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## Women marginalisation in context of Bapsi Sedhwa's Novel 'Ice Candy Man'

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### Abstract

The present study was intended to explore the violence and the oppression of widows during partition as reflected in Bapsi Sedhwa's Novel "Ice Candy Man". Out of the several factors that can explain this watershed moment in South Asian history, this paper focuses on the issue of gendered violence and oppression that took place during Indo-Pak partition. This ethnic genocide witnessed two kinds of gender-based violence. Firstly, the violence inflicted on women by men of the opposite religious group that involved kidnapping, rape and mutilation of the genitalia or public humiliation. The supposed aim of this kind of violence was to abase the men of the rival religion to which the women belonged. A second form of violence against women included the violence inflicted on women by their own family members. An analytical study was employed for justifying the results. However, the results of the study reveal that in the novel Ice candy Man, rape and sexual assault were consistently followed by abduction of the victimised women. Bapshi Sedwai highlighted that these abducted women typically became domestic servants and sex slaves. The intensity of oppression was so deep, that many abducted women were sold into prostitution and some, in very rare instances, were married to their abductors and later claimed to be leading happy and respectable lives. In addition to this, after the abduction, many families refused to take their daughters and wives back by claiming that the rescued women had been polluted by men of other religion. A woman without her chastity and her purity had no place in the patriarchal scheme of things.

**Keywords:** Violence, oppression, ice candy man

### Introduction

Born in 1938 in Karachi (of undivided India) to a Parsi business family, Bapsi Sidhwa was educated in Lahore. She had polio in her right leg. Due to this her childhood passed more with the servants in her house than the children of the neighbourhood. She shifted to Bombay with her marriage but went back to Pakistan in just five years. At Pakistan, after her second marriage to Noshir Sidhwa, Bapsi Sidhwa took to writing to fill up the intellectual vacancy of her life. She could fill up this vacancy with four novels and one adaptation. The Crow Eater's (1978), The Bride (1984), Ice Candy Man (1988) and An American Brat (1999) are the four novels and Water is the print adaptation of Deepa Mehta's film Water. In the meanwhile, she settled in Houston, USA with her husband. Sidhwa in Ice Candy Man juxtaposed the pre-partition and post partition relation among different communities of sub-continent. Sidhwa shows that before the Partition, the different communities and religions lived in peace and harmony socially, culturally and religiously. She shows that the Muslims and the Hindus could even fall in love with each other across religious distinctions. Large number of studies has been conducted on the novel "Ice candy Man". However, gendered violence and oppression is least explored, in context to same, the investigator made an ample effort to explore the below mentioned research problem:

### Statement of the Problem

In the research of Sidhwa's, Ice Candy Man the focus is on highlights how female sexuality remains a pivotal point in the gendered environment of Sidhwa's novel. In consonance to same, the investigator selected the below mentioned problem:

"A Study of Violence and the Oppression of Women in Context of Ice Candy Man"

### Objectives of the Study

The present study intends to explore the gendered violence and the oppression of women during partition. However, the present study will ramble within the context of “Ice Candy Man”.

### Delimitations of the Study

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1998) deals with the suffering and survival of various female figures against backdrop of the political and social chaos caused by the partition of 1947 between India and Pakistan. Within the larger political scenario of partition riots, Sidhwa skilfully embodies the gendered oppression of her female characters. However, the present study has been delimited to only violence and the oppression of Women in Context of *Ice Candy Man*.

### Rationale of the Study

Therefore, in *Ice Candy Man* (1988) Bapsi Sidhwa makes an honest attempt to articulate the point of multiple intersections and of territories, geographical, mental and emotional of the sufferers of partition, shaping out the credos of a new discourse named as partition literature. The strong ties between people of different communities have been portrayed by Sidhwa in *Ice Candy Man* and she has highlighted the sentiments of the villagers. *Ice-Candy-Man* shows an important action of a “gynocentric view” of reality in which the female mind and experiences are presented with a massive style. The women characters of the story are responsive and sure of their uniqueness and cannot be easily dominated. Lenny, her Ayah Santa her mother and Godmother confirms their independent selfhood and exhibitability of carrying new roles and responsibilities. The novel describes the reasonable or real picture of Hindu Muslim conflict and the changing political situation, emotional disorder, weak spot, killings, brutalities and much more are suffered by women. The whole story is narrated by a female leading role who shares her personal observation as well as experiences of that time. She tells us about men’s behaviour towards women, the lustful desires of males and the way they treat the women as sexual objects or for the fun as Aristotle says “*woman is a deformed male*”, *woman as a sexual doll*” (Aristotle, 2012), if we look at the time of partition we can see Aristotle’s views about women that woman is inferior to man who has no identity in patriarchal society (Ehsan *et al.*, 2015) <sup>[1]</sup>. Usually, rape and sexual assault were invariably followed by abduction of the victimised women. These abducted women typically became domestic servants and sex slaves. Many abducted women were sold into prostitution and some, in very rare instances, were married to their abductors and later claimed to be leading happy and respectable lives. The issue of abducted women was so widespread that the governments of India and Pakistan established the Inter Dominion Agreement on November 1947 for the recovery of abducted women from both sides of the border. To begin with, 9,000 women were recovered from India and over 5,500 from Pakistan during the first year of the Recovery Act. By December 1949, the numbers had risen to 12,500 Muslim women recovered from India and over 6,200 Hindu and Sikh women from Pakistan. The trauma caused by partition was brutal beyond the imagination of human being. The smell of humanity was not prevailing anywhere. Bhalla, A. (2007) <sup>[2]</sup> narrated it emotionally in the following words:

“Those whose bodies were whole had hearts that were splintered. Families were torn apart . . . The bonds of human relationship were in tatters, and in the end many souls remained behind in Hindustan while their bodies started off for Pakistan”. (Bhalla, A. 2007: Pp-189) <sup>[1]</sup>

To demonstrate how the abducted women were treated by the rescue mission, one must refer to the Recovery Bill itself. The Recovery Bill stated that any Muslim woman found in India with a Hindu man after 1 March 1947 and before 1 January 1949 shall be considered abducted. One of the distinctive clauses narrated by Butalia (1994) <sup>[2]</sup> states:

“Conversions by persons abducted after March 1947 will not be recognized and all such persons MUST be restored to their respective Dominions. The wishes of the [abducted] persons concerned are irrelevant and consequently no statements of such persons should be recorded before Magistrates. (Butalia 1994: Pp-140)

Continuing my commentary on the recovery of abducted women (whether willingly or forcefully), one may note that the process did not simply end with bringing the women back to their families. On the contrary, many families refused to take their daughters and wives back by claiming that the rescued women had been polluted by other religious. A woman without her chastity and her purity had no place in the patriarchal scheme of things. As a result, “the State, so quick to come forward with its recovery was at a loss about the reintegration of these women into the new nation” (Butalia 1994) <sup>[2]</sup>. Many women were grudgingly accepted back because their families simply needed someone to do the housework. Many political leaders and social workers used their influence and urged the families to take the recovered women back. For instance, it is interesting to note that Gandhi (after pre-partition Noakhali riots in 1946 and even during the early stages of violence post partition) as a response to various instances of mass suicides and honour killings had expressed views such as: “I have heard that many women who did not want to lose their honour chose to die. Many men killed their own wives. I think that is really great, because I know that such things make India brave” (qtd. in Mookerjea-Leonard 2015: 32). However, as several thousand rescued women were now being refused by their families (therefore making them the responsibility of the state). As Guha (2011) <sup>[4]</sup> stated that Gandhi radically changed his views and claimed:

“It is being said that the families of the abducted women no longer want to receive them back. It would be a barbarian husband or a barbarian parent who would say that he would not take back his wife or daughter. . . . They had been subjected to violence. To put a blot on them and to say that they are no longer fit to be accepted in society is unjust. (Guha 2011: Pp-275) <sup>[4]</sup>.

The women victimization was not limited to their oponents, but were socially rejected by their own family members. When one talks about violence against women, one must acknowledge that many women were killed by their own family members or coerced into committing suicide for the sake of protecting religious and familial honour, same happened in partition. As Menon and Bhasin (1998) <sup>[5]</sup> stated that:

“Poisoned, strangled or burnt to death, put to the sword, drowned. It was made abundantly clear to [women] that death was preferable to “dishonour”, that in the absence of their men the only choice available to them was to take their own lives”. (Menon and Bhasin.....1998) [5].

Therefore, from the above discussion it is evident that Butalia's statement on society's refusal to see women as capable of any kind of agency proves that even in their aggression, women are seen as creatures passively succumbing to their fates as sanctioned by the religious community. At the time passes Lenny realized that marriage of a girl is important responsibility of parents and female gets real identity after marriage on the name of her husband. Lenny in her childhood she enjoys the love of her mother and the guard and care of her dear father but the theme and story of this novel is totally changed as compared to love because in this story Bapsi Sidhwa introduced the rights of female which they not get from this quarrel society. Lenny opened her eyes to the knowledge of truth and kindness. She watches that women are in very bad situation and being raped by men. Women are prey of men and rights are only for the males. Sidhwa's men declares dominance over each other by sexually assaulting women. Shaheed, F. (1991) [6] states “*that rape is a violation of trust between two people and a greatest violence*”. Bapsi Sidhwa explains that women are always degraded, she always objection against it. Lenny's mother is a female character, a housewife; she also has the same case like her daughter limits up to their home. She represents the conventional woman who never asks for their rights. Through Lenny Sidhwa shows that men have to reduce their ego and women have to be physically powerful. And there is a need of mind set that women and men are equal and right should be given on equal occasion. Sidhwa exposes the society, which thought that women are inferior to men, and women are just are for the guardian of home. But Bapsi Sidwa has a helpful approach towards women's rights. This forces her to cope with the bitter realities of life. She learns to manipulate the situation and to grab advantage from every situation. Lenny was introduced with the world by Ayah because she takes her with her wherever she goes. Her beauty draws the attention of the men and achieving her was the target of men in the society. Lenny makes the coterie of character, while going out in the park with her Lenny reported: The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down, they look at her. Stub-handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships. Ayah was forced to be a dancing girl and prostitute by her beloved Ice-candy man. Her beauty, cheerfulness and proud demeanour were punctured in the imprisonment at the Khotha. Lenny with the help of her Godmother was able to rescue her from the imprisonment and send her to her family in Amritsar. Amritsar had become the part of the India after the partition. After her rescue, Ayah was not same as she was previous; her light-hearted and joyful approach towards life was ruined. With the division of districts announced, communal riots spread all over. In Lahore, people begin to shift to safer places. Muslims and Sikhs become enemies, thirsty of each other's blood. Muslim mobs of Lahore attack Hindu houses.

Though Parsi people in Pakistan are safe, they are still worried about their survival. Amidst the riots, a Muslim mob reaches Lenny's house. They enquire about all the Hindu servants, especially the Ayah, Shanta. Iman Din lies about her fake departure. At this crucial moment, Ice Candy man takes disadvantage of Lenny's regards for him and plays with her innocence. Lenny, be fooled by Ice Candy Man, discloses about Ayah's hiding. Ayah is dragged out of her hiding place. Lenny, shocked, repents her trust and foolish innocence. Ayah is taken to Hira Mandi, and is managed as prostitute there by Ice Candy Man, who now has become a pimp reciting Urdu poetry. Ice Candy Man's betrayal has shocked Lenny to a great extent. She feels sad and dejected. Lenny remembers having seen a changed Ice Candy man after he had seen the mutilated bodies of Muslims in the Ghost train. Something, of which the child Lenny was unaware, had changed a friend to foe. Lenny feels guilty:

“For three days I stand in front of the bathroom mirror staring at my tongue. I hold the vile, truth-inflected thing between my fingers and try to wrench it out.... (It) mocks me with its sharp rapier tip darting as poisonous a snake”. (Sedhwa- ICM: Pp-184)

Therefore, from the above discussion it is evident, that Women's sexuality, as it had been violated by abduction, transgressed by forced conversion and marriage and exploited by impermissible cohabitation and reproduction was at the centre of debates around national duty, honour and identity. This highlights not only their particular vulnerability at such times, but an overarching patriarchal consensus that emerges on how to dispose of the troublesome questions of women's sexuality.

### Conclusion

Actually, Sidhwa exposes how female characters, young and old, are positioned within the gender specific roles through patriarchal biases centred on the female body. Sidhwa allows us in fiction to see how the female body remains the most important entity for the female figure in its ability and disability as it assigns meaning in the gendered world of Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man. We also witness how the female figures unite in sympathy and understanding to help and rescue each other as the mayhem of partition begins to violate the female bodies. Bapshi Sedwai highlighted that these abducted women typically became domestic servants and sex slaves. The intensity of oppression was so deep, that many abducted women were sold into prostitution and some, in very rare instances, were married to their abductors and later claimed to be leading happy and respectable lives. In addition to this, after the abduction, many families refused to take their daughters and wives back by claiming that the rescued women had been polluted by men of other religion. A woman without her chastity and her purity had no place in the patriarchal scheme of things.

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