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## Partition, Violence, and Human Identity in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*

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### Abstract

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* is one of the most significant Partition novels in Indian English literature. Set against the backdrop of the Partition of India in 1947, the novel vividly portrays the communal violence, displacement, trauma, and psychological fragmentation experienced by ordinary people. Narrated through the innocent perspective of Lenny, a young Parsee girl, the novel explores the destructive impact of religious hatred and political manipulation on human relationships. Sidhwa highlights the suffering of women during Partition, the collapse of communal harmony, and the complexities of identity in a divided nation. Through powerful symbolism, realistic characterization, and historical insight, *Ice-Candy-Man* becomes both a historical document and a humanistic critique of violence. This paper examines the themes of Partition, communalism, gender violence, innocence, identity crisis, and narrative technique in the novel.

**Keywords:** Partition, communal violence, feminism, identity, trauma, nationalism, displacement, innocence

### Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 remains one of the most traumatic events in South Asian history. The division of British India into India and Pakistan led to widespread communal riots, mass migration, violence, and psychological devastation. Millions of people lost their homes, families, and identities during this political upheaval. Among the many literary works dealing with Partition, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* occupies a distinguished place. Published in 1988 and later republished in the United States as *Cracking India*, the novel provides a sensitive and deeply human portrayal of Partition through the eyes of a child narrator. Sidhwa avoids political propaganda and instead focuses on the emotional and social consequences of historical violence. The novel is narrated by Lenny, a polio-stricken Parsee girl living in Lahore. Her

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innocent observations expose the complexities of religion, class, gender, and communal tensions in pre-Partition India. Through her limited yet perceptive understanding, Sidhwa presents the gradual disintegration of a multicultural society.

### **Historical Background of Partition**

The Partition of India was the result of political tensions between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, along with British colonial policies of divide and rule. The demand for a separate Muslim nation led to the creation of Pakistan in August 1947. The Partition triggered one of the largest forced migrations in human history. Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs became victims of brutal communal violence. Entire villages were destroyed, women were abducted and raped, and families were permanently displaced. Sidhwa situates *Ice-Candy-Man* within this historical reality. Lahore, once known for its multicultural harmony, gradually transforms into a city of fear, hatred, and violence. The novel reflects the emotional chaos experienced by ordinary individuals trapped within political conflict.

### **Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*: Plot Overview**

The novel revolves around Lenny and her Ayah, Shanta, a beautiful Hindu nanny admired by men from different religious communities. The social environment initially appears peaceful, where Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Parsees coexist harmoniously. Among Ayah's admirers is the Ice-Candy-Man, a Muslim vendor who is charming, humorous, and emotionally expressive. However, communal tensions begin to intensify after Partition. News of massacres and riots transforms the atmosphere of Lahore. *The Ice-Candy-Man* undergoes a dramatic psychological transformation after witnessing the mutilated bodies of Muslims arriving from India. Consumed by revenge and communal hatred, he betrays Ayah, leading to her abduction by a violent mob. The novel ends with Ayah's rescue and departure for India, while the Ice-Candy-Man remains emotionally shattered. Lenny gradually loses her innocence as she witnesses the cruelty and complexity of human behavior.

### **Theme of Partition and Communal Violence**

The central theme of the novel is the horror of Partition. Sidhwa portrays Partition not merely as a political event but as a human tragedy. The communal riots destroy relationships, trust, and shared cultural identities. Initially, Lahore is depicted as a cosmopolitan city where people of different religions interact peacefully. However, political developments gradually poison social relationships. Religious identity becomes more important than human connection. The violence in the novel is sudden, brutal, and irrational. Neighbors become enemies overnight. Sidhwa emphasizes how political ideologies manipulate ordinary people into acts of cruelty. One of the most horrifying episodes in the novel is the arrival of the train carrying massacred Muslim passengers. This event transforms the Ice-Candy-Man from a playful entertainer into a vengeful fanatic. The scene symbolizes how violence reproduces more violence. Sidhwa demonstrates that Partition shattered not only geographical boundaries but also the moral foundations of society.

### **Innocence and Loss of Childhood**

Lenny's narration is central to the emotional power of the novel. As a child narrator, she observes events with curiosity and innocence. Her limited understanding often exposes

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deeper truths about adult society. Through Lenny's perspective, readers witness the gradual destruction of innocence. Initially, she enjoys the diversity and vitality of Lahore's multicultural society. However, the violence of Partition forces her to confront fear, betrayal, and human cruelty. Lenny's physical disability also symbolizes vulnerability. Like India itself during Partition, she experiences fragmentation and insecurity. Her emotional growth throughout the novel reflects the painful transition from innocence to awareness. The use of child narration allows Sidhwa to present political violence in a deeply personal and emotional manner.

### **Representation of Women and Gender Violence**

One of the most important aspects of *Ice-Candy-Man* is its portrayal of women's suffering during Partition. Women become victims of sexual violence, abduction, and exploitation during communal riots. Ayah symbolizes feminine beauty, vitality, and communal harmony. Men from different religions admire her without conflict before Partition. However, once communal hatred intensifies, her body becomes a site of violence and revenge. Ayah's abduction represents the larger tragedy of women during Partition. Thousands of women were kidnapped, raped, or forced into marriage during the riots. Sidhwa highlights how women's bodies became battlegrounds for male honor and communal politics. The novel also presents strong female characters such as Godmother, who courageously helps rescue Ayah. Through such characters, Sidhwa emphasizes women's resilience and moral strength. From a feminist perspective, the novel critiques patriarchal systems that reduce women to symbols of community honor and political revenge.

### **Character Analysis**

#### **Lenny**

Lenny is the narrator and emotional center of the novel. Her innocence, curiosity, and sensitivity allow readers to experience Partition from a deeply human perspective. Her gradual psychological maturity reflects the traumatic impact of historical violence.

#### **Ayah (Shanta)**

Ayah represents beauty, sensuality, and communal harmony. Her tragic fate symbolizes the suffering of women during Partition. Despite her victimization, she remains emotionally resilient.

#### **Ice-Candy-Man**

The Ice-Candy-Man is one of the most complex characters in the novel. Initially playful and romantic, he later becomes violent and manipulative due to communal hatred. His transformation illustrates the psychological damage caused by Partition.

At the same time, he is portrayed as emotionally vulnerable and tragic. His obsession with Ayah reflects both love and possessiveness.

#### **Godmother**

Godmother represents wisdom, courage, and moral authority. She acts as a protector and mediator during times of chaos. Her intervention in rescuing Ayah demonstrates the importance of compassion and humanity.

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## Symbolism in the Novel

Sidhwa uses several powerful symbols:

- **Ice-Candy-Man:** Symbolizes instability, emotional unpredictability, and the changing face of society during Partition.
- **Lenny's polio:** Represents vulnerability and fragmentation within society.
- **Ayah:** Symbolizes multicultural India violated by communal hatred.
- **Trains:** Symbolize migration, displacement, and mass death during Partition.
- **Lahore:** Represents the collapse of communal harmony and cultural coexistence.

## Narrative Technique and Style

Sidhwa's narrative style combines realism, irony, humor, and emotional intensity. The use of first-person narration through Lenny provides intimacy and authenticity. The child narrator technique is especially effective because it presents violence indirectly yet powerfully. Lenny's innocent observations often reveal the hypocrisy and brutality of adults. Sidhwa also incorporates multiple languages, cultural expressions, and local idioms, creating a rich representation of South Asian society. The novel balances historical realism with emotional storytelling, making it both politically significant and artistically compelling.

## Communal Harmony and Humanism

Despite its depiction of violence, the novel ultimately promotes humanism and communal harmony. Sidhwa criticizes religious fanaticism and emphasizes the shared humanity of people across communities. The Parsee community in the novel occupies a neutral position during Partition. Through this perspective, Sidhwa questions the irrationality of communal divisions. The novel suggests that political ideologies and religious extremism destroy ordinary human relationships. Love, friendship, and coexistence become casualties of hatred and nationalism.

## Conclusion

*Ice-Candy-Man* is a profound exploration of Partition and its devastating consequences on individuals and society. Through the innocent eyes of Lenny, Bapsi Sidhwa portrays the violence, fear, displacement, and psychological trauma of one of the darkest periods in South Asian history. The novel highlights the destructive nature of communalism and the suffering of women during political conflicts. At the same time, it celebrates human resilience, compassion, and moral courage. Sidhwa's realistic characterization, symbolic richness, and emotionally powerful narrative make *Ice-Candy-Man* a landmark text in Partition literature. Even today, the novel remains highly relevant in discussions of nationalism, identity, gender violence, and religious intolerance. Ultimately, *Ice-Candy-Man* serves as a warning against hatred and a reminder of the importance of humanity in times of political division.

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