



## **Influence of Riots and Partition on the Lives of Women in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India***

***Dr. Laxmikant Govindrao Bahegavankar***

Head, Dept. of English, Swa. Savarkar College Beed 431122(Maharashtra)

Mob.9422744488 [lgbahgavankar@gmail.com](mailto:lgbahgavankar@gmail.com)

Bapsi Sidhwa is Pakistan's leading diasporic writer. Her fictional works reflect her personal experience of Indian sub-continent like partition crisis, abuse against women, the themes of marriage, expatriate experience, immigration to the US, the Parsi milieu and social peculiarities of the Parsis, the problems of Asian women.

This paper attempts to make a critical analysis of Sidhwa's *Cracking India* to find out the impact of the communal riots caused by the unwanted event i.e. partition especially on women characters.

The novel, *Cracking India* is the first person narrative. In this novel, by means of a child narrator Sidhwa employs the political and narrative strands. The story is told from a child's point of view. The narrator, Lenny is an eight years old who suffers from polio. Lenny records the incidents relating to the partition. The child narrator as the device enables Sidhwa treat the holocausts of partition without censorship. The Parsi community is shown in fix on the issue of the partition. Parsis want to stay wherever they are. The novel describes the fate of people in Lahore. It begins with the verse of Iqbal's *Complaint to God*,

Shall I hear the lament of the nightingale, submissively lending my ear? Am I the rose to suffer its cry in silence year after year? The fire of verse gives me courage and bids me no more to be faint. With dust in my mouth, I am abject: to God I make my complaint. Sometimes you favor our rivals then sometimes with us you are free, I am sorry to say it so boldly. You are no less fickle than we. (CI, P. 11)

Iqbal, in this poem represents man's complaining to God about the whimsicalness in the world and not maintaining it. Man has to pine for every pleasure. Someone's joy is another's pain; someone's gain is another's loss. Man has to tolerate unbearable suffering. Who knows who got benefitted by the Partition, but it has brought only everlasting agonies for the common people in the Indian sub-continent.

Lenny who lives on Warris Road is lame and helpless. Her movement between Warris Road and Jail Road seems limited. She sees the Salvation Army Wall with ventilation slits which makes her feel sad and lonely. The novel, through the narrator's eyes has captured the localities in Lahore and the unforgettable historical horrifying situations. The narratives of political and moral upheaval resulting in a mass trauma continue to appear in the minds of new generation.

In this novel, Bapsi Sidhwa has presented the people from different ethnic groups. The event of partition has been depicted as the painful experiences of these ethnic groups. The novel depicts how the violence of partition has cut the roots of people of different communities, irrespective of ideology, friendship and rational ideas. It was the most shocking and traumatic experience as it has not only divided the people of India but it was a division of hearts and communities.

The novel presents chaotic and traumatic moments in the life of one generation. The tidal waves of violence, hatred and communal violence changed the feelings of fraternity. *Cracking India* evokes the trauma brought about in the life of all communities in Lahore and at Pir Pindo. There are once again the events of robbery by force, abduction, mutilation and rape. It is a grim story of individuals and communities caught in the whirlpool of partition of the sub continent into two states, India and Pakistan in 1947. It also exposes the hollowness of the two nation theory. It also shows how communal amity embedded in the collective consciousness of rural areas.

*Cracking India* can also be said as a social document revealing Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Parsi made traditional structure. Lenny, a bright Parsi girl narrates the story of her changing world with sophistication and wonder. She is presented as an observer of social change and human behavior. She notes interesting sidelights and listens to opinions and occasionally makes judgments.

In this novel, historic truth is only a back-drop of the novel. The Parsi paradox of whether to support 'Swaraj' or to maintain their loyalty to the British Raj is also humorously outlined. A piquant touch is given to this dilemma. The Parsis in Lahore at a special meeting at their temple hall in Warris Road have an acrimonious debate on the political situation. The meeting is interesting as it expresses the insecurity of the Parsis not because of communal

antagonism, but the apprehension of their status at the departure of the British. Already the unstained loyalty to the colonial power is declining. Col. Bharucha and Lenny's father blame the British:

'The god damn English! I think, infected by colonel Bharucha's startling ferocity at this "dastardly" (one of father's favorite words, just as 'Plucky' is Mother's) instance of British treachery. "They gave us polio! And notwithstanding the compatible and sanguine nature of my relationship with my disease, I feel it is my first personal involvement with Indian politics: the quit India sentiment that has fired the imagination of a subject people and will soon sweep away the Raj!" (CI, P. 26)

It was not just the partition on India but a traumatic experience of those Indians who were subsequently divided into Indian and Pakistani. When Lenny learns that India is going to be divided, she seems to be baffled by many questions, such as-

Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother's then? (CI, p. 101)

And she also becomes aware of instantaneously occurred religious and cultural differences. She worriedly remarks-

It is sudden one day everybody is themselves and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, people shrink, dwindling into symbols. (CI, p. 101)

Lenny's comprehension of the events of Partition is told through the story of what happens to her beloved Hindu Ayah. When the story begins, Ayah is surrounded by many admirers, Hindu and Muslim. Among all the admirers it is Ice-candy-man after whom the novel is named. The novel recollects how the Partition was nearing and Muslims and Hindus became hostile among one another. Some Hindus, only for the sake of saving their lives, became Christians:

Hindus are being murdered in Bengal... Muslims in Bihar. It's strange... the English Sarkar can't seem to do anything about it. (CI, p. 64)

Some Hindus leave Lahore. Ayah, a Hindu is but protected by her Parsi employers. But unfortunately her charms lead to her abduction by a group led by the Ice-candy-man. Ayah, as an individual is fully aware and confident of herself. At the same time she is fiercely loyal to the family. She is extremely protective of Lenny, as a mother and emotionally attached to her. She suffers during the partition and riots. In her interview with Montenegro she tries to defend Jinnah being Pakistani writer.

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 have dehumanized him, made him a symbol of the sort of person who brought about the partition of India, a person who was hard headed and obstinate. Whereas, in reality, he was the only constitutional man who didn't sway crowds just by rhetoric and tried to do everything by the British standards of constitutional law. <sup>1</sup>

Kashmir has always been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan. According Sidhwa, the British has shown favour of Nehru by granting him Kashmir. Sidhwa depicts the tide:

The Hindus are being favored over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its object over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved the British favor 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, while Jinnah futilely protests: "Statesmen cannot eat their words!" (CI, P. 169)

The impact of the partition was witnessed first in cities and then in the villages. Lenny as a child could not believe how the same people who were ready to give their lives for sake of each other have become their own enemies. The partition seemed to have spared Parsi. However, their agony was as intense as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Dr. Modi questions the neutrality of Parsis.

How we can remain uninvolved, our neighbours will think we are betraying them and siding with the English. (CI, P. 45)

The novel also touches the identity crisis of the Parsi community on the eve of Partition. It re-examines the role of the British in cracking the country into Pakistan and India. The birth of Pakistan leads to an identity crisis she observes:

I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that. (CI, P. 150)

The discussion between Col. Bharucha and Dr. Mody reminds the history of the Parsi Diasporic community which left Iran and settled in India. The core of the discussion was the partition. While some were hesitant to live in a Muslim country, some found a solution to migrate to Bombay or London. Dr. Mahek Mody remarks:

And what do we do; he asks, when the English king's Vazir stands before us with a glass full of milk? Tell him we are brown English men; come to sweeten their lives with a dash of color? (CI, P. 49)

Colonel Bharucha ends the discussion:

As long as we conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present not threat to anybody, we will prosper right here. (CI, P.49)

It shows migration, instability of living of Parsi and highlights their questions of existence after Partition. Lenny is the representative of the Parsi community. The birth of Pakistan has confined her world.

The protagonist of the novel is seen struggling for existence and identity in different style. Ice-candy-man belongs to Hira Mandi of Lahore, the streets of the dancing girls. His mother had been one of them and his early years shaped his personality according to his tastes. He is a gifted poet, rather poetic in his interaction with others and then in another poetic outburst Ice-candy-man declaims:

She lives to dance, and I to toast her dancer's, grace! Princes pledge their lives to celebrate her celebrated face! (CI, P. 259)

The first half of the novel presents the Ice-candy-man as a jovial and life-loving person. He is known for his warmth and good nature. This is one side of his personality. One incident transforms the peace loving Ice-candy-man into a selfish man and a savage. Bapsi Sidhwa describes one briefly through the eyes of Ice-candy-man:

I'll tell you to your face I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur ... threat 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... I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women...the penises!"(CI, P. 166)

When the train arrives from Gurdaspur, it does not carry passengers but dead bodies of Muslims. There are no women but bags full of chopped female breasts. This barbaric scene shocks him and he loses his sanity. He runs in the street of Lahore to avenge the death of Muslims. During the riots, he takes active part in killing Hindus and Sikhs the worst part comes later. He joins a mob of Muslim goondas looking for Hindus.

They stop in front of Lenny's house and enquire about the Hindu Ayah. The faithful servant Imam Din lies by saying-  
She's gone to Amritsar! (CI, P. 194)

But, Ice-candy-man comes forward and asks Lenny about Ayah. Lenny out of her innocence points towards the right direction:

They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her grams 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. (CI, P. 194-195)

Ice-candy-man and his men dragged Ayah from inside and forcefully abducted her. It is only after a couple of weeks that Ice-candy-man marries her. But Aya's dignity has already been violated. Ayah is frequently raped by many persons for days and now she has to stay in the locality of prostitutes of Hira Mandi, the place of dancing girls.

Shanta, Ayah is the Hindu Ayah of Lenny who works in the house of a Parsi family in Lahore. She is sharp, beautiful and responsible. She becomes Lenny's mentor and guide in this world of harsh realities. Ayah has a number of admirers irrespective of religion. The communal riots in Lahore have influenced Ayah's personality. She becomes an easy prey for lusty and angry Muslims. Ice-candy-man has tormented her soul and her warmth is gone; and her world of dreams, desires and romance is shattered.

The main focus of the novel is how the Partition of India, an important event, affected many aspects of life. The partition has left ineradicable tormenting memories for the people who once were just Indian, and now Indian and Pakistani. It presents the reactions after the creation of two new nations.

Playing British gods under the calling fans of the Falsetti's Hotel behind Queen Victoria's garden skirt-the Radcliff commission deals out Indian cities like a pack of cards. Lahore is dealt to Pakistan, Amritsar to India. Sialkot to Pakistan. Pathankot to India. (CI, P. 150)

Radcliff commission declared the new nation, which also happens on Lenny's eighth birthday. Lenny and her people who were Indians now became Pakistani. Jinnah's speech echoes on the radio:

You are free. You are free to go to your Temples, you are free to go to your Mosques or any other place of worship in the state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of state.... etc., etc., etc. Pakistan Zindabad! (CI, P. 154)

*Cracking India* is a fictional narration of violence in which the partition lingers as a significant moment in the modern world. It has also a political significance for creation of India and Pakistan and the impression of atrocities and horrific emotional duress. The communal violence was unspeakable in its brutality, ferocity, killings, rapes and kidnappings. It has resulted into psychological wounds which might never be healed. It has damaged the multiculturalism of India to a large extent. It has redefined the cultural values of India. The Holi festival of the Hindus and Sikhs coming up in a few days and the Muslims, ironically kept shouting:

So? We'll play Holi-with-their-blood! Ho-o-o-li with their blo-o-o-d! (CI, P. 144)

The city is ablaze and communal violence erupts. The Shalmi Market is up in flames. Ice-candy-man is furious that his rival Masseur's quarters in Mochi Darwaza are burning.

At the community level, Partition horribly affects Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The dark cloud of suspicion and fear arise among the Sikhs and Muslims, Imam Din the cook, the Ice-candy-man, Dilnawaz and Hassan Ali, his cousin brother, who have lived together for centuries. Once people in undivided India were seen engaged in the Quit India Movement, but now the Muslim League is seen motivating the Muslim community to raise a demand for a separate nation for the Muslims. Often the slogans of 'Pakistan Zindabad' (CI, P. 145) was heard in the streets.

In Lahore, riots broke out in locality far away from Lenny's house. There is killing of innocent people on both the sides. The news of bloodshed spreads like a wild fire. All India radio also reports about cases of violence from different parts of India.

"So! Gurdaspur's gone to India after all". "Which means there is uncontrollable butchering going on in Gurdaspur". (CI. P. 158)

The novel realistically reflects the losses and violence caused by the partition. There are personal and collective losses. Common people suffered lot. Partition left a permanent scar on their psyche. They underwent an emotional trauma. Innocent women were raped, assaulted and attacked. It became difficult for them to live with this social stigma.

The title of the novel has allegorical significance. It bears political connotations. The word 'icy' stands for unstable quality of the politicians who were engaged in determining the fate of the nation. In their outlook, they appeared to be icy and slippery. They were not firm and consistent in their political views. They change their decision from time to time. They were just like the Ice-candy-man who changed his roles in frequent manner. When there was fall in the sale of Ice-candy-man in the cold weather, he changed his profession and became a birdman who took pride in deceiving his customers. When there was increasing communal trouble, he becomes 'Allah's telephone' (CI, P.107) and gives an impression that he was in direct line of communication with God. He pretended to be a holy man but in reality he was not so. At the end of the novel, the Ice-candy-man takes up the profession of pimping. It shows the deceptive and immoral aspects of his personality.

The word 'ice' bears another meaning also. According to Sidhwa, the politicians during the days of partition were as cold as ice to the sufferings of the people. The battle for Partition had caused violence and bloodshed but the politicians remained indifferent to the terrible loss of human life. The novelist includes the name of Gandhi, Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose and the English Viceroy Lord Louis Mountbatten in this matter.

---

**References:**

1. Montenegro, David. "*Bapsi Sidhwa: An Interview*". The Massachusetts. Review winter, 1990. P.532
2. Bhalla, Alok. *Partition Dialogues*. New: OUP, 2006. P.226