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**BAPSI SIDHWA'S NOVEL, 'ICE CANDY- MAN': HIGHLIGHTS FEMINIST CONCERN
ABOUT WOMEN ISSUES, PARTICULARLY THEIR EXPERIENCE OF VICTIMIZATION
AND SUPPRESSION WITHIN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETIES**

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ABSTRACT

A piece of writing, which justifies, propagates or perpetuates discrimination against women cannot be termed as feminist, only that artistic work which sensitizes its readers to the practices of subjugation and opposes them can be treated as being feminist in nature. The women- characters of Ice Candy- Man draw our attention to the facts of victimization of women and their compulsions to define their lives according to the pre- fixed gender roles. They also expose the patriarchal biases present in the archetypal social perceptions. In a patriarchal set- up which is essentially discriminatory against women and emphasizes on conditioning them for life- long, the female characters of 'Ice Candy- Man' are not only conscious of their desires, but also eagerly assertive about their independence to lead the life. On the other side male characters, despite the fact that they initiate almost all events of the novel, lacks the will to change and transcend the current circumstances. The novel, 'Ice Candy- Man' highlights the pathos of women, who were destined to mould themselves according to the wish of the males. They had to lead their lives like bondages. But, through some female characters, Sidhwa tries to say that some females of the society wanted to lead their life independently. For this cause they were not hesitant to struggle. Females of that society struggle to get their own identity. The novel poignantly describes the mindless partition violence and focuses on its socio- historical consequences to women.

In an interview Bapsi Sidhwa remarked:

"As a woman, one is always marginalized. I have worked among women to create an awareness of their rights and protested against repressive measures aimed at Pakistani women and minority communities."

(The Hindustan Times Sunday Magazine 26 April 1998)

Key Words: Propagates, Perpetuates, Discrimination, Feminist, Sensitizes, Subjugation, Opposes, Victimization, Compulsion, Patriarchal, Biases, Archetypal, Conscious, Assertive, Independence, Transcend, Destined, Bondages, Socio- historical, Marginalized, Repressive.

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Bapsi Sidhwa – A Biographical Sketch

Sidhwa is widely recognized as one of the most prominent Pakistani- Anglophone novelists writing today. She was raised in the parsi community, a religious and ethnic minority in Pakistan.

Critics regard Sidhwa as a feminist postcolonial Asian author whose novels- including, 'The Crow Eater' (1978), 'The Bride' (1981), and 'Ice Candy- Man' (1988; republished as 'Cracking India' 1991) - provide a unique perspective on Indian and Pakistani history, politics, and culture. Her characters, often women, are caught up in the historical events surrounding the geographical and social division- or "partition" – of India and Pakistan in 1947, and the subsequent development of Pakistan as an independent nation.

Sidhwa skillfully links gender to community, nationality, religion, and class, demonstrating the ways in which these various aspects of cultural identity and social structure do not merely affect or reflect one author, but instead are inextricably intertwined. Since moving to the United States and becoming a naturalized U.S citizen, Sidhwa has written 'An American Brat' (1993), which describes the Americanization of a young parsi woman.

Biographical Information: Sidhwa was born on August 11, 1938 in Karachi, Pakistan, then part of India. Her family belongs to the parsi ethnic community which practices the Zoroastrian religion. Sidhwa received a bachelor's degree from Kinnaird College for women in 1956.

Sidhwa served as Pakistan's delegate to the Asian women's congress. She immigrated to The United States in 1983 and became a naturalized American citizen in 1993.

Since moving to The United States, Sidhwa has taught lectured and presented workshops, in creative writing at several colleges and universities, St. Thomas University, The University of Houston and Mount Holyoke College in Amherst, Massachusetts. She held a bunting fellowship at Radcliff Harvard in 1986 and was a visiting scholar at the Rockefeller foundation center in Bellagio, Italy in 1991.

Sidhwa also served on the advisory committee on women's development for former

Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1991. She was awarded the Sitara -i- Imtiaz, Pakistan's highest national honor in the arts. She has also received a variety of grants and awards for her fiction including a National endowment for the Arts grant in 1987, a New York Times Book Review Notable Book of the year award for 'Cracking India' in 1991, and a Lila Wallace- Reader's Digest award in 1993.

Bapsi Sidhwa's works: Sidhwa first two novels- 'The Bride' and 'The Crow Eater' focus on parsi families in the city of Lahore and outlying areas that were incorporated into Pakistan, both of these novels were privately published in Pakistan and became immensely popular. 'The Bride' was awarded the Pakistan National Honors of the Patras Bokhri Award in 1985.

Sidhwa's third novel, 'Ice Candy- Man' published in Britain in 1988 and in The USA as Cracking India in 1991 and made into Deepa Mehta's film Earth (1998).

'An American Brat' was written after Sidhwa migrated to America. 'Water' written in 2006, is Sidhwa's fifth novel. Like the 'Ice Candy- Man', this too has been turned into a film by Deepa Mehta.

Introduction

History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be un-lived. 'Ice Candy- Man' is the story of pain of people who suffered the partition. Some people suffered morally, some financially while some suffered socially, but the memories of all the people were beyond to be forgotten. Sidhwa repeatedly condemns the dehumanizing impact that religious zealotry played in promoting mob mentality, separation, and revenge during partition. Sidhwa captures the turmoil of the times, with a brilliant combination of collective anguish of a newly independent but divided country. Bapsi Sidhwa shows that during communal strife, sanity, human feelings and past friendship are forgotten.

By going through 'Ice Candy- Man' it can be said that the country divided on communal lines on the eve of independence brought in its wake the twin traumas- the physical one of being dislocated and forced to migrate and the psychological one of living in 'alien' conditions, which millions of people experienced living on both sides of the religious

divide. The novel poignantly describes the mindless partition violence. Sidhwa has sensitively portrayed the political anxiety and social insecurity, which was shared by all the divided people during the partition days. 'Ice Candy- Man' describes the narrowing tale of partition days, when the lofty ideal of nationalism was suddenly bartered for communal thinking, resulting in unprecedented devastation, political absurdities and deranged social sensibilities. 'Ice Candy- Man' is a politically motivated novel. Sidhwa depiction of communal riots is touching as well as shocking; children and women suffered the most.

Bapsi Sidhwa explores a female universe hemmed in by the restrictive and reductive forces of patriarchy and colonization. The author uses the "Women – As – Victim" Paradigm but victimization is the result of collective action due to communal riots that followed partition. The riots are shown as being orchestrated by males.

Novels based on partition: There are number of novels written about partition of India like, 'Train to Pakistan' by 'Khushwant Singh', 'Tamas' by 'Bhisham Sahni', 'Azadi' by 'Chaman Nahal', 'A Bend in the Ganges' by 'Manohar Malgaonkar', 'The Rape' by 'Raj Gill', 'Ashes and Petals' by 'H.S. Gill', 'Twice Born Twice Dead' by 'K.S. Duggal', 'The Dark Dancer' by 'B. Rajan', 'Sunlight on a Broken Column' by 'Attia Hosain' and 'Ice Candy- Man' by 'Bapsi Sidhwa.'

These novels realistically portray and depict the upheaval that the Indian Sub- Continent experienced. It was the most shocking and traumatic experience of division of hearts and communities. These literary works leave the reader with the feeling of disquiet and disturbance. These novels deal with the tumultuous and traumatic moments in the life of one generation.

Bapsi Sidhwa's 'Ice Candy- Man' is not only the latest novel on this theme but also one by a parsi writer, who has no Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim axe to grind.

It is perhaps for this reason that even Khushwant Singh has described 'Ice Candy- Man' as among, "The most authentic and best" novels on the partition of India.

Feminism in 'Ice Candy- Man' and Theme of victimization of women in 'Ice Candy- Man': Today, feminism occupies an important place in modern

literature. It is a modern political, social, economic, and cultural movement which focuses on the exploitation of women by the patriarchal system of society. The concerns of this movement, which implicitly as well as explicitly questions the positioning of women as "inferior" or "defective" (Aristotle), "passive" and "subordinate" in comparison to men.

Feminist challenged these assumptions of woman's secondary status to the primary status of man and the presumptuousness of compartmentalizing her essence as a home maker, a mother, and a stationary, presence in stark contrast to the stereotypes of masculinity, male strength, wanderlust and aggression. The feminists identify the origins of this "Sexist" bias in patriarchy. According to the epochal study of Kate Millet, patriarchy constitutes 'perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power.'

Toril Moi a later feminist critic explains:

"In keeping with Millet's approach, feminists have politicized existing critical methods, and it is on this basis that feminist criticism has become a new branch of literary studies." (Feminist Literary Criticism.... P.205)

Feminist critics have been unearthing the women writers whose expression has remained largely marginalized in the literary canons all over the world. Women's writings: dairies, poetry, are now studied by the feminist critics for specific consciousness-raising projects. However, they are carefully studied by feminists not to present all women writers as "feminist."

A piece of writing, justifies, propagates or perpetuates discrimination against women cannot be termed as 'feminist.' Only that artistic work which sensitizes its readers to the practices of subjugation and opposes them can be treated as being feminist in nature.

Reading a work of literature, a feminist reader asks the following questions:

- A) How does a literary text represent women?
- B) What does it have to say about gender relations?
- C) How does it define gender difference?

Or is the text simply silent about women- which in itself would be a comment on its attitude towards women? Furthermore, what does it mean to write as a woman, and what does it mean to read as a woman? While traditional "patriarchal" criticism, assumes that a literary text is meant to be read and enjoyed by all readers alike, the feminist critics question this assumptions by reading even an old work from women's perspective and pointing out how it is addressed only to men and expects even women to read it like men. What is more, feminism focuses on how women have been treated as second or third rate citizens by men in all countries in all ages not only in life but also in literature.

Massive difference between a male discourse and a feminist text is that in the male discourse it is men who are invested with the qualities of action, heroism, justice, fair play and sacrifice, while the female characters in it are usually the recipient of male protection, chivalry and bounty. In a feminist text, on the contrary, it is the women who control and dominate the action by their active involvement and concern and in the process acquire the attributes of heroism and become the moral centre.

'Ice Candy- Man' undoubtedly a feminist novel: Judged by this criterion, Bapsi Sidhwa's 'Ice Candy-Man' can be undoubtedly be termed as a feminist novel because it has not only a girl- narrator from whose perspective the whole story is told but also women characters who effectively try to subvert the ingrained elements of patriarchy and to privilege female will, choice, and strength without sacrificing the feminine qualities of compassion and motherhood. At the same time, this novel not only sketches and reviews the dehumanizing patriarchal norms and a social climate hostile to women but also portrays women's struggle against selfhood.

'Ice Candy- Man' is indeed a significant testament of a gynocentric view of reality in which feminine psyche and experiences are presented with a freshness not found in partition novels written by men.

Though the paradigm of 'women as victim' features in almost all writings on the theme of partition like, Chaman Nahal's 'Azadi', Khushwant Singh's 'Train to Pakistan' and Manohar

Malganokar's 'A Bend in the Ganges'. 'Ice Candy-Man' stands apart from the rest in its dramatization of this paradigm. The extensive featuring of women's shared experiences of victimization in the communal riots is here complimented by a presentation of their oppression and the strategies to overcome the oppression even at a personal level inside their homes, and in their relationships with husbands and lovers.

'Ice Candy- Man' is a feminist novel, first of all suggested by the choice of its female narrator, an eight year old parsi girl. It is from her consciousness that the traumatic incidents of the novel come filtered to the readers. Her perspective is the only consistent anchor for the reader. She observes records and withholds judgments.

Its protagonist's world- view is largely determined by her limited range of movement around her house:

"My world is compressed warris road, lines with rain gutters,

Lies between queen road and jail road...

Rounding the right- hand corner of warris road and Continuing on jail road is the hushed Salvation Army road...

Jail road also harbors my energetic electric-aunt and her adenoidal son..." (Ice Candy-Man p. 12)

Sidhwa has recreated a universe where women appear as biological being 'female' as compared to the stereotype 'feminine', this is not to say that by depicting so many women, the text or Lenny's narrative person because 'feminist' or even that all or some of its characters are feminist.

One aspect of the plot of 'Ice Candy- Man' is that it is a bildungsroman of the narrator's consciousness, her education and growth into maturity. Both men and women inhabit Lenny's universe when she is young, but as she grows up, she develops an anxiety regarding men in spite, of her interaction with cousin, ayah's wooers and her own father:

"The mystery of the women in the courtyard deepens. At night we hear them wailing, their cries verging on the inhuman..."

And closer, and as upsetting, the caged voices of our parents fighting in their bedroom. Mother crying, wheedling. Father's terse, brash, indecipherable sentences. Terrifying thumps... although father has never raised his hands to us, one day I surprised mother at her bath and see the bruises on her body." (Ice Candy- Man P. 212)

Nilufer Bharucha in her article "A Feminist Reading of Three Parsi Novels" points out that:

"Lenny...is not male- identified. She has strong female models with whom she has a woman- to- woman bonding." (The Fiction of Rohinton Mistry p.48)

This bonding is not born instinctively, it occurs gradually just as her alienation from the men is a gradual process. As a child sensing a void in her life she gravitates towards her godmother who has nurtured her instead of her biological mother. Extolling this relationship Lenny says that it is:

'Stronger than the bond of motherhood. More satisfying than the ties between men and women' (Ice Candy- Man p.4)

The Hindu Ayah who epitomizes herself the strength of the femininity of a woman and thereby infuses in Lenny the idea of independence and choice. She is also highly loyal to interests of the family she serves and is extremely protective of Lenny. As an elder sister would be. Ayah is fully conscious of herself as an individual and cannot be taken advantage of by her admirers until she does not become the victim of male atrocities during the holocaust of partition. Between her abduction and forced marriage, she suffers the worst possible humiliation and in the words of godmother, is "Used like a sewer" by "Drunks, peddlers, sahibs and cut throats." Her name, identity and religion are taken away from her, but nothing can change her indomitable will and destroy her spirit. As soon as the opportunity presents itself, she seizes it with both hands and opts for her freedom from the man she does not love. She is firm and decisive, in spite of the Ice Candy Man's protestation and promises and in spite of the uncertainty that her family in Amritsar may not accept her after what has happened to her. In this way she asserts her will and freedom of choice.

Electric- Aunt, who is a widow, represents self help, independence and capacity for management. She runs her own business completely and is educating her son, Lenny's cousin. Yet she finds time with Lenny's mother to help the helpless Hindu's and Sikh's leave Lahore by providing petrol for their vehicles. Thus Sidhwa shows that when it comes to social commitment, even women like Lenny's mother and Electric- Aunt do not lag behind.

Lenny's mother is not conspicuously 'feminist'. Instead, as an obliging wife, an accomplished hostess, a guilty mother and an attractive woman, she conforms to all the roles considered 'feminine' in patriarchal society. However, interest in this character as an individual is aroused only when she begins to drive out of the house with her car load of petrol canisters. Lenny is always shown a little baffled by her mother's intractability in spite of her apparent femininity. Lenny wonders why her father acts indifferent or superior to her mother and the mother pampers him still. What are fallen women? What are the things men do to women in Hira Mandi? Lenny's narrative poses these fundamental questions; hence it operates as a feminist allegory. Through the character of Lenny, Sidhwa explores a female universe hemmed in by the restricting and reducing forces of patriarchy and colonialism.

Having subtly but firmly positioning this feminist concern, Sidhwa goes on to delineate this aspect of mother's character since she belongs to the economically privileged strata of society. Lenny's mother has a number of servants to attend to her domestic chores, while socializing takes up all her time. It is largely into Ayah's care that the children are left.

Mother's new 'Avatar' as a social worker, who helps the victims of partition cross over to their allotted nations and tries to rehabilitate the abducted. Orphaned and raped women, is her partial release from her sorry state. She strikes a new chord in Lenny's heart once the child is told about the true purpose of her mother's maneuvers. Through her character Sidhwa presents some of the commoner forms of woman's exploitation within her domestic sphere, and her ability to retain her

sense of individuality in the midst of that exploitation.

Between the characterization of Ayah and Lenny's mother, Sidhwa is able to prompt a dialogue on female sexuality versus the male power structures within or outside their homes. Understandably, there are no happy marriages in this novel though there are several memorable sexual encounters.

Towering high among the women characters is of course godmother, Rodabai. She is endowed with qualities of a razor- sharp wit, untiring stamina, boundless love for Lenny, social commitment, profound understanding of human life and of the world around. Unmindful of what people will say, she visits Hira Mandi, the locality of prostitutes and tries to console the Ayah after what the latter has suffered:

"That was fated, daughter. It can't be undone. But it can be forgiven...worse things are forgiven...that is the way of life."

But when she finds that ayah is determined to go back to her family in Amritsar, godmother leaves no stone unturned, meets the officials in charge, compels them to cut short the bureaucratic red-tape, and finally manages to secure Ayah's release from the clutches of the Ice Candy Man in just fifteen days while, normally, the process would have taken months.

Full of self- confidence and righteous zeal, godmother has the capacity to handle crisis-situations in a deft manner. A brilliant example is provided by her dealing with the slippery and glib-tongued Ice Candy Man who can Change colours like a chameleon.

When he says that he loves the Ayah and no harm can come to her, she asks him:

"No harm? ...you permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks, and goondas and say she has come to no harm?"

Not know for mincing words, she says that he would have his own mother carried off if it suited him because he is a:

"Shameless badmash! Namakharam! Faithless!"

Taken by surprise, Ice Candy Man replies quite insolently,

"Yes, I'm faithless! ... I'm a man! Only dogs are faithful! If you want faith, let her marry a dog!"

Women, fall prey to men's violence like Lenny's two Ayahs's, cannot hope for their restitution to their own families. Conversation between Lenny and godmother is very important in this context:

"What's a fallen woman?" I ask godmother...

"Hamida (The second Ayah) was kidnapped by the Sikhs," says godmother seriously...

When that happens, sometimes, the husband or his won't take her back."

"Why? It isn't her fault she was kidnapped."

"Some fold feels that way- they can't stand their woman being touched by other men."

The conversation shows how inscrutably the unwritten laws of patriarchal constitution are. The women themselves often internalize these laws into their perception of self identity.

Toril Moi, in her perceptive introduction to some of the important issues raised by feminism, warns against tendencies to deify women as essences of a higher and purer nature,

"The tendency to venerate them as virgin and mothers of god..."
(Feminist Literary Criticism)

She explains that:

"Gratifying though it is to be told that women really are strong, integrated, peace-loving, nurturing and creative beings, this plethora of new virtues is no less essentialist than the old one, and no less oppressive to all those women who do not want to play the role of earth mother."

In an overview of all the women characters in the novel, the godmother's significance actually lies in her encouraging womanly confidence and inspiring self- worth in Lenny's evolving sensibility.

In sharp contrast, male parsi characters like Lenny's father, Dr. Manek Mody, and Dr. Bharucha, are indifferent to what is happening around them, while Muslim characters like the Ice Candy Man are extremely vicious and vindictive. Common men like Hari and Moti are weak and they opt for conversion to save their lives, while Muslims like the Ice Candy

Man act monstrously, and engage in acts of violence rape, murder and arson. A few like Imam Din, Yousaf, the owner of the restaurant, the Butcher, etc. are morally weak. It is ironical that Imam Din, who unsuccessfully tries to protect the Ayah from the Muslim Goondas led by the Ice Candy Man by uttering a false oath in the name of Allah, later joins other in raping her.

Practically all men in 'Ice Candy- Man' believe in patriarchy. Even the enlightened Col. Bharucha believes that a woman's role in life is confined to the four- walls of her house. He says about Lenny rather positively:

"She's doing fine without school...

She doesn't need to become a professor...

She'll marry- have children lead a carefree life."

Conclusion

Hence, the female characters of 'Ice Candy- Man' try to improve their condition and position in the society but even then they suffer in the male dominated society. They act according to the wish of the males. But in this novel, this is good that almost all of the female characters try to save their position and don't surrender themselves under the will of the males. They want to have their own authority. The novel poignantly describes the mindless partition violence and focuses on its socio- historical consequences to women. Sidhwa also commented on the historical inevitability of social process, suggesting that people who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.

The Author being herself female knows very well the problems of female in the male dominated society. She knows the problems, which a woman faces daily because the expectations are much more from her in 'Ice Candy- Man', the author has tried to elaborate the gender differences, which is given too much importance by our so called advance society. In this novel the author clearly depicts that at one side, males attend the party to enjoy themselves, while on the other side, women attend those parties just to please their husbands and to become a thing of attraction for others.

It can be said that gender differences play an important role in 'Ice Candy- Man'. All these factors make it a feminist text.

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