

When I Raised My Eyes Again: Women's Journey to gain Power in Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*

Mamona, Mahin Wahla*

Masters of Arts in English

Bahuaddin Zakariya University, Multan

Pakistan.

mahinwahla1996@yahoo.com

*Corresponding Author

Abstract-The aim of the present study is to show the women's journey to gain power in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy Man*. This will be done by showing their dual representation in the novel in the light of Feminist Theory. The study will first show how the women are victims of patriarchal oppression, subjugation, marginalization and sexual exploitation in the novel, and then it will be described that how they are not entirely victim. This will be accomplished by showing their strength to come out of that situation of victimization to gain power and assert their independent identity.

Key words- Patriarchy; Female Suppression; Marginalization; Feminism; Sexual Exploitation; Power; Strength; Identity

1. INTRODUCTION

Bapsi Sidhwa was born on 11th August, 1938 in Karachi. She belongs to the Parsi community, Zoroasterian, a distinctive minority who left Iran for South Asia to avoid the religious persecution. She was educated at home till the age of 15 by an Anglo-Indian lady because she became a polio victim at the age of 2. Sidhwa was married twice. Firstly at the age of 19 with a Bombay businessman, but got divorced. Later she got married to Noshewan, a businessman of Lahore. Afterwards, she graduated from Kinnaird College, Lahore. Now she is an active social worker with great concern for the women around. Sidhwa started writing in the 1970s when she was inspired by the story of a young girl who ran away from home and was killed by her husband in the Hindukush Mountains. This story was published in the form of her second novel: *The Bride*. Her notable novels include: *The Crow Eaters* (1978), which is the story about the life and fortunes of Parsi Junglewalla family in British India; *The Pakistani Bride* (1983), the story of a Parsi girl adopted by a Pathan during partition; *An American Brat* (1993), the story about the conflicts of value systems and cultures on personal and social level; and *Ice-Candy Man* (1988), which is a story about the change in the lives of people before and after the partition. She has also won numerous awards for her novels: The Patras Bokhari Award for *The Bride* in 1985; The Sitara-e-Imtiaz in 1991; and she has also won the German Literaturepreis award for *Ice-Candy Man*. *Ice-Candy Man*, also named as *Cracking India*. She was a first woman novelist from Pakistan. In *Ice Candy Man*, she describes about the fate of the people in Lahore and Partition of India through the eyes of a precocious 8 years old handicapped Parsi girl, Lenny.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study will be focused on trying to find the answers of the following questions:

1. How the women in *Ice Candy Man* have been dually represented?
2. In what ways women in the respective novel are the victims of patriarchal oppression?
3. How the women characters show their female agency to gain power in *Ice-Candy Man*?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

"*Ice-Candy Man*" has drawn the attention of many researchers and a lot of work has been done on it. Different researchers have come up with different themes and ideas. They have tried to interpret this novel in a number of ways. Among these 'partition' has been the theme for many researchers. Perhaps it is because partition was an event that many people cannot forget. Arabati Pradeep Kumar (2014)[9] in his article "Postcolonial Perspective on Partition: A Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* (*Cracking India*)" also talks about the grim realities of partition as it has been portrayed by Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy Man*. He shows that how Sidhwa has truly depicted the critical time of partition. He is of the view that this novel highlights the grim details of bloodshed and "untold stories". He talks about the communal hatred as the cause of partition, which has been portrayed by Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy Man*. He thus puts it: "It examines the inexorable logic of partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by communal hatred" (2014:139).

Muhammad Ayub Jajja (2012)[7] in his research article "Portrayal of Partition by Bapsi Sidhwa and Khushwant Singh: A Comparative Study" deals with the issue of communalism and politics as the major cause of

partition. He also talks about the religious identities and religious extremism at the time of partition as it has been presented by Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy Man*. He also describes that the religious identities were actually the result of communalism and politics which resulted in the form of partition. Jajja (2012)[7] in the same article also talks about the theme of migration and the effect of it on the minds of people. He says that: "Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy Man* depicts the greater migration in the human history as a result and price of the partition" (2012:8). Talluri Mathew Bhaskar (2015)[3] in his article "Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*: A Thematic Study" focuses upon the loss of humanity which was the result of religious consciousness. He sees religious extremism as a means of spreading disharmony which resulted in frenzy and chaos. He also shows the psychological effect of the partition on the lives of people. He talks about the loss of relations, trust and that how even friends became the enemy of each other. As he says that "in a world gone topsy-turvy friends turn into foes"(2015:58).

The narrative technique and the child narrator is also another important aspect which has drawn the attention of different researchers. They have drawn different interpretations about it. For example Mr. Kudipsinh D. Jadeja (2015)[6] in his research article "Autobiographical Elements in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-candy Man*" traces the autobiographical elements in the narration of *Ice-Candy Man*. He says that whatever Sidhwa experienced during partition, she has described it through a Parsee child narrator who is of the same age in which Sidhwa had been during partition, he describes: "The novel can be truly considered autobiographical in nature, depicting the historical incidents fictionalized and colored by the writer's own reflections, opinions, beliefs, feelings, emotions and imaginations" (2015:403).

Barjinder Singh (2016)[15] in his research article "Writing the Margins: a Study of the Parsi Perspective in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*" talks about some other aspects related to narration through a Parsi girl. He says that unlike other partition and postcolonial novels which completely neglect the existing minorities in sub-continent, Sidhwa's novel depicts the problems and difficulties faced by the Parsi community at the time of partition, he comments: "Her novel can be seen as giving voice to the Parsi community that is marginalized and silenced community in the partition discourse as well as the history of the two post-colonial nation states" (2016:60).

Theme of Feminism in *Ice-Candy Man* has also been broadly discussed by different researchers. They have said that the novel has a feminine perspective. Women characters are shown as being oppressed and used as commodity. They are the ones who have to bear the burden of the wrong doings done by the men.

Jacquelynn M. Kleist (2012)[8] in her article "More than Victims: Versions of Feminine Power in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*" also talks about this fact that much of the partition literature focuses upon female victimization, she says: "Because of the focus on female victimization, much

of the writing about partition reduces both men and women to perfect binaries: rapists and raped; protectors and protected; villains and victims; buyers and bought; sellers and sold" (2012:69).

The issue of female suppression and marginalization in *Ice-Candy Man* has been discussed by many researchers. Almas Akhtar, Shaista Andleeb and Prof. Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Awan(2015)[1] in their collective research, titled as "Female Oppression and Marginalization in *Ice-Candy Man* by Sidhwa and *The Holy Woman* by Shahraz" have specifically shown the oppression on women in these novels. About *Ice-Candy Man*, they say that "*Ice-Candy Man* is an epic of female suppression and marginalization" (2015:17). Showkat Hussain Dar (2013)[4] in his article, "Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*: A Feminist Perspective" also talks about patriarchy and its control over women and shows women as dependent, weak and on the margin of patriarchy, he describes: "The novel highlights feminist concerns about women issues, particularly their experience of victimization and suppression within patriarchal societies"(2013:2).

S. Anandh Raj (2016)[12] in his article "Feminism in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*" talks about another aspect in *Ice-Candy Man*. By showing the characters in *Ice-Candy Man*, he says that in a patriarchal society a woman may be harassed not only by the men but by the women as well. Ane Frislid Sveinhaus Marwah (2008)[10] in her research article, "When I Raised My Head Again: Feminism and Female Body in Bapsi Sidhwa's Novels *The Pakistani Bride* and *Cracking India*" talks about the fact that how men try to control female body. Through the analysis of female position in these novels, she has shown the marginalized state of women, she says that "to varying degrees, the men in these novels try to gain and assert their power over women, and, hence, over female bodies" (2008:8).

Other researchers have been done on the strength of women characters in *Ice-Candy Man*, as opposed to showing them as weak. Kleist (2011)[8] and Waughmode (2011)[17] have also dealt with these themes of female strength. S.T. Waughmode (2011) in his article, "Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*: A Feminist Artefact" says that "women strive to come out of their plight and finally move forward from their degraded and tormented state to start their lives afresh" (2011:5).

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is an attempt to describe the women's journey to gain strength in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy Man* in the light of Feminist Theory. Feminist theory has emerged from Feminism Movements. According to Maggie Humm (1990:251)[5] and Rebecca Walker (1992:39-41)[13], there have been three movements of feminism: the first wave started in 19th century which continued until early 20th century; the second wave started in 1960s and continued until 1970s;

and the third wave started in 1990s which is still present. These were political, cultural and economic movements and the basic aim of these movements was to establish legal protection and equal rights for women. Feminist theory which emerged from these movements is concerned with gender issues. It highlights such issues as: patriarchy (male dominance) and its oppression on women, traditional gender roles, marginalization, objectification, victimization, subjugation and sexual exploitation of women. The present study analyzes the ways in which women characters in *Ice-Candy Man* have been marginalized, in the light of the specific terms described above. The study will also focus on the treatment of women as “Other”, a concept which was given by an existentialist, Hegel, and analyzed by the French Feminist, Simone de Beauvoir, in her groundbreaking work—*The Second Sex* (1949). De Beauvoir asserted that woman is as free to choose as man. Employing the concept of De Beauvoir, the paper shows how women, in *Ice Candy Man*, take strength out of their circumstances.

Furthermore, the character of Ayah will be analyzed through the concept of “Male Gaze”, a term which was coined by Laura Mulvey in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). The term refers to a way of describing the power-relationship between the observer (the man) and the observed (the female body). Likewise, it also highlights the reduction of female body to the status of sensual object to soothe male sexual desires and fantasies in male dominating society.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5.1. Woman as victims

Women in *Ice-Candy Man* are the victim of patriarchal oppression. However, the question arises why a woman is victim? How she is treated and what is the value of a woman in a patriarchal society? This has been best explained by a French feminist Simone de Beauvoir (2009), she says: “Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female, whenever she as a human being, she is said to imitate the male” (*The Second Sex*). Thus in patriarchy humanity is associated with male and a woman cannot even define herself. Instead, it is the man who defines her with reference to himself. He is regarded as essential and important, while a woman is considered as “Other”. She is regarded as something unimportant who is even excluded from the definition of humanity. This attitude toward woman is also evident in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*.

Lenny, who is the child narrator and protagonist of the novel, is also marginalized by her gender. In fact, the very first sentence of the novel, in Lenny’s words, is that “my world is compressed” (Sidhwa 1988, p.1)[14]. These words show her marginalized and restricted position in patriarchal set up. The fact that she is polio-stricken and disabled, this lameness actually symbolizes her weakness and passivity in a male-dominant society. Also in the earlier part of the novel, Lenny’s doctor advises her

mother not to take any tension about her education, because he thinks that there is no need for a girl to get education. Thus he tries to confine her fate to the four walls of the house. In this way, he is marginalizing her fate in a man-made society, he says:

“She is doing fine without school, isn’t she?Don’t pressure her... her nerves could be affected. She doesn’t need to become professor. She will marry---have children---lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams” (Sidhwa 1988, p. 15)[14].

In other words, he is trying to dismiss her educational development by her biological duties. Because in a patriarchal set up, it is expected from a woman to do her domestic chores, raise children and obey her male members. The fact that a woman is sexually exploited in patriarchy has been represented by Lenny’s cousin. He engages Lenny in a close relationship with him. Her cousin, who would be of just 11 years old, tries to become more and more explicit in his relationship with Lenny throughout the novel. In fact, he also tries to molest her.

Ayah or Shanta is the centre of “male gaze” throughout the novel. The term refers to the power relationship between man and the female body. It refers to the fact that how a woman is objectified in patriarchal society. Therefore, this is very much true to the character of Ayah as well, as a number of people gather around her just because of her “chocolate-brown” skin and attractive female body. Lenny observes:

“Stub-handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretenses to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships” (Sidhwa 1988, p. 3)[14].

In fact, her female body is brutally exploited by men during partition. She is gang-raped and then *Ice-Candy Man* takes her to Hira Mandi where she is prostituted by men and Lenny observes that how she has lost her charm. Her voice and her desperate look are no more recognizable. This is how she has been objectified and sexually exploited by men.

Like Lenny, her mother is also marginalized by her gender. Although apparently she seems very happy, contented, active in attending social parties and living a modern life style, but in reality she also occupies a traditional role of a submissive wife. Lenny observes that how her mother constantly tries to create a pleasant atmosphere to make her husband happy. According to Lenny, her mother continuously chatters in sweet tones just to fill up the infernal times of father’s mute meals. Lenny seems habitual to observe “peal of laughter from Mother and a smile from Father” (Sidhwa 1988, p. 81)[14] on dining table. Lenny’s remark hints that there is some inner void in her mother’s character. That she hides her inner hollowness by a deceptive and beautiful screen of social grace. However, this social elegance is not something which is desirable for her, but rather it is a kind

of bondage in which she is forced to accept her role as a female and a wife. Lenny also sees some bruises or marks on the back of her mother which indicates that she might be receiving occasional beatings by her husband. Papoo, who is the sweeper's daughter, is the most abused child in the novel. She spends much of her time in doing hard domestic chores but still she is constantly beaten by her mother. She always bears the anger of her mother. However if one tries to deeply analyze her mother's character, one comes to know that it is because she is submissive to her husband and cannot resist, therefore Papoo's body becomes an outlet of the frustration of her mother. Such attitude toward less threatening is called "displacement" or displaced aggression in psychology. However, even after receiving severe beatings from her mother Papoo is physically very much strong. About her Lenny says: "She is strong and high-spirited, and it's not easy to break her body....But there are subtle ways of breaking people" (Sidhwa 1988, p. 48)[14]. Papoo who would be just 11 years old, though she is physically strong enough to bear anything but she is emotionally broken by her forced marriage to a much older man than her. Because when partition takes place, her mother finds her marriage as the only solution to protect her daughter. But there seems no good hope for Papoo even after her marriage because now she may be abused and sexually exploited by her a middle aged husband.

Apart from Lenny, Ayah, her mother and Papoo, other minor female characters of the novel are also the victim of patriarchy. Such as Hamida who is the second ayah of Lenny and the women in Ranna's village had also been sexually exploited by men during the partition.

5.2. Women as survivors

Up till now, the focus of the present study was the description of women as the victims of patriarchal oppression. Now the focus will be on analyzing the ways in which they are not entirely victim. How they show their female agency by challenging the patriarchal oppression, how they play the role of survivors and how they are able to step outside their traditional roles, as Simone de Beauvoir (2009) states: "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (2009:46). Thus according to Beauvoir, a woman's submissive role is not something which is inherent in her rather it is the male definition of woman that makes her submissive. But if she wants, a woman has the courage to assert her independent identity.

Lenny also plays the role of a strong female character in the novel. She possesses the unique quality of asserting her will. In fact, she makes her lameness her strength and manipulates others to win candies and getting attention of others. She knows very well the limitations of gender roles but she rejects such things and goes outside her house. She goes to parks, hotels and other public places with Ayah and her servants and gets the knowledge of outer world. There is also transformation in her character like bildungsroman protagonist. Thus the novel can be said as having the traits of bildungsroman or coming of age novel,

because Lenny like the characteristics of such novel's protagonists also develops physically, emotionally and psychologically from age five to eight years old girl. She grows mature and learns the darker side of human nature. It is because of spending her time outside the house and observing Ayah's relationship with male characters that she is able to escape her cousin. Otherwise her cousin would have raped her. But rather than submitting herself to her cousin's masculine authority, she exerts control over her cousin by telling him that she is not interested in him. About her own mental and psychological development, she mentions an incident. She says that when she first meets Ghandhi jee, she lowers her eyes with shame. But she says it was many years later that she realized her strength, as she states: "He touches my face, and in a burst of shyness I lower my eyes. This the first time I have lowered my eyes before man. And then, when I raised my head again, the men lowered their eyes" (Sidhwa 1988, p. 89)[14]. This shows that it is not only man who have the power of objectifying woman by "male gaze", but if a woman with the power of her confidence and knowledge looks into men's eyes, she can also force them to lower their eyes.

Lenny's Godmother is another strong female character possessing manly qualities. Her unique power is evident as she exerts the powerful influence throughout the novel. Lenny also feels secure in her presence. She represents the role of 'Matriarch'—a term that is used for a highly respected woman who rules a family as authoritative leader and dominant in society. Godmother has also established her identity through the awareness of everything in her community including the secrets of people. That is why Lenny uses the words "a network of espionage" for her extending knowledge. Godmother's agency is specifically evident in her interaction with Ice-Candy Man. She verbally attacks him for the maltreatment which he has done to Ayah. Thus she goes beyond her gender by challenging the manhood of Ice-Candy man, as she says: "what kind of man would allow his wife to dance like a performing monkey before other men? You're not a man; you are a low-born, two-bit evil little mouse" (Sidhwa 1988, p. 253)[14]. Here by challenging his manhood, Godmother reverses the traditional patriarchal power. She can be regarded as the most ideal and strong female character. She condemns Ice-Candy Man and ultimately liberates Ayah from her physical and marital subjection to him.

Toward the end of the novel, Lenny's mother also rejects her traditional role and plays the role of a social activist. She no longer remains at home all the time, as Lenny observes that her mother develops "a busy air of secrecy and preoccupation that makes her even more remote. She shoots off in the Morris, after Father drudges of on his bicycle, and returns late in the afternoon---and scoots out again" (Sidhwa 1988, p. 175)[14]. Her mother and her aunt construct a refugee camp for "fallen woman" and attempt to restore them to their families. They also smuggle gasoline to help their Hindu and Sikh friends in crossing the border to India.

Though Ayah is physically victimized later in the novel, but earlier like Lenny, she also shows the manipulative power over men. Through her physical beauty, she manipulates her admirers and takes advantage by asking them to bring different eatables for her. But the thing that is more admirable in her character is her self-discovery in the end of the novel. She realizes that she is being exploited by men and therefore she takes the firm decision to go back to her home. Even though she is not sure that whether she will be accepted by her family or not, but she can no longer let her exploited by men at Hira Mandi, she says: “whether they want me or not, I will go” (Sidhwa 1988, p. 267)[14]. This is what feminists also assert that a woman cannot liberate herself unless she does not realize that she is being marginalized. Thus Ayah’s self-knowledge and her decision to go back to her home brings hope that she may be accepted by her family, as Simone de Beauvoir (1949) states: “Self-knowledge is no guarantee of happiness, but it is on the side of happiness and can provide the way to fight for it” (The Second Sex).

6. CONCLUSION

After analyzing the female characters in *Ice-Candy Man* in the light of Feminist theory, it can be argued that they have been represented in two ways by Sidhwa. Although they are victim of patriarchal oppression but when time comes, they are able to challenge that patriarchal setup. They reject the traditional gender roles and take a step to gain power. Thus the women characters show their female agency and retain their independent identity. So, Sidhwa’s novel provides a unique view in which women are not entirely submissive to patriarchy, rather they show and assert the strength of their character and struggle to fight for their rights.

7. REFERENCES

- [1] Akhtar, A. & Awan. (2015). “Female Oppression and Marginalization in *Ice-Candy Man* by Sidhwa and the Holy Woman by Shahraz”, in Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics. Vol. 16, p. 16-22.
- [2] Beauvoir, S. (2009). *The Second Sex*. New York: Alfred A. Knop.
- [3] Bhaskar, T. (2015). “Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*: A Thematic Study”, in International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Management Studies. Vol. 01, No. 7, p.56-60.
- [4] Dar, S. (2013). “Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*: A Feminist Perspective” in Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal. Vol. 2, p. 1-6.
- [5] Humm, M. (1990). “Wave (definition)”, in The Dictionary of Feminist Theory, Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- [6] Jadeja, K. (2015). “Autobiographical Elements in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*”, in International Journal of English Language. Vol. 2, p. 397-404.
- [7] Jajja, A. (2012). “Portrayal of Partition by Bapsi Sidhwa and Khushwant Singh: A Comparative Study”, in Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences. Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 209-220.
- [8] Kleist, J. (2011). “More than Victims: Version of Feminine Power in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*”, in Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies. Vol.3, No. 2, p.69-80.
- [9] Kumar, P. (2014). “Postcolonial perspective on partition: A Study of Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy man (Cracking India)*” in An International Literary Journal. Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 137-149.
- [10] Marwah, A. F. (2008). “When I Raised My Head Again: Feminism and Female Body in Bapsi Sidhwa’s Novels *The Pakistani Bride* and *Cracking India*”. University of Oslo.
- [11] Mulvey, L. (1975). “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. Oxford Journals. 16 (3):6—18.
- [12] Raj, A. (2016). “Feminism in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*”, in An International Journal in English. Vol. 2(4), p.1-9.
- [13] Rebecca, W. (1992). “Becoming the Third Wave”, in Ms. New York: Liberty Media for Women. P. 39-41.
- [14] Sidhwa, B. (1988). *Ice-Candy Man*. New Delhi: Penguin India, Print.
- [15] Singh, B. (2016). “Writing the Margins: A Study of the Parsi Perspective in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*” in Research Journal of English Language and Literature. Vol.4.1. Print.
- [16] Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 2nd Edition: New York Routledge Group.
- [17] Waghmode, S. T. (2011). “Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*: A Feminist Artefact”, in Golden Research Thoughts. Vol. 1(4), 2011.