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# PERCEPTION OF PARTITION OF INDIA IN ICE-CANDY MAN

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One of the major thrusting events that the world visualized in the middle part of the 20th century is Partition. This had to be the last ever effort of the British Raj, being the soothing colonial thinking in the mind was successful to make a knife-cut of India and created the two nations, India and Pakistan simultaneously. Maybe this happened during the last political battle converging with nepotism that the Raj won against this subcontinent, after their colonization for more than two hundred years. Though India gained freedom and a new neighboring nation was created namely, Pakistan in reality, under the surface reality it lost the most valuable qualities- brotherhood, fraternity, love and affection, affectation, sympathy and empathy, space for understanding each other sorrows and joyfulness that shaped the cocoon of life and humane spirit once that time when there existed no demarcation and the geographical borderline between the two nations. This subcontinent partition created bigotry and this affected the commoners indulging in a physical tussle based on blindfolded religiosity leading to bloodshed and butchering of the budding lives. Not only so but the innocent persons had undergone a lot of traumatic experiences, bitter and painful gasping agony for being uprooted from their native land and for loss of their near and dear ones, maybe the filial bondage or the friendship-relations. They did not even feel the thrill of independence or freedom (in whatever form or term it may be described), but rather wept and cried for their past. History plays an important role in the historical records and archives that unveil many hidden truths related to partition politics and colonizer's motifs generation after generation, but with due respect to historical essentialities, it can emphatically be stated that we need to be delving into the pool of literature for making us aware the unforgettable painful sufferings and the psychological cognition of those unfortunate human beings from the socio-political perspectives. Partition has evoked a great body of work, as it has been already said, be it literature, art, or films. Historians, political analysts, and social scientists have since put forward heart-rending and mind-boggling chronological accounts of the tragedy, and there is no dearth of authentic documents and records available on the subject, written over different times. History, however, becomes an inadequate medium for reading Partition, hence there is a need for fiction. The litterateurs, therefore, lay aside history which could never 'record the pain, trauma, and sufferings of those who had to part from their kins, friends, and neighbors, their deepening nostalgia for the places they had lived in for generations,

the anguish of devotees removed from the places of worship and harrowing experiences of the countless people who boarded trains thinking they would be transformed to the realization of their dreams, but of whom not a man, woman or child survived the journey'(Hasan 10) and try to interrogate the entire issue poignantly and seek to foreground the alternative history -the so far untold tale of suffering, misery before and after Partition along with human agonies and traumas. Many creative writers from different regional dialects and languages have been exploring and reading Partition in their works, thereby giving birth to the concept of the literature of anguish. The Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (Skeleton), the Bengali writer Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Emaar Ganga*, *Opar Ganga* (The River Churning), the Parsi writers Dina Mehta's *And Some Take A Lover* as well as Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*, the Urdu writer Attia Hussain's *Sunlight On A Broken Column* and the writers like Sadat Hossen Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*, Khushwant Singh's *A Train To Pakistan*, Amitava Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What The Body Remembers* and the nonfictional writers like Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side Of Silence* and Kamala Bhasin and Ritu Menon's *Borders and Boundaries* are some of the great canonical flashes of Partition Literatures.

Pakistan's leading diasporic writer, Bapsi Sidhwa was born to Zoroastrian parents, Photon and Tehmina Bhandara, in 1938 in Karachi, and later moved with her family to Lahore. Grown-up with her parents, she was later married at the age of nineteen and moved to Bombay for five years with her established businessman husband Gustad Kermani. She felt traumatic and lunatic-like at the beginning, though she was enchanted with the open and fun-loving Parsi community of Bombay. Their marital bondage did not last long and she felt to escape somehow through creative writings from the tinsel of everyday drudgery life. She admits, 'Whenever there was a bridge game I'd sneak off and write. But now that I've been published, a whole world has opened up for me.'(Sidhwa 63). Later she chose Noshir Sidhwa, a Zoroastrian as her husband. She describes him as a "Punjabi-Parsi-Indian-Pakistani"(Sidhwa 112). She has been an active women's rights spokesperson, representing Pakistan in the Asian Women's Congress of 1975. As one of the most prolific writers of the diaspora and Parsi community, she began her literary career at the age of twenty-six when she was located in Lahore, Pakistan. From then on, her pen has created some of the great fictional works, namely *The Crow Eaters* (1980), *The Pakistani Bride* (1983), *IceCandy Man* (1988) which was published under the title, *Cracking India* (1991) in America and *An American Brat* (1994). The Parsi-Pakistani writer Bapsi Sidhwa's perspective on Partition of the Indian subcontinent is her religious distance from its most immediate effects as a member of the Parsi/Zoroastrian community. In *Ice-Candy Man*, she recounts the traditional story of the Parsi's arrival from Iran to India in the seventh century AD, in which an Indian prince sent Zoroastrian fleeing refugees fleeing Islamic expansion a messenger with a glass of milk, signifying that the Indian people were a united and homogeneous mixture that should not be tampered with. In response, the Parsis dropped a lump of sugar in the milk, saying that they would blend in easily and make the culture sweeter. It followed that they were granted a home in India because Parsis neither proselytized nor entered into politics. Thus Bapsi Sidhwa's heritage allowed her to witness Partition from a safe distance since Parsis held a religiously and politically neutral position. In an interview, she says, "the struggle was between the Hindus and the Muslims, and as a Parsi (member of a Zoroastrian sect), I felt I could give a dispassionate account of this huge, momentous struggle."(Sidhwa 115). Published under the title *Cracking India* in 1991 in America, Sidhwa here uses a child narrator to present the kaleidoscopically changing socio-political realities of the Indian subcontinent just before it was partitioned in August 1947. This extremely taut and sensitive story takes up the themes of communal tensions, using religion as a way to define individual identity, territorial carvings, political opportunism, power, and love, and binds

them together in a very readable narrative. The novel, in a word, portrays the non-committal attitude of the Parsi community on the changing communal relations during the period through the consciousness and lenses of the child, Lenny who appears to be an unusually precarious Parsi girl. *Ice-Candy Man* presents the Parsi dilemma of retaining allegiance to political masters, as well as a Parsi perspective of Partition.

The Parsi people are said to be the descendants of the Aryan tribes which migrated from the Pamirs of Central Turkistan to West Asia, particularly Iran. The word Parsi is an ethnic term, meaning a native of Fars, an ancient Persian province. The religion they follow is Zoroastrianism which was founded around 2000 BC. Their religious texts are collectively known as the Avesta, and their religion is quintessentially preserved in five Gathas or divine songs which are dialogues of Zarathustra, the Prophet, with God and reveal the essentially ethical nature of his gospel. The Parsis are forced to leave their land in the eighth century AD. They first arrived at the Port of Din after which they set sail towards the south and landed at the Port of Sanjan in Gujrat around 785 AD. Sanjan was then ruled by a liberal monarch, who gave them refuge with certain stipulations, enjoying on then the adoption of the Gujrati language, veneration of the cow, and forbidding any attempt at conversion to their religion. Their stipulations have always been respected by Parsis, reflecting their characteristic spirit of adaptability which enabled them to prosper in a country of diverse religious practices. Thus, set in pre-Partition Lahore, Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* sets the tone and tenor of events described at the very beginning of the novel. The tone of neutrality manifest in the child-narrator Lenny in describing the climatic incidents of Partition is anticipated in the Parsi get-together for the Jashan prayer to celebrate the British victory in World War II, at the Fire Temple in Lahore. While the Parsis have all along been loyal to the British Government, they, however, fear the Partition of the sub-continent, and consequently, in a fix as to which community they should support. The Parsis are going to be neutral in the tug of war between the three communities of India. The neutral attitude of Lenny has its roots in the racial psychology of the Parsis and the attitude of the Parsian community revealed here is externalized collective sub-consciousness of Lenny. Throughout history, fantasies as well as ideologies pushed to the emotional brink of daring their lives, have taken the plunge, which has triggered off a chain reaction of rigid mental fixations and attitudes. Sidhwa's novel, *Ice-Candy Man* examines the inexorable logic of Partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by hardening communal attitudes. This novel stresses the vulnerability of human understanding and life, caused by the throes of Partition which relentlessly divided friends, families, lovers, and neighbors. It is the novel of upheaval that includes the cascade of characters from all the communities, say, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Parsis so that the multiplicity of perspectives of Partition could be viewed by all affected communities. Sidhwa uses a child narrator, namely Lenny, a precarious Parsi girl, eight years old with a handicapped foot narrating the stories of the changing world with sophistication and wonder. With the wonder of a child she is minutely observing social change and human behavior, nothing interesting sidelights, seeking and listening to opinions and occasionally making judgments. The device of imprinting such a child narrator enables Sidhwa to treat a historical moment as horrifying as Partition without morbidity, pedanticism or censure.

The Parsi paradox of whether to support 'swaraj' or to maintain loyalty to the Raj is also humorously delineated. A piquant touch is given to this dilemma and this dilemma rings through the ambit of the Persian atmosphere within the text. With the impending news of independence, the paranoid feelings of the Parsis, a minuscule minority get accentuated. The Parsis in Lahore at a special meeting at the temple hall inwards Road, have an acrimonious debate on the political situation. The meeting is interesting as it

expresses the insecurities of the Parsis not because of political antagonism, but the apprehension of their status at the departure of the British. Already the unstinted loyalty to the colonial power is declining. Col. Bharucha and Lenny's father blame the British for bringing polio to India. So at the meeting, India's smallest minority is trying to redefine its strategy which Col. Bharucha claims as "we must hunt the hounds and run with the hare." (Sidhwa 94). The ambivalent attitude of the Parsis towards Partition and Independence emerged at the main hall meeting at the Fire Temple. Col. Bharucha, the President of the community in Lahore, advocates the status quo. He warns fellow Parsis to shun the anti-colonial movement and nationalist agitation spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi. His reasoning is based on expediency. If there is a "Home Rule", political glory, fame, and fortune will be acquired by the two major communities, Hindus and Muslims. He considers 'Home Rule' as a power of struggle, saying "Hindus, Muslims, and even the Sikhs are going to jockey jump into the middle, you'll be mangled into chutney!" (Sidhwa 61). He also advocates caution, because of Parsis's long-standing attitude of loyalty to the British. This attitude stemmed from the Zoroastrian religious belief of loyalty to a ruler and a close relationship between state and community. The other cause of loyalty to the British was purely economic. The Parsis primarily traced their secured status as a prosperous minority to British rule. So loyalty is a self-evident precept to the Parsis. Thus, Col. Bharucha does not want any Parsi of Lahore to offend British sensibilities by espousing nationalist causes. In a tone of admonition, he says, "I hope no Lahore Parsi will be stupid enough to court trouble- I strongly advise all of you to stay at home and out of trouble." (Sidhwa 175). The sentiments and ideas of Col. Bharucha represent a prominent social code of behavior amongst the Parsis. They have always venerated loyalty. Dr. Homi B. Dhalla in his essay, *The Zoroastrian Moral Imperative: Its Relevance in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries* states "Large gatherings of Parsis over the years, assembled for public acts of worship and thanksgiving." Adaptability being part of their social code, the Parsis Lahore adjust to the changing circumstances after Partition. In this novel, the change in attitude is depicted. Col. Bharucha and Lenny's father curse the British for bringing polio to India. Lenny suffers from polio and the disease is considered another example of British treachery. Later in this novel, we see Lenny's mother, Mrs. Sethi and other Parsi women help Hindus and Sikhs families escape in safe convoys to India and assist in the rehabilitation of destitute and kidnapped women. Lenny's grandmother rescues the Hindu Ayah forcibly married to her Muslim friend, the seller of ice candies. The grandmother helps Ayah return to Amritsar, under police escort. There is always a sense of involvement with the new reality as Lenny's parents. Grandmother and Parsi friends try to bring up a semblance of sanity in frenzied Lahore, yet the suffering of women is on the verge of the extremity: "The mystery of the women in the courtyard deepens. At night we hear them wailing, their cries verging on the inhuman. Sometimes I can't tell where the cries are coming from. From the women- of the house next door infiltrated by our invisible neighbors." (Sidhwa 135). With witty remarks and subtle usage of language, Bapsi presents the impact of Independence and Partition in vivid images. The altered social reality becomes even more striking, as narrated by Lenny. Independence becomes evident to Lenny when she visits the Queen's garden: "I cannot believe my eyes. The queen has gone! The space between the marble canopy and the marble platform is empty. A group of children playing knuckles, squat where the gunmetal queen sat enthroned." (Sidhwa 220). So within her restricted space, Lenny aptly reveals the fading away of an Empire and its value systems. The theme of separation caused by Partition is also revealed in a simple but vividly poignant observation by Lenny. During her whereabouts at the Queen's garden, she notices the absence of cosmopolitan gathering: "The garden has depressingly altered. Muslim families who added color when scattered among the Hindus and Sikhs now monopolize the garden, depriving it of color. The absence of the

brown skin that showed through the fine veils of Hindu and Sikh women, and beneath the duties and shorts of the men, has changed the complexion of the queenless garden." (Sidhwa 226). No wonder, the loyalty of Parsis towards the Raj is frequently seen to be changing. Through the wandering eyes of the precocious Lenny, the novelist shows the disruption of settled order and traumatic separations of friends, the legacy of Partition. This impact of Partition is psychologically understood and narrated through the feelings of the child, who is a member of a religious minority. The sense of loss is aptly demonstrated as Lenny and his brother Adi wandering through the garden observe, "Adi and I wander from group to group peering into faces beneath the white-skull caps and above ascetic beards. I feel uneasy. Like Hamida I do not fit. I know we will not find familiar faces here." (Sidhwa 220). The uprootedness of Partition is revealed as Lenny drifts through the Queen's garden searching in vain for familiar faces and acquaintances. Even in the child, there is insecurity. She clings to the hands of her Ayah and cajoles her not to marry the Muslim Masseur who promises to marry Ayah and protects her during the throes of Partition. Bapsi shows brutalization and revengefulness through the consequent pattern of violence. 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." (Sidhwa 230). The transformation of a fun-loving man who frolicked and acted like a buffoon into a park ogre due to communal frenzy is aptly revealed by Lenny's horror at the sadism on his face. Lenny is also 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." (Sidhwa 129). The venomous hatred of friends who had months earlier rationalized the impossibility of violence has a frightening impact on the young Parsi girl, Lenny. Violence breeds violence and Lenny is just a victim of it. Thus, the stark horror of loss, bloodshed, and separation are portrayed without verbosity, sensationalism, and lurid details. Written at a period of history when communal and ethnic violence threatens the disintegration of the subcontinent, this novel is an alarming warning of the dangers of communal frenzy. Bapsi shows that fuming communal strife, sanity, human tenderness, and feelings of last friendships are forgotten. Sidhwa subtly delineates the psychological impact of the horrors of the Partition on the lives of people. The communal frenzy has a distorting effect on people and leads to feelings of suspicion, distrust, and susceptibility to rumors. Even the children, Lenny, Adi, and their cousin are intrigued and suspicious of any other minor deviations from normal behavior. 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 were intrigued by the movements of their mothers. The Hindu Ayah is also suspicious about the movements of cans of petrol by the two Parsi ladies. The author shows that in a highly surcharged atmosphere, suspicion and distrust become inevitable. The three children are stupefied by their 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." (Sidhwa 206). Lenny attempts social interaction with a group of Sikh children but Masseur tries to pull her away. Sikh women ask her name and the name of her religion. When the child says that she is Parsi, the Sikh women express amazement at the discovery of a new religion. It is then Lenny instinctively realizes the social divide between communities. Rationalizing her feelings she says, "That's when I realized what has changed. The Sikhs, only their rowdy little boys running about hair piled in topknots, are keeping mostly to themselves." (Sidhwa 221). The author implies that events at the Queen's Garden are a reflection of the crystallization of feelings on a larger scale in Lahore and other cities of India. Cultural and religious exclusivity leads initially to indifference and later to contempt while becoming the breeding ground for

communal violence and bigotry. Though *Ice-Candy Man* does focus on the changing attitude of the Parsi community, it leaves out the exploration of the dilemma that the community had to resolve regarding its unnatural schismatic division between Indian and Pakistani Parsis. Sidhwa, however, deftly projects the Parsi perception of reality during the troubled times. The threats and insecurities which forced them to opt for neutrality and the historical background of this choice are vividly presented in the novel as well as the facts which later compelled the community to provide humanitarian relief to the suffering people. Justifiably remarked by Anita Desai in *Dawn*, '(Sidhwa) performs the remarkable feat of bringing together the ribald farce office family life and the stark drama and horrors of the riots and massacres of 1947.'