



A Disquisition Of Woman Emotions At Different Levels In Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man

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Citation: Dr. Deepa .C (2024), A Disquisition Of Woman Emotions At Different Levels In Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(3), 2351-2353
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i3.5569

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Bapsi Sidhwa is a Pakistani novelist of Gujarati Parsi Zoroastrian descent who writes in English and resides in the United States. She has been widely celebrated as the finest novelist produced by her country—the New York Times called her “Pakistan's finest English-language novelist.” She represents a group of women creative writers who portray strong-minded women for whom traditional roles are inadequate. These women wish to affirm their independence and autonomy and are perfectly capable of assuming new roles and responsibilities. In *Ice Candy Man*, Sidhwa envisions a world free from dominance and hierarchy, a world based on the principles of justice and equality, and one that is truly human. The novel explores themes such as identity, loyalty, betrayal, innocence, and violence. This research article attempts to study women's emotions at different levels and the impact of partition on them.

Keywords: woman emotions, identity, loyalty, betrayal, innocence, and violence.

Introduction

The popular novel *Ice Candy man* by Bapsi Sidhwa describes the scenario of pre-partition India in Lahore. It narrates the series of events of turmoil on the Indian subcontinent when it was divided into two countries: a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan in 1947. The original title of the novel is *Cracking India*. The story of the novel revolves around the bloody partition of the Indian subcontinent during the late 1940s. *Ice Candy man*, in a broader sense, refers to every man of the Indian subcontinent.

The Partition brings widespread violence and instability, instilling fear and trauma in individuals. Lenny is an eight-year-old girl who passively observes and delineates the story in her own way. Lenny's journey is not an easy one. She belongs to the Parsee community, she is born in the atrocious times of partition, and she has polio that has affected her leg and made it crippled. The protagonist, Lenny, witnesses brutalities that leave a lasting impact on her psyche. Similarly, Ayah, Lenny's nanny, experiences intense fear and eventual trauma as the violence escalates. The titular character, *Ice Candy man*, embodies complex emotions of love and desire, especially towards Ayah. His love, however, turns possessive and destructive, reflecting how intense emotions can become tainted by the surrounding chaos.

Discussion

The plot starts with Lenny, a 4-year-old Parsee girl who recounts her childhood memories after she is struck by polio in her infancy. She spends most of her time with Ayah (Shanto), an 18-year-old Hindu girl from Amritsar, and she learns a lot about adult relationships. Ayah is so beautiful that everyone from the shopkeeper to the beggar stares at her in the street. She has a number of suitors, including Masseur, Sharbat Khan, and *Ice Candy Man*. Every evening, Lenny is taken out to the garden, the zoo, or other such places by Ayah.

Col Bharucha, Lenny's surgeon, had put a plaster over her leg to correct it. When he is taking away the plaster, Lenny is apprehensive that the fault might not have been corrected. Col Bharucha consoles Lenny's mom, saying, “If anyone's to blame, blame the British! There was no polio in India till they brought it” (p.85). The *Ice Candy Man* is presented as a lovable rascal, who knows how to trick both the English and Ayah. However, his dark side is hinted at when he dangles Lenny's brother Adi from his arms and threatens to drop him unless Ayah goes to the cinema with him. Another critical incident is Lenny accompanying Imam Din to his native village Pir Pindo, where, unlike Lahore, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs live peacefully. Imam Din was

the sixty-two-year-old cook of the Sethi family (Mr. and Mrs. Sethi, Lenny's parents). Lenny meets Imam Din's grandchildren Ranna, Khatija, and Parveen. The village Chaudhary, the Mullah, the granthi, and other villagers strongly express their solidarity and vow to protect each other, asserting that the city's madness will not infect the villages. Slowly and gradually, Lenny starts witnessing the change in her.

Lenny sees people around her belong to separate religious communities. Ayah and the family gardener Hari are Hindus. Imam Din, the odd-job man, Ice Candy Man, and the Masseur are all Muslims. The zookeeper Sher Singh is Sikh. She notes how each group has its own way of dressing, eating, and worshipping. As the relations between these communities get worse, Lenny becomes more and more aware of their differences. When Master Tara Singh, a Sikh political and religious leader, visits the city and threatens the Muslims, violence breaks out. People start fighting, fires, and killing each other. This period also sees a growing intimacy between Ayah and the Masseur, with the jealous Ice Candy man constantly stalking and observing them.

The news of Partition gets confirmed by April of 1947. The overnight creation of the new nation of Pakistan begins. Lenny remarks, "I am Pakistani." Just like that, the political situation becomes serious. While Hindus and Sikhs are leaving Pakistan for India, some of the Muslims in India are heading for Pakistan. One day, a train comes carrying Muslim refugees from India. Ice Candy man finds that his female relatives traveling on the train have all been murdered and mutilated. In revenge, he joins the mobs attacking Hindus and Sikhs or robbing their properties. Out of fear, the gardener Hari converts to Islam.

Ranna, Imam Din's great-grandson, escapes with his life when groups of Sikhs enter Pir Pindo, massacre everyone in the village, and rape the women. Ranna, once he reaches his grandfather, shares his terrible story with everyone, including Lenny. The story reaches its climax when a Muslim mob comes to Lenny's house. From their names, this mob assumes that they are Hindus. Imam Din comes out to protect the house and tells them that this is a Parsee household. Yet the group wants to know what happened to the Hindu nanny Ayah. Ice Candy Man comes up to Lenny to ask where she is hiding. Lenny thinks she can trust Ice Candy Man and discloses the truth. Ayah is dragged out of her hiding place. Lenny, shocked, repents her trust in Ice Candy Man. Ayah is taken to Hira Mandi and is managed as a prostitute by Ice-Candy-Man. Lenny feels guilt-stricken.

When Godmother tries to locate Ayah, she comes to know that Ice Candy Man has married her after keeping her as a prostitute. Godmother plans to visit Ayah, now Mumtaz, after her marriage. Lenny insists on going with her to Hira Mandi. Lenny is shocked to see the sadness in Ayah's eyes. Ayah, now Mumtaz, pleads with Godmother to send her back to her relatives in Amritsar. Godmother assures her that she will be rescued. Thereafter, Godmother's contact helps Ayah to get free from Hira Mandi and Ice Candy Man. She is lodged in a recovered women's camp on Warrish Road.

Ice Candy man tries to meet her but is beaten up by the guards. He now becomes a dejected lover, reciting love songs and searching for his lost love. One day, Lenny learns that Ayah, with other Hindu women, has been shifted to Amritsar to her family. She also gets the news that Ice Candy Man has also followed her across the Wagah Border into India.

Lenny's journey from innocence to a premature understanding of the adult world illustrates the loss of childhood amidst conflict. Her emotional growth is a poignant aspect of the narrative, showcasing how children's perspectives and emotions evolve in turbulent times. Lenny's interactions with her friends, particularly with Ayah and other servants in the house hold, highlight bonds of friendship and loyalty. These relationships are tested by the external pressures of communal tensions and societal changes.

The main theme of the novel is betrayal, but it leads to a thread that reveals various emotions of women in different conditions. Ice Candy Man's betrayal of Ayah, driven by a mix of jealousy and desperation, evokes strong emotions of guilt and remorse. This personal betrayal mirrors the larger betrayal felt by communities during Partition.

The novel vividly portrays the spectrum of emotions of women at different levels of society, from harmonious coexistence to communal hatred. Characters like Imam Din and Hari represent the hope for communal harmony, while the mob violence epitomizes the destructive power of hatred and bigotry. The varying responses of characters to the suffering around them, ranging from deep empathy to stark indifference, reflect the moral dilemmas faced by individuals in a fractured society. Lenny's family, particularly her mother and Godmother, exhibit empathy and attempt to protect Ayah, contrasting with others who become indifferent or complicit in the violence.

Conclusion

Ice Candy man is a profound exploration of human emotions across different levels. The Partition era stirs strong feelings of patriotism and questions of identity. Characters grapple with their sense of belonging and national identity, often leading to internal conflict and external confrontation. Amidst the pervasive despair of Partition, there are glimmers of hope. Characters like Lenny's parents and Godmother strive to retain their humanity and compassion, representing a hope for reconciliation and peace in the future. Bapsi Sidhwa masterfully captures the interplay of personal desires, interpersonal dynamics, societal pressures, and national upheavals, creating a nuanced portrayal of the human condition during one of the most turbulent periods in South Asian history. Through her characters, Sidhwa delves into the emotional landscapes shaped

by love, fear, betrayal, and resilience, offering readers a deep understanding of the complexities inherent in human emotions.

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