



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 3.4
IJAR 2015; 1(4): 45-46
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 28-02-2015
Accepted: 29-03-2015

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A postcolonial study of bapsi sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*

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Abstract

The aim of the present research paper is to show postcolonial impact in Sidhwa's fascinating novel called *Ice-Candy Man*. Being a Parsi, Sidhwa successfully presents the story of the novel without any partiality and partisanship. The novel is based on the partition of India into two sovereign countries including India and Pakistan and its devastating impact upon Hindu-Muslim relationship, moral decay, communal riots, murdering of innocent people, migration of thousands of people and etc. The story of the novel is narrated from the perspective of a child narrator named Lenny, a Parsi girl.

Keywords: Native language, divide and rule policy, vested interest in economy, Hindu-Muslim riots, abduction and rape of women.

Introduction

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, "Postcolonialism 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 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 story of *Ice-Candy Man* is based on the real tragic history of the partition of India into two independent nations called India and Pakistan. The novel is famous not only for the presentation of partition of India but also for presenting the aftermath effects of colonialism after the independence of India. It demonstrates and presents myriad incidents showing the brutal murder, killing, migration of people, and heinous rapes of women, arson, riots between Hindi or Sikh and Muslim. The novel begins with the happy lives of close friends including Lenny, Imam Dinn, Aaya Ice -Candy Man, Masseur, Hamida, Mini Aunt and Muchho. The important aspect of the novel, which distinguishes it from other postcolonial novels, is the employment of a child narrator named Lenny. The reason behind employing the child narrator is to be impartial and non-pre judice in presenting the real events of partition without any personal thinking and approach of the novelist.

History undoubtedly demonstrates British rulers always used the policy of divide and rule to dominate Hindu-dominated country. In Indian history, there are renowned stories of brotherhood and close relationship between Hindu and Muslim community. But this deep unity of Hindus and Muslims was partially disintegrated by British rulers through their tricky policies. This traumatic situation can be observed in the *Ice-Candy Man* through the relationship of Ice Candy Man, Masseur and Aaya. Ice Candy Man belongs to Muslim community but Masseur and Aaya are Hindus. In the novel, Ice Candy Man confesses: "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..."

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I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women... The penises!” (Sidhwa 156).

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, 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 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.

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.

To sum up, 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.

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