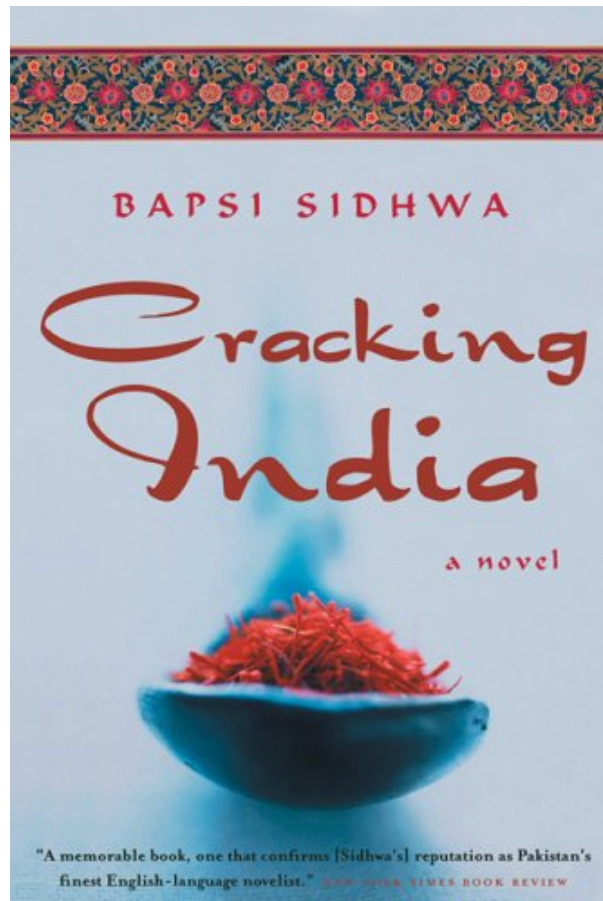
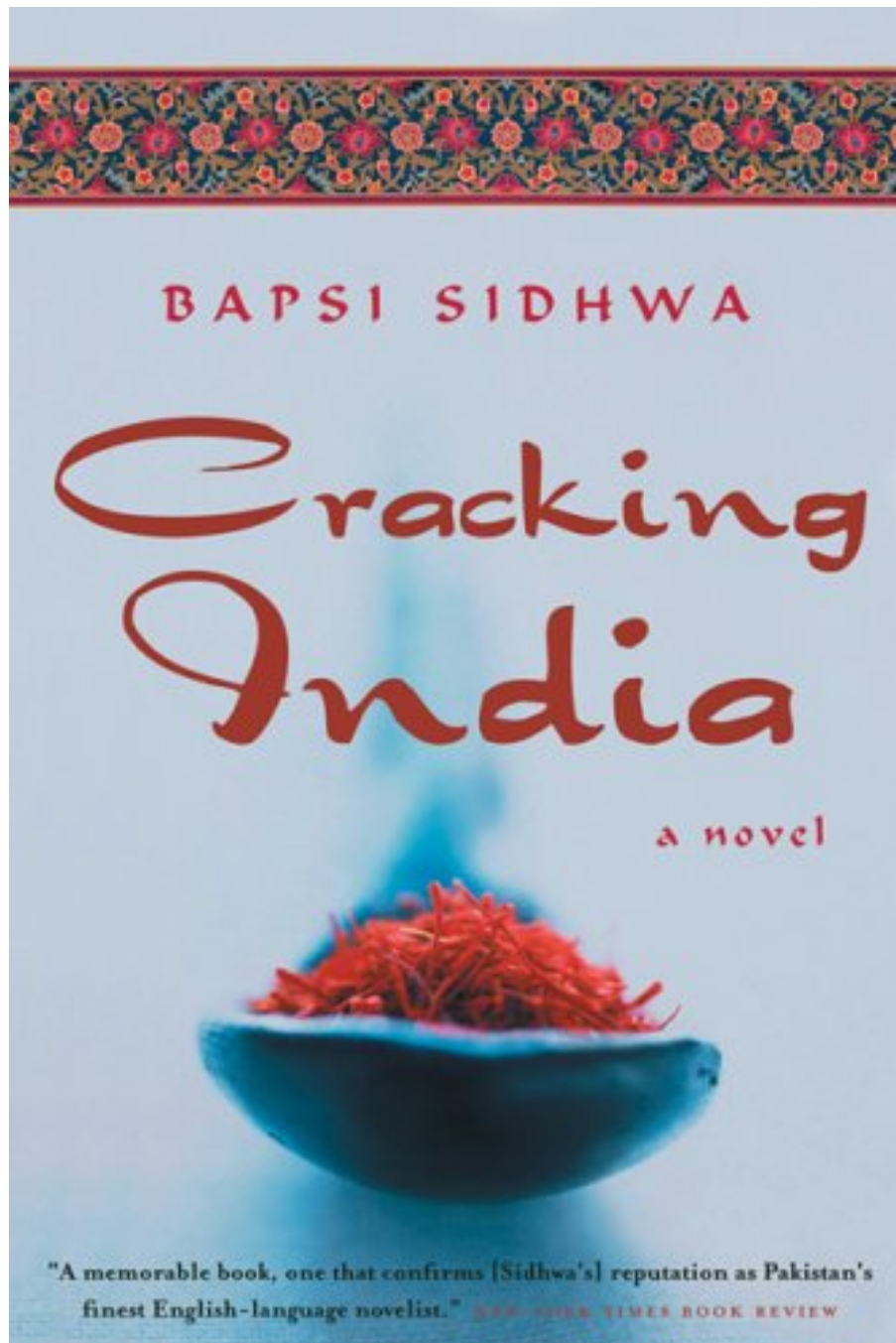


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The 1947 Partition of India is the backdrop for this powerful novel, narrated by a precocious child who describes the brutal transition with chilling veracity. Young Lenny Sethi is kept out of school because she suffers from polio. She spends her days with Ayah, her beautiful nanny, visiting with the large group of admirers that Ayah draws. It is in the company of these working class characters that Lenny learns about religious differences, religious intolerance, and the blossoming genocidal strife on the eve of Partition. As she matures, Lenny begins to identify the differences between the Hindus, Moslems, and Sikhs engaging in political arguments all around her. Lenny enjoys a happy, privileged life in Lahore, but the kidnapping of her beloved Ayah signals a dramatic change. Soon Lenny's world erupts in religious, ethnic, and racial violence. By turns hilarious and heartbreaking, the domestic drama serves as a microcosm for a profound political upheaval.

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Most helpful customer reviews

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The Partitiion of India

By Joyce Merletti

The story is told through the eyes of Lenny, a young Indian girl whose beautiful Hindu nanny has included her in her friendship with a number of young men of various religions and walks of life. Despite the differences, they are united by their love for her. As their beloved nation drifts toward a complete rupture, violence begins in the streets; the child sees some of the young men changing religions to protect their families, or leaving the city for a safer place. She begins to understand the religious divisions that are ripping the fabric of India. She witnesses scenes of slaughter; her nanny is betrayed and kidnapped, bringing her to a shameful life.

No childhood can continue amid this terror, and the reader feels such sympathy for little, crippled Lenny and her young friends. But heart-wrenching as the story is, it is only one story of that time, and Sidhwa tells it very well. She sheds light on this dark period, but in doing so, makes the reader want to know more about that time, and what led to it.

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

Loss of innocence and national chaos

By Luan Gaines

Wrenched from the security of the familiar, a young girl gleans intimate knowledge of the nature of betrayal. As a cosseted child, Lenny's short life is defined by the affection of family, friends and her beloved Ayah. As most children who have the blessing of regularity in their lives and know the indulgence of boredom, Lenny

is on an intimate terms with mundane household affairs and neighborhood gossip, her extended family ever available for entertainment and amusing peccadilloes. The family's simple life changes forever with the Partition of India in 1947 and the creation of Pakistan for Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs remaining in the state of India. As citizens of the newly formed Pakistan, this family's everyday reality begins to shift with the changing times, threatening to destroy a child's security and trust forever.

In Lahore, a city that has welcomed differences and encouraged variety, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus have mixed without incident. After the Partition, the dangers of alliance permanently stamp the mark of change and entire families begin to disappear overnight. In agonizing stages, Sidwha relates this tragic account through Lenny's eyes. And it is that vision, with glimpses of violence flashing around the periphery, that ultimately alerts Lenny to the shape of the future. The juxtaposition of family life and national chaos outlines an insider's interpretation of daily routine and a whole country spinning out of control. Peopled with eccentric characters and quirky personalities, one of the most romantic and beloved is Lenny's beautiful and desirable Ayah. Ultimately, the abrupt disappearance of that Ayah, who has been kidnapped by nefarious characters, is central to the theme of this carefully wrought tale. All sense of harmony and continuity is abruptly shattered by the miasma of violence that seeps under closed doors at night like a poisonous invisible fog. This book is a stunning reminder of the nature of impermanence, "collateral damage" in the form of a loving Ayah, whose lovely spirit is virtually destroyed along with Lenny's innocence.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

The animal inside us all

By A Customer

I was shocked to read a couple of previous reviews claiming "Cracking India" portrays certain groups as monstrous while favoring others. Whoever has made these statements has obviously skipped over huge chunks of Bapsi Sidhwa's book, for Sidhwa goes out of her way to present a balanced point of view of Partition. This book is about the animal inside all people -- the demon that can emerge in the name of religion within everyone, whether Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, or whatever. This book is not about an "us" and the "other" -- or conversely, it deals very much with the "us" and the "other," and in doing so, is not. While i could very easily disprove the claims of bias made by a couple of previous reviews, by quoting several powerful incidents from the book i would only be doing future readers a disfavor -- i do not want to rob anyone of exactly the elements of universal horror and suspense that make the book the masterpiece it is. I recommend this book highly to anyone -- i know it left me tear-streaked and stunned.

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