



Gender and Politics in Partition novels: A comparative study of *Ice Candy Man* and *Clear Light of the Day*

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Abstract:

The partition of India and the emergence of a new country Pakistan has been a life changing event for everyone in the sub continent. The violence that was unleashed during the partition did not only challenge the identity of the nation but it also affected the identity of women irrespective of distinct cultures and religious faiths. Woman, who is considered to be the honour of the family especially in Asian countries like India are being oppressed, disparaged in the name of religious, social and cultural traditions and has been considered as a commodity and an object of entertainment by men. The partition has affected not only the psyche of the people but also the social life as well. Women have always been subjugated by patriarchal domination and it was vivid during the partition. The way women were treated during partition shows how women as a distinct class were treated in the Indian subcontinent. The traumatic experience of partition affected the lives of women especially in India subcontinent. During the chaotic phase of partition, the violence that was carried out has been compared by some great writers like Bapsi sidwa and Anita Desai with the violence that was unleashed on the bodies of women. The violence was so horrible that some fathers killed their daughters. Women were murdered in the name of honour. Writers like Bapsi Sidwa and Anita Desai in their works *Ice Candy Man* and *Clear Light of the Day* respectively, endeavoured to contribute to the process of restructuring and revising the status of women and the aim of my research paper is to see how far they have succeeded in the attempt. In this paper I have tried to closely analyse the female characters of both the novels who had survived the horrors of partition and will see how they negotiated politics and patriarchy.

Keywords: Partition, Gender, Negotiating, Patriarchy, Identity, Politics, Trauma, Domination.

Introduction

“Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistanis”

Khuswant Singh

After three hundred years of slavery when India woke up in the land of independence in August 1947, she faced another blow and that was of partition of subcontinent into two independent nations i.e India and Pakistan, Hindu majority as India and Muslim majority as Pakistan. The negative repercussions of the partition can be seen even in twenty first century as well. The partition led to one of the greatest migrations in

human history till date as Sikhs and Hindus moved to India and Muslims trekked either to Bangladesh or west .It is estimated that 16.7 million people were forced to leave during the four years after the partition. This also suggests that 2.2million people went missing or unaccounted during the partition(BKM.2008).Since migrants were likely to be male, Muslims in India had a higher male ratio than Hindus and Sikhs and when Muslims migrated to Pakistan it affected the gender ratio and literacy rate as well.

Those communities which were once living in harmony and had fought together against British rule had now turned butchers and it led to blood and guts , where Hindus and Sikhs were on one side and Muslims were on the other side. Especially in Punjab and Bengal the insurrectionism was intense with bloodsheds, mass abductions, sexual violence .In approximation, some seventy five thousand women were raped and some of them mutilated and defiled after being physically assaulted as Nisid Hajari in his book *Midnight's Furies* states “ Gangs of killers set whole village aflame, hacking to death men and children and the aged while carrying off young women to be raped. Some British soldiers and journalists who had witnessed the Nazi death camps claimed partition's brutalities were worse: pregnant women had their breast cut off and babies hacked out of their bellies; infants were found literally roasted on spits.”

The term “Partition” can be easily comprehended as the division of one country into two new entities, it can be seen as a consequence of multiple socio cultural or political narratives which led to the partition of various countries like Ireland(1919),India(1947) and Palestine(1948). Great events like French Revolution and Irish Civil War has always been an inspiration to literature. Literature plays a vital role in preserving the memories from these epoch events. Partition literature exists across every literary genre be it poetry, novels, short stories, non-fiction, etc. Francisco has also rightly depicted “only the literature truly evokes the suffering of innocent, whose pain is more universal and ultimately a vehicle of more honest reconciliation than political discourse. The literary work on the partition affirms that the subject of the partition was the first human being-[...](250).

The worst sufferers of partition were women who were brutally oppressed in forms like abduction, sexual violence, forced marriage and honour killing . Women had become scapegoats in the agony of partition as males of the opposite communities took revenge by assaulting women .They were traumatised not only from outside (by other communities and religions) but from inside(from their own family) as well. Some of the events have been recorded in the history of partition were daughters were being killed by their fathers.

Some of the works which played a key role in the foundation of partition literature in India are *Toba Tek Singh*(1955), *Train to Pakistan*(1956), *Midnight's Children*(1981), *Tamas*(1974), *Ice Candy Man* and so on. The writers of these works have successfully portrayed the massacre and bloodshed of the people during Partition. Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan*(1956) has depicted how the once

secular village called Mano Majra, where Muslims and Sikhs were living in harmony has turned bloodthirsty because of the chaotic event like Partition. Not only novelists but poets as well lamented on the partition like Faiz Ahmad Faiz in *Subh-e-Azadi* (Freedom's Dawn, 1947) bewailing the violence and oppression of partition states "this is not that longed for break of day, not that clear dawn in quest of which our comrades set out." Partition cannot be reduced to mere historical event but it inspires our writers to outpour their thoughts on it. They have not only depicted the tragic tale of partition, the atrocities and oppression but the impact of partition on women belonging to different community. Bapsi Sidwa's *Ice Candy Man* and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of the Day* are pertinent examples which delineated the brutality that was unleashed on women during the partition. Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani novelist has gained a world wide acclamation through her works especially *Cracking India* (also published as *Ice Candy Man*) which brought her international acclaim and she emerged as one of the promising writer of Indian Literature in English. *Ice Candy Man* is a politically stimulated novel as Bapsi Sidwa herself conceded it in one of her conversation:

"The main motivation grew out of my reading of a good deal of literature on the Partition of India and Pakistan... what has been written has been written by the British and Indians. Naturally, they reflect their bias. And they have, I felt after I'd researched the book, been unfair to the Pakistanis. As a writer, as a human being, one just does not tolerate injustice. I felt whatever little I would do to correct an injustice I would like to do. I don't think I have just let facts speak for themselves, and through my research I found out what the facts were".(36)

Anita Desai, an Indian novelist and Emerita John E. Burchard Professor of Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She has been a prolific writer who not only won Sahitya Academy Award but was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize for her accomplished novel, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). In *Clear Light of the Day*, she has remarkably illustrated the lives of women and how they for their own identity in the patriarchal society. She states even in her interview with Sunil Sethi:

"My novel is about time as a destroyer, as a Preserver and about what the bondage of time does to the people"(India Today Dec 1-5, 1980:142).

Bapsi Sidhwa, in her novel, has provided an insight of the oppression, atrocities, exploitation of women with such an artistry that tragedy comes alive. She has illustrated the women's scrape and exploitation in a patriarchal world. The paradigm of women as victim has been used as a device in the depiction of violence. She has presented her women characters as survivors in the chaotic situations of partition in 1947. Women were brutally assaulted not only physically but mentally as well. Sidhwa has attempted to portray the psyche of the women who suffers the agony of partition. Female characters have taken the centre stage in the novel while the male protagonists remain passive or indulged in violence. The girl-child narrator, Lenny in the novel has been given a prominent position. Lenny

witnessed varied forms of victimization on women during partition in India. The fate of Ayah , an eighteen year old lady working in parsi family as a care taker of Lenny, four years old polio child Lenny has worked as an eye through which we witness these divisions and riots during the partition, how Ayah used to take Lenny out to the park where they used to sit under the shadow of Queen Victoria's statue. Ayah has been portrayed as strongest women among all women characters and Sidhwa has provided the insight to Lenny through which the readers understand the turmoil of the chaotic time. Sidhwa has prominently depicted how women were being deprived of their rights and freedom which eventually led to the identity crisis of women. Ice Candy Man who after violating the chastity of Ayah repents and asked her for marriage, even her name was changed to Mumtaz , but she rejects the new identity that her marriage offer's her.

The unity of religion which could be seen before the partition turns out to be different during partition as Lenny herself comments:

“One day everybody is themselves- and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah – she is also a token- A Hindu”.(98)

Through this novel, Sidhwa has given us an insight how limitations are put on women's identity in a male dominated society and who other than Lenny's mother could better qualify it. Lenny's mother has been a significant example how she adapts the traditional view of being faithful and submissive wife. Females are forced to give birth to baby boys as if they are being informed and asked for a choice if u like to give birth to baby girl or boy. Males take the baby boys very proudly and what his future would be is always determined by their dominant fathers and mothers are always left behind.

Sidhwa has approached this novel adversely as she has not only showed heinousness that was unleashed on women but concurrently she has portrayed how they turned out to be victorious of their conditions through her significant female characters like Ayah ,who even in that patriarchal milieu has managed to control the action and emotions of her male admirers. She was very confident, kept her calm in the midst of her admirers as well. She suffers during the riots when she was abducted by the friends of Ice Candy Man because of Lenny's "truth infected tongue". She came into Ice candy man's sweet talks and showed her Ayah's hiding place which she regrets later .Her sense of guilt is so prominent in these lines ,she says "I have betrayed Ayah. Even Imam Din's desperate lie fails us save her, I am the money-man performing money, the trained circus elephant, the snake-man's charmed cobra, an animal with conditioned reflexes that cannot lie."(169).

Lenny's truthfulness has brought doom to Ayah. She is forced to believe that old Ayah is dead. Ayah's condition had reduced to unprotected girls whom people look at as sex object and want her for their sexual gratification as it depicted in the text:

“Up and down, they look at her. 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 their presence 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.”(3)

Narratives have played a significant role in recording the gruesome events of partition. The physical, psychological, mental torture that women folk of diverse communities had undergone during the riotous event of partition which can not be recorded but narrated. Women of privileged class were not escaped of this patriarchy. The instance of Mrs.sethi, Lenny’s mother who assisted women who were victimised during the partition, she helps to locate kidnapped women and provide them shelter, but in the four walls of her bedroom she was also a victim of violence by her husband. Sidhwa has beautifully bestowed Lenny’s understanding of the parents distorted relation in words,

“And closer, and as upsetting, the caged voices of our parents fighting in their bedroom... I know they quarrel mostly about money. But there are other things they fight about that are not clear to me. Sometimes I hear Mother say, “No, jana; I won’t let you go! I won’t let you go to her!”(224)

Sidhwa has successfully shown in the novel how Ayah despite her suffering emerges victorious as she accomplished to set herself free from the shackles of patriarchal dominant ideology which was even naturalised among people especially tradition women. Her chastity and her name was snatched from her ,those two important assets which plays a key role in a woman’s existence , her name from Shanta was changed to Mumtaz , firstly she was raped and then was forced to be bride of the same person, Ice candy man so that she was not questioned by anyone and the one who should have been stoned to death was doing as if a kind of favour to Ayah by marrying her. But she refused to marry the person who has been responsible for the turmoil that occurred in her life, and her adventures has been central to Lenny’s perceptions, she states, “They have shamed her, Not those men in the carts- they were strangers... but I am certain of her humiliation”(102)

Another important women character that has been discussed in the novel is Lenny’s Godmother, Rodabai, who is known for her ready wits and understanding of things. When she consoles Ayah after the violence that happened on her , her insight can be comprehended better in these lines:

“That was fated, daughter. It can’t be undone but it can be forgiven. Life goes on and the business of living buries the debris of our pasts. Hurt happiness... all fade impartially...to make way for fresh joy and new sorrow.That’s the way of life.”(105)

Godmother was always ready for the help .When Ayah did not want to marry Ice-candy Man, she supports her in her decision and while scolding Ice- Candy Man for what he did to Ayah and ruined her life , she confronts him saying “Is that why you had her lifted off – let hundreds of eyes probe her – so that you could marry her? You should have your own mother carried off if it suited you! You are a shameless badmash! Nimakharam! Faithless!... “oh? what kind of man? A royal pimp? What kind of man would allow his wife to dance like a performing monkey before other men? You ‘re not a man, you’re a low-born, two-bit evil little mouse!”(248). Though Godmother has seen as a very strong lady but sensitive at a same time.

No doubt Sidhwa’s *Ice- Candy Man* has a title of male but its very important to understand the insight of her how beautifully and successfully she has celebrated victimatisation of women during Partition as one of the prominent themes of the novel despite the novel carrying a male title . Ice –Candy Man is a representative of the male dominance who after taking an advantage of woman turns her into unvirtuous one, as it has been put in the text : “The much loved Ayah now becomes what Lenny’s boy cousins calls the opposite of virgin Mary a Whore.”(88)

Women are subjugated everywhere in the world, they have remained confined to the four walls of their home and Anita Desai has endeavoured to show her female character’s psyche in her novel *Clear Light of the Day* has discussed the same issue-oppression on women during the riots of partition .She, while answering to a query says, 9of the ocean...” (Replies to the Questionnaire,1). She “ probes deep into the inner recesses of the psyche of the character and delves 10 deeper in a character or a scene rather than going round about it” . (Desai Interviewed, p.68). Though the novel mainly focuses on the description of the state of mind of the lead female protagonists ,but the setting or the background of the novel traces the riots of partition which portrays the impact of partition on the psyche of people especially women. The title of the novel is basically a phrase and has been taken from the last portion of the book. The novelist herself comments on the novel , ““about time as a destroyer, as a preserver, and about what the bondage of time does to people”.

Though the work has been written during partition and Anita Desai has lamented the partition because of the havoc and the bloodshed which was caused by it. The disturbance that took place during the partition can be compared to the internal conflict of the female characters of the novel. The novel is comprised of four parts , the second part of the novel described the chaos, riots, horror , bloodshed which took place during the partition, though the novelist has not directly involed her characters in the partition or the women characters do not bear a direct comparison with the partition. The Das family separated their ways not out of the violence of partition but as an outcome of their own choices. Their partition was self-imposed.

In this novel, Desai has shown how life moves backward and forward in the time and has shown the conflict that took place in the mind of the protagonist, Bim who has sacrificed her life for the sake of her family, who put her family's happiness first than her own life and she can be seen as a representative of the the women in everyday life as they also have been submissive and learnt to compromise in every field of life. Bim has decided to take care of her brother, Baba who is mentally

retarded. She decided not to marry, "I shall earn my own living, and look after Mira massi and Baba and be independent". Desai, in this novel has shown the transformation of women from innocence to experience. Though this is a novel, but we can see how beautifully she has used poetic devices like imagery in order to portray the emotions of her female characters like she has used buds, insects, animals, flowers, etc in order to show the emotions of her female characters.

Desai has tried to show how the close bonds can become your strength and weakness at the same time and how badly these close ties can break your heart. It is

the story of a woman who is oscillate between the present and the past, between fascination and reality. It does not only portrays the sacrifices of women, their emotional state but it also potrays their ability to forgive and forget, their ability to move on leaving behind the bitterness of the past memories and this statement can be justified from the title of the novel itself, *The Clear Light of Day*, where the protagonist, Bimla has learnt to forgive, to let go the past and starts afresh.

"If there were hurts, these gashes and wounds in her side that bled, then it was only because her love was imperfect and did not encompass them thoroughly enough and because it had flaws and inadequacies and did not extend to all equally" (p. 165).

Anita Desai has portrayed the life of women in India through the representation of her female characters; Bim, Tara Mira-Masi and Bim's mother, They were being marginalised, suppressed, oppressed in the male dominant society and the novelist has successfully described that through out the novel, The struggle of women in Indian society being a mother, sister, wife, etc has been shown in the novel. Bim, elder daughter of Das family in the first section of the novel has been shown as kind, sympathetic and self-sacrificing, who sacrificed her life for her family, how kind she has been to her elder brother, Raja during his illness or how she looks after her another brother, Baba. In this first phase of the novel Bim imitate the traditional mode of women in India, where women are emotional to an extent that they can kill themselves for the welfare of others. But, this trend got changed in the next phase of the novel, where Bim has become mature and has an optimistic point of view towards life. She now desired to be financially independent;

“... I shall earn my own living. and look after Mira massi and Baba and be independent”

Bimla did not want to be dependent and was ready to shun the shackles of patriarchy of any form;

“for all father cared I could have grown up illiterate- and cooked for my living or swept. So I had to teach myself history and teach myself to teach”.

Conclusion

In this work, I conclude that Indian women should take stand for their selves and should quest for their Identity. Women also have desire to achieve something in their life and they need to liberate themselves from the household duty in order to provide a real shape to their imaginations. Writers like Bapsi Sidhwa have attempted to depict the impact of partition on the life of people especially women, how violence and chaos of the partition has played a major role in shattering their lives. The subordination of females by male members of Indian society has become so pervasive that even after so many years of Partition women have internalised the domination of male and justify it. Both the writers, Bapsi Sidhwa and Anita Desai have attempted to highlight the changes taken place in the patriarchal pre and post independent India that has been witnessed through out the world with the movement of Feminism ,which vouches for the equality of women in the male dominating world and indeed they have been successful in interpreting the issue through their lead protagonists. Both the writers have centred their above mentioned works on female characters which itself describes how they attempt to bring the tide of feminism in India as well through their writing and change the male dictated society into a society where not only men take lead but also women are integral part for its prosperity and development of a nation

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