

IMPACTS OF COMMUNAL INSURGENCE DURING THE PARTITION STRUGGLE: A
STUDY OF BAPSI SIDHWA'S ICE-CANDY-MAN

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Abstract

This paper entitled “Impacts of Communal Insurgence during the Partition Struggle: A study of Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man*” analyses the impacts of communal insurgence during the Partition struggle. Communal Insurgence is a social problem caused mainly by the social inadequacies and social tensions. It occurs as a result of communal politics propagated by some political parties. In *Ice-Candy-Man* Sidhwa presents the communal insurgence which prevailed during the Partition struggle. She reveals the evil impacts of the communal struggle. She presents how the communal unrest keeps the people in fear, the inhuman activities of men, the loss of human lives and values and the separation of friends, families, relatives and neighbours. By highlighting the evil impacts of communal insurgence, Sidhwa creates a kind of awareness in the readers’ minds to promote brotherhood and communal harmony in the society. Sidhwa urges to humanize the world by projecting the evil impacts of communal insurgence in the novel.

Key Words: Insurgence, Partition, Disharmony, Impact, Riot

Partition the word itself is so inadequate. It casts a dark shadow in the minds of the Indians as well as the Pakistanis. In an article entitled “Search for Human values: A study in the Partition Novels” Lalji Mishra defines partition as “One of the bloodiest upheavals in the history of human race” (190). Historians, Political analysts and Social scientists present only the chronological accounts of when, why, what and how partition occurred. But literature tries to present the entire happenings differently. Creative writers in literature write about the history of untold sufferings and miseries which happened before and after partition. A large number of creative writers in English, Hindi, Punjabi and Bengali have written about partition. Indian writers like Kushwant Singh, Chaman Nagal, Manokar Malgongar, Amitav Ghosh, Shiv. K. Kumar, Attia Hussain, Salman Rusdie and many such writers have focussed on partition from different perspectives in their works.

Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man* is set in pre-partition Lahore. The story of the novel revolves around the people from diverse religious backgrounds- Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Parsis. People from all these religions live in perfect harmony till the announcement of partition. But the situation turns bleak after the announcement of partition in the country. Sidhwa Presents the Communal violence and bloodshed on both sides of the border. In the beginning of the novel itself Sidhwa prepares the readers for the gruesome and gory patterns of communal insurgence that became blatantly obvious during partition. Sidhwa describes this through the child narrator, Lenny’s nightmares. The intimations of death and destruction lurk in the symbolic significance of Lenny’s nightmares at the break of dawn.

In one of the nightmares she faces an immaculate nazi soldier “coming to get me on his bicycle”(22). In another nightmare she recalls from her childhood of the “men in uniforms quietly slice off a child’s arm here, a leg there” (22). She feels as if the child in the nightmare is herself. Lenny pictures her Godmother as stroking her head as to dismember her. She says “I feel no pain, only an abysmal sense of loss – and a chilling horror that no one is concerned by what’s happening” (22). This nightmare symbolises the division of India which is as cruel as the dismemberment of a child. Lenny’s lack of pain suggests her community’s non- involvement in the struggle. In another one nightmare she faces a zoo lion breaking loose and mercilessly mauling her. Sidhwa describes it as:

The hungry lion, cutting across Lawrence Road to Bird wood Road, prowls from the rear of the house to the bedroom door, and in one bare-fringed leap crashes through to sink his fangs into my stomach. . . whether he roars at night or not, I awake every morning to the lion's roar. He sets about it at the crack of dawn, blighting my dreams. (23-24) The hungry lion symbolizes the flood of Indian independence released to cause havoc to the Hindus, the Muslims and the sikhs on both sides of the border. Sidhwa also portrays the fear of every individual regarding the communal frenzy that followed partition. Because of the fear within them they give importance to their own lives and their families.

Sidhwa portrays man's fear regarding the communal frenzy through a sikh priest, whom Lenny meets during her visit to Immam Din, the cook's village at Pirpindo. The people in the village are of the opinion that the communal trouble is confined to the cities alone, it would not affect the people in the villages. But Imman Din warns them that "ugly trouble . . . it is spreading. Sikh-muslim trouble also. . ." (56). For his warning the villagers try to protest. The sikh priest stops them and tries to ally his fear as "Brother, . . . our villages come from the same racial stock. Muslim or Sikh, we are basically jats. We are brothers. How can we fight each other? (56). In another occasion Sharbat Khan, one of the admirers of Ayah creates fear in Ayah by describing the trouble as "These are bad times- Allah knows what is in store. There is big trouble in Calcutta and Delhi: hindu-Muslim trouble" (75). Ayah is alarmed to hear this. Partition fear is revealed by Sidhwa even through her child protagonist Lenny. She is a keen observer of people. She notices people talk about the division of the country. On hearing those talks she fears "can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it futher up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother's house then? (92). Sidhwa highlights the fear in every individual regarding the communal trouble.

In an article entitled "Unmaking History: A comparative study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice- Candy- Man*" Lata Mishra points out that "Violence divides and destroys communities. It bathes in blood the historical memories of affected population who are displaced and become homeless" (73). Sidhwa presents violence as a medium that divides and destroys communities during partition. In *Ice- Candy- Man* also Sidhwa presents violence as the immediate impact of partition. She describes the violent nature of man as "the skyline of the old walled city ablaze and the people splattering each other with blood!" (134). She portrays how each religion show their power over the other. To describe this she presents a political meeting in which Master Tara Singh, an Akali leader declares that the sikhs would not allow the creation of Pakistan. He says that "we will see how the Muslim swine get Pakistan! We will show them who will leave Lahore!" (134). And the sikhs milling about them shout, "Pakistan muradabad! Death to Pakistan"(134). From the other side the muslims shout, "so? We'll play Holi- with- their- blood! H-o-o-o-l-i with their b-l-o-o-d"(134). They set fire to the houses and shops at Shalmi. The manic wave of violence sets Ayah tremble and she holds Lenny tight. Ayah and Lenny witness a group of men tying the legs of a man to jeeps and pulling in two opposite directions and spray petrol on the burning buildings. The city burns and the horrifying scenes of violence and communal frenzy affects Lenny also, she feels as if "The whole world is burning. The air on my face is so hot I think my flesh and clothes will catch fire. I start screaming: hysterically sobbing"(137).

Violence breeds violence, and Lenny, the Parsi girl is also a victim. Her rage is directed at her collection of dolls. In a frenzy she acts "I pick out a big bloated celluloid doll. I turn it upside down and pull its legs apart. The elastic that holds them together stretches easily. I let one leg go and it snaps back, attaching itself to the brittle torso"(138). The destructive urge overcomes Lenny and she is not satisfied till assisted by her brother Adi, she wrenches out the legs of the doll and examines the spilled insides. This violent act of Lenny is an apt allegory on the mindless violence of partition. After her violent act Lenny breaks down and cries at her pointless brutality. Through Lenny's act Sidhwa presents that unless there is re-thinking, brutality and insensitivity become a way of life.

During the partition struggle many innocent muslims, sikhs and hindus loss their life for no apparent reason. Sidhwa portrays it by projecting the inhuman nature of man during the struggle. She also highlights the loss of human life during the struggle. She portrays this through Masseur. Masseur is a good natured muslim. He loves Ayah and Ayah too prefers Masseur among all her

admirers. When Ayah is abducted he defends Ayah and on the contrary Ice Candy Man betrays her. Masseur is not a religious fanatic but he is found dead on Warris Road Path. Lenny sees the dead corpse of Masseur and describes it as “The swollen gunny- sack lies directly in our path. Hari pushes it with his foot. The sack slowly topples over and Massuer splits out- half on the dusty side walk, half on the gritty tarmac- dispelling the stiletto reek of violence with the smell of fresh roses” (174).

Kushwant Singh in his novel *Train to Pakistan* also presents a village named Mano Majra which is an obscure, placid, sleepy and tiny frontier village stands out as an oasis of communal harmony. The villagers reciprocate their mutual respect and love for the Muslims and the Sikhs equally. They do not know if “the country is divided into Hindustan and Pakistan” (20). Like Kushwant Singh Sidhwa also presents a village named Pir Pindo . The people of this village are also unaware of the trouble. Pir Pindo villagers once believed that “the communal trouble is confined to the cities alone, it won’t affect the people in the villages” (56). But suddenly a sikh mob attack the village “They are like swarms of locusts, moving in marauding bands of thirty and fourty thousand” (197). In the riot Ranna witnesses the death of many of his relatives “Ranna saw his uncles beheaded. His older brothers, his cousins. . . Ranna fell just inside the door on a tangled pile of unrecognisable bodies. Someone fell on him, drenching him in blood” (201). Sidhwa presents the heavy human loss during partition violence through the loss of the lives of many people in Ranna’s village.

Partition violence creates not only human loss it also makes the people suspicious to the core. Neighbours suspect neighbours, friends suspect friends and relatives suspect relatives. Sidhwa presents suspicion as a bad impact of Communal Insurgence which followed partition. Sidhwa portrays that the children are suspicious of their mothers. Lenny’s mother accompanied by Electric aunt helps the victims of violence by taking them in their morris car and sends them to safer places. Fearing the trouble they do this secretly. This act of their mothers creates suspicion in the children’s mind. Lenny, her brother Adi and her cousin think that “Our mothers are setting fire to Lahore! (173). They think so because their mother’s carry petrol in the car’s dicky. The violent partition atmosphere corrupts even the innocent mind of the children and it makes them suspicious and uncertain.

Communal insurgence makes men violent, suspicious and uncertain. And at the same time, it sweeps away their morality and human values. Sidhwa presents that there is a quest for human values and morality during the partition communal trouble. Sidhwa portrays the loss of human values during the partition struggle in *Ice-Candy-Man*. She reveals that after the communal trouble, a group of people descend Lahore to loot the houses which are emptied by the Muslims, the Hindus and the Sikhs. They salvage every bit of scrap from the gutted shops and loot the palatial bungalows of affluent Hindus and Sikhs. Sidhwa describes it as:

Succeeding waves of maulers, riding in rickety carts, have systematically stripped the houses of doors, windows, bathroom fittings, ceiling fans and rafters. Casual passer-by, urchins and dogs now stray into the houses to amidst spiders’ webs and deep layers of dust, hoping to pick up old newspapers and cardboard boxes, or anyother leavings that have escaped the eye and desire of the preceding wave of goondas. (176)

Sidhwa opines that during the communal riot people do not care for their loss of good human values and they give importance to materialistic benefits. All the losses in the world can be regained but if men losses his values, it cannot be regained. So the loss of human values is considered as one of the worst impact of communal insurgence. In an article entitled “En(gendering) Nationalism: Sabiha Sumar’s *Khamosh Pani* and Deepa Mehta’s *Earth 1947*” Eliza Joseph states that:

During partition women’s bodies were treated as nation, as territory to be claimed, conquered and marked by men of other community. Their bodies were the turf on which nations and communities could legitimize their own identity and create their own society. They were sexually assaulted, raided and raped by men of the enemy group, as if to validate not only their sense of manhood but also far too pertinently, their sense of nationhood. Women are therefore not allowed even to forget the shame of their sexual assault and it stayed with them as a splinter that would hurt incessantly for the rest of their lives.(93)

During the time of communal insurgence women are the worst sufferers. Sidhwa describes how men treat women's body as a nation or territory to be claimed, conquered and marked by the men belong to other community. Sidhwa portrays the suffering of women through Shanta, Lenny's Ayah. During the trouble Ayah is abducted and she is deposited in a brothel house named 'Kotha' by one of her admirers and lover, Ice Candy Man. She is the symbol of male exploitation of female sexuality. Sidhwa describes Ayah's struggle during the abduction as "They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet that that wanted to move backwards- are forced forward instead. Her lips are drawn away from her mouth like the dead child's screamless mouth...Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in tuiaphant grimaces"(183). Ice Candy Man then forces Ayah to become his bride and God Mother puts it as "He has christened our Ayah Mumtaz"(260). Ice Candy Man marries Ayah and changes her name with her consent. Due to his violent act Ayah becomes a victim of partition. The torture women are subjected to during partition is clearly revealed by Sidhwa when Dost Mohammad narrates the suffering of Muslim women during communal struggle. He says his fellow villagers about the inhuman activities of the Sikhs as "They are killing all Musilms. Setting fires, looting, parading the Muslim women naked through the streets- raping and mutilating them in the center of villages and in mosques" (197).

Sidhwa also gives a glimpse of the abandoned women during the riots. Women during the communal struggle are tortured to the core and they are deposited in the refugees camp. They are not accepted even by their parents. Hamida, she is also one of the abandoned women. They are termed as "fallen women" (213). Lenny with the curiosity of the child asks her God Mother "What are fallen women" (214). God Mother replies that "some folk feel that way- they can't stand their women being touched by other men" (215). They send them to the refugee's camp. There also they suffer a lot. Lenny and her inmates of her house often hear the sound of these fallen women from the refugees' camp next to their house. Lenny puts their suffering as "At night we hear them wailing, their cries verging on the inhuman" (212). Sidhwa by presenting the fate of these women reveals the fact that these fallen women can only wail by thinking about their fate. Hamida puts it as "What can a sorrowing woman do but wail?" (213). During the communal trouble women are claimed like their own territories and conquered by men. They are not accepted by their family members and they suffer till their death.

Sidhwa presents separation as another horrifying effect of communal insurgence. Communal insurgence separates friends, families, lovers and neighbors. Novy Kapadia in his article entitled "Partition and the Parsi Novel" states that "Partition relentlessly divided friends, families, lovers and neighbours"(94). Sidhwa portrays how it separates lovers and friends. Communal disharmony separates Ayah and her lover Ice Candy Man. It makes Ice Candy Man a religious fanatic and he abducts and marries Ayah without her consent. This makes Ayah to hate him. Eventhough he marries her forcefully she is not ready to accept him as his bridegroom. She leaves him in Lahore and goes to her relatives in Amritsar. When she departs Ice Candy Man murmurs that "'My passion has brought me to your street- where can I now find the strength to take me back?'" (277). Ayah pretends as if "he is invisible. . .Ayah behaves as if he is inaudible too" (177). Ian Talbot in his article entitled "Literature and the Human Drama of the 1947 Partition" points out that "violence from outside intruded itself into harmonious family and community relationships destroying that which is claimed to uphold"(46). Thus, communal insurgence declines the harmonious relationship between Ayah and Ice Candy Man.

Sidhwa brings out the separation between friends through the Sikh- Muslim trouble in Pir Pindo. The villagers once believed that the city madness would not spread into the countryside and they pledged that "every man in this village will guard his sikh brothers with no regard for his own life!" (57). But the poor innocent folk are proved wrong as the communal frenzy soon spreads on both sides of the border with disastrous consequences. The Muslims and Sikhs fight each other and many lose their lives in Pir Pindo. Once they lived as brothers but now they fight like enemies. The communal struggle has seperated them.

In *Ice Candy Man* Bapsi Sidhwa highlights the evil effects of communal insurgence. She presents how communal insurgence keeps the people in fear, the inhuman activities of men during

the communal struggle, the suffering of men and women, the loss of human lives and values and the separation of friends, families, relatives and neighbours. By presenting these evil impacts of communal insurgence Sidhwa condemns the dehumanizing impacts that religious fanaticism creates in the minds of men in promoting violence and separation. She highlights the fact that how religious intolerance in each individual leads to the religious intolerance of the whole society. She wants to humanize the world by projecting the bad impacts of communal insurgence which happened during the partition struggle.

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