

Representing Identity as the Destructive Source in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*

Man

By

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Abstract

The partition of Indian subcontinent is an interesting theme in many of the fiction writing which propound varied perspectives on the partition. The phenomena of the partition of India shook the roots of people and left deep impact upon the mindset of people. Afflictions, agony of women, communal riots and uncountable sufferings are represented in fiction. The impact of the partition on identity is commonly observed. Many of the authors have marked and traced its impact in alteration of identity and identity crisis is marked in fiction. The present paper endeavors to study how self-identity whether religious, national, communal or gendered becomes the source responsible for the destruction of people. It attempts to represent identity as the source of destruction. The formulation of new identities made people suffer. Violence, communal riots, identity crisis, religion conversion, abduction and rape of women, mass migration, massacre and pain are the common impacts of the partition demonstrated in this novel.

Keywords: Identity, destruction, partition of India, communal riots.

Introduction

In her novel *Ice Candy Man* Bapsi Sidhwa reckons the story of the partition of Indian subcontinent and its aftermaths. The process of the partition becomes crucial and problematic to millions of people migrating within these two nations. The novel isn't merely about social turmoil but it also demonstrates anxiety about dehumanizing effects of the partition. The notion of partition seems clear: to part a united continent in order to formulate/build up new nations on the basis of religion. In August of the year 1947, the Indian subcontinent was divided into India and Pakistan, the majority of Muslims in Pakistan and of Sikhs and Hindus in India. Until this announcement people of various religions lived in the various regions of the continent. After the pronouncement of authorities, people realized to enchain themselves with their fellow religion mates. With that mass migration started. Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan side started migrating towards India and Muslims to Pakistan some forcefully, some wanted to join their religious sect. The communal riots, violent actions and massacre started with this upheaval.

Bapsi Sidhwa portrays the tension and anguish between two religions through Parsee kid Lenny's eyes. Set in Lahore, this partition story revolves around a Parsee girl Lenny, her Hindu Ayah and the admirers of Ayah. The actions of the novel take place in the pre-partition and post-partition of Indian subcontinent. In this novel Sidhwa has attempted to represent each one of the community. Sher Singh, the zoo caretaker; the Masseur; the Ice-candy man; Hari, the gardener; Imam Din, the family cook; Sharbath Khan, the knife sharpener; Ramzan, the butcher are some people Lenny and Ayah meet regularly in the Queen's garden. They meet regularly, share some happy moments, Ayah's admirers admire her until the communal and partition tension rose.

This motley group, whom Lenny collectively terms 'Ayah's circle', is a truly 'secular' group, with members of almost all faiths and communities of the Indian subcontinent represented in it. And it serves as a kind of barometer in that little Lenny notices the tenuous changes that are taking place in

Lahore on the eve of the Partition through the alterations that take place in the nature, number, mood and tenor of this circle. (Roy 67)

Bapsi Sidhwa has presented the different insights of partition. During partition women are ruthlessly treated while males of 'other' religion are killed brutally. The pronouncement of partition brings forth varied 'identities' of people. In the child narrator Lenny's words; "And I became aware of religious differences. It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves- and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols" (Ice-Candy-Man 93).

The communal environment changed with the partition. Neighbors and friends turn into fiend. The novel demonstrates the clash between two nations, religions and different political mindsets. Community riots in Lahore not started until they heard about Hindu-Muslim and Sikh-Muslim riots. "It is spreading Sikh-Muslim trouble also" (Ice-Candy-Man 56). Hindu-Muslim-Sikh lived together so they have confidence that they won't attack each other. As it is described in the novel;

Imam Din nods. There is a subtle change in his face; he looks calmer. As long as our Sikhs brothers are with us, what have we to fear? He says, Speaking to the granthi, and including the other Sikhs with a glance. I think you are naughty, brother; the madness will not infect the villages. If needs be, we'll protect our Muslims brothers with our lives! Says Jagjeet Singh. (Ice-Candy-Man 56)

As community riots began Hindu and Sikh families started migrating to India, leaving their homes behind in Lahore. Due to communal identity Hindus are tortured and killed. Lenny witnesses major communal riot in which,

The man is knocked down. His lips are drawn away from rotting, Pann-stained teeth in a scream. The men move back and in the small clearing I see his legs sticking out of his dhoti right up to the groin – each thin, brow leg tied to a jeep ... and there is the roar of a hundred throats: 'Allah-o-Akbar!' and beneath it the growl of reviving motors. (Ice-Candy-Man 135)

After that horrible incident Lenny examines the same and its consequences, "I examine the doll's spilled insides and holding than in my hands, collapse on the bed sobbing" (Ice-Candy-Man 138-139). After the attacks due to communal riots that happened, Sikhs destroyed Muslims in village Pir Pindo. Because communal riots are spreading speedily, Imam Din with Lenny visits his village to know about his people. Ranna, the great grandson of Imam Din becomes the victim of major communal riots narrates his story that, "he saw his eleven-year-old sister, Khatija, run stark naked into their courtyard. Her long hair disheveled her boyish body bruise, her lips cut and swollen and a bloody scab where her front teeth were missing" (Ice-Candy-Man 202).

The national identity as Indian or Pakistani came into existence with the partition of Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan respectively. The formulation of nations divided people in communities and religions. With this proclamation Hindus and Sikhs became Indians while Muslims Pakistani. Kushwant Singh rightly depicts the pains of Muslims through a character Imam Baksha, in *Train to Pakistan*, by saying "What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers" (Train to Pakistan 126). Even some good friends and neighbors became wicked to each other as if the partition has made them blind. They become blind in the name of religion and nationalism. Lenny and Ayah generally meet in the garden with other friends. During these days riots are at its peak. Lenny, Ayah and friends looked from roof as the garden is blocked. Tara Singh shouts:

We will see how the Muslim swine get Pakistan; we will fight to the last man! We will show them who will leave Lahore! 'Raj Karega Khalsa, akirahina koi!' The Sikhs milling about in a huge blob in front wildly wave and clash their swords, Kirpans and hockey-sticks, and punctuate his shrieks with roars: 'Pakistan Murdabad! Death to Pakistan! Sat Siri Akkal! Bolay se nihaal!' And the Muslims shouting: "So? We'll play Holi-with-their blood! Ho-o-o-li with their blo-o-o-d! (Ice-Candy-Man 134)

The friends of Ayah discussed about partition where Masseur expresses that “if Punjab is divided, Lahore is bound to go to Pakistan. There is Muslim majority here...”(Ice-Candy-Man 128). The Government House gardener claims that “Lahore will stay in India”(Ice-Candy-Man 128)because in Lahore the number of Hindu is very large and it depends on Hindus’ money. Hindus are the owners of most of the business. Masseur continues insisting, “but there are too many Mussulmann’s!” in reply someone in the group says, “So what? People don’t matter...Money does!”(Ice-Candy-Man 128).

The religious identity played an important role in shaping the portrait of partition more gloomy and disastrous. Identity based on religions caused brutality against Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan, and proved ruthless against Muslims in India. The religious identity created outrage in life of people. Hindus killed Muslims only because they are being Muslims. And the similar happened with Hindus. Their religious identity becomes cause of their destruction. Lenny observes that “one man’s religion is another man’s poison”(Ice-Candy-Man 117). The train that arrived from Gurudaspur gives an example of brutality laid upon people only for their religious belongings. The author narrates this vicious act in the following lines: “A train from Gurudaspur has just come in, “Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women’s breasts!”(Ice-Candy-Man 140). The Ice candy man was waiting for relatives who were to come in that train. The incident affected him so deeply that he just cannot accept that fact and he again says staring at Sher Singh:“I was expecting relatives... For three days... For twelve hours each day... I waited for that train! What I’ve heard is unbearable. I don’t want to believe it. For a grisly instant I see Mother’s detached breasts: soft, pendulous, their beige nipples spreading”(Ice-Candy-Man 149).BapsiSidhwa narrates that during this turbulent partition Parsees remained neutral. They neither supported Muslims nor came against Sikhs and Hindus. As she has put in the words of Bharucha: “I hope no Lahore Parsee will be stupid enough to court trouble—I strongly advise all of you to stay home—and out of trouble”(Ice-Candy-Man 37).

During partition of Indian subcontinent women were attacked mercilessly only due to gendered or biological identity. At that time abduction and rape of women becomes weapon to fight against the enemy. Frustration and tension of partition is laid down upon women. Women became the victim of men’s lust. During mass migration the militant mob of Muslim male attacked, abducted and raped Hindu and Sikh women in Pakistan, and on the other hand revengefully Hindu and Sikh mob did the same with the Muslim women. In this upheaval it becomes vicious towards female. One day Ice-candy-man with a mob of militants comes to Lenny’s house. In absence of Lenny’s father her mother handles the mob. Being Parsee, Ayah isprotected in Lenny’s house. Lenny says: Ice-candy-man is crouched before me. ‘Don’t be scared, Lenny baby,’ he says. ‘I’m here.’ And putting his arms around me he whispers, so that only I can hear: ‘I’ll protect Ayah with my life! You know I will ... I know she’s here. Where is she?’

And dredging from some foul truthful depth in me a fragment of overheard conversation that I had not registered at the time, I say: ‘On the roof – or in one of the godowns...’(Ice-Candy-Man 182)

Bapsi Sidhwa has portrayed that how women are treated during partition. The mob find out Ayah and;

They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet – that want to move backwards – are forced forward instead. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like the dead child’s screamless mouth. Her violet sari slips off her shoulder, and her breasts strain at her sari-blouse stretching the cloth so that the white stitching at the seams shows. A sleeve tears under her arm.

The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces.(Ice-Candy-Man 183)

They abducted Ayah and taken her with them. The identity of woman is sufficiently enough for her destruction. The incident of train from Gurdaspur made changes in Ice candy man. He is not able to forget that incident and becomes desperate. In order to take revenge he attacked Lenny's home and abducted her Hindu Ayah, Shanta with militant mob. Lenny learns through her cousin that her Ayah was seen travelling in a car who nowadays lives in the disrepute place. She further learns that Ayah was later raped by Ice candy man and other mob. After the partition both religions blamed each other for the massacre. But in fact ultimately people suffered the trauma regardless of the question that who started it. Khushwant Singh has described it in his novel *Train to Pakistan*, "According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped"(Train to Pakistan 1).

Partition played an important role in formulation of varied 'identities'. Though lived together friends became enemy to each other. Role of partition was to provide these 'identities', a source which destroyed life of people. They suffered for what they are. It is seemingly represented in this novel that nothing but own 'identity' is responsible for the destruction of people during partition. The religious, communal and national identities become paramount over the human identity. Religion conversion is described as the instant remedy for the survival during the conditions of the partition. So, people changed their identity since there is no choice left. Hari, the gardener becomes Himmat Ali who is converted to Islam for protection amidst the uproar of communal riots.

Conclusion

A small spark can result into a giant disaster and that spark the partition provided people for their own devastation. Hindu-Muslim-Sikh lived happily as brothers before the partition unconscious of politics of caste and religion. During the partition actions of cruelty and brutality raised to its peak. The conflict between religions and newly made nations is demonstrated in this novel. The communal and religious identities play an important role in the mass migration and massacre. In such situations the level of anger and antagonism is increased. In the conflict of identities the human identity is totally forgotten and set aside.

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