



Expatriate Experience in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*

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Abstract

The Creative fecundity of Bapsi Sidhwa, the much-acclaimed English novelist of Pakistan brings forth excellent novels which lay bare the existential plights and the precarious position of her immigrant community. Sidhwa belongs to a microscopic minority community called Parisi/Zoroastrian which is nearing its extinction as a result of its rigid doctrines and intense exclusivity. In the post-colonial India and Pakistan they had a lose their hegemony over business, Politics and education and inculcated a feeling of insecurity and fear following the unpreceded socio-political happenings and the increasing communal violence. Accentuated by the external threats and the plights of the dwindling community, standing on the verge of extinction, contemporary Parsi writers like Boman Desai, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry and Bapsi Sidhwa vociferously assert their ethnic identity and earnestly attempt to reconstruct their racial history in their writings. Sidhwa is the author of four internationally acclaimed novels. Her third novel *Ice-Candy-Man* was published in 1988.

Keywords: Expatriate, Immigrant.

1. Introduction

The terms 'Expatriate' and 'Immigrant' in general refer to persons who live outside their own country either by choice or otherwise the 'Expatriate' is more a reluctant entrant into a new culture and finds it hard to let go a familiar way of life. The 'Immigrant' willingly transforms her/him to fit in and absorb the best in the host culture. That kind of experience therefore becomes a transformative process of the 'self and its relation to society. Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* deals with the metamorphosis of an expatriate.

Bapsi Sidhwa was born in undivided India and was broughtup in Lahore, Pakistan. She was a precocious polio-ridden child with an uncanny knack for life around her. As a young girl, she witnessed the bloody partition in India and its aftermaths in 1947, in which seven million Muslims and five million Hindus were uprooted in the largest, most horrible and shocking exchange of population. Her home city Lahore became a border city in Pakistan and it was flooded with thousands or war refugees. Most of them were victims of rape and torture and thus experience diaspora. Due to lasting shame and their husband's damaged pride, many victims were not permitted into their homes after having recovered. Bapsi Sidhwas has recaptured that decisive moment in the history of the two nations in her novel *Ice-Candy-Man*. This novel has vividly captured the events leading to partition and migration.

This paper seeks to analyze Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) from the standpoint of ethnocentrism and the expatriate experience. It is told from the point of a young Parsee Zoroastrian girl. Sidhwa, herself admits that her novel has certain autobiographical elements. For instance, the child protagonist Lenny is reminiscent of Sidhwa's own childhood. Like Lenny, Sidhwa too was, at the time of partition, a polio ridden eight-year-old girl, living in Lahore. Lenny is an eight-year-old girl, who comes from an affluent Parsee family of Lahore. She is lame in one leg due to an early attack of polio. She is taken care of by the Hindu Ayah, Shanta who is eighteen-year-old. She is Lenny's trusted advisor.

Ayah is always surrounded by Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Parsee admirers. The men from all these communities are always unified around her. This hints at a Hindu-Sikh-Muslim communal harmony that was prevalent in the pre-independent days. They behaved as if they were blood relations. Ayah's admirers include the Ice-Candy-Man, a masseur, a gardener, a restaurant owner, a zoo attendant, a knife-sharpening pathan, Sharbat Khan and several more. The evil news of the impending partition however disturbs the communal harmony and the same people begin to look at each other with suspicion. The rumblings of communal discord soon reach Lahore.

Lenny's heart ails to see the violence because in pre-partition days, she has enjoyed the company of Ayah's friends from different religions including, Masseur Hari, Sharbat Khan, Chinaman, the Pathan, Shere Singh, Ice-Candy-Man and others. They argue in the queen's garden about the impossibility of violence against each other. Slowly everything changes in Lahore but about Ayah Lenny says, "only the group around Ayah remains unchanged, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee are as always, unified around her" (96). Lenny never imagined that the group around Ayah would change or break. But Lenny senses that the news of partition seemed to bring about a subtle change and unease. Lenny's fear proves to be true when violence changes all the friendly ambience of Lahore. Ayah's friends do not gather in the garden or in the wrestler's restaurant.

Their visits become rare, instead, they sit in front of Lenny's house and gossip. The vortex of violence that follows sucks up Ayah and her muslim Admirer Ice-Candy-Man just as it rips apart other lives. All the characters in the novel bring home the horror or what they survive. As men lose their senses and indulge in raping, killing and looting. Women reveals their strengths, building links across the divided communities, survivors, and insisting on continuity. The inspired effects of communal frenzy after the partition were horrible. All the three communities suffered irrevocably.

People were forced to vacate their homes, land and property. Lenny has very kind and compassionate sentiments towards Ayah. Only Ayah, among all Lenny's friends stays behind in Lahore. She doesn't go because Masseur has assured her of safety there. However, after Masseur is murdered and his body is found in a sack, Ayah is shocked. When a mob approaches Lenny's house and demand for the Hindu Ayah, the Parsee family is shocked. Ayah senses danger to her life and hides herself in the house of Lenny.

The Muslim Iman Din, however, tries to save the Hindus from the mob but in vain. The Ice-Candy-Man plays mischief and deceives Lenny by assuring her of saving the life of her Ayah. Lenny innocently reveals the hiding place of Ayah. Lenny follows the path of truth that she has learned without knowing the consequences of her revelation. The Muslim mob drags Ayah out mercilessly. Ice-Candy-Man further, abducts Ayah and takes her to Hiramandi.

Lenny is hurt and considers herself as a traitor of Ayah. Women rise as saviors to the victims of partition. In *Ice-Candy-Man* Col. Bharucha Quotes an incident that shows Parsis honesty is avoiding proselytism, "Emperor Akbar invited Zarathushti scholars to his darbar". He said he'd become a Parsee if he could.....but we gave our oath to the Hindu prince that we couldn't proselytize and the Parsees don't break faith."(98)

Sidhwa in her works points out religious tolerance as a common virtue of the Parsis. Though, there is a religious community, closed to outsiders, the Parsees know how to respect other faiths. The Godmother Rodabai goes out of her way to rescue Ayah Shanta. The meeting between Ice-Candy-Man

and Godmother shocks Lenny. Ayah had been kept in a brothel of Hiramandi. The Ice-Candy-Man forcibly marries Ayah and changes her name to Mumtaz. Now Shanta, changes into Mumtaz. Lenny wishes to save Ayah from the monster Ice-Candy-Man. In spite of the communal victims, Sidhwa also depicts women's suffering as common to all communities.

Sidhwa meticulously introduces in her novel *Parsis*, typical manner of disposing off the dead body. They never bury or cremate the dead as they reckon fire and earth are sacred and they should not be contaminated with a corpse. Instead, they expose the corpses to birds of prey in Dunganwadi which the Britisher named Tower of Silence. The brutally murdered dead bodies of the Muslims in the tram from Gurudaspur completely transform the kind and loving Ice-Candy-Man into a violent and frenzied person. His anger to revenge the Hindus results in his abducting Ayah and prostituting her body.

His love for Ayah fails to influence him and hold him away from the evil in him. He does not feel anything incorrect in exploiting the innocence of Lenny. He also forgets his friendship with Sher Singh and exposes him to Muslim attackers. 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. But Ayah cannot forget her sexual and mental torture. Masseur's murder has already taken away and energy out of her life. After Ayah's rehabilitation, Ice-Candy-Man waits for her outside the camp. He sings songs and becomes a dejected lover calling out for his beloved. In a final, sentence Sidhwa writes that the "Ice-Candy-Man too, disappears across the Wagah border into India." (277)

Ice-Candy-Man fails as a human being in the eyes of Ayah. His involvement in violence does not change his status of that of others. He does not possess any human values and he has no love for truth in his life. End of the novel Ayah's departure from Lahore, followed by a "harmless" Ice-Candy-Man. The novel ends in a statement on the self on its ability or inability to survive, especially when the self is a woman. Ayah struggles to survive in spite of her prolonged exploitation we are not sure whether Ayah's family will accept her but she will survive with courage because she says, "whether they want me or not I will go" (262).

Ayah is symbolic of the earth that is looted, raped and humiliated. As the earth continues to exist, Ayah too continues her existence. Ice-Candy-Man these reflects the emigrant experiences of a whole community of humankind. After partition, Lahore enters Pakistan, while Gurudaspur and Amritsar remain in India. Bapsi Sidhwa gives visibility to the hidden tragedy of thousands of women on whose flesh the nations of honors and shame shade by families, communities, nations and strictly connected to female purity were contended. Ayah represents the fate of most women who suffered rape and abduction and, in the aftermath, found themselves deprived of their identity and full of a place in society..

2. Conclusion

As a prey of male violent possession, Ayah's raped and humiliated body turns into the symbolic representation of the gendered violence unleashed during the traumatic events of partition. The outbursts of violence, the feelings of revenge and suspicion, the departures or conversions of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh friends make of her a cowering, fearful being. As a result, she considers leaving Lahore to reach her relatives in Amritsar. The traumatic events Ayah has experienced have changed her life.

Due to the Partition of India and Pakistan many people were uprooted from their native lands. Sidhwa has not only depicted the sufferings of Ayah but also she has portrayed the mayhem of all the women during this partition. Due to partition is forceful shifts, even close friends turn out to be vigorous foes. Ayah migrates to Amritsar with a hope that she may get a better life there.

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