

# Revisiting Partition In Select Novels Of Bapsi Sidhwa – A Study

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## ABSTRACT

A few authors have discussed the Partition of India and Pakistan on both sides of the border in the genre of Anglophone writing produced by South Asian essayists. There is no doubt for South Asians living in the areas where the Partition took place and in the diaspora. Overall, the healing of that terrible memory accepts through the creation of show-stoppers that include, among other things, a rich body of scholarly work that started after the 1947 Partition and continues to the present day. The question posed in this section is what happens to each person's and the group's memory of the separation of India and Pakistan when evaluated by a group living far from the subcontinent. It suggests reading Bapsi Sidhwa's short story "Protect Yourself Against Me" to start answering this question. By examining the story, we can learn more about how a group of South Asian migrants in the USA handles the memory of the events surrounding the 1947 Partition. For the people from the revisiting diasporic community portrayed in the novel, remembering it as a part of their lives certainly gives off the idea that it is both undeniable and valuable for the meaning of their character. While the characters process the memory in their ways based on how they see the event, they also do it collectively. In this way, remembering turns into a process that unites a group of many ethnic and rigid networks, whose members believe their roots trace to a distant location and a common past. The Ice-Candy Man and The Crow Eaters by Bapsi Sidhwa both address issues of ethnicity and identity crises.

**Keywords:** Partition, memory, migrants, ethnic, diaspora, revisiting, remembering...

## INTRODUCTION

The significance of history in portraying the division of the Indian subcontinent into Pakistan and India served as the region's most significant sociopolitical turning point. The Radcliffe Line-1 was inked with blood to mark the end of the

British authority. Millions of individuals on both sides of India saw their fortunes shift due to the line separating the two newly formed states. According to a government assessment, 500,000 people were murdered, 12,000,000 fled their homes, and more than 100 women were kidnapped, raped, or mistreated. The

killing of large numbers of refugees frequently preceded or followed their escape. After two hundred years of colonial authority, this tremendous convulsion marked a turning point in Indian history, preceded by the division of families, houses, lands, or relationships.

The most important genre of literature, fiction, chronicles facts about societal norms, human behaviour, and moral principles. And a novelist might be described as a sociopolitical individual whose primary goal is to improve the state of the world by developing and promoting particular moral values. A novelist is required to present significant sociopolitical, religious, and other subjects in a fun way.

*The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia, published in 1998, states:

People travelled in buses, cars, and trains, but mostly on foot in great columns called *kafilas*, which could stretch for dozens of miles. The longest of them said to comprise nearly 400,000 people, refugees travelling east to India from western Punjab, took as many as eight days to pass any given spot on its route. (1-2)

The history published paints a generic image of the Partition based on these testimonies of the horrific devastation and brutality. History is a product of the dialectics of politics, sociology, economics, and other fields and has thus far come to recognize as the marker of civilization. As a result, it has nearly become clear to see historical facts as biased versions that attempt to establish the partial perspective of the predominating discourse. The full picture reveals by considering the opposing

viewpoints expressed by the silent voices and the stories that rise from below.

Fictions about revisiting the Partition, published from both the Indian and Pakistani perspectives, are made up stories based on actual historical events. There is occasionally a holistic approach to merging the national and personal versions, even though their separate national and political ideologies mediate them. Many novels have been published in the revisiting the Partition thus far. They not only describe the holocaust-like effects of the Partition but also show it as it has been passed down personally by the victims to future generations.

Bapsi Sidhwa is among the writers mindful of the dynamics between their positions as writers and the society they inhabit. She is also aware of the dialectical relationship between a culture and its art. Bapsi Sidhwa wishes to be referred to as a Punjabi-Pakistani-Parsi woman even though she simultaneously holds citizenship in India, Pakistan, and the United States. She based her four novels, "The Crow Eaters," "The Pakistani Bride," "Ice-Candy-Man," or "Cracking India," and "An American Brat," on her experiences growing up as a Parsi, Punjabi, and Pakistani woman. In addition, she also wrote the novel "Water," based on the same-named Deepa Mehta movie. Sidhwa's books include a significant amount of autobiographical material.

The writings of Bapsi Sidhwa very effectively convey the Parsi spirit. A novelist's ability to elicit a range of responses from readers defines their excellence. And there is no doubt that Sidhwa was successful in this area. Her

novels' subjects reflect a wide range of interests that are not limited to any genre, such as comic books, religion, or Partition. It's significant to notice that Sidhwa has consistently been able to come up with titles that are appropriate for her expansive subjects. We can easily see how her one book differs from her other books in terms of subject and method of presentation. She has addressed themes related to the Parsi community, the social quirks of the relatively small minority, the marriage theme, feminism, the partition crisis, and expatriate experiences. This variety of topics aids her development as a skilled novelist and a perceptive observer of social behaviour.

### **THE ICE CANDY MAN BY BAPSI SIDHWA**

The Ice Candy Man by Sidhwa examines how women felt about the Indian holocaust from a female perspective. It does this by using a little girl's perspective on her rendition of the Partition.

The Partition and its effects are a prominent issue in Bapsi Sidhwa's third book, *Ice Candy Man* (1989). Its distinctiveness, however, resides in how it portrays this sub-continental holocaust from a distinct Parsi, Pakistani, and Punjabi perspective, as experienced by a little girl. The work fills a new void in the genre of Partition fiction thanks to its objective, or more specifically, "other" perspective. Lenny, the book's young narrator and a polio-stricken girl of eight, charts the beginning of a breach in Lahore's secular system, the rise of broad scepticism among former pals, and the grotesque savagery that gave rise to two nations.

Sidhwa also gives rise to the female perspective in examining the harms caused

by Partition by making her narrator a young girl child. The historical patriarchal hegemonies are called into question by this emphasis on the feminine perspective.

In this instance, Lenny depicts the horror of Partition not through any historical data analysis or report but rather through the Muslim marauders' kidnapping and gang rape of her Hindu Ayah. Her afternoon visits to Queen's Park enrich by their close friendships and neighbourhood ties formed by the Masseur, Ice-candy man, Imam Din, Moti, Haria, and Sher Khan. Her Hindu ayah was the centre of attention for all the male visitors, regardless of their religion or community background. In this context, Ayah represents the compositional harmony of India's many religions, sects, and communities.

In his essay "Ice Candy Man: A Parsi Perception on the Partition of India," Jagdev Singh makes the following observations:

Underlying the basic unity among the various religions of India is the Hindu Ayah and her multi-religious crowd of admirers. Taking their turn one by one: the Mali Hari, the Ice-Candy-Man, the masseur, Sharbat Khan, Imam Din, and Sher Singh all converge on this focal point. The Ayah is indiscriminating towards all, and it is in this that she becomes a symbol of India's composite culture. (152)

However, through the eyes of this young child, Sidhwa allows the readers to witness the dramatic shift in these people's actions—who were once friends but are now rivals due to their emotional and religious beliefs. Ayah's admirers begin to separate from one another due to the increasing intercommunal strife brought on by Partition. They stop meeting in Queen's

Park, which had been their usual meeting place, and begin to assemble at the Wrestler's restaurant, which not only signifies the transformation of the open environment into a constrained one but also, in the words of Jagdev Singh:

The geographical shift in their get-together is a suspicion of the emergence of the pattern of communal discord. The British queen, whose statue stands abandoned in the Park, will soon relinquish her suzerainty over India. The Wrestler's Restaurant, to which all flock now, is a symbol of the wrestling ring that Partition will raise on the joint borders of India and Pakistan. (*Ice Candy Man: A Parsi Perception on the Partition of India.*" (153).

Sidhwa clearly distinguishes between the psychology of the rural and urban environments regarding how they responded to the quelling of the communal riots during Partition. Villages like Pir Pindo or Dera Tek Singh initially stayed unscathed by these political or communal conflicts, while mass killing, rape, and kidnapping occurred in places like Lahore. There, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs coexist perfectly because they all share a connection to the land, serving as their food source and livelihood. Their racial identity is given additional weight in this passage by the author, preventing any social unrest.

"Brother," says the Dera Tek Singh Sikh Granthi. "The racial stock of our villages is the same. Whether Muslim or Sikh, we are essentially Jats. Brothers, we are. How can we contend with one another? (*Ice Candy Man* 56), which is backed by the Pir Pindo hamlet Chaudhury:

"*Barey Mian*"..." I'm alert to what's happening...I have a radio. But our relationships with the Hindus are bound

by strong ties. The city folk can afford to fight...we can't. We are dependent on each other: bound by our toil...To us villagers, what does it matter if a peasant is a Hindu, a Muslim, or a Sikh? (*Ice-Candy-Man* 56)

However, like Lahorians, they are affected by the ferocity of Partition's onslaught on their psyche. On her second visit, Lenny noticed a change in the social and political climate of Pir Pindo, which was the exact reverse of what she had observed on her previous visit. The incident of Ranna, who has a scar on his head that symbolizes the scar on India, best captures the terrible breakdown of intercommunal harmony in rural Punjab. From this perspective, it is also appropriate to discuss some of the personal suffering experienced by those who fled their homes on the country's eastern side when it was divided.

Lenny's Hindu Ayah, whose cruel kidnapping by Muslim thugs creates the novel's pivotal moment of the Partition, becomes a symbol of the woman suffering under patriarchal-controlled political upheavals. The women who remain behind to exacerbate calamities are generally considered the victims. They restore the community by healing all the wounds caused by geography and historical suffering using their traditional role as a caring agent. That is the situation facing women. Comments from Urvashi Butalia

Why was it that we heard so little about them? How had they experienced the anguish of the division, the euphoria of the newly-forming nations? My assumptions were simple: firstly, these questions had remained unasked because of the patriarchal underpinnings of history

as a discipline. I also believed (...) that in times of communal strife and violence, women remain essentially non-violent and are at the receiving end of violence as victims... ("Community, State, and Gender... 33-34)

Lenny connects this female passivity with the bloody and gruesome activities by projecting the vulnerable position of women in general and Shanta, her Ayah, in particular at the time of Partition. Lenny is an objective viewer and narrator of the Partition story, trapped within a "compressed world" and destined to be happily married and raise children.

The Ice Candy Man and her consequent rescue by Lenny's Godmother and Mother to send her to her home at Amritsar on the other side of the border poignantly underlines the gory effects of Partition from a Personal end. Lenny's new Ayah, Hamida, a Muslim refugee woman from the Rehabilitation Camp, is an apt substitute to carry on the feminine pains and scars continuum.

Lenny grows up with the wounds of Partition; her bondings with Truth earned good words from her mother but exposed her Ayah to the fanatics. This dilemma of True and False haunts her, only to discover the Truth hidden in the piles of history on revisiting the Partition.

### **THE CROW EATERS BY BAPSI SIDHWA**

The Crow Eaters was published in 1978 before The Pakistani Bride, even though Bapsi Sidhwa wrote both. Because they talk too much and too loudly, the small minority in the Indian subcontinent Parsi community is called "crow eaters" by the majority population. We travel via flashbacks in the book "The Crow Eaters."

Fareedoon Junglewalla, the book's main character, who is dying, tells his children and other nearby children the tale of his early years.

The Crow Eaters is a short book that depicts a family's reality and a network of human ties. In the novel, Freddy shows his allegiance to the British at every chance. The Parsis are mostly concerned with their survival. Parsis' peculiar view of their women has codified a defining paradox of feminine behaviour.

The work effectively captures the changing Parsi environment. However, this is not a book specifically about Parsis; rather, it is a book about Parsi characters. The characters could have been Hindu or Muslim, and the satire would still have been strong. Every ethnic group, after all, has its quirks and absurdities.

The funeral rites performed by Parsis are unusual and remarkable. They store their deceased in open-roofed enclosures atop hills for the vultures to eat. These structures are known as "Towers of Silence":

...the marble floor slopes towards the centre where there is a deep hollow. This receives the bones and blood.

Underground ducts from the hollow lead to four deep wells outside the Tower.

These wells are full of lime, charcoal, and sulphur and provide an excellent filter.

(The Crow Eaters, 45)

According to the teachings of the Parsi prophet Zarathustra, fire is the most sacred thing, and the Parsi community views smoking as a sin. When one of Fareedoon's servants is found smoking, the youngster suffers a brutal beating in the current story. Par- holds a firm belief in astrology and the stars. In "The Crow

Eaters," Faredoon visits the fortune-tellers whenever he is anxious. His visit to the Brahmin Gopal Krishan shows his belief in astrology.

Parsis have a unique technique of telling their elders they want to be married. The drinking water is seasoned with salt. The family head approaches them once they have finished the water to ask what they would want. Faredoon carried out this rite during his marriage and repeated it whenever Yazdi wanted to marry. Outside-the-community unions are forbidden to Parsis. After hearing Yazdi's wish to wed the Anglo-Indian girl Rosy Watson, Faredon smacks him and vehemently opposes the union in "The Crow Eaters":

You have the gall to tell me you want to marry an Anglo-Indian? Get out of my sight. Get out. (The Crow Eaters, 123)

On the other hand, Mrs. Easymoney agrees to Billy's (another Faredoon son's) proposal for her daughter Tanya simply because he is wealthy and Parsi. The Parsi system of marriage is described in length in the book "The Crow Eaters." The full details of Billy and Tanya's marriage have been provided:

The officiating priest eventually recited...' say whether you have agreed to take this maiden named Tanya in marriage to Following the rites and customs of the Mazda worshippers, this bridegroom promised to pay her 2000 dirhems of pure white silver and two dinars of standard gold of Nishadpur coinage. (The Crow Eaters, 223)

The language and way of life of the inhabitants of culture have long served as indicators of that culture. The language used in "The Crow Eaters" is comical. The

novel, which is quite amusing, honours the accomplishments of a little community that underwent migration, peacefully settled, and flourished without sacrificing its cultural identity. A portion of the Parsi community attacked this book, saying it gave an unfair impression of the community by disclosing its secrets to the outside world. But Sidhwa disputes this accusation:

Because of my deep-rooted admiration for my diminishing community- and an enormous affection for it- this work of fiction has been a labour of love. (The Crow Eaters, author's note, 7)

The world appears to be being introduced to the Parsi community, its culture, rituals, and customs as the sole goal of authoring "The Crow Eaters." The Second World War, feminist issues, the effects of colonialism, and other themes are also hinted at. But the Parsi community and its way of life have been highlighted throughout the book. Sidhwa's title, "The Crow Eaters," is unquestionably appropriate for the novel's main themes and provides both implicit and explicit dimensions revisiting the Partition. It both implies the psychology of a small town and expressly foreshadows the novel's comedic qualities.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the main subjects Sidhwa has explored in her fiction reveals one thing to us: as Sidhwa's reputation as a novelist has grown, her themes have moved beyond the Parsi community and into the more general realms of the revisiting of Partition, migration, diversity, and other topics. In "The Crow Eaters," the Parsi ethos is discussed and continued in "Ice-Candy-Man." The riots

create a risky circumstance in *Ice-Candy Man* and *The Crow Eaters*. Hindus assault Muslims, who in turn assault Hindu neighbourhoods. Sidhwa can understand the futility of artificial distinctions thanks to her sense of the absurd. We can peek into the made-up universe that, during the story, turns out to be genuine through Bapsi Sidhwa's magical casements.

#### Word Notes:

1. The Radcliffe line is the demarcation line between India and Pakistan, which began on 17 August 1947. It was named after its architect, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who was the Chairman of the Border Commission and was given the charge of drawing the line to divide 175,000 square miles with 88 million people.

2. Please refer to Paromita Deb's essay 'Religion, Partition, Identity, and Diaspora: A Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*' published in *South Asian Diaspora*. London: Routledge, 2011.

3. Urvashi Butalia, in her book *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), uses the word 'underside of its history' to refer to the personal saga of loss and pain, individual and collective memories, etc., which make up the reality of any historical fact, which remains covered within the macro-historical discourses.

4. Please refer to Joan Kelly's *Women, History and Theory* (1984).

5. I was highly impressed by the title of the essay 'The Geography of Scars and History of Pain: A Study of *Ice candy Man*' by Vanashree Tripathy, published in *Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man*, edited by

Rashmi Gaur, Asia Book Club, New Delhi in 2004. The phrase induced the true pain that Partition perpetrated on land and its inhabitants.

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