



Disability as Narrative Power: Lenny's Polio -Stricken Body in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*

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Abstract

Ice-Candy Man, a novel by Bapsi Sidhwa, published in 1988, presents a unique reinterpretation of the history of Partition through the consciousness of Lenny, a polio-afflicted Parsi child narrator. The purpose of this paper is to analyze how Lenny has disabled body functions not as a symbol of weakness but as a source of narrative authority and ethical perception. The theoretical frameworks provided by both Disability Studies and postcolonial studies. Based on Disability Studies and postcolonial thought, the work contends that Lenny's disability gives her a marginal yet privileged observational position, allowing for a critique of violence, nationalism, and the power of the patriarchy in the Partition of India. Contrary to the dominant paradigm in the representation of the Partition of India in existing scholarship that highlights the powerful masculine ideals of heroism, Sidhwa's novel focuses on vulnerability, immobility, and innocence in exploring the human aspect of partition. The relevance of the article will illustrate on how the experience of disability is actually a strategy in the telling of the tale that interrupts the linearly ordered history and the assumptions inherent in the colonial and nationalist construct of able. Finally, *Ice-Candy Man* retrieves disability as the strength of narrative, replacing the notion of physical difference with the perspective of morality.

Keywords: disability studies, partition literature, narrative voice, embodiment, postcolonial fiction

Introduction

Disability in literature was conventionally figured either as the sign of moral impairment or as a problem needing correction and cure. The Disability Studies approach challenges the simplistic correlations of disability in favor of the construction of disability as experience. Disability in postcolonial literature often intersects with experiences of violence, displacement, and marginalization and, therefore, represents one of the key sites of exploration of power discourse.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* situates disability right at the center of its concerns through its protagonist, Lenny, who is a young Parsi girl suffering from polio. Lenny's disability makes her mobility-impaired but also enables her to observe things keenly, thus keeping her both inside and outside the social context in which she is situated. As a child, as a Subject from a minority community, and as one suffering from disability, Lenny is situated in a position of triple marginality that makes her a witness to the events leading to Partition, despite her non-engagement with the ideological fervor of



Partition. Through the argument that Lenny's disabled body is a kind of narrative power, this paper will show how Lenny's disability disrupts the hegemonic historical narrative in favor of vulnerability, slowness, and ethical thinking over nationalist violence and masculine heroism. In a reading of *Ice-Candy Man* from the perspective of Disability Studies, this research highlights the ways in which bodily difference alters the narrative of power.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the portrayal of physical disability in *Ice-Candy Man*.
- To analysis how Lenny's disabled body informs narratives of perspective and authority.
- In order to examine the dynamic connections among disability, childhood, and history, it is necessary witnessing.
- Applying Disability Studies theory on Partition literature.
- In order to determine the degree to which Sidhwa contests ablest and nationalist.

Research Methodology

The current study applies a qualitative textual method in its analysis of *Ice-Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa, which was published in 1988. Ideas such as postcolonial theory and others from authors such as "Lennard J. Davis" and "Garland- Thomson" are applied in the study for the purpose of analysis. The study applies MLA documentation style.

Research Gap

The critical studies that are currently available on *Ice-Candy Man* are largely focused on the trauma of Partition, gendered violence, and communal identity. Although Lenny's experience of life as a child has been the subject of critical discourse, her disability has largely been constructed in *Ice-Candy Man* as incidental to the narrative rather than central to it. The current research seeks to fill this gap in that it positions disability at the center of a critical approach that is a context for understanding history, violence, and power.

Literature Review

Disability Studies academics argue that it is essential to recognize that the problem of disability is not just a biological or medical issue but also a cultural and discursive process. Lennard J. Davis analyzes the ideology of "normalcy." Davis states that the body is standardized based on an ideological imperative (Davis 29). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's work emphasizes the significance of representation and its relation to culture. According to her, representation is an essential part of literary studies as it helps create the body images of the culture (Garland-Thomson 5). The work of Michael Oliver introduces a social model of disability that shifts the topic from the body to society. Disabling social environments (Oliver 11).

In Partition literature, trauma, memory, and gendered suffering have received considerable analysis in Partition literature, but disability as a concept remains relatively untheorized. A close analysis of *Ice-Candy Man* through the optic of Disability Theory will highlight how physical disability and violence of a different kind correlate to produce new modes of telling and watching.

Disability as Storytelling Power in *Ice-Candy Man*

Lenny's physically disabled body is not merely a background fact in *Ice-Candy Man* but is actually the axis on which the narrative structure and vision of the novel revolve. Lenny's disabled motility system circumscribes her physical presence in the public and political domain, even as this disability paradoxically magnifies her role as an observer. Lenny's presence is largely in the interior spaces, gardens, and public spaces, and she occupies spaces that are liminal, where the private life spills over into the public history. In this way, she is able to hear the conversations of adults, the fears of the community, and the ideological Change without ever being thought of as an active listener. Lenny's disability is thus an example of what Disability Studies calls "alternative epistemology," a knowledge practice that is rooted in observation, vulnerability, and sensory awareness rather than physical action or ideological declaration.



In contrast with able nationalist stories, where speed and territorial and masculine heroism characterize the nationalist imperative, Lenny's perspective might be described as one of quietude and observation. However, her pace is clearly in opposition to the rapid escalation of violence in the Partition of India. Indeed, the incongruity in pace draws attention to the violence of change in politics, reflecting how politics progresses with a catastrophescale rapidity, leaving bodies in a powerless situation with no possibility of keeping up with it and getting out of its destructive sweep. In fact, as Lennard J. Davis argues, the modern obsession with speed, efficiency, and progress has a necessarily marginalizing impact on those bodies that do not move at the same rate (35). In any case, Lenny's body, in its opposition to acceleration, can be seen as a silent commentary on nationalist politics when these associate progression with territorial and violent movement through territory. Forces the reader to dwell on the fear, uncertainty, and loss that a dominant historical narrative would gloss over.

Lenny's disability is also significantly connected with childhood innocence, giving her story even more potency. She, as a child, does not have ideological frameworks required for a complete understanding of the political logic of communal hatred. Nevertheless, this imperfect understanding proves to be ethically fertile rather than restrictive. Her confusion and curiosity articulate the irrationality and arbitrariness of violence better than adult understanding replete with religion-political discourse. Since Lenny has not imbibed the rigidity of communal identities yet, she watches the genesis of communal violence with a disbelieving heart. Her body, damaged with polio, socially remains non-threatening, enabling her free access to the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Parsi world without exciting any doubts. This peculiar kind of freedom in social and communal respects, combined with physical immobility, gives her a very special kind of narrative authority.

However, Lenny's physical vulnerability also has an interlocked relationship with the fragility of the position of women in the context of Partition, as

represented paradigmatically in the figure of Ayah. While Ayah's able-bodied female flesh renders her hyper-visible and sexually vulnerable in a climate of communal aggression, Lenny's disabled body is inscribed by impairment rather than desire. This differential inscription highlights the ways in which power differentially inscribes itself upon bodies based on gender, sexuality, and physical ability. Ayah's body becomes a site of contestation across masculine and communal possessiveness, whereas Lenny's remains relatively immune only because it is so clearly outside normative dispensations of desirability. In this case, disability works as a sort of narrative insulation: witness even when everybody else is erased, displaced, or killed. At the same time, Sidhwa resists the romanticization of disability as moral immunity. Lenny's survival is tinged by guilt especially regarding Ayah's fate. Her unin-tended betrayal shows that disability does not confer moral immunity but rather positions the subject within dense networks of responsibility and power. This ethical complication of witnessing is clearly an enrichment of the novel's exploration of witnessing; indeed, implying that survival itself may be a morally complicated position.

Lenny's disability hence facilitates the narrative but does not excuse Lenny from complicity, underscoring the novel's rejection of simple moral dualisms. Lenny's disability, therefore, makes it easier for the story to unfold, but it in no way absolves Lenny of his complicity, thus emphasizing the novel's refusal to be bound by simplistic notions of morality. Moreover, *Ice-Candy Man* subverts ablest ideologies in that it resists curing, overcoming, or solving Lenny's disability as a plot device or as something to be transcended metaphorically. In *Ice-Candy Man*, Lenny's disability is not something to be overcome or solved but rather something, that defines Lenny's perspective and identity. Ultimately, instead of bringing about physical healing, *Ice-Candy Man* brings about historical consciousness as opposed to physical or ableist healing. In this way, Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* brings about socially modeled concepts of disability in that it is not Lenny's physical disability that leads to his



marginalization during the time of Partition, but how society feels about people with physical disabilities. Lenny's polio-weakened body is a narrative counter-discourse to dominant historiography. In a historiography in which the role of the abled male and territorial thinking are privileged, *Ice-Candy Man* privileges a disabled child's slow witnessing and its emotional undertones. In her use of disability as a trope of narrative subversion in relation to historiography, Sidhwa asserts the value of bodily or epistemological deviance in bringing about a different kind of knowledge and truth.

Conclusion

Ice-Candy Man challenges the conventional view of disability as a lack and instead establishes it as a site of narrative empowerment. Bapsi Sidhwa's novel, through the character of Lenny with polio, articulates a counter-history of Partition with a focus on vulnerability, ethics, and the body as a site of perception and witnessing. As a disabled person, Lenny is able to observe from a marginal but authoritative position, and through her character, she testifies to the price of nationalist and communal violence in the Partition of India and Pakistan. Through the novel, the historical narrative is challenged in its nationalist and masculinist ideologies, and the notion that disability can be a site of knowledge and resistance in itself is asserted. In aligning with the site and idea of Disability Studies, *Ice-Candy Man* proposes a construct of disability as a relation and a narrative construct interfered with

and conditioned by politics and ethics. Sidhwa's novel forces a reevaluation of whose bodies enter the historiographic project and how a marginal site can redefine the memory of a community in general. In the novel, disability becomes a strength rather than a limitation and a fantastic site of seeing and narrating the world in general.

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