

Ice Candy Man: A Narration of Great Human Convulsion Instigated by the Partition of India.

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Abstract:

Partition of India affected millions of people and also changed the geographical dimensions of the state. Partition resulted in violence and bloodshed. People lost their homes, lands, family members, friends and their religious identities too. Communal violence at the time of partition engulfed the humanity and human relationships, the barbarity, brutality and uncivilized behaviour of human beings is epitomized by the incidents that occurred at the event of partition. Novelists from both the regions of India and Pakistan have given a fictional account of the partition in their respective works but Bapsi Sidhwa a Pakistani internationally acclaimed and accepted novelist writer of fiction adds another dimension to the Partition fiction in the her novel *Ice Candy Man* by narrating the event through the view point of a character belonging to the Parsi decent. The members of the parsi community remained distant from the religious frenzy and also maintained good social relations with all the other religious communities and hence had a better and unbiased grasp of the situation. Partition novels unveil this trauma of suffering brutality and survivor's shame doubt, or guilt felt by the survivor of the catastrophe. In the novel *Ice Candy Man* Sidhwa has retraced the catastrophe of trauma events that took place at partition. The objective of this paper is to analyse the trauma of violence and bloodshed witnessed by the people during the time of partition as portrayed by Bapsi Sidhwa in her novel *Ice Candy Man*.

Keywords: violence, partition, convulsion, migration, abduction, bloodshed, humiliation, barbarity

India accomplished independence from long British imperialistic reign on 15th of August 1947 but independence of the nation had trauma embedded within it for the people of nation. The independence from the clutches of British raj meant partition of the Indian nation into two sovereign states India and Pakistan. This division of India into two states was on the basis of two nation theory which stated that the Hindus and the Muslims have different social, cultural and religious identities hence they cannot live together in one nation. “The Muslim majority regions of Punjab and Bengal were divided, with west Punjab and east Bengal forming west and east Pakistan and India in the middle of the two” (Hassan: 1993). This division of Indian nation into two respective states had a horrendous and shattering impact on the lives of the people leading to their traumatization. The division of the nation resulted in destructive and violent mass migration of people

across the borders, division of homes, families, relations or lands foregrounded this massive convulsion. The people of Hindu and Sikh community immigrated to India and Muslims immigrated to the newly formed Pakistan with the hope of peaceful and better living, ethnic identities. Urvashi Butalia describes partition in following words,

The political partition of India caused one of the great human convulsion of history...twelve million people moved between the new, truncated India and the two wings, east and west, of the newly created Pakistan...estimates of dead vary from 200,000 to two million but that somewhere around a million people died is now widely accepted ... 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of different religions and even by the men from their own religion (and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion).

Partition fiction is one of the major sources of documentation of the calamitous events of partition. Although the fictional documentation is imaginary construct but it is based on the real and historical facts, in reality this acts as an interface between the history and literature by intermingling the memories with the facts that the victims remember ardently or reluctantly. Bapsi Sidhwa offers her perspective of the catastrophic event of partition in her novel *Ice Candy Man*. Sidhwa states that

I was just attempting to write the story of what religious hatred and violence can do to people and how close evil is to the nature of man. Under normal circumstances people can be quite ordinary and harmless; but once the mob mentally takes over, evil surfaces. Evil is very close to the surface of man. (Bapsi Sidhwa)

The novel gives a realistic depiction of the cultural and social relations among members of different religious communities of India prior to and after the event of partition. The novel reflects upon the fact that how the event of partition drastically brought about the change in the thought process of people, the evil nature overpowered their innocence. Lenny a polio stricken girl belonging to Parsi community narrates the story of novel and Sidhwa "*Through the wondering eyes of the precocious Lenny, the novelist shows the disruption of settled order and traumatic separations of friends, the legacy of partition*". The novel mirrors the violent racial religious clashes that sparked the bloodshed during partition and all the members of all religious communities whether it be Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Parsi were affected by the event. The novel highlights the fact that the demon of partition firstly caught up with the people of urban regions, they had already begun to slit throats of one another in the name of religion where as the people in rural regions were living in peace and harmony, they had love and affection for one another, the diversity of culture and religions was celebrated the people of the nation and in particular by people belonging to rural areas. Even at the time when the news of bloodshed, abduction and rapes was circulating amongst people the people of Pir Pandoh assured to stay together even in such a calamitous situation.

Barey Mian” ...” I’m alert to what’s happening...I have a radio. But our relationships with the Hindus are bound by strong ties. The city folk can afford to fight...we can’t. We are dependent on each other: bound by our toil...To us villagers, what does it matter if a peasant is a Hindu, or a Muslim, or a Sikh?

But this harmony, love and peace doesn’t last long in the rural regions as well. Lenny distinguishes the change in political and social conditions of Pir Pandoh , in her second visit to the village. The atmosphere in the village was the opposite of what she had seen in her first visit.

Lenny’s first visit to Pir Pindoh cast an impression that the rural Punjab was an oasis of communal fraternity. While the scorching and blazing conflagration of communal frenzy engulfed the whole nation. In fact, the villager vowed to unite their efforts to curb and refute the communal violence.

The character of Ayah is of major significance in the novel. She represents the composite culture of the unpartitioned India, she had admirers from all the religions, they shared great bond and Ayah indiscriminately smiled on all the admirers but as soon as communal violence broke out the admirers parted their ways and became enemies and posed threats to one another. The admiration for Ayah fades away in the communal turmoil and she too had to suffer the brutality and humiliation on the hands of her admirer Ice-candy-man because of her religious identity. Sidhwa relates the scene through the eyes of narrator of Ayah’s abduction: *“The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands,...propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces.”* She faces psychological as well as physical trauma as she is gang raped and then later on taken to Hira Mandi, the red-light area of Lahore where she forced to serve as dancing girl cum prostitute. People like Imam Din, cousins Cook, the Butcher and Ice- candy –man whom she considered as her friends also exploit and abuse her sexually, on top of sexual abuse she is forced to change her religious identity ,and is assigned a new name Mumtaz thereby signifying her changed religious status.

The trauma violence, bloodshed and mass murdering of people took places on both the sides of border. The presence of multi religions served as the fuel for arousal of communal violence. The Hindus, The Sikhs, and The Christians suffered the brutalities in the Muslim dominated areas of Pakistan, similarly The Muslims had to face the horror of death, rape and abduction in the Hindu dominated regions of India. The mass murder of the Muslims in Pir Pandoh has been described by Sidhwa as Ranna witnessed it as:

Ranna saw his uncles beheaded. His older brothers, his cousins....Ranna fell just inside the door the tangled pile of unrecognised bodies. Someone fell on him, drenching him in the blood.

The Hindus and the Sikhs undergo the same trauma in Lahore as experienced by the Muslims that fell in the Indian side of the border “...while the old city in Lahore crammed behind its dilapidated Moghul gates, burned, thirty miles away Amritsar also burned”. Ranna passes through the inferno of trials and evils of refugees, he saw infants murdered and their mothers raped and killed while he was on his way to Pakistan, the scenario with the people migrating to India was no different, they too experienced the cruelties and brutalities of the communal tension. Some of the people reached crossed the border some were murdered and those who stayed were transformed to Islam and Christianity. The Muslims pick up their nefarious intention of The Hindus to drive them out of their locality in Lahore and hence stocking a large amount of arsenal in their homes and shops. The Muslims retaliate by spraying the entire area with petrol as a result of which the entire area is engulfed by a rapid and uncontrollable blaze. The spectacle of this conflagration astounds Lenny as she refers to the event as

It is like a gigantic fire work display in which stiff figures looking like spread-eagled stick-dolls leap into the air, black against the magenta furnace. Trapped by the spreading flames the panicked Hindus rush in droves from one end of the street to the other. Many disappear down the smoking lanes. Some collapse in the street. Charred limbs and burnt logs are falling from the sky.

The psychological impact of fire on Lenny is depicted by Sidhwa as Lenny feels as if “*the whole world is burning*”.

Sidhwa in the novel has realistically retraced the barbarous and uncivilized acts that occurred at the time of partition. She fairly exposes how religion became the major guide and mobilising force and reason for the calamity. She unveils how the rationality, humanity, human relationships, logic and sanity was overpowered by the mass hysteria of communal barbarism. She denounces the two nation theory which laid the ground for trauma of partition and writes: “*The Radcliff Commission deals out Indian cities like a pack of cards. Lahore is dealt to Pakistan, Amritsar to India, Sialkot to Pakistan. Pathankot to India. A new nation is born. India has been divided after all*”. Robert L. Ross explains Sidhwa’s assertion:

That Ice-Candy-Man represents the remote (and icy) politicians who, decides the fate of millions, their opinion shifting with the winds, their motives sometimes noble and sometimes selfish. Like them, Ice-Candy-Man changes, slipping from one role to another.

Sidhwa depicts the insensibility of the religious bigotry. She reveals that only the political leaders gained from partition, common people had to go through suffering and agony. The people succumbed to fanatic fundamentalism and lost their homes, lands and their identity. The novel unveils how the political figures alter their position and intone political strands on behalf of their own interests. Politicians concerned deceive the people they represent. The novelist incisively exposes and ridicules the fickleness and whimsicality of the

politicians. The novelist unveils that only the common people who had to pay the price, streets on both sides of the borders were drenched with the blood, dead bodies were lying all over the place and the two nation theory promised a better future for their respective communities had miserably failed as it brought trauma of communal violence, bloodshed and murders embedded within it.

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