
Heroes of Humanity: A Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*

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Abstract

Where co-existence, mutual love, respect, and well-being of all is considered over and above, there flourishes humanism. East is widely known for its distinct culture, thought, and value system in the world. Indian philosophy upholds, promotes and propagates the lessons of peace, non-violence, tolerance, patience, sacrifice, love for ones' own birth place, and patriotism. Indian philosophers distinguish themselves by their spiritual philosophy from material philosophy of the West. Spirituality of the East never taught schemes of exploitation and appropriation. The Indian tradition is the oldest living religious tradition in this world. It believes in the all-inclusive world-view. It sees divine presence in all living and non-living objects. The ethicality of East suddenly lost into dreary desert of fire and blood during division crisis is really the matter of surprise for us.

Keywords: Violence; Partition; women; ethical values.

To every Indian, value of relation and religion counts most but unfortunately, simple probable political design and declaration of division of the country maddened Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh all of sudden to such an extent that they forgot all the ethical and moral values and finally gave horrendous shape to the Partition hours of the country. Division itself is a dangerous process. People of undivided India took idea of division to heart. They thought it the end of all ties and terms. Hindu-Muslim unity, during pre-Partition was one of the most sought and promoted aspect of Indian freedom struggle. But what happened all of sudden to these communities listening the probable division of the subcontinent? Friends turned foe; our turned them. I think, it was not a single day's change. Of course, differences among them were extant long past but were put into sleep mode. Political representatives, literary scholars, and those who did their best to mobilize and bring Hindu and Muslim together against the British tyranny for the short time if not for good, deserve our sincere salutation. Very few people during horrific Partition violence belonging to Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and some other communities struggled hard to save lives of people of opposite communities at the cost of their own lives. Most of such real-life heroes could not become the part of the account of history writing aftermath independence. Such characters are the concern of this article with reference to the novel *Ice-Candy-Man*. The novelist boldly puts up the whole narrative from Parsis' perspective through her persona the child Lenny.

Parsi folks came to India as refugees to safeguard their lives from Persia (current Iran) some thousand years ago. They made first entry into India from Mumbai (then Bombay). Some of them later on moved to Lahore (a city of Pakistan now). However, they didn't shift their cultural and religious identity. They continued practicing their traditional rituals and faiths. In beginning, they started as agriculturalist, artisans and businessmen. By 17th century, they grew themselves into leading business tycoons. They did trade with the East India Company. They contributed a lot to the economic, intellectual, social and political development of India during 18th and 19th centuries. With the entry of the British rule in Indian subcontinent, the heyday of Parsis actually begins in India. The Britishers strategically encouraged them to build-up their 'Tower of Silence' (Dokhma) to dispose dead bodies as per their customs. Perhaps, it was to win their favour and prepare them against natives of India. Parsis' quick involvement and adaptability into culture, custom, and language of natives endeared the British rulers very much. As a result, many Parsis earned prestigious positions in colonial rule. Under the colonial rule, these Parsis enjoyed favours of English rulers. They were considered to be the most anglicized elite class of people. Under the colonial influences, they were drawn to lead life like that of colonials. Technically, they had attached their allegiance with the English rule. They

even had identified themselves with the colonials. They were supposed to be least concerned about the national politics of India. They had carefully presented themselves as neutral but during the revolution of 1857, most of the Parsis supported the British which exposed them. Their loyalty with the British rule was definitely indigestible to Indian freedom fighters.

With the establishment of Indian National Congress in 1885 and frequent nation-wide agitations in the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders supporting Indian cause against the British rule, made the Parsi community apprehensive about their prospect in would-be independent India. They found themselves in tension whether they should continue supporting the British or begin espousing Indian cause or they should leave the sub-continent and settle somewhere in Europe. They were afraid of losing their current status in the independent India.

History says that Parsis since their advent in Indian subcontinent had been peace-loving and had nothing to do with freedom struggle. Their passive neutrality how turned into active neutrality, Sadhwa depicts in the novel *Ice-Candy-Man*. Colonel Bharucha and Lenny's father blame the Britishers for bringing polio virus in India. Mr. Bharuch, the president of Parasi community of Lahore strictly advises his community members to stay away from nationalist politics so that they may not offend the British sentiments. In view of would-be independence declaration, Parsis decided to go by the rules of the land where they settled. They will not meddle in political matters. Whosoever rules over the country, let them. They will continue prospering as long as they do not hurt any of communities- Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or Christian. But this kind of neutral attitudes how changed after the Partition was one of the concerns of the novelist. How they corrected themselves and won the favour of all communities in general, forms in fact another version of Parsi history. They re-sketches their identity by rendering services to humanity aftermath the Partition. Sidhwa being a sensitive woman writer cannot forget or skip women causes in general and the contribution of Parsi-women in particular.

Anita Rau Badami in her *Can You hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006) writes about the victimhood of women during crisis, "A woman damaged in places too private to see" (Anita Rau Badami 399). Panoramic unrest, violence (rape, abduction, arson, and mass killings of innocents in particular), and displacement coincided with the Partition of sub-continent. Men of center (that is high politicians representing respective communities) maneuvered men of

periphery of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh communities to satisfy their so-called pride and ability. In fact, Partition was carried out on the blood and bodies of poor and helpless people especially women. Women especially young ones get immediately at the receiving end of violence because in traditional Indian societies they are thought as tokens of honour. P. Chakraborty writes, "When an event of catastrophic violence, such as partition, comes about, it is women, after all, who find their most personal, most private spaces, relationships, even the most intimate folds of their bodies, as the location of such catastrophe" (Chakraborty 49). Arunima Dey in her essay "Violence against Women during the Partition of India: Interpreting Women and their Bodies in the context of Ethnic Genocide" identifies two ways violence women suffered during Partition. It was truly gendered violence. She writes: Firstly, the violence inflicted on women by men of the opposite religious group that involved kidnapping, rape, and mutilation of the genitalia or public humiliation. The supposed aim of this kind of violence was to abase the men of the rival religion to which the women belonged. A second form of violence against women included the violence inflicted on women by their own family members. This could vary from honour killings to the insistence of male kin that their mothers, daughters, or wives commit suicide in order to safeguard the purity and chastity of the community. Both forms of violence substantiate the claim that women were not treated as humans but rather as markers of communal and national pride... (Dey 104). She in her another essay "Women in the Partition of India: Graphic Narratives" elucidates the similar idea: Rape became a symbol of forceful penetration, destruction and scavenging of one's country, religion and honour, all of which the female body symbolized. Mutilation of breasts and marking of the genitals with religious symbols were perverse methods used by the two communities to indicate that they were branding the other's rightful territory as their own. Scarring of women's reproductive parts posed an ideological threat regarding the continuation of one's religious and ethnic community. Violence against women was not treated as crimes committed towards *women as citizens or human beings*, but the atrocities were seen as acts that were meant to humiliate men and belittle their religious identities (Dey 124). "It is now a common place that in 1947, as Hindu, Muslim and Sikh mobs fought one another in the violence of India's Partition, women become, in the way that is typical of war, the primary symbolic and literal targets of communal violence" (Baldwin 2). S. Brownmiller writes: Man's discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe. From prehistoric times to the present, I believe rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear (Brownmiller 14-15). In cases of sexual offences, women as ever are seen most vulnerable and helpless.

Sexual/gendered nature of violence was to consolidate patriarchal idea of masculinity. In Indian sub-continent, men on average feel responsible for the safety of women. As such women could not claim even their bodies as their own. A woman is thought to be the custodian of family, community, and nation's dignity and respect. In fact, she is not important as an identity instead for myths associated with family, community, and nation which are to be protected.

Bapsi Sidhwa in the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* seems justifying in fact, the popular Pre-partition beliefs in truth, love, peace, and help for all those who need for genuine reasons. In fact, the Parsi community living in around the world is popular for their distinct attitude towards life and line. It is their humanist belief and workmanship that made them one of the loving communities of India. Beliefs and values they approve and practice bear universal signification. To them, all are human beings if they go by the laws of humanism. India in the world communities is known for its secular and non-violent policies. Love to all and respect to all has been very basis of India since immemorial times. During Partition crisis, a few real saviours of mankind from Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and many other minor communities did worth remembrance duties and safeguarded age-old humanist beliefs and value-patterns of India. In Indian subcontinent, people of all communities argue for such value-sets even today except a few.

Bapsi Sidhwa took the harrowing history of Partition as subject material for her most ambitious novel *Ice-Candy-Man*. The Milkweed Editions America rechristened it and gave title *Cracking India* to it in 1995. Deepa Mehta a Canadian of Indian origin turned it into a motion picture with the title '1947 Earth'. It is set in 1946-1948, in Lahore, Pakistan. The novel takes place during the subcontinent's struggle for independence and its eventual partition into India and Pakistan. After Partition, Lahore became part of Pakistan. Sidhwa in the first few chapters clarifies the stand of Parsee community on Partition. She casts almost all her major characters with particular colour and taste. Lenny, a child of eight years at the time of partition, is a polio victim. Her Hindu maid Ayah (later called in the novel Shanta) is at the centre of narrative. She has oomph and great liking for everything eighteen years old. She is a Hindu maid employed in the Sethi family to look after Lenny. She is largely neutral to religious differences. Godmother, Sidhwa particularized by giving her glowing generosity. Lenny's electric-aunt has great passion for navy-blue items. Ice-candy-man is "a raconteur" and "an absorbing gossip" (ICM 19). He changes his business as per the demands of the time.

The Partition-crisis suddenly destroyed the interrelationship of people belonging to different cities and religious communities. In pre-partitioned India, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee, and other communities were living in harmony. Perhaps it was the reason why Lenny thought 'partition' absurd. Imam Din, the Muslim cook of Sethi family one day decided to visit his grandson Dost Mohammad's village Pir Pindo, some forty miles away from Lahore beyond Amritsar to see growing communal unrest. Lenny accompanies him. The talk between Chaudhry of the village and Imam Din reflects on communal goodwill and harmony whereas cities were suffering communal tension. The Chaudhry of Pir Pindo village tells Imam Din that "we are dependent on each other: bound by our toil... To us villagers, what does it matter if a peasant is a Hindu, or a Muslim, or a Sikh?" (ICM 56) Even the Sikh *granthi* says that Sikh and Muslim are from the same racial stock and they are basically Jats. Jagjeet Singh says that we shall protect our Muslim brothers with our lives. The Chaudhry of the village declares that 'every man in the village will guard his Sikh brothers with no regard for his own life' (ICM 57). Such amicable atmosphere of Pir Pindo made Imam Din feel heavy and guilty at heart and conscience. Here at Pir Pindo, there was nothing to be panic. Shanta (Ayah) usually takes Lenny to the park where her admirers; Hindu, Muslim, Sikh come and enjoy gossips. The park scene signifies that in Lahore before Partition, there was no communal tension. Shanta threatens them if they continue talking about Hindu-Muslim business, she will stop coming to the park. During pre-partition days, religious differences were not the matters of concern. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh all were only asking for independence.

The day Lenny became aware of religious differences and impending Partition of India, she thought painfully: "One day everybody is themselves- and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols" (ICM 93). The devils of Partition quickly began haunting everywhere and consequently no villages and no cities keep themselves untouched.

Colonel Bharucha is by profession a doctor and the head of the Parsee community of Lahore. Colonel Bharucha asks his community to stay calm and cool on the matters of Partition and government. He even finds Hindu and Muslim engaged into the struggle for power. He reminds his men of milk-sugar legend. Parsee folks are all-religion loving people. They celebrate festivals of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians. And therefore, Colonel Bharucha advises them to be neutral ethnically:

'If we're stuck with the Hindus they'll swipe our businesses from under our noses and sell our grandfathers in the bargain: if we're stuck with the Muslims they'll convert us by the sword!' (ICM 37)

'As long as we do not interfere we have nothing to fear! As long as we respect the customs of our rulers- as we always have- we'll be all right!' (ICM 39)

Admirers of Ayah stopped meeting her aftermath the partition. Muslims were in pursuit of Hindus. Ayah also wished to go back and join her relatives immediately for security and safety reasons here in Lahore. Sethi family feels responsible to keep Ayah, a Hindu safe and secure. Ethnic cleansing on both sides turned friends to foe. Those who were once admirers of Ayah's beauty look for her defloration. She was all-religion loving lady. She was once loved by people from all creeds and castes. Since people know her very well, it was very difficult for Lenny and her parents to keep Ayah safe and hidden. Lenny has been taught to speak the truth always. This was the reason she could not pierce Ice-candy-man's trickery and disclosed Ayah's hiding. Then what happened can wring any heart. Ayah was forcefully dragged out of her hiding:

The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces. (ICM 183)

Lenny could not bear this inhuman treatment towards a lady. She cursed herself for speaking the truth and for three days kept staring at her tongue and many a time tried to wring it. She even made it bleeding by rubbing prickling toothbrush on it. Hamida a new ayah substituted Lenny's Ayah. But Lenny could not develop the intimacy with her. Later on, she was also ported to Amritsar by anti-Muslims.

Ayah was sold then to a brothel in Hira Mandi. Here she was renamed Mumtaz. Ice-candy-man marries her only to kill her soul. Masseur the favorite man of Ayah also fell prey to rioters and lost his life. His death shattered Ayah's heart utterly. Her eyes were haunted by the memories of Masseur. He has assured her as far as he is here none can even touch a single hair on her head. Lenny along with Godmother Rodabai visited Hira Mandi to kiss her agonies

away. Godmother did all the best for Ayah's safe release and port to Amritsar. She left Pakistan being unmindful whether she was accepted by relatives or unaccepted. Ayah's betrayer Dilnawaz Ice-candy-man exposed Sher Singh to rioting Muslims. Despite Dilnawaz's strong arguments that he loves Ayah more than anything could not win Godmother's faith. He in fact destroyed himself at personal and social levels both. At the end of the novel, Ice-candy-man is seen crossing the Wagha border in search of Ayah. Since Ayah was as pure as ever, Ice-candy-man yet betrayed and deflowered for no reasons. Perhaps her piety of heart and soul got over Ice-candy-man's satanic self and compelled him to ask her forgiveness at the cost of his own life across the border.

Imam Din is another interesting Muslim character employed as cook in the Sethi family. During pre-partition, the people (Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh) of Pir Pindo village were altogether restless about the probable division of Punjab. They were even firm not to quit the land where they took birth and grew up. "And to uproot themselves from the soil of their ancestors had seemed to them akin to tearing themselves, like ancient trees, from the earth" (ICM 198). During rampage, Sethi family was surrounded by Muslim rioters. They were looking for Hindu and Sikh workers. They asked Imam Din for Hari the gardener, Moti the sweeper, and Ayah employed in the Sethi family. To Imam Din life is more valuable than any religious codes. Rioters first asked for Hari. Imam Din told them about Hari that he forsook Hindu religion and took on Islam as such named himself as Himat Ali. On being asked about Moti, Imam told them that he turned Christian and named himself David Masih. Imam Din genially but strongly argued with rioters to make enough gap of time so that Ayah could escape and hide herself:

And then someone asks, 'Where's the Hindu woman? The ayah!'

There is a split-second's silence before Imam Din's reassuring voice calmly says: 'She's gone.'

'She's gone nowhere! Where is she?'

'I told you. She left Lahore.'

'When?'

'Yesterday.'

'He's lying', says the familiar voice again. 'Oye, Imam

Din, why are you lying?'

.....

'Call upon Allah to witness your oath,' someone says.
'Oye! Badmash! Don't take Allah's name! You defile it
with your tongue! Says Imam Din losing his geniality.
'Ha! So you won't take an oath before Allah! You're a
Black-faced liar!
'Mind your tongue, you dog!' shouts Imam Din.
Other voices join in the attack and, suddenly, very
clearly, I hear him say: '*Allah-ki-kasam*, she's gone'.

(ICM181-82)

Before-the-Partition, Ayah and the group of her admirers, and their frequent visit to the park represent the peaceful life in Lahore. Her voluptuous outfit, coveted by most of the people without minding her Hindu pedigree, symbolizes pre-Partition religious harmony.

Conclusions

To the end it can be said with full confidence that The Chaudhry of Pir Pindo village, the role of Sethi family, Sikh *granthi*, Jagjeet Singh, and Imam Din uphold quite ancient humane values. They are representative of those unheard and unsung real-life heroes of humanity whom humanity was over and above all the differences. Taking of false oaths is deemed in Indian value system no less than a sin yet for the cause of humanity false oaths if taken under duress, become superior to true oaths. For humanity's sake Imam Din remorselessly took the oath of Allah (God). However, the situation is different altogether today. Lenny was since her childhood taught to speak the truth. At the time of moral crisis, all ethical and cultural values get shattered right away. During Partition crisis, humanity to the large extent embarrassed. The devils and hard-liners of pro-Partition thrust some ten million men, women, and children into incalculable ocean of misery and hardship.

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Author's bio-note

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