

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
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Lecture – 32
Accounts of the Survivor - IX




Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. We are discussing Accounts of the Survivor, and we are actually talking about Cracking India by Bapsi Sidhwa in continuation to our discussion from the previous lectures. We are going to talk further about the women in Cracking India and Lenny growing up in the presence of/ in the vicinity of women and subalterns.

The people surrounding the child enable in the shaping of the psyche. The people in the vicinity of Lenny shapes her child psyche, and I have already explained. So, this story can be seen as being narrated at the heart of a cataclysmic event, such as partition, and it is a story of passage.

The story of a child maturing and learning about the adult ways of the world, acquiring the adult lens to see the world, learning about religion, about gods and violence, about sexuality. So, it is a story where we see Lenny the protagonist and the narrator as someone privileged to an extent, spoiled, and someone that is initially naive and yet acquires new knowledge about human possibilities, about human character, about the complexity of human character. (Refer Slide Time: 02:25)

Women in Cracking India

- Caught up in history, the naive, spoiled, and fortunate Lenny gains knowledge about the larger world: It is full of deception, injustice, hypocrisy, religious enmity, and cruelty.
- At the same time she witnesses the resilience of the human spirit and the power of individual courage. She realizes the role women such as Godmother can play - 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.
- Godmother serves as a feminine ideal; she is a powerful personality who can face wrongdoing head on and correct matters. Lenny grasps the fact that women do not resort to violence for solving problems; men do.

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And so, she is caught up in the history and gains new insight about the larger world -- how the world is full of deception, injustice, hypocrisy, cruelty and how religion becomes a topic of conflict and turns one person against the other; even turns a longstanding friend against the other.

The readers note how Lenny witnesses not only brutality, animosity and violence, but also the resilience of the human spirit and the power of individual courage. This is especially depicted through the character of godmother, a powerful woman, and this is how godmother has been described in the narrative - "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." She is a figure of power, of courage, of positivity amid the chaos and the general dismal conditions. She serves the figure of the feminine ideal; she actually handles/ she faces wrongdoing, any kind of social misdemeanor head on.

She can directly, squarely face mistakes, crimes and correct the matters; she is a figure of positivity and so, through the figure of godmother, it actually dawns in Lenny that women are, generally speaking, pacifist; they do not resort to violence, men and women become the receptacle of a violence engendered by men or through a homosocial violence that is engendered through male-male disputes, [which] actually affects the woman the worst.

The book *Cracking India* describes in different parts of the novel.. we see instances of female unity, where women are trying to protect each other and they are trying to balk the commotions that are caused by men. Sidhwa is successful in building a very strong image of the women that stand together in protecting the children, especially from the strangers or from any kind of negative, pejorative influence. (Refer Slide Time: 05:50)

Women in Cracking India

- The book gives a glimpse of the female unity with women trying to protect each other from men and from the commotion caused by men. Sidhwa creates a strong image of these women standing together protecting their children when they feel the arrival of strangers.
- Sidhwa - "Mother, voluptuous in a beige chiffon sari, is alert. In charge. A lioness with her cubs. Ayah, with her haunted, nervous eyes, is lioness number two. Our pride on the veranda swells as Moti's wife and five children join us."

So, Sidhwa at one point says that -- "Mother, voluptuous in a beige chiffon sari, is alert. In charge. A lioness with her cubs. Ayah, with her haunted, nervous eyes, is lioness number two. Our pride on the veranda swells as Moti's wife and five children join us." So, it is an all-female cosmos that commonly inform Lenny's process of growing up, the development of her child psyche.

And then (like I said), she also interacts with men, but not the ones that are the chief architects and protagonists in the nation-building process. These are mainly subalterns that, in a way, carry out the decisions that have been imposed on them from above. As she grows with the progression of the narrative, Lenny learns that women are often victims, although they do not initiate the conflicts. (Refer Slide Time: 07:09)

Women in Cracking India

- Lenny learns that women are often the victims, as is the case with Ayah and the women who have been raped, then placed in the rehabilitation quarters next to Lenny's family home.
- On the other hand, she witnesses her mother's display of strength when a gang threatens their home, and when her mother and Electric-aunt smuggle gasoline to Hindu friends that are fleeing Lahore.
- After the fight between Mr. Singh and Mr. Rogers, where they fight over the idea of Partition, their wives attempt to make peace and alleviate the situation. This is an example of the non-violent approach of women, and a clash of male ego that ultimately victimizes women on a larger scale.

And so, one instance of female victimhood is Ayah. There are also women in the story that have been referred to - women who have been raped and then placed in rehabilitation quarters - quarters that are located next to Lenny's family home.

The ensconced position, the elite position from where the story begins, in a way crumbles, it falls apart. Although Lenny, belonging to the Parsi community, is not directly affected since the Parsis as a minority never participated or revealed their position in favor or against any communal group, yet we see that Lenny's secure position, the development of her psyche, the way normal and elite upbringing happens.

We see that Lenny's upbringing is, in a way, disrupted; her development...this development of psyche is disrupted. So, there are new things that come on her way, which clash with her ensconced status, her elite status, the way her parents would like her to grow up and see the world.

For example, the rehabilitation quarters next to her family home debunk the violence, the violated... debunk the hypocrisies that underlie the process of Partition. So, the conditions that women were subjected to is revealed quite early to a child-like Lenny, and she learns about words, such as rape. She witnesses her mother's display of strength.

The narrative is full of references to strong female characters. For example, Lenny's mother.. So, Lenny's mother and electric aunt smuggle gasoline to Hindu friends that are fleeing Lahore. They do it with considerable risk.

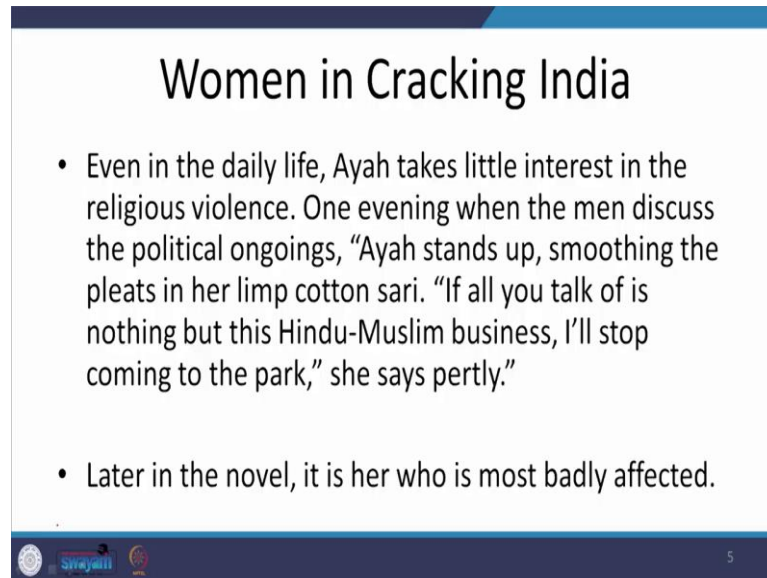
There are other instances. For example, the fight between Mister Singh and Mister Rogers over the idea of Partition, where the role of the wives who attempt to make peace and in general alleviate the situation.. prevent it from getting worse.

And so, these are examples of women's sensible nonviolent, pacifist approach and it also debunks, it also exposes how clash of male ego actually leads to any form of conflict, any form of war, and at the heart of all this, the worst victim is the woman.

So, any form of disagreement among males victimizes women on a large scale, although they do not participate or corroborate such conflicts. So, in the everyday life, in the mundane course of events, even Ayah among the lower-class people...Ayah asserts her pacifist position. She takes little interest in religious violence. So, there is a point where

there are discussions... where other men..so, her male friends discuss about the political ongoings, the larger political happenings, to which Ayah responds by just threatening to leave. She stands up and says that if you talk of [this]...if this is the only thing you have to talk about, the Hindu-Muslim business, then I will stop coming to the park altogether.

She strictly says that she is not interested in such discussions, and she would never participate in heated arguments, in such altercations. (Refer Slide Time: 12:27)



Women in Cracking India

- Even in the daily life, Ayah takes little interest in the religious violence. One evening when the men discuss the political ongoings, “Ayah stands up, smoothing the pleats in her limp cotton sari. “If all you talk of is nothing but this Hindu-Muslim business, I’ll stop coming to the park,” she says pertly.”
- Later in the novel, it is her who is most badly affected.

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Yet, the irony in the novel or the irony in the real facts of partition... lies in the fact that it is women like her who had the least to do with partition that get most badly affected.

The unfathomable magnitude of the partition is further complicated by the narrative fracture, where we get two different first person voices. One voice that is located within the narrative frame coming from the juvenile narrator Lenny, who is a child at the time when the actions are taking place, when she experiences the different events.

And then there is another narrator, who is commenting on the past from her vantage point, which is far away from the time-space of the novel. So, Lenny that has grown up; and yet, it is very difficult because the two voices, in a way, merge and overlap.

The two 'I's that we get are at times very difficult to distinguish, and this is more so because the immediacy of the partition does not go away with the passing of years. The magnitude of pain, suffering and trauma lives on even after the events have occurred, and they come back to haunt.

So, it is difficult to say whether the 'I' is from the the position of memory, if it is speaking spontaneously from within the events as they happen live. For example, the 'I' that announces that – “That night I had the first nightmare that connects me to the pain of others.” (Refer Slide Time: 14:54)

Narrative Voice in Cracking India

- The unfathomable magnitude of the Partition is, however, complicated by the narrative fracture between the two different first person voices.
- The 'I' who announces 'That night I have the first nightmare that connects me to the pain of others', is not the five-year-old Lenny who dreams of the Nazi soldier before the Partition 'happens.' This 'I' is an older Lenny, the Lenny who survives the Partition and speaks about her nightmare in the present from a position of memory.

[This] might not be the five-year-old Lenny; it is a statement made in retrospect; this happens when Lenny dreams of the Nazi soldier before the partition happens.

So, 'I' is an older Lenny, in this case, 'I' is an older Lenny - someone that survives the partition and speaks about her nightmare from the position of memory. (Refer Slide Time: 15:21)

Narrative Voice in Cracking India

- Shirley Chew - "By situating Lenny's narrative in the present, Sidhwa imposes limits upon her perspective. This, however, is only one aspect of a complicated strategy. There is also the **occasional back-stepping into the past tense** which renders time an unstable factor in the novel, and blurs the line separating the immediacy of experience from the vividness of a memory in which events are 'branded over an inordinate length of time'. Forty years on and it would seem that Lenny continues to 'live' her memories of the 'hellish fires' and 'monstrous mobs' of her childhood."

So, Shirley Chew would say that: "By situating Lenny's narrative in the present, Sidhwa imposes limits upon her perspective.

However, this is only one aspect of a complicated strategy, and it is also the occasional stepping back into the past tense, which renders time an unstable factor in the novel, and blurs the line separating the immediacy of experience from the vividness of a memory in which events are 'branded over an over an inordinate length of time'.

Even after forty years have passed it seems that Lenny continues to live the traumatic memories.. the memories of hellish fires of mobs and of a childhood... a chunk of which is lost. It is very difficult to pinpoint and locate and distinguish thereby the past from the present.

The treatment of time in the novel is very complicated; it moves back and forth between the two 'I's/eyes. Now, Jennifer Yusin and Deepika Bahri would say that distinguished from each other by time, the two first person voices are, however, not two different people. They are, rather, the same Lenny -- the one and the same Lenny.

On the one hand, we have the younger Lenny, the child Lenny within the time-frame of the novel, that is, the character that is witnessing the events as they unfold/ as they unravel...who is there, therefore, walking through the novel. It's a person that is experiencing the happenings in accordance with the historical [sequence]/chronology of the partition.

And then, there is the older Lenny, who survives/ who is a partition survivor, who is a citizen of Pakistan and who has returned to the events of younger Lenny. So, she is outside the story frame and she is commenting on what younger Lenny has witnessed, experienced, and learned.

The 'I'/eye that narrates the nightmares can be read either as the younger Lenny or the older Lenny, and also a simultaneous presence of the two. So, here it is (like I said) it is very difficult to distinguish one 'I' from the other. The story is churning out through an interlacing/ through an intervening of the adult and the juvenile psyche.

This demonstrates the very problem of accounting for the traumatic event at the time, at the very moment when it is experienced. (Refer Slide Time: 18:36)

Narrative Voice in Cracking India

- The 'I' who narrates the nightmares can be read as either the younger Lenny or the older Lenny, or the simultaneous presence of both first-person voices. This demonstrates the very problem of accounting for the traumatic event at the point when it is experienced.
- The most poignant aspect of Lenny's nightmares is that they intertwine history and the individual in a manner that allows the reader to investigate the Partition as a historical trauma.
- The image of Lenny's dismembering through multiple surgeries also anticipates the violent separation of Pakistan from India as a dismembering violence.

We have already discussed trauma and PTSD, and how it's very difficult to claim that one has come out of trauma, once and for all.

How the feeling of trauma, the aftermath of trauma lives on, and there are situations like critics have said, where the person experiences or remembers nothing at the time when the event is taking place, but the repercussions happen afterwards; they keep coming back in a cyclic fashion to the trauma survivor.

There is hardly a question of coming out of trauma. One could very well argue that the juvenile Lenny is as much talking from the heart/ from the pith of trauma as is the adult Lenny, who is further commenting on the juvenile individual's perspective.

The most poignant aspect of Lenny's nightmares is that they intertwine history and the individual in a way that allows the reader to examine partition as a historical trauma. So, we have already discussed how the trauma of the individual interacts with the larger trauma that is happening all over India. The two traumas actually speak to each other and, in a way, escalate and amplify the effect of each other.

We have also talked about how the dismembering of Lenny's polio-stricken foot through multiple surgeries suggests or [is] symbolic of the violent separation/ tearing away of Pakistan from India.

So, dismembering happening at a microcosmic level and then at the level of...at the macrocosmic level too. So, when we look at Lenny's dreams, they anticipate the partition as a historical trauma, which is already bound to memory. (Refer Slide Time: 21:37)

Narrative Voice in Cracking India

- Lenny's dreams anticipate the Partition as a historical trauma already bound to memory.
- From the point of view of time and narrative, the first-person voice is always already the older Lenny attempting to return—through the voice of the younger Lenny—to the past of the Partition in an effort to rearticulate it as an integrated experience.
- Through the disturbing depictions of violence whose images haunt its readers beyond the narrative, the novel interconnects Lenny's individual trauma with the Partition as a historical trauma. Testimony to the Partition as a historical trauma becomes possible in this interconnectedness between Lenny and the Partition.

The first person voice is always-already the older Lenny, and through narrating Lenny is attempting to return; it is a story of guilt because she was not able [to save Ayah]...she was instrumental, in fact, in Ayah's abduction... she played an instrumental role in Ayah's abduction.

The first person voice is always-already the older Lenny, and through narrating the story she is attempting to return to the core of the event, to the heart of the mishap and the cataclysm. It is also a way of looking back and thereby rearticulating and attempting to integrate the experience -- an otherwise fragmented experience -- trying to make sense of what happened back then, when she was a child.

So, it is a story one could read as confessional, in a way. There are so many ways [of reading it] - it is a social history, it is a counter-history, it is the story of a child seen through the child's lens, and then it is also confessional; it is a way of purging ones guilt. It's a way of making up for Lenny's inability; the child Lenny's inability to save a long-standing friend, her Ayah.

These are so many different ways of reading the novel. What propels the narrative, what is the force that drives the narrative forward? Through these disturbing depictions of violence whose images haunt the readers even beyond the narrative, the images that stay with the reader...and through these depictions,

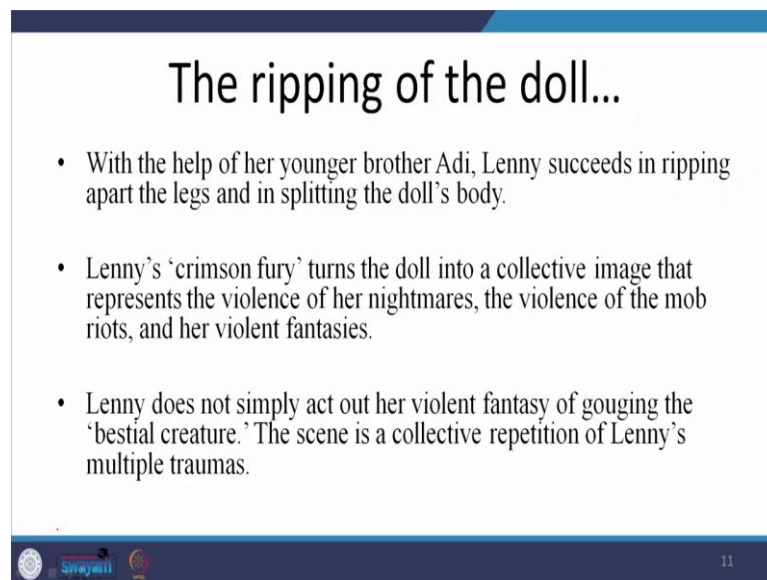
the novel interconnects Lenny's personal individual trauma with the partition as a historical trauma, a collective trauma for all the Indians, for the entire subcontinent.

Because this is also a story at the personal level, a story of losing one's trust, losing a friend, growing up learning the ways of the adults in a hard way, in a harsh way... so, learning the harsh ways of the world.

Testimony to the partition as a historical trauma is only possible through this interconnection, through connecting Lenny's personal loss, Lenny's inner psychic journey with the largest schema of partition. So, we see in a scene that Lenny and her younger brother, her cousin actually ripping a doll. They succeed in ripping apart the legs and in splitting the dolls body; later, Lenny starts crying over the torn body of the rag doll.

Lenny's fury turns this doll into a collective image that represents the violence that the child has internalized; violence [inhabiting] her nightmares. The violence that she witnesses outside, everywhere... rampant killing, violence of the mobs, riots and something that have seeped into her...seeped into and shaped her fantasies.

So, now this is a child fantasy... ripping of a doll... and it has gone on to become so violent. It is emulating what is happening in the larger world. (Refer Slide Time: 26:19)

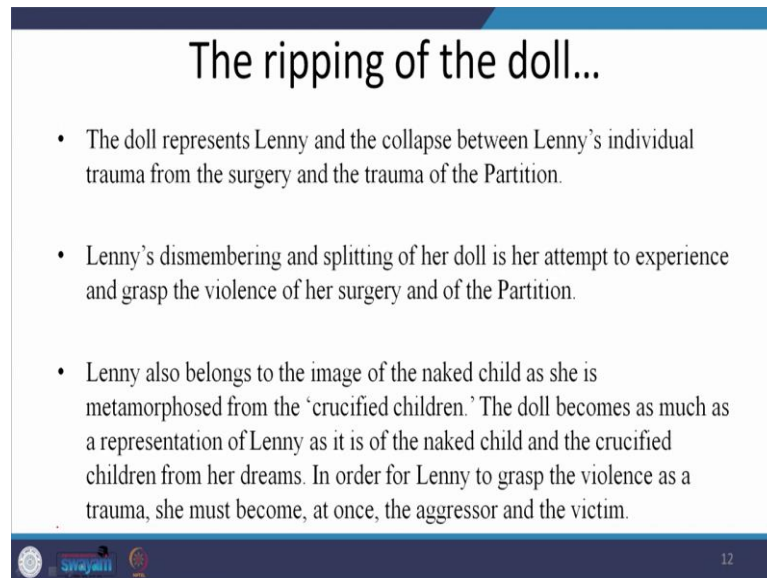


The ripping of the doll...

- With the help of her younger brother Adi, Lenny succeeds in ripping apart the legs and in splitting the doll's body.
- Lenny's 'crimson fury' turns the doll into a collective image that represents the violence of her nightmares, the violence of the mob riots, and her violent fantasies.
- Lenny does not simply act out her violent fantasy of gouging the 'bestial creature.' The scene is a collective repetition of Lenny's multiple traumas.

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So, Lenny does not simply act out her violent fantasy, but the scene is a collective repetition of her multiple traumas. It is a way of taking out what she is imbibing from her immediate society, from her immediate surrounding; she takes it out on the doll through ripping it apart. (Refer Slide Time: 26:44)



The ripping of the doll...

- The doll represents Lenny and the collapse between Lenny's individual trauma from the surgery and the trauma of the Partition.
- Lenny's dismembering and splitting of her doll is her attempt to experience and grasp the violence of her surgery and of the Partition.
- Lenny also belongs to the image of the naked child as she is metamorphosed from the 'crucified children.' The doll becomes as much as a representation of Lenny as it is of the naked child and the crucified children from her dreams. In order for Lenny to grasp the violence as a trauma, she must become, at once, the aggressor and the victim.

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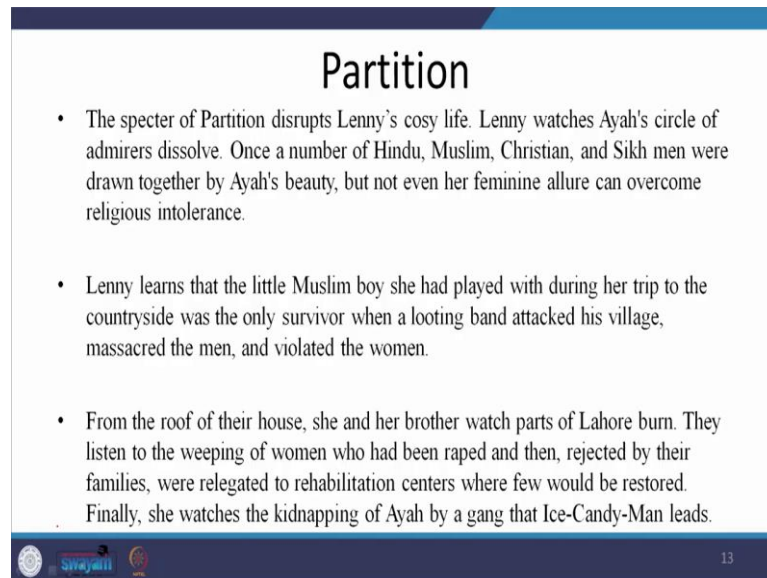
So, through this representation of the doll we see that Lenny's individual trauma, through successive operations of her polio-stricken foot, collapses with the trauma of the partition. So, Lenny splitting the doll is actually her attempt to grasp the violence of the surgery as well as the violence of partition. The surgery that was made on the nation, which separated Pakistan from India.

Through her feet, it would not be wrong to say that the child is experiencing the partition through her body. It is a female child, a specially-abled child that grasps the violent meanings inscribed in the ongoings of partition; through her body, she realizes the process [of] what is happening to her.

Lenny belongs to the image of the naked child, as she metamorphoses from the crucified children. So, the doll is as much a representation of Lenny as it is of the naked child and the crucified children from her dreams. So, ah Lenny has to grasp ah the meanings the significance of the violence around her through becoming both the aggressor and the victim.

It is a very powerful scene I am referring to; the film...Deepa Mehta's Earth, where the child rips the doll and then immediately afterwards starts crying. So, we see the dual role

that the child plays -- that of the aggressor and immediately afterwards of the victim.
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Partition

- The specter of Partition disrupts Lenny's cosy life. Lenny watches Ayah's circle of admirers dissolve. Once a number of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Sikh men were drawn together by Ayah's beauty, but not even her feminine allure can overcome religious intolerance.
- Lenny learns that the little Muslim boy she had played with during her trip to the countryside was the only survivor when a looting band attacked his village, massacred the men, and violated the women.
- From the roof of their house, she and her brother watch parts of Lahore burn. They listen to the weeping of women who had been raped and then, rejected by their families, were relegated to rehabilitation centers where few would be restored. Finally, she watches the kidnapping of Ayah by a gang that Ice-Candy-Man leads.

So, the specter of partition disrupts Lenny's cosy life; she watches Ayah...she watches how Ayah's circle of admirers dissolve. They suddenly take on their communal identities.

One day they were all friends and the next day they become Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs and what not...so the Christians. All of these people, regardless of their communal belonging or identity, were drawn by Ayah's beauty and yet this entire group of close-knit friends fall apart due to religious intolerance. They are overcome by extremist ideas and they start spewing venom through the language they use for each other.

Lenny learns, so her process of growing up is through interacting, through accepting how violent humanity can be; how the possibilities that a human [can be violent]...how violent humans can be. So, for example, she learns that the little Muslim boy that she had played with during her trip to the countryside was the only survivor when a looting band attacked his village, and as a result of this attack, the men in the village were massacred, the women were violated and only human left to survive was that Muslim boy.

So, and then we already discussed how Lenny and her brother watch parts of Lahore burn from the roof-top and they listen to weeping women that are introduced to them by way of adult's conversation as "giri hui aurat" (fallen women), because they are rape

victims and they have been rejected by their families and they have been relegated to rehabilitation centers.

In the end, she acquires her guilt-stricken self, something that she can never get over with, when she witnesses the kidnapping of Ayah by a gang led by the ice candy man, who also happened to be her very dear friend. So, she loses friends, she loses trust, she learns the ways of the world...new revelations that are not pleasant, obviously.

And so, this story also tells us how during a cataclysm, during a socio-political situation that partition gave rise to, how a child is introduced to the question of sexuality...man-woman relationship. It is not very normal, it is not something that the child [can easily settle with], it's not a very normal and simple story of passage.

Because whenever Lenny henceforth would remember Ayah's romantic relationship with the Masseur, she would understand it in juxtaposition with the ice candy man's role as a turncoat, as a defector and as a murderer who also facilitated the process of Ayah's abduction.

The revelations, the entry into adulthood is never smooth that a child could cherish afterwards. This actually goes on to tell us how the partition damaged a generation's childhood, childhood dreams, hopes and the general innocence of childhood.

With this, I am going to close our discussion on Cracking India, and I will meet you again with another topic and another lecture.

Thank you.