

Ice Candy Man as a Feminist Manifesto

Aumir Ali Jan, S/O:Ali Mohd Itoo
Research Scholar at J.S. University
Shikohabad, Firozabad U.P. India
E.mail- aamiralijan999@gmail.com

Prof. Anurag Aggarwal
HoD Deptt. Of English
J.S University, Shikohabad, Firozabad U.P. India.

ABSTRACT

The novel Ice Candy Man can be categorized as a feminist text as it has the female characters that hold and perform the action. There is basic difference between a male discourse and a feminist text. The male discourse has male characters having the qualities of heroism, sacrifice, justice, chivalry etc. and the female characters remain passive and the receivers of the actions done by the males. But in a feminist text the female characters perform and control the action having the qualities of heroism and glory. They promote the action with their active involvement in the process.

KeyWords: feminist, heroism, partition, freedom, suffering, patriarchy, exploitation

Introduction

The Ice Candy Man presents the strength of the narrator in holding the power. Lenny has the influence of Ayah, who infuses the qualities of freedom, courage and resistance in her. With these qualities, Lenny becomes assertive and aggressive in the difficult situations. She has a relationship with her cousin. When he tries to manipulate her sexually, she does not allow him to do so and makes him remain a drooling figure. Sidhwa provides her female characters with moral qualities and keeps them at the centre place while the male characters remain secondary, indulging in violence and other actions of disintegration. In this novel, the female characters pulsate with a will and life of their own. Sidhwa here gives a clear idea that masculinity and femininity are not associated with the biological sex. Masculinity is associated with superiority that implies strength, action, domination and self-assertion, whereas femininity is associated with

inferiority that implies weakness, passivity, obedience and self-negation. Sidhwa's female characters prove to be masculine in this regard. The character of the Ice Candy Man is a memorable creation by Bapsi Sidhwa. She presented him as a versatile man who plays various roles from a seller in the streets to the messenger of Allah. His transportation and repentance in the later part of the novel shows his quality of emotional human being. Ice Candy Man is also presented as an opportunist.

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In this novel, Sidhwa has provided multiple perspectives to look at the differences through the stories of Lenny and Ranna. The novelist does not want herself to align with any particular community. He presents a truthful, realistic picture of the riot hit country with all the differences of different parts. Sidhwa presents her liberal humanist thought. Her primary notion is individuality as she chooses the truth infected child narrator to express her purpose. She uses the present tense to stress the specific importance of the incidents during the partition. Stephen Slemon pointed out this important point in the novel. He comments, "Wherever a globalised theory of the colonial might lead us we need to remember that resistances to colonialist power always find material presence at the level of the local, and so the research and training we carry out in the field of post-colonialism, whatever else it does, must always find ways to address the local."

The character of the Ice Candy Man has the change of pattern in his journey. The change from communal dispute to that of reconciliation, from a rough and rustic man, he becomes a person of distinguished sensibility. Initially, his character is painted with loud colours of his role in the partition, but his passion and love for Ayah turns him from senseless communal hatred. After he abducts Ayah, she is rescued and sent to Amritsar. He crosses the border for his beloved forgetting everything, his land and religion. This is an example of self-sacrifice as he comes there for the sake of his Hindu beloved. It is also symbolic of the future rapprochement between the Hindus and Muslims. In this way, the novel shows a changing pattern of communal relations, the unity between the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Ice Candy Man realistically describes the horrors of the Partition and makes the readers go deep into the history. It describes the fears, the insecurity and the communal hatred that was put in the minds of the people by the politicians of

Raima's village. It tells how the humans behaved like savages, killing their own countrymen who once lived together like brothers. Like every other men, the Partition also psychologically affects the Ice Candy Man as his family is murdered brutally on the train. This incident creates hatred about the Hindus in his mind and turns him into a cruel person. He joins the riots and starts killing Hindus, some among them were his own friends. Thus, the novelist described a sad tale of Partition, where the crimes of the people killed the national spirit. The partition always remains as a deep scar on the psyche of the people of both the sides that can never be forgotten. As Jinnah himself put it, 'Pakistan has been the biggest mistake of my life.' Partition of India is truly the darkest point in the history of the subcontinent. The partition and the creation of a new nation amidst turmoil and violence and at the stake of millions of people was a blunder of the past. Both the countries have regretted this past incident and will do so for the rest of their existence.

Ice Candy Man is different from other novels in its representation of the theme of Partition. The protagonist Lenny reveals the sufferings of the Partition through her memories. She narrates the story with humour, parody and allegory while describing how friends and neighbours become helpless and ineffective while facing the mob frenzy during the partition. Sidhwa also focuses on the political leaders who create the feelings of suspicion and distrust about other community among the people by manipulating the ideals. Once they succeed to provoke communal passions among the people, the social fabric is disturbed and leads to reckless destruction. The novel also deals with the historical inevitability of social process. Sidhwa suggests that people who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. In the novel, the tragic events are combined with the witty freshness that characterizes the narrator's attitude of mere a distanced spectator. The novel mournfully describes the mindless violence during the partition and focuses on its socio-historical consequences, especially on women. Additionally, as Pier Paolo Piciuccio puts it, "The craft of describing violent and humorous scenes alternatively and of freely mixing historical tragedy with witty comedy is not the result of a compromise but it rather displays a lively authenticity which very few novels can be credited with."

Bapsi Sidhwa perfectly uses the sense of humour in this novel. She says, "Laughter does so many things for us. It has the quality of exposing wrongs and getting rid of anger and excitement." The novel Ice Candy Man deals with different topics including the analysis of Sidhwa's subtexts about various issues. It is the recollection of the painful events of the partition

and the wounds it has given to the masses. Sidhwa recalls them and hopes that they may be healed. The novel was published with a different title, *Cracking India*, in America. This title shows the crack which the partition brought to India. The events of destruction during the partition are shown without excessive comment and the horrors of the partition are also revealed. The comments on the inner realities and the historical background of the partition are also made in the novel combining them with violent contradictions, twists and heroism. Sidhwa goes beyond the tragedy and the horrors of the partition and records the incidents of courage, compassion, sacrifice and honour. There are the instances of these notions explained through the efforts of Lenny's mother to help women, Godmother's efforts to save Ayah and secure her freedom, Imam Din's generosity and Hamida's stoicism. Many novels have been published in India and Pakistan on the theme of partition after the *Ice Candy Man*. This novel lacks the experience of these recent novels. But Chelva Kanaganayakam says, "It remains an authentic and compelling work, one whose success serves to reinforce the notion that realism is not a thing of the past." The satire that Sidhwa has used in this novel is of a characteristically cruel and unforgettable. Lenny's life revolves around her relationships with Ayah, her loving caretaker, her passionate cousin who takes her from dolls to condoms, a Godmother and her Slave sister. Lenny, through her life's journey, learns the lesson that divides her Hindu Ayah from her Parsi employers and her Muslim enemies. To put it in the words of Madhu Jain, "The novel is about the slow awakening of the child heroine both to sexuality and grown up pains and pleasures and to the particular historical disaster that overwhelms her world."

Sidhwa tries to adopt the modernist and post-modernist style of narrative experimentation. She has the quality of Dickens in story telling but she differs as she has less interference and the realistic narration. Being a Parsi, she focuses on the traditions, customs, rites and rituals and mannerisms of her community. She is only the third writer after Perin Bharucha's *The Fire-Worshippers* in 1968 and Nergis Dalal's *The Sisters* in 1973 that focused on this minority community. This community has been neglected or it remained unknown to the other communities due to less population and their attitude of aloofness. Bapsi Sidhwa tried to bring her community in focus and made others to understand it better. She brought the details about their faiths, culture and beliefs etc. Thus Bapsi Sidhwa fulfils the concept of the essential role of the writer by M.G. Vassanji. He says, "The essential role of the writer is as a preserver of the

collective tradition, a folk historian and myth maker.” The diction of the novel is perfectly used by Sidhwa. The dialogues of the characters and the words are selected with appropriate measure. She used many non-English words, phrases and some Urdu and Hindi poems to make her readers comfortable in understanding the text. Her use of typical Indian non-English words displays the Indian culture to the readers. She uses many words and phrases as they originally are and sometimes she translates them into English. The allegory has also been used by Sidhwa to depict the trauma of partition effectively. This can be found in the words of Lenny when she is affected by the violence during the partition. She says, “The whole world is burning. The air on my face is so hot I think my flesh and clothes will catch fire. I start screaming: hysterically sobbing.” The narrator Lenny has a horrifying impact of the violence and the communal hatred among friends during the partition. Lenny is the victim of the violence. The effect of this violence vent through her behaviour with her dolls when she, in a frenzy, turns her doll upside down and tears its legs. She expresses her rage through this act. This anger and violent act by Lenny is an allegory on the senseless violence of partition.

The Ice Candy Man is a story in which the individuals and their community have separate identities. This is the story of the newly formed and emerging nations and at the same time a story of every single character. The narrator Lenny and every other character experiences the important changes during the partition. The character of Ayah goes through a big transformation with the Ice Candy Man. The best example is Ice Candy Man himself, his own moral transformation through the process of the partition. He represents all the people who went through the migration and the incidents of rape, torture during the partition. The major characteristic of this novel is its linkage between the individuals and nations. Ice Candy Man is an exquisitely, gracefully written and tightly constructed novel. It gives us the clear picture of the dark part of the Indian history and at the same time the Asian life. It makes a child, the protagonist Lenny, aware about an adult world and its wildest side and educates her about the atmosphere around her. Finally, the novel takes us to the world where feminine values have powers and capacity to rule. The role of women is very strong in this story. They are shown as victims in the beginning, but then they act as saviours. Our history tells us that women were kidnapped, paraded naked and raped during the partition. Their breasts were copped off and they were mutilated. Their children and husbands were murdered before them. But on the other side

some brave and courageous women, like those in *Ice Candy Man*, were performing the heroic deeds by saving the people from the communal riots. Bapsi Sidhwa, through this novel, tries to establish her political identity. She does this firstly, by focusing on the worst Indian violence and riots committed in the Punjab during the partition. Secondly, by re-evaluating Jinnah's life and taking efforts to improve his image by blaming the British that they were less than fair to Jinnah and to Pakistan too. As a Pakistani, Sidhwa speaks about how excessive religious intolerance takes place; how violence affects everyone and how Pakistanis were treated unfairly. She defends Jinnah saying that he was not a monster. The atrocities that were committed by the Sikhs during the partition were more compared to those by the Muslims. She suggests that the partition favoured India over Pakistan. Sidhwa believes, "The Hindus are being favoured over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favour Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri, they grant him Kashmir. Spurning logic, defying rationale, ignoring the consequence of bequeathing a Muslim State to the Hindus: while Jinnah futilely protests: Statesmen cannot eat their words! Statesmen do. They grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot without which Muslim Kashmir cannot be secured."

ShashiTharoor, the renowned Indian politician and novelist, has objected Sidhwa's use of the word grant while speaking about Kashmir. He says the British did not grant Kashmir to India. Sidhwa, in one of her interviews given to the *New York Times*, says, "Gandhi really sowed the seeds of partition and turned the whole independence struggle into a Hindu movement. It's hard for people in the West, where he is deified, to regard him as a petty manipulative politician." Laurel Graeber, the interviewer, concluded in his article by saying that "Sidhwa attempted to give a Pakistani perspective to the partition of India." Sidhwa does not support the two nation theory, neither she stress the belief of Pakistani Muslims of the necessity of the partition and the creation of the new nation. She has a view that the religious and cultural differences among the communities are artificially and deliberately created and promoted among the people. She expresses it through Lenny's perspective that how these differences are deliberately encouraged among the masses on the eve of the partition.

Conclusion

In *Ice Candy Man*, the protagonist Lenny reveals the sufferings of the Partition through her memories. She narrates the story that how friends and neighbours become helpless and ineffective while facing the mob frenzy during the partition. Sidhwa also speaks about the political leaders who create the feelings of suspicion and distrust about other community among the people by manipulating the ideals. The novel also deals with the historical inevitability of social process. The novel combines the tragic events with the witty freshness that characterizes the narrator's attitude of mere a distanced spectator. The novel mournfully describes the mindless violence during the partition and focuses on its socio-historical consequences, especially on women. Pier Paolo Piciucco puts about it as, "The craft of describing violent and humorous scenes alternatively and of freely mixing historical tragedy with witty comedy is not the result of a compromise but it rather displays a lively authenticity which very few novels can be credited with."

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