

***GENDERED SUFFERINGS WITH REFERENCE TO
SIDHWA'S ICE-CANDY MAN***

By Amit Kumar Singh (Research Scholar)

Department of English and Modern European Languages

University of Allahabad, Prayagraj

Abstract:

Partition was a sorrowful event in the history of India. Millions of people were compelled to move from one side to other and this event turned into mass slaughter which can be printed as a traumatic and worst religious communal violence in the world history. Perhaps, it was Britisher's political strategy to divide a nation on the basis of religion, caste and creed into two different nations: India, the Hindu homeland and Pakistan, the Muslim homeland. According to Kate Millet, "Man and woman relations are deeply embedded in power structure with political implication. All aspects of society and culture function according to Sexual politics that encourage woman to internalize their inferiority until it becomes psychologically rooted in them". (Millet) In this paper, it is attempted to depute the victimhood of woman during partition cataclysm.

Key words: Partition, Patriarchy, Equality, Violence.

Why was the partition of India subcontinent so necessary? Who was responsible for such a cataleptic condition? Why women were harassed? Was it happened because of sexist imagery of woman? Bapsi Sidhwa as a novelist, tried in her own way to display the event of partition along with naked cruelty and ruthlessness.

Generally, in every cases of battle, fight and dispute, woman suffer the worst because sexism is so deeply rooted in society that the only way to cure it is to completely eliminate gender, the concept of gender, should be eliminated only then this male- female gap would be bridged. The worst experiences woman faced as Urvashi Butalia points out: “Roughly ten to twelve million people are said to have moved, within the space of a few months, between the new truncated India and the newly created Pakistan, Between 500,000 to one million people are believed to have died, hundreds of thousands of children lost and abandoned between 75,000 to 100,000 women raped and abducted”. (Butalia208)

The novel Ice – Candy Man was originally published in London under the title Ice-Candy Man in 1995, the American milkweed edition changed the title of the novel to Cracking India, because the publisher assumed Americans would misunderstand ice-candy and confuse it with some drugs. A Canadian film director Deepa Mehta turned this novel into a motion picture with the title “1947 Earth”. Bapsi Sidhwa has depicted the unforgettable historical moment of partition effectively and artistically through the child narrator of eight year old – Lenny , who belongs to Parsee community of Lahore, and she is a polio victim. Ayah, who is a maid, in Sethi family looks after Lenny is central character and a flame of sensuousness and female vitality around whom Ice-Candy-man Masseur, the government house grader hover all the time. She is a Punjabi Hindu maid, whose real name is Shanta. She is beautiful who controls the action and emotions of male who gaze her physical beauty. Lenny notices male gazers while she was being taken by Ayah to her Godmother:

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 work ships (ICM3).

Laura Mulvey a British feminist film theorist in her book *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) described the ‘male gaze’ concept. She said that female today suffer from ‘male gaze all these masculine people or males in the society, they look at the females which is said to be “male gaze” so males are the subject and they are gazing at the object, which is bad and need to change it.

Donna Haraway in her work *Cyborg Manifesto* talked about male gaze and says that technology is something that is going to dissolve sex and gender discrimination because technology is neither male nor female. We all have facebook. Facebook is neither male nor female. We need to refuse the binary separation of male and female into subject and object.

Colonel Bharucha is a doctor and renowned name in the Parsees community of Lahore. He feels that the Parsis living in Lahore will not be safe if the place is ruled by the Muslims, so he feels that Parsis in Lahore should shift to Bombay. Colonel Bharucha advises his community members to be neutral ethnically-

If we’re stuck with the Hindus they’ll swipe our business from under our noses and sell our grandfathers in the bargain: if we’re stuck with the Muslims they’ll convert us by the sword! And God help us if we’re stuck with the sikh’s! (ICM 37) ... As long as we do not interfere we have nothing to fear! As long as we respect the customs of our rulers – as we always have –we’ll be all right! (ICM 39)

Ice-candy man Dilnawaz is a street vendor who sells ice candies in summer and birds in the winter and he is shown in the novel as one of the admirers of Lenny’s Ayah. He is Muslim Lenny calls him, is an intelligent and glib raconteur.

Sidhwa wants to depict the impact of trauma and terrifying sights witnessed by ice – candy man and how he tried to avenge the genocide of his Muslims relatives:

A train from Gurudaspur has just come in; he announces, panting. Everyone in it is dead. Butchered they are all Muslims. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts! Ice-candy –man's grip on the handlebars is so tight that his knuckles bulge whitely in the pale light. (ICM 149)

Hassan (masseur) and Ayah love each other but due to communal violence Hassan is killed by Ice-candy-man Ayah is abducted by the cronies of the Dilnawaz Ice-candy-man and persecuted and raped by them. They drag ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet-that want to move backward- are forced forward instead.

The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces. (ICM183)

Women have always been subjected to an artificially constructed idea of the feminine. It seems ironical that, man becomes the encompassing presence for woman in karma and dharma, in social life as well as in religious practice. Virginity is of prime value in such a situation. Woman is called 'grihlaxmi', because she has to confine herself within the four walls. She is called 'Devi', because she has become a symbol of sex-object and procreating machine. She is called 'sati' because she will be dictated by the hard rule of a man throughout her life. Even Aristotle, in his book Politics, clearly states that, not only children should be kept under control but wife should also be under unrelenting control of a husband.

“Man is full in movement, creative in politics, business and culture. Woman, on the other hand, is passive. She stays at home; as is her nature she is matter, waiting to be formed by the active male principle... Man consequently plays a major part in reproduction; the woman is merely the passive incubator of his seed”.

On the other hand, Mary Wollstonecraft is not agreeing with Aristotle and other philosopher like Rousseau and states that:

“Woman is not a mere plaything for titillating male senses but is an independent being, who is both capable of and entitled to every kind of training and discipline. If she is given the right kind of education and due access to the sources of knowledge, she too, can become capable of making rational choices of surpassing significance”. (Mary 263)

Ayah’s name is changed from Shanta to Mumtaz and she is kept at a kotha even after her marriage. Lenny repents for speaking the truth and for three days kept staring at her tongue in front of mirror, godmother helps ayah to go to Amritsar and she even does not think that whether her family or relatives would accept her or not. This event is very similar to the story of ‘Pinjar’, a novel written by Amrita Pritam, and beautifully depicted by Chandraprakash Dwivedi in his movie ‘Pinjar’, where Puro is abducted by Rashid for vengeance.

Thus, women and property become synonymous as possessions to be guarded fiercely and virginity symbolizes the family’s prestige. Partition will constantly remain carved in the psychic consciousness of sufferers specially women sufferers. The novels of Khushwant Singh, Attia Hosain, Yashpal, Chaman Nahal, Bhisham Sahni, Amrita Pritam, Bapsi Sidhwa and several short stories of Saadat Hassan Manto evokes the horrors of the partition holocaust on both sides of the Radcliffe line. A reader finds himself terrified by the images of the frightened, tormented, dispossessed men and women representing millions of unsettled humanity across the border. Hope, one day the world would be free from cruel patriarchy, dominance, class system, oppression of women and the principles of justice and equality would conquer.

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