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## Exploring Trauma, Violence, and Women's Victimization Through the Lens of Bapsi Sidhwa's "Ice Candy Man"

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### Abstract

The Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 changed Indian history. Countless people were traumatised during this turbulent time, leaving generations-long wounds. Bapsi Sidhwa's novel "Ice Candy Man" (also known as "Cracking India") skillfully explores the suffering, violence, and victimisation of women who survived the partition. Sidhwa's moving novel explores the complex layers of grief that persisted after the political borders were set. Religion divided the subcontinent into two nations, causing turmoil, violence, and communal strife. Families were broken apart, homes devastated, and lives changed forever. Women suffered disproportionately from sexual abuse and social prejudice during this time. Sidhwa's story mixes together the stories of numerous female characters, each symbolising a different aspect of the partition's peril. The novel's protagonist, Lenny, a little Parsi girl, witnesses the atrocities and shows us the emotional toll of the division. Her innocence and the horror she witnesses highlight the stark contrast between childhood and violence. "Ice Candy Man" recounts past traumas and concerns the long-term impact of trauma on survivors and their descendants. For women who were silenced by society, historical trauma and brutality left deep scars that must be acknowledged and addressed.

In this essay, we will examine Bapsi Sidhwa's "Ice Candy Man" to understand its complex depiction of trauma, violence, and women's victimisation during India's partition and its lasting effects. Sidhwa's remarkable story shows the endurance of the human spirit and the essential need for healing and reconciliation after such tragic tragedies.

**Keywords:-** Partition, Borders, Community, Violence, Trauma.

### Introduction

Bapsi Sidhwa is largely acknowledged as a preeminent contemporary Pakistani-Anglophone novelist. Situated in Karachi, Pakistan, which was formerly a province of India, she was born on August 11, 1938. Throughout her upbringing, she was immersed in the Parsi community, which constitutes a religious and ethnic minority in Pakistan. Her family is a member of the Parsi ethnic group, specifically adherents of the Zoroastrian faith. As of 1956, Sidhwa had earned her bachelor's degree from Kinnaird College for Women. Sidhwa had represented Pakistan at the Asian Women's Congress as a delegate. Since her entry into the country in 1983, she has been a naturalised citizen of the United States. Sidhwa has delivered lectures and conducted workshops on the subject of creative writing at various colleges and institutions in the United States, including Mount Holyoke College in Amherst, Massachusetts, St. Thomas University, and The University of Houston. She was awarded a

Bunting Fellowship at Radcliffe Harvard in 1986 and then served as a Visiting Scholar at the Rockefeller Foundation Centre in Bellagio, Italy, in 1991. Both of these honours occurred during the same time period. In addition, Sidhwa was a member of the advisory committee for women's development that was established in 1991, and former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto served as the committee's chair. She was awarded Pakistan's highest national honour for her contributions to the arts, the Sitara-i-Imtiaz, which was bestowed upon her. In recognition of her work in fiction, she has been awarded several grants and honours, including one from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1987, one from the New York Times Book Review as a Notable Book of the Year for 'Cracking India' in 1991, and one from Lila Wallace-Readers' Digest in 1993. Sidhwa has gained renown as a writer due to her astute observational abilities, nuanced depictions of characters and themes, adaptable writing style, and, most significantly, her biting sense of humour. To date, she has authored *Water* (2006), *The Crow-Eaters* (1978), *The Bride* (1983), *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988), and *An American Brat* (1994). Sidhwa's novels exhibit a thematic connection to the continent of her birth and upbringing, as well as encompassing a cosmopolitan allure that readers can perceive as an intangible presence beneath the characters and narratives of a specific era and place; this characteristic contributes to her allure. Accurate depictions of the oppression of women can be found throughout Sidhwa's novels. It is noteworthy that Sidhwa's perspective evolves with the publication of each novel. According to Sidhwa, the primary determinants that are largely responsible for women's victimisation include patriarchy, tradition, and the conflict between the individual's struggle for a voice and the authoritarianism of a society that seeks to impose rigid conservatism, thereby impeding the personal development of an individual. Sidhwa also identifies the authoritarianism of a society as a factor that contributes to the victimisation of women.

The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 is widely regarded as one of the most catastrophic events in history. Its scale, scope, and brutality compel individuals to ponder the broader implications of the events that transpired and to confront the lethal forces that ignited such enormous firestorms. Although in a fragmented state, the Indian subcontinent achieved independence in 1947. India was partitioned into India and Pakistan, with the frontier between the two nations being marred by blood due to communal strife that claimed the lives of nearly half a million individuals. In the process of fleeing, more than one hundred thousand women were abducted, raped, and mutilated, while twelve million individuals fled their residences. There were fires that consumed tens of thousands of dwellings, stores, and other establishments. The barbarism at this time was offensive to every rational person in existence. Authors on both sides of the Radcliffe line have written a sizable number of novels that describe the horrors of the Partition Holocaust. viewpoint of the traumatic experiences is portrayed in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975). In contrast, the Pakistani perspective of the tragic events is depicted in MehrNigar Masroor's *Shadows of Time* (1987). While both renditions are devoid of religious bias and composed primarily out of compassion and agony rather than wrath, *Ice-Candy-Man* distinguishes itself by offering the tumultuous turmoil of Partition through the perspective of a disabled Parsi girl child. Sidhwa skillfully explores the delicate equilibrium between despair and hilarity as she portrays Lenny, a child narrator and chronicler, in order to illustrate the multifaceted nuances and complexities associated with a pragmatic political decision. In the literary work *Ice-Candy-Man*, the protagonist, Lenny, not only contemplates noteworthy facts but also employs evocative language in his discourse. The Ayah is central to the narrative, with the exception of the conclusion of the Second World War, the independence of India, and the partition of the subcontinent into Pakistan and India. The novelist meticulously observes the society in which she is situated. Each significant and insignificant societal

event is detailed in her novel. The way someone dresses and speaks typically identifies them. Additionally, the attire that individuals don reflects their culture. Therefore, Lenny inquires as to why Ayah, a Punjabi, did not wear Punjabi attire despite being of Punjabi descent; Ayah responds that her meagre income prevented her from purchasing such attire. The author illustrates the circumstance by asking :

*“ShantaBibi, you’re Punjabi, aren’t you? ‘For the most part’ Ayah agrees warily. ‘Then why don’t you wear Punjabi clothes? I have never seen you in Shalwar-Kamize’. Though it has never strikes me as stranger before- I’m so accustomed to Ayah only in a sari- I see the logic of his question and wonder about it. ‘Arrey Baba, says Ayah spreading her lands in a fetching sister, ‘do you know what salary Ayah who wear Punjabi cloths get? Half the salary of the Gaon Ayahs who wear saris! I’m not so simple!” (Sidhwa 29).*

Sidhwa illustrates Lenny's growth as a person in terms of sexuality, community, and nation, as well as her perspective on partition, which she sees not as a premeditated political event but rather as something that occurs by chance and has an impact on the private lives of those who are close to her. On the level of the story, Lenny functions as the embodiment of the poetic passion that can be found in Iqbal's poetry. The child does not possess notable attractiveness. She says, *“I am skinny, wizened, sallow, wiggly-haired, and ugly”*. (Sidhwa 22) It has also been brought to our attention that she possesses a dark complexion, in contrast to her brother, who possesses a light complexion. *“It’s a pity, Adi’s fair and Lenny so dark. He is a boy. Anyone will marry him”*. (Sidhwa 81) The abnormality of her foot, on the other hand, causes the adult world to take notice of her and contributes to the singularity of her viewpoint. Isabella Bruschi highlights a compelling parallel when she writes this:

*“The deformity of her (Lenny’s) foot, which will be cured in time, works as an allegory of the nation that will gain independence, thus being healed of the impairment of British Rule; Lenny herself remarks that polio makes her feel involved in politics, when her doctor, Col. Barucha, blames the English for having brought it over to India . She is shocked . . . painful treatments, makes her more receptive and sympathetic to the torments of others.” (Bruschi 179)*

In an interview, Sidhwa makes the following declaration:

*“Truth, nothing but truth can lead to a lot of harm, too”.*

(Bahri 228) .

Due to Lenny's unwavering honesty as a child, her innocence becomes the cause of Ayah's suffering. During the time of the partition, she is working in a Parsi household in Lahore as a "Ayah" for a young girl named Lenny. Lenny has polio and needs assistance moving around. The prevalence of sexual abuse against her has been consistent both in pre- and post-partition India and Pakistan. The ice candy vendor functions as a liaison between the various characters and serves as the reporter of the story. Queen Victoria’s Garden functions as a communal area where prospective grooms of diverse religious affiliations congregate, encompassing Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian faiths. As a Parsi who is devoted to her homeland, she admires Jinnah and expresses disapproval towards Mahatma Gandhi, the yoda of Indian independence. Members of many religious communities engage in sexual harassment against her, as made apparent by the statement of the eight-year-old narrator, Lenny:

*“The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down, they look at her. Stub handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretences to look her with lust. Hawkers, cart drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes...”*  
(Sidhwa 3)

Among Ayah's many tormentors, Ice-Candy stands out as the most prominent. Using the guise of love and affection, he endeavours to engage in sexual activities with her, even in public places. He attempts to gently knead Ayah's body beneath her traditional Indian garment: *“things love to crawl beneath Ayah's sari. Ladybirds, glow-worms, Ice-candy man's toes”*. (Sidhwa 19) Ayah's body serves as a symbol of the damaged land, coveted by everyone and violated by those who pursued and adored her. She represents the collective experiences of women who endured the intense hardships before and after the partition, whose bodies were the subject of conflicts and the foundation of nations. Butalia sheds insight on the rationale behind the major role of women and their sexuality in the events leading up to the division.

*“ Throughout the nationalist movement one of the most powerful symbols for mobilizing both women and men had been the image of India as the mother ... if the severing of the body of the country recalled the violation of the body of the country recalled the violation of the body of the nation-as-mother, the abduction and rape of its women, their removal from the fold of their families, communities and country, represented a violation of their bodies as real – not metaphorical – mother.”*

(Butalia 189)

Undoubtedly, the ice candy man harbours deep fondness for Ayah. However, this attachment undergoes a transformation into communal animosity following the partition of India. A shipment of deceased bodies arrives from the neighbouring country, causing people to segregate based on their religious convictions. This divide occurs within the bodies of women. The ice-candy man, who harbours deep affection for Ayah and goes to the extent of killing her partner to win her over, inexplicably loses his emotional attachment to her upon discovering the A train originating from Gurdaspur has recently arrived. All individuals within it have perished. All of them adhere to the Islamic faith. There are no deceased young females! Merely two sacks brimming with female breasts!

He becomes enraged and chooses to seek retribution on Ayah by sexually assaulting her. She conceals herself in order to protect herself from being kidnapped. Imam Din endeavours to save her, stating that she departed from Lahore. However, the Ice Candy man manipulates Lenny's emotions by resorting to emotional blackmail:

*“Don't be scared, Lenny baby ...I am here...I'll protect Ayah with all my life! You know I will ...I know she is here. Where is she?” Lenny, who seems to believe him, says, "On the roof or in one of the godowns....". After appealing to her feelings, the mob finally locates Ayah, and then "They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet- that want to move backwards- are forced forward instead"... “the men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it”*. (Sidhwa182-183)

Following the kidnapping, the Ice-candy man transports her to "Hira Mandi, the red light district," where she is employed as a dancer and her abductor acts as her procurer. She is brought to the location where males hire ladies to do dances, sing, and engage in physical activities. Initially, he exploits her physicality to gain financial advantages, and subsequently, he converts her to Islam and enters into matrimony with her. Despite her lack of consent, she endures coerced conversion, marriage, and many types of sexual assault. The godmother, upon discovering that Ayah is married to the Ice-candy man, welcomes him to her home and inquires as to why he resides in Hira Mandi. Is this the area known for its red light district? This location is unsuitable for a man with a family. Perceiving that the ice candy vendor continues to act as a procurer for her even after their marriage, she loudly yells, how he allows her to be sexually assaulted by butchers, alcoholics, and thugs, and claim that she has suffered no harm? She inquires whether that is the reason he had her publicly scrutinised and examined by many people, with the intention of marrying her. She is cognizant of the fact that the ice candy man forces her into marriage and tolerates her debasement. She thinks he is dishonest, dangerous, and vile. This realisation spurs her to take decisive action in order to bring Ayah back to her family from Hira Mandi. She explicitly requests him to repatriate her to her family in Amritsar.

The Godmother pledges to reinstate her "with a sense of worth" and restoring her "to the social acceptability". (Menon & Bhasin 192) Therefore, she follows Ayah's lead in making her own decisions. Ayah frequently reiterates, "I want to go to my folk". (Sidhwa 263) She acknowledges, "whether they want me or not, I will go". (Sidhwa 262) Godmother enlists the assistance of the police administration in order to retrieve Ayah from the brothel, in accordance with her request. As the initial stride towards reunification with the family, she effectively conveys her to the camp. She undergoes a metamorphosis into a social worker who, amidst a period of significant societal upheaval, managed to exploit opportunities to advocate for women and avoid procedural oversight. As a result of their independent initiative, Ayah has travelled to Amritsar to visit her family.

Sidhwa's account of the division delves into the themes of silence, horror, and the profound grief experienced by both males and, more specifically, women. She demonstrates the profound impact of the partition decision on the lives of regular individuals, regardless of their religious affiliation as Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh. Their lives were devastated by the partition, which shattered their sense of self, their loyalty to their country, and their ability to see each other without suspicion and hostility. The story commences with the verses of renowned Urdu poet Mohammed Iqbal, serving as a metaphor for the writer's state of awareness.

*" Shall I hear the lament of the nightingale, submissively lending my ear?*

*Am I rose to suffer its cry in silence year after year?*

*The fire of verse gives me courage and bids me no more to be faint."* (Sidhwa 1)

Sidhwa concludes her tale by including Iqbal's lines as well. In the last chapter of the novel, she included a quotation from him at the opening.

*" Give me the wine that burns all veils, the wine by which life's secret is revealed,*

*The wine whose essence is eternity,*

*The wine which opens mysteries concealed.*

*Lift up the curtain, give me power to talk.*

*And make the sparrow struggle with the hawk.” (Sidhwa 275)*

Sidhwa conveys her intense desire to address the scars of partition and articulate the sorrow through the two epigraphs included at the opening and end of the novel. The transition from a state of communal disagreement to one of reconciliation can be achieved through the character of the Ice-Candy-Man. Despite being shown in vivid and exaggerated terms in relation to the catastrophic events of partition, his increasing ardour and affection for Ayah are seen as rescuing him from the abyss of irrational community animosity. Transforming from a rugged and unsophisticated individual, always nudging Ayah, the Ice candy man evolves into a person of cultured sensitivity. He immerses himself in poetry. When Ayah is abruptly separated from him and relocated to Amritsar, he pursues her over the border. The iceCandy-Man's willingness to abandon the country he deeply treasures for the sake of his Hindu lover exemplifies both self-sacrifice and symbolises a potential reconciliation between the Muslim and Hindu communities, who have been in conflict. While Bapsi Sidhwa suggests the potential for a future when Hindu and Muslim communities coexist harmoniously, she does not fully explain the transformation of the ice candy man's character.

## CONCLUSION-

The manner in which the problem of Partition is portrayed in *Ice-Candy-Man* is what sets it apart from other works. By rehashing her recollections in a manner that incorporates comedy, parody, and allegory, Lenny paints a clear picture of the horrific effects that Partition had on her life. In the face of the hysterical mob, she shows how friends and neighbours are rendered helpless and unable to make a difference in the situation. Sidhwa provides further elaboration on the strategies that political leaders adopt in order to exert influence over the minds of the general public and engender feelings of mistrust and suspicion in them. The dependence of individuals on widespread but outmoded beliefs undermines the social order and leads to devastation that is both indiscriminate and thoughtless. Sidhwa has also made comments on the unstoppable march of societal progress, insinuating that people who refuse to learn from the mistakes of the past are destined to repeat the experiences that they had in the past. The tragic events are combined with the perspective of the narrator as an objective observer, which is defined by a creative and original approach to the situation. The work does an exquisite job of depicting the terrible violence that occurred during the partition, and it notably investigates the sociohistorical effects that the split had on women. Furthermore, the ability to portray violent and amusing moments alternately as well as the merging of historical tragedy with sharp comedy is not the result of a compromise but rather demonstrates a vibrant authenticity that can only be credited to a select few novels. This is something that can only be traced to a few number of novels. *Ice-Candy-Man* gives viewers the ability to appreciate the scope of the pain produced by partition and examine it within the context of its historical context. As a result, it offers a compelling demonstration of the pointlessness of resorting to violence on both the individual and the societal levels.

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