UNIT 1 THE AUTHOR: BACKGROUND, WORKS, AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are threefold. Initially it is to introduce the students to Bapsi Sidhwa, the Pakistani woman novelist who is an important voice in the genre of Indo-Anglian Commonwealth fiction. Bapsi Sidhwa is a Parsi Zoroastrian and as the background of the author plays an important role in her novel, Ice-Candy-Man, it is essential to have a historical perspective on this minority community. So, for a better understanding of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel it is vital to understand the Parsi ethos. Finally this unit examines the significance of the title and the possible political connotations that occur with this unusual title.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Bapsi Sidhwa's background

Celebrated Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz described the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa as:

   Ruthlessly truthful, deeply perceptive, she tells her story with rare courage, frankness, and good humour. (Paranjape 82)

This is an apt assessment of the Pakistani woman novelist Bapsi Sidhwa, an important voice in the genre of commonwealth fiction. Her four novels—The Crow Eaters (1978), The Bride (1983), Ice-Candy-Man (1988) and An American Brat (1994)—reveal remarkable diversity, vision, and perception of themes which are both universal and particularly relevant to the subcontinent. However, the most striking
Ice-Candy-Man

feature of her novels, especially *The Crow Eaters*, is her remarkable sense of humour, which is both bawdy and ironical.

Born in Karachi in 1938, in a prominent Parsi business family, the Bhandaras, the now sixty years old Bapsi is a literary figure as well as an active social worker. She divides her time between Pakistan and U.S.A. In 1991 she was awarded the *Liberaturpreis* from Germany for *Ice-Candy-Man* and the *Sitara-i-Imtiaz*, the highest honour given in arts by the government of Pakistan. In 1992 she won the prestigious Lila Wallace Readers Digest award. Her novels have been translated in four languages, French, German, Russian and Urdu. In India her novels were initially published by Sangam books and are now published by Penguin. In England her novels were published by Jonathan Cape and Heinemann, and in U.S.A by Milkweed editions.

Born in Karachi in undivided India, Bapsi Sidhwa was brought up and educated in Lahore. Her marriage to Noshirwan is her second marriage. When she was nineteen years old, she fell in love and married a sophisticated Bombay businessman. The marriage did not last long. She then married Noshirwan, a respected Lahore businessman who is the son of Mr. P.K. Sidhwa, former mayor of Karachi and a renowned freedom fighter. Bapsi had earlier graduated from Lahore's Kinnaird College for women. Mother of two girls and a boy, Bapsi was initially a housewife. A sense of social guilt and concern for the poor made Bapsi participate in social work. She soon became an activist and took special interest in women's rights. She was involved in setting up the destitute women’s and children's home in Lahore.

Despite her interest in social work, Bapsi was restless. She took to writing out of boredom and loneliness. She admitted later that as a typical socialite in Lahore, her life was one of unrelieved tedium. She abhorred the aimless gossip and conversation at coffee parties. So as a kind of therapy she took to writing. Reading had been a hobby since childhood. In an interview given to *The Friday Times* of 20-26 July, 1989, Bapsi admitted to Jugnu Mohsin "I had polio as a child. I had to have extensive treatment, my parents were advised not to send me to school. I was tutored at home by an Anglo-Indian lady who taught me to read and write." From this interview it can be seen that the depiction of Lenny, the girl-child narrator, who also has polio in *Ice-Candy-Man*, is very autobiographical.

As a lonely child, Bapsi read copiously. Her favourite authors were Charles Dickens, P.G. Wodehouse and V.S. Naipaul. She has revealed in interviews that her favourite books were *Pickwick Papers* by Charles Dickens which she read six times and Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas*. As she grew up she came to admire the works of Leo Tolstoy. The influence of her favourite novelists is evident in the writings of Bapsi Sidhwa. Her novels, especially *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice-Candy-Man* greatly resemble Naipaul's comic masterpiece *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). Like Naipaul's early novels, the works of Sidhwa are also a complex blend of autobiography, fiction and social commentary. The focus on a child's growing awareness of the world, evident in *Oliver Twist* and Pip's career in *Great Expectations* is also used by Bapsi in her presentation of Lenny in *Ice-Candy-Man* and the way she chronicles the adventures of a young Pakistani Parsi girl Feroza Ginwalla in America. The verbal abandon, caricature and witty remarks, a feature of the writings of Charles Dickens is also evident in the works of Bapsi Sidhwa. She adheres to the Dickensian method of a gripping story but is unlike Dickens in her limited authorial intervention. The sense of history which is so dominant in the novels of Dickens and Tolstoy also plays a prominent part in Bapsi Sidhwa's novels. After all, *Ice-Candy-Man* can be interpreted as the Pakistani perception of Partition. Her raucous humour, irreverence to established traditions and extrovert ribaldry reflect the influence of P.G. Wodehouse.
1.1.2 Use of Urdu Poetry

In Ice-Candy-Man, Bapsi Sidhwa uses a lot of Urdu poetry. The Urdu writers that have influenced Bapsi Sidhwa are Mirza Ghalib, Alama Iqbal (Pakistan's National Poet and a mystic), Faiz Ahmed Faiz (a Lenin prize winner) and women poets Zehra Nigar and Kishwar Naheed. She explains her use of Urdu poetry to Feroza Jussawalla in an interview. Sidhwa admits,

Yes, my love of Urdu poetry overflows in this book (Ice-Candy-Man). I've made it a part of this book and woven it into the structure because I feel it gives a resonance to the book, a cultural resonance, something which is very eastern. Urdu has permeated the book in the form of poetry. (Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World p.215)

As part of her strategy to highlight the cultural differences as a post-colonial writer, Bapsi Sidhwa makes use of Urdu poetry and untranslated words like the political slogans "Jai Hind Jai Hind" and "Pakistan Zindabad!" (p.127) "lungi" or dress (p.127) "tamasha" or spectacle (p.136) and moulds the English language to suit her purpose.

The author also feels that the use of Urdu poetry and Urdu language gives an Indian ambience to her novel, Ice-Candy-Man. Such poetry also adds to the romantic flavour, especially in the scenes which depict the masseur wooing Lenny's attractive maid servant, known as ayah. Towards the end of the novel, when the ice-candy-man is besotted by ayah, he is unable to see her as she is in the recovered women's camp at Warris road. At such moments when love rather than communal hatred is the overwhelming passion, the author cleverly uses verses from Urdu poetry to depict the mood. The love-stricken ice-candy-man recites passages from Zauq, Faiz, Iqbal and Mirza Ghalib. For instance, standing at the gates of the compound in Warris road, he recites Zauq:

Why did you make a home in my heart? Inhabit it. Both the house and I are desolate. Am I a thief that your watchmen stop me? Tell him, I know this man. He is my fate. (Ice-Candy-Man p.276)

He is also heard humming Zauq's poems:

Don't berate me, beloved. I'm god-intoxicated! I'll wrap myself about you; I'm mystically mad. (Ice-Candy-Man p.277)

Urdu poetry adds to the pathos of the love affair and conveys the local ambience very effectively. I feel that by her selective use of Urdu poetry, Bapsi Sidhwa gives a lot of local colour, atmosphere and added meaning to her story. Creditably the use of the poetic verses do not appear jarring or just scholastic but the chosen verses enhance the appeal of the story. The English translation of these verses, used in the novel, are of very high quality.

1.1.3 Why she wrote in English

Like many people who are educated and brought up in the sub-continent, Bapsi Sidhwa is fluent in several languages- English, Urdu, Gujarati and Punjabi. Bapsi has however only written in English. Unlike some Indo-English novelists and critics she has no feelings of guilt or nagging doubts about writing in English. She uses English without inhibitions. Bapsi feels that she is an end product of the British Raj and so socio-historical circumstances make it inevitable that she should write in English. In an interview with David Montenergro, in March 1989, published in "Points of Departure: International Writers on Writing and Politics," Bapsi Sidhwa makes her position about writing in English very clear, she says:
I find myself comfortable writing in this language (English). My written Urdu is not very good, though I speak it fluently. As for Gujarati, hardly anyone in Pakistan knows the language. In Britain of all places, people say, "Why don't you write in your own language?" And they bring heavy political overtones to bear on this. But I think well, the English don't have a monopoly on the language. It is a language of the world now. And it is a means of communication between various nationalities and the most immediate tool at hand. So I use it without any inhibitions or problems as far as I am concerned. (p.38)

She also has strong political reasons for writing in English. Sidhwa feels that writing in English increases the scope of her works of fiction. She feels that English is the language of the privileged, the elite and the powerful. Above all she feels it is important to write in English because it has emerged as the major world language.

Overall her writing style is influenced by Salman Rushdie and the technique of Indianisation of written English. Many of her sentences are punctuated with Gujarati and Urdu words, Parsi proverbs and Parsi-Gujarati cadences. She also feels that her writing style is influenced by her manner of speaking which she calls a "salad of languages."

Her reasons for writing in English are brutally candid and border on the political: She says:

"Although the Raj has been banished, and the empire repossessed, the status of English remains more or less the same: it is still the language of the elite or the privileged and powerful... and the most important factor contributing to the phenomenon is the emergence of English as a world language." (Ibid)

1.1.4 How and why she became a novelist

Bapsi Sidhwa became a writer more by accident than design. She began to write at the suggestion of an Afghan woman she met on an aeroplane. Prior to that she was overawed by the term author and imagined him or her to be a superior human being. In an interview to David Montenergro she explained:

I'm so fond of reading, and I used to think that a writer was some sort of a being who lives in another sphere. I never thought of the writer in human terms but almost as some disembodied power that automatically produced books. And suddenly by telling me that she (the Afghan woman) was a writer, she made me realise that writers are very flesh-and-blood persons. And that did make me want to write. (Ibid p.5)

This incident gave Bapsi Sidhwa the confidence to become a writer. She thought up her first novel after she heard the story of a young Punjabi girl who had run away from her tribal husband. The tribes live by a code of honour that reflects the harsh conditions of their environment. The girl, after surviving for almost two weeks in the lofty mountains was killed by her husband. This story haunted Bapsi Sidhwa as she felt it reflected the helpless condition of women in the sub-continent. It became an obsession with her and she decided to write it as a short story but it soon became a novel, The Bride or The Pakistani Bride, as it is titled in India. As Bapsi Sidhwa has herself often said, that it was not a tentative foray into writing, but a giddy and intoxicating nose-dive into a fabrication guided more by an intuition to write than by an exercise of the intellect. It was while she started writing that Bapsi Sidhwa discovered her ability to compose humorous passages. In an article, "Why do I write", Bapsi Sidhwa explained how she made time for her writing. She says:

So I wrote when I was dummy at bridge, when my children were at school and my husband at work. Everything in my life took precedence over my
writing. My husband was my sounding board. I read out what I'd written and his reaction, the surprised expression that often crossed his face, the way he raised an eyebrow and sometimes looked at me, fortified me. I could trust his judgement... he responded to the humorous passages with gratifying glee. (p.28)

Her first novel was written in long hand in a variety of notebooks and she typed the results, editing and retyping as the novel progressed. Nowadays of course she works on a computer. In an interview with Asif Rahim Khan published in Weekend Post of Friday, 23 October 1991, she stressed that she was not a methodical writer or a disciplined writer like Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson or Nayantara Sehgal, who followed a fixed routine and wrote for so many hours per day. Her approach to writing is very similar to that of V.S. Naipaul, her favourite author, namely the need for inspiration and deep concentration when excited about a theme. In the interview with Asif Rahim Khan she explained how her approach is very individualistic:

When I'm writing a novel, if I happen to write ten days a month, that's about the maximum. But when I do write, I write for almost 12 to 14 to 18 hours a day. You get into a roll, and sometimes you just don't want to stop, and then I can leave the novel for three to six months. It happened while I was writing Ice-Candy-Man. (3)

So we can see that by sheer chance and later, supported by her husband's enthusiasm, Bapsi Sidhwa discovered her talent and vocation as a novelist. Now that we know enough about the author, I would like to give a brief sketch about her four published novels.

1.2 THE WORKS OF BAPSI SIDHWA

Her controversial first novel The Crow Eaters (1978) is described by the author herself in the Preface as "The hilarious saga of a Parsi family", and also as a "labour of love about the few eccentricities in the community". Certain sections of the Parsi community considered it an unfair parody of Parsi life and rituals and there was even a mock bomb threat after its initial publication. The novel derives its humour from a blend of fantasy, scatology, physical and verbal incongruity and caricature. She writes in the tradition of Aristophanes, Fielding and the earlier novels of V.S. Naipaul, a mixture of farce and irony which arouses laughter but also reflects very serious themes. Her vision is comic and tolerant as she portrays the variety and vitality of life. There are also perceptive insights in presenting the marginalised Parsi milieu and Parsi characters as cultural hybrids.

Sidhwa dedicates The Bride (1983) to "the incredibly simple, deprived and courageous women of this (Pakistan) magnificent country". The core of the book is the heroine Zaitoon; not only is she a symbol of women fighting oppression in Pakistan but of the human spirit struggling to survive and maintain its integrity. It is a book about 'Khudi' or will, a type of strength of nature or force within us.

Her third novel Ice-Candy-Man (1988) belongs to the genre of the Partition novel popularised by Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgaonkar, Chaman Nahal and Attia Hosain. She uses the girl-child narrator Lenny and subtle political allegory to examine the inexorable logic of Partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by hardening communal attitudes. The use of rumour, dislocation of families and friends and the impact of violence on the human psyche are all humorously interwoven in a gripping and well-written narrative. Her implied message is similar to Bisham Sahni's Tamas (1973), that, "those who forget history are condemned to repeat it".
Ice-Candy-Man

There are several other interpretations of the novel. The use of the precocious, eight year old, polio-infected Lenny is autobiographical. Bapsi Sidhwa was also affected by polio early in her life. The device of the child narrator enables Bapsi Sidhwa to treat a historical movement like Partition without morbidity, censure or pedantry. By the use of Lenny, the author maintains a masterful balance between laughter and despair. Through the character of the girl-child narrator the author Bapsi Sidhwa explores a female universe hemmed in by the restrictive and reductive forces of patriarchy and colonisation.

The author uses the "woman-as-victim' paradigm but the victimisation is the result of collective action due to the communal riots that followed Partition. The riots are shown as being orchestrated by males. The maid in the Parsi family at Lahore known as "ayah" suffers the impact of Partition the most. Her body is commodified by her husband, the ice-candy-man.

Sidhwa's fourth novel An American Brat (1994) moves its locale, for the most part to the United States of America. This novel reflects the trend of globalisation in the Indian diaspora. It reveals the experiences of Feroza Ginwalla, the rebellious daughter of Cyrus and Zareen Ginwalla, who moves from Gulberg, Lahore to Denver, Colorado, for higher studies. Sidhwa cleverly shows how attitudes change when a young and impressionable student moves from the third world to a first world nation like U.S.A. Feroza has to make a lot of cultural readjustments. Her roommate Jo, teaches Feroza various Americanisms, so that she does not feel a misfit. For Feroza, the formation and maintenance of community takes on new dimensions. She outgrows the confines and limitations of her secluded, sheltered life in Lahore, develops an independent mind and chalks out her own career instead of being guided by solicitous advice from parents and elders.

The Parsi context to this novel is provided by the perennial problem of inter-faith marriage. This issue emerges when Feroza wants to marry David Press, an American Jew. The novelist through the guise of humour shows how elders exert pressures of conformity, tradition and emotional blackmail, to prevent the proposed marriage. There is an ironic exposure of fundamentalism characterized as parochialism, ignorance, conformity and insecurity at what is visibly different. Sidhwa criticizes fundamentalism amongst all communities in her novel. She criticises the "mullah mentality" that "girls must not play hockey or sing or dance," and the Parsi community's attempts to preserve cultural purity by forbidding all inter-faith marriages. She is equally critical of the narrow mindedness of American society in certain situations.

In the genre of Indo-Anglian fiction, Bharati Mukherjee has explored the theme of migration and re-adjustment in her short stories and her novel Jasmine (1989). Earlier Anita Desai had examined this theme in Bye-Bye Black Bird (1971) and Kamla Markandaya in The Nowhere Man (1972).

1.3 WHO ARE THE PARSIS?

The Parsis are an ethno-religious minority in India, living mostly on the west coast of the sub continent, especially in Mumbai. In Pakistan, most Parsis reside in Karachi and Lahore. The word Parsi means a native of "Fars" an ancient Persian province, now in southern Iran, the Greek word for this province was Persepolis. The Parsis left their homeland over twelve hundred years ago to save their religion, the teachings of Zoroaster, from being Islamized by the invading Islamic Arabians in the seventh century A.D. The Parsis are followers of prophet Zarathushtra. Their religion known as Zoroastrianism was founded around 2000 B.C. Historians dispute the date about
the origins of Zoroastrianism. Eminent historian and social chronicler, Eckehard Kulke in his meticulously researched book, *The Parsis in India: A Minority as Agent of Social Change* admits that there is controversy about the time of Zoroaster's actual historical appearance. According to Kulke, Western scholars, "date Zoroaster's activity mainly in the fifth and sixth centuries B.C. (Jackson, Altheim, Zachner, Wesendonk, Henning, Hinz) or between the ninth and sixth centuries B.C. (Widengren)." (Kulke p.14). However Kulke says that Greek historiographers believe that Zoroaster lived and taught between 4,000 and 6,000 B.C.

Another renowned social historian, Piloo Nanavutty says two theories exist about the date of Zarathushtra (the Parsis pronounce the prophet as Zarathushtra, but in the Western world he is known as Zoroaster). In her book, *The Parsis* she says that the first tradition, "favoured by Western scholars is a late Sassanian tradition stating that Zarathushtra lived 238 years before Alexander. This tradition is based on the assumption that Kava Vishtaspa of the Gathas is the same as the Achemenian Vishtaspa, son of Cambyses I and father of Darius the Great. The genealogies of these two Vishtaspas, however are totally different. On linguistic grounds, also this theory is not tenable." (Nanavutty p.12).

Piloo Nanavutty feels that the tradition which asserts that Zarathushtra lived about 2,000 B.C. or earlier is the most probable theory as it is based on a linguistic comparison and evidence of a split between the Aryan tribes. According to Nanavutty, the linguistic comparison is between the Gathas and the Rig Veda. The split between the Aryan tribes which led to one branch migrating to India and the other remaining in Iran is considered to be due to the reforms initiated by Zarathushtra. Historians thus differ on the origins of this religion. However amongst the Parsis in India, the most commonly held view is that Zarathushtra lived about 2,000 B.C. Kulke believes this view is held, "because it helps the Parsis to that feeling of religious exclusivity necessary for the existence and survival of the community." (Kulke p.15).

The origins of this small community of around 100,000 go back to the Indo-European branch of the Aryans. They are said to be descendants of the Aryan tribes which migrated from the Pamirs of central Turkistan to west Asia, particularly Iran.

The religious texts of the Parsis are collectively known as the *Avesta*. The essence of the religion can be found in the five gathas or divine songs of Zarathushtra (there are many more gathas, but they are not traceable). The gathas are basically Zarathushtra the Prophet's dialogues with God, which reveal the ethical nature of his gospel. Other religious texts are the *Yasna*, a collection of seventy-two psalms which forms the chief liturgical work in the *Avesta* and the *Vendidad* which is a code of conduct, with laws on purity and behaviour in twenty-two chapters.

So the religion of the Parsis is Zoroastrianism. The word Parsi is an ethnic term or identity for this minority community. They should really be called Parsi-Zoroastrians. Present day Zoroastrians who have migrated to U.S.A or Canada or Britain can be distinguished in two groups. Those who have migrated from the Indian subcontinent are referred to as Parsi-Zoroastrians whereas others who have come from Iran are known as Iranian Zoroastrians.

The Parsi-Zoroastrians are famed for being a very adaptable minority community. Since they have settled in the Indian subcontinent they have adapted Gujarati as their main language. With the advent of the British and the spread of the British empire, the Parsis were the first Indian community to learn English. Nowadays Parsis learn how to speak, read and write in both Gujarati and English. Parsi families residing in different regions of India, also learn the regional language or Hindi. So most Parsi families in the Indian subcontinent speak at least three languages. This linguistic diversity is reflected in the works of Bapsi Sidhwa. A lot of her sentences in English are punctuated with Gujarati and Urdu words. For instance, in her novel *Ice-Candy-
Man, Sidhwa shows how efforts are being made to stem the hardening communal attitudes in and around Lahore. She writes that gramophones and speakers mounted on tongas and lorries pour out the melody of Nur Jahan's popular film song.

Mere bachpan ke sathi mujhe bhool na jana-
Dekho, dekho hanse na zamana, hanse na zamana (*Ice-Candy-Man* p. 159)

The English translation by Bapsi Sidhwa of the above lines is:

Friends from our childhood, don't forget us-
See that a changed world does not mock us.

So Bapsi Sidhwa writes in a new English, punctuated with words from Urdu and Gujarati like 'Shahbash' (p. 245), "Khut putli" (p. 222), "Chachi" (p. 208), "Paijee" (p. 226) and "Churidar" (p. 105).

The scriptures of religious texts of the Parsis are written in the ancient avestan languages or the pahlave script. There is a interesting history behind the development of the language spoken by the ancient Parsi Zoroastrians. This has been explained by the eminent Parsi scholar Jer D. Randeria in her book *The Parsi Mind: A Zoroastrian Asset to Culture*:

From the speech of the ancients developed oral languages which have been called avestan by philologists, and the ancient gathic dialect of the avestan has been found to be similar to the sanskrit of the Rig Veda. In 530 B.C. a script was attempted which produced the cuneiform inscription on clay tablets in the avestan related ancient or old Persian language during the reign of the Achaemenian Darius the great. Old Persian became the language of the great Persian empire around 600 B.C while the Aramic script was used for writing. From it evolved the middle Persian, also called pahlave language around 300 B.C. The use of pahlave, mixed with Parthian words, continued until about 300 A.D. During the early Sassanian rule, it was replaced by Persian or Farsi as the official language. In the mid-Sassanian period about 530 A.D. an unknown priest invented the new avestan alphabet of 46 letters, based on pahlave characters, but having greater accuracy. By 1,000 A.D. the Iranian Zoroastrians began writing in new or modern Persian using Arabic script due to the Arabian invasion of Iran, but among themselves they preferred to speak in a local dialect called 'dari' (p. 9-10).

However all these languages are now extinct and are only used by priests for prayers.

### 1.3.1 Feeling of Group identity

In the 1997 census, conducted by the Government of India, the Parsis were only about 100,000, in number, 0.16 per cent of the total population of India. Yet their feeling of group identity and active participation in the social, cultural and economic life of both India and Pakistan is immense. Eminent jurist Nani Palkhiwala observes in his book *We the Nation: The Lost Decades* that "history affords no parallel to the role of Parsis in India. There is no record of any other community so infinitesimally small as Parsis, playing such a significant role in the life of a country so large". (p. 317)

Are Palkhiwala's views just a case of euphoric back-patting? No. Let us examine the facts. As a community they are well-off and urbanized (about 94%). In industries such as shipping, aviation, banking, catering, canning and dairy products the Parsis have been pioneers in India. There have also been numerous legal luminaries. History names many notable Parsis such as Rustamji, Jivanji, Gorkhodu, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, K.F. Nariman, an ardent promoter of the Swadeshi movement, Dadabhai Naoroji, one of the founders of the Indian National Congress,
Sir Dinshaw Eduljee Wacha, President of the Indian National Congress at its 1901 session and Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University and member of the Municipal Corporation of Bombay. Several of them played prominent roles in the freedom movement. Another significant feature is that despite being a miniscule minority, the Parsis have never asked for any "reservations" in the form of jobs or entrance to colleges in post-independent India. Along with such a progressive attitude and comparative prosperity, the Parsi community maintains a very strong sense of group identity and cohesiveness. Bapsi Sidhwa provides frequent examples of this group consciousness in her novel Ice-Candy-Man.

The best instance, I can think of, is the special meeting conducted by the Parsis in Lahore at their temple hall in Warris road to discuss the future prospects of the community when Independence and Partition were seen to be inevitable.

Now that we have a reasonable insight about the Parsi community let us try and understand some of the motivating factors, which make this small religious minority strive for a distinct identity. To understand their impetus even better, it is important to get some knowledge about the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism.

1.4 THE ZORAOASTRIAN RELIGION

The religion founded by Zarathushtra or Zoroaster (the more commonly used Greek form of his name) is in its original form, monotheistic. In contrast to the innumerable gods and demons (daevas) of his time, Zoroaster proclaimed the sole, absolute, omnipotent, eternal god, called Ahura Mazda or "wise lord". Ahura Mazda is both the creator as well as the judge on the day of the last judgement. Zarathushtra was born in the city of Arak, in Azerbaijan. At the age of fifteen, Zarathushtra turned away from all worldly pleasures and devoted himself day and night to the worship of Ahura Mazda. When he was twenty years old, he bade farewell to his parents and went to meditate in a cave. Like Gautama the Buddha and like Mahavir, Zarathushtra also wanted to unravel the mystery of life. His queries all dealt with eternal problems like why was there death and suffering in the world and how did evil come into the world and why were some hungry and poor and others rich and well-fed.

According to customary tales Zarathushtra lived alone in a cave, high on mount Ushidaren eating roots and berries and drinking goat's milk. On mount Ushidaren which means "bestowing awareness", Zarathushtra received enlightenment and conversed with Ahura Mazda in a vision. At the age of thirty, Zarathushtra went back to the world of men and taught them the wisdom he had learnt. He and his first disciple Maidbyomaongha became wandering preachers. Many of the nearby tribes listened to him but rejected his teachings. After many trials and tribulations he first succeeded in the small kingdom of Bactria in Eastern Iran. His missionary labours continued for thirty years, after which he settled at Balkh the capital of Bactria, the Greek name for Afghanistan. For more detailed information on the life of Zarathushtra and his teachings you can read eminent Parsi historian Piloo Nanavutty's book The Parsis (1977). According to her, Zarathushtra was killed when he was seventy-seven years old. The prophet was stabbed in the back, whilst praying at the fire temple at Balkh, by Tur-bar-tur leader of the Turanians, a tribe hostile to the concept of monotheism.

1.4.1. The Zoroastrian Ethic

Zarathushtra preached the monotheistic religion of the one supreme god, Ahura Mazda. His message is a positive, life-affirming, active-principled one, which demands not so much belief as reason and action on the part of every individual. According to the prophet Zarathushtra, the whole universe is dominated by two primal forces, good and evil. The task of mankind is to choose between them.
Spenta mainyu, the power of light and good are the good spirits opposed in this world by the evil spirits angra mainyu. The supreme god Ahura Mazda thus combines with Spenta mainyu to become the principle of good represented as Ohrmazd. The personified evil spirit is Ahriman. Life is seen as a ceaseless struggle between the forces of good and evil. There is no concept of earthly renunciation or asceticism. The moral demands on Parsi-Zoroastrians are "Hvarshta (good deeds), Hukhta (good words) and Humata (good thoughts)" (Eckehard Kulke, p.18) The conflict between good and evil will continue until evil is routed. After the destruction of evil, according to Zarathushtra's teachings there will be a general resurrection, a final judgement and then an endless era of universal peace. On earth human beings must make their own choice. A choice of the forces of good is a personal responsibility. In involves a life of active benevolence. The views on life after death are similar to those in Christianity. The good people will enter paradise, the rest will be ushered into purgatory or be plunged straight into hell.

Keki B. Shroff in a presentation made to Vision T.V. of Canada on 26 May 1995 showed how Zoroastrian ideas have played a vital role in the development of Western thought. He listed some theological concepts shared by Zoroastrianism with Judaism and Christianity. The similarities are as follows:-

Belief in one supreme and loving god.
The concept of heaven and hell and individual judgement.
The ultimate triumph of good over evil.
A strict moral and ethical code.
The messiah to come for the final restoration.
The concepts of resurrection, final judgement and everlasting life.
The Zoroastrian origin of words like Satan, Paradise, Pastor and Amen.

Now that we have understood some of the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism, let us briefly examine how it influences the behaviour of some of the Parsi characters in Ice-Candy-Man. The narrator Lenny's mother, Mrs. Sethi and her aunt Minnie travel all over Lahore providing cans of petrol to the beleaguered families of the minority Hindus and Sikhs to help them escape across the border. Explaining their secretive and seemingly suspicious outings, Lenny's mother says:-

I wish I'd told you. We were only smuggling the rationed petrol to help our Hindu and Sikh friends to run away. And also for the convoys to send kidnapped women, like your ayah, to their families across the border. (Ice-Candy-Man p.242)

The motivation behind such selfless and noble actions by Lenny's mother is neither individual heroism nor political gain. Instead the motivating factors for such charitable acts can be linked to the Zoroastrian ethic of "good deeds". Towards the end of the novel, Lenny's godmother (one of her aunts) named Rodabai shows remarkable energy and capacity to handle crisis situations by rescuing the ayah after she was kidnapped and kept at a "kotha." Rodabai takes ayah to a rescued woman's camp and then arranges to send her to her relatives in Amritsar. Again the motivation of Rodabai's actions can be explained by the Zoroastrian credo of good thoughts and good deeds. So I would like to emphasize that the Zoroastrian ethic is a major motivating factor for many characters in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel.

1.5 THE MIGRATION TO INDIA

A historical perspective is essential to understand the dilemmas, identity crises and problems of the Parsi community in India which is aptly reflected in Parsi literature. The Parsis are the descendants of the Persian Zoroastrians who had sought refuge in
India in the eighth century A.D. when Persia now Iran was conquered by Arab invaders. After the collapse of the Persian empire at the battle of Nahawand in 642 A.D. the defeated Persians who practised the ancient monotheistic religion, Zoroastrianism, were converted to Islam by the conquering Arabs. Consequently many Zoroastrians fled from Iran and sought refuge in India.

Several history books dealing with the exodus of the Parsi Zoroastrians to India have stated that after fleeing from Madyan in Iran they first arrived at the port of Diu in the eighth century A.D. After their stay for about 19 years, they set sail towards the South and landed at the port of Sanjan in Gujarat around 785 A.D. Sanjan was then ruled by the liberal monarch, King Jadhav Rana.

The dastur (Priest) who was heading these refugees approached King Jadhav Rana, narrated their tales of woe and sought permission to settle down in Sanjan. At a public assembly in an open Maidan, the dastur gave details of the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism in sixteen sanskrit shlokas. It is believed that initially Jadhav Rana was hesitant about giving shelter to the refugees from Persia, as he was uncertain about the reaction of his own citizens. The King's first response was a sorrowful inability to accommodate the Zoroastrians on a permanent basis at Sanjan due to inadequancy of space.

At this crucial juncture, the dastur requested that an urn filled with milk to the brim be brought to the assembly. When the same appeared he took off his ruby studded gold ring and dropped it into the urn. Using this symbolic gesture, the dastur showed that just as the contents of the urn had not spilt over but become richer by the insertion of the precious ring, similarly the Parsi-Zoroastrians would bring further prosperity to that area if granted shelter. Moved by the reasoning of this pious priest, King Jadhav Rana asked the dastur to narrate their actual requirements. The dastur replied that they desired freedom of worship, freedom to bring up young children in their own traditions, and land for cultivation so that they became self-sufficient. Jadhav Rana agreed to these demands but imposed five pre-conditions for allowing the Zoroastrians to settle in Sanjan. The five stipulations were:-

**To adopt the Gujarati language.** (The Parsis have adopted this language faithfully, have forgotten their traditional dialects and in any modern day census reports indicate Gujarati as their mother tongue).

**The women would wear the sari** (this sartorial custom has also been faithfully followed and the Parsis in India have adopted sari as the dress of the community. Traditional Parsi women wear the 'Sidhi' sari in the Gujarati fashion, draped over the right shoulder, with one end tucked at the back and one end falling in the front).

**Men should hand over their weapons.**

**Venerate the cow.** (Due to this condition, traditional Parsis still do not eat beef, though there are no religious taboos against the eating of beef).

**The marriage ceremonies shall be performed at night only.** (This condition was imposed so that the local population is not attracted by such a ceremony and hence the danger of conversion is minimized. The Parsis in the subcontinent still follow this tradition and do not allow outsiders in their fire temples, which is a further guarantee that they will not attempt any conversions to their religion).

After accepting these stipulations, the fragile but learned dastur made one more symbolic gesture to assure the king of their loyalty and diligence. He stirred a spoonful of sugar in a brass bowl full of milk and said, "We shall try to be like this insignificant amount of sugar in the milk of your human kindness." Emotionally moved by such sincere commitment, King Jadhav Rana granted asylum to the
refugees in Sanjan. The dastur then appeared before the King and on behalf of the community pledged these words:

_Hame Hindustan Rayr Bashim._

We shall be the friends of All India.
_(Dipanjali: June-December 1996, 11)._  
The words of the dastur remained the basic credo or article of faith for Parsi Zoroastrians throughout their stay in India. It also reflects the characteristic spirit of adaptability of this minority community which enabled it to thrive in a country of such diverse cultures and religions.

1.5.1. **Problems of Alienation**

However, eminent Parsi literary critic Nilufer Bharucha views that the conditions and restrictions like adopting the local languages, costumes, customs and not intermarrying with the local population and never proselytizing led to feelings of alienation within the community. She writes:

> These unequal conditions provided fertile breeding ground for feelings of ambivalence and alienation from the host country. This ambivalence and alienation became exacerbated during the colonial period, when the Parsis were among the first to embrace English language education and become the most Westernised Indian community. Most Parsis, thus felt bereft at the end of the empire and the resultant loss of the special/elite status they had enjoyed during the colonial period. Several migrated to the West in the 1950s and 60s. (Bharucha p.358)

However, as is evident in Parsi literature both the Parsis who sought opportunities in the West and those who stayed on in India have experienced identity crisis and confusion. In the West, the Parsis face the dilemma of being branded as just another community of sub-continental Asians, an identity they sought to escape. In India, as is reflected in the works of Rohinton Mistry, Dina Mehta, Firdaus Kanga, Boman Desai and Bapsi Sidhwa, this minority community has to cope with the hegemonic forces of the dominant community. The struggle to create their own space in the West as well as in India and the identity struggle of what it means to be a Parsi Zoroastrian and all the major problems, aspirations, hopes, ambitions and prejudices of the community are reflected in Parsi literature.

1.5.2 **Declining Numbers**

Madhavankutty Pillai in an investigative article in the _Asian Age_ of 13 May 1997 reveals that prosperity, extreme individualism, urbanization, late marriages, low birth rate and antique laws about not accepting the children of Parsi women married outside the community are taking their toll on the Parsi community in India. Statistics show that the Parsis are the most urbanized community in India. 94% of the Parsi population is urbanized as compared to 16.4% of Hindus. Also the Parsi population in India has declined from about 1,14,890 in 1941 to about 75-80,000 in 1997. Though there are no definite figures available at present, a rough estimate is that in a year there are 1,000 deaths and 500 births.

Given these conditions and factors, the laws of statistics dictate the eventual annihilation of this community. If attitudes do not change, it seems unlikely that the Parsis will see another millenium change. Under these circumstances, as Rohinton Mistry has indicated in a recent interview, fiction such as his will record the history of the Parsis for the ages to come. Seen in this context, literature like the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa are a vital source of information about Parsi beliefs and practices.
1.6 TITLE OF THE TEXT

1.6.1 Political Connotations of the Title

When this novel was first published in 1988 in London, it appeared as Ice-Candy-Man. This was the title that Sidhwa had intended. However, in the 1991 American edition, the title was changed to Cracking India, because the publishers thought, Americans would misunderstand "ice-candy" and confuse it with drugs. The new title for the American edition is more explicit and clearly indicates that it is a novel of partition, which prioritises India. However the original title had significant symbolic connotations. First of all we must remember the centrality of the ice-candy-man's role to the love theme and political themes of this novel. Sidhwa deliberately avoided naming the central character. He is called ice-candy-man because this name has certain specific political connotations.

Sidhwa has always maintained that this character represents what she calls or considers the "icy" unstable quality of politicians who determine the fate of their subjects. At one point in the novel, Lenny the adult narrator talks about the "Ice lurking deep beneath the hypnotic and dynamic femininity of Gandhi's non-violent exterior" (Ice-Candy-Man p.88). Such men are icy, according to Sidhwa because they are remote and indifferent to the human loss they cause by their political acts. She also feels that political leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose and the English Viceroy Lord Louis Mountbatten were cold as ice to the sufferings caused by Partition. Such an interpretation is again part of Sidhwa's historical vision. She has always believed that politicians stir up trouble and it is the ordinary person, a woman like godmother, who "battles wrongs."

So the title Ice-Candy-Man is a metaphor for those who wield power and it provides an inventive and indirect way to explore the role politicians played in the holocaust and bloody birth of Pakistan and the new India. Sidhwa feels that politicians like the ice-candy-man were just role playing. She thereby implies that politicians are not consistent and their public image keeps shifting. It is also suggested that the motives of politicians appear noble but are often selfish. Like the scheming politicians, the ice-candy-man also frequently changes roles. When the sales of ice-candy decline in cold weather he changes his profession. He becomes a birdman who takes pride in deceiving his customers. When due to communal tension, bigotry is on the increase, the ice-candy-man become "allah's telephone" (p.107), posing as a holy man with a direct line to the almighty and apologizing to his clients that allah "has been busy of late... you know; all this Indian independence business." (p.107). So towards the end of the novel, the ice-candy-man becomes a holy (actually unholy!) pretender, which the author implies is the role of many politicians. Ultimately the ice-candy-man takes up the despicable profession of pimping. So overall it is seen that the ice-candy-man uses his glib tongue and power of rhetoric to be successful in many roles. The author suggests that politicians especially during the time of Partition were indulging in mere double-speak.

Overall, the novel is far too subtle to state a direct political view. However, it does not idolize the Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru and vilify Jinnah as often happens in post-partition fiction and histories. For political reasons, at times, Sidhwa provides an alternate view of Jinnah and appears to be praising him. However Sidhwa's overall belief is that the maneuvering of those in power has no more substance or permanence than melting ice-candy. So ironically the seller of such an ephemeral product, the man who shifts from one role to another turns into the unlikely symbol of those who were making history or at least thought they were doing so. The title, as I have tried to explain is not just chosen at random but has several interesting political connotations which enhance the subtle meanings of this text.
1.7 LET US SUM UP

It must be realized that Bapsi Sidhwa drifted from being a typical socialite and wife of a successful businessman in Lahore to becoming an internationally acclaimed novelist. She became a novelist by chance and accidentally discovered that she possessed the gift of telling stories in a gripping and humorous manner. This is also probably due to the influence of her favourite authors - Dickens, Tolstoy, V.S. Naipaul and P.G. Wodehouse. Her narrative style is racy with liberal use of Urdu and Gujarati words and idioms. The novel for detailed study, Ice-Candy-Man is quite autobiographical, as the girl-child narrator Lenny suffers from polio, which afflicted Sidhwa at a young age. In her novel, the Parsi-Zoroastrian background is dominant. Hence in this section, we have identified features of this minority, and have given a comprehensive view of their religion and group identity. The Parsi diaspora, the migration to undivided India is shown in greater details because it has an impact on how certain characters behave in this novel. To give you a better understanding of this humorous but unique novel, I have also given a brief presentation of two of the most contentious topics amongst contemporary Parsis, their alienation from the majority community and their declining numbers. Finally the political connotations of the title have been examined.

1.8 GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gathas:</td>
<td>Sacred texts of the Parsis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inexorable:</td>
<td>Relentless or unyielding or remorseless</td>
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<td>Millenium:</td>
<td>A period of a thousand years</td>
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<td>Minority discourse:</td>
<td>A type of writing with emphasis on the views, attitudes and feelings of a small group of people who differ from others in certain characteristics.</td>
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<td>Paradigm:</td>
<td>An example or model used as a standard for the whole group of an archetype. Also the framework of theories and concepts forming the background of a scientific approach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patriarchy:</td>
<td>A society or social organisation marked by the supremacy of the father or a male figure. Male dominated society in which male members act as leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proselytising:</td>
<td>To convert from one religion or belief to another</td>
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<td>Resurrection:</td>
<td>A state of revival.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scatology:</td>
<td>Obscenity or obsessive interest in obscenity in relation to excrement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shlokas:</td>
<td>Verse forms, used in ancient Indian Literature</td>
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1.9 QUESTIONS

Q1. How and why did Bapsi Sidhwa become a novelist? Mention the authors who influenced her style of writing. Why did she prefer to write in English?

Q2. Outline the origins of the Parsi community, and give an account of the Zoroastrian ethics.

Q3. Why did the Parsis immigrate to India? How did they gain permission to settle in Gujarat?

Q4. Discuss the various political connotations of the title, Ice-Candy-Man.

1.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Background Material


Palkhiwala, A. Nani. We the Nation: The Lost Decades, New Delhi: UBSPD, 1994.


Secondary Material


Gandhi, K.J. ed., *Fed Newsletter*, Published by the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India, New Delhi


UNIT 2 THE NARRATIVE VOICE IN *ICE-CANDY MAN*

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 The Narrative Voice and its ambivalence
2.3 Lenny’s Narrative
2.4 The Function of Narrator’s several Identifications viz. the society
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 Glossary
2.7 Questions
2.8 Bibliography
2.9 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to study the unique narrative voice of *Ice-Candy-Man*. The author’s reasons for employing a girl-child as the narrator of her novel set in the politically volatile period of India’s Partition in 1947 will also be explored. We shall see how Lenny’s dual aspects as the narrator and the chief character of *Ice-Candy-Man* modify a novel on the theme of communal antagonism into an intensely complex and personal statement.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Having read the novel the readers must have noticed that it is, above all else, the narration by an intensely self-reflexive and observant character. This character, an eight year old polio afflicted child, Lenny, narrates the incidents, introduces the novel’s characters and talks aloud as it were, her ruminations on all the subjects included in her narration. Therefore, the narrative of *Ice-Candy-Man* becomes a character’s autobiography. The text juxtaposes the child’s psyche with the goings on of the adult world, while for this child the world around her itself is a text.

The dividing line between a child as the narrator and a writer speaking through a child’s consciousness is deftly camouflaged by the use of first person narration in the present tense. This ambivalence in the narrative voice is revealed only on account of Lenny’s acute self-awareness of her implication in the rather precious response she makes to the world around her.

So we have to address several issues when we discuss the narrative voice of this novel. Firstly, why is an ambivalent narrative voice employed by Sidhwa for this story? Secondly, why does she use a child’s perspective to contextualise the events of a political battle in India’s history? Lastly, why is this child a character marginalized from several locations of her social identity i.e. what purpose is served by Lenny’s being a handicapped Parsi girl child narrator?

The possible answers to these questions would provide valuable insights into the political sympathies of the novel itself.
2.2 THE NARRATIVE VOICE AND ITS AMBIVALENCE

The narrative opens with the Urdu poet Iqbal’s ‘Complaint to God’:

Shall I hear the lament of the nightingale, submissively lending my ear? 
Am I the rose to suffer its cry in silence year after year? 
The fire of verse gives me courage and bids me no more to be faint. 
With dust in my mouth, I am abject: to God I make my complaint... (1)

It is often through ‘verse’ or art that the stifled sentiments of the victimised minorities in any culture are given a voice. For her novel Bapsi Sidhwa chooses the eight year old Lenny as the narrator to voice the anxiety of the underprivileged during India’s Partition. Lenny in the novel is not just marginalised as a child but also as a girl, as a Parsi and as a physically deficient member of her society. This makes her’s a very effective and resonant narrative voice both in the genre of Partition novels and in the bildungsroman writings.

Spoken from the margins of the mainstream discourses of patriarchy, nationality, religion and aesthetics, Lenny’s comments reverberate with questioning and critique even at their most naive; ‘He [Gandhi] is a man who loves women. And lame children. And the untouchable sweeper – so he will love the untouchable sweeper’s constipated girl-child best’ (87).

I would also like the students to notice here how the narrator is distancing herself from the “untouchable sweeper’s constipated girl-child” in spite of the ironic similarity in their multiple marginalized status. Lenny is thus avoiding, even resenting, any gush of Gandhi—like pathos as a desired response to her narrative. Instead, the narrative carries the readers along a lighthearted current of irony and wayside observation into some of the most heart-rending areas of human experience.

Like most eight year olds, our child narrator is an untiring explorer. Forever asking questions, forever watching, listening – her curiosity to fathom the seen and the unseen dimensions of life around her is typical of growing children. And her intuition is stronger than most. The result is a collage—like narrative. Events, people and ruminations are unpredictably juxtaposed in it and hence, the various concerns the author has in mind are presented in an uncontrived manner.

The child-narrator is shown coming across post-colonial politics, gender divisions, victimisation and dilemmas of the minority communities, child-abuse et al. and she tells her story as such. In her interview for The Hindustan Times in 1998, Bapsi Sidhwa emphasized the importance of a writer’s location when he/she is writing. ‘I wanted to be in Pakistan/India. There are little details one absorbs, a sense of place, a resonance of being there, memory does not give you the feel’ she explains. Perhaps, the same can be said about Sidhwa’s use of a child as the story-teller. Narrating as a child (its autobiographical account) makes childhood the location of experience. It gives the feel that writing ‘about’ childhood as an adult might miss – “a resonance of being there”. So Lenny’s experience and her expression of it strikes a special chord with the readers. Innocently wide-eyed sometimes, and at other times staggeringly precocious, Lenny’s perspective defamiliarizes the common places of adult experience ‘What is God’ she wonders (94) and “What is a fallen woman?” she asks her Godmother (215).

However, Ice-Candy-Man is not a child’s almanac only. The author, infact, is keeping a close watch over this mini-narrator. In the introduction we said that there is a deftly camouflaged dividing line between the child-narrator and the writer