

Autobiographical Novel -Bapsi Sidhwa

Bapsi Sidhwa, the internationally-acclaimed Pakistani Parsi writer, has secured an enviable position for herself among the literary circles today. She has proved that her minority experience as the member of a tiny Parsi community in Pakistan, far from being a visible trouble-spot on her creative psyche, offers her enough to celebrate her talent.

While dealing with the “Ice Candy man”, Bapsi Sidhwa’s firsthand experience of the partition has found expression in the novel *Ice Candy Man* wherein the novelist narrates the fictionalized real story of partition. In an interview with Mayank Austen Soofi, Bapsi Sidhwa the following about the fictionalization, “Even I often don’t know where fact ends and fiction begins, because of childhood polio the doctor suggested I should not be burdened with school. I had light tuition thankfully no math, I have fictionalized biographical elements in the earlier part of *Cracking India*. Lenny is not me, perhaps my alter ego.” In the same interview she said, “I am almost every character in my books.” In the novel *Ice Candy Man* the story has been narrated by a Polio stricken child named Lenny, a daughter of a Parsee family of Lahore that reminds readers of the childhood of the writer herself. Writer didn’t go to school because of physical ailment till she was of fourteen and was privately tutored. We see the same experiences in the character of Lenny. Like the protagonist, Lenny, Sidhwa at the time of partition was an eight-year-old girl living in Lahore and interestingly, both Bapsi and Lenny have same date of birth i.e. 11th of August. □ Similarities in Experiences of writer and narrator: □ Use of first person narrator: The first person narration technique used by the author in the novel makes readers feel as if they were reading an autobiography of the writer. There are quite a few

evidences to consider Lenny as the portrayal of the writer herself. Lenny, being a child of a Parsee family, roams freely through the Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, and Parsee society of her environs in Lahore and observes everything and reports everything with a child’s natural innocence. The writer uses immature child as a narrator to add more authenticity to the reporting of the events. As the narrator is stricken by polio in infancy she is receiving private schooling at home like the author and remaining always present at almost all places to witness every incident. Like Sidhwa, Lenny too has to undergo a series of operations during her childhood. In the novel Dr. Col. is not in favor of her schooling which reminds readers of doctor’s advice given to the writer’s parents not to burden Bapsi Sidhwa with school.

Kidnapping of Ayah: Like other incidents, kidnapping of Ayah in the novel “*Ice Candy man*” resembles to the incident in Bapsi Sidhwa’s own life. Recalling the nightmarish experience of those days, Sidhwa tells Feroza Jussawalla: When I was a child living in Lahore at the time of partition, my maiden name was Bhandara, which sounded like a Hindu name. After most of the riots were over, a gang of looters came in carts into our house thinking it is an abandoned house. They were quite shocked to see us and my mother and everybody there. At that time our Muslim cook came and said, what do you damn people think you are

doing? “This is a Parsee household”, and they said, “We thought it was a Hindu household” and they went away. I decided to write a story about partition because this scene was vivid in my mind.

Refugees Camps:

Further the description of the refugee camp Courtyard of Recovered Women near Lenny’s house is a fine blend of fact and fiction. Lenny’s beloved Ayah is restored to this camp and many other people familiar to Lenny and her family also joined the camp after becoming victims of the chaos of the partition. “There was a rehabilitation camp with many of these women nearby to Sidhwa's house, and she states that she was inexplicably fascinated with these "fallen women," as they were described to her at the time.” Author has fictionalized her childhood observations of the refugee camps to clear the cost that women had to pay for partition.

□ Burning Lahore incident by writer:

Sidhwa gives descriptions of burning Lahore in the novel that she witnessed during her childhood. “The flame covers two or three brick buildings in the bazaar and it’s hard to put out the fire. People are pouring into the lanes from their houses and shops. After a while, a fire brigade wan arrives. Instead of water they pour fuel on the entire rows of the buildings on both the sides of the street which ignites in an incredible large destructive fire. People are running here and there and sometime they disappear in the smoke. Her home city of Lahore became a border city in Pakistan, and was crowded by thousands of refugees.

The writer writes about her childhood, the ominous roar of distant mobs was a constant of my awareness, alerting me, even at age seven, to a intence sense of the evil that was taking place in various parts of Lahore.

□ Gunny-sack incident:

The incident of the gunny-sack also a true case which was witnessed in real by the author mat Ali are walking on the Warris road, on the way they find a bulging

gunny-sack in which was found the Masseur dead. People's attitude towards the dead body has been described in the following heart touching words. "People gather around them, some concerned, some curious. But they look at Masseur as if he is not a person. He isn't. He has been reduced to a body. A thing. One side of his handsome face already buried in the dusty sidewalk.

□ **Bapsi sidhwa's beliefs about partition:**

The writer clearly mentions that during division Muslims and Pakistan have suffered. The British government has done injustice to Jinnah and favored Nehru. Here the writer puts forth her own belief about the division. The writer has compared Nehru with Jinnah. In the comparison she criticizes Nehru and favors Jinnah. The writer shows Nehru as Lady Mountbatten's lover. Writer wants to convey that in the allotment of areas at the time of partition British and Nehru took the benefit of Jinnah's good character and personality and did injustice to him.

Conclusion

The status of being a historical novel i.e, discussing events of history confirms that the events discussed in the novel are not imaginary and as Bapsi Sidwa has herself experienced these historical events, it further confirms the autobiographical shadow on the novel.

Bapsi sidwa as Parsee writer being biased or not:

She comes from a Parsee background and thus is indifferent between religious differences. She tries to remain neutral and leaves the final decision pending to the reader rather than forcing it on reader. But one can say that Bapsi is somehow biased towards her own community throughout the course of partition we find that Parsi Community keeps itself neutral towards the violence and later becomes the 'masiha' of the victims. Lenny's mother goes in the nights to help the Hindus and the Sikhs to escape from the mass-killing. Godmother helps Shanta to go back to Amritsar to her family. Hence, where the Muslims, the Sikhs and the

Hindus are struggling for the power, the Parsis are struggling for existence and are neutral towards all of the communities and in addition to that they help them in their needs. In an interview Bapsi was asked that did your Parsee identity had some influence on the your identity as a writer. She replied to them that how can someone cut yourself with her background. My community has a role in making my thoughts, ideas, beliefs.

Biasness on behalf of writer's own community confirms the tag the autobiography to the novel.

Conclusion:

Bapsi Sidhwa's first hand experience, observations, beliefs and arguments are presented in the novel through words of an innocent child narrator. Though the writer herself says Lenny is not herself, one feels as if the narrator Lenny were the writer herself narrating the complete story of the partition. The writer experienced the trauma as a Parsee child born and brought up in Pakistan so she presents the trauma from Pakistan's point of view. She reproduces the experiences and events in a manner that makes reader feel the same, though the 21 century readers may not have witnessed the events themselves. Through the realistic description of a fictionalized story of partition readers are made to feel as if they were present at the time of partition to witness the event and trauma. The novel can be considered truly autobiographical in nature, depicting the historical incident fictionalized and colored by the writers own reflections, opinions, beliefs, feelings, emotions, and imaginations.