

Inhabiting Enclosures and Creating Spaces: The Worlds of Women in Indian Literature in English

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FEMALE SPACE IS biologically recessed. The enclosure of the womb affords protection to the growing foetus and is therefore a positive factor. An androcentric world, however, has extended the analogy of biological female inwardness to create a feminine reductiveness. This has turned a biological virtue into a societal and cultural handicap. The male world, after having imposed this limitation onto women, has celebrated it in song and dance. Literary discourse has been utilized to bear witness to the circumscription of women's worlds. The outer limits of women's lives have also been delineated by religious scriptures. While literature and poetry have romanticized these worlds, religious texts have provided it moral sanction and dogmatic validation.

These strategies of disempowerment have not been lost on women and, if male discourse has dwelt on the mystique of the veil, the inner courtyards, the *antharpurs* and *zenanas*,¹ female discourse has attempted to subvert these moves by tearing apart the *purdahs* and demolishing the architectural enclosures of a misogynist patriarchy. Given the strength of the androcentric world, acquired through millennia of oppression and legitimized by the male logos, female discourse is not always successful in breaking out of the enclosures assigned to it. However, women's writing has the moral force of the marginalized as it strives to create spaces for itself.

Traditionally, time has been seen as a Man and space as a Woman.² While most feminists urge that women should claim more fully this man-ordained space, they also agree that this should not be the ultimate goal. The aim should not be simply to claim more space for women under the existing social structures

but to deconstruct and transform the existing reality to reflect better Julia Kristeva's contention that women "are one half the sky" (202). The creation of female spaces entails going beyond the male-allotted spaces into the realms of true equality.

In light of these observations, this paper considers the texts written by Indian women—Bapsi Sidhwa, Dina Mehta, Attia Hosain, and Githa Hariharan—who belong to different religious groups—Parsi Zoroastrian, Muslim, and Hindu. Although women in India are bound by a common reductiveness, it would be simplistic to categorize them as a hegemonic sorority. Third World feminists quite rightly point out the dangers of lumping together white middle-class women with those belonging to the underprivileged nations of the world. Just as that sort of white hegemony is to be resisted, so too is a Third World hegemony, which in turn imposes just as simplistic a sorority on all Indian women. This is not to deny that the "secondary status of woman in society is one of the true universals, a pan-cultural fact" (Ortner 237), but to assert that women belonging to different ethno-religious groups experience this secondary status in different ways.

The current explosion of ethno-religious politics has forced the recognition that ethnic identity cannot be subordinated to indices of secular modernity. In the face of global technology and the impact of satellite communications, ethnicity is often the last refuge of great masses all over the world. It appears that in a postcolonial, postmodernist, post-Marxist world, most human beings retreat into tribal mansions—what Harold R. Isaacs calls the "House of Mumbi," the home of the progenital mother of the Kikuyu tribe in Kenya. Ethnic identity is the fundamental identity and is composed of primordial affinities and attachments. It is the identity with which a person is born and is distinct from all multiple or secondary identities acquired later in life. It is an identity which can be renounced but can never be taken away. It therefore has extraordinary strength and asserts itself most tenaciously when confronted with homogenizing ideologies of dominant groups. When one group's identity clashes with another group's, the politics and history of ethnic clashes are born.

The Indian subcontinent has had a long and checkered history of diverse ethno-religious groups co-existing in uneasy calm,

which from time to time has erupted into open conflict. Women are more often than not caught in the crossfire of these clashes, and their suffocating enclosures and limited spaces become even smaller as patriarchy closes ranks on either side of the divide to protect what it sees as its property. Women have always been the ultimate territories and countries on whom men have mapped their rights of possession. The bloody dismemberment of India in 1947, in the wake of the departing colonial power, resulted in some of the most horrific atrocities against women on both sides of the new borders. The forces of fundamentalist Islam and resurgent Hinduism have been felt most immediately by the women of these ethno-religious groupings. In a post-Ayodhya India, women once again have been relegated to the inner worlds and enclosures from which they had begun to emerge. The hegemonic forces of Hindutva have also impacted on Parsi Zoroastrians, who, as one of the tiniest minorities in India, have felt threatened by the homogenizing forces of the dominant group and retreated into their own "House of Mumbi," thereby encroaching on the spaces of their women.

The texts of Sidhwa, Mehta, Hosain, and Hariharan illustrate how women from these different ethno-religious groups deal with these threats, how they inhabit their male-dictated enclosures and in the face of all odds, create their own spaces. Sometimes these spaces might appear to be very tiny extensions of those granted to them by men, but at other times they move right out of male enclosures into female worlds. Several feminist literary theorists, including Pam Morris have posited that the term "female" is a neutral construct, referring to biological sex; "feminist" refers to political perceptions and aims; and "feminine" is related to cultural perceptions of gender. To yet others, such as Elaine Showalter, these terms denote developmental stages—feminine (imitative), feminist (protest), and female (self-discovery). In this article, I use the term "female" in the Showalterian sense.

The walls which closed upon women as a direct result of the partitioning of India are most clearly depicted by Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988). The text begins on a note of enclosures, restrictions, and reductions:

My world is compressed. . . . My child's mind is blocked by the gloom emanating from the wire-mesh screening the oblong ventilation slits [of the Salvation Army wall]. I feel such sadness for the dumb creatures I imagine lurking behind the wall. I know it is dumb because I have listened to its silence. (1)

To create text from a negation is a special gift of women writers who have been denied articulation in a man's world. It is also significant that this silence is experienced in relation to the Salvation Army wall—the Salvation Army bringing the civilizing, Christian message of a colonizing power to the dumb, pagan Calibans of this world.

The world of Sidhwa's female child, Lenny, is further constricted by her lameness. Lenny experiences enclosure within enclosure as her space shrinks. Her lameness is allied to her femaleness to deprive her of a proper education. The doctor tells her parents, "She'll marry—have children—lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams" (15). Deprived thus of schooling, Lenny is thrust more and more into the company of her Ayah, with whom she explores the multi-faceted world of Lahore. It is this association which forms the core of the text.

Through the agency of the Ayah, Lenny is awakened to a frank appreciation of female sexuality as the Ayah is assiduously courted by a cross-section of men in Lahore. The favoured suitor is the Masseur whose clever fingers "massage Ayah under her sari," until "she moans, a fragile, piteous sound of pleasure." From such moments of vicariously shared excitement, Lenny discovers the "secret rhythms of creation and mortality" (19). It is also through the Ayah and her many admirers that Lenny learns of pain, violence, and betrayal.

The idyllic days of erotic romance come to an abrupt end as colonial India is dismembered into two bleeding nations. Almost overnight the landscape of Lahore is fragmented into religious enclaves. "One day everybody is themselves—and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christians. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. The Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah—she is also a token—a Hindu" (93). As a token, Ayah is raped by her erstwhile Muslim admirers and friends.³ She is abused in retaliation for the trainloads of dead

Muslims and bags full of the breasts of Muslim women cut off by Hindu men. As Kate Millet has put it, rape is an offence "one male commits upon another—a matter of abusing 'his woman'" (34). The Ayah, who fearlessly roamed the wide open spaces of Lahore with her ward, is confined to the enclosures of the Prostitute's Quarter in Lahore, as she has become what Lenny's male cousin calls the opposite of the Virgin Mary—a whore. Lenny's mother and godmother desperately strive to rehabilitate other "whores"—like Hamida, Lenny's new Ayah—who have become untouchables because their husbands do not like other men to touch their women. Thousands of such "whores" and "untouchables" ended their days in the enclosures of Homes for Destitute and Fallen Women as a vengeful patriarchy denied them even the meagre space they had occupied in a male-ordained world.

Mehta's *And Some Take A Lover* (1992) is also set in the colonial period; but while *Ice-Candy-Man* deals with the Partition of India, Mehta's book details the Nationalist struggle, especially the Quit India Movement of 1942. Here, once again, events which take place in male time have an impact on female space. Mehta's text bears witness to how, even as the imperial power was fighting a last-ditch battle against India's nationalist aspirations, the privileged group of Westernized communities in India, especially the majority of Parsis, continued to be imprisoned in what the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o has called in *Decolonising the Mind* the slave culture of imperialism. Mehta's Roshni occupies not just a female enclosure but also a world which is restricted by being a mirror-image of that of the colonial master. Roshni's family distances itself from the nationalist struggle and hates the fact that Roshni wears khadi sarees, "which made her look like a gunny-sack." They also strongly disapprove of her raising "slogans about independence and 'Quit India' and follow[ing] in the footsteps of that scoundrel and vagrant, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who went about bare down to his navel" (38).

Roshni's admiration of Gandhi becomes even more ardent when she falls in love with a Gandhian activist, Sudhir. Sudhir is a nationalist as well as a Hindu so he is doubly unacceptable to her

family, who, like most Parsis, frown upon marriages outside the Zoroastrian fold.⁴ As for Sudhir, Roshni, in spite of her almost desperate flaunting of her nationalistic sympathies, is not acceptable to him. It was not so much Roshni's ethno-religious origins that was the obstacle as it was her sexuality. For Sudhir, nurtured on Gandhian philosophy, the woman as a sexual being was taboo. Unlike the hypermasculine colonizing male, Gandhi deliberately cultivated the feminine side of his personality and advocated "female passivity," as opposed to "male aggressiveness," but his womanliness was that of a de-sexed mother rather than that of a woman as wife. Gandhi's unilateral vow of celibacy within marriage and his subsequent experiments in curbing his sexuality are too well-known to recount here. However, what needs to be noted is the enclosure of woman in the mold of the mother. Through this straitjacketing, men have sought to control, domesticate, and neutralize female power. One of the earliest organized Nationalist mother-nation pairings is to be found in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandmath*. Mother India is the Durga *avatar* of female power, not the rampant Kali. The latter is symbolic of untrammelled fecundity and female dominance. Kali must be tamed, if not totally desexed, and turned into a mother. As mother, she is under the control of men and can be safely elevated to a superior status and worshipped.

At a party given by a mutual friend, Sudhir turns away from Roshni, symbolically dressed in red—the colour of blood, fertility, and not so coincidentally that of whores—the scarlet woman. He seeks refuge from her challenging sexuality in a fellow-Gandhian, Lajwanti. The plainly dressed Lajwanti has "no apparent feminine vanities . . . [she] is a disembodied spirit in six yards of thick coarse khadi . . . [with a] high madonna forehead . . . and huge eyes. A spirit at once gentle and radiant" (50-51). Lajwanti is the nonthreatening ideal woman that such Romantic poets as Wordsworth and Victorians such as Tennyson and Dickens had immortalized. These were the role models on which colonized Indian men, even those with a nationalistic bent, had based their notions of their dream women. Lajwanti is the patriarchal stereotype of the Madonna/Virgin—more spirit than flesh. Sudhir distances himself from Roshni as she would be a "distraction" in

his highminded life mission. To block off all return routes, he even marries a Harijan girl, as advocated by his mentor, Gandhi. Roshni sees this as a betrayal and in an attempt to break out of the male-dictated role of a pure-minded virgin, takes a lover.

However, this is not a creation of female space. For if Sudhir denied Roshni her sexuality, her lover, Rustom, sees her only as a sexual object. Roshni refuses to play the role assigned to her by patriarchal society—pure virgin before marriage and then chaste wife. Moreover, she also has the temerity to feel dissatisfaction with her lot. “In an era when women were schooled to regard themselves as satisfied, dissatisfaction had to be a personal failure” (15). She has spurned her proper “function in life . . . that of the hen, to rear the young” (15). By turning away from these male-ordained duties, Roshni’s “chastisement” at the hands of Rustom becomes inevitable. Her carefully hoarded virginity, so trustingly offered to Sudhir and so cruelly rejected, is finally plundered in a rather clinical fashion by Rustom. The loss of this socially required virginity convulses Roshni with “the first fine throes of guilt . . . she was lost forever, the scarlet letter her companion for life” (23). Brought up in an age when it was believed that “women ought not to go into action without a ring” (28), Roshni’s notions of women’s liberation “were based on Shaw’s prefaces, Ibsen’s plays and a paperbook edition of Havelock Ellis” (29).

The liaison with Rustom becomes a trap; he keeps on having sex with her while in the best of patriarchal traditions he continues to revere his wife and his family. Even as Roshni resents this victimization, the larger victimization of the colonized by the colonizer was entering its final stage. Just as India was seeking to opt out of an unequal and exploitative relationship with Britain, Roshni too opts out of the victim position that Rustom had assigned to her. Moving out of Rustom’s sphere, Roshni forges a delicate female bonding with her old friend Jer. This bonding takes place in spite of the fact that Jer is now married to one of Roshni’s old admirers, Behram.

Free of male control—both romantic and sexual, Roshni becomes embroiled in a murder mystery and a nationalist spy ring. Stepping out from the “pure sweetheart” mold, and rejecting the

roles of both mistress and wife (she spurns Rustom's belated offer to divorce his wife and marry her), she is able to enter into wider sociopolitical public spaces. However, this is not an autonomous female space, nor is Roshni totally independent of men. It is true that she has wrested some more space for herself but it has been gained at considerable cost.

Sidhwa's and Mehta's women are restricted by patriarchy and colonialism, but their enclosures are metaphorical rather than literal. Zoroastrianism does have severe restrictions on the movements of women, especially from the view of rituals related to notions of purity and defilement, and Parsi women used to be physically segregated during menstruation. However, this is a handicap they shared with their other Indian sisters. Female segregation, in the sense of *pardah* or incarceration in *antharpurs/zenana*, is neither doctrinally sanctioned nor recommended by Zoroastrianism. Thus, while female subordination for Parsi women has societal force, it is not sanctioned by scriptural authority.

The relegation of Hindu and Muslim women to a secondary status and physical enclosures, however, does have doctrinal and scriptural force. Hindu scriptures and legal texts define women only in relation to men; wifehood confers a respectable status on women and with motherhood a woman reaches the pinnacle of her existence. In *Manusmriti*, women are presented as meek childlike creatures who have to be protected from their own waywardness—read as sexuality—by male control. A Hindu woman's *laaj* (virtue) is her ornament and a Muslim woman is bound within the enclosures of *izzat* (honour) and *sharam* (shame). As several scholars have pointed out, Islam is an egalitarian religion and has given a better status to women in terms of social and economic status than they had enjoyed in pre-Islamic Arabian society (see Showeb; Zakaria). The *Quran* enjoins modesty in both men and women; however, unlike men, women are also told to hide their charms:

And say to the believing women
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty: that they
Should not display

Beauty and ornaments except
 Thereof: that they should
 Draw their veils over
 Their bosoms and not display
 Their beauty except
 To their husbands, their fathers. (24:30)⁵

The texts of Hariharan and Hosain detail how Hindu and Muslim women deal with doctrinal and scriptural restrictions and try to create spaces in the holes and semiotic fissures of the *odhni* and the *pardah*. Hariharan's women might not be physically restricted by the walls of the *zenana* that close around Hosain's women, but they too peer out at the world from behind the confines of a metaphorical *odhni*:

My *odhni* three yards long
 With its corners four,
 Four are the sides of my world
 The four corners
 Of the courtyard
 Between every two comers,
 A Wall . . .
 Corners walled in
 The walls like a veil
 Suffocation inside the veil,
 Life suffocates.⁶

In Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), her women Sita, Devi, and Mayamma are separated by the gulf of time and caste but are linked by the shared reductiveness of their gender. All three of them live within the confines of the *odhni*, which each tries to tear apart in her own way to create spaces for herself.

Sita sacrifices her immense talent in playing the *veena* for the duties she owes to her family as a daughter-in-law, wife, and mother. However, she exacts a terrible price for this from herself, her husband, and her daughter. In her self-destructive anger, she is the mythical Gandhari from *The Mahabharatha*, who, in anger at being married off to a blind prince, had tied a bandage over her own eyes. This terrible self-punishment not only fuelled her own anger but was an ever-present reproach to those who had wronged her.

Devi's existence is stifled in her mother's vengefully constructed fortress "that shut out the rest of the world, . . . a secure

womb" (13)—the ultimate female enclosure. It was her grandmother's stories which provided an escape route for Devi from "the sticky walls" of her mother's womb. Grandmother's stories taught Devi to dream, to fly, to tear to shreds the suffocating veils of femaleness. The old woman's myths, fables, and fantasies subvert analytical, rationalist, and male discourse. If history is male, then myth is female and predates history. Such feminist writers as Angela Carter, Fay Weldon, Mahasweta Devi, and Suniti Namjoshi have rewritten and repossessed myths which have been used by men to denigrate women. Their texts have sought to deconstruct myths that demonize powerful women and develop new ways of representing women. Hariharan uses a combination of Western feminist fantasies of flying⁷ with stories from the Indian epic, *The Mahabharatha*, to create the magical world of the female child Devi. Fed on stories of the vengeful Amba, Devi created her own magical realist world in which she was a female warrior who "rode a tiger, and cut off evil, magical demons' heads" (41). Like Karan from *The Mahabharatha*—the illegitimate son of Kunti, who was born with the magical *kawach* (armour), but had been brought up by a low caste man and had acquired divine weapons to offset his caste handicap—Devi acquires several magical weapons and a thick armour-like skin from her female mentor. In her fantasy world, Devi images herself as "an incarnation of Durga, walking the earth to purge it of fat-jowled, slimy-tailed greed" (43). This is a feminist fantasy of decimating exploitative men—an Amazonian desire to inhabit autonomous spaces outside male-ordained enclosures. Devi's idyllic world is shattered when her heroine is killed in battle with a man; the end of the Amazonian fantasy is also decreed by Sita, who issues the edict: "no more of these fantasies. The girl is almost a woman, she must stop dreaming now" (45).

Devi's rebellious spirit, however, is not so easily tamed. In a clever move, Sita gives her a long rope and lets her go to university in the US, but when the time is ripe Devi is drawn back to India and married off to Mahesh. Marriage once more traps Devi in man-made enclosures. Her grandmother's stories of vengeful, magnificent, strong women are now replaced by her father-in-law's discourse that is firmly patterned on Manu's laws, which run

like a leitmotif through the second part of the text. If grandmother's stories were "an initiation into the subterranean possibilities" of womanhood, the father-in-law's stories "define the limits. His stories are for a woman who has already reached the goal that will determine the guise her virtue will wear" (51).

The walls close around Devi and she experiences the futility, pain, and reductiveness of womanhood. Her husband turns to her only in the darkness of night; her days are spent haunting the empty rooms of her married home. Her father-in-law, whom she calls Baba, appears to be an ally but the servant-woman Mayamma reveals that his wife, Laxmi, felt stifled by his patrician home and left in search of independent salvation. Devi digests this fact along with Baba's Manu-inspired stories of the "path a woman must walk to reach heaven . . . [she] has no independent sacrifice to perform, no vow, no fasting; by serving her husband, she is honoured in the heavens. On the death of her husband, the chaste wife, established in continence, reaches heaven, even if childless, like students who have practiced self-control" (55). Laxmi is not convinced by this argument and sets out to find her own way to heaven. Very soon Baba too dies and Devi feels even more alone than when her own father died in Africa while she was in the US. Estranged from her mother by the severe austerities and controls Sitha imposed upon herself, Devi turned first to her father and then to her father-in-law but was disillusioned by them. She realizes that it is "useful to remember that [if] a husband is a man. So is a father. He trembles if you climb a tree, a foolish, unaided girl. He holds you back from journeys, mistrustful of devils, snakes, young boy's legs, books, anything at all" (92). The father-in-law had "all that abstract nobility hoisted on a lofty pedestal, yet [his] wife ran away to seek salvation elsewhere" (84). She too runs away, but not from men—she leaves with the sensuous Gopal, the classical singer. As a member of his train, Devi hopes to find salvation through the *bhog* route rather than the *tapas marg* adopted by her mother-in-law.

Not surprisingly, life with Gopal does not afford her the space she craves for, so Devi finally turns to her mother, Sita. The mother she had sought to escape all her life—first through fantasy and then through male-identification—provides the ulti-

mate space Devi needs. It is to Sita's neat fortress-like house that Devi returns. "She straightened her back as she saw the house come into view. She rehearsed in her mind the words, the unflinching look she had to meet Sita with to offer her her love. To stay and fight, to make sense of it all, she would have to start from the very beginning" (139). As Devi opens the gate she is wonderstruck by the wilderness of Sita's usually neat garden, and then as she quickens her footsteps, she heard the "faint sounds of a *veena*, hesitant and childlike, inviting her into the house" (139). So, in a paradoxically regressive movement, Devi finds her enlarged female spaces within the inner recesses of femaleness itself—her mother's womb-like fortress.

Hosain's only novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), details the worlds that existed behind the high walls of the *zenana*. Her text describes also the inevitable changes wrought on these closed, inner worlds by the decolonization of India and the dismantling of feudal *talugdari* by the newly independent state. The impact of the creation of the Muslim state of Pakistan is also felt by the women of the *zenana* as families are torn apart and ancestral properties and homes divided. These changes unleash new trends in which the old inner worlds of women are swept aside by the tide of history; but whether or not these forces created female spaces that these women of enclosures could then inhabit is a question which is not easily answered.

Laila, the orphaned female child in the text, grows up under the shadow of a strict, authoritarian patriarchy, symbolized by the dying Baba Jan. Because of her dead father's wishes, she is spared the strict rigours of *pardah*, but she still grows up in the *zenana*, and her life experiences are predominantly female and reductive. As a role model, she has first her Aunt Abida—an efficient, practical woman who, during the last illness of Baba Jan, her father, runs his large estate—but from behind a *pardah*. There is also her Aunt Majida, Baba Jan's widowed elder daughter, who, along with her daughter Zahra, lives with her father. Majida's world is defined by the confines of the *zenana*, and she dictates of her father and brothers. She has brought up her daughter to become a good wife, according to the tenets of Islam. It is an extremely restricted world in which women are supposed to be

protected by the enclosures of the *zenana*, but to which several powerful male relatives had easy access and could sexually exploit the women. In response to Laila's Uncle Mohsin's words, "[this] slut of a girl is a liar, a wanton," the servant-girl Nindi's retorts, "A slut? A wanton? And who are you to say it—who would have made me one had I let you?" (28). The young high-bred girls Laila, Zahra, and their cousins are carefully protected from an awareness of their own sexuality and thus their vulnerability; but carnal knowledge intrudes into the locked *zenana* as the girl's young male cousin Asad mutters in his delirium, "Zahra, darling, Zahra, don't leave me, don't ever leave me" (80). Zahra's mother immediately hastens her daughter's marriage and the girl is removed from within the ambit of her besotted cousin. Erring servants such as Suliman and Nandi are similarly banished when they are found to be with child.

The enclosures of the *zenana* are, however, not unassailable; and in a bid to move with the times, Laila's Uncle Hamid, who takes over as head of the family after Baba Jan's death, does not let his wife Saira observe *purdah*. Aunt Saira, however, still retains a *purdah* mind-set and happily retreats into a modified version of it after her husband's death. Laila's education is extended to the college level, but when she wants to marry a man of her own choice, the family assails her with notions of *izza* (honour) and makes her aware that she would be marrying a man much beneath her family's status. Laila is as stubborn as Devi but, unlike her, will not let herself be emotionally blackmailed into giving up her lover. So while Devi abandons her American lover, seeing their continued relationship as an unrealistic dream, Laila takes a stand and marries Ameer, a poor relative of the Raja of Amirpur, her Baba Jan's old friend. However, this meets with the strong disapproval of her Aunt Abida, who admonishes her: "You have let your family's name be bandied about by scandal-mongers and gossips. You have soiled its honour on their vulgar tongues" (312). Laila then knows that understanding is impossible between them and admits that her aunt has "a way of thinking" (312) she cannot reject. By admitting that she loves Ameer, Laila breaks the code of the *zenana*, where even husbands and wives cannot openly live with one another and where love

between man and woman is “associated with sex, and sex [is] sin” (312). Laila is outraged by this and rejects the *zenana* world and the politics of patriarchy to create her own space.

Interwoven into these inner worlds of Muslim women are the wider stories of Britain’s colonial war, in which Laila’s husband is killed, and of India’s partition into India and Pakistan and the subsequent communal carnage. While one of Laila’s cousins, Kemal, opts to stay on in India, Kemal’s younger brother, Saleem, goes to Pakistan. This results in the ancestral home “Ashiana,” in Lucknow, being divided. Laila herself is impacted by the trauma of Partition. She and her child are rescued by her old Hindu schoolfriend Sita. At the end of the text, Laila strikes out once again on her own and enlarges her space by leaving with her idealistic, nationalist cousin Asad; thereby she is signalling not just a rejection of the old *purdah* world but also a lack of faith in the separate development of Hindus and Muslims. Asad stays on in decolonized India, and Laila throws in her lot with him.

This acceptance of India does not necessarily imply deracination; membership of an ethno-religious group does not negate a belonging to the wider grouping of a nation state. Similarly, moving into wider spaces does not mean women have to desex themselves and become male-identified in order to gain acceptance in an androcentric world. The circumscription and reduction of the inner worlds of women are undesirable and must be resisted; but the strength of residing in the House of Mumbi is positive—as Githa Hariharan’s *Devi* discovers—and should be cherished by all who have access to it.

NOTES

- 1 In India and Pakistan, these terms indicate that part of the house reserved exclusively for women of the household.
- 2 William Blake in “A Vision of the Last Judgement” says of the description of a large painting: “Time and space are Real Beings, a Male and a Female. Time is a Man, Space is a Woman, and her masculine portion is Death” (604, 614).
- 3 The Ayah can also be seen as a symbol of the Indian earth and the titular Ice-Candy-Man as the ravisher, the conqueror(s) of India (see N. E. Bharucha).
- 4 Parsi Zoroastrians had sought refuge in India (*circa* AD 936) in the face of forcible conversion to Islam and other religion related discriminations, after the Arab conquest of Iran. One of the conditions upon which they had been allowed to stay on in the kingdom of Jadhav Rana, was that they would not proselytize. That being

the condition, about the only way of ensuring the survival of the community was to impose a ban on marriages outside the Parsi Zoroastrian fold. This strict endogamy will see a tiny number of Parsis, approximately 100,000 worldwide, surviving the end of the twentieth century. Both the ban on conversion and intermarriages have over the centuries acquired an almost scriptural sanctity, which has served the community's purpose of survival against all odds quite well.

- 5 I am using Yusuf Abdullah Ali's translation.
- 6 This is the opening song in the video *Odhni: A Collective Exploration of Ourselves, Our Bodies* (VHS/PAL), English and Hindi (23 minutes), Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay, 1993. Scripted and directed by Anjali Monterio and K. P. Jayasankar, it was produced for the project "Understanding Sexuality: Ethnographic Study of Poor Women in Bombay," which was part of a larger programme on women and AIDS sponsored by the International Council for Research on Women.
- 7 Hélène Cixous's assertion of flight as means of female emancipation is most powerfully manifested in the character of Fevers in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. In this text the bird-woman takes control of her own myth and celebrates her regained freedom and sexuality. This is also a gothic text where the horror is parodied and used intertextually to subvert dominant male discourse.

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