her spontaneity and substitute for it the grace and charm she has been taught by her elder sisters. Any self-assertion will take away from her femininity and her seductiveness” (de Beauvoir, 347). In such cases the girls usually do not question the social laws and give up their own expectations. The following study of two characters from the novels, *The God of Small Things*' Mammachi and *Ice Candy Man*'s Lenny's mother, will try to show in what degree this holds true for the novels' characters.

3.1 Mammachi

The major character that conforms to the rules set out for her in *The God of Small Things* is Mammachi. She seems to be the pillar of the family. It is ironic that she is the weakest character in the novel. On a closer look, one can see that she plays the traditional role of the mistress of the house. In no way does she ever cross the line between the housewife and a rebel. From the very outset, her portrayal is that of a docile wife. She conforms to every rule that is imposed upon her. Mammachi does not seem to protest when, due to her husband's envy, her violin lessons were “abruptly discontinued” (Roy, 50). Her loyalty to her husband and obedience remain steady with her husband even after his death. She seems to be a very passive woman, accepting anything that comes her way, be it good or bad. She accepts her husband's beating quietly without protest. She does not revolt even when the beating started to involve Rahel. Rather than opposing her husband, she teaches her daughter to hide well outside the home after he had “beaten her and Mammachi and driven them out of their home” (Roy, 181). Her husband decides not to talk to her ever again as a punishment of a different kind. It seems that she takes anything that happens in her life, acting as an object rather than a subject. She endures a great deal of oppression by her husband but devotes herself to guarding his reputation. His tyranny is never revealed by her. However to resume his good name, she involves herself in the family business after his death. She is portrayed as active in her home and passive in her relationship with her husband. This was the conventional role of women in South Asia. Such a role is in agreement with Loomba's assessment of the family situation in colonial times. She explains the situation by claiming that “the strengthening of

patriarchy within the family became one way for colonized men to assert their otherwise eroded power” (Loomba, 184).

The only time Mammachi asserts herself in a dominant manner is when she learns about the relationship of her daughter with Velutha. She breaks out in rage because Velutha is far below her social level –an untouchable. But more reasonably Mammachi is not willing to accept any of Ammu’s offence against her values. She keeps grudges against her behavior. But there is evidence that Mammachi secretly encourages the moral lapses of her son, Chako. Whereas Chako is allowed to keep many mistresses on the ground of “men need”, the offence committed by her daughter is unforgivable. Her double standards require that Ammu conforms to the same rules that she has conformed to herself. Mammachi thinks that having divorce from Ammu’s husband brings bad reputation to her family. Though Mammachi knew it very well that Ammu’s husband beats her and her children repeatedly, Ammu’s return to her mother's house is not welcomed. And while Mammachi actively supports Chacko's many mistresses, the one single affair that Ammu had is unforgivable. This double standard seems to shock everyone. Double standards indeed seem to be the founding principle of upbringing in South Asia. This is related to the traditional role division in a patriarchal society. Simon de Beauvoir states in *The Second Sex*, “Now, what peculiarly signalises the situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilise her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego (conscience) which is essential and sovereign”.(de Beauvoir, 37)

Mammachi accepts that there are different set of rules for men and women. She readily obeys the rules that were imposed on her and expects everybody else to act upon them, too. Apparently, she passes the tradition on others and believes that adopting those traditions within a woman only assures her good luck. She perceives Ammu's value system a threat to her life and limits all the possibilities in her life.

3.2 Lenny's Mother

In *Ice Candy Man* there are several female characters who adopt the traditional role. However among them Lenny's mother character has individual traits and her appearances are comparatively longer. She appears repeatedly throughout the novel and has a somewhat more important role in the novel. She resembles with *The God of Small Things'* Mammachi in being a traditional housewife and also differs from her in many aspects- she seems to be more independent, having more of an individuality than Mammachi. In the beginning Lenny's mother projects the womanly traits of being happy and content with her life and family but gradually she appears as mature woman by the end of the novel. The reason why she appears to be more independent than Mammachi might be that, the miseries and traumas of human life during partition moved her a lot.

Basically, what is known about Lenny's Mother is from the narration of Lenny. Lenny's mother belongs to the privileged economic class of the society. Traditionally, she got married to a suitable husband and become the preserver of the family's good reputation. As a servile housewife, she limits her life to the four walls of her home. She reticently follows her husband, who is the decision-maker of the family. Lenny's mother is a representative of those traditional women who as subordinates never express their desire to establish themselves as better human beings. Lenny's mother is kept busy with her social entertaining guests and partying use up her time. Lenny's physical handicapped situation has generated a sense of guilt in her. The fact is known from her conversation with Col. Bharucha. She says to Col. Bharucha, "It's my fault; I neglected her—left her to the care of Ayah." (Sidhwa, 16) Lenny admires her delicate beauty, but resents her "all-encompassing" motherliness. She is initially possessive about her mother but soon learns to cope with it: "The motherliness of Mother....How can I describe it? While it is there it is all-encompassing, voluptuous. Hurt, heartache and fear vanish....The world is wonderful, wondrous - and I perfectly fit in it. But it switches off, this motherliness...." (Sidhwa, 42).

Lenny is given ample personal space by her mother. Lenny is permitted to accompany Imam Din twice to a village Pir Pindo her visits to parks and restaurants with Ayah are also unchecked. Lenny's mother is also able to effortlessly control the servants and run her household smoothly. Despite her liberated handling of children and a modern life-style, she is

very much a traditional wife. She is almost servile in her attitude towards her husband. She is humorous and tries to create an atmosphere of pleasant merriment around her husband. Simon de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex* that “To catch a husband is an art; to hold him is a job” (de Beauvoir, 468) and Lenny’s mother seems to know her job very well. Lenny looks on when her mother chatters in sweet tones to fill up the “infernal time of Father’s mute meals. Though Lenny is not able to decipher it, her remarks indicate an inner void in her mother’s personality. More often where the woman playing societal role of pretending a happy housewife, there exist an inner hollowness in her life. The sexuality of Lenny’s mother lies in sophistication and unfulfilled longings. Here she is in sharp contrast with another female character of the novel, Lenny’s Ayah. She is fully aware of her sexual charm and uses it to manipulate her admirer that hovers around her.

Though the similarities between Mammachi and Lenny’s Mother are not a big one, both of them stand for same tradition and defend the same value system. It is not quite clear from the text that what made these two women follow the rule, but it is possible that both them belong to the same traditional environment. They never exposed to an alternative way of life and always follow the rule they have received from their parents. The violation of the rules by anybody close to them makes them aware. In such case they remind the rule breakers their social role and expect a docile return to their position. It is also interesting that they are not quite conservative in terms of what meant suitable bride to them. Both of them allow women to be independent to a certain extent- Lenny’s mother’s emerging as a social worker can be inspiring and Mammachi’s working in the factory can set a different pattern of work to housewives.

Both Mammachi and Lenny’s mother thus show how women are considered as an object, a man’s property, rather than becoming a subject herself. They are not allowed to take decision actively about their life. Ania Loomba points out their position as: “From colonial as well as nationalist records, we learn little about how they felt or responded, and until recently, there was little attempt to locate them as subjects within the colonial struggle” (Loomba, 185). The traditional role that women play can neither be denied, nor be sought after anyway.

Chapter 4

Women Who Break the Codes

Roy, Desai and Sidhwa portray women who deliberately challenge the traditional norms. Most of the women they depicted in their novels are strong women who keep the courage to fight for themselves no matter what. When a rule is imposed on them they seem to show some rebellious reaction to it and as a side effect of their reaction they break the rule. Roy's novel examines the consequences of breaking the rules that it bring to characters. There are characters in the novel who are involved either directly or indirectly in breaking the codes.

The God of Small Things has strong women characters that fight for their rights and are ready to face the consequences. None of them, however, are able to imagine how different and cruel the real punishment can be from what they expect. There is a discrepancy between the appropriate punishment they imagine if they cross the line and what they have to face when they do. What might seem to be a normal behavior to a Western woman, can be considered as a deadly act in case of performing the same by the South Asian middle class women. Following one's dream is not only considered unusual but is cruelly punished.

Also in *Clear Light of Day* there is Bim, the central character, who follows her dreams and thus crosses the line of what is traditionally considered an appropriate behavior for a woman. The character has her unfulfilled desires and is punished and silenced by the system in various ways. She ends up being angry, unhappy and frustrated. Her situation implies the question the narrator of *The God of Small Things* asks directly on breaking social norms and having the punishment; was it: "a Small Price to Pay?" (Roy, 336)

The characters in *Ice Candy Man* differ from those in the other two novels in that their behavior is usually determined by events and they seem at first not being able to have a protesting voice. These women characters survived in the period of the worst religious riots in the history of the Indian subcontinent. The events of the time set Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs against one another in deadly territorial rivalries. It also demonstrated especially high level of violation against women's body. The novel projects the emotional turmoil, suffering

and plight of women during the time. The masculine power exposed in the novel fulfills its desires by brutally assaulting women. On the other hand, what the narrator focuses most in this novel is the inner strength and courage of the characters that are determined not to give up.

This chapter will examine some of the characters from the novels who do not conform to the traditional norms and expectations of the society. It will focus on what is their motivation for not conforming to the rules, their attitude to the social norms is and their limitations. It will concentrate on Ammu and Baby Kochamma from *The God of Small Things*, Bim from *Clear Light of Day* and Lenny and Godmother from *Ice-Candy –Man*.

4.1 Bim

Just as it will be shown in the case of most of the other women characters, Bimla (often referred to as Bim) breaks the rules set out for her because of her dreams. Bim and her three other siblings were brought up facing parental neglect. Bim lives in the house she was born in and teaches in the college where she studied. At the social level, she has witnessed confusions following South Asian social struggle. As she grows up into a young woman, her mental strength gives her the power to deal with the struggle. The difference between her dreams and the reality is in fact the reason why she crosses the line. Her disobedience includes her decision to be independent by pursuing education and deciding not to marry. At this point of her life she decides to revolt against the social norms not realizing, how hopeless her revolt is. She embodies Desai's vision of the "new Indian woman". Unlike most Indian girls, rejecting marriage she gracefully accepts a life full of challenges and limitations. Bim decides to stay out of marriage after seeing her parents' unhappy family life. Although Biswas, the family's doctor, wants to marry her, she chooses to be free from the bond of marriage. She wants to be self dependent and prefers to look after her brother and aunt rather than getting married. Most importantly Bim also chooses herself and her own happiness before marriage. She considers women to be strong enough to work and take care of themselves. She does not consider women as objects that need to be looked after.

Bim refuses to play the role of a submissive house wife that she assumes will be imposed on her if she marries. This is shown through her interactions with Dr. Biswas and his mother. After a few dates and a final meeting with his mother, Bim decides to end everything

between them: “The tea party was of course a mistake and Bim scowled and cursed herself for having softened and let herself in for what was a humiliation and a disaster for everyone concerned” (Desai, 90). The cultural difference is problematic in Indian society when people have interracial relationships. The fact that Dr. Biswas and his mother speak Bengali created tension in Bim. This is because if two people belonging to two different cultural backgrounds marry, the relationship demands the bride to adopt the groom’s culture leaving her own. Bim who aspires to fulfill her dream independently would not afford to see her in that position. Also, we see the differences in wealth as an important matter to be considered. Moreover we are shown through Mrs. Biswas’s inquiry “How many servants? What do they do? What do you pay them?” (Desai, 91) that Bim does not stand up to her expectations. Bim proves herself to be a strong female character not to fill the role Mrs. Biswas wants her to fill. She leaves their apartment, and is determined to find her own way home: “I’ll go back alone,” she said, her voice rising too high. “Really, I *want* to, I’d *like* to” (Desai, 92). Bim realizes that if she agrees to marry Dr. Biswas this will only add more responsibilities to her life, rather than making life easier for her.

On the other hand, Bim’s sister, Tara, plays the traditional role of a woman who dreams of marriage and children rather than school and a career for herself. Bim, stands in a sharp contrast to her ;who is more sensitive, passes a mundane life that lacks any particular ambition: “Bim of course worshipped Florence Nightingale along with Joan of Arc in her private pantheon of saints and goddesses, and Tara did not tell her that she hoped never to have to do anything in the world, that she wanted only to hide under Aunt Mira’s quilt or behind the shrubs in the garden and never be asked to come out and do anything, prove herself to be anything” (Desai,126).

Bim aspires to become a heroine rather than a mother or a wife. She prefers to talk about Indian politics rather than Indian princess. Unlike most Indian girls, Bim refuses to marry. She has rather chosen a life of spinsterhood to pursue a career and a way of life which she accepts gracefully despite its limitations. She refuses to play the conventional role of a sex-object and of a submissive wife. She becomes, in a sense, a truly liberated woman. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* admits that a woman may find herself in a more positive stage of life: “She can also permit herself defiance of fashion and of ‘what people will say’; she is freed from social obligations, dieting, and the care of her beauty” (de Beauvoir ,595).

Compared to other rebellious characters that were forced to stop their behavior, like Ammu, Bim has to face little opposition. Rather it is the unwelcoming incidents of life where she

finds herself trapped in. Her dream has taken its toll on her life. Bim faithfully follows her ideal by deciding to sacrifice the happiness of a married life. For that she gladly pays the heavy price required for accomplishing it. She plays the role of traditional woman within the boundaries of domestic sphere. Even as young girl, she nurses her brother Raja and treats her ailing aunt with utmost care and devotion. But she gets frustrated when her aunt dies, and Raja deserts her. Ultimately, she is left with her mentally handicapped brother Baba and spends her declining youth devotedly looking after him. While Bim accepted her role as a surrogate mother of the family, she is still angry and bitter towards her siblings. The same bitterness she feels for her father too when it comes to family business. For her father, Raja is the capable one in handling business. Therefore he has learned how to carry on with it. When his father passed away Raja shows no interest in the business and leaves it to Bim to figure out what to do with it. Since she is a girl, Bim has learned nothing about the farm either from Raja or her brother. So her angry resentment is also towards her father who discriminated between his son and daughter and considered his girl to be the weaker one underestimating her capability:

“I don’t understand the insurance business. Father never bothered to teach me. For all father cared I could have grown up illiterate and – and *cooked* for my living, or *swept*. So I had to teach myself history, and teach myself to teach. But father never realised – and Raja doesn’t realise - that doesn’t prepare you for insurance business” (Desai, 155).

Bim aspires to become a heroine and a rebel and her rebellion is a very careful one. She crosses the boundaries to follow her dream and to show that a woman can sustain without the mercy of a male. The more boundaries she crosses, however, the more she tends to get back to her traditional position. Ironically, Bim stays in the same place, doing the same dull routine and does not move beyond Old Delhi. However, her present does not torment her, what made her suffer are memories from the past. She is neither tormented by her shattered childhood nor an incompatible marriage. For twenty years, she torments herself with the rejection, the desertion of Raja, her elder brother whom she shared a very passionate relationship. He runs away leaving her alone in the crumbling house. She remains alienated with her alcoholic aunt and mentally retarded brother. Raja leaves her for a life of security, of luxury and this comes to Bim as a betrayal on the part of her brother. For this betrayal she feels the anguish and frustration inside her.

Bim finally resolves her emotional crisis. She realizes that she, after all, belongs to Raja, Tara and Baba. It is difficult to separate her from them. She succeeds in bridging the gap

between the aspiration and reality. She eventually realizes that love alone redeems and keeps a human being whole. It is this realization that saves her from disaster.

Bim's violation of the rules could have limited her life. The main motivation behind this violation is to find the freedom she is looking for and the expression for her life as she wants to live it. However all her attempts fail to achieve this goal. Being tormented by the offensive and unpardonable letter of Raja, looking after the needs of Baba and running the house for so many years, she is now trying to retrieve her true self. It is only in a forgiving state of mind, she throws out from herself a past of hate and bitterness. She forgives her brother and thus the years' long bitterness turns into reconciliation. Bim's character is the only one in the three novels that is the closest to the ideal of a modern woman, in that she conquers herself and achieves inner equilibrium.

4.2 Lenny

Lenny is rather different from the rest of the characters studied in this chapter. Lenny is the female protagonist of the novel who narrates very realistic and transparent picture of horror during Hindu-Muslim riots in 1947 to what mostly women became the victim of. During her stepping to the adolescent phase from childhood, she experiences the horror of violence and describes her observation and reaction. While most of the other characters analyzed in this chapter have to face the expectations that are placed upon them, Lenny is free from social conditioning. So she voices and acts her disagreement rather differently. As a physically handicapped girl, she is not bound to rules; rather she has been given ample freedom from her mother. Lenny is a strong and bold enough character who not only observes but also analyzes and acts against degrading attention of men, voraciousness of male sexual desires, women's plight and subjection.

As Lenny moves from childhood to adolescence, she develops a more mature vision towards life. Lenny's character offers a closer look at the relationship between man and woman. She gradually realizes the social norms that are placed on women. Lenny as a narrator becomes the witness of inhuman torture suffered by women. Even though Lenny is a physically handicapped girl; she is a creative female writer. This is suggestive of the fact that writing is not only a male bastion; a female can also be creative enough to exercise it. As a creative

writer Lenny discloses her consciousness on the creation of the gender, the socially accepted role of women and girls, and also of her burgeoning sexuality. She is aware that her “world is compressed” (Sidhwa, 1). Her awareness is shown for the first time when Col. Bharucha prophesies her future, “She'll marry, have children—lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams” (Sidhwa, 15). Lenny claims that the suggestion made by Col. Bharucha sealed her fate. It reveals the limitations associated with a girl's life. Since ages it has been considered a woman's duty to tend house, raise children and give comfort to her family. Simone de Beauvoir holds the same view about social conditioning. She writes in *The Second Sex* that the girl-child is often concerned in this way with motherly tasks. She is forced to acquire feminine traits that make her aware of her feminine duty. But thus she is deprived of happy freedom, the carefree aspect of childhood.

Lenny as a girl learns that marriage of girls is of utmost importance to their parents. Independence and self-identity are meant for men. The intense concern for her marriage even in her childhood puts Lenny in dismay. She states, “Drinking tea, I am told, makes one darker. I'm dark enough. Everyone says, “It's a pity Adi's fair and Lenny so dark. He's a boy. Anyone will marry him.”(Sidhwa, 81)

Lenny does not seem to comply with gendered social norms .This is shown through her interactions with her male cousin. Lenny and her cousin sometimes share a minor relationship; they kiss, pursue each others' affections, and promise to marry. Yet, in their exchanges Lenny does not demonstrate feminine behaviors of submission. Rather she maintains a degree of control. Lenny, unlike her mother, does not feel obligated to her cousin's preferences. Instead, she is direct in expressing her honest opinions and occasional disgust with his actions. When he tries to coax her into new sexual behaviors, she states, “I like Cousin. I've even thought of marrying him when we grow up, but this is a side of him I'm becoming aware of for the first time, and I don't like it” (Sidhwa, 172). Subsequently, rather than submitting to masculine authority, Lenny shows control over Cousin. “Bent on further pleasuring me, squashing his panting chest on my flattened bosom, Cousin gives me a soggy kiss. Poor Cousin. His sense of timing is all wrong....Pushing him back and holding him at arm's length, I say, ‘If you don't tell me everything at once, I'll knee your balls” (Sidhwa, 243). In this interaction, Lenny acts against the expected gender roles. While the male is expected to dominate, Lenny does not give him the chance to do so. She does not conform to what is expected from the cousin and make it very clear that she is not interested.

She threatens to him further “insult” his masculinity if he does not respect her wishes. Lenny’s refusal to conform to feminine role has left Cousin longing for masculine control.

Lenny recognizes the biological exploitation of women during partition time. She is shocked to perceive Ice-Candy-Man pushing his wife Ayah into the business of prostitution. The sight of Hindu and Muslim women being raped during the riots petrifies her. She watches men turning into beasts that don’t care for morality and human values. Women become victims of personal and political envy, malice, jealousy and rage. These were the tools for men through which they could practice power over women.

Lenny is not ready to accept the prevailing social conditions. As a grown up, she analyses the whole situation and intends to take a stand for women. She decides to save Ayah from the terrible profession of prostitution and talks to her mother regarding the matter. Lenny decides, “If those grown men pay to do what my comparatively small cousin tried to do, then Ayah is in trouble. I think of Ayah twisting Ice-Candy-Man's intrusive toes and keeping the butcher and wrestler at arm’s length. And of those strangers’s hands hoisting her chocolate body into the cart. . . . I decide it’s time to confront Mother” (Sidhwa, 247). Due to Lenny’s continuous effort, Ayah is saved at the end and returned back to her home.

Throughout the novel, Lenny appears as a courageous and bold girl who refuses to all social conditioning. Instead of limitations associated with women's lives in patriarchal society, Lenny demonstrates a powerful narrative voice. She is not only aware of the social system but does not hesitate to questioning and selectively participating in it.

4.3 Godmother

Lenny’s Godmother whose name is Rodabai is one of the notable female characters studied in this chapter. She has a unique power to cross social boundaries and ultimately determine the future of several characters in *Ice-Candy-Man*. She does not follow the common pattern in breaking the rules with the rest of the characters in this chapter. Unlike them, there are no rules imposed on her; yet her social commitment shows a pathway of how powerfully one can go beyond the boundaries of traditional role. According to Lenny, Godmother’s personality sparkles with razor-sharp wit. In spite of her old age, she has the power to mould,

modify and order not only individuals but even the system. In fact, Lenny describes her bond with her godmother as “stronger than the bond of motherhood. More satisfying than the ties between men and women” (Sidhwa, 4). She is the example of a woman who can provide securities and assurance to other women. Lenny recalls, “When I at last look into her shrewd, ancient eyes, I can tell...everything’s going to be all right! (Sidhwa, 263) This do not only exhibits Lenny’s relationship with Godmother but also proclaims her feminine strength. She retains power through influencing multiple facets of society and eventually liberating Ayah and condemning Ice-Candy-Man.

Godmother’s knowledge is not limited within the traditional feminine realm of the domestic. It goes far beyond and she is aware of the events in her community. Lenny narrates that this knowledge has been developed over time: “Over the years, Godmother has established a network of espionage with a reach of which even she is not aware....She has access to many ears. No one knows how many” (Sidhwa, 223). Because Godmother “makes it her business to know everything about everybody” (Sidhwa, 239), she has developed connections in various levels of society. In one statement Lenny details Godmother’s wealth of knowledge and multi-faceted skill:

“[Godmother possesses a] reservoir of random knowledge, [including] knowledge of ancient lore and wisdom and herbal remedy. You cannot be near her without feeling her uncanny strength. People bring to her their joys and woes. Show her their sores and swollen joints. Distilling the right herbs, adroitly instilling the right word in the right ear, she secures wishes, smooths relationships, cures illnesses, battles wrongs, solaces grief and prevents mistakes”. (Sidhwa, 223)

The feminine power of Godmother lies not only in knowledge, but also in action. Lenny has ultimate faith in Godmother’s ability to affect or prevent change, stating, “She can move mountains from the paths of those she befriends, and erect mountainous barriers where she deems it necessary” (Sidhwa, 223). Godmother seeks admission to a boarding school for Ranna which Lenny refers to as “a minor miracle...as difficult as transposing him to a prosperous continent, and as beneficial, not only for him, it is said, but for seven succeeding generations of the Ranna progeny” (Sidhwa, 223). Again Godmother’s boldness becomes particularly evident as she enables Ayah from escaping her physical and marital subjection to Ice-Candy-Man. Doing so, Godmother repeatedly gains authority over men, specifically Ice-Candy-Man. The most glorious example of her self-confidence, authoritativeness is evident when Godmother saved Ayah from the clutches of Ice-Candy-Man after she has been

kidnapped and is kept at a *kotha*. Godmother confronts his shabby treatment of Ayah, demanding, “You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks, and goondas and say she has come to no harm? ...What kind of man would allow his wife to dance like a performing monkey before other men?” (Sidhwa, 260). In her verbal attack of Ice-Candy-Man, Godmother questions not only his morality, but also his manhood. She further points out that he is neither an honorable husband nor a masculine protector. She clarifies her resentment, stating “You have permitted your wife to be disgraced! Destroyed her modesty! Lived off her womanhood!” (Sidhwa, 260). She further denounces him as a dutiful son as well, declaring, “You could have your own mother carried off if it suited you! You are a shameless badmash! Nimakharam! Faithless... You’re not a man, you’re a low-born, two-bit evil little mouse...the son of pigs and pimps!” (Sidwa, 261). Specifically, Godmother’s denunciation is for each and every man who makes victim of women.

Godmother’s assurance of freedom for others can be seen as a variation on the theme of the chapter. But there is a pattern common for all the women examined; they all frequently question the social norms and are able to influence on surrounding individuals and circumstances, changing the lives of others as well as shaping their own. From Godmother’s verbal dominance over Ice-Candy-Man, it is clearly revealed that she is clearly the more powerful party. Through her social power and verbal accusations, Godmother has shattered Ice-Candy-Man’s confidence. She reduces him to “a deflated poet, a collapsed peddler” (Sidhwa, 276) who quietly moves away, disappearing “across the Wagah border into India” (Sidhwa, 289). In her verbal and physical dominance over Ice-Candy-Man, Godmother ensures feminine power within herself than over him as Mary Woolstonecraft wishes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* “I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves.” (Wollstonecraft, 113)

4.4 Ammu

Ammu definitely belongs to the group of people who do not hesitate to challenge any expectation that is placed upon them. She is the cause of so many chaoses in the novel. She pursues her rebellion from the societal norms and codes without thinking what the consequences might be.

The motivation for her being a rebel is like this- at the beginning she seems to stand upon her parents will; showed resistance on coming back to Ayemenem, to their almost cruel behavior

and then finally decides to revolt and live a life she has chosen for herself. She is raised by a mother who silently bears her husband's torture and taught Ammu to bear the same in her life. This shapes Ammu's character in a way that she shows both rebellion and resistance in her character. Her rebellion begins with the resentment she feels against her mother for silently suffering the torture. Her act of rebellion starts with her attempt to escape "the clutches of her ill tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother" (Roy, 39). The act is itself an attempt to escape her mother's fate. No way had she wanted a conventional married life of her mother. She married her husband because he was ready to accept her in spite of lack of dowry. This was the main reason why nobody came to ask for her. Already then she has to face the rejection of her family for marrying a person who is not a Syrian Christian, the religion they belong to. The fact that her husband is a Hindu gains much of the resentment of society as well as Ammu's family. To her ill fate, her husband turns out to be very much like her father. He proves himself even worse than her father who has the habit of drinking and beating. Moreover he is not ashamed of lending his wife to his boss in exchange for maintaining his position.

The cruelty Ammu has to face for her husband results in her revolting against him. The act of rebellion demands much courage on her part especially when she files for a divorce. While her mother lacks the courage to do the same, she possesses it when it comes to the point that her husband aims his drunken violence at their children. She knows very well what she will have to face for coming back to Ayemenem, to her parental home. It is a common view that a married girl has no position in her parent's home. For a divorced daughter, according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere. As for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, the woman has to bear certain outrages of society. As in Ammu's case, "Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject". (Roy 45-46). Ammu involves herself into love marriage, chooses a husband who does not belong to her religion and finally get divorced. All her acts are regarded as violation of the reputation of her family and this made Baby Kochamma to resent her forever. She then becomes aware enough to follow the rules so that her children's lives become at least bearable. This submission in her character is also criticized because as "a woman that they had already damned, now had little left to lose, and could therefore be dangerous" (Roy, 44). This proves itself to be true. She breaks the rule in a way nobody expected. Her relationship with an untouchable is something which is considered as an atrocious act in Indian society. By doing so, she not only breaks the love law but breaks the moral and social code also. For her 'shameless' act of having a relationship with an untouchable, Ammu is punished in a way she never imagined. She is kept harshly locked up

in her bedroom. Her confinement leads to the death of two innocent people and ruins so many lives. Later her children are taken away from her. Ammu becomes the reason for every single disaster and loses the last degree of respect from each and everyone around her. All of them seem to have lost interest in listening to what she has to say in her defense. She is even considered as a prostitute when she comes to the police station to narrate what had really happened.

Ammu's repeated rebellion against her position is always justified. Throughout the novel she seems to struggle for a life that could give her freedom as a woman. But all her fights for the right ironically end in the opposite despite her good intention. She cannot access any of the privileges which her brother has- either be it property or adventure of life. Rather there store for her a harsh punishment from the society for a little abuse of the law. Ania Loomba states in "Colonialism/Post colonialism", the position of women in postcolonial society:

"while women and gender are seen as emblematic of culture and nation...Women who broke the codes of silence and subservience became the objects of extreme hostility, which, in some cases, succeeded in silencing outspoken women...The more feminist research recovers and re-interprets the lives of women under colonial rule, the clearer it becomes that women, as individuals and as a potential collectivity, constituted a threat and were thus at least partially the target of earlier patriarchal re-writings of "tradition" (Loomba, 186).

This holds true in the case of Ammu, as well as several others women studied in this chapter. These women are excluded from the society on the ground that they break the rule. Their inappropriate behavior challenge women position in the society and what they are or are not allowed to do. Under no circumstances these women are allowed to break the rules of the society.

4.5 Baby Kochamma

Baby Kochamma's life started as a really promising and rebellious one. Being a daughter of well esteemed clergyman, she apparently had all the prospects a girl could ask for. In her youth, she opposes tradition of arranged marriages by independently choosing a man. She even converts to Catholicism against her father's will. It was only at the age of eighteen, that

she suddenly found out that there is one thing she could not have. The one thing Baby Kochamma really wanted is the love of the man she liked. She goes on struggling against her fate, not realizing how hopeless her effort is. Finally she realizes that whatever she does, she cannot possibly make Father Mulligan love her. Interestingly enough Baby Kochamma has to face little resistance for her rebellion. She has to face little opposition compared to other characters in the novel. One of among them is Ammu who was forced to stop her behavior. Later in life Baby Kochamma becomes more conservative and accepts her fate as a “Man-less woman”. Although she acts against her father’s wishes, he is ready to help her when needed. No punishment follows her misbehavior. She is eventually helped when she wants to study gardening. Such lack of resistance on her father’s side gradually makes her follow the expected rules. She seems to condemn others who break the rules like she once did. Obviously she has some dissatisfaction with her life and is jealous of other people, for instance Ammu.

It is said in the novel that “Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted the fate of the wretched Man-less woman” (Roy, 45). In Baby Kochamma’s opinion, Ammu as a “divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage” (Roy, 56) did not have the right to live in her parent’s house. She does not spare any chance to make Ammu, and her children remember this.

It can be argued that Baby Kochamma’s revolt was a very careful one. She crossed the boundaries for once in her life but it did not bring too many consequences. It ruined her reputation but finally she was able to restore it. Although her motivation was not as pure as it would be for a well behaved girl, it is excusable as eccentric behavior of a very pious girl. She has no courage to pursue her dreams any further. Being dissatisfied with life, now she is ready to follow the rules and denounces others who violate it. At the end of the novel she expresses her condemnation on people who violate the rules. Although it was a slightest mistake on Velutha’s part, Baby Kochamma makes up a story to punish him that literally destroys his life. Baby Kochamma thus is able to keep intact her family’s reputation. Baby Kochamma comes across a hypocritical judge of other people’s behavior. While she goes beyond what is morally acceptable, she expects others not to cross the limit. She assumes that enforcing the rules she once crossed and imposing them on others will confirm her moral purity.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The God of Small Things, *Clear Light of Day* and *Ice-candy-Man* all portray exceptional women in unexpected life situations. These novels vividly describe how the women characters cope with the challenges they have to face. The first two novels are similar as both of them represent many aspects of the traditional South Asian culture while the third text has fictionalized the victimization of women during India-Pakistan partition in 1947. While the first two novels are narrated from an insider's point of view, the third one is narrated from the viewpoint of a handicapped Parsee girl child. The latter thus lacks the explanatory aspect found in Desai's and Roy's novels. The narrator devoid of any biases looks at characters belonging to different communities through her own Parse sensitivity. All three South Asian texts reveal characters that are meticulously examined from both insiders and outsiders' point of view enabling thus the authenticity of them.

However the characters in the three texts share many similarities. Although the characters portrayed are not necessarily very realistic, yet they all challenge the position of women in modern South Asia. Through the depiction of their female characters the three texts question the position of South Asian women in society and their rights. The limits of their freedom are also challenged frequently. The society, as it is revealed in the texts, is still a traditional one. It accepts any changes with great reluctance. The female role is given and women are expected to conform to it. The social expectations in all three texts vary from character to character according to their social status. Middle class female characters are expected to be chaste, obedient and loyal whereas no such qualities are expected from the lower class women. The qualities if adopted by a young girl will then increase her value as a bride. It is therefore important that she cultivate them. According to social norms, a girl's bright future solely lies in being a valuable bride through marriage. A bride must possess the best qualities possible and is expected to cultivate them further as a bride and a wife. A wife's role involves first of all giving her husband children, preferably sons. This is as if the ultimate goal of a woman's life is to be a mother.

There are several characters in the three narratives that do not meet these requirements or fail to stand up to the expectations of the society. In fact there are few who do meet the desired expectations. Mammachi and Lenny's mother are two of the most distinctive characters who do. Mammachi accepts the rules imposed on her very obediently and she is ready to resent anyone who breaks them, even her own daughter. Lenny's mother is not as strict as Mammachi. At the beginning of the novel she seems to play the traditional role of a wife very successfully but towards the end she turns into a committed social worker. She stands against the victimization of women and prevents them from easily becoming the prey of men. However, she, too, expects her daughter to follow the rules in her life. Because of her submissive and docile behavior with her husband, her daughter becomes conscious of the creation of the gender based expectations, the socially accepted role of women and girls. Lenny is aware that her "world is compressed" (Sidhwa, 1). Her awareness is further intensified when her mother makes arrangements for her so called bright future according to the prophecy of Col. Bharucha. Col. Bharucha is Lenny's doctor who ultimately seals her future stating, "She'll marry, have children—lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams" (Sidhwa, 15)

Besides the women who follow the rules, there are examples of women breaking the social code once or in one area of their lives. Such is the case of Baby Kochamma who violates the customs by joining a convent, yet later on denounces everyone who violates the societal, patriarchal codes and tries to force everybody to follow them. Then there is a character like Bim, who breaks the social codes in pursuit of her dream. Her driving force is her longing for boundless freedom. Bim ultimately falls into despair in her later life in the pursuit of her dream. In the case of Lenny and Godmother; they seem to stand beyond the violation. But they seem to have a more powerful voice to confront and act against the victimization of women thus questioning the social codes. The detachment and distance that Ammu is made to feel by her family is perhaps the reason she is more attached to Velutha, an untouchable. Ammu is among the all, the epitome of resistance in breaking the codes and there is always a social enforcement on her that made her the most disobedient.

Except the case of Lenny and her Godmother who have a different reason to break the codes, no violation remains unpunished. The punishment varies from case to case. The punishment can be physical; as in the case of punishment of Ammu's relationship with Velutha. The punishment can be psychological as well- as in the case of Ammu's divorce, Bim's

entrapment in a despairing social system, Baby Kochamma's not having what she expected from life.

The life of a woman is considered a public affair. Her personal revolts are consequently revolts against the society as a whole. The punishment she faces is regarded as her responsibility. Since ages it has been a tradition that the stereotypical situation of women gives the society the authority to exercise power over them and make them conform to the social codes. The degree in which women accept the authority differs, as is shown in the analysis of the three texts. Yet the pressure of the society and the principle is the same.

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