

Ishfaq Hussain Bhat

Ex Student,

Department of English,

University of Kashmir.

Thune, Kangan, Ganderbal, Jammu and Kashmir.

eshfaqbhat786@gmail.com

**Ice-Candy-Man as a Partition Novel: A Tale of Communal Violence
And Bigotry.**

Abstract:

Bapsi Sidhwa (b. 1938) is a Pakistani novelist of Parsi descent who writes in English. Bapsi Sidhwa is beyond doubt one of the best contemporary novelists writing in English. Her novel *Ice-Candy-Man* (1991) earned her international acclaim and acceptance as one of the most promising English novelists from South Asia. “The novel brings out Sidhwa’s qualities as a prolific writer, her heightened sense of story and character and her moral vision of community.”¹ *Ice-Candy-Man* belongs to the genre of the partition novel. It is a tale of bloody Partition of India. The novel effectively, realistically and artistically depicts the unforgettable historical moment of Partition which relentlessly divides friends and thus makes them communal and destructive. The paper aims to analyze *Ice-Candy-Man* as a Partition novel vis-à-vis communal violence and bigotry.

Keywords: Communal, partition, bigotry, distrust, chaos, violence.

“I was just attempting to write the story of what religious hatred and violence can do to people and how close evil is to the nature of man. Under normal circumstances people can be quite ordinary and harmless; but once the mob mentally takes over, evil surfaces. Evil is very close to the surface of man.”

(Bapsi Sidhwa)

The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* is set in pre-Partition India in Lahore. The novel describes events of turmoil on the Indian sub-continent when it was disintegrated. “*Ice-Candy-Man* presents the turbulent upheaval of Partition from the view point of a handicapped Parsi girl child, Lenny.”² “She looks at characters belonging to different communities through the prism of her own Parsi sensitivity. The novel presents the horrifying details of callousness, human loss and migration. It describes society which has lost its courage, and therefore only crumbles away. It not only presents the barbaric details of atrocities perpetuated by one community over the other, but also delineates various manifestations of pettiness and degenerated values which, like termite, had hallowed the inner structural strength of the society.”³ Githa Hariharan while praising Sidhwa’s work in *Economic Times* states:

“[Sidhwa has captured] the turmoil of the times, with a brilliant combination of individual growing up pains and collective anguish of a newly independent but divided country.”

“Sidhwa, in this novel, shows how during communal strife, sanity, human feelings and past friendship are forgotten. Cultural and religious exclusivity leads initially to indifference and later to contempt which eventually becomes the breeding ground for communal violence and bigotry. Sidhwa effectively establishes how religious fundamentalism with its stinking tradition affected the two nations in general and women in particular. In Sidhwa’s view, women are often the victims. She shows the brutalities which communal frenzy causes. Even friends and lovers turn hostile.”⁴ This has artistically been portrayed through the relationship between different communities in the novel. Before the riots break out all communities live in peace and harmony and are not conscious of their religious identities. However, when the riots break out everything undergoes a change.

Almost all male characters are presented as communal, indifferent, apathetic and destructive in the novel. “Bare facts present the horror of the greatest communal divide in history. Bapsi Sidhwa aptly shows the inexorable logic of Partition which moves on relentlessly leaving even sane people and friends helpless and ineffective.”⁵ During a quarrel, Sher Singh threatens the Muslims with dire consequences in the event of Partition: “You don’t worry about our clout!

We can look out for ourselves... You'll feel our clout all right when the time comes!" This shows how deep the communal discord among the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs had become. Pir Pindo, a Muslim village is attacked by Sikhs. Muslims in the village are killed, their women gang-raped. Men, women and children are mercilessly butchered. Women are so badly treated and harassed that it is decided that the women and girls of Pir Pindo would gather at Choundhry's house and pour kerosene oil around the house to burn themselves. Only Ranna, a small boy escapes. Ranna, wounded, runs for life when the Sikhs attack Pir Pindo. The massacre of Pir Pindo presents perhaps the vilest side of communal discord. This episode has been mentioned at length by Bapsi Sidhwa to highlight and condemn the communal violence and bigotry:

"There were too many ugly and abandoned children like him scavenging in the looted houses and the rubble of burnt-out buildings. His rages clinging to his wounds, straw sticking in the scalped skull, Ranna wondered through the lanes stealing chapattis and grain from houses strewn with dead bodies rifling the corpses for anything he could use... No one minded the semi-naked specter as he looked in doors with his knowing, wide-set peasant eyes."

Another instance of this communal violence is manifested in the train episode:

"A train from Gurdaspur has just come... Everyone in it is dead... butchered... two gunny-bags full of women's breasts."

The women were not only killed but first tortured, raped and then butchered like animals. This incident so horrifies Dilnawaz that his communal and obscurantist passions are aroused.

"The communal frenzy has a distorting effect on people and it leads to feelings of suspicions and distrust. When there is news of trouble at Gurdaspur, the Ice-Candy-Man and his friends at once interpret it as: "There is uncontrollable butchering going on in Gurdaspur."

In the vitiated communal atmosphere, insanity prevails as ordinary men lose their rationality. This is best exemplified in the rage of Ice-Candy-Man who states:

‘I’ll tell you to your face- I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur...that night I went mad, I tell you, I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I’d known all my life! I hated their guts.’ ”6

Bapsi Sidwa highlights the communal discord found in different communities through the dilemma and fear of the Parsi community:

“If we are stuck with the Hindus they’ll swipe our business from under our noses, and sell our grand fathers in the bargain: if we are stuck with Muslims they’ll convert us by the sword! And God help us if we are stuck with Sikhs.”

At this moment, Colonel Bharucha allays the fears of his community by advising them to cast their lot with whoever rules Lahore:

“Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land.”

Bapsi Sidhwa in this novel highlights and condemns the uncivilized attitude of the people who, blinded by their communal bigotry, rape and kill women. When the riots break out Ayah, the protagonist, becomes a victim of the lust of the uncivilized and frenzied mob. Dilnawaz, the Ice-Candy-Man, leading the Muslim mob raids Godmother’s house in search of the Hindus.

Mad with the rage, he throws Ayah into the hands of the frenzied mob:

“They drag Ayah out. They drag her by arms...her bare feet- that want to move backwards-are forced forward. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like dead child’s scream...Four men stand pressed against her...their lips stretched in triumphant grimances.”

Rape is the greatest violence because it implies that a woman has no right on her own body and it can be used by anyone. Such acts of violence are an intimate destruction of the feminine. Similarly the Sikh families are also attacked in Lahore. Sher Singh, the zoo attendant flees from

Lahore, due to insecurity, after his brother-in-law is killed. Prakash and his family migrate to Delhi and Rahoo Singh and his pretty sisters are escorted to a convoy to Amritsar. The moneylender Kripa Ram flees leaving guineas and money behind. Hari, the gardener, is circumcised and converted to Islam for protection. Moti, the sweeper, opts for Christianity, the Masseur is butchered grotesquely, markets and houses are burnt and living beings are torn asunder. Thus Partition is shown as a series of images and events depicting human loss and agony. The dislocation of settled life is aptly revealed by Lenny:

“Lahore is suddenly emptied of yet another hoary dimension: there are no Brahmins with caste-marks- or Hindus in dhoties with bodhis. Only hordes of Muslim Refugees.”

When Lenny learns that India is going to be broken, she has many unanswered queries:

“Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother’s then?”

Though Lenny is baffled by such questions, she gradually becomes aware of religious differences. She worriedly remarks:

“It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindus, Muslims, Sikh, Christians. People shrink, dwindling into symbols.”

At the festival of Holi, instead of splattering friends with bright colours, people splatter each other with blood. Bapsi Sidhwa artistically shows the human loss in Partition:

“Instead, wave upon scruffy wave of Muslim refugees flood Lahore- and the Punjab west of Lahore. Within three months seven million Muslims and five million Hindus and Sikhs are uprooted in the largest and the most terrible exchange of population known to history. The Punjab has been divided.”

Mushirul Hasan rightly states:

“The history books do not record the pain, trauma and sufferings of those who had to part from their kin, friends and neighbours, their deepening nostalgia for places they had lived in for generations, the anguish of devotees removed from their places of worship, and the harrowing experiences of the countless people who boarded trains thinking they would be transported to the realizations of their dreams, but of whom not a man, woman or child survived the journey.”

“The unpleasant historical event of Partition has left deep scars on the psyche of people of both the countries - India and Pakistan.”⁷ Sidhwa describes how political leaders manipulate the ideals and generate feelings of suspicions and distrust in the psyche of the common man. “Once communal and obscurantist passions are aroused, the social fabric is torn asunder, leading to wanton and reckless destruction. The novel artistically describes the mindless Partition violence and focuses on its socio-historical consequences to women. *Ice-Candy-Man* enables the reader to understand the extent of the trauma of Partition and review it in its historical context, and thus suggestively delineates the fruitlessness of violence in individual and collective lives.”⁸ Describing the horrors of Partition depicted in the novel, Sylvia Clayton aptly remarks: “The colossal upheaval of Partition, when cities were allotted to India and Pakistan like pieces on a chess-board, and their frightened inhabitants were savagely uprooted, runs like an earth tremor through this thoughtful novel.”

Ice-Candy-Man is thus a narrative of upheaval resulting in a mass trauma and exodus, which continues to haunt the people of both the countries. “It examines the inexorable logic of Partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by hardening communal attitudes. It looks at Partition as a means of spreading disharmony which resulted in frenzy and chaos. The sense of violence and venomous hatred of friends who had rationalized about the impossibility of violence have harrowing impact on every character in the novel.”⁹ Bapsi Sidhwa associates

Partition with evil and destruction. In this novel Bapsi Sidhwa artistically portrays the communal violence and bigotry which resulted in mass trauma and exodus during Partition. In the novel she offers her most eloquent and comprehensive response and perspective on the philosophy, ideology and rationale of Partition.

Works Cited

Bruschi, Isabella. Partition in Fiction: Gendered Perspective. Atlantic. 2010. Macwan, Mital Joseph. A Critical Analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's Major Novels. 2014.

Hasan, Mushirul. India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization. Oxford University Press. 1993. Print.

Sidhwa, Bapsi. Ice-Candy-Man. New Delhi: Penguin Books India. 1989.

Web Sources:

1. <https://www.google.co.in/amp/s/neoenglish.wordpress.com/2010/08/28/structure-of-ice-candy-man/amp/>

2. neoenglishsystem.blogspot.in/2010/08/brutal-realities-of-partition-depicted.html?m=1

3. <https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&source=web&ct=j&url=http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/7881/8/08-chapter>

4. neoenglishsystem.blogspot.in/2010/08/ice-candy-man-communal-frenzy-and.html?m=1

5. neoenglishsystem.blogspot.in/2010/08/ice-candy-man-communal-frenzy-and.html?m=1

6. neoenglishsystem.blogspot.in/2010/08/ice-candy-man-communal-frenzy-and.html?m=1

7. neoenglishsystem.blogspot.in/2010/08/novel-today-and-ice-candy-man-bapsi.html?m=1

8. neoenglishsystem.blogspot.in/2010/08/brutal-realities-of-partition-depicted.html?m=1

9. neoenglishsystem.blogspot.in/2010/08/ice-candy-man-communal-frenzy-and.html?m=1