

“Postcolonial Perspective in *Ice-candy-man*”

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Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* is a candid examination of the changing socio-political realities of the Indian sub-continent just before the partition. The central theme of the narrative is communal strife, individual identity, territorial carvings, and political savagery. It presents the Parsi Pakistani perspective of partition and the Parsi dilemma of retaining allegiance to political masters. Bapsi Sidhwa's novel informs the reader that one should learn lessons from history. The narrator of the novel, Lenny is an eight-year-old polio stricken girl child. She is an innocent Parsi, who examines the consequences of partition, dispersion, and fragmentation. Her imagination maps different landscapes. Bapsi Sidhwa rejects any communal perspective. *Ice-Candy-Man* depicts the abduction of Ayah, communal strife, partition, and violence witnessed by an innocent girl Lenny.

Key words: Territorial dispersion, fragmentation, communal strife, violence.

Introduction

Ice-Candy Man chronicles the cataclysmic event of the Indian subcontinent at the wake of Independence. The central character Lenny observes the violence of nation making. Lenny belongs to the minority Zoroastrian community who suffers trauma through loss of domestic workers, friends and neighbors. The innocent child unknowingly betrays her Ayah. Ayah is forcibly taken away by a mob led by the Ice-candy man. Ayah is the epitome of the subaltern women. She is assaulted, raped and forced into prostitution by the vengeful Ice-candy man. Ayah is named Mumtaz by her spouse and traitor, Ice-candy man. Santha's kidnapping and subsequent rapes followed by a descent to Lahore's red light district, charts a disintegration of her world.

Postcolonial Perspective

Bapsi Sidhwa subverts the British and Indian versions of the Partition in *Ice-Candy-Man*. The author gives voice to the marginalized Parsis to demonstrate that they were compelled to remain neutral in the context of the Partition. She accentuates the violence inflicted upon the Muslims by the Sikhs, shifting the blame of the Partition. The novelist reconstructs the image of Jinnah and unravels the image of Gandhi and Nehru. Jinnah in the novel is highlighted as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity. The child narrator undercuts the sublime image of Gandhi constructed by British and Indian historians. Lenny describes Gandhi as a small, dark, shriveled, old man, who looked like Hari, the gardener. Bapsi Sidhwa reduces Gandhi, who is celebrated for banishing the British from India, to the role of an eccentric dietician.

Masseur believes that Gandhi is a politician, who suits his tongue to the moment. Similarly, Nehru is a foxy politician, who despite the efforts of Jinnah will profit the most. Ice-Candy-Man thinks Nehru is a sly man since he has acquiescence. Bapsi Sidhwa's depiction of the atrocities committed by Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs are unbiased. She sympathizes with the Muslim victims. Lenny's response to Gandhi emerges as a multidimensional reality.

“The pure shaft of humor, compassion, tolerance and understanding he directs at me fuses me to everything that is feminine, funny, gentle, loving. He is a man who loves women. And lame children. And the untouchable sweeper - so he will love the untouchable sweeper's constipated girl-child best.” (87-88)

Lenny truly comprehends the hidden nature of "ice" lurking beneath the hypnotic Gandhi's 'non-violent exterior' only after the communal frenzy starts. Bapsi Sidhwa's description of Gandhi is a mixture of awe and irreverence. Her eulogy on Jinnah signifies her moral obligation to defend him. Taking a passage from Sarojini Naidu's tribute to Jinnah, Bapsi Sidhwa reinforces her argument.

The calm hauteur of his accustomed reserve masks, for those who know him, a naïve and eager humanity, an intuition quick and tender as a woman's, a humor gay and wishing as a child's prominently rational and practical, discreet and dispassionate in his estimate and acceptance of life, the obvious sanity and serenity of his worldly wisdom effectually disguise a shy and splendid idealism which is of the very essence of the man. (161)

The author resorts to subversion in *Ice-Candy-Man* to offer the perspective of the marginalized. She presents candid conversations and the attitude of the common people. Her minor characters such as Masseur, the Government House gardener and Sher Singh analyze and draw conclusions, which mirror the viewpoint of each communal group. The butcher's comment on Gandhi is a satire on communalism.

That non-violent violence monger-your precious Gandhijee - first declares the Sikhs fanatics! Now suddenly he says: "Oh dear, the poor Sikhs cannot live with the Muslims if there is a Pakistan!" What does he think we are-some kind of beast? Aren't they living with us now? (91)

There is a hint of sarcasm in the Masseur's reply. He says that Gandhi is merely a politician and it is his business to suit his tongue to the moment. Thus, their interpretations of the latest political developments give Lenny a vivid idea of the crumbling social order. Her realization that one man's religion is another man's poison is charged with profound significance.

History

Bapsi Sidhwa highlights the dilemma of the Parsi community on the eve of Partition. They were forced to make a choice and were reduced to 'irrelevant nomenclatures'. Bapsi Sidhwa unfolds the role played by the British in dividing the country. The creation of Pakistan leads to an identity-crisis in Lenny. She observes bitterly in a snap she is a Pakistani.

Bapsi Sidhwa's perspective is discernibly Pakistani. Bapsi Sidhwa believes the Partition was a violent tempest which could have been evaded and that the Partition espoused India over Pakistan. 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 favour Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri, they grant him Kashmir. Spurning logic, defying rationale, ignoring the consequences of bequeathing a Muslim State to the Hindus They grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot without which Kashmir cannot be secured. (265)

Bapsi Sidhwa refuses to accept the British and pro-Hindu Indian versions of history. She re-writes history from the Pakistani and Parsi point of view in order to unravel the Parsi conundrum at the time of the Partition. She informs the readers of Parsi displacement thirteen hundred years ago when the Arabs invaded Persia. The Parsis were forced to leave their homeland. They set sail for the port of Din. The Grand Vazir visited them with a glass of milk filled to the brim, suggesting that his land is full and there is no room for migrants. However, the Parsi forefathers, intelligently, added sugar into the milk symbolizing that the Parsis would merge into his country like sugar in the milk. The short account explains the dilemma the Parsis have faced of assimilation in an alien culture and endangering the loss of their identity. The community again faces the threat of annihilation with the impending partition. Thirteen hundred years ago, the Parsis had embraced heterogeneous Indian culture but at the crucial moment of Partition they might be compelled to choose one of the ruling communities in India. Bapsi Sidhwa subverts the historical view that the Parsis were nonchalant about the partition of the country. Parsis had a complex attitude towards Partition, illustrated in the main-hall meeting in the Fire Temple. Col. Bharucha, the president of the community in Lahore, informs the Parsis to evade the anti-colonial movement and maintain allegiance with the British Empire. He warns the Parsis that after Independence, Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs would compete for power and if the Parsis intervened they would be adversely affected. Their alienation from all the major communities ultimately forces them to support whoever rules Lahore.

Conclusion

Bapsi Sidhwa evinces that we must learn lessons from history. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*, narrated by a Parsi girl, Lenny, examines the consequences of partition, dispersion and fragmentation. Lenny is an eight-year-old polio stricken girl child. Her imagination maps different landscapes. Bapsi Sidhwa rejects any communal perspective. *Ice-Candy-Man* depicts the partition, abduction of Ayah, communal strife and violence witnessed by an innocent girl Lenny. Bapsi Sidhwa novel is a harsh critique of the Partition and the aftermath of cracking India. Millions of people were displaced on both sides of the border. The suffering and loss caused by the communal discord is not justified. The artificial borders widen the communal chasm leading to heinous crime, murder, rape of women and children, loss of lives and property. The novel is a grim reminder of the horrors of partition and the violence inflicted on innocent women. It also reveals the predicament of the Parsi community and their neutral stance towards the partition.

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