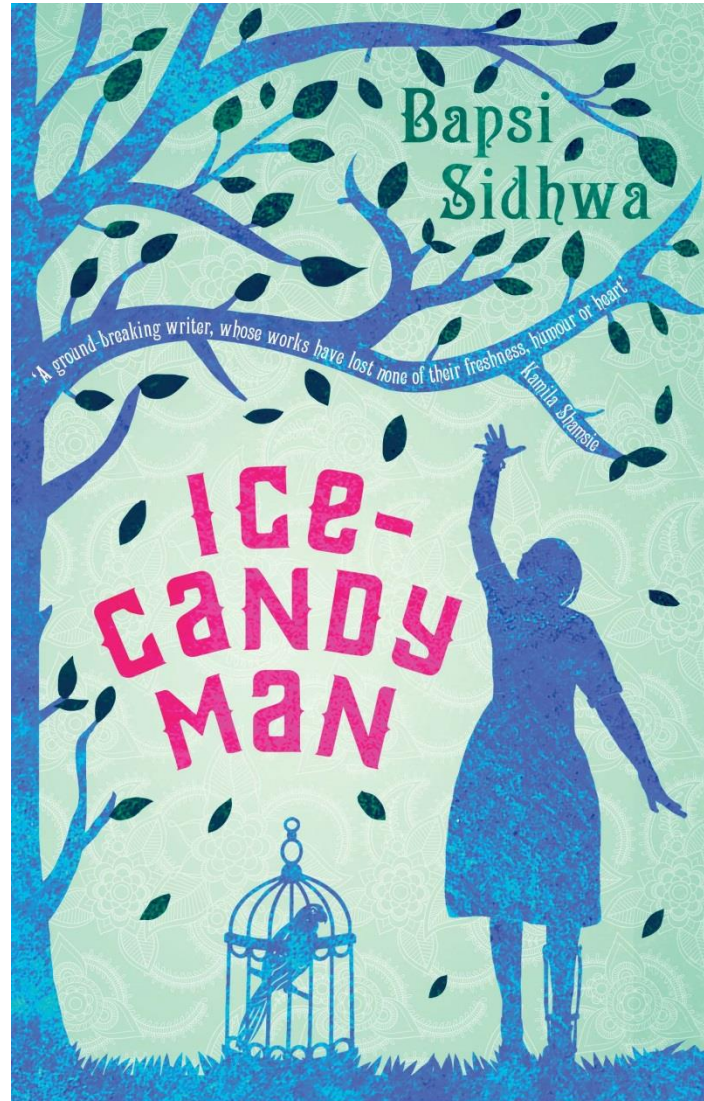


A Thematic Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's Novel
ICE-CANDY-MAN

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Abstract

Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani novelist, is an important voice in the world of common wealth fiction. Sidhwa's fiction deals with both the pre and post-colonial period of the Indian-

subcontinent. Her fiction not only brings to life the horror of the partition but also vividly portrays the complexities of life in the sub-continent violence after independence. Bapsi Sidwa's novel *Ice-Candy-Man* reveals how the violence of partition has serrated the roots of people of different communities, irrespective of ideology, friendship and rational ideas. The novel represents the historical violence of Partition from the perspective of the eight-year old polio-stricken girl Lenny, who belongs to a Parsi family. Her closest companion is her Ayah (nanny) Shanti. The novel weaves together multiple narratives of betrayal, events and conditions engendered by the Partition of the Sub-continent. The story is an actual fact based on the novelist, Bapsi Sidhwa's child hood experiences. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* thus portrays the political pre-occupation –the violence and the fragmentation caused by the partition.

Key words: Partition of the Subcontinent, Parsi, Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*

Novels on the Theme of Partition of India

A number of novels in the Indian sub-continent have been written on the theme of the Partition of India. This unforgettable historical moment has been captured as horrifying by the novelists like Kushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* (1956), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) by Manokar Malgeaonkar and these novels examine the inexorable logic of partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism and fanaticism sparked by hardening communal attitudes. These novels belong to the genre of the partition novel. These novels and effectively and realistically depict the vulnerability of human understanding and life, caused by the throes of partition which relentlessly divided friends". Sidhwa's novel are narratives of political and upheaval resulting in a mass trauma which continues to haunt the minds of generation.

Novels of Sidhwa

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 experiences of these ethnic groups. With the morbid sense of humour, Sidhwa reveals how the violence of partition has serrated the roots of people of different communities, irrespective of ideology and rational ideas. Lenny's destruction of the doll also has

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allegorical significance. It shows how even a young girl is powerless to stem the tide of surging violence within, thereby implying that grown up fanatics enmeshed in communal frenzy are similarly trapped into brutal violence. It becomes obvious that there is no solution to communal holocausts except struggle and resistance to communalism in a collective effort. There are no winners in these riots and the communal holocaust devours everything that supports life sustaining principles. It presents a scene of Holi, not of colours but of blood in the living inferno. The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* is a Pakistani version of the Partition.



Bapsi Sidhwa

Courtesy: testing2.carnegie.org

Bapsi Sidhwa was born on 1938 in Karachi in an eminent family. Her parents Peshotan and Bhandra belonged to the parsee community. Soon after Sidhwa was born, her family was cut off from the mainstream parsee life. She received numerous awards and professionship that marks the beginning of her literary fame.

Ice-Candy-Man

The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* opens with the portrayal of the pre-Partition days and its communal harmony and progresses inexorably towards a violently and reductively changing domestic and social space which indexes the impending catastrophe. Lenny notices how one day they are all one and the next day they are Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians. People shrink

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dwindling into symbols. She also notices that Ayah is no more the “all-encompassing Ayah. She is also a token” Further, she sees the common people whom she crammed into a narrow religious slot they too are diminished”. Thus the novel dehistoricizes the lived experience of communal harmony.

Lenny and Her Ayah

Lenny’s polio-stricken feet restrict her movements and also restrict her mingling with Ayah for love and companionship. This companionship proves invaluable to her for the attention she manages to get from Ayah and all her male friends. Her disability also accords her an exclusive access in to the adult life of Ayah. Lenny finds her disability to be advantage to her. When the renowned doctor Mayo tries to retrieve the strength and agility of her foot through surgery Lenny’s worry is that her serene world would be lost when she discovers that the doctor could not make much of a difference to her fact, she is reassured. She is relieved and is placed to see the gratifying abnormal leg.

Mingling with Other Groups

It is the malformed body of Lenny that draws her out of her identity as Parsi and takes her into the mixed society of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs of which Ayah is a part Lenny owes her warm relationship with Ayah and consequently with Masseur and the ice-candy-man and the indulgent attitude of her parents as she is a girl child in a patriarchal society to her deformity conversely, it is the extravagant youthfulness and unconstrained sexuality of Ayah’s eighteen year old body that finally reduces her to a “ground” on which communal violence is enacted through rape.

Bapsi reflects how at the core of the Lahore of 1940’s is the tolerant, balanced and unprejudiced civil society. “The cosmopolitan lexicon of Lahore” of the pre-partition days is one of the social diversity and political freedom, free from virulent communalism”. As the men compete for Ayah’s attention, their love for her is sensual and unconditional, normal and human. It is kind of a genial and harmonious space that brings Ayah there with Lenny day after day. Lenny watches with wonder her beloved Ayah and the power of Ayah’s sensuality, she learns many a lesson of life.

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Bapsi Sidhwa foregrounds a warm and affectionate relationship between Ayah and Lenny, uninfluenced and unmonitored by the adults in Lenny's family. In spite of the unprivileged position Ayah occupies in the society, she has the potential to exercise her agency and this fascinates as well as educates Lenny.

Violence in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*

The 1947 Partition of British India divided India into two independent nations. It was accompanied by communal violence unspeakable in its brutality and ferocity, leading "bloody vivisection". One of the profound ironies of the period is that while a rhetoric and ideology of non-violence prevailed in the political push for freedom and from Colonial rule, a blood bath accompanied the actual attainment of this goal. In the months immediately preceding and following the creation of free nation-states, untold numbers of murders, kidnappings, rapes and arsons were committed by ordinary citizens of all the major religious groups caught up in the turmoil. It is certainly true that communal violence was not unprecedented in sub-continental society, but the fact of impending Partition and subsequently its reality, unleashed a maelstrom that was so horrific that some aspects of its history have been excluded. There is substantial evidence that it was also "spontaneous", where individuals, incited into group think, perpetrated opportunistic acts of aggression, sometimes unleashing escalating cycles of retribution.

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice- Candy- Man* which has received considerable attention as a trenchant portrayal of the violence surrounding the Partition, can profitably be explored as an examination of this issue for it depicts a broad cross-section of Lahore society both before and after the city become a part of Pakistan.

The Character of Ayah

The character of Ayah in *Ice- Candy Man* can read not just as a Hindu Woman violated by a Muslim mob, but as a domestic worker or servant in the middle class Sethi household. The child narrator Lenny's social accidental betrayal of Ayah's where about in the text juxtaposes against the not so innocent, historical betrayal of subaltern hopes in the decolonization achieved by the middle class. In the taste of recuperating the stories of victims, there is a real need to resist homogenizing all traumatic experience and instead to imagine modes of recuperation which go

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beyond the hierarchal one of the middle class feminist interventions in the lives of working class Shanta Ayah's position in *Ice-Candy-Man*, is not only that of a Hindu woman working in a Parsee household who is abducted by a Muslim Mob, but also that of a woman who is a Nanny and therefore a domestic labourer in a bourgeois household. This Partition novel does not present an account of Partition Violence as a movement from Victimhood to recover in an uncomplicated manner. Bapsi Sidhwa shows Ayah as responding to her relatives in India. In these movements, refugees were able to reclaim agency and not become passive victims of state policy by consciously aligning themselves with broader movement for land reform. This contrast in the passivity of rape victims versus the organized effort for seeking readers for violence and loss endured during partition. The script of silence about rape, which the novel replicates, marks the inability to seek legal restitution or resist the aggressive efforts of the state to restore national honor by exchanging bodies of abducted women.

Rape

In the novel, the rape is an episode affecting the working class population, the promiscuous Ayah and her villainous, disreputable, paramour Ice-Candy-Man, thereby preserving the sanctity of the honor coded, bourgeois Parsee household. The class division in this novel is indeed reflected through the lens of sexuality. While the text may state, these laws are often flouted in the world of the proletariat to which Ayah and Ice-candy-Man belong. This world represents an alternative vision of gender relation and destroyed in the novel is a heteroglossic form. It can represent both the bourgeois prejudice against working class sexuality as well as subversive attraction for a greater liberatory potential of the social mores practiced by this group.

Ice-Candy-Man Depicts the Transition

By presenting two contrasting representations of the middle class wife and the working class Nanny, Sidhwa's novel, while narrating a story of partition also offers the representation of a new norm of womanhood for the new nation patriarchy.

Ice-Candy-Man depicts the transition from a more diffuse, sexually open, less codified interactions among the working class characters in Lahore's queen's parole, to the hegemonic

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rise of the idea of the new respectable woman. The novel, unlike conventional or oral history, is not just a straight forward recreation of a historic milieu. It can be thought of as a multi-layered palimpsest, gesturing a several threads in the complex partition. It is through Lenny's observations that the readers are introduced to the world of Lahore. It is through her access to the world of her middle class family and the social world of Ayah that the readers have intimate knowledge of the bourgeois and the urban proletariat, the public and the private arenas. Furthermore, Lenny is the witness/participant in several of Ayah's final capture by the mob. In the abduction scene, Lenny and her mother are both witness to the violence. By analyzing Lenny and her of roles through the class and gender structure of the household and through attention to their voyeurism, the dominant narrative's attempt to posit them as victims and innocent bystanders to the violence can be challenged. Instead, it is possible to focus on elements in the novel which gesture towards the intermingling of pleasure and power in acts of gazing at sexual intimacies, as well as violence. The many acts of voyeurism that Lenny is involved in can be seen as a part of a continuum of sexual experience that Lenny, prepubescent child, and her mother, a middleclass wife limited sexual choices, enjoy vicariously through the less restrictive, sexual opportunities available to Ayah. Ultimately, Lenny's position as a voyeur is one of power, and it is an extension of the power both she and her mother wield over Ayah because of the relationship they inhabit as mistresses and servant. They become unwilling witnesses to Ayah's subjection to mob violence, but once again their position as onlookers, "Voyeurs", and their religious and class difference protect them from falling prey to the same violence they can be distant from the violent incident and gaze at Ayah's transformation to an object of sexual pleasure. There is something even more questionable in their benevolent action of the rescue of Ayah. The very silence of Ayah, after her abduction and her acquiescence to God mother and mother's plans to repatriate her, trigger memories of the protests of many women for whom this was symptomatic of yet another violation of their desires.

Satiric Humor

Ice- Candy-Man's depiction of the world of the servants is infused with satiric humor, irreverence, a questioning of elite norms along with a vision of lived everyday religious co-existence. The novel charts the ascendancy of the urban proletariat. This is dramatized through

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the transformation of Ayah from an active member of this non elite community- infact, the pivotal to a mute and helpless victim of partition violence and a voiceless person recovered after the traumatic event. Ayah center's around the working class characters of the novel like Masseur, Ice-Candy-Man, Imam Din, Sharabatkhan, Hari, Moti, and others form a community. Their interactions take place mostly in the outdoor space of Lahore's Queen park, distinct from the middleclass Sethi family that interacts with its acquaintances indoors.

Papoo and Class Discrimination

Early in the novel, the readers are introduced to Papoo, the sweeper's daughter who lives with her family in the servants' quarters behind the Sethi bungalow. A little older than Lenny, Papoo draw attention first to the ways class difference affect the treatment meted out to the girl child. While the polio-stricken Lenny is doted on, Papoo lives a life of deprivation, a life all too routine for most subcontinental girls. The readers find out that her mother Muchho routinely "maltreats her daughter".

Violence

The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* suggests that Punjabi society even in the state of pre-partition normally, relatively untinged by communal conflict, suffered with violence, particularly that directed against women and thus what occurred during the partition was not an aberration but merely a re-contextualization of an already familiar phenomenon..

The novel's title *Ice-Candy-Man* refers to a rupture, and partition certainly ruptured both political constructs, and families and communities evident in the patterns of violence inscribed in the text. It portrays a routine acceptance of various kinds of casual, almost banal violence, and suggests that these episodes indirectly show that Ayah's abduction is one point most prominent one in a continuum. While other analyses of the novel have accurately reflected the Ayah's centrality which show how the lives of the women in the novel depict a pattern of victimization. The main plot of the Ayah's story focuses attention on the abductions of women as the symbolic epicenter of communal violence, other ancillary objectification and exploitation of women was an accepted almost routine element in the society. At the novel's outset, the Ayah is a sexually empowered woman, deploying her sensuality. In the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* Sidhwa implies,

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through the Ayah's fate and through that of the other women that sexual violence eventually leads to the proliferation of violent acts enacted to the bodies of women; the turbulence of 1946-47 re-labels rape and other acts of domestic violence against women as acts of "communal" aggression.

Literary Techniques

Novels are narrated and are told to the reader by one of the characters or by an independent narrator or they are reported to the reader in an apparently impersonal way. The presentation of a novel depends upon the point of view from which it is told. The word "technique" in literature has a wide scope of meaning. When a novelist writes a novel, he conveys his theme with the help of a story which consists of certain events taking place through certain characters. Since the novel is in a verbal form the story has to be narrated. The technique includes everything that the novelist uses for telling his story. The literary elements in narratives include setting plot, theme, characters etc., Literary techniques include metaphors, similes, personification, imagery, etc. Sidhwa handled these narrative techniques creatively in her novel *Ice-Candy-Man*.

Women writes not only portray the victimization of women but also their resilience. Though Ayah in *Ice-Candy-Man* finds herself in diminished circumstances and is totally helpless as Mumtaz in *Hira Mandi*, she simply does not give up her resistance. When godmother enquires whether he still mistreats her. She says "Not now. But I cannot forget what happened" (ICM262). Her adamant refusal to continue as *Ice-Candy-Man*'s wife event the risk of being disowned by her relatives in India as she is a 'fallen women', shows her inner strength and sense of dignity that remains intact in spite of what she undergoes. Because of the deep hurt caused by betrayal and shames at the hands of her so called friends they cannot and does not forgive *Ice-Candy-Man*. As a woman Sidhwa shares and understands the pain and humiliation and her portrayal of resilience and determination. Ayah lends an air of dignity to the fallen 'woman'.

The Plot of the Novel

Lenny's passionate love for Ayah , and the loss of innocence that accompanies their changing relationship through the Partition, is an energetic centre to the plot. Lenny's

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relationships with her mother, her powerful godmother, and her sexually invasive cousin are also important to the novel. Lenny's polio forms a significant early narrative thread. Other minor but compelling subplots include Lenny parents' changing relationship, the murder of a British official, Raima's tragic tale, and the child marriage of Papoo, the much-abused daughter of one of Lenny's family's servants.

Sidhwa's focus in this symbolic novel is not so much on the story, it is on the narrative techniques, for they contribute to the work's total effect. Foremost among them is the first – person present-tense narration. Lenny, is –or was –a child when events described takes place, and the events are seen through her consciousness, the present tense providing immediacy and a certain simultaneity between past and present. By the end of the novel, the narrator knows much about human treachery, mainly through the impact of external events. Lenny learns of the perverse nature of amorous human passions from her experiences with her cousin, who courts her with a determination comparable only to the Ice-Candy-Man's pursuit of Ayah. How religious fanaticism can breed hatred and violence is evident in the killing of the Hindus in Lahore and the Muslims in the Punjab of the Sikhs.

Bapsi Sidhwa chooses Lenny, a polio-ridden, precocious child as the narrator of the novel because she provides her with a scope for recording the events leading to bloody Partition riots with utmost objectivity, without an air of propaganda. Moreover, she comes from a Parsi family and so is free from any religious or ethnic bias. Like most of the children of her age, she has a truth-infected tongue.

Bapsi Sidhwa herself explains why she chose Lenny as the narrator of the novel: "I'm establishing a sort of truthful witness, whom the reader can believe. At the same time, Lenny is growing up - - learning, experiencing, and coming to her own conclusions" (76). Though it sounds cautioning to identify the narrator with the author, the intersections of the two at various points of the narrative seem to be deliberate and not a mere coincidence, because the novel is as much about personal history as it is about memory and imagination.

Lenny is the narrative persona in *Ice-Candy-Man*, her narration starts in her fifth year and ends after her eighth birthday. The working of native psyche is well brought out by an ingenious

use of various devices by Sidhwa in the novel. She shows with graphic clarity, how little Lenny's mind sees, grasps and ponders over the world around her through her nightmares, metaphors, both homegrown and alien.

Besides idioms which evoke a terrible national tragedy. Bapsi Sidhwa also makes use of devices such as nightmares, jokes, poetry by the Urdu poet Iqbal, and Parsi entrance to India. As the narrative progresses, everything is filtered through the consciousness of Lenny. Her interest in things around her is somewhat unnatural as the readers find her recording each and everything like a video camera. There are no restrictions on her movements and she to be enjoying all the happenings around. She can attend the Parsi meetings to discuss the future course of action in the wake of Partition conflict e also loiter around parks cheap hotels and such other places along with her and ayah and can have access to the population opinion.

Though Sidhwa's novel does focus on the changing attitude of the Parsi community, it leaves out the exploration of the dilemma that the Parsi community had to resolve regarding its unnatural schismatic division between Indian and Pakistani Parsis. Sidhwa's prowess over the genre is impressive. Her range of setting, plot, themes, and characters makes her on of the most exciting of the recent common wealth novelists.

Sidhwa's representation of an affectionate relationship between Lenny and Ayah that goes unmonitored by her parents demonstrates the subversive potential of desire. This relationship gives Lenny insight into the contradictions and the potential for resistance to her society's dominant codes. The relatively unsupervised relationship between Ayah and her charge allows Lenny's education desire to unfold without the usual injunctions against her developing too much familiarity with her nanny. Her narrative figures her growing awareness of the links between the power relations she experiences as a girl-growing awareness of the links between the power relations she experiences as a girl-growing up in patriarchal, minority community and the pressures Ayah negotiates as a female Hindu servant living in colonial India and postcolonial Pakistan.

The rebellious Papoo is "broken" when her family marries her off to an unappetizing old man. Papoo initially resists, enacting tempestuous tantrums of protestation but eventually

restated it “a precarious semblance of docility”. When Lenny arrives at the “celebration”, she finds the young bride lying in a crumpled heap of scarlet and gold cloths” and “when Lenny tries to water her up, she appears to be drunk. Later Muccho shakes her awake, calling her” ufeemi” and Lonny realizes that Papoo, “has in fact been drugged” (ICM200). The story of Papoo’s coercion into marriage reflects accurately the misfortunes of millions of sub-continental society in general connived at the subjugation of women, affording societal consents soul enslavement. It is especially ironic that Papoo’s mother is the primary agent of her daughter’s flight. No voices are raised in protest against the coercion of a young girl, indeed the marriage is attended and celebrated by the extended family and the community at large. Papoo’ rebellious spirit is ground into subservience and conformity.

Sidhwa’s text opens up a narrative space that resist this objectification, where Ayah and Lenny are portrayed as neither “heroines” who rise above the patriarchal conservative-nationalist struggles that engulf their communities nor are they complete “victims” of its physical and discursive violence. Instead, they are figured as negotiating their subjective status within the experience and interpretation and shaking the outcome of material events as they do so. Moreover, Sidhwa’s narrative exists between social structures and individual agents. Her novel *Ice-Candy-Man* engages with the material and discursive implications of Partition and makes visible the agencies which slip through structures in new situations, at transitional moments or in luminal areas where women like Ayah or Lenny question and state interests.

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