

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

## IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE NOVEL OF BAPSI SIDHWA'S *ICE- CANDY- MAN*

Dr.D.BHARATHI<sup>1</sup>, Dr.P.KRISHNAVENI<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Assistant Professor of English,

Annamacharya Institute of Technology & Sciences, Tirupati



### ABSTRACT

Bapsi Sidhwa, "Pakistan's finest English language novelist" is an international writer and she got international acclamation for her works. She received several prestigious awards like Sitara-i-Imtiaz, Pakistan's highest national honour in arts in 1991, the LiBeraturepreis Award, Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Writer's Award etc. Basically Sidhwa is an active social worker. She was born on August 11, 1939, in Karachi, Pakistan, the then part of India and was brought up in Lahore. She is the author for five novels and her third novel is *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) – in USA it was published as *Cracking India*. The novel deals about the Pre-Partition and Post-Partition of India. Sidhwa writes this novel from a Parsi perspective. The novel depicts the holocausts of Partition without morbidity or censure. She not only depicts how communal riots played a vital role in the Partition but also how women in all communities were used as a play material in the Partition play ground.

**KEY WORDS:** Partition of India, Communal riots, Women bodies, Identity of Minorities, Atrocity

### INTRODUCTION:

The topic of Indian Independence is an ever interesting theme for many writers. On this arena one can find not only works on conflagrations on either side of Radcliffe Line but a number of films were also deal with the same theme. *Ice-Candy-Man* or *Cracking India* by Bapsi Sidhwa (1988), which was made into a film 1947 subtitled *Earth* (1999) is one among them that focus on "Freedom was not FREE to the sub-continent." In fact *Ice-Candy-Man* has an element of autobiography where Sidhwa not only narrates from the perspective of a Pakistani regarding the "dark days" in the history of united India, through a character called Lenny, an eight-year-old polio affected girl-child belonging to a marginalized Parsi community who stands as a full-time spectator and a witness to various socio-religious and political disparities and also provides Ranna's experience as a victim – how

minorities were marginalized during and after the partition.

### DISCUSSION

Lenny is under the total care of Shanta, a Hindu from Amritsar, called *Ayah*, one of the servants in Lenny's house at Warris Road in Lahore. Lenny is not sent to school because her family doctor suggests that she should evade strain to her mind and to her polio-effected leg since it needs complete supervision. Being intelligent, Lenny observes that people of different religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, etc. are very amicable with one another and they are ready to help and even sacrifice for one another as they are bound to friendship. Though the people of different communities live within their own houses, the boundaries drawn around them are never rigid. There is a lot of intermingling and exchange. They

share each other's joys and bereavements. Sher Singh the zoo care taker, the Masseur, the Ice-candy man, Imam Din the cook, Hari the gardner, Yousf , Sharbath Khan the knife sharpener, Ramzan, the butcher are some people known to Lenny and Ayah where they meet regularly in the Queen's garden.

Bapsi Sidhwa seems to have certain fixed views about the attitude of the leaders from the dominant communities to others. Jinnah and other Muslims did not think about communalism even though the Muslim party did not win in the 1934 elections. But Ayesha Jalal in her article *Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Partition of India* states: "Gandhi's role in introducing religion into politics, the anti-Muslim proclivities of the Hindu right, led by Patel in the 1940s, and Nehru's arrogance and haughtiness in dealing with Jinnah and the Muslim League" (Jalal 1) cannot be brushed aside. Sidhwa expresses her view in an interview to David Montenegro that "... Jinnah, who was one of the founders of the Congress party, found he had to edge away from it because it was changing into a Hindu party" (Montenegro 523). At one stage Jinnah and others began to feel that they were overshadowed by the Hindu leaders. This marginalization existed not only in politics but also in community.

Since it is not possible to protect their unique identity with Gandhi, Nehru and Patel, and Hindu fanatics like Akalis, Kewal Keloti in his novel *The Fated Sky* says that "Jinnah, Sahid Sohraworthy and Liaquat Ali" (Keloti 149) and other members in the Muslim League passed a resolution in 1943 for a separate nation. Kabir in his article *Gender, Memory Trauma* depicts "Two-Nation Theory," the conceptual basis of the demand for a separate homeland for Muslims propounded by the Muslim reformer Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) in the nineteenth century, was first formally introduced in Allama Iqbal's presidential address to the Muslim League on December 29, 1930" (Kabir 228). Gandhi was shocked to learn about the proposal of the division of the country. Keloti points out, Jinnah openly declared that "If I do not get Pakistan, I shall destroy the whole of India" (Keloti 149), and continues "Sahid SohraWorthy Chief Minister of

Calcutta "a drunkard, pork-eater, womanizer, gangster" (Keloti 71) had given the slogan of Direct Action Day to pressurize their demand for Pakistan. 16 August 1946 was fixed as a day of Direct Action. At one point Gandhi suggested to make Jinnah the first Prime Minister of India but Nehru refused to accept it. Alok Balla in his article *Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home* points out "If Nehru had, then the Partition would not have happened" (Balla 224). At last Gandhi agreed to partition on condition that it would be like a partition between two brothers.

Sidhwa expresses the Britishers intention on Indian Independence through the character General Rogers that the Indians must arrive at their freedom slowly. They must first educate themselves to be free. If British leave India prematurely, then it will be impossible for Indians to rule India peacefully, because people kill each other and the nation will be in total chaos. And the British also observes that even though the Muslim League won in Punjab elections, and Jinnah had the backing of 70 million Muslims, Nehru, Gandhi and others are not listening to the Muslim League on the idea of United India. Nahal in *Azadi* comments upon the leaders understanding that "it was a shame they were not united in their demands" (Nahal 99).

In order to see his people, Imam Din, along with Lenny, goes to Pir Pindo village. In the midst of the festival, Ranna senses something different. He finds a number of strangers in the village and smells a kind of abnormal atmosphere in the village:

"A sikh youth whom Ranna has met a few times, and who has always been kind, pretends not to notice Ranna. Other men, who would normally smile at Ranna, slide their eyes past. Little by little, without his being aware of it, his smile becomes strained and his laughter strident" (106).

In a similar situation, Kushwant Singh in his novel *Train to Pakistan* states that the Sikhs in Manomanjra Village advise Muslims that there is no thought of separatism between the brothers of the village but outsiders may do anything to Muslims because many Sikhs are arriving from outside and are becoming more furious day by day.

Kushwant Singh depicts the pains of Marginal Muslims through a character Imam Baksha, a village Muslim leader, by saying "What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers" (Singh 126). The question remains to the Muslims where they can go by leaving their love for their native land, their property, their lands, their kin, and their business. It is not the question that the people of one religion or one village but of millions of minorities at many places especially in North India. The political conditions make united India break. Punjab is torn into two. One of these days people expect Tara Singh to speak outside the Assembly Chambers near Queen's garden. Since there is no place in the garden Lenny, Ayah and friends see it from Falettis hotel's roof. Tara Singh shouts:

"We will see how the Muslim swine get Pakistan; we will fight to the last man! We will show them who will leave Lahore! '*Raj Karega Khalsa, aki rahi na koi!*'

The Sikhs milling about in a huge blob in front wildly wave and clash their swords, Kirpans and hockey-sticks, and punctuate his shrieks with roars: '*Pakistan Murdabad! Death to Pakistan! Sat Siri Akkal! Bolay se nihaal!*'

And the Muslims shouting: "So? We'll play Holi-with-their blood! Ho-o-o-li with their blo-o-o-d!"(134)

Thus India becomes a playground for people of three religions – Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. During a discussion regarding the partition between the borders of India and Pakistan, Masseur expresses his view that "if Punjab is divided, Lahore is bound to go to Pakistan. There is Muslim majority here..." (128). But the Government House gardener responds in such a way that "Lahore will stay in India" (128) because the settlements of Hindus are very large and the central business in Lahore totally depends on Hindus' money. They have fixed assets and own most of the business. Masseur continues insisting, "but there are too many Mussulmann's!" Someone in the group says, "So what? People don't matter...Money does!" (128). Dhawan in his *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa* states that "The disagreements were no longer youthful verbal

quarrels but echoed bigger divisions" (Dhawan 41). It shows clearly that the society is domineering with mad protests, killings, and robbing. Normally it becomes a daily routine. People are accustomed to day-to-day conflagrations. Meanwhile Wrestler quietly reveals that "Sikhs are preparing to drive the Muslims out of East Punjab – to the other side of Ravi"(130). There is a lot of talk about partition. The English become only spectators as they have no intention to deal with the situation in full length. Slowly the problem spreads from cities to villages. The fear of partition makes the common man think of his safety.

Lenny narrates a horrible thing that happens in front of her eyes. She and others see a terrible thing below the terrace that the activists in the procession are milling about two jeeps pushed back to back. They come to a halt:

the men in front of the procession pulling ahead and the mob behind banked close up. There is a quickening in the activity about the jeeps. My eyes focus on an emaciated Banya wearing a white Gandhi cap. The man is knocked down. His lips are drawn away from rotting, Pann-stained teeth in a scream. The men move back and in the small clearing I see his legs sticking out of his dhoti right up to the groin – each thin, brow leg tied to a jeep ... and there is the roar of a hundred throats: 'Allah-o-Akbar!' and beneath it the growl of reviving motors" (135).

On the other side Shalmi starts to burn. Lenny observes that the flames swallow two buildings. People come out from their shops and houses, meanwhile fire engines and fire brigade pumps out water from their hoses at the rest of the buildings; as the fire brigade drives away the next minute both sides of the buildings ignite incredible conflagrations. Lenny finds Ice-candy-man is with a kind of strange exhilaration on his face. At first Ice-candy-man and others are confused, later he announces by laughing aloud that they sprayed petrol and confirms that they are Muslims. Lenny sees panicked Hindus and Sikhs come out and run from one end to another, charred limbs, and parts of flesh in the street. And the Muslim men and women

on the roof are expressing their happiness through laughing, slapping and hugging one another. It is very pathetic that Army too is communalized. Lenny feels that the whole world is burning.

The British appointed an expert Cyril Radcliffe to draw the boundary lines between India and Pakistan. Ravikanth in his *Translating Partition* states that "The Cartographer Cyril Radcliffe, a man without any understanding of the composite culture of India, was assigned to draw the lines that would eventually become the national boundaries" (Ravikanth 4). Independence was declared to Pakistan and India on the 14<sup>th</sup> and on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 1947 respectively. On 16<sup>th</sup> of August the maps of demarcation were handed over by the Last Viceroy Lord Mountbatten, to the new rulers, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru. On 17<sup>th</sup> of August 1947, the British announced the borders of the two nations. They spent only seven weeks on the fate of India. Sidhwa says that "the Radcliff Commission deals Indian cities like a pack of cards" (140). In that distribution, Lahore and Sialkot went to Pakistan where as Amritsar, Pathankot, Gurudaspur and Kashmir to India. Sidhwa speaks on behalf of Pakistan that without Gurudaspur and Pathankot, Muslim Kashmir cannot be secured. Britishers divided united India by creating Kashmir problem between India and Pakistan forever. Thus a new nation was born in the world map. Since Lahore has gone to Pakistan, Sidhwa says that she becomes a "Pakistani in a snap just like that" (140).

Masseur suggests to Sher Singh that if the circumstances become too bad then it is better for him to move to Amritsar or Gurudaspur. But Sher Singh obstinately refuses Masseur's suggestion and says that he has no intention to leave Lahore. Meanwhile Ice-candy-man comes on a cycle breathlessly, with sweat and dust and his frantic eyes instantly rest on Sher Singh for a while and turn towards the group and breathlessly announces, "A train from Gurudaspur has just come in," "Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts!" (140). Once again he sees Sher Singh and says:

"I was expecting relatives... For three days... For twelve hours each day... I waited for

that train! What I've heard is unbearable. I don't want to believe it. For a grisly instant I see Mother's detached breasts: soft, pendulous, their beige nipples spreading. (149)

The details of train massacre are described by Sidhwa in such a way that the reader experiences the horror of partition in her novel *The Pakistani Bride* through a character Qasim. He describes the horrors of train as follows:

Compartments and lavatories are jammed with stifled brown bodies; some carry the dead weight of children asleep on swaying shoulders. Women hold on to flush chains, they lean on the children cramped into washbasins. The train speeds on" (Sidhwa 25).

Only now does the engine-driver realize there is something further down the track. A roar rises from the mass of jolted refugees. The train's single headlight flashes on. It spotlights the barricade of logs and some unaligned rails. White singlets flicker in and out of the glare. The train brakes heavily and the engine crashes into the logs. People are flung from their scant hold on the footboards, roof and buffer. Women and children pour from the crammed compartments.

Now the mob runs towards the train with lighted flares. Qasim sees the men clearly. They are Sikhs. Tall, crazed men wave swords. A cry: 'Bole so Nihal' and the answering roar, 'Sat Sri Akal!' Torches unevenly light the scene and Qasim watches the massacre as in a cinema. An eerie clamour rises. Sounds of firing explode above agonized shrieks. (Sidhwa 28).

Within three months after partition, seven million Muslims and five million Hindus and Sikhs were uprooted in the largest terrible exchange of population so far known to history. The Punjab and West Bengal were divided thoroughly city by city, village by village, even person by person. All kinds of anti-social elements were involved in this partition. Old personal grudges, possessiveness, matters relating to women, etc plays a vital role along with partition. They killed not only people of another religion but also of their own, and women

were raped and mutilated not only by men of other religion, many times by their own folk.

Very rapidly Lahore becomes a symbol for mono religion. There are no Hindus and Sikhs with their religion identities. Only Muslims – natives and refugees. Greed plays a dominant role during the Partition.

One day a procession comes to Lenny's house with a slogan *Allah-ho- Akbar* when Lenny's father is not at home. Lenny's mother faces the mob. Ice-candy-man emerges out from the mob. Lenny says:

Ice-candy-man is crouched before me. 'Don't be scared, Lenny baby,' he says. 'I'm here.' And putting his arms around me he whispers, so that only I can hear: 'I'll protect Ayah with my life! You know I will ... I know she's here. Where is she?'

And dredging from some foul truthful depth in me a fragment of overheard conversation that I had not registered at the time, I say: 'On the roof – or in one of the godowns...'(182)

At once the matter reaches the mob and four of them surround the house on all sides and enter inside and Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy-Man* and Mehta in her movie 1947 clearly show how the majority community treated minority women during the partition period:

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. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like the dead child's screamless mouth. Her violet sari slips off her shoulder, and her breasts strain at her sari-blouse stretching the cloth so that the white stitching at the seams shows. A sleeve tears under her arm.

The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces. (183)

In fact, Ice-candy-man is ready to do anything for the sake of Ayah out of love for her. But here Dhawan feels that "the passion of love is powerless against religious bigotry" (Dhawan 46) and love is shown as not being able to do anything when communal passions are aroused.

Ranna narrates the events that happened in Pir Pindo. Sidhwa narrates Ranna's experience as a victim and witness of tragic things that affected himself, his family, and his clan just two months ago.

Pir Pindo is a village which is very close to Amritsar dominated by Sikhs. Jagjit Singh requests and warns the Muslims to leave the village since the neighbouring villages are occupied by Akhalis under the leadership of Dera Tek Singh, a cruel leader. Owing to their love for the land, Muslims refuse to leave Pir Pindo at once. That night, Dera Tek Singh and his mob cover Pir Pindo village on all four sides.

They killed each and every Muslim man, woman, child, and baby not only in his house but in the entire village. He says that "he saw his eleven-year-old sister, Khatija, run stark naked into their courtyard. Her long hair disheveled her boyish body bruise, her lips cut and swollen and a bloody scab where her front teeth were missing" (202). He saw other women folk had been tortured by the Sikhs. The mob made the women naked and hung them upside down and their long hair kept on fire. And for some women they separated their parts. The mob raped each and every woman and girl irrespective of their age. Some women were raped and ripped through their stomachs. They killed babies by smashing them against the walls and throwing them in boiling oil. They did not leave a single place in the village without searching. They covered fields, houses, mosques, etc.

One day Lenny's cousin announces that he saw Ayah in a car and continues that she has become a call girl. From the discussions between Godmother and Ice-candy-man, Lenny learns that Ice-candy-man raped Ayah and allowed the men to rape her and he has become a pimp in the red light area. Ice-candy-man has changed Ayah's name from *Shanta* to *Mumtaz* and seized her physically and mentally and married her without her wish.

Balla points out the horror situation of minority women that "Women were literally sold

like vegetables in streets of Punjab for ten or twenty rupees like vegetables: Men used to go down the streets with captive women, shouting, 'woman for sale, woman for sale!'" (Balla 237).

Nahal describes in his novel *Azadi* regarding the women parade in Sialkot through Arun the protagonist that he figures there were forty women from sixteen to sixty years of age in the parade:

They were all stark naked. Their heads were completely shaven; so were their armpits. So were their public regions. Shrove of their body hair and clothes, they looked like baby girls, or like the bald embryos one sees preserved in methylated spirit... They were all crying, though their eyes shed no tears ... none of them made any attempt to cover themselves with their hands... The bruises on their bodies showed they had been beaten and manhandled.

The procession moved through the bazaar, and along with the procession moved a river of obscenities – foul abuses, crude personal gestures, spurts of sputum, odd articles like small coins, faded flowers, cigarette butts and bidis that were thrown at the women. As soon as the women came near, that section of the crowd became hysterical. 'Rape them.' 'Put it inside of them.' 'The filthy bitches.' 'The Kafir women'. Some said worse things. Then came the shower of spittle. Almost everyone spat, and hundreds of tongues were pushed forward inside of their teeth and hundreds of uplifted faces canon-like fired the saliva... Many men in the front rows of the crowd lifted their lungis to display their genitals to them. Others aimed small articles at them and tried to hit them... And almost to the last man, whether they spat or shouted or threw things of just stood with their mouths open, they stared at the pubic regions of the women. Through indelicate exposure those areas had lost their glory, lost all magic, and there was only a small, slippery aperture you saw there. But men's eyes were

settled on these apertures. And the moment the women had passed ahead, the eyes were settled on the bruised buttocks. (Nahal 261-262)

According to Keloti, the madness of Partition has reached its peak when people of both countries started to send gifts to the new Prime Ministers. The Muslim mob found an abandoned suspected milk utensil on the street:

"Slowly and consciously the servant boy of the 'chat – shop' went close by. Carefully, he opened up the lid and turned the utensil upside down. Everybody was stunned to see the contents. It were a mound of circumscribed human penises, might be of fifty-sixty in number. A pungent smell followed...The servant boy spit repeatedly, picked up a piece of paper, a letter, from within the mound, came back and handed the paper to the educated man. He read aloud, 'The First Gift for Jinnah on First Freedom Day of his Pakistan.'" (Keloti 130).

Similarly the Hindu mob found a gift on a Ghost Train from Pakistan where everyone was killed in and writes "The First Gift for Nehru and Patel on First Freedom Day of India" (Keloti 131). The trains not only carried dead bodies but also horrific tales and rumors as well. Exchange of gifts between the two nations has become very common. Keloti points out the inefficiency of Indian political leaders: "Within a span of three weeks Independence, Free India became the slave of British Empire again under the Governor Generalship of Lord Mountbatten as Nehru was referred to have said, "We are well experienced Agitators but not Rulers" (Keloti 199). Approximately ten million people had to leave their homes and ancestral holdings and a tenth of them were slaughtered in the most singular civil war in recent history. There were no leaders, no armed forces, and no plans – only a spontaneous and visceral ferocity. Indeed, in this age of global violence and atrocity, we need to pause and take stock of the lessons we have learned from history and literature" (Montenegro 10)

## References

- 1947: *The Earth*. Dir. Deepa Mehta. Prod. Anne Masson and Deepa Mehta. Perf. Amirkhan and Nanditha Dass. 1999. DVD.
- Bhalla, Alok. *Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home*. New Delhi: OUP, 2006. Print.
- Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Viking, 1998. Print.
- Dhawan, R.K. and Novy Kapadia. *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1996. Print.
- Gopal, Priyamvada. *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration*. Oxford: OUP, 2009. Print.
- Hasan, Mushirul. *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*. New Delhi: Roli Books, 2005. Print.
- Jindal, T.P. *Ayodhya Imbroglio*. New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1995. Print.
- Kabir, A.J. "Gender, Memory Trauma: Women's Novels on the Partition of India." *Chang Gung Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol.4. 2Oct. 2011. Web. 13 Jan. 2013.  
<<http://memo.cgu.edu.tw/cgjhs/CGJ4-2-01.pdf>>.
- Kant, Ravi and Tarun K. Saint. Foreword. *Translating Partition*. New Delhi: Katha, 2001. XIII. Print.
- Kakaria, Bachi. "Ice-Candy Woman." *The Times of India*. Feb 19, 2005. Print.
- Keloti, Kewal. *The Fated Sky*. New Delhi: Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd, 2008. Print.
- Malgonkar, Manohar. *A Bend in The Ganges*. New Delhi: Orient publishers, 1964. Print.
- Moelkar, M.Y. "Kushwant Singh's Train To Pakistan And Bapsi Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride: A Thematic Comparison." *Journal of Literatures in English Association of English studies*. Vol.3. (2010). 31- 40. Print
- Nahal, Chaman. *Azadi*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001. Print.
- Sengupta, Anwesha. "Looking Back at Partition and Women: A fact sheet." *Peace Prints: South Asian Journal of Peace building*. 4.1. Wiscomp.com. n.d. 2012. Web. 15 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.wiscomp.org/peaceprints.html>>.
- Sidhwa, Bapsi. *Ice-Candy-Man*. New Delhi: Milkweed Editions, 2006. Print
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Pakistani Bride*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990. Print.