

Struggle of Colonialism and anti-colonialism in Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man

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Abstract:

This research will explore the effects of partition of Indian subcontinent on women's life. The brawling of colonialism and anti-colonialism is said to be devised on the body of women, especially middle-class women. Memories of partition are too distressing to be told. A historian writes only about events, but a creative writer writes all the perspectives of all events and marks it approachable and comprehensible to common man. Bapsi Sidhwa's narrative of partition speaks about silence, horror and loss of men and women. Ice Candy Man can be rightly defined as a post colonial bildungsroman, as it deals with growth and education of its female protagonist, Lenny. The research paper will focus on Ice Candy Man from different aspects of partition and its effects on women.

Keywords: Colonialism, anti-colonialism, partition, womanhood, nationhood

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Content

Post colonial literature is a body of a literature that deals with the writings against the process of colonization. It has also been presiding subject for renowned writers such as Ashish Nandi, Khushwant Singh, Kiran Desai, Chinua Achebe, Joseph Conrad, Salman Rushdie. Being aware of drastic impacts of colonialism, Bapsi Sidhwa shows it in her most critical and influential novel Ice-Candy-Man. The story of Ice-Candy- Man is based on tragic story of partition of India. The novel is famous for its presentation of partition of India but also the repercussions of colonialism, after getting independence. The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India by Urvashi Batulia viewed the pains and conflicts caused due to partition as homes, villages, communities, families and relationships were destroyed and how the individual life affected by the upheaval. Women were instrumental in defining the country, its culture and its own identity as it was literally linked to the symbolic significance of their bodies.

Mass scale migration, death, destruction, loss – no matter how inevitable Partition seemed no one could have foreseen the scale and ferocity of bloodshed and enmity it unleashed . . . still less could anyone have foreseen that women would become so significant, so central and indeed so problematic. (Batulia 188)

This Batulia declaration explains the systematic attempt to separate women's lives. The dynamic relationship between femininity and nationhood describes the Indian situation perfectly. Cynthia Cockburn correctly commented that women are highly regarded and also symbolise the spirit of country in nationalist discourse. The colonial and anti-colonial struggle is said to be connected to the women's body. However the nation was celebrating the concept of freedom and new female identity on one side, but the face of reality was that women were sufferer of abduction and mass rape. The communal crimes against women during partition was of extreme brutality.

These brutalities were result of evolution from social settings, conception of gender relations. While there are many official partition accounts, there are few social history or feminist tales. However, some writers not only make women prominent but also integral in their narratives. Abuse towards women was the norm during mass migration. Hundreds of women were suicidal or murdered by their own families. During the exodus, almost 100,000 have been kidnapped. A young woman may be kidnapped and coerced into marriage by individuals of another faith. Attacking 'other' women's cleanliness means attacking the dignity of the entire group as well as the country. Actually the weapon in the battle were sexual violence and abduction. *Borders And Boundaries: women in India's partition*, the book by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin showing dreadful partition during 1947, describing history of two countries, India and Pakistan, and how the women suffered whose scars rekindled till now. Menon and Bhasin clearly defined the scenario.

The material, symbolic, political significance of the abduction of women was not lost either on the women themselves and their families, on their communities, or on leaders and governments. As a retaliatory measure, it was simultaneously an assertion of identity and humiliations of the rival community through the appropriation of its women. When accompanied by forcible conversion and marriage it could be counted upon to outrage both family and community honour and religious sentiments. (Menon and Bhasin 05)

Hundreds of women were forced to take their own lives in order to avoid humiliation of sexual abuse. Menon and Bhasin called it "shame- fear- dishonour syndrome". (Menon and Bhasin 59). Many were killed by their own husbands, fathers and brothers for the same reason. It is asserted that women in that time actually entered some other realms from where they are living . The women who abducted entered "the realm of silence". On the other hand the women who were abducted or taken into forceful marriages entered "realm of the martyrdom" (Batulia 208). The undertakings of rapes were inescapable that leaves women with only choice of committing suicide. Because a raped woman is seen as impure woman . And an impure woman could not find place into the domestic sphere of family. A raped woman can not

be a part of family and ultimately the nation. Jasbir Jain rightly remarked that partition was inscribed on the bodies of women .

Bapsi Sidhwa, a creative writer has portrayed the details left by the historians. The historical events coated with fiction in *Ice Candy Man* are appealing to readers worldwide. Sidhwa was of the belief that with passage of time the two communities would forget this case and heal themselves but she was wrong, "neither in Pakistan, nor in India, nor even in Bangladesh . . . This hostility has to be dealt with". (Sidhwa Int. by Preeti 292) She felt motivated to write *Ice Candy Man* because she wanted her novel "to function as a recording of a particular history, hoping that one might learn a lesson from that history". (Sidhwa Int. by Rajan 13) Her account of partition speaks of the silence, terror and loss of men and women in particular. It shows how the decision to split the lives of ordinary citizens, be they Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, has been devastating. The scattered tormented their life, personality, citizenship and nationality and left them unaltered, but with mistrust and hate to see each other. The novel opens up with a metaphor of the writer's knowledge of the famous Urdu poet Mohammed Iqbal.

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 01)

The lines of Iqbal also end Sidhwa's book. At the start of the last chapter of the book, she quotes him:

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. (275)

Sidhwa compares herself to a sparrow and her feeble voice to sparrow's voice as during hard times of partition a faintly voice can not struggle against numberless voices of official discourses, which are compared to hawk. These hawks makes people's sufferings speechless to utter the secret and mysteries. Sidhwa writes deliberately about „woman“ as the balance of society should not be

impartial, it should be made smooth by men and women equally. Definitely the novel is gender-conscious, she have enough space to women . On the last page of the novel she wrote :

The guard . . . squats by Ice-Candy-Man, gleaning wisdom from his comment on life and its ways and the wayward ways of God and men and women". (277)

Ice Candy Man can definitely a post colonial bildungsroman as it deals with the growth and education of its female protagonist. Lenny, a Parsihandi capped girl who is first person female narrator of the novel, sees the world around her through a parsi sensitivity. However the novel can be considered an authentic source to show the present time turmoil because of a child's narration in it . The novel focuses on deteriorating communal climate in partition seen through prism of a marginalized minority girl. However, Lenny is not directly affected by the events of partition as she was protected by her parents. But she observes the events keenly. She comments on the events that she sees in a reporting tone that enhances the pathos of the emotions. It is also possible, by being nearly part of a reader's consciousness, to equate Lenny's character with the Chaucer Prologue to the Canterbury Stories. With a child's wonder, she studies social shifts, human behaviour with fascinating sidelights, thoughts and sometimes judgments Her childish innocence is like Chaucer's obviously naive personality, a source of sharp irony. Sidhwa says in an interview, "Fact, nothing but truth can also cause much harm."Lenny was an innocent child . She always speaks truth. But the truth lead torturers to Ayah's life. In pre independent and post independent era, her subjugation to sexual abuse remains the same. The ice candy man is the linking element in the plot. Ayah herself being parsipraises Jinnah and criticizes Gandhiji. But men of all communities Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsi tried to harass her . Lenny narrated it in her words:

The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down, they look at her. Stub handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars ⁴ 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 03)

Though Ice candy man also pretends to love Ayah and show affection to her. He tried to win her sexuality even at public places. He tried to touch and massage Ayah under her sari. Here, the body of Ayah itself becomes a broken property, which everybody desires. Ayah stands for all those women whose bodies were contested and nations established in the time that suffered. Batulia explained that the preceding division was focused on women and their sexuality.

Throughout the nationalist movement one of the most powerful symbol 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)

Ice Candy's love soon transformed Ayah's rage and repugnance when he learned that a train had just arrived from Gurdaspur. And everybody's dead in this train. All the dead bodies are of Muslims and there is no young women among the dead. "Only two gunny bags full of female breasts !" (144). When he knows it, he loses his temper and tries to take vengeance Ayah. She does not want to be kidnapped. Imam Din is trying to save the saying 'she's gone.' But Lenny is emotionally choked by Ice candy man to know where she is. Lenny says Ayah to him. The mob discovers Ayah and "They drag her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet- that want to move backwards- are forced forward instead". (183) Continuing the narration, she further says, "the men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it" (183). After the abduction, Ice-candy man takes her to "Hira Mandi...the red light district" where she works as the dancer and her kidnapper plays pimp for her. (240) She is taken to the place where "the men pay them *girls+ to dance and sing ...to do things with their bodies" (240). He first takes advantage of her body to achieve the financial advantage and later becomes a Muslim and then

marries her. She is going through forced conversion, marriage and sexual exploitation in various ways against her will. Having found Ayah married to Ice, godmother invites him and asks him, “why do you live in Hira Mandi? It’s the red light district, isn’t it? It’s not a suitable place for a family man”. (246) Sensing that ice candy man plays pimp for her even after the marriage, she outshouts, “You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks and goondas and say she has come to no harm?”(248). She further says, “Is that why you had her lifted off-let hundreds of eyes probe her so that you could marry her?” (248). She knows that ice candy man forcefully marries her and lets her “be disgraced!” (249) She finds him “treacherous, dangerous and contemptible” (249). With this realization, she commits to recover Ayah from Hira Mandi and restore to her family. She even tells him, “Restore her to family in Amritsar”. (250) The godmother commits to imbue her “with a sense of worth” and restoring her “to the social acceptability”. (Menon & Bhasin 192) So, she chooses what Ayah chooses for herself. Ayah often repeats, “I want to go to my folk”. (263) She admits, “whether they want me or not, I will go”. (262) Godmother responds to Ayah's plea and retrieves her from the brothel by assisting the police administrative. The first step to restore the family was to introduce her to the camp. They become the social workers in the business “time of great social dislocation... found it possible to slip through the cracks and exercise their agency on behalf of the women whenever they could”. (Menon & Bhasin 201) Due to the exercise of their agency, Ayah “has gone to her family in Amritsar”. (Sidhwa 277)

The book also records Hamida, like Ayah she is also victim of partition and labelled as a fallen woman. She comes to work for Lenny as ayah, as Ayah of the family gets abducted. She was abused and that’s why she decides not to go back to her family, rather she searches work in Lahore. Hamida was also kidnapped by Sikhs. Lenny comes to know about this kidnapping from Godmother. Even it was not one’s own fault to be kidnapped or raped but the family denies to take that woman back to home. Godmother tells Lenny that “ some folks feel that way... they can’t stand their women being touched by another men”. At this , Lenny recalls when Himat Ali once forbids her to touch the sparrow that had tumbled from its nest on her veranda: “Let it be, he’d

stopped me the mother will take care of it. If our hands touch it, the other sparrows will peck it to death. Even the mother? She asked. Even the mother” he’d said”. (215-16) Hamida too, doesn’t try to go back to her family. Even she never blames her husband for not coming to recover her . Rather she blames her destiny. She believes that humans are mere puppets at hands of fate. All these incidents are deeply marked in Lenny's consciousness. As Lenny grows old, she starts developing thoughts. She assets:

I feel so sorry for myself – and for Cousin – and for all the senile, lame and hurt people and fallen women – and the condition of the world – in which countries can be broken, people slaughtered and cities burnt – that I burst into tears. I feel I will never stop crying. (217)

Conclusion

In conclusion, Sidhwa wants to demonstrate that women have worked hard to respect themselves, regardless of religion or culture. On the one hand, Sidhwa depicted Ayah, the true name of which is Shanta (a Hindu woman), while on the other hand, Sidhwa symbolised the plight of a Muslim woman. Ayah's a step to Amritsar is a sign of honour restore. There is no doubt that women suffer most from division and that Sidhwa is stronger and more able to emphasise the pain and the difficulty of division in the female body and in the psyche. In their attempt to restore voice to all, Bapsi Sidhwa has been quite fruitful.

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