

Beyond 'Mother India' and 'New Indian Woman': Indian Educated Middle-Class Women in Partition Novels

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Abstract : This article attempts to restore the subjectivity of Indian-educated middle-class women during the partition period through three partition novels: Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), and Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993). Despite extensive research on women in partition, there is little focus on the group of educated middle-class women. In mainstream historical and political discourse, these women have consistently been constructed within the official discourse dominated by males. They are either 'Mother India', or the 'new woman' to meet the requirements of India's changing political atmosphere. However, by delving into the particular historical context and personal experience of the educated middle-class women in the three novels, the article argues that they continuously subvert the essentialized identities imposed upon them by different versions of official discourse. As the embodiment of Shakti, they are distinct from the archetypes of 'Mother India' and the 'new woman'. Instead, they create their ideal family spaces based on their personal cognition and transcend the homogeneous gender discourse to reflect the fluid and complex nature of female identity.

Keywords : Indian educated middle-class women, subjectivity, partition novels, Mother India, new woman, Shakti

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