

Gender Subjugation in Indian and Pakistani Society with reference to Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man*

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Abstract:

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man* explores the marginalization of women during the partition and after the partition. The main objective of this paper is to project in bright light the various forms of gendered violence during the partition of India. An analysis of the central character Ayah and other women characters in the novel, underscore how acts of abduction and rape use women's sexuality as a tool to articulate religious enmity. This paper will depict that Ayah's abduction is a punishment for her lack of adherence to cultural norms. This paper also highlights that women's bodies were under patriarchal surveillance and regulations and those who fail to abide societal rules are inevitably discarded. This paper intends to explore the treatment of abducted women by the patriarchal state to expose the social reality where victimized women were ostracized by society. By analyzing the violence against women during the partition, this paper will highlight how Sidhwa's novel contributes to a silenced feminist reading of partition history.

Keywords: abduction, violence, oppression, patriarchy, sexuality

Introduction:

Gender and literature are closely related to each other in every society and culture. Sex is the creation of God. But gender is not God's creation. Patriarchy serves the male flair for domination. The Patriarchal social set up allows men's superiority over women. Although women have played a vital role in the creation of society, the patriarchal thought has always relegates them to margins. Literature reflects social reality and shapes the complex ways of men and women organization, their interpersonal relationship and their perception of their social-cultural reality.

Feminism occupies an important place in modern era. It focuses on the exploitation of women by the patriarchal society. Modern movement questions the positioning of women as inferior, passive and subordinate in comparison to men. Feminists challenged these assumption of women's secondary status to the

primary status of men. There is a massive difference between a male discourse and a feminist text. In the male discourse, men are invested with the qualities of action, justice, fair play and sacrifice while the female characters are the recipient of male protection, chivalry and bounty. In contrast to that, in a feminist text, it is the women who control and dominate the action.

The qualitative mode of research is used to analyze the novel, *Ice Candy Man*. Social Feminist theory is used to challenge the male control over the female. This paper has followed a descriptive approach and a critical study of the novel has been written with a strong feminist perspective. Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani American novelist, throws light on the tribal society of Pakistan. Women are experienced a variety of partiality within their family circle. Many writers have shown women as inferior and weak. They see men as stronger sex. But the real fact is that

women face more problems and difficulties than men. Sidhwa was born on August 11, 1938 in a Parsi family in Karachi in undivided India. Her father was Peshotan and mother was Tehmina. She belongs to a prominent Parsi business family. She was affected by Polio, when she was two years old. She spent seven years as an Indian citizen in the plains of Lahore. She became a Pakistani after the partition of India. She did not attend school until the age of fourteen. She was home tutored. An Anglo-Indian governess was employed for her to teach at home.

Ayah is chocolate brown and short. Everything about her is eighteen years old and round and plump even her face. Full brown cheeks, pouting mouth, and smooth forehead curve to form a circle with her head. And as if her looks were not stunning enough, she has a rolling bouncy walk that agitates the globules of her buttocks under her cheap colorful saris and the half spheres beneath her short sari blouses. (Sidhwa, 3).

Ayah's body has drawn the attention of the people and Lenny is impressed by her interaction with the men. When the partition came nearer, the communal riots start. The Hindus and the Sikhs became the enemy of the Muslims. They began to attack the Muslims particularly women. The women were raped by them. They cut their breast and vaginas to declare the victory of one community and shame for the other.

In *Ice Candy Man*, women become the signifiers of the honor of their families. During the partition, in many cases women were not ready to commit suicide. But they were emotionally appealed by their family members to commit suicide. In this disturbing partition, women's bodies were freely oppressed by men on both the sides. Men calm down their anger and frustration in this way. Sidhwa views that during the partition, religious conflict fought in the battlefield on women's bodies. Lenny observes the body of Ayah and she becomes

more aware of her own body. She does not accept her body as disabled. Even her body is polio-stricken, she confesses that it has many benefits. "Having polio in infancy is like born under a lucky star. It has many advantages." (Sidhwa, 10). Lenny said that she gained more attention, affection and love from her mother, godmother and Ayah because of her disability. Lenny said,

Mother massages my leg. Lie diagonally on the bed, my small raised foot between her breast. She leans forward and pushes back the ball of my foot. She applies all her fragile strength to stretch the stubborn tendon. (Sidhwa, 40)

Lenny's attitude towards her body is the result of people's remark which she hears around her. For example, Lenny recalls,

Drinking tea, I'm told make ones darker.

I'm dark enough.

Everyone says, "It's a pity Adi's fair and Lenny so dark.

He is boy. Anyone will marry him. (Sidhwa, 78)

These comments show that Lenny is marginalized through her body and color. In her early childhood, she comes to know that a girl should have a fair complex than the boys. Though she drives a social attention due to her disability, the society does not spare her by the gender marginalization. Lenny's doctor advised her mother that they should not take any worries about the schooling of Lenny. He said,

She is doing fine without school, isn't she? says the doctor.

"Don't pressure her.... Her nerves could be affected. She does not need to become a professor. he turns to me. Do you want to become a professor? I shake my head in a firm negative. "she will marry – have children-lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain

her with studies and exams. He advises thereby sealing my fate.(Sidhwa,15)

Lenny said that her doctor had marginalized her fate to the four walls of the house. Her educational development is easily dismissed by her biological duties. However, Sidhwa shows that the rigid attitude of man towards women's education. Sidhwa reveals this social oppression and discrimination through the character of Papoo. Papoo is a sweeper's daughter. She spent her days in doing the hard domestic work. Sidhwa portrays Muccho as unjust mother. She shows neither love nor tolerance for her daughter.

Bitch! Haramzadi ! may you die ! and Muccho's grasping hand reaches for the root of her daughter's braid. The gaunt, bitter fingers close on the hair, yanking cruelly and Papoo bows back and staggers backwards at an improbable angle. She falls in sitting on her small buttocks her legs straight out; still holding the jolted and blinking infant on her lip and the broom in her hand (Sidhwa,44)

Papoo's mother Muccho is deeply submissive to her husband. She knows well that women are marginalized in our society. She wanted to mold her daughter in the similar way. Lenny knows that one day Muccho would kill her daughter. She says,

I hate Muchho. I can not understand her cruelty to her own daughter. I know that someday she will kill her. From the improbable angle of Papoo's twisted limbs, I'm sure she has already done some.(Sidhwa,45).

In these lines, Lenny symbolically indicates that this physical twisting of Papoo's limbs shows that the emotional and the psychological suppression of men in this society. Sometimes, Papoo tries to escape from her mother unconsciously, when her mother beats her. Lenny observes this and said,

Skipping nimbly from her mother's lungs, Papoo jerks her boyish hips and

makes dark grinning faces and rude and mocking sounds and gestures. All at once, she pretends to go limp and again rolling her eyes up to show their whites, crumples defenseless to the ground and then spinning like a bundle of rage in a gale, flinging, jeering. Now tantalizingly close, now just out of reach.(Sidhwa,45)

In Ice Candy Man, Sidhwa explores that Papoo's body becomes an outlet of oppression and frustration of her mother. In this way Papoo's mother lets down her carthasis. Lenny's mother thinks that she is responsible for Lenny's disability. She works to put her limbs straight. Papoo is very strong. It is not easy for her mother to break her body. But Lenny goes through different kinds of operation. Her mother did a lot of exercises to bring back her leg into the right shape. We can say that the bodies of Lenny and Papoo are the sites of struggle to mold their bodies into feminine mold. Papoo's mother broke the wilderness spirit.

Electric Aunt is another important character in this novel who represents independence. She is a widow. She runs her own business and educating her own son. Yet she finds time to help the helpless people to leave Lahore by providing petrol for their vehicles. Thus, Sidhwa narrates that when it comes to social commitment, even women do not lag behind. Electric-Aunt is a good example for this act.

Lenny's mother is an obliging wife, an accomplished hostess, a guilty mother and an attractive woman. She conforms to all the roles which are considered to be feminine in the patriarchal society. However, her character becomes interesting when she begins to drive out of the house with her car, load of petrol canisters. Lenny shocked when her father acted superior to her mother and her mother pampered him still. What are fallen women? What are the things men do to women in Hira Mandi?. Lenny's narrative posed these questions. Through Lenny, Sidhwa explored a female universe hemmed in by the restricting forces of Patriarchy. Lenny's mother belonged to the economically privileged group of society.

Lenny's mother has a number of servants to attend her domestic chores. As a social worker, Lenny's mother tries to rehabilitate the abducted, orphaned and raped women. She strikes a new chord in Lenny's heart when the child is told about the true purpose of her mother's deed. Through her character, Sidhwa presents some of the common form of women exploitation in the domestic sphere and her ability to retain her individuality in the midst of their exploitation. There are no happy marriages in the novel. Sidhwa explores the female sexuality and the male power structures through the character of Ayah and Lenny's mother.

Rodabai is another women character in the novel who played a very crucial role. She is endowed with qualities of sharp wit, boundless love, social commitment, profound understanding of human life and of the world around. She never minds what people will say about her and visits Hira Mandi, the locality of prostitutes and tries to console Ayah. She said, "That was fated daughter. It cannot be undone. But it can be forgiven. Worse things are forgiven. That's the way of life." (Sidhwa, 147) But when she knows that Ayah is determined to go back to her family in Amristar, Rodabai meets the officials in charge and manages to secure Ayah's release from the clutches of Ice Candy Man in just fifteen days, while the process normally would have taken months. Rodabai is full of self-confidence and righteous zeal. She has the capacity to handle the crisis situations. Her dealing with Ice Candy Man who can change colors like a chameleon is a good example for her intelligence. When he tells her that he loves the Ayah and no harm can come to her, she asks him,

No harm?..You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks and goondas and say

She has come to no harm?

Women who have fallen prey to men's violence like Lenny's two Ayahs can not

hope for their restitution. Conversation between Lenny and Godmother shows that ,

What's a fallen women? I asked the grandmother....

Hamida (The second Ayah) was kidnapped by the Sikhs" says Godmother

seriously...

When that happens, sometimes the husband or his relatives won't take her back.

Why? It was not her fault she was kidnapped. Some fold feels that way- they can't

stand their women being touched by other men. (Sidhwa, 167)

This conversation clearly shows that how cruel the unwritten rules of patriarchal constitution are. The women internalize these laws into their perception of self-identity. In an overview of all the women characters, the God Mother's significance lies in her encouraging womanly confidence and inspiring self-worth in Lenny's sensibility. The novelist depicted that males attend the party to enjoy themselves while women attend those parties to please their husband and to become a thing of attraction for others.

Bapsidhwa's novel Ice Candy Man explores how women become the primary target of horrific violent acts during the ethnic warfare between the two communities of men. The gendered violence during the partition of India was due to the fact that attacks on women were symbolic attack on the honor and purity of the religion to which they belonged. Women experienced two forms of violence against them. The first form of violence was rape which is inflicted on women by men of other religious community to humiliate the enemy religion. The second form of violence was that male family members killing their women or forcing them to commit suicide in order to safeguard their family

pride and their ethnic religious purity. Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man* focuses on the first form of violence. The novelist depicts the abduction and rape through the character of Ayah. Papoo's mother Muccho is deeply submissive to her husband. She knows well that women are marginalized in our society. She wanted to mold her daughter in the similar way. Lenny knows that one day Muccho would kill her daughter. She says,

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way of life.”(Sidhwa,147) But when she knows that Ayah is determined to go back to her family in Amritsar, Rodabai meets the officials in charge and manages to secure Ayah’s release from the clutches of Ice Candy Man in just fifteen days, while the process normally would have taken months. Rodabai is full of self-confidence and righteous zeal. She has the capacity to handle the crisis situations. Her dealing with Ice Candy Man who can change colors like a chameleon is a good example for her intelligence. When he tells her that he loves the Ayah and no harm can come to her, she asks him,

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This novel reveals how apart from the forced silence imposed on the stories of women’s abduction and rape, the novelist

brings forth the rape narratives to light because language fails to articulate these incidents while keeping the dignity of the rape victim in mind. Hence, this paper explored the gendered violence during the partition riots which has been neglected by the hegemonic male-centric version of partition. It is evident that Sidhwa achieved what she was aiming to articulate through her storytelling. Sidhwa used a seven year old girl named Lenny as narrator. She belongs to Parsee Community. Parsi is a minor community which held a neutral position during the partition. Lenny is affected by polio. Despite her class privilege, she occupies a marginalized position in the society. By using a female child narrator as her mouthpiece, Sidhwa exposes how exploitative patriarchal rubric governs everyday life.

In this novel Sidhwa used the women as victim paradigm. The victimization of the women is a result of a collective action of the communal riots after the partition. The maid Ayah suffered the impact of partition the most. The communal riots gave Ice Candy Man the opportunity to abduct Ayah. The most tragic part of the Ayah’s abduction is that Lenny’s truth inflicted tongue sets it off. It is Ayah’s misfortune that people who love her most betrayed her. Unfortunately her husband becomes instrumental in admitting her into a brothel which commodifies her body. Lenny’s grandmother liberates her with the help of the recovered women’s camp. Ultimately she returned to Amritsar where her family lived.

The novel narrates the horrible traumas of partition, merciless butchering, naked women’s parade, cutting off women’s breast, rape, massacre and looting belongings that were frequent in the days of partition. The Indian version of partition portrayed the Muslims in general and the Jinnah in particular as the villain responsible for the partition of the Indian subcontinent. Sidhwa attempts to put forward the other version i.e. the Pakistani version of partition. Sidhwa says,

And I felt in Ice Candy Man, I was just redressing in a small way a very grievous wrong that has been done to Jinnah and Pakistanis by

many Indian and British writers. They have dehumanized him, made him a symbol of the sort of the person who brought about the partition of India whereas in reality he was the only constitutional man who did not sway crowds just by rhetoric. (Sidhwa, 174)

In Lenny's house, the gardener Hari changed his name as Himat Ali and Moti becomes David Masih. This incident shows that how different people resort to the politics of compromise and survival at the time of crisis. The Massuer's dead body was found in a gunny sack. The event of partition depicts human loss and agony.

The novel *Ice Candy Man* depicts the atrocities on women. Sidhwa gives a realistic picture of the traumatic event of partition in *Ice Candy Man*. The festival of Holi becomes a blood-soaked festival. Horrible scenes are observed in the border of both the sides.

Conclusion:

Thus Bapsi Sidhwa's novel, *Ice Candy Man* depicts how society curbs its individual's freedom under the pressure of patriarchy. She also highlights the power relations that govern society. The novel brings to our notice the secondary status of woman designed by the discrimination in the name of gender. The lowly status of women forces them to accept the ill-treatment at the society in general and the male in particular. The women characters projected in the novel seem to have been awakened but they could not transform their will and pleasure into reality. They retreat from the path of self-awakening. They submit to the oppressive hegemonic structure in the name of security and stability.

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