

Communalism threatens humanity: Analyzing Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*

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Abstract:

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* documents real incidents of partition through fictional characters. It depicts some turbulent situations before readers and they feel as if they were participants in the tragic partition of Indian subcontinent. The book not only depicts horrifying scene through eyes of Lenny, a ten years old girl, but it also narrates suffering and sad moments of innumerable innocents that become victims of communal riots during the partition. Sidhwa, through this book proves that religious fanaticism is one of the biggest problems and is the root of many evils and drawbacks of our civilized society. She opines that, in the modern world, it becomes very important to establish and maintain communal harmony to take human race forward. She propagates an idea that a humanitarian approach should be adopted by people to make this earth a place of worth living for coming generations.

Key Words: Partition, Subcontinent, Religious fanaticism, Communal harmony, Horrifying.

Bapsi Sidhwa (b. 1938), a distinguished Pakistani writer, born in Karachi in a Parsi Zoroastrian family from Gujarati ancestors, is a diasporic, living in United States. When she was two years old, she was attacked by polio virus, which made her suffer throughout her life. During partition she was nine years old and living with her family in Lahore. She minutely absorbed the incident of this time that left a strong impression on the little mind of Sidhwa. Her experiences of this time become the base of her one of the most acclaimed works entitled *Ice Candy Man*. She completed her Bachelor degree in 1957 from Kinnaird college of women (Lahore). She knows Gujarathi, Urdu and English, but she used English in writing her novels. She taught in many reputed universities like Columbia University, University of Houston, Brandeis University, Mount University, Rice University and Holyoke College. Her main writing are: *The Crow Eaters* (1978), *The Bride* (1982), *Water: A Novel* (2006) and *Ice Candy Man*. Her talent has received many national and international awards including Bunting Fellowship at Radcliffe/Harvard (1986), Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writer's Award (1994), and Sitara-i-Imtiaz, highest award in arts by Pakistan in 1991. Her novel '*Ice candy Man*' has been adopted into movie 'Earth' by Deepa Mehta, a prominent Indo-Canadian filmmaker.

Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* comes in the genre of partition novel like Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Magonkar's *A Bend in Ganges*, Attia Housain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*, Chaman Nihal's *Azadi* etc. which describes horrifying and terrible moments of the Subcontinent. These writers have tried to depict some pernicious incidents that, how a wide rift was created in minds of crores of people giving India one of the biggest loss of humanity and fraternity. The writers not only presented unforgettable loss/history but also gave a message of not becoming religious fanatic. Aforementioned books presented examples how humanity is lost and people become animals without thinking that innocents become victims of communal frenzy, without having their fault. They forget that main purpose of religions is to create an atmosphere of love and fraternity not hatred and terror.

Sidhwa portrays all incidents through eyes of eight years old Girl Lenny, who narrates dilemma of Parsee community, which is struggling to maintain their existence. Population of Parses at that time was very less as compared to other people, like Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. So it was a crucial time for them to maintain their cultural and social identity. They were in a fix and there were many questions before them like: whom should they support and why? How they can maintain their existence and culture?. In his *Parsi English Novel*, Jaydipsinh Dodiya opined that "major issue pertaining to the Parsi paradox during the period of the Indian struggle for independence, whether they should support Swaraj or they should be loyal to the Britishers, is depicted in *Ice Candy Man* (Dodiya 91). So a meeting was organized at Fire-Temple at Warris Road to take appropriate decision whether they should support Hindus or Muslims. Neutral Attitude of Parsee community toward Independence and fear of partition could be seen in the book when, the President of the community in Lahore, Col. Baruchha expressed his thought as: "We must tread carefully... We have served the English faithfully, and earned their trust ... so, We have prospered! But we are the smallest minority in India... Only one hundred and twenty thousand In the whole world. We have to be extra wary, or we shall be neither here nor there" (Sidhwa 16). He presented his suspicion for Muslims Hindus and Sikhs by saying that "If we're stuck with the Hindus they will swipe our business from under our noses and sell our grandfathers in the bargain: if we're stuck with the they will convert us by the sword! And God help if we're stuck with the Sikhs (Sidhwa 92). The statement of Col. Baruchha represents fear of Parsee community, they only want patronage of their community. They don't want any participation in movement spearheaded by great freedom fighters against the English. They are loyal to the Britishers because their economical and social status depends on them. The community knows very well that if they favor Hindu or Muslim then it can harm their interests. Mr. Toddywalla at the meeting suggests that Parses should support hegemonic class that is going to have political power after Independence, only then their community's interests could be maintained. All this discussion proves that communal frenzy at that time was a great threat to minorities and even human beings also. Some parses were so afraid of communalism that they started to migrate in other developed countries where other people from the same religion were living, while some thought to settle in urban areas.

Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* is set in pre-independence and post-independence, which put forth social and political milieu, through nine years, disabled girl Lenny. In Lahore, people from all sects and religions: Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Parsee, are living peacefully without any ill-will. Lenny's family is a complete amalgamation of all religion which includes, Ayah Shanta (a Hindu), Imam Din (a Muslim), their cook and her family. They involve in festivals of all religions and enjoy. Lenny's Ayah Santa is a beautiful Hindu girl who attends on her. Ice-candy-Man and Messure are in love with Ayah, they are competitor so both of them want to win her favor over other. Everything is going good till they come to know that communal riots have erupted in many cities. Ice Candy-Man goes to receive some of his relatives who are coming by train from Gurdaspur. He was stunned and terrified when a train filled with dead bodies of Muslims come and halted on the station. He narrates "I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train. That night I went mad, I tell you! I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I'd known all my life! I hated their guts... I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women... The penises!" (Sidhwa 156). A man (Dilnawaz) who was of jovial nature have turned into a beast at this sight and started indulging in mob, mad with religious frenzy. While in the beginning of the novel there was an environment of peace and happiness, now situation turned very tense and people from different religions who were living together started to see each other with glass of religion. Lenny describes the incident, when a group of fanatic Muslims come to her home and asked about Ayah. Lenny innocently told truth and Ayah was dragged out of home. She writes:

They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her feet- that want to move backward- are forced forward instead. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throats opens her mouth like the dead child's screamless mouth. Her violet sari slips off her shoulder, and her breast strains at her sari-blouse stretching the cloth so that white stitching at the seams shows. A sleeve tears under her arm (Sidhwa 183).

Sidhwa narrates the terrifying and dreadful situation as: "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 172).

Ayah was taken to brothel and profession of prostitution was imposed on her. Dilnawaz himself become a pimp in religious frenzy. Lenny and her family member were very worried about Ayah so they started to search her. At last they come to know about Ice-Candy-Man and his deeds. Lenny and her godmother visited the brothel to see Ayah. Sidhwa writes about the miserable condition of Ayah as: "where have the radiance and animation gone? Can the soul be extracted from living body?..." (Sidhwa 260). They were very sad to see the miserable condition of Ayah, so they decided to evacuate her from there. Lenny's

godmother informed police to rescue Ayah, and took her to refugee camp in Amritsar. She was sent to Indian province after some time.

Ice-Candy-Man killed Masseur not to have favor of Ayah but because of religious fanaticism. Many Hindus and Sikhs changed their religion to avoid any atrocity and physical and mental harassment. As soon as, the announcement of division of India was made on All India Radio, Sikhs and Hindus started to migrate towards Amritsar. Suddenly rumors spread that there are communal riots in many cities. Sikhs and Muslims got excited and started butchering counterparts. Pir Pindo, a village where people were living happily, turned in battle and there was bloodshed everywhere.

Communal riots created a situation in which friendship and fraternity was judged only on the basis of religion. Even lovers turned into foes. Ice-Candy-Man who loved Ayah from the core of his heart took her to brothel at Hira Mandi in Lahore and forced her to work as prostitute. He forgot all love and feeling about her and made her to convert her religion. Similarly, thousands of innocent women were raped and assaulted, children were massacred. One of the biggest decision of partition of Indian sub-continent was taken on the religious basis. Isabella Bruschi quotes Urvashi Butalia in Introduction : The trauma of Partition in his book Partition in Fiction as

“ Partition could not so easily be put away, [...] its deep, personal meaning, its profound sense of rupture, the differences engendered or strengthened, still lived on in so many people, lives. I began to realize that Partition was surely more than just a political divide, or a division of properties, of assets and liabilities. It was also, to us a phrase that survivors use repeatedly, a ‘division of the hearts.’ It brought untold suffering, tragedy, trauma, pain and violence to communities who had hitherto lived together in some kind of social contract” (Bruschi xv).

It was said that Hindus and Muslims have different culture so they can not live together, while we have seen in History that people from both the religion have been living with peace and harmony.

Conclusion:

Ice-Candy-Man by Bapsi Sidhwa documents devastating, horrible and terrifying incidents of Indian history. There was an environment of chaos everywhere and law and order had completely vanished at that time of partition. The book depicts women oppression, arson, butchering and communal frenzy during partition. Communalism became the biggest threat to humanity and people of various religions were killing one another. Sidhwa through this book portrays hard reality of religious fanaticism. Partition of India during independence was also due to this fanaticism which was one of the biggest loss to humanity and brotherhood. This novel gave a message that religious tolerance is necessary to maintain harmony in a civilized society. Sidhwa through many incidents in the novel asserts that people should be liberal in religious matters and should respect other religions also. Communalism in future, could play a devastating role if not tackled in sensitive way, so it

become need of the hour to teach humanitarian thoughts to coming generations, instead of giving sermon on a specific religion.

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