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Representation of women during partition with special reference to ice candy man

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Abstract

This study focuses on the issue of violence against women during the Partition of India in 1947 in context of the Bapsi Sedhwa's Novel "Ice Candy Man". In addition to this, the present study explored the gender specific reading of partition genocide facilitates a discussion on various forms of violence that targeted women and the symbolic meanings behind these acts. The investigator explored that the central protagonist of the novel namely 'Ayah' underscores that the abduction and rape of woman's sexuality was employed as a tool to articulate religious/national enmity. Besides, the investigator explored that the treatment of abducted/raped women by the patriarchal state to expose the social reality post partition where victimised women, due to their altered position as contaminated sexual beings, were disliked by society. Further investigator revealed that during partition the predominance of gendered violence was due to the fact that attacks on women were symbolic of attacking the honour and purity of the religion/country to which the women belonged.

Keywords: partition, representation of women, ice candy man (1988)

1. Introduction

Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man (1988) ^[22], subsequently published in the United States as Cracking India (1991), is the first Pakistani Anglophone novel that not only narrates the story Partition is always a metaphor for irreparable loss of the partition of India, but also testifies to the multiple expressions of gendered violence that formed the crux of the ethnic genocide of partition. Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man is an example to give us insight into the public frenzy, communal hatred, exploitation of women, extreme disintegration and large scale sectarian violence. Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man describes the series of events with such artistry that the tragedy comes alive. What distinguishes Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man is the passive sensitivity through which the tragic event is depicted. Indeed novel deals with the various brutal happenings, however, among all section of humanity, women suffers the most. Keeping in view, the Bapsi Sedhwa has realistically illustrated the women's plight and exploitation in the patriarchal society. Keeping the above evidence under consideration the investigator, intends to explore the representation of women during in context of Bapsi Sedhwa's novel, "Ice Candy Man". Sidhwa justified that the experience of partition was brutal for people of all communities like Train to Pakistan. In Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan a similar train comes from Pakistan. It too carried dead bodies only. Everyone in it was also dead butchered. But they were all Hindus and Sikhs. In pursuance to same, Graeber, A. G. (1991) ^[25] is inclined towards the Muslim killings and on the other hand Khushwant Singh's Novel represents a train which carry the dead bodies of Hindus.

Vaguely familiar, pointed out and identified the Mussulmans by name"Graeber, A. G. (1991, Pp-201) ^[24]

2. Objectives of the study

The novel Ice Candy Man largely deals with the melancholic saga that took place during partition. However during the diasporic movement of the participation, children and women were most victimised section of subcontinent. Keeping in view, the present study intended to explore the gendered violence, rape, prostitution of women during portion. However, in the present study these variables will be explored in context of Bapsi Sedhwa novel "Ice Candy Man"

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3. Methodology

The presents study as intended to explore the impact of partition on the female bodies in context of “*Ice candy Man*”. Keeping in view, the study was carried in marginalised nature. Therefore, present study is qualitative. While exploring the objectives above and addressing the questions being posed, secondary sources are consulted to pry the study. A ‘Close Reading Technique’ (of textual analysis) is applied to probe and examine the above feature of feminism in the novel. Accordingly, the present study was carried in context of feministic approach.

4. Discussion analysis

The partition of India resulted in ten million refugees and a minimum of one million died from the rioting, fighting and migrating. It was all done to give India and Pakistan a separate identity so that the Hindus and the Muslims can live in harmony among their own crowd. No matter, how just was the idea to divide a secular India, into an India for Hindus and a Pakistan for Muslims, the execution was poorly implemented. The once brotherhood between the communities was torn apart on the basis of religion. The Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who lived together before became thirsty of other peoples blood. It was fratricide at such a large scale that nobody was spared: men, women and children. In the name of partition there occurred jealousy, loss, cupidity, cunning and death by butchery, by rape and by deracination. In the entire body of writings of Bapsi Sidhwa a commitment is reflected towards the exploration of the trauma of Partition. She unfolds in the backdrop of her writings the hindered communication and the domains related to Partition catastrophe confirm the violent frenzy that lies unnoticed beneath the apparent jubilation of Independence. There is a linguistic heterogeneity in the chaotic ambience of the society. The essential trauma relates to the culture and identity. The writings of Sidhwa took a post-colonial turn when the writer critiqued alienation and separation in the partition of the nations and partition of the individuals. Partition of a nation is a political event but partition of individuals is a psychological hindrance that is impossible to overcome. In the Ice- Candy –Man the expression of the traumatic communication caused by Partition is very much authentic. It makes alive the grotesque and bizarre experience of the refugees, mass murders and exploitation on both individual and collective levels.

Sketched in Hindu and Muslim blood, Sidhwa’s Novel, ‘*Ice Candy Man*’ narrates how women are reduced to the status of sexual objects and relates the peculiar disadvantages, social and evil, to which they are subjects. Ice-Candy-Man is a melancholic saga of gendered violence, female suppression, rape, prostitution and marginalization of women of both communities. Women suffered in the hands of a handful of fanatics almost equally in Pakistan as well as in India. Pain, suffering and trauma were almost similar on both the sides of the border. The description of riots at Pir Pindo, the Muslim village that fell on the Indian side of the border is equally terrifying:

*“Rana saw his uncle beheaded. His older brothers, his cousins. The Sikhs were among them like hairy vengeful demons, wielding bloodied swords, dragging them out, as a handful of Hindus darting about the fringes, their faces
(.....Sidhwa, Ice Candy Man Pp-99)*

The novel ‘Ice Candy Man’ projects realistically women’s plight and exploitation within the context of patriarchal society. It exposes how men establish their masculine power and hence fulfil their desires by brutally assaulting women. While as on the other hand, it poignantly depicts how women endure the pain and humiliation enacted upon them. In this novel, Sidhwa represents a series of female characters who survived in a chaotic time of 1947 in India which can be registered as a period of worst religious riots in the history of human kind. Emotional turmoil, individual weakness, and barbarities of communal riots inflicted on women have been faithfully projected by Sidhwa. The whole story has been narrated by Lenny who relates the horrors of violence and her personal observation and reactions. She not only observes but analyses man’s degrading attention towards woman. When the partition riot erupts, the Ice-candy-man seizes his chance to debase the Ayah and leads a Muslim mob to Lenny’s house. The Parsi family and its Muslim servants hide the Ayah, but Lenny unwittingly betrays her. Ayah is dragged away by the mob and raped. After her degradation, the Ice-candy-man sets her up in a house in the prostitute’s quarters in Lahore. Having proved his mastery over her, he now professes to be crazily in love with her and wants to marry her. She, having been betrayed by him and physically abused by the mob, refuses to accept him. The women from Lenny’s family eventually rescue her and she becomes a candidate for rehabilitation. Lenny is thus a witness to the varied women victimization in the time of partition of India. Sidhwa depicts the events overtaking the partition in their naked cruelty and ruthlessness. Thus, from the above discussion it is evident that women were used as sexual object and the revenge to opposite community was taken with the help of Rape Subash Chandra (1980)^[26] writes thus:

“In a “patriarchal social set up,” ‘masculinity’ is associated with superiority whereas ‘femininity’ is linked with inferiority, and while masculinity implies strength, action, self-assertion, and domination, femininity implies weakness, passivity, docility, obedience and self-negation”.
..... (Subash: Chandra: Pp-88)

The protagonist Lenny, a Parsi in Ice-Candy-Man is an eight year old polio stricken girl child who views the partition through her innocent eyes. She feels alienated due to her physical deformity but her Ayah, who is a mother figure to her sees to it that she is well looked after. Ayah’s sexuality is magnetic and her lovers are attracted to her like a moth to a flame. Bapsi Sedhwa tried to highlight that during the decades of partition, bringing forth various women-centric partition narratives into the historical retelling of partition has challenged this aspect. Bapsi Sedhwa designate that the position of women during partition was equal to rape, abdication, prostitution. The statements of the Sedhwa can be well justified. For instance, Butalia, U. (1998).^[27] In her essay “Community, State and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India” argued that women aspirations were seen as:

“I am a woman / I want to raise my voice / because communalism affects me / In every communal riot / my sisters are raped, my children are killed . . . / my world is destroyed/ and then / I am left to pick up the pieces . . . / It matters little if I am a Muslim, Hindu or Sikh / and yet I

cannot help my sisters. Violence is almost always instigated by men, but its greatest impact is felt by women. In violent conflict, it is women who are raped, women who are widowed . . . in the name of national integrity and unity . . . We women will have no part of this madness, and we will suffer it no more . . . Those who see their manhood in taking up arms, can be the protectors of no one and nothing” Butalia, U. (1998)^[2].

Sidhwa hold the strong resilience women during partition. The women characters of the novel are approachable and resilient of their uniqueness and cannot be easily dominated. The feministic resistance has been narrated through the character of Lenny, her Ayah, Santa her mother. Additionally, Godmother confirms their independent selfhood and pliability of carrying new roles and responsibilities. In this regard, Mishra, P. V. (2018)^[28] commented-

“Ice-Candy-Man shows an important action of a “gynocentric view” of reality in which the female mind and experiences are presented with a massive style”.
(.Mishra, P. V. 2018)^[16]

The investigator justified that women are just plaything in the hands of the males of the society. Bapsi Sidhwa represented that miseries, pain and trauma faced by women of the society in different cultures, subsequently, for Sidhwa Partition is based on women perception as their trauma has remained ignored. In this regard, Navin Patwa (2013)^[29] analysed that;

“Sidhwa treats the theme of partition from women perspective. The women sufferings were left unnoticed by the historians and literary authors. Sidhwa becomes a spokesperson of the women and creates a character Ayah, and presents the calamity befallen on her (abduction, gang rape, conversion, marriage and prostitution)”
(.Navin Patwa 2013)^[19]

The narrative informs the reader that a temporary rehabilitation shelter in the neighbouring house is established for raped/abducted women who were recovered by the state post partition. This halfway house is representative of how “women who survived wartime rape often suffered physical damage and were left isolated”. These women can therefore be called a “*disenfranchised class*”. Lenny observes that the women in the camp next door “*keep to themselves, unobtrusively conducting their lives, lurking like night animals in the twilight interiors of their lairs*” (Sidhwa 1988: Pp-189-190).

5. Conclusion

Thus, to conclude, the investigator can argue that Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988)^[22] exemplifies how women’s bodies, reduced to the status of a mute token, become the primary targets of horrific violent acts during ethnic warfare between two communities of men. They were treated as sexual objects. Besides, Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988)^[22] specifies that raping and prostitution of women was considering political and religious revenge towards the members of opposite community. The predominance of gendered violence during the Indian partition was due to the fact that attacks on women were

symbolic of attacking the honour and purity of the religion/country to which the women belonged. Besides, from the above discussion we can argue that the Novel, “*Ice-Candy-Man/Cracking India*” demonstrates the need to re-examine narratives about women during partition. Ayah’s abduction and bodily violation are results of personal jealousy and vehemence of her rejected lover who, as an opportunist, uses the ethnic clash of partition to justify his vindictive actions as a valiant performance of his Muslim nationalism and manhood. Furthermore, Sidhwa, through Hamida, reveals that despite the states’ paternalistic efforts to recover and rehabilitate abducted and raped women, these violated women became a reminder of the nations’ shame, which led to the social death of the victimised gendered subject. Sidhwa also emphasises the difficulty, or rather, the impossibility of articulating violence against women in its entirety. Sidhwa, through her narrative strategy, underscores that rape narratives can lead to a second violation of the victim. For the surviving victims of sexual violence, articulation is impossible because of the twofold fear of reliving trauma and facing social castigation. In essence, *Ice-Candy-Man* allows for exposing the patriarchal nationalist agenda at the time of partition that used women’s bodies as means of inscribing power relations between two opposing ethnic groups, thereby erasing the gravity of the embodied violence enacted on the female body.

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