UNIT 5 ICE-CANDY-MAN AS A NOVEL OF PARTITION

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The immediate objective of this Unit is to show how Bapsi Sidhwa uses the genre of the Partition novel to present the Pakistani perspective on Partition, a reappraisal of the role of politicians like Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah and a woman's perspective on the great communal divide showing dislocation, emotional turmoil and sense of loss. One of the major objectives of this unit is to present Bapsi Sidhwa's political stance that politicians keep shifting their role, remain remote, indifferent and manipulative whilst heroic actions are performed by ordinary people. Partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by hardening communal attitudes is also probed. Further the genre of the Partition novel in English has been examined to see how Ice-Candy-Man is both similar and different to such novels. In this novel the narrative technique is quite unusual as it combines laughter, ribaldry, a passion for history and truth telling.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 The Partition Novel

Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man was first published in London in 1988. In the 1991 American edition, this title was changed to Cracking India, because the publishers felt Americans would misunderstand "ice candy" and confuse it with drugs. The novel is set in pre-partition India in Lahore. It belongs to the genre of the Partition novel like Manohar Malgaonkar's A Bend in The Ganges (1964), Chaman Nahal's
Ice-Candy-Man

Azadi (1975), Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan (1956), B. Rajan’s The Dark Dancer (1959) and to a certain extent Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children (1980). These books present the Indian perception of the Partition holocaust. Mehr Nigar Masroor’s Shadows of Time (1987) and Mumtaz Shahnawaz’s The Heart Divided (1957) present the Pakistani version of these violent and tragic events. Both the versions are however free from religious bias and written more in agony and compassion than in anger. However in the overall genre of Indian-English fiction, Bapsi Sidhwa’s Ice-Candy-Man is the third novel on Partition by a woman author. A couple of years earlier, Mehr Nigar Masroor had written a novel about the impact of time on families divided by Partition. The first novel by a woman author on these traumatic events was Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961) by Attia Hosain. Both Attia Hosain and Bapsi Sidhwa share similar perspectives on the calamities of Partition. The denouement of both novels is comparable as they stress the vulnerability of human lives. The Partition relentlessly divided friends, families, lovers and neighbours in both countries.

Overall, Ice-Candy-Man is a novel of upheaval which includes a cast of characters from all communities — Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Parsis. Thus a multiple perspective of Partition emerges as viewed by all the affected people. However what really distinguishes Bapsi Sidhwa’s Ice-Candy-Man is the prism of Parsi sensitivity through which the cataclysmic event is depicted. It is the only novel written by a Parsi on the theme of Partition. This makes it unique. Another fascinating aspect of this novel is the use of the child narrator, the precocious Parsi girl Lenny. Lenny is like the persona that Chaucer adopts in his Prologue to The Canterbury Tales rendering credibility by being almost a part of the reader’s consciousness. It is a device which is a source of sharp irony and enables Bapsi Sidhwa to treat a historical moment such as Partition without morbidity, pedantic display or censure. The unique aspect of this Partition novel is that the author throughout maintains for us a balance between laughter and despair.

The change of attitude of the Parsi community, the impact of violence on the girl-child narrator, the use of allegory to depict the horrors of Partition, the role of rumour, the dangers of communal frenzy and the rise of obscurantism are all aspects of the Partition which get reflected in Ice-Candy-Man. I will show in the subsequent sub-divisions how the author uses witty banter, irony and parody in her sensitive handling of the impact of Partition on the Parsi community, the girl-child narrator and deteriorating human relationships. It is these aspects which makes Bapsi Sidhwa's novel unusual. Otherwise the cruelty, the horrors, the human loss and dislocation of Partition have been chronicled in the works of other Partition novelists.

5.2 SIDHWA’S POLITICAL STANCE

5.2.1 The Politics of Partition

Ice-Candy-Man comprises thirty two chapters and provides a glimpse into the cataclysmic events and turmoil on the Indian sub-continent during Partition. Historic truth is a backdrop of the novel and the focus is on the personal fate of the character Ice-candy-man, the deteriorating human relationships and communal discord. However Bapsi Sidhwa’s political stance in this novel is of great importance.

The novel Ice-Candy-Man is deeply political in its retelling of the events of Partition from a Pakistani rather than an Indian perspective (a more detailed analysis of this theme is in Unit-6, ‘The Post-Colonial Perspective’), so the Ice-Candy-Man is a politically motivated novel. Sidhwa admits this in a conversation with David Montenegro cited in Points of Departure – International Writers on Writing and Politics, 1989.
The main motivation grew out of my reading of a good deal of literature on the Partition of India and Pakistan... What has been written has been written by the British and the Indians. Naturally they reflect their bias. And they have, I felt after I'd researched the book, been unfair to the Pakistanis. As a writer, as a human being, one just does not tolerate injustice. I felt whatever little I could do to correct an injustice I would like to do. I have just let facts speak for themselves, and through my research I found out what the facts were. (p.36)

The major Indian political figures of that time, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lord Mountbatten, Subhash Chandra Bose, are either caricatured or presented in a slightly unfavourable manner in this novel. This is all part of Sidhwa's conscious design as such political figures are shown as inconsistent and shifting from one position to another. Sidhwa is deliberately playing the role of the iconoclast. She is trying to reassess Gandhi's place in history. During the political debate in Queen's Gardens, one of the characters the masseur (Ayah's lover) soothingly says of Gandhi, "He's a politician yaar, ... it's his business to suit his tongue to the moment" (Ice-Candy-Man p.91). Gandhi's visit to Lahore is also gently parodied by the author. The child narrator Lenny's immediate observation of Gandhi is unfavourable. She innocently compares him to her gardener Hari. She says:

He is small, dark, shrivelled, old. He looks just like Hari, our gardener, except he has a disgruntled, disgusted and irritable look, ... (Ice-Candy-Man p.86).

So Gandhi's Lahore visit is deliberately demystified. He is not presented as a political saint. Instead he talks about personal hygiene and nothing profound but "flush your system with an enema, daughter," (p.87). So Lenny dislikes Gandhi and thinks of him as "an improbable mixture of a demon and a clown" (p.87). Sidhwa told David Montenegro that she was reacting to a lot of literature and the film Gandhi, which sanitised him into a saint. She said, "He's not human in that film. And I tried to humanise him." (Points of Departure ...)

Sidhwa makes her Pakistani bias quite evident in Ice-Candy-Man when she suggests how Partition favoured India over Pakistan.

The Hindus are being favoured over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favour Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri, they grant him Kashmir. Spurning logic, defying rationale, ignoring the consequence of bequeathing a Muslim state to the Hindus: ... They grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot without which Muslim Kashmir cannot be secured. (Ice-Candy-Man p.159)

Eminent Indian novelist Shashi Tharoor has objected to Sidhwa's use of the word "grant", noting that the British did not grant Kashmir to India. This outburst on Kashmir is by Lenny and it can be construed as the outburst of the girl-child narrator. It is true that Lenny is not the author but in a New York Times interview to Laurel Graeber on 6 Oct.1991, Sidhwa says, "Gandhi really sowed the seeds of Partition and turned the whole independence struggle into a Hindu movement. It's hard for people in the West, where he is deified, to regard him as a petty manipulative politician," (p.11) Laurel Graeber in his article also concludes that, "Bapsi Sidhwa has attempted to give a Pakistani perspective to the Partition of India." (p.110) Creditably Sidhwa, however rises above petty nationalism or any form of jingoism. Her novel does not uphold the Two-Nation theory behind the creation of Pakistan. In other words, she does not stress the belief of Pakistani Muslims of the necessity of Partition and the creation of Pakistan. In fact Ice-Candy-Man suggests that religious and cultural differences are artificially created and deliberately fostered. Again through Lenny's perspective, Sidhwa shows how religious differences are deliberately exploited on the eve of Partition.
Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Iqbal, Tara Singh, Mountbatten are names I hear. And I become aware of religious differences. It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindle into symbols... (Ice-Candy-Man p.93).

Human beings also change, as Lenny observes. The devotional fervour is aroused in the Ayah and she spends a small fortune on worshipping the gods and goddesses in the temples. Imam Din and Yusuf become religious zealots and take Friday afternoons off for the “Jumha prayers”(93). The lower caste Hari, Moti the sweeper and his family become even more untouchable. The English Christians look down upon the Anglo Indians and the latter are scornful of the Indian Christians. So this is the human tool of the politics of Partition. As we can see in this section, Bapsi Sidhwa presents a Pakistani version of the horrors of Partition. An alternate version of history is being presented through fiction, an aspect which I will examine in the next section in the depiction of Muhammed Ali Jinnah.

5.2.2 Role of Jinnah

Using fiction as a shaping force in history, Sidhwa tries to redefine the role of Jinnah. She strongly feels that the depiction of Jinnah in history written by the Indians and the British is unfair. She feels he was caricatured “as a very stiff villain of the piece”. Thus she tells David Montenegro:

And I felt in Ice-Candy-Man, I was just redressing, in a small way, a very grievous wrong that has been done to Jinnah and Pakistanis by many Indian and British writers. They’ve dehumanised him, made him a symbol of the sort of person who brought about the Partition of India... whereas in reality he was the only constitutional man who didn’t sway crowds by rhetoric. (Points of Departure p.50)

In the novel, a major reference to Jinnah is aptly made in the context of the Parsi family that is the focus of the novel. Lenny comes across the picture of an “astonishingly beautiful woman” and is told that it is the picture of Jinnah’s wife. A Parsi woman, she married the Muslim Jinnah and risked censure by her wealthy, knighted father and her family. The marriage as history suggests was not very happy and the beautiful wife died of a broken heart. In this context Sidhwa does not completely exonerate Jinnah but she manages to blur the criticism by noting that Jinnah too died of a broken heart in September 1948. She stresses that she is on Jinnah’s side:

But didn’t Jinnah too, die of a broken heart? And today, forty years later, in films of Gandhi’s and Mountbatten’s lives, in books by British and Indian scholars, Jinnah who for a decade was known as ‘Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity’ is caricatured and portrayed as a monster. (Ice-Candy-Man p.160)

In this same chapter, there is also a fascinating contrast between Nehru and Jinnah, presented by Lenny. However the observations reflect not only Sidhwa’s views but the gossip about the two leaders that Lenny has overheard from the servants, the retinue of Ayah’s admirers and local people. So it is a type of received history. Nehru is presented as charming, suave, handsome and “with an aura of power and a presence”(p.159). There is also a touch of scandal. “He bandies words with Lady Mountbatten and is presumed to be her lover”(p.150). In contrast Jinnah “is incapable of compliments”(p.159). He is described as austere and deathly ill (reference to the cancer of which he died in September 1948 soon after the formation of Pakistan). The author implies that Nehru was successful with the British and has always received praise as a statesman because he was charming and urbane. Her concern is that Jinnah has not received his due because he was “past the prime of his elegant manhood”
(p.160), sallow and uncompromising. In revealing the image of Jinnah, Sidhwa again displays the important presence of hindsight in her fiction ("Today, forty years later"). She further justifies her portrayal of Jinnah by using a quotation from the Indian poet and freedom fighter, Sarojini Naidu, which praises the founder of Pakistan’s appearance, manners, idealism, demeanor and wisdom. The novelist has therefore adopted a historicist approach in her portrayal of Jinnah.

5.3 THE USE OF POLITICAL EVENTS

5.3.1 Historical Signposts

Marianne Wiggins in a scathing review of Ice-Candy Man for the New Statesman (26 Feb., 1998. p.23) says that the choice of the marginalised narrator, a child, a female, a Parsi and a victim of polio mars the political impact of this book. Despite Wiggins’ view what I would like to suggest in this section is that Partition is the shaping force of this novel and the author uses political events very subtly to add to the effect. Another critic, Alamgir Hashmi does not share Marianne Wiggins’ hostility towards Sidhwa’s narrator but has some reservations about the historical content of the novel. Yet what I would like to stress is that the novel Ice-Candy-Man is both historicist and with a political bias in its retelling of the events of Partition from a Pakistani rather than an Indian perspective. It is a novel with a modified historicist approach which subtly depicts political events so that they are interwoven with the flow of the narrative.

At times the author does not follow chronology or exact dates in presentation of historical events. For instance there is a reference to Gandhi’s intention “to walk a hundred miles to the ocean to make salt” (Ice-Candy-Man p.36). The time scale is totally erroneous. Gandhi’s famous salt march to Dandi Beach took place in the early months of 1930, not in the pre-Partition months of 1947. However this is not an inaccurate historical detail deliberately used by the author. Rather it suggests a blurring of the narrator’s memory. What Lenny is told and what she remembers hearing first hand, often merge. So this reference of Gandhi for Lenny is a received truth even if it is historically out of its time. The historical references or signposts in this novel are limited because Lenny does not understand much of what she hears. As Lenny herself says:

Obviously he’s (Ice-candy-man) quoting this Bose. Sometimes he quotes Gandhi or Nehru or Jinnah but I’m fed up of hearing about them. Mother, father and their friends are always saying: Gandhi said this, Nehru said that. Gandhi did this Jinnah did that. What’s the point of talking so much about people we don’t know? (Ice-Candy-Man p.29).

5.3.2 The Visit of Gandhi

Other significant historical events occur in the novel. For instance, Sidhwa shows Mahatma Gandhi visiting Lahore. At the particular context in history which forms the back drop for this novel, the pre Partition months of 1947, the visit of Gandhi may not be historically accurate. There is no recorded evidence of Gandhi visiting Lahore and speaking to the people in the early months of 1947. However it is a fictional rendering based on similar visits Gandhi made to various parts of the sub-continent. More significantly, the presence of Gandhi in Lahore allows Bapsi Sidhwa to reassess his place in history. In the novel, Gandhi is depicted as talking to Lenny and her mother about “enemas and clogged intestines” (p.87). The child Lenny is bewildered that this frail man is considered so famous. When she looks at his eyes she discovers compassion, tolerance and as the child gauges, “everything that is feminine, funny, gentle, loving” (p.87). Her instinctive reaction is:
He is a man who loves women. And lame children. And the untouchable
sweeper’s constipated girl-child best. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.87)

However a different image of Gandhi emerges when she recalls the meeting with
him some years later. Now it is not the child narrator Lenny who is reacting but a
grown up and mature narrator. The other side of Gandhi that is recalled is somewhat
sinister:

> It wasn't until some years later—when I realised the full scope and
dimension of the massacres — that I comprehended the concealed nature of
the ice lurking deep beneath the hypnotic and dynamic femininity of
Gandhi's nonviolent exterior. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.88)

So the author uses the observations of Lenny to deliberately erase the mystique of
Gandhi. I would like to stress that this is another aspect of the Partition novel, in
which the author has used political events to reassess the role of important historical
characters, in history.

### 5.3.3 Scenes of Violence

Some of the other political events mentioned in the novel are Tara Singh’s visit to
Lahore and the passionate speeches of the Akali leader about the necessity of
preserving undivided India. His place in history is also reassessed. Sidhwa calls him
“the Sikh soldier-saint” and he is described in images of violence, “holding a long
sword in each hand, the curved steel reflecting the sun’s glare as he clashes the sword
above his head” (p.133). His tone is aggressive and challenging:

> We will see how the Muslim swine gets Pakistan. We will fight to the last
man! We will show them who will leave Lahore! Raj Karega Khalsa, aki rahi
na koi! (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.134).

The portrayal of a volatile Akali leader Master Tara Singh, is part of Sidhwa’s
political game plan and her understanding of history. She is of the view that the
Muslims in East Punjab suffered more because of organised violence by the Sikhs
who were manipulated by politicians.

Similarly there is a vivid description of the Sikh’s attack on the Muslim village of Pir
Pindo in the Punjab. Again the description of the attack may not be historically
accurate but such attacks took place frequently during the turmoil caused by Partition.
The delineation of brutality by the Sikhs is again part of Sidhwa’s political strategy to
present the Pakistani perspective. She explains to David Montenegro:

> The Sikhs perpetrated the much greater brutality—they wanted Punjab to be
divided. A peasant is rooted to his soil. The only way to uproot him was to
kill him or scare him out of his wits. (*Points of Departure* p.36)

The child narrator also confuses the burning of Lahore and mob violence with the
celebration of Holi. This is a deliberate ironic perspective. The Holi festival
celebrates brotherhood, and spontaneous joy “when everybody splatters everybody
with coloured water and coloured powders and laughs and romps...”(p.134). But
instead of joy there was bloodshed. Sidhwa tersely depicts the skyline of the old
walled city ablaze, and people splattering each other with blood!”(p.134). The scenes
of violence during the Holi festival are all part of Sidhwa’s historic vision that
gullible mobs were inflamed by self-motivated political leaders to perpetuate
violence.
5.4 DISLOCATION AND SENSE OF LOSS

5.4.1 The Human Toll

In this section, I will examine how Bapsi Sidhwa aptly shows the inexorable logic of Partition which moves on relentlessly leaving even sane people and friends helpless and ineffective. She at times uses the technique of reportage. Bare facts present the horror of the greatest communal divide in history. The neighbours of the Sethis, Mr. and Mrs. Singh hurriedly leave Lahore with their two children and a few belongings. Other goods are left behind with Lenny’s parents. Sher Singh the zoo attendant flees from Lahore due to insecurity after his brother-in-law is killed. Similarly the students fraternity of King Edward’s Medical College is disrupted. Prakash and his family migrate to Delhi and Rahool Singh and his pretty sisters are escorted to a convoy to Amritsar. In Lenny’s household, the gardener Hari is circumcised and becomes Himmat Ali and Moti becomes David Massih, showing the politics of compromise and survival. Ayah’s lover the masseur’s mutilated dead body is found in a gunny sack. The money lender Kirpa Ram flees leaving guineas and other wealth behind. Communal mayhem and riots cross the class divide. Even middle-class families like the Shankers flee in haste.

In rural areas the Muslim village of Pir Pindo is attacked at dawn and swamped by Sikhs. Men, women and children are massacred. Bapsi Sidhwa as a sensitive novelist shows that humanitarian deeds are performed by individuals like Rodabai, known as Godmother, Lenny’s mother and Jagjeet who with a furtive group of Sikhs visit the Muslim village of Pir Pindo under cover of darkness to warn them of an impending Akali attack. The novelist is also very practical and worldly wise. She shows that individual acts of kindness and bravery can only help some victims and alleviate their misery but not stem the tide of organised violence.

Partition is shown as a series of images and events depicting human loss and agony. The dislocation of settled life is revealed by Lenny’s understanding of the demographic change in Lahore. In awe she observes that Lahore is no more cosmopolitan. The Sikhs and Hindus have fled.

Lahore is suddenly emptied of yet another hoary dimension: there are no Brahmins with caste marks – or Hindus in dhotis with bodhis. Only hordes of Muslim refugees. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.175)

The child narrator senses the difference and pain caused by the huge exchange of populations. The dislocation and uprootedness of Partition is experienced by Lenny and her brother Adi as they drift through Queen’s Gardens searching in vain for familiar faces and acquaintances.

Adi and I wander from group to group peering into faces beneath white skullcaps and above ascetic beards. - ...I feel uneasy. Like Hamida I do not fit. I know we will not find familiar faces here. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.237)

The dislocation of life during Partition caused emotional upheavels. This is best exemplified by the attitude of Lenny when she learns that Masseur one of Ayah’s several admirers has proposed marriage. Even in the child there is a feeling of insecurity as she clings to Ayah’s hands and cajoles her not to marry the masseur as it would entail separation.

5.4.2 Parody and Brutalisation

The Partition novels of Manohar Malgaonkar, Khushwant Singh and Chaman Nahal focus on Punjab and the dislocation of life and emotional turmoil in that region. So Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel is similar to the novels in this genre. The only difference is that
the pointless brutality of communal frenzy is parodied as it is presented and narrated by the child narrator Lenny. The properties of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are destroyed as the author implies that ire knows no religion.

The terror of the fight for Lahore between Muslims and Sikhs is palpable. For the child narrator it is a spectacle, a variation from routine life, but mingled with terror and horror. The shrieks of “Pakistan Murdabad! Sat Sri Akaal! Bolay so nihaal!” of the Sikh mobs when listening to Master Tara Singh at Queen’s Garden and “Allah-o-Akbar! Yaaa Ali! And Pakistan Zindabad!” of the rampaging Muslim mobs give Lenny as many nightmares as when she recollects the roaring of the lions in the zoo. With such subtle comparisons and ironic exposures, Sidhwa shows the brutalisation which communal frenzy causes. Even lovers turn hostile.

The Ice-candy-man, the Muslim lover of the Hindu Ayah watches Shalmi and Mozang Chowk burn with, “the muscles in his face tight with a strange exhilaration I never want to see” (p.136). The transformation of a fun loving man who frolicked and acted the buffoon in the park, into an ogre is conveyed by Lenny’s horror at the sadism in his face. It is a vivid image which is a stark reminder of the brutality of the times. Subtle insinuations, images and gestures enable Bapsi Sidhwa handle the delicate and sensitive theme of Partition without verbosity and sensationalism. The horror of human loss, bloodshed and separation is portrayed without lurid details and maudlin sentimentality.

In the next section, I will carefully examine some of the narrative techniques and devices used by Bapsi Sidhwa in this novel.

5.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

5.5.1 Similarity with Attia Hosain

There are certain striking similarities between Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel and Attia Hosain’s sensitive Partition novel, Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961). Both these women novelists use a narrator heroine with considerable merit. Attia Hosain’s narrator heroine Laila reveals the trauma of Partition through her memories and insights of the Taluqdar family disintegrating. In the same way the enigma and traumas of Partition are sensitively handled in the Ice-Candy-Man.

In Sunlight on a Broken Column when Laila’s cousin, Zahra who is married in Pakistan returns to her ancestral home at Hasanpur, she quarrels with her cousin about the protection of Muslim culture and language. The disagreements are now no longer youthful verbal quarrels but echo bigger divisions. Lenny too by observation and instinct surmises the dislocation caused by Partition, just as Laila also shows the cruelty of parting ways when she says,

In the end, inevitably we quarreled, and though we made up before we parted I realised that the ties which had kept families together for centuries had been loosened beyond repair. (Sunlight on a Broken Column p.303)

Like Lenny, the grown-up Laila is also both nostalgic and restless. When Laila wanders about in her disbanded ancestral home “Ashiana” after Partition, memories come flooding back. However it is not nostalgia for the old order to return. Her new found identity and struggle to be Ameer’s lover and wife, curbs any desire for a return to the cloistered feudal order. Instead her horizons have broadened and she has come to detest dogmatism, either in the name of religion or radicalism. Her mature perspectives on life developed after intense personal struggle enable Laila to tackle the loss of her husband Ameer and the trauma of Partition without rancour or excessive grief.
So both narrator heroines react against communal responses and the horrors of violence. The mature Laila rationalises against communal tension whereas the young Lenny instinctively reacts against the horrors of Partition. There are also other similarities. Both narrator heroines realise there are no easy solutions to communal holocausts except intense struggle against dogmatism. Laila’s concerted attempts at breaking from traditional customs, the negation of despair and recognition of struggle are upheld by Attia Hosain. Her narrator does not lapse into a glorification of the past or take refuge in mysticism, epicureanism or jingoism. Similarly Bapsi Sidhwa shows there are no easy winners in the communal holocausts of Partition. The use of narrators enable both Bapsi Sidhwa and Attia Hosain to maintain their story-telling pace and prevent the narrative from declining into a sentimental plot. This is done by blending socio-political events with personal observations and reactions. It is achieved either through the childlike innocence or naivety of Lenny or the rationalised approach of Laila.

5.5.2 The Use of Allegory

Allegory is another literary device used by Bapsi Sidhwa to depict the trauma of Partition. The child Lenny is affected by the violence at Lahore.

The whole world is burning. The air on my face is so hot I think my flesh and clothes will catch fire. I start screaming; hysterically sobbing. (Ice-Candy-Man p.137)

The scenes of violence and arson and above all the venomous hatred of friends who had months earlier insisted on the impossibility of violence, have a frightening impact on the young Lenny. Violence breeds violence and Lenny is also a victim. Her rage is directed at her collection of dolls. In a frenzy she acts. “I pick out a big, bloated celluloid doll. I turn it upside down and pull its legs apart. The elastic that holds them together stretches easily. I let one leg go and it snaps back, attaching itself to the brittle torso” (p.138). The destructive urge overcomes Lenny and she is not satisfied till assisted by her brother Adi she wrenches out the legs of the doll and examines the spilled insides. This violent act by Lenny is an apt allegory on the mindless violence of Partition. With a morbid sense of humour, Bapsi Sidhwa reveals how the Partition had uprooted people of different communities, irrespective of ideology, friendship and rational ideas. In such a depiction, Bapsi Sidhwa captures the horror portrayed by William Golding in Lord of the Flies (1954). Golding indicated that there is a thin line between good and evil in human beings and it is only the structures of civilisation which prevent the lurking evil from being rampant. In Lord of the Flies, the boys of Jack’s tribe get a sadistic delight in hunting Ralph. The situation is saved as a naval officer reaches the island and by his presence curbs the pointless brutality of the abandoned boys. Golding wrote this novel after World War II and the allegorical meaning was evident. In the world of fiction, a grown up steps in to curb the atrocities and brutality of the boys, but when countries commit atrocities there is no restraining power. Lenny’s destruction of the doll also has allegorical significance. It shows how even a young girl is powerless to stem the tide of surging violence within thereby implying that grown up fanatics enmeshed in communal frenzy are similarly trapped into brutal outbursts. Lenny breaks down and cries at her destructiveness, a sombre message by the novelist that unless there is rethinking, cruelty and insensitivity become a way of life, such is the conditioning of communalism.

5.5.3 Role of Rumour

Bapsi Sidhwa subtly delineates the psychological impact of the horrors of Partition. The communal frenzy has a distorting effect on people and leads to feelings of suspicion, distrust and susceptibility to rumours. Even the children, Lenny, Adi and Cousin are suspicious of any minor deviations from normal behaviour. Mrs. Sethi and
Aunt Minnie travel all over Lahore in the car but do not take the children with them. Deprived of long drives, Lenny and her cousin are intrigued at the movements of their mothers. Ayah enhances the sense of mystery when she states that the dicky of the car is full of cans of petrol. The author shows that in a highly charged atmosphere, suspicion and distrust become inevitable. The Ayah is also suspicious about the movements of cans of petrol by the two Parsi ladies. If she suspects they are distributing petrol to the arsonists she does not say so. The three children are stupefied by this revelation and let their imagination run wild. Finally they come to the same conclusion.

We know who the arsonists are. Our mothers are setting fire to Lahore! ...
My heart pounds at the damnation that awaits their souls. My knees quake at the horror of their imminent arrest. (Ice-Candy-Man p.173)

Bapsi Sidhwa cleverly parodies the suspicion of the children. The imaginary fears of Lenny, Adi and their cousin are a source of humour but also a grim reminder of how rumour becomes institutionalised in a tense atmosphere. The children only fantasize about their mother’s dangerous acts but the author shows how rumour preys upon the frenzied minds of men vitiated by communal hatred. On the radio there is news of trouble at Gurdaspur which the ice-candy-man and his friends at once interpret as “there is uncontrollable butchering going on in Gurdaspur”(p.149). There are further rumours of a train full of dead bodies coming to Lahore from Gurdaspur. The Ice-candy-man returns panting after a frantic cycle ride and adds to the horror, by describing the atrocities on women and says the dead are all Muslims. The acquaintances of Queen’s Garden believe this rumour and harbour a feeling of revenge against the Sikhs. They now look with hatred on their long standing friend Sher Singh compelling the latter to flee from Lahore.

In the vitiated communal atmosphere, insanity prevails as ordinary men lose their rationality. Such a degradation is best exemplified in the rage of the Ice-candy-man who says,

I’ll tell you to your face—I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur... that night I went mad, I tell you, I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I’d known all my life! I hated their guts (Ice-Candy-Man p.156).

Revenge becomes the major motivation for the Ice-candy-man and his friends. The role of rumour and the consequent pattern of violence shown by Bapsi Sidhwa is very contemporary as similar patterns are depicted by Amitav Ghosh in his novel The Shadow Lines (1988). Using the narrative technique of revealing events by reading old newspaper reports, Amitav Ghosh shows how communal violence spread in Calcutta and cities of erstwhile East Pakistan in 1964. The poisoning of water, the trains of dead bodies, all incredible rumours, further inflated the communal frenzy.

Amitav Ghosh’s novel is very relevant as it shows how fanatics thrived on the spread of rumours which intensified feelings of anger and triggered off violence. The bland newspaper reports and the memory technique of Amitav Ghosh removes the impact of horror that is caused by communal riots. Historical episodes sometimes collapse in memory. The 1964 Calcutta riots could be the 1984 Delhi riots, the 1987 Meerut riots or in recent times the 1989 Bhagalpur killings. They all follow a similar pattern, suspicion, distrust, rumour activating conditioned minds, all sources of terrifying communal violence.

Very perceptively Amitav Ghosh shows how different cultures and communities are becoming antagonistic to a point of no return. Hence in The Shadow Lines he effectively uses political allegory to stress the need for a syncretic civilisation to avoid a communal holocaust. Bapsi Sidhwa’s view is a parallel. The message in Bisham Sahni’s novel Tamas, that “those who forget history are condemned to repeat
it,” is applicable to the Ice-Candy-Man also. The novel written at a time when religious and ethnic violence threatened the disintegration of the sub-continent, is an apt warning of the dangers of communal frenzy. Bapsi Sidhwa shows that during such upheaval, sanity, human feelings and past friendships are forgotten. At the Queen’s Park in Lahore, friends and colleagues had argued endlessly about the impossibility of betrayal of friendships. Yet ironically, whilst the elders, Masseur, Butcher, Ice-Candy-Man, Sher Singh and Ayah gossip about national politics the child narrator senses the change:

I can’t put my finger on it—but there is a subtle change in the Queen’s Garden. (Ice-Candy-Man p. 96)

5.6 BIGOTRY

5.6.1 The Pretender

The author implies that the events at Queen’s Garden are a reflection of a crystallisation of feelings at a larger scale in Lahore and other cities of India. Cultural and religious exclusivity leads initially to indifference and later to contempt which becomes the breeding ground for communal violence and bigotry. With a subtle parody, Bapsi Sidhwa conveys the dangers of social exclusivity. The Ice-candy-man, in striking attire enters the Queen’s Garden, “thumping a five-foot iron trident with bells tied near its base”(p.97). He is in the guise of a holy man and chants ‘Ya Allah!’ With his ash-smeared face and eccentric manner he pretends to be Allah’s telephone. The author implies that in an atmosphere which encourages religious bigotry, even charlatans emerge as godmen. The difference between appearance and reality is slim. The Ice-candy-man’s buffoonery gets taken as real. Burkha clad as well as smartly dressed women call him ‘Sufi Sahib’. A bearded man inquires if Allah will grant his wife a son. The Ice-candy-man pretends to talk to God on the telephone. The scene is ludicrous and a source of rich humour. However amidst laughter the real meaning to such clowning emerges. The Ice-candy-man’s antics provoke amusement but it is a pointer to the duplicity of people in the name of religion. Their sheer gullibility is exposed in a scene vividly described:

Suddenly he springs up. Thumping his noisy trident on the ground, performing a curious jumping dance, he shouts: Wah Allah! Wah Allah! so loudly that several people who have been watching the goings-on from afar, hastily get up and scamper over. Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims form a thick circle round us. ... I can tell from the reverent faces around me that they believe they are in the presence of a holyman crazed by his love of God. And the madder the mystic, the greater his power. (Ice-Candy-Man p. 99)

The message is clear. If charlatans can arouse such fervour, then obscurantism needs little prodding to slide into bigotry.

5.6.2 Perils of Communal Frenzy

The secular group of Ayah’s admirers maintain a façade of unity by cracking ribald jokes on community characteristics. However very soon they also become vicious and fall a prey to communal frenzy. The Ice-candy-man is part of the rampaging mob which abducts Ayah and keeps her in the brothels of Hira Mandi. So even the passion of love is powerless against religious bigotry. Later in the novel, the Ice-candy-man attempts to make amends. He forcibly marries Ayah, changes her name to Mumtaz and recites love poetry to her. But even here love is shown as powerless. Ayah has a revulsion for her newly acquired Muslim identity. With the help of Lenny’s Godmother she is taken to a Recovered Woman’s Camp and then sent to her family
Ice-Candy-Man

in Amritsar. The Ice-candy-man, now a “deflated poet, a collapsed pedlar” follows her to Amristar in vain. Their relationship is severed forever, one more victim of frenzy and Partition. Love does not conquer all, when communal and obscurantist passions are aroused.

With a sprinkling of humour, parody and allegory Bapsi Sidhwa conveys a sinister warning of the dangers of compromising with religious fundamentalism. Otherwise a certain inevitability marks this historical process. Though her novel is about the trauma of Partition, Bapsi Sidhwa like Amitav Ghosh reveals that communal riots are contemporaneous and her message is like Bisham Sahni’s Tamas (1973), that those who forget history are condemned to repeat it.

5.7 LET US SUM UP

A historicist reading of Ice-Candy-Man involves an understanding of how it is a unique Partition novel, with its use of the girl-child narrator, witty banter, irony and parody and the use of a variety of narrative techniques to sustain the racy story. The politics of Partition, the divide between the Hindus and Sikhs on the one hand and the Muslims on the other are all carefully delineated. In this section, the author’s view on Gandhi, Jinnah and the turmoil of Partition reflect her world view that it is important to have a Pakistani version of history. She has always believed that Partition is as much a part of Pakistani history as it is part of Indian history. So she presents an alternate history of that shared horror. In her handling of political events, Sidhwa shows how politicians, the remote icy men in power, play roles that manipulate ordinary people whereas it is only some committed individuals like Godmother, Mrs. Sethi and Jagjeet Singh who “battle wrongs”. Subtle insinuations and images along with parody enable the author to sensitively handle the dislocation and loss caused by Partition. Also there is her veiled message that communal hatred cannot be wished away and is not just an offshoot of Partition. She warns that bigotry will prevail, unless people learn from the lessons of history. Overall this section shows how Sidhwa with examples sustained by imagination, compassion, parody and irony continually enables us to apprehend the trauma and agony of Partition.

5.8 GLOSSARY

Allegory: A work in which the characters or events have symbolic meaning and illustrate a moral or spiritual theme; It expresses by means of symbolic fictional figures, truths or generalisations about human existence.

Bigotry: A state or atmosphere or situation of extreme prejudice and intolerance.

Caricature: A portrait of a person such as a cartoon or a written parody, exaggerating the features and qualities for comic or satirical effect. Also a copy or imitation that is ridiculously inadequate.

Contemporaneous: Existing or occurring or originating during the same time.

Charlatan: A person who claims to be an expert but is fake.

Dogmatism: Pedantic, stubborn or committed to a theory.
Historicist: An interpretation that takes historical realities into consideration.

Holocaust: Historically it refers to the mass killing of the Jews by order of the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. The meaning can also be extended to mean great destruction by fire.

Iconoclast: Historically a breaker or opponent of sacred images during the Reformation. Nowadays this word also means an enemy of traditional institutions or ideas.

Parody: Imitation or representation that is crudely distorted, a type of satire or to mock at something.

Ribald: Coarse or indecent joking, humorous in a lewd, vulgar way.

Syncretic: An attempt to reconcile differing beliefs or religious value systems.

5.9 QUESTIONS

Q. 1. Comment on Sidhwa’s presentation of Gandhi and Jinnah in the novel.
Q. 2. Analyse Sidhwa’s use of political events in the pre-Partition months.
Q. 3. Discuss the manner in which Sidhwa presents human loss in this novel.
Q. 4. Comment on Sidhwa’s use of narrative techniques in the novel.

5.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Background Material


Crane, J. Ralph. "A Passion for History and for Truth Telling" : The Early Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa, cited in Ibid. 48-60.


**Primary Reading**


**Secondary Reading**


