

A Study of Women and Violence in Bapsi Sidhwa's Novel *Ice Candy Man*

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Abstract

*Bapsi Sidhwa (1938) is a Pakistani novelist of Gujrati, Parsi and Zoroastrian descent who was born in Karachi. Her novel *Cracking India* (1991) was originally published under title *Ice Candy Man*. In year 1998 it was adapted into movie under title "Earth 1947". Bapsi Sidhwa has earned international acclaim and acceptance as one of the prominent and promising novelists from Asia. *Ice Candy man* is a tale of cataclysmic violence of 1947. *Ice Candy Man* belongs to the genre of the partition novel. Partition is remembered as time of great uncertainty, humiliation, trauma, anger and sadness. The violence was orchestrated with political purpose and organization resulting in near civil war conditions in north India where religion alone defined the basis of political identity. As bodies of women were marked sexually and ethnically since ages and are practiced till today. Female body has undoubtedly become a transitional object which is symbolizing site of intelligibility in rhetoric of nationalism. The paper aims to analyze the unforgettable historical moment of Partition in which family were relentlessly divided and women become the victim of gendered violence.*

Keywords: *partition, female body, gendered, violence*

Recent revisions to the history of the Indian subcontinent's partition have attempted to undo the erasure of this holocaust from official historiography by resurrecting the stories of women who survived the agony of ethnic cleansing and rape. The female body and its representation in the Partition myth is a place of not only racial competitiveness but also class antagonisms colliding. This is especially visible in Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*, which has gained a reputation as a representative Partition fiction written in English. Sidhwa's clever use of the novelistic genre in depicting Partition can provide insight into the complexities of rape's position in the Indian Partition. During the split, women made the greatest sacrifice. They were the victims of sexualized assault, and they have given up their honour. They were betrayed by their enemies, who took their children and spouse. They were the last to seek medical help and food when resources were scarce. Women have lost their souls, their identities, in addition to their honour. Sidhwa's work depicts how rationality, familial ties, and human feelings are

neglected during communal warfare. The exclusivity of culture and religion causes apathy at first, but gradually creates a fertile ground for women's identity crises. In *Ice Candy Man*, the figure of Ayah can be seen as a domestic worker or servant in the middle-class Sethi household, rather than a Hindu lady who has been raped by a Muslim mob. The inadvertent betrayal of Ayah's location in the text by the kid narrator Lenny contrasts with the not-so-innocent historical betrayal of subaltern hopes in the Indian middle class's decolonization. In order to recover victim tales, it is critical to reject homogenising all traumatic experiences and instead create modalities of recovery that go beyond the hierarchical one of middle-class feminist interventions in working-class women's lives.

Almost all of the novel's male characters are uninterested and disinterested. Sidhwa shows how religious fanaticism, with its rotting heritage, has affected individuals from all walks of life, especially women, in her work. Women, in Sidhwa opinion, are frequently the victims of community hysteria, as she demonstrates. Before and

after the violence, Sidhwa illustrates the relationship between two communities. Bapsi Sidhwa aptly depicts the inexorable logic of partition, which carries on inexorably, leaving even rational people and families impotent and useless. Sidhwa narrates the history of times through her tale, which is based on true events of Partition. After a very scant recording of this event in official Indian historiography, Sidhwa's novel is a reconsideration of the Partition episode at a time when increased historical and social interest in this holocaust has emerged. Attempts in the 1990s by anthropologist Veena Das and feminist oral historians Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, and Kamala Bhasin to describe various layers of women's experiences of Partition are instances of scholarly attempts. In this way, Sidhwa's novelistic portrayal of Partition echoes the efforts of anthropologists and historians to break the official historic silence on the holocaust by reclaiming the oral testimonies of communities affected by ethnic riots and women who were abducted and raped on both sides of the border. While examining the connection between gender and violence, in her famous essay "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain," Veena Das writes, "In the literary imagination of India, the violence of Partition was about inscribing desire on the bodies of women in a manner that we have not yet understood. In the mythic imagination in India, victory or defeat in war was ultimately inscribed on the bodies of women"(82). Thus rape in Partition exemplifies the "intimate connection" of sexuality in the construction of nationalism. Das traces the origin of the equation of a woman's body and its violation to nationalist violation in the colonial depictions of rape in narratives of rape following the Sepoy Mutiny.²

Abduction, which frequently accompanied or preceded rape and was followed by sale or prostitution, and sometimes marriage to the abductors with the establishment of new bonds or family identities, represents the more complex and broken side of women's experience of Partition. The policies of the new states, India and Pakistan, through the passage of the Abducted Persons (Healing and Restoration) Act of 1949, further damaged this fragile process of emotional recovery following communal strife. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* demonstrates the compulsive engagement

of political elites in the implementation of this legislation, according to Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin's research. The rhetoric can be traced in the following speeches by Nehru and Gandhi.

In a Letter to Evan Jenkins, Nehru Wrote

There is one point, however, to which I should like to draw your attention, and this is the question of rescuing women who have been abducted or forcibly converted. You will realize that nothing adds to popular passions more than stories of abduction of women, and so long as these... women are not rescued, trouble will simmer and might blaze out. (qtd. in Menon and Bhasin 68)

In another excerpt, Menon and Bhasin give us a glimpse of Gandhi's thinking on this issue: I hear women have this objection that the Hindus are not willing to accept back the recovered women because they say that they have become impure. I feel that this is a matter of great shame. That woman is as pure as the girls who are sitting by my side. And if any one of those recovered women should come to me, then I will give them as much respect and honor as I accord to these young maidens. (qtd. in Menon and Bhasin 99)

In this patriarchal society, women are always the first victims of any violence that occurs in the city. Women's issues were generally unheard and unspoken, although many educated women spoke up to express the trauma and violence women experienced during the division. Women writers depicted partition as a hellish experience in which women of all religions were abducted and raped. As a result of the city's circumstances, some family members attempted to murder their ladies, and some women murdered themselves in order to die in a dignified manner. The trauma these women experienced is difficult to pinpoint, but trauma theorists Cathy Caruth and La Capra provide insights into the trauma of the characters who were subjected to Partition violence.

Everyone who faced partition has undergone some or the other kind of trauma. To understand one another history trauma must be recounted. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy states that there is a deep link between history and trauma: "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, [...] his-tory is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (192). The

understanding of one's own trauma helps in understanding others trauma because others trauma becomes more visible when we relate it with our trauma.

Trauma is a sort of emotional and psychological damage that develops as a result of distressing event and can have substantial and long term psychological effects. Trauma is derived from greek word "wound" which means separation of bodily tissues. Kai Erikson says,

By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively... By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with 'trauma'. But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared:..."We' no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a large communal body (153-4)

The uncertainty provided by class complicates the representation of rape in Sidhwa's Partition fiction. In her crucial re-evaluation of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, Ambreen Hai addresses the problematic character of the novel's image of postcolonial feminism, as well as the feminist reading and study it encourages. Ayah's marginalisation as a working-class Hindu lady is perhaps highlighted for the first time in this story by Hai. She claims that Ayah's rape and subsequent repatriation to India, in the cultural economy of Pakistani nationalism, distances the trauma of Partition and confines its violence to a working class and Hindu-Muslim phenomenon, consolidating Parsee minority identity in Pakistan at the expense of Hindu minority presence.

Hai also argues that the perpetrators of sexual violence against women are represented exclusively as working class men. Any other representation of sexual violence is "not permissible within the bourgeois imaginary of the text"(Hai 40 I). Hai interprets the actions of the Parsee women in rescuing Ayah as limited but still

laudable as they urge political activism in a segment of Pakistani society that is "notoriously apathetic"(402).

The novel's premise revolves around Ayah, a nanny in a bourgeois Parsee household in Lahore during Partition. Ayah is a lovely Hindu woman who looks after Lenny, an eight-year-old girl suffering from polio. Ice-Candy-Man and Masseur are the two suitors who are most interested in Ayah. As Partition's political events infiltrate the Sethi household's home environment, Ayah's acquaintances become increasingly divided along religious lines. With reports of ethnic massacre, Lahore's polyglot, tolerant culture shifts. From the east, death trains carrying massacred bodies arrive. One train, which was supposed to bring Ice-Candy-relatives, Man's arrives with sacks full of women's breasts instead of women. Masseur is discovered dead and placed in a sack in front of the Sethi residence. Lahore's Hindu and Sikh neighbours have fled. Finally, Ice-Candy-Man leads a crowd of men into the Sethi household in the novel's climax scene, demanding retribution on the Hindu servants, notably Ayah. Imam Din, an elderly and respected Muslim, swears in the name of Allah that Ayah has departed for Amritsar while Lenny's mother is hiding her inside. However, Lenny, who has faith in Ayah's ex-boyfriend Ice-Candy-Man, reports that Ayah is inside the house..Despite Ayah's screams and Lenny and her mother's dumb paralysis, the mob marches in, snatches her out, and carts her away on a cart.

Later, Lenny's mother becomes active in humanitarian relief efforts, delivering rationed gas to leaving families and rescuing abducted women. After finding Ayah as a prostitute in Heera Mandi, Lahore's red light district, Godmother and Mother rescue her from Ice-Candy-Man and transport her across the border to Amritsar. Hamida, Lenny's second Ayah, is likewise a rescued woman. The majority of the action in *Ice Candy Man* is depicted through Lenny's first-person narrative. She purports to reflect a child's point of view on the horrific acts. However, there are temporal alterations in the narrative voice between a child's consciousness and an adult's consciousness. Throughout fact, Lenny is far too precocious in the story to be considered a youngster with no adult consciousness.

We are exposed to Lahore's world through Lenny's insights. We have extensive knowledge of the bourgeois

and urban proletariat, public and private arenas, thanks to her access to the world of her middle-class family and Ayah's social sphere. Lenny is also a witness/actor in several of Ayah's sexual interludes, as well as Ayah's final mob capture. Lenny and her mother both witness the violence during the kidnapping scenario. The dominant narrative's attempt to portray Lenny and her mother as victims and innocent spectators to the crime is challenged by examining their positions via the household's class and gender structure, as well as their voyeurism. Instead, concentrate on sections of the text that allude to the blending of pleasure and power in acts of staring at sexual intimacies, as well as violence. The numerous acts of voyeurism that Lenny engages in can be understood as part of a continuum of sexual experiences that Lenny, a prepubescent kid, and her mother, a middle-class lady with restricted sexual options, enjoy vicariously through Ayah's more open-ended sexual prospects. In the end, Lenny's role as a voyeur is one of power, and it is an extension of the power she and her mother have over Ayah as mistresses and servants. They become unwitting witnesses to Ayah's mob violence, but their status as observers, "voyeurs," and their religious and social differences shield them from becoming victims of the same violence. They may stand back from the violent episode and observe Ayah's transformation into an ethnic target, just as Lenny's stare had converted Ayah into a sexual object. Their compassionate deed in rescuing Ayah raises even more questions. After her kidnapping and consent to Godmother and Mother's plans to repatriate her, Ayah's quiet evokes recollections of many women's complaints, as this was emblematic of yet another violation of their desires.

The line of class that divides female identity in the bourgeois household into mistress and nanny divides the novel, *Ice Candy Man*, in a less overt way than the Hindu-Muslim difference. The abduction scenario, on the most basic level, brings the triangular love narrative between Ayah, Masseur, and Ice-Candy-Man to a close. When Ayah rejects Ice Candy-Man in favor of Masseur, he seeks vengeance by inciting a Muslim mob to kidnap and rape her, following the established pattern of ethnic revenge

through the rape and possession of women of the "other" religion/ethnicity.

This sensual triangle and its jealousies, on the other hand, interact with the less evident but always present triangle of Lenny, Ayah, and her suitors. Lenny learns about adult sexuality through her voyeur role and her privileged access to Ayah's sexual intimacies. Lenny's job differs from others in that she is not a passive observer. She does, in fact, occupy a liminal position between observer and participant once more. Ayah and Masseur have an early scene together, Lenny narrates;

I take advantage of Ayah's admirers. "Massage me" I demand, kicking the handsome masseur... Taking a few drops of almond oil from one of the bottles in his cruet set, he massages my wasted leg and then my okay leg. His fingers work deftly, kneading, pummeling, soothing. They are knowing fingers, very clever and sometimes, late in the evening, when he and Ayah and I are alone, they massage Ayah under her sari. Her lids close. She grows still and languid. A pearly wedge gleams between her lips and she moans, a fragile piteous sound of pleasure. (28)

Although Mother and Ayah may not enjoy the same level of intimacy as Lenny and Ayah, it is much easier to picture them as rivals than Lenny and Ayah. It's possible that the competition is about Lenny, but it's more likely that it's about dominating the novel's sexual landscape. Mother is a thin shadow in comparison to Ayah, who is clearly the centre of the novel's erotic action. Ayah could be viewed as a danger to the new nation patriarchy's established standard of respectable womanhood. Her rape and subsequent plunge into prostitution may be interpreted as a warning to the new nation of Pakistan to reinstall monogamous heterosexuality as the preferred mode of female sexuality. The novel is multi-layered, hinting to multiple interpretations of Lenny's betrayal. The novel contrasts Lenny's mother's apathy during the kidnapping scenario with her extraordinarily active participation in assisting with the transportation of refugees by giving families with rationed fuel. Lenny had before observed the burning of Lahore and narrated, "I stare at the tamasha, mesmerized by the spectacle. It is like a gigantic fireworks display..." (147),

The observer of violence is thus a participant in the mechanisms of cruelty and pleasure. As Lenny watches the city of Lahore burn, she is once again cast as a bystander to violence. She is later seen mutilating her dolls in another scenario. Lenny is, on one level, imitating the violence she sees around her. However, she appears to be confining her destructive desire to one inanimate body by inflicting agony and marking the body of an inanimate object. This act could be considered a mourning ritual. Lenny is able to return to a sense of everyday normalcy and endure the horrible experiences she is exposed to by inflicting her psychic suffering on a physical body.

The compassionate events of women's life are presented by Bapsi Sidhwa where she represents how women's were fragmented during partition. The philosophical vision of Sidhwa is presented in her writings. In the novel Bapsi showed the violence against women through sacks of mutilated breasts. Whatever happened in Ayaah's life was the outcome of violence that place around her surroundings.

The irony is that partition was chosen by the man in authority, and women of all ages, whether teenagers, infants, or the elderly, paid a high price for it. Women of both religions have been victims of rape, abduction, murder, and even bosom cutting by males of both religions. The novel by Amrita Pritam, Urvashi Butalia, and Khadija Mastur shows us their struggles to find their identity, their emotions, plights, anguish, and a ray of hope for a better life.

We will look at the female breasts as a symbol of power and governmentality, using Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man/Cracking India* (1988) as a narrative example of the importance of women's point of view, framed in the rhetoric of Mother India, as the violence inflicted on women was equivalent to a sacrilege against one's religion, family, and country. We'll also look at the passage of sacks of mutilated breasts as a horrible rehearsal of Partition history and a metaphor for a border crossing that threatens the country's stability. In light of Julia Kristen's abjection theory, we'll interpret the female bodies. We will finish by claiming that the novel addressed in this research work can be viewed as a scathing critique of both violent process and local misogynist corruption as

well as a feminist resistance weapon. Authors like Bapsi Sidhwa show women's mutilated bodies in order to highlight the tragedy and anguish, as well as the history/body dialectic.

The worst victims of atrocities during civil strife as victories against the enemy are inscribed, marked and celebrated on women bodies. Menon and Bhasin also claimed that "women's sexuality symbolizes 'manhood,' its desecration is a matter of such shame and dishonour that it has to be avenged. Yet, with the cruel logic of all such violence, it is women ultimately who are most violently dealt with as a consequence"(43).

Conclusion

After declaration of independence in 1947, the heat of religious extremist once again becomes the root cause of riot. In the flames of that heat women was once again burning in the hands of man who were just in the mood of taking revenge. Hindus were abducting, murdering and raping Muslims women Vis a Vis Muslims were doing the same with Hindus women. Rehabilitation of abducted women is depicted in the novel as a project done by kindly Parsee ladies. Godmother's agency in saving Ayah from prostitution and repatriating her to Amritsar contrasts with Lenny's mother's passivity and Lenny's unintentional betrayal. Godmother is the third of the three women who mother Lenny. In terms of class identification, she is far closer to Mother than Ayah.

Although Ayah is happy to be rescued by Godmother in this novel, this text can be read in conjunction with various Partition rescue accounts, which report that rehabilitation efforts frequently replicated the first act of violence and dislocation by forcibly reuniting abducted women with their pre-Partition families, without allowing them any voice. Many of the complex concerns raised by the rescue operations are obfuscated by the manner of middle-class feminist action used to save Ayah. The denial of any agency to working-class victims of violence mirrors the middle class' abandoning of working-class hopes in the decolonization movement. In order to reverse female victimhood, renewed scholarly attention to the South Asian Partition must contend with the complexities of class.

Ice Candy Man depicts the world of Lahore's Queen's Park and its working-class society, including its liberties,

humour, and reluctance to adopt elite nationalism narratives. Despite the fact that this world is destroyed, its presence in the book might be seen as a fleeting utopian moment of a more inclusive and egalitarian version of nationalism, which scholarly, artistic, and political effort could attempt to recapture.

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