

## Communication Hindered: Trauma in the Writings of Bapsi Sidhwa with Special Focus on *Ice Candy Man*

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### Abstract:

*Bapsi Sidhwa, an eminent Pakistani novelist has tried her best to communicate the misery of women to the outer world through the exploration of female psychology in Ice Candy Man. She has succeeded in depicting the gloomy picture of exploitation and suppression of women during the tragic period of partition. The masculine power, a symbol of brutality visualizes the language of muscles creating terror among feeble creatures. The tragedy of partition caused eternal communication gap among different religious groups, dividing them into clusters of dead souls. The writings of Sidhwa delineated the incredible sufferings that made the soul of humanity bleed and it caused an unforgettable trauma for umpteen, leaving the survivors mute and exhausted forever. All this happened during the partition of India. Communication was truly hindered among communities and this gap in communication increased misunderstandings. The trauma of female life is explored so sensitively by Sidhwa that sometimes it needed some decoding. The subcontinent which witnessed the trauma wanted some loud voice for expression. The writings of Sidhwa gave this voice of protest and of sufferings at the same time. Thus through this paper an attempt has been made to decode the language of brutality and its after effects that left an indelible mark during the partition.*

**Key words:** *Brutality, Partition, Passion, Language, Lust, Trauma*

“Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree”- Ezra Pound

## I - INTRODUCTION

Partition is always a metaphor for irreparable loss. The partition of India resulted in ten million refugees and a minimum of one million died from the rioting, fighting and migrating. It was all done to give India and Pakistan a separate identity so that the Hindus and the Muslims can live in harmony among their own crowd. No matter, how just was the idea to divide a secular India, into an India for Hindus and a Pakistan for Muslims, the execution was poorly implemented. The once brotherhood between the communities was torn apart on the basis of religion. The Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who lived together before became thirsty of other peoples blood. It was fratricide at such a large scale that nobody was spared: men, women and children. In the name of partition there occurred jealousy, loss, cupidity, cunning and death by butchery, by rape and by deracination. In the entire body of writings of Bapsi Sidhwa a commitment is reflected towards the exploration of the trauma of Partition. She unfolds in the backdrop of her writings the hindered communication and the domains related to Partition catastrophe confirm the violent frenzy that lie unnoticed beneath the apparent jubilation of Independence. There is a linguistic heterogeneity in the chaotic ambience of the society. The essential trauma relates to the culture and identity. The writings of Sidhwa took a post colonial turn when the writer critiqued alienation and separation in the partition of the nations and partition of the individuals. Partition of a nation is a political event but partition of individuals is a psychological hindrance that is

impossible to overcome. In the *Ice-Candy-Man* the expression of the traumatic communication caused by Partition is very much authentic. It makes alive the grotesque and bizarre experience of the refugees, mass murders and exploitation on both individual and collective levels. .

For the generations of South Indians, writing about Partition is an act of compulsion because these people have personally experienced partition in one way or the other or heard about it from family sagas and legends. Such a devastating event needs to be etched out in history. So it is the job of literature to duly depict such politically important event, so that the new generations can know more about the birth of their beloved nations. At first, there were no works solely based on Partition but slowly after a period of about fifty years of so, writers have started revisiting that unlucky day in the history of India.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* is the most authentic expression of the partition of India. It makes alive the grotesque experiences of refugees, mass murders, and exploitation on both individual and collective level. Writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie have tried to depict Partition in their own style and perspective but all narrate the gruesome incidents that a common man had been witness to. Bapsi Sidhwa in *Cracking India* tried to depict the horrors of Partition from point of view of an eight-year-old Lenny. Lenny was a crippled daughter of a wealthy Parsee family who became crippled by polio. Using such style she succeeds in making the incidents less appalling. Khushwant Singh, in his novel *Train to Pakistan* used his fictional village of Mano Majra as a place to show the killings and atrocities that had been taking place along the Radcliffe line. However writers such as, Salman Rushdie used the technique of magical realism where his protagonist is born with telepathic powers at the stroke of midnight of Partition. He takes the atrocities of partition along with the lives of children those were born close

to midnight of Partition. He has tried to capture the moment of Partition in *Midnight's Children* by showing the ecstatic speech delivered by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru along with the images of death and burning.

“And in all the cities all the towns all the villages the little dia-lamps born on the window-sills porches verandahs, while trains burn in the Punjab, with the green flames of blistering paint and the glaring saffron of fired fuel, like the biggest dias of the world,

And the city of Lahore too is burning...

The monster in the streets has begun to roar, while in Delhi, a wiry man is saying, ‘...at the stroke of midnight hour, while the world sleeps. India is awoken to life and freedom...’ And beneath the roar of monster there are two more yells, cries, bellows, the howls of children arriving in the world, their unavailing protests mingling with the dim of independence which hands Saffron and Green in the night sky.”(Midnight's Children, p. 134)

Here, the writer brings the contrast between the colours of our national flag. He compares colour Saffron that signifies courage and selflessness to the ‘*glaring saffron of fired fuel*’ and colour Green that signifies prosperity to the ‘*green flames of blistering paint*’ of the burning train in Punjab. Even though the number of people, beaten, maimed, tortured, raped, abducted, exposed to disease and exhaustion and otherwise physically brutalised remains measureless. But we should acknowledge these dark times of our history, with our heads held down in shame.

Bapsi Sidhwa has given voice to the sufferings of women during the tragic partition. Her characters depict the life of tortured females enduring all sorts of humiliation and barbarism. The patriarchal society victimised the fairer sex and the same has been depicted vividly in her work. She succeeds tremendously in bringing out the agony of the women who were subjected to the cruelty of males. Her *Ice Candy Man* unveils the communal violence and unprecedented crimes through the

eyes of Lenny which echoes the horrifying events as seen from Pakistan.

## **II – PORTRAYAL OF PARTITION BY SIDHWA:**

Being a politically motivated novel, the whole story of the Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice -Candy –Man* moves around the mega event of partition and its aftermath. It has been made into a film 1947-Earth by noted Canadian director Deepa Mehta. The shifting patterns of communal conflict in the novel present the humane as well as the Satanic survivals in the unsympathetic world. The survival in this novel is not confined to any individual Hindu or Muslim. It covers different communities and also the entire globe in terms of the theme of survival. This paper examines the survival trauma and hindered communication critically on the personal and social level with reference to the major characters in terms of its socio-political-religious contexts of partition and the British Raj. The process of representing the Partition that led to the creation of two sovereign nation-states of India and Pakistan is very difficult because it is full of ugly images of war and death. But writers such as Sidhwa, had tried to narrate the incidents through the eyes of eight-year-old first person narrator, Lenny. By doing so she is able to narrate the political incidents without taking sides. Even though the readers know the sensitivity of the events taking place, it is the innocent perspective of Lenny, which makes the events somewhat less gruesome.

“There is much disturbing talk. India is to going to be broken. 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 Godmothers’ then?”(Cracking India, p. 101)

Here, the readers can understand as Sidhwa depicts that with Lenny's limited knowledge on such topic, even she is scared of Partition as it will separate her from her close relatives and

also fears for her home and family. We also witness the coming of age of Lenny as the aftermath of partition increases. She is the eyewitness to political divisions as well as personal traumatic experiences of partition. One such case was the change in attitude towards Lenny's Ayah, Shanta, from her admirers and potential lovers during Partition. Eventually the readers also witness Lenny's loss of innocence as the violence begins.

### **III – PARTITION: BEFORE AND AFTER**

Partition of India in 1947 led to an irrecoverable trauma and sorrow. The barbarity and hatred towards the other communities came out during the Partition, or what she termed as a Holocaust. But it is not wrong to say that these communities lived in peace socially, culturally and religiously before Partition. They interacted with each other as friends and brothers unconscious of their religious beliefs, They shared each other's joys and sorrows and sometimes even participated in each other's religious and cultural events. The common man had always lived in peace with each other.

Before Partition they had one common enemy, British. So these different communities of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs stood side by side in voicing their hatred towards British rule in India. They all shared the same cultural background for hundreds of years. But when, British left India into the hands of local authorities who had no such previous experience of such things. As a result, things went out of hand and people did what they had to do in order to curb their bloodlust appetite for revenge.

Sidhwa has clearly depicted in *Cracking India* the changes that happened during the course of Partition through her character of Ayah (Shanta), Lenny's nursemaid. Sidhwa shows that even Ayah's charm- that was previously so admired by Hindu, Muslim and Sikh men- could not overcome the

religious intolerance and she is abducted, manhandled and forced into prostitution by a mob of her admirers. She also gives an account of the village of Pir Pindo where Lenny frequently visited. During the course of her visits, she starts noticing the differences created by the Partition and at the end, the whole village is consumed by fire of hate. During the Partition the atrocities mainly happened on women and children as they usually become the hapless victims and provide the battleground for men to play their competitive games. The cumulative effect of the partitioning of the nation and the violence gendered with selfish motives is portrayed with monstrous realism. Some forms of violence are specific to determined cultural communities and all female writers show a special penchant for portraying the sensibility underlying an event rather than the physical graphics. The focus on the psychological perspectives is preferred by Sidhwa.

Sidhwa grants us a glimpse through the eyes of Lenny into the changing atmosphere of Pir Pindo. Here is an extract from her first visit:

When the worried Imam Din warns the villagers about potential troubles, he is contradicted by the reader and keeper of Sikh scriptures who predicts solidarity across racial and religious lines:-

“Brother,” the Sikh granthi says when the tumult subsides, “our villages come from the same racial stock, Muslim or Sikh, we are basically Jats. We are brothers. How can we fight each other?”(Cracking India, p .64)

The Sikh’s argument is echoed by the Muslim village headman, the chaudhary, who uses a similar line of reasoning:

“The city folks can afford to fight....we can’t. We are dependent on each other: bound by our toil; by Mandi prices set by the Banyas – they are our common enemy – those city Hindus. To us villagers, what does it matter if a person is a Hindu or a Muslim or a Sikh.”(Cracking India, p. 64)

These lines bring a false sense of harmony in troubled times. A year later on her next visit, Lenny notices the strained relations of Sikhs and Muslims. Her next description of Pir Pando is through Ranna's side of story. Ranna is a Muslim boy who resided in Pir Pando. Ranna's narrative description of the attack on Pir Pando and the death of his family clearly depicted the end of humanity in Pir Pando, a village where about an year or so people of different communities stood for each other and saw the city folks as their true enemies.

#### **IV – SIDHWA'S PERSPECTIVE ON PARTITION**

Sidhwa's perspective on Partition was not country biased. Disorientation and dissatisfaction are portrayed from a purely psychological point of view. The myth of freedom is mocked and she has nicely documented the gap created by hindered communication between communities. . Being a Pakistani, she claims that both Hindus and Muslims were equally responsible for the acts of violence. She says that none of the communities initiated the attacks but she believes that it was due to the social and cultural differences between the communities. She believes the Brahmin ideologies of purity did contribute in the alienation of Muslims. In *Cracking India*, Lenny describes one such incident where due to mere shadow of a non-Hindu, a Brahmin's food was polluted. This hatred and disliking of Muslims by the Hindus due to their ideologies of purity made Muslims conscious of their identity. So, they asked for a separate homeland where they can live in peace among their own kind. She displays utmost sensitivity in her portrayal of individual suffering from the trauma of restricted communication caused by religious differences. They seem deeply entrenched in ghettos of hatred and ill –feelings. Fundamental issues of insensitivity in discriminating man from man are raised in the novel depicting the outburst of anger and



resentment which further make the myth of Independence a mockery.

Sidhwa describes the Muslims barbaric behaviour in *Cracking India*, where a Hindu banya was partitioned alive by Muslims and the partitioning of a Punjabi Sikh in *The Bride* again by Muslims resulting in unnatural death of unnatural death of Hindu banya and Punjabi Sikh. She compares the Partition of India to the partitioning of human beings which is a barbaric act.

Sidhwa cites an example when Lenny partitions her life-like doll, with china face and blue eyes, with the help of her brother, Adi. They both hold the doll in a fierce tug of war and as the doll breaks both Lenny and Adi are thrown off-balance. Sidhwa compares the doll to India and the children are the two communities of India are Lenny and Adi. As the children partition the doll (India), the two separate parts(nation-states) are thrown off-balance. Adi describes the partition as an act of pointless brutality. The author wants its readers to know that the Partition of India was an undesirable, atrocious and unnatural act of violence.

In *Cracking India* she uses Ayah as a symbol of India who was humiliated, disgraced, violated and manhandled by her one-time lover (the Muslim protagonist). Sidhwa presents the abduction of Ayah as the worst betrayal. The Muslims had ruled over for countless years. Like them (the Muslim protagonists) was once an admirer of Ayah. But still the Muslims demand for Partition to snatch away India in the same way, as Ayah is abducted against her will. The treatment meted out to Ayah was disgraceful and she deserved so much better treatment from a person for whom she was his beloved. India was disgraced in the following manner by the rioting, killing that accompanied the Partition.

## **V – PORTRAYAL OF BRITISH**

Sidhwa describes British as incompetent, incapable and biased rulers. In her works, *The Bride* and *Cracking India*, Sidhwa holds British responsible for the massacres that strained the dawn of freedom with the blood of people of India. In *The Bride* (1987), Sidhwa shows that the British were in such a hurry to wind up things in India that they did not pay enough heed to the details concerning the division of India. In *Cracking India*, Sidhwa shows that the British were dealing the Indian cities like a pack of cards.

“the Radcliffe Commission deals out Indian cities like a pack of cards. Lahore is dealt to Pakistan, Amritsar to India, Sialkot to Pakistan, Pathankot to India. I am a Pakistani. In a snap, just like that.”(Cracking India, p. 150)

It is the message of an adult author behind the innocent voice of Lenny, who makes such a sarcastic comment. This unjust division had far horrific consequences which the British overlooked while supervising the Partition. Sidhwa portrays British to be biased to Hindus and the Congress. She also holds them duly responsible for sowing the seeds of hatred in the minds of Muslims towards Hindus and vice versa. She cites the example of Kashmir and says that it was given to India without any logic. As a result, the reader understands the careless game of politics which cost India many lives.

## **VI – PORTRAYAL OF VIOLENCE AND PRICE OF PARTITION**

History bear witness to the atrocities carried out during Partition. Men were massacred and women were violated, their bodies were mutilated and their children were thrown up in the air and caught at the edge of swords. Sidhwa depicts the violence during Partition by the traumatised bodies of women

and children. She succeeds in drawing readers' attention by the portrayal of her characters such as Ayah, Lenny's nursemaid and Ranna, a Muslim orphan boy.

Ayah (Shanta), Lenny's nursemaid is a beautiful Hindu women. The relationship between Lenny and Ayah is a strong one as Lenny's aristocratic mother fails to provide her the motherly affection. With such bonding with her Ayah, she gets a chance to get a perspective of outside world beyond her household. She notices that Ayah had a chain of admirers from the different communities but as the religious disputes arises between communities, her admirers also dissolve.

“it is sudden. One day everybody is themselves- and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer my all-compassing Ayah, she is also a token. A Hindu...”(Cracking India, p. 101)

Rodabai, Lenny's Godmother is very intelligent and loving. She loves Lenny. She has the power to control the situation. She follows the Parsee religion's principle of helping others out of commitment. She helps the Hindus during riots for their safe departure to India. She gets information about everything happening in Lahore. She donates blood and helps people. The most courteous example of her self-assurance, trust worthiness and capacity to handle catastrophe is her release of Ayah. She demonstrates her capability to use the system for the victimized. She very kindly comments on Ayah's situation and says, “That was fated, daughter. It can't be undone. But it can be forgiven.... Worse things are forgiven. Life goes on and the business of living buries the debris of our pasts. Hurt, happiness . . . all fade impartially . . . to make way for fresh joy and new sorrow. That's the way of life” (ellipsis in orig.ICM, 262). A group of Muslim mob which even included her one time love, the Muslim protagonists, abducts Ayah and she is manhandled. Even her feminine charm could not save her from

the brutality of war and that too at the hands of her potential lover.

Ranna gave another detailed account of the horror of Partition. To clearly depict the horrors, Sidhwa inserts a third person, male child's, eyewitness account of Partition. This account helped the author in depicting the violence that was taking place in the core of the city. Such an account could not have been provided by Lenny as she was being protected within the walls of her house of a rich aristocratic household. Ranna's story gives the physical details of violence throughout the city. Ranna's story is an extension of Lenny's visits to Pir Pindo.

When Lenny meets Ranna for the third time, she describes him as orphaned and bears "*the improbable wound on the back of his shoved head*" – "*a grisly scar like a brutally gouged and premature bald spot*"(Cracking India, p. 206).

"Ranna saw his uncles beheaded, his older brothers, his cousins. The Sikhs were among them like hairy vengeful demons, wielding bloodied swords, dragging them out as a sprinkling of Hindus darting about at the fringes, their faces vaguely familiar... pointed out and identified the Muslims by name. He felt a blow cleave the back of his head and the warm flow of blood. Ranna fell just inside the door on a tangled pile of unrecognisable bodies. Someone fell on him, drenching him in blood..." (Cracking India, p. 213)

He still manages to escape his fate and reaches his uncles village. He roams the burning city of Amritsar and gapes at the inhuman acts of violence. One such incident shown in the burning city is:-

"No one minded the semi-naked spectre as he looked in doors with his knowing, wide set of peasant eyes as men copulated with wailing children – old and young women. He saw a naked woman, her light kashmiri skin bruised with purple splotches and cuts, hanging head down from the ceiling fan and looked on with a child's boundless acceptance and curiosity as jeering men set her long hairs on fire. He saw babies snatched away from their mothers, smashed against

walls and their bowling mothers brutally raped and killed.”  
(Cracking India, p. 218-219)

The readers, seeing violence of its worse type and at such a large scale, are eager enough to ask, why exactly this violence was necessary. Suris Kaul, answers this question that violence is necessary act of sacrifice during Partition of a nation. He states that

“all nations are founded in blood and that porous boundaries are sealed only through violence, sacrificial blood-letting, that is, necessary for the making of strong nation-states. The vocabulary of martyrdom is an important feature of such understanding and for good reason: senseless death are recuperated, those who were killed, however randomly, are seem to have died for a cause, the guilt of those who survived (or who participated in violence) is assuaged. In this vision, the nation or the quam (community) demands its shaheeds, and is strengthened by them.”(7) (Birth of Nations: Representing the Partition of India in Bapsi Sidhwa’s Cracking India)

However, the shaheeds during India and Pakistan were mostly women and children who could not fight for themselves against the brutality of illogical men, driven by hatred and revenge.

Even though Ice-candy-man marries Ayah, it is a callous marriage because he kills Ayah's soul. Hence, his confession in front of Godmother does not create any sympathy. About Ayah says, “I'm less than the dust beneath her feet! I don't seek forgiveness . . .” (ellipsis in orig., ICM 251).

The communal riots in Lahore disappoint her. Masseur whom she loves assures her security and she says to him, “I'm already yours . . . I will always be yours” (158). After Masseur's murder she feels lonely. Ice-candyman's friendship with her turns to be Satanic when he disgraces her. Her situation confirms Gyanendra Pandey's view that “partition was violence, a cataclysm, a world (or worlds) torn apart” (7).

## VII – CONCLUSION

At last, I would like to conclude that the Literature of Partition gives us time to pause, and gaze upon that unfortunate moment of history, which created destruction on such a large scale. We must acknowledge that the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis were all single people, even though culturally different. The violence of Partition occurred because a single person was torn between two countries in an atmosphere of revenge, bloodlust, panic, self-interest and greed. Bhalla implores that in most works of Partition it was suggested that before Partition, different communities harmoniously co-existed and there was essential connectedness between them. How come this connectedness could not prevent the degeneration of human values during Partition, “Why did not we as a people resisted?”

From the works of literature we get to know that; Firstly, our freedom struggle had already had violent climate to begin with; Secondly, the exchange of population created an empty space that was habitable for goons and thugs only; Thirdly, there was legitimate confusion over the future of the country; and Lastly, because a major part of violence did not necessarily arose from the communal hatred but mostly due to momentary lapse in our better judgement and momentary rage.

Hasan from his works points out that:

“It is undesirable that most people, Hindus and Muslims alike were largely unconcerned with or indifferent to the newly created geographical entities. Most were caught upon the crossfire of religious hate. Most were driven out of their homes and drifted from one place to another out of fear, panic and a sense of hopelessness. They were indeed hapless victims of a triangular game plan, worked out by the British, the Congress and the League without care or consideration for huge number of people who had no commitment to a Hindu Homeland or fascination for an imaginary dar-al-islam. They had no

destination, no mirage to follow.”(India Partitioned: The other Face of Freedom, vol. I, p. 33)

Through the works of literature we come to know majority of population was uprooted and driven out of their homes by the fear of death and in search of a place across an invisible line, they never wished to create. It is evident through literature that a high political game was played in the backdrop of Partition and its consequences were meted out to the ordinary people. The debate could go on as to what caused it and what it caused, but surely the literature of Partition has etched out the gory details of our leaders mistakes.

If an idea emerges from the literature of Partition, it is that such a decision was historically unjust, politically unapologetic for the crimes that were carried out in the name of “destiny” and was a mockery of religious and sentimental values. Mostly the literature of Partition is politicized. And it should be, because Partition was an event so devastating that it resulted in great human trauma in the lives of Indians. Literature of Partition should rightly allow people to choose sides as it is literature’s job to depict this event psychologically and emotionally so that we are bounded together in our pain and loss.

The reason why we badly need literature is the urge to lay blame on someone. Only through literature, can we truly evoke the sufferings of innocent. It can be rightly said that the subject of Partition was first and foremost a human-being, not a Hindu human being, nor a Muslim, nor a Sikh. Hence, literature of Partition did something that the religious leaders of each community failed to do so, that is, to reaffirm their faith in humanity and to see the pathos and sufferings of each community without prejudice.

Our choices are not doomed like the men and women of august 1947, and are not limited to death and exile. If the literature can teach people of different faiths to remember the

teachings of their respective gods, not when they are facing their respective places of worship but when they face people of different faiths. If this is achieved then, the work of literature is done.

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