

PARTITION FROM POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES: A STUDY OF BAPSI SIDHWA'S ICE CANDY MAN (CRACKING INDIA)

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Abstract : Bapsi Sidhwa remains a potent voice among the modern writers. She is the only Parsi woman writer to write on the theme of Partition. Bapsi Sidhwa through her extremely absorbing and most important work, *The Ice-Candy-Man*, through the subaltern eyes of a child-narrator belonging to the Parsi diaspora in colonial Lahore, Pakistan. Bapsi Sidhwa describes the traumatic tale of Partition days when the lofty ideal of nationalism was suddenly bartered for communal thinking resulting in unprecedented devastation, political absurdities and deranged social sensibilities. Through her novel Bapsi Sidhwa has not only been successful in questioning the British and Postcolonial perspectives on partition: A study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*. (cracking India) Indian versions of the subcontinent's history, but has also provided an alternate version of history based on the prevalent, dominant Pakistani point of view. It will be explored as to how the novel examines the inexorable logic of Partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by communal hatred. This novel is the prism of Parsi sensitivity through which the cataclysmic event is depicted.

Keywords: Bartered, Cataclysmic, Communal hatred, Diaspora, fundamentalism, Postcolonial perspectives, Subaltern eyes, Trauma of Partition, Violence.

1.0 Introduction

Bapsi Sidhwa is a prolific and an eminent Pakistani diasporic writer. Her works include *The Crow Eaters* (1978, Pakistan; 1979 & 1981, India; 1980, England; 1982, US). *The Bride* (1982, England; 1983; 1984, India; published as *The Pakistani Bride*, 1990 US and 2008 US), *Cracking India* (1991, U.S.; 1992, India; originally published as *Ice Candy Man*, 1988, England), *Bapsi Sidhwa Omnibus* (2001, Pakistan), *An American Brat* (1993, U.S.; 1995, India), *City of Sin and Splendour : Writings on Lahore* (2006, US), *Water: A Novel* (2006, US and Canada), *Jungle Wala Sahib. (Translation from Urdu in 2012)* *Their Language of Love* (2013). Her novels in English reflect her personal experience of the Partition of Indian subcontinent, abuse against women, immigration to the US, and membership in the Parsi or Zoroastrian community.

The term post-colonial literature is relatively new addition of the lexicon of literature. Postcolonial literature is a body of literary writings that has been written against the process of colonization. It has always been a dominant subject for famous writers such as Ashish Nandi, Salman Rushdie, Khushwant Singh, Kiran Desai, Chinua Achebe, Joseph Conrad and Michael Ondaatje and so on. The chief function of these authors is to show that the pernicious effects of colonialism do not end with the withdrawal of British rule in their native areas. An analytical understanding of colonial history will undoubtedly delineate the prevalence of impact of colonialism. Nagarajan explains the postcolonial by saying that, "Post colonialism examines and analyses the aftermath of colonization, and the effects of colonial oppression. In other words, it analyses the literature that was affected by the imperial process, the literature that grew in response to colonial domination..." (Nagarajan p.,185). The root of colonialism always continues to spread, although these are not clearly visible to the common masses. Being aware of the colonial and its drastic impact, Bapsi Sidhwa effortlessly shows these impacts of colonialism in her most critical and influential novel called *Ice-Candy Man* (1988).

The creative writer gains an advantage over the historian; he provides the local events with a global perspective, studies the aftermath, the affected victims and its effect on the life of individuals as well as the future of a nation. The historian needs to be selective and he presents only the significant events important from political, social or national perspective. On the other hand the creative writer paints the details left by the historian, wraps the factual details of the historical events with a coating of fiction and makes the events interesting and appealing to the readers worldwide. The historian presents what was? While the creative writer answers the

past, present and future aspects of a historical event. The impetus to write comes from within. The creative writer is “guided more by intuition and an itch to write, than by an exercise of intellect”. (Sidhwa “Why do I write?” 29). Sidhwa, further adds-“I have loved to commemorate in my fiction, about my concerns. That is the nature of writing, if you have things to say, you need no other reason to write”. (Sidhwa *Why do I write ?* p., 31)

Historical events which shook the world also have an indelible impression on the mind and psyche of the laymen and the creative writer. It is the sensibility, the empathy of the writer to experience the fellow’s agony, pain, the loss and devastation, the importance of the occasion and to convey it exactly to the readers. Historiography concentrates solely on historical facts and time. Time is an important and decisive factor in the writing of history, but in case of literature (historical fiction) at times, the author exploits the situation and time according to his artistic purposes. Sidhwa reveals- “The storyteller naturally gravitates to the dramatic. She (he) has a passion to recreate the momentous occasion, whether it be fantasized or personally experienced, of a domestic nature or of historical dimension... and record events for the posterity as filtered through her unique vision”.(Sidhwa *Why do I write ?* p., 31)

Two events are the important episodes in the Indian history which changed the whole course of the life, culture, communal harmony and the future of the nation. The two events Independence and Partition not only affected the fate of an individual, but nation, religion and culture are still paying the price. The partition of India and Pakistan soon after India’s independence was a painful ending episode which led to great upheaval, a brutal massacre and exodus of masses over the borders.

Thousands of the natives were uprooted from their homelands, many women widowed, raped and murdered and, children became orphans. This cataclysmic incidence has created gaps and boundaries and, ever since a feeling of suspicion and misunderstanding has been developed among the two concerned countries.

It may be worth mentioning that Bapsi Sidhwa herself was a young girl in Lahore in the years leading up to Partition, and thus, like Lenny in *Cracking India*, witnessed the historical events of the time. Due to the conflicting or contrasting nature of the Partition narratives, the element of truth becomes very indispensable in the writing process of fiction or non-fiction. Sidhwa is alive to this danger and, therefore, chooses the age and sex of her narrator of the novel circumspectly. Through the first-person account of an eight-year old girl, Lenny, in Sidhwa’s work, we feel the unease and insecurity experienced by this ethnic and religious minority group the Parsis. Such quintessential diasporic discourses can be explained in Homi Bhabha’s terms as, “the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective” (Homi Bhabha: 1994, p., 2).

In the beginning of the novel, there is no place for the feeling of enmity among Hindus and Muslims but with the passage of the time this friendly situation completely reverses and they become killers of one another. To avenge murder of his sisters who are raped and murdered in riots of Hindu and Muslim, Ice Candy Man murders Masseur who loves Aaya and promises to marry her. He also gets indulged in other activities of violence. The novel clearly shows that this reversed situation is not a sudden result of any particular incidents but a result from policy of divide and rule used by the British rulers. They create uncertain and dangerous atmosphere where Hindu and Muslim can remain and live together for long time. Hindus and Muslims start hating one another for the cause. In this situation, thousands of innocent people including women, children, old people and so on are killed mercilessly by Hindus and Muslims without thinking who really is responsible for this situation. History shows that women have always been victims of violence whether it is religious riots or caste based riots. Therefore, they cannot be spared from the ill effects of post colonialism. The novel demonstrates that the revenges are realised through the victimization of women in riots. During the partition, women are raped and murdered on the open street as presented in following lines:

Setting fires, looting, parading the Muslim women naked through the streets - raping and mutilating them in the centre of village and in mosques. The Bias, flooded by melting snow, and the monsoon, is carrying hundreds of corpses. There is an intolerable stench where the bodies, caught in the bends, have piled up. (Sidhwa, p., 172).

Sometime it happens that she gets failed to understand from where the sound of wailing of women is coming: “The mystery of the women in the courtyard deepens. At night we hear them wailing, their cries verging on the inhuman. Sometime I can’t tell where the cries are coming from. From the women or from the house next door infiltrated by our invisible neighbours” (Sidhwa.1991 p., 212). The character of Aaya and sisters of Ice-Candy Man are not just characters but they represent those innocent people who become the victims of partition of India crafted by British rulers. The novel evidently narrates the hidden and vested interest of the British Government which has no personal interest in the development of India with economic policies. They knowingly introduced such acts and rules which could suit their personal interests. Although this aspect of development is not clearly presented in the novel but a deep study of the novel reveals that such policy and action are taken by the British Government to develop and improve the ravaged economic condition of India. In

the novel there is no a single character who can be said to be flourished and economically strong. They all belong to poor families without any fixed job. Ice-Candy Man is the best example of the situation. Having no permanent occupation, Ice-Candy Man always changes his profession. There are no plans to create jobs for common masses. All the resources are transported by British Government into England.

Bapsi Sidhwa subverts the Indian perspective on Partition in general and on Jinnah in particular. From the point of Bapsi Sidhwa, Partition was the result of British policies of divide and rule, Gandhi's mixing of religion and politics and Nehru's Prime-ministerial ambitions. According to Bapsi Sidhwa, Muslim League and Jinnah have been presented in the books of Indian and British scholars in a biased manner. Her presentation of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Master Tara Singh as the architects of Partition and excusing Jinnah paves way for an alternate view of reality. Her assessment of Jinnah's role in the freedom movement is also noteworthy. She is of the view that the British have been less than fair to him as well as to Pakistan. Her portrayal of Gandhi is too radical to miss. She directly blames Gandhi for the Partition, while not caring to remember that the strongest opposition to the idea of Partition came from Gandhi himself. The analysis of the political leadership during the Partition days by Sidhwa is subjective and at times even prejudiced.

The contrast between Nehru and Jinnah is seen as the opposition between superficiality and worth, appearance and reality. The charm of Nehru is presented as deceptive while the austerity of Jinnah is seen as his virtue. Here the writer sheds all the pretensions of using Lenny as an objective narrator, and uses her authorial voice directly to stress the disparity between Nehru and Jinnah.

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Like Chinua Achebe's narrative in *Things Falls Apart*, Bapsi Sidhwa has used the native words in the novel to show her anticolonial attitude. The amalgam of English language with indigenous words shows that she is delighted to write the novel in English but the significance of the indigenous words are not neglected. These indigenous words show the importance of the words whose essence cannot be expressed in words of alternative language. At one side she writes the novel in English, on the other hand she uses Indian diction such as 'pahailwan', 'choorail', 'shabash', 'ghar ki murgi dal brabar', 'kotha' etc. By using these words she wants to represent Indian culture. Bapsi Sidhwa's anticolonial attitude is apparent when Iqbal's poem "Complaint to God" is recited. It can be undoubtedly said that Sidhwa is a master of representing the postcolonial aspects in her famous novel named *Ice-Candy Man*. The novel not only confined itself with one particular aspect of post-colonialism but also touches upon the issues relating to women's physically and mentally exploitation, divide and rule policy British policies, communal as well as religious riots between Hindus and Muslims, exploitation of resources of India by British ruler and etc. While reading the novel, readers feel that they are not only just reading the novel but feel that they are clearly watching and experiencing the incidents presented in the novel. *Ice-Candy Man* can be called a representative of postcolonial literature.

2.0 Conclusion :

Ice Candy Man gives us a glimpse into the events of turmoil on the Indian subcontinent during Partition. It distils the love-hate relationship of the Hindus and Muslims through the consciousness and point of view of Lenny, an unusually precocious eight-year-old Parsi girl. It presents the Parsi dilemma of retaining allegiance to political masters, as well as a Parsi-Pakistani perspective of Partition. Bapsi Sidhwa has not only been successful in questioning the British and Indian versions of the subcontinent's history, but has also provided an alternate version of history based on the prevalent, dominant Pakistani point of view. Through *Cracking India*, Bapsi Sidhwa has indeed brought to life the spiritual, emotional, and the real implications of the Partition of India.

3.0 References

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