

A COMPENDIOUS NARRATION OF POST-INDEPENDENT HOLOCAUST IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S ICE-CANDY-MAN.

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Abstract

Bapsi Sidhwa is a reputed Pakistani-American novelist who has probed deep into the social, religious and political turmoil that took place immediately after the partition of India and exposed the impact of the same in her novel *Ice-Candy-Man*. The novel is highly satirical in tone. It delineates the Hindu-Muslim conflict that has distorted and uprooted the communal harmony and peace. She also brings to limelight the reasons for the conversion of Hindus to Islam and Christianity. It is to save themselves from being brutally killed or forcefully abducted or raped. Sidhwa criticises the British for colonising India and enslaving the countrymen for maintaining and exercising their imperial rule. She also raises her voice against the social evils such as rape, murder, physical assault, child marriage, women trafficking, prostitution and forceful migration. On the other hand, Sidhwa is all in praise for the Parsi community who have respected the social and the religious system of the Indians and in addition, they have never attempted to convert the natives to embrace their religious doctrines. Sidhwa mocks at the politicians who have been responsible for the Partition of India (1947) which had resulted in horrible genocide. The research paper is an attempt to explore and expose the humiliation and exploitation encountered by the Indians during the Partition of India.

Key words: Partition of India, social and political turmoil, religious conversion, child marriage, prostitution, migration, physical assault, Parsi community, genocide.

Bapsi Sidhwa is one of Pakistan's most distinguished and leading diasporic writers. Her *Ice-Candy-Man* criticises the colonial and postcolonial condition of India through a Pakistani's view point. Sidhwa highlights the communal issues encountered by the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Parsis during the colonial reign. Hira Hussain, a critic, in the article "The Exceptional Writer – Bapsi Sidhwa" published in House of Pakistan opines, "Bapsi's work has pulled together positive and bright critical attention for giving an exceptional Parsi view on politics and culture of India's partition" (Web Oct,13,2015). Sidhwa of Gujarat Parsi Zoroastrian descent resides in the United States of America. Her writing projects her stand as neutral while discussing about the partition of India in 1947. It cannot be denied that it still stands an inexorable feeling in the politics and history of India. Shashi Tharoor in "Life With Electric-aunt and Slavesister" published in The New York Times recalls, ". . . the 1940's were a decade of death and devastation. To the horrors of the Holocaust, the killings and the firebombings of the war in Europe and the Japanese outrage in East Asia were added the massacres and atrocities that accompanied the partition of India in 1947, which took over a million of lives, displaced 13 million people and brutally treated millions more" (Web Oct,06,1991). Treachery, turbulence and depletion of natural and human resources have been the order of the times that had resulted in great havoc and brutal killings. The death and destruction that had been caused during the period of partition is a grotesque reminder of the mistakes that had not been envisaged by the perpetrators. Shiv K. Kumar in *Train to Delhi* explains that partition which had provoked hatred among the people of various communities forced the affected community to resort to voluntary migration by leaving behind their home, land and other valuable properties.

Sidhwa brings to limelight that invasion by the Britishers is responsible for almost all the sufferings and misfortunes of India. The introduction of cash crops by them has profited them but it led to famine and penury in the villages of India. Moreover, colonialism had become the root cause for the birth of many unidentifiable and innumerable diseases. Sidhwa accuses, "If anyone's to blame, blame the British! There was no polio in India till they brought it here!" (ICM 16). Lenny, the narrator of the novel *Ice-Candy-Man*, had been affected with polio undergone surgery at the age of five is put under the care of the Ayah Shanta. The colonialists have also introduced chemical fertilizers and converted the fertile land into sterile one. They caused rift among the native to implement their policy of "Divide and Rule." They preferred the choice of conversion to Christianity to get the support of the indigenous and thus paved way

for the enmity among them. Shiv K. Kumar in *Train to Delhi* delineates, "... the Englishman, who first landed on the Indian soil as a mere trader, and later ruled as the absolute monarch of this subcontinent, had now assumed his new role as a missionary. So, all the affluent Anglican missions in England started pouring generous donations into this church which they now believed, was now destined to 'annex' India's spirit, if not her body" (54). On being enamoured and bewitched by fertility of the soil and the riches of our country, the colonialists slipped into our soil under the disguise of the traders to become gradually the rulers. Unable to fight against the statesmen's spirit of every Indian, they had to take refuge under the pretext of missionary to receive foreign funds and persecute the sons of the soil in their own country both by their own men and by the villainy hands of the settlers.

Sidhwa is intolerant to the monuments and the statues erected in commemoration of the English aristocrats. She derides, "Queen Victoria, cast in gunmetal, is majestic, massive, overpowering, ugly. Her statue imposes the English Raj in the park" (18). Sidhwa questions the erection of a foreign lady's statue in India who has never set her foot in India and who has not done anything productive to the welfare of the people of the colonised country.

The struggle for freedom by the Hindus and the Muslims against the Britishers has bound them together and consider the settlers as their common enemy. Though a parsi, Sidhwa expresses her contempt for the colonialists as she is a devoted patriot of her country. She also stresses the importance to cherish and nourish the native values rather than blindly following the fashion of the Englishmen. Ice-candy-man, lover of Shanta, the Ayah, advocates, "If we want India back we must take pride in our customs, our clothes, our language . . . And not go mouthing the got-pit sot-pit of the English" (28-29). Sidhwa advocates the Indians to value and protect the honour of the ancestry, beauty and grace of the native languages and protect the culture and tradition of India. She opines that the indigenous people should not to be the victims of the Western Civilisation. She throws satirical remarks against the anti-nationalists who have played the second fiddle to the English rule.

Sidhwa criticises the statesmen who were imprisoned in A-class prisons as a punishment to their dream to become rulers of independent India. Col. Barucha, a parsi surgeon, presumes, "It is no longer just a struggle for Home Rule. It is a struggle for power. Who's going to rule once we get *swaraj* . . . Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power" (36). Sidhwa mocks at most of the leading statesmen who crave most to become the Prime Minister of free India. The final stage of the struggle for freedom since the 1920 was characterised by Congress Party's compliance with a Mahatma Gandhi's policy of non-violence and civil disobedience. However, in 1946 Britain announced its willingness to grant India freedom. Anita Rani in "Why Did the Partition of India Happen", reminds, "India was divided by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer who had never visited the country before and had little time to grasp the social consequences of his decision" (Web 20 Sep 2018). This resulted in inter-communal violence and mass deportations. The impulsive decision of partition without taking the worst aftermath consequences of partition landed the Indians and migrants to Pakistan in trouble.

Sidhwa records that even before independence there existed communal tension between the Hindus and the Muslims due to the divide and rule policy of the British Government. Imam Din, the cook, worries, ". . . Once aroused, the English are savages . . . Then there is the Hindu-Muslim trouble . . . It is spreading. Sikh-Muslim trouble also" (56). One of the first major communal riots that broke between the Hindus and the Muslims in Mumbai in August 1893 killed nearly hundred people and resulted in the injury to eight hundred people. The period between 1921 and 1940 has also marked a difficult phase. Sidhwa also highlights the conflict that arose between the Congress and the Muslim League headed by Jinnah. Sharbat Khan, a pathan and one of the admirers of Ayah, assumes, "These are bad times – Allah knows what's in store. There is big trouble in Calcutta and Delhi: Hindu-Muslim trouble. The Congress wallahs are after Jinnah's blood . . . they are stirring up trouble for us all" (75-76). Sidhwa though assumes to speak the words of the pathan she should have thought twice before recording the above-mentioned sensitive remarks. She registers, "They even rejected Lord Wavell's suggestion for an Interim Government with a majority Congress representation! . . . These arrogant Hindus have blown the last chance for an undivided India . . . Gandhi and Nehru are forcing the League to push for Pakistan!" (62-63). Sidhwa has attempted to demean the dignity and misinterpret Gandhiji's intention on quoting Gandhiji's endeavour of forcing Jinnah to claim a separate nation for the Muslims. The unfair remark on Gandhiji, who believed in communal co-existence and never wished to become the Prime Minister of independent India, is highly contemptible.

Sidhwa raises her voice against child marriage which is indubitably a social evil. Khaled Hosseni, an Afghan novelist, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has discussed in detail the cruelty of child marriage, especially to the girls below fifteen who get married to old men. In *Ice-Candy-Man*, Muccho, the sweeper

in Lenny's house, arranges marriage for her daughter Papoo who has not yet reached her teenage. Lenny understands it through her conversation with Ayah. Lenny pities, "I am seven now, so Papoo must be eleven" (94). It can be understood that child-marriage had been the norm of the society.

ShirabAshgar in "BapsiSidhwa as a Novelist," published in Pak Literature comments, "The partition is a very sensitive subject because the events of partition have been presented differently by the authors of India and Pakistan" (Web 03 Apr 2020). In *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sidhwa has aggressively attacked the Akalis, the members of Akhali Dal. It is the principal organisation of the Sikh community in the state and is centred on the philosophy of promoting the well-being of the country's Sikh population and providing them with a political and religious platform. Inspector General Rogers charges, "The Akhalis are a bloody bunch of murdering fanatics" (63). The Akhalis headed by Master Tara Singh has showed commitment to the cause of freedom and hence, the party has been against the Partition of India. Those who stood against the Britishers were treated as criminals by the colonial power. Dost Mohammad, grandson of Imam Din, informs, "They talk of a plan to drive the Muslims out of the East Punjab . . . To divide the Punjab. They say they won't live with the Mussalmans if there is to be a Pakistan" (107). The Akhalis might have felt that if the nation is to be divided for a religious purpose due to the problems of co-existence, there may arise more tension and religious conflict between them in future. Hence, the faction might have decided that it would be better to avoid further violence, riots and killings as there are religious fanatics in all religions. This resolution might not have affected the rich and high class Muslims. On the contrary, the peasants of the villages who are ignorant of politics might have found it hard to digest.

Sidhwa is afraid that the society has become insane as "One man's religion is another man's poison" (117). Communal hatred has heightened the level of brutal killing to uphold the supremacy of their respective religion. Invading another country for political and economic benefits has been the a causative factor for all these calamities. Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy-Man* unveils that the Parsi community that was ostracised from Persia has sought asylum in India but they have not troubled the social harmony of the settled country. They have neither wished to become rulers nor claimed superiority over other communities.

Sidhwa illustrates, "Playing British gods under the ceiling fans of the Falettis Hotel – behind Queen Victoria's garden skirt – the Radcliffe Commission deals out Indian cities like a pack of cards. Lahore is dealt to Pakistan, Amritsar to India. Sialkot to Pakistan. Pathankot to India" (140). It is noteworthy that the British government in a hurry divided India without taking into consideration the emotional attachment, the sentimental expectations and dreams with which the Indians co-existed in spite of all the differences. Immediately after partition, a huge number of Hindus were unwillingly moved to India and a considerable population of Muslims migrated to Pakistan. Mr. Singh, a neighbour of Lenny, announces, "I don't think there are any Hindu family left on Warris Road . . . There's bound to be trouble . . . There is bound to be trouble . . . We have just received orders from our leaders . . . We are to leave Lahore for ever!" (145-46). Sidhwa admits that the Sikh community was also in trouble but not the Christians and the Parsis. Sarah Ansari in "How the Partition of India Happened – and Why its Effects are Still Felt Today," published in *The Conversation* recalls, "The partition triggered riots, mass casualties, and a colossal wave of migration. Millions of people moved to what they hoped would be safer territory, with Muslims heading towards Pakistan, and Hindus and Sikhs in the direction of India" (Web 10 Aug 2017). The partition of India has instigated hatred which led to genocide, of no respect for human life. The Ice-candy-man speaks to the gardener, Hari, Moti and Ayah about killing and mutilating the bodies of the Hindus and the Sikhs to avenge the murder of the Muslims. The non-Muslim friends of the Ice-candy-man are alarmed and they decide to flee to India to save their lives. The gardener says, "When our friends confess they want to kill us, we have to go" (157). The poor Hindus have no refuge other than Lahore, their native soil. Moti, the sweeper, admits, "I talked to the padre at the Cantonment Mission . . . We're becoming Christian" (157). Sidhwa indicates that the Hindus have converted to another religion without even knowing the ideology, principles and the core values of the religion just to escape racial massacre and forced migration. She reveals that the non-Hindus and the non-Sikhs are safe in the country. Hari has converted to Muslim and the family of Moti has converted to Christianity but Ayah has not converted any religion and as a consequence "They drag Ayah out . . . The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it" (183). It is the Ice-candy-man who has trafficked Ayah and let her be raped by ruffians to keep her under his control. The grandmother questions, "You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks, and *goondas* and say she has come to no harm with me" (248). The Ice-candy-man is not guilty of his shameless deed and the treachery against Ayah. He justifies that he had married her to save her from being killed. He has also changed her name to Mumtaz. Sidhwa also discusses about Muslim women being carried away, raped and killed in India during the time.

She states that women were vulnerable to sexual abuse and assault. Mumtaz discloses, “I want to go to my family I will not live with him” (261). She also adds, “I’m not alive” (262). She wishes to get disentangled from the cobweb of patriarchy and meaningless life that she leads. The wealth provided to her by the Ice-candy-man does not waver her mental stability. She resolves to remain free and independent and wishes to join her family members in Amristar. The grandmother succeeds in rescuing Ayah with the help of her well-wishers.

The research paper is an attempt to disclose the harsh realities encountered by the Indians during the partition of India. The events of turmoil and upheaval undergone by the victims of partition are examples of the degeneration of human values. Communal violence and bigotry has disturbed the peace of the people, particularly that of the poor. Sidhwa has strongly condemned the violence inflicted against women and children throughout the novel. She has also depicted the social life condition of parsi community during the pre-colonial and postcolonial period. The novelist has criticised Gandhiji and Nehru and has favoured Jinnah who has demanded the partition of India.

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