

## Bapsi sidhwa's Ice Candy– Man: Partition based fictional autobiography

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**Abstract:** A number of novels in the Indian sub-continent have been written on the theme of partition of India. This unforgettable historical moment has been captured as horrifying by the novelists in their novels. These novels examine the inexorable logic of partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism and fanaticism sparked by hardening communal attitudes. These novels are remarked as partition novel. Such novels effectively and realistically depict the 'vulnerability of human understanding and life, caused by the throes of partition which relentlessly divided friends.' The narrative design that Bapsi sidhwa follows in her novel apparently looks very simple and straightforward, but on a closer look one realizes that it is translated by author. Objective of the paper is to assess and analyze Bapsi sidhwa's Ice Candy – Man in the light of autobiographical elements and see the tragic effect of partition.

**Key Words:** Sub-continent, Partition, Fundamentalism, Fanaticism, Realistically, Autobiographical.

### Introduction:

August 1947 marks the end of the British raj in the subcontinent. The departure of the British from the subcontinent led to the creation of the two independent states, Pakistan and India. The division was based on two 'Nation Theory' with the argument that the Hindus and the Muslims cannot live together as one nation since both have distinct social cultural and religious identities. The Muslim majority regions of Punjab and Bengal were divided, with west Punjab and east Bengal forming west and east Pakistan and India in the middle of the two (Hassan: 1993). This resulted in the massive and violent migration of the people across the divided Muslims moved into Pakistan and Sikhs and Hindus moved into India with the prospects of peaceful and better living, ethnic identities.

Urvashi Butalia describes partition in following words,

“ The political partition of India caused one of the great human convulsion of history...twelve million people moved between the new, truncated India and the two wings, east and west, of the newly created Pakistan...estimates of dead vary from 200,000 to two million but that somewhere around a million people died is now widely accepted...75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of different religions and even by the men from their own religion (and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion.)” (Butalia)

### The Partition Literature:

The tragedy of the partition encounter has given rise to fictional explorations with an attempt to define the inner turmoil and social complexes that plagued the subcontinent. The vast volume of partition fiction in English, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali and many other languages of the subcontinent faithfully records the disaster in wake of partition.

Few of the best known writers and their works are mentioned here which also deals with the theme of partition, **Khushwant Singh's Train To Pakistan (1956)**, **Rahi Masoom Raza's Adha Gaon (1966)**, **Amitav Ghosh's Shadow Lines (1988)**, **Manohar Malgaonkar's A Bend In The Ganges (1964)**, **Attia Hussain's Sunlight On A Broken Column (1961)**, **Rajan's The Dark Dancer**, **Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice**

**Candy-Man, Chaman Nahal's Azadi, Bhisham Sahni's Tamas, Short stories by Saadat Hassan Manto and poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz** are some such examples that attempt to give us an insight into the public frenzy, communal hatred, extreme disintegration and large scale sectarian violence.

### **Bapsi Sidhwa and Her Works:**

Bapsi Sidhwa is a prolific and an eminent Pakistani diasporic writer. Her works include *Their Language of Love* (2013), *Jungle Wala Sahib* (Translation from Urdu in 2012) *City of Sin and Splendour : Writings on Lahore* (2006, US), *Water: A Novel* (2006, US and Canada), *Bapsi Sidhwa Omnibus* (2001, Pakistan), *An American Brat* (1993, U.S.; 1995, India), *Cracking India* (1991, U.S.; 1992, India; originally published as *Ice Candy Man*, 1988, England), *The Bride* (1982, England; 1983;1984, India; published as *The Pakistani Bride*, 1990 US and 2008 US), *The Crow Eaters* (1978, Pakistan; 1979 &1981, India; 1980, England; 1982, US). Her novels in English reflect her personal experience of the Partition of Indian subcontinent, abuse against women, immigration to the US, and membership in the Parsi or Zoroastrian community.

Bapsi Sidhwa's most famous novel is *Ice Candy Man* (*Cracking India*). The novel is set in pre-Partition India in Lahore. It examines the inexorable logic of Partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by communal hatred. It looks at Partition as a means Postcolonial perspectives on partition: A study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (*cracking India*)

Sidhwa is an important signature in the literary world of Pakistan. Being a parsi, sidhwa through her novels focuses attention on rapidly changing scenario in her parsi polity and culture. *Ice Candy- Man* is sidhwa's important novel which is based on partition of india. In this novel, she deals with the partition crisis, the parsi milieu the problems of Asian women and theme of marriage. Sidhwa remains a potent voice among the modern feminist writers. She is the only parsi woman writer to write on the theme of partition. Through the child narrator lenny, Bapsi sidhwa brings out her fictionalized autobiography.

Sidhwa's work has received worldwide acclaim and she has been honored with several international awards including **Bunting fellow-ship at Radcliff/ Harvard, visiting scholar at the Rockefeller Foundation centre, Bellagio, Italy, Pakistan's highest award for arts, Sitara-i-Imtiaz (1991), Lila Wallace- Reader's digest writer's Award (1994) and Premio Mondello for Foreign Author for Water in 2007.**

The review in the observer in 1980 observed on her novel *The Crow- Eaters* as:

“Bapsi sidhwa's novel belongs to that rapidly expanding literary by- product of the Empire: English language fiction by third world writer's about their societies during the colonial rule.”

The Urdu poet from Pakistan Faiz Ahmed Faiz praises Bapsi sidhwa for her wit, racy style and shrewd observations of human behavior. He even compared her to V.S Naipaul and R.K Narayan.

Bapsi sidhwa's novels are narratives of political and moral upheavals resulting in a mass trauma which continued to haunt the minds of generations. Generally, in the novels of sidhwa, there are people from all walks of life and from all communities. They are Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and parsis. The event of partition has been depicted through the painful experience of these ethnic groups.

### **The Central Consciousness of the Fictional world:**

The central consciousness of the fictional world of *Ice Candy-Man* is a young parsi girl Lenny, who is lame. The lameness of the narrator- protagonist is suggestive of handicap, a woman creative writer faces, but when she decides to wield the pen because writing is an intellectual exercise , is considered a male bastion,, outside the routine of women; submissive domesticity. Her recuperation symbolizes the over-coming of the constraint on the intellectual activity of writing by Bapsi sidhwa, by making Lenny

the narrator of the novel. The novelist lends weight and validity to the feminine perspective on the nature of surrounding reality.

The child- narrator Lenny is also affected by the violence at Lahore. The rampaging Muslim mobs gives Lenny as many nightmares as when she recollects the roaring of the lions in the zoo. Thus we see that scenes of violence and arson have a frightening impact on the young parsi girl Lenny. With some ironic exposures, Bapsi sidhwa shows the brutalization which communal frenzy causes. Once communal and obscurant passions are aroused, the social fabric is torn asunder, leading to wanton and reckless destruction. Sidhwa also criticizes the British design, commenting that obtaining their objective to divide India, they favored Hindus over Muslims. The impact of partition is narrated through the feelings of a child. Regarding this change, Lenny remarks:

“That’s when I realize what has changed. The Sikhs, only their rowdy little boys running about hair piled in topknots, are keeping mostly to themselves.”

### **Autobiographical Elements in Ice Candy- Man:**

Bapsi sidhwa’s experience of the partition has found expression in the novel Ice Candy- Man wherein the novelist narrates the Fictionalized real story of partition in an interview with Mayank Austen Soofi, Bapsi sidhwa said the following about Fictionalization,

“Even I often don’t know where fact ends and fiction begins...Because of childhood polio the doctor suggested I should not be burdened with school, I had light tuition thankfully no math’s...I’ve fictionalized biographical elements in the earlier part of Cracking India- Lenny is not me- Perhaps my alter ego.” (Soofi 2014)

In the same interview she said, “I am almost every character in my book.” (Soofi 2014)

In the novel Ice Candy Man the story has been narrated by a polio stricken child named Lenny, a daughter of a parsi family of Lahore that reminds readers of the childhood of the writer herself. The first person narration technique used by the author in the novel makes readers feel as if they were reading an autobiography of the writer. There are quite a few evidences to consider Lenny as the portrayal of the writer herself. Lenny, being a child of a Parsee family, Roams freely through the Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, and Parsee society of her environs in Lahore and observes everything and reports everything with a child’s natural innocence. The writer uses immature child as a narrator to add more authenticity to the reporting of the events. As the narrator is stricken by polio in infancy she is receiving private schooling at home like the author and remaining always present at almost all places to witness every incident. Like Sidhwa, Lenny too has to undergo a series of operations during her childhood. In the novel Dr. Col. Bharucha is not in favor of her schooling which reminds readers of doctor’s advice given to the writer’s parents not to burden Bapsi Sidhwa with school. Further the writer seems to be claiming truth in her story by the reference of truth inflected tongue of the narrator. Once Lenny says,

“I am tempted to tell her the truth .... My wretched truth inflected tongue just in time.”

Further the description of the refugee camp/ Re habitation Courtyard of Recovered Women (a camp for fallen women) near Lenny’s house is a fine blend of fact and fiction. Lenny’s beloved Ayah is restored to this camp and many other people familiar to Lenny and her family also joined the camp after becoming victims of the chaos of the partition.

“There was a rehabilitation camp with many of these women adjacent to Sidhwa's house, and she states that she was inexplicably fascinated with these "fallen women," as they were described to her at the time.” (Malmberg)

Author has fictionalized her childhood observations of the refugee camps to manifest the cost that women had to pay for partition. Sidhwa gives descriptions of burning Lahore in the novel that she witnessed during her childhood.

“The flame covers two or three brick buildings in the bazaar and it’s hard to put out the fire. People are pouring into the lanes from their houses and shops. After a while, a fire brigade wan arrives. Instead of water they pour fuel on the entire rows of the buildings on both the sides of the street which ignites in an incredible conflagration. People (Hindus) are running here and there and sometime they disappear in the smoke.”

Her home city of Lahore became a border city in Pakistan, and was crowded by thousands of Refugees. Sidhwa writes about her childhood,

"...the ominous roar of distant mobs was a constant of my awareness, alerting me, even at age seven, to a palpable sense of the evil that was taking place in various parts of Lahore." (Malmberg)

The incident of the gunny-sack is also a factual one which was witnessed in real by the author herself. In the novel while Lenny and Himmat Ali are walking on the Warris road, on the way they find a bulging gunny-sack in which was found the Masseur dead.

“The swollen gunny-sack lies directly in our path. Hari pushes it with his foot. The sack slowly Topples over and Masseur spills out--- half on the dusty sidewalk, half on the gritty tarmac dispelling the stiletto reek of violence with smell of fresh roses. ”

People’s attitude towards the dead body has been described in the following heart touching words.

“People gather around them, some concerned, some curious. But they look at Masseur as if he is

Not a person. He isn’t! He has been reduced to a body, a thing. One side of his handsome face already buried in the dusty sidewalk.”

In the novel Sidhwa presents her own opinions and beliefs about the personalities and characters of Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah through the narration by Lenny. Sidhwa seems to be giving her own opinion about Gandhijee though the brief portrayal of Gandhijee’s character in the novel narrated by Lenny. In the novel the author gives the description of the event when Gandhijee comes to Lahore wherein the author has focused more on Gandhijee's advices related to dieting and enema. Here it seems the author has portrayed the character of Gandhijee focusing on very few traits of his personality. Gandhijee has been depicted having feminine characteristics and the description sometimes appears to be laughing at the personality and character of Gandhijee. When Gandhijee visits Lahore, Lenny and her mother meet Gandhijee. He is knitting surrounded by women. When Lenny and her mother go to Gandhijee, he politely puts aside his knitting and asks softly to practice enema, a medical way to clear the intestines.

"Flush your system with an enema, daughter, says Gandhijee...’Look at these girl”, says Gandhijee, indicating the lean women flanking him. I give them enemas myself there is no shame in it- I am like their mother you can see how smooth and moist their skin is look at their shining eyes!"

Further Gandhijee advices Lenny to practice enema, "Flush her stomach! Her skin will bloom like roses.”

Here the author has depicted the character of Gandhijee talking only about enema. She presented Gandhijee announcing, "An enema a day keeps the doctor away." The narrator has been shown by the author wondering in following words, "I am puzzled why he's so famous."

The writer clearly mentions that during division Muslims and Pakistan have suffered. The British government has done injustice to Jinnah and favored Nehru. Here the writer puts forth her own belief about the division.

“Within three months seven million Muslims and five million Hindus and Sikhs are uprooted in the largest and most terrible exchange of population known to history. The Punjab has been divided by the icy cards- sharks dealing out the land village by village, city by city, wheeling and dealing and doling out favors.....For now the tide is turned- and the Hindus are being favored over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favor Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri; they grant him Kashmir.....they grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot, without which Muslim Kashmir cannot be secured. ”

The writer has compared Nehru with Jinnah. In the comparison she criticizes Nehru and favors

Jinnah. The writer shows Nehru as Lady Mountbatten’s lover. Writer wants to convey that in the allotment of areas at the time of partition Britishers and Nehru took the benefit of Jinnah’s good character and personality and did injustice to him. Sidhwa ranks Jinnah as a constitutional man.

“His training at the Old Bailey and practice in English courtrooms has given him faith in constitutional means, and he puts his misplaced hopes into tall standards of upright justice.”

The writer says that Jinnah has been criticized in films of Gandhi’s and Mountbatten’s lives and in books by British and Indian scholars.

“Jinnah who for a decade was known as Ambassador of Hindu- Muslim Unity is now portrayed as a monster.”

These are clear comments of the writer in defense of Jinnah through the words of Lenny the narrator of the novel. There are various other instances in the novel where writer defends Jinnah. Sidhwa quotes Jinnah's voice announcing Pakistan as a secular country. She herself once considered the book as a defense of Jinnah.

“And I felt, in *Ice Candy Man*, I was just redressing, in a small way, a very grievous wrong that has been done to Jinnah and Pakistanis by many Indian and British writers. They’ve dehumanized him, made him a symbol of the sort of person who brought about the partition of India...where as in reality he was the only constitutional man who didn’t sway crowds just by rhetoric. ” (Dodiya)

In an interview with David Montenegro, Sidhwa claimed that her motivation in writing *Ice Candy- Man* was to present the Pakistani view of the history of partition. She has surely succeeded in this aim; but as she destroyed the customary distance between the author and the narrator. For this reason, Marianne Wiggins and many others rightly find fault with the narrative voice. Wiggins writes,

“much of sidhwa’s trouble in telling this tale lies in her choice of narrative voice...as character fails, so does any sense of the politics of the time- so does any sense of place.”

That may be going too far but the fact remains that the narrative voice in the novel is problematic at best and flawed at worst.

### **Conclusion:**

*Ice Candy- Man* is a sincere and successful effort to artistically portray the life in the subcontinent at a crucial juncture in history without indulging in hostile parodist melodrama or extravagant, vociferous

pro techniques one may find in the recent sub continental fiction. Sidhwa's "truth telling" narration transcribes the destructive impulse of the time with such compassion in an unpretentious idiom that even most anaesthetized or cynical reader feels touched. Though the writer herself says Lenny is not herself, one feels as if the narrator Lenny were the writer herself narrating the complete story of the partition. The writer experienced the trauma as a parsi child born and brought up in Pakistan so she presents the trauma from Pakistan's point of view. She reproduces the experiences and events in a manner that makes reader feel the same, though the 21 century readers may not have witnessed the events themselves. Through the realistic description of a fictionalized story of partition readers are made to feel as if they were present at the time of partition to witness the event and trauma. The novel can be considered truly autobiographical in nature, depicting the historical incident fictionalized and colored by the writers own reflections, opinions, beliefs, feelings, emotions, and imaginations. Overall it can be said that 'Ice Candy- Man' depicts the tragedies of common people caused by partition with true colors.

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