

Chapter II

Gender, Nation and
Narration in
Ice-Candy-Man



Bapsi Sidhwa (1938 -)



I

Bapsi Sidhwa is a renowned name in the present day South-Asian English scenario. She is a Pakistani – Parsee now settled in America (Houston, Texas). She was born on August 11, 1938 in Karachi, in a prominent Parsee business family- the Bhandaras of Pakistan; to Tehmima and Peshoton Bhandaras. Brought up and educated in a typically conservative Parsee family in Lahore, she experienced polio-ridden childhood. She had number of operations and was not sent to school for a regular education. She had a private tutor at home until age fifteen and then she went to Kinnaird College for Women (Lahore) to receive a B.A. (1956). Her family was not an extended family, which resulted in her being an isolated child who spent lot of time with the servants. We see the reflections of her lonely childhood in *Ice-Candy-Man*.

At nineteen, Bapsi got married to Gustad Kermani and moved from the stern, orthodox atmosphere of her home in Pakistan to the open and fun-loving Parsee community in Bombay. After five years of married life, she got divorced and returned to Pakistan. Then, she remarried a Parsee businessperson in Lahore, Noshir Sidhwa, the son of R.K. Sidhwa, the freedom fighter from Sind. In 1983, they moved to America.

It was a time when in Parsee community a woman writing a novel would have been laughed at. Her first two novels *The Crow-Eaters* (1978) and *The Bride* (1983) were, therefore, written secretly. In addition, by the time, she had three children and the responsibilities of a family forced her to conceal her adventure with writing. She says, "Whenever there was a bridge game, I'd sneak off and write."¹ After the publication of *Ice-Candy-Man*, Bapsi Sidhwa was acclaimed worldwide. She has received numerous literary awards like Bunting Fellowship at Harvard (1987), the Sitara-i-Imtiaz – Pakistan's highest national award in arts (1991), the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Writer's Award (1993) and many more. Though she has settled in America, she often visits Pakistan to perform her duties as a women's rights activist. She works with the organization of women for large-scale awareness – raising public protests. As an acclaimed writer, she has used her position to raise a voice in Pakistani media against women's repression and harm towards minority communities. She was the secretary of the Destitute Women and Children's Home in Lahore and was appointed to the advisory committee to Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Women's Development until 1991. She represented the Punjab at the Asian Women's Conference at Alma Ata. Though she is not formally educated, she has taught college level English courses at St. Thomas University, Rice University, and university of Texas and at graduate level at Columbia University; and has conducted workshops on creative writing. Currently, she is working on a collection of short stories and essays.

¹ www.monsoonmag.com/interviews/i3inter_sidhwa.html.

For Bapsi Sidhwa, writing has been her savior, hobby and love. In an interview with Julie Rajan, she tells that this boon was discovered accidentally, when she visited Northern Pakistan at twenty-six, with her second husband. While staying in a remote camp in the Karakoram Mountains, she heard about a young Punjabi girl who was married into the Kohistani tribes, still living in the cave era. She ran away and her husband along with his clansmen hunted her down. The punishment for a run-away bride in these parts of the world is death. Her mutilated body was found in the Indus River. The haunting story and the mystic mountains compelled Sidhwa to write about the girl, when she was back in Lahore. This was her first novel *The Bride*.

Soon after that, she wrote *The Crow-Eaters*. It is a Parsee comedy set against Lahore. It is a poignant, bawdy humorous work telling the story of a Parsee family and at places, laughing at the ridiculous in the community. This was the first Parsee novel to be published (1980). It is said that it influenced writers like Salman Rushdie (*The Midnight's Children*, 1981). But the secretive Parsee community in Pakistan was very angry as it was felt that Bapsi Sidhwa had revealed too much too openly about its customs, values and religious practices of the community in the novel. It took a lot of time to get the two novels published. There were no facilities of publishing in English in Pakistan. So, Sidhwa self-published *The Crow-Eaters* in Lahore and distributed the book herself. In 1980, Jonathan Cape published the book in England. *The Bride* came out in 1983.

Her next novel *Ice-Candy-Man* was published in 1988. In America, publishers thought that the title would mean nothing to American readers. Therefore, the title was changed to *Cracking India* (1991). It was the first work by a Parsee, about the massacres and atrocities of the most poignant moment in the Nation's history. The novel was awarded the German 'Literaturepreis' and a nomination for 'Notable Book of the Year' from the American Library Association. It brought the writer a worldwide acclamation. In 1998, a Canadian director Deepa Mehta made a cinematic adaptation of the novel. The film is titled 'Earth 1947'.

Sidhwa's most recent novel was published in 1993 under the title *An American Brat*. It chronicles the adventures of a young Pakistani Parsee girl, Feroza, in America. It is comic reflection on confusing friction that different cultures impose upon her in United States. In all of her works, Sidhwa tries to communicate her own experiences in relation to the problem of ethnic and national identity.)

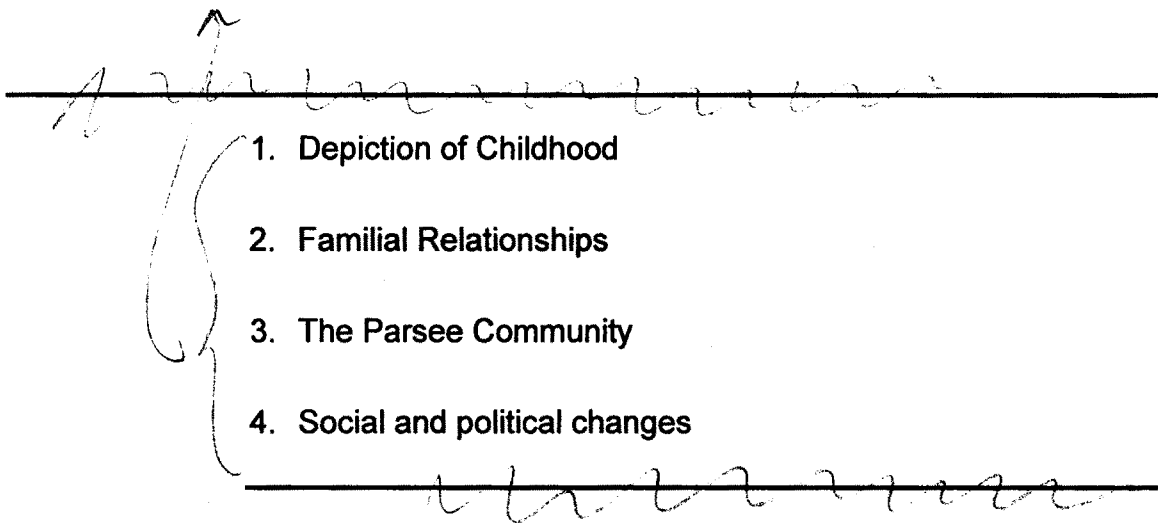
Through her writing, Sidhwa has always tried to tackle some of the most painful aspects of human life. Almost all her novels claim for the autobiographical traces in their plots and characters. *Ice-Candy-Man* records her childhood memories of fanatic massacres and bloodshed at the time of the partition of India. The story narrated by a girl comments, directly or indirectly, upon the communal lunacies and the blood-curdling violence along with the life in the city of Lahore and its surrounding villages. The story also pictures the Parsee society with all its oddities and the changing nature of human relations

under the threat of destruction. It portrays day-to-day life of men and women from different social strata (with all the flavor of colloquial language) as it was lived at the dawn of freedom. In other words, Ice-Candy-Man opens into the lanes of a lost world, which once was an integral part of this nation's throbbing existence.

The story is set against the background of the pre-partition Lahore. It unfolds through the perspective of a child, Lenny. Lenny Sethi is a Parsee girl whose age grows from four to eight as the action in the novel advances. She is physically dependent upon the people around her as her childhood is shadowed by polio. Her hazy world wakes up and we get acquainted with lively people like her beautiful mother, self-indulgent father and mercurial brother Adi, the voluptuous Ayah and flock of her admirers, the title hero Ice-candy-man, handsome masseur, omni-potent Godmother and Slavesister, the love-sick cousin and others. Every character around Lenny is full of flesh and life. The narration begins with a lively observation of Lenny's own life and of those whom she knows. It passes through the changes in social atmosphere of Lahore and those in the people around her; and ends with all the major characters destroyed in one way or other. Masseur is killed in communal riots. Ayah is abducted, raped, and then married to Ice-candy-man who is the cause of her ruin. The once goonda-type Ice-candy-man ends into a poet-pimp whose passionate love for Ayah takes him across the border in search of his love. The ayah's admirers one by one get dissolved- either killed or converted to other religion. Imam Din's (the cook) family in Pir Pindo is slaughtered. Even Lenny is changed at the end, with her innocence destroyed by her awakening into the grown-up world. The

story of these people is what majority of the victims of partition went through, suffered and survived. The saga of a nation's and its people's being divided unfolds and what is left is the sense of tremendous loss which can never be overcome.

The novel can be read to understand the issues of 'gender and nation'- the two inter-twined cultural aspects of asserting identity in the modern narrative. The discussion takes up the following issues one by one through which gender and nation get an expression.

-
- 
1. Depiction of Childhood
 2. Familial Relationships
 3. The Parsee Community
 4. Social and political changes
-

II

DEPICTION OF CHILDHOOD

The narration keeps rolling from lens-eye of the Parsee girl Lenny. When the story begins, Lenny is a four-years-old girl who is brought up in a well-

to-do Parsee family with considerable care. Her right leg is crippled. The polio-stricken child is growing up in comfort and tranquility. Most of her day is spent with the ayah, roaming through lanes of Lahore, visiting the gardens and her Godmother's house. The close circle of her life is formed by her family members- mother, father, brother, cousin, Godmother, Slavesister, Electric-aunt; who shower her with their unconditional love. She is also fond of her voluptuous ayah (Shanta) and the servants of the house- Imam Din the cook, Hari the gardener, Papoo- etc. Lenny meets the group of ayah's admirers everyday in the park. Gradually, winds of division of the country reach to her. She witnesses communal riots in the burning streets of Lahore. The circle of Ayah's admirers disappears in the inferno and unknowingly, the truth-loving Lenny helps in her favorite ayah's abduction. Later, knowledge of the world of grown-ups and their passions awakens her into an untimely adulthood and she is only 8, when the storm calms down. Thus, Lenny is the narrator-character and the center of narration.

One can say that Lenny Sethi, in some parts, is Bapsi Sidhwa. In Sidhwa's novels, there are some autobiographical elements. Lenny's childhood is reminiscent of her own childhood. Like Lenny, Sidhwa was also brought up in a conservative Parsee family in Lahore. She spent a secluded life, mostly indoors, as she was also a crippled child. She had two brothers (Lenny has one); but spent most of the time with servants of the house; just like Lenny. Lenny does not go to school; instead, she goes to Mrs. Pen for private tuition. Sidhwa had a number of operations and was not sent to school. She had a private tutor at home until the age fifteen. As the family was not an extended

one, she was a little isolated. At the time of partition, Sidhwa witnessed riots and killings, which affected her childhood tremendously and imprinted it with nightmarish memories. In her personal recollections of partition, she says-

"The roar of distant mobs was a constant of my childhood: it was a sound that terrified me, because I knew they were doing evil. ----- I saw buildings on fire, a sudden change in our neighborhood. ----- I saw dead bodies."²

Lenny is always haunted by the nightmares of the lion, the Nazi soldier and the child being dismembered. Distant roars of the Sikhs heard by Ranna at Pir Pindo and those of the Muslim hooligans who come in carts to take the ayah away are just as terrifying for a child as would have been for Sidhwa in her childhood. Lenny also witnesses Lahore burning for months. She watches explosions from the house of Ice-candy-man when the Hindu mohalla- Shalmi is set on fire. When circumstances worsen for Sikhs and Hindus, her neighbours- the Shankars and the Doctor- abandon their houses and unknown refugees take hold of the neighborhood. She sees the still alluring body of dead masseur and hears about bodies being stuffed in gutters (Mr. Rogers'). So, most of her experiences are, in fact, Sidhwa's memories as a girl living in Lahore. Lenny's narration becomes a national narrative which relates the story of a nation in its troubled times. It is also, about how circumstances mould the personality of a child.

²www.monsoonmag.com/interviews/i3inter_sidhwa.html.

The novel begins with the poem 'Complaint to God' by Iqbal, a renowned Urdu poet. The changing nature of human relations and insecurity of life is what the novel underlines and this theme is evoked in the very beginning. Lenny, though a child, shows a considerable maturity at times. Her innocence is just a shroud. Even at the age of 4, she has a kind of insight into things. In the first paragraph itself, she shows this.

"My child's mind is blocked by the gloom--- I feel such sadness for the dumb creature--- I have listened to its silence. ---"(1)

This is the first instance, which shows her exceptional ability to look at things from a point of view usually not available to a child. She is an observant person and her minute observations help her to peep inside the people. She notices the people's eyes and faces which are mirrors to their inner-selves.

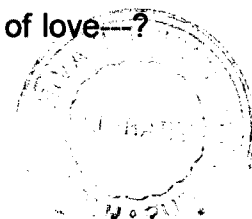
"Confronted by Ayah's liquid eyes---"(2)

"The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me."(3)

Col. Bharucha who treats her crippled leg has "complex hazel eyes" and "they are direct as an animal's. He can read my mind". (4).

As a child is concerned always with what is beneficial for it, she knows that her physical disability is actually her strength. That's why she hates to go to Col. Bharucha for treatment (who knows what she intends) and pretends to limp.

"--- I ponder my uncertain future. What will happen once the cast came off? What if my foot emerges immaculate, fault-free? Will I have to behave like other children, slogging for my share of love---?"



---while other have to clamour and jump around to earn their candy, I merely sit or stand , wearing my patient--- and displaying my calipers- and I am showered with candy.”(9)

Lenny has accepted her invalid childhood as a kind of privilege. Perhaps, her maturity comes out of this physical dependency. She says-

“Having polio in infancy is like being born under a luck star. It has many advantages---“. (10)

She is always aware of guilty conscious, which is a peculiarity of a child who is brought up in a truth-loving family. Her conscience is always alert and makes her life difficult on different occasions.

“--- Lying doesn't become me. I can't get away with the littlest thing.” (84)

She cannot even curse and swear like other children of her age. She is confused,

“Everybody in the world lies, steal and curses except me. ---why can't I act like everybody?” (85)

This different set of mind, this innocence of character set Lenny apart from other children and her conscience becomes-

“A life sentence? Condemned to honesty? A demon in saint's clothing?” (85)

This obsession (though unconscious) for truth begins when she is three. She admits her mistake of breaking a plate and her mother praises her for

her virtue. But this virtue becomes a curse. When Ice-candy-man comes with the men in carts to take Ayah, she is hidden and they are told that she has gone to Amritsar. Ice-candy-man manipulates his influence over Lenny and asks her about ayah.

“And dredging from some foul truthful depth in me ---I say: ‘on the roof---”

“---I know I have betrayed ayah.” (182)

“I am the monkey-man’s performing monkey, the trained circus elephant---an animal with conditioned reflexes that cannot lie---
“(184)

After this, comes the remorseful repentance. The child is harassed by her guilt-stricken mind and wanders heart –broken.

“For three days I stand in front of the bathroom mirror staring at my tongue. I hold the vile, truth-infected thing--- try to wrench it out ---mock me ---as poisonous as a snake.” (184)

The poor child learns her lesson that speaking truth is no virtue in the vile world of grown ups.

Bapsi Sidhwa seems to have a sound knowledge regarding the psychology and behaviour of a child. A child has no inhibitions. It doesn’t need to follow the behavioral norms of grown ups. Lenny keeps asking questions about the things which confuse her; because they are not a part of period of life through which she is passing now. Her inquisitiveness sometimes makes us feel that Lenny is astute beyond her age. But Sidhwa presents questioning nature of

the child to convey us that she is naturally curious about those aspects of human beliefs and nature which are yet unknown to her. It is changing and vicious environment to which she is being exposed that has influenced the child's mind so much that she can not keep mum unless her curiosity is satisfied.

Bapsi Sidhwa has used the persona of a child with a purpose. A child is innocence incarnate-at least it is supposed to be so. It is free from malice and prejudices of elders. A child sees the world through eyes filled with innocence. Then, it is the choice of a female narrator which demands particular attention. This choice has enabled her to peep into the inner world of a growing girl which is so far not dealt with in literature. Children are used as narrators in novels (like *The Seven Summers* by Mulk Raj Anand), but they are boys. A girl narrator is a new experiment to underline the centrality of the feminine world.

This
is
not
entirely
true

The gendered constructions of an individual's personality in a society prohibit a woman from dealing with female sexuality. But Sidhwa has elaborately dealt with sexual aspect of gender in her novel through Lenny's own growing sexuality and her entrance to the grown up sensual world with the help of Ayah. Again the female body plays a crucial part in this matter. Lenny looks at her young, beautiful Ayah as the centre of her fascination. Ayah is desired by men of all religions and classes around her and as a medium through which she learns the vicarious nature of human passions. Ayah is for Lenny the intensely desired 'self' and 'other'- a desirable femaleness that Lenny wishes to acquire someday in her disabled body. Her repeated descriptions of Ayah's warm, fragrant, curvy body, "chocolate softness" (104), "kohl-rimmed' eyes etc. prove that Ayah is the object of her own hidden desire and those of the men who try to

seduce ayah- the Ice-Candy-Man, the Masseur, Sharbat khan and others. Lenny is a secret sharer in ayah's adventures with her lovers and it gives birth to her own sexual arousals. As a lover murmurs to Ayah,

“---something happens in my (Lenny's) stomach” (128).

She also notices Ayah's seductive body language. Ayah drawls, has liquid eyes and prim gloating, her covetous glances educate Lenny; she knows that 'things love to crawl under ayah's sari' and that the fingers of the Masseur are knowing and clever. She says,

” I learn of human needs, frailties, cruelties and joys. I also learn from her the tyranny magnets exercise over things.” (20)

Lenny's mother also exhibits an irresistible yet dignified sex appeal on those around her. Her soft Parsee beauty has a healing effect on Lenny. The interactions between her parents in bed make her aware of the sexual tensions between the two. Lenny is brave enough to talk about 'menstruation' (117) an utterly private feminine experience which is a sign of her developing womanhood. She discovers and explores her own sexuality in the presence of her cousin who allows her to handle his masculine body parts, kisses her and even provides her with the knowledge of what men do to women's bodies (240-41). At one stage, she is attracted towards him and dreams of marrying him.

“--- while I hang about Cousin, my eyes hang on him and I shamelessly and eloquently ogle Cousin.” (230).

“I am feeling despondent. --- It used not to be so. I wonder: am I growing up?” (217)

This is a girl being introduced to her budding body and a woman's psyche. She confesses-

"I look about me with new eyes. The world is athrob with men. ---
all exert their compelling pull on my runaway fantasies." (217)

She also prides in her changing physique, which is the main attraction for the 'other' sex. It is the time she discovers her body to be the instrument of deriving carnal ecstasies.

"--- aroused to a passion that tingles from my scalp into the very tips of my fingers, I finally permit my lover to lay his hands upon my chest." (219)

The developing breasts fill her with the confidence that she will grow up to be quite an attractive woman. The gender-biased notions of a woman's being attractive to men have already taken roots in the girl's mind. The suppressed attraction for Ayah's desirable body is now turned towards her own and she dreams herself to be as attractive and seductive as her role model. At the same time, the woman in her keeps her constantly aware of her vulnerability and the threat of her body being violated. So, she says,

"I am hard put to protect them; I guard them with a possessive passion---." (219)

Her encounter with the male genitals (of Hari and Cousin) obsesses her,

"I haven't been able to keep my eyes off flies since: intrigued by the fleshy machinery." (162)

Mysterious longings trouble her.

" Cousin certainly does not arouse in me the rapture Masseur aroused in Ayah---I recall the bewildering longings the look on Masseur's face stirred in me when he looked at Ayah --- and other stirrings---." (218)

The courting newly wed couple makes her think of 'their night-long ecstasy' and 'the dark fragrance Masseur's skillful fingers generate beneath Ayah's sari.' (43) Lenny has a mysterious attraction for Masseur and when he dies, along with Ayah, she grieves too.

"--- we walk hand in hand, two hungry wombs--- impotent mothers under the skin." (177)

As a woman, she tries to understand Ayah's-the deprived lover's- pain.

"---Masseur's death has left in her the great empty ache I know sometimes--- around hungry spaces within me---." (177)

This identifying herself with Ayah is a sign of the universal feminine emotions that she treasures within her own mind. This is really astonishing and at the same time dangerously daring to describe such emotions through the medium of a so-called innocent girl-child which is so far supposed to be banal. But Sidhwa exploits all the avenues of femininity in her narration. In doing so, she challenges the superiority of a masculine narration which always keeps a female character at the marginal position and thus, disallows femininity from getting expressed in gender biased national narratives.

III

FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

In an interview with Julie Rajan, Bapsi Sidhwa says,

" As a child in Pakistan ----it was very much like Lenny's life in 'cracking India'. ---I did not have an extended family and this resulted in my being a little isolated. "³

At another point, she accepts,

"--- because my childhood was lonely, it was full of a lot of silences.
--- so, writing has been a way of breaking through that silence."⁴

A person's family life helps in shaping his or her personality. Family is one of the most significant social institutes in development and daily lives of individuals. It shapes us, instills values in us and defines what we consider normal and abnormal. We carry with us in community what we learn in our family. So, family and community are indivisibly related to one another. The nation trope is projected through family analogy. Nation is family; national leaders are patriarchal heads-fathers, husbands, sons and the protectors and providers of family. Women are reproducers of family, bearing and rearing children and thus, multiplying the number of community. The fellow citizens are the brothers and sisters. The relations between family members form atmosphere in a family. Healthy family atmosphere shapes personality of the

³ www.monsoonmag.com/interviews/i3inter_sidhwa.html.

⁴ Ibid.

child in the family and healthy character of an individual becomes the base for a healthy nation.

Lenny is a product a typically patriarchal Parsee family. Hers is a compact family with close relationships. Her father, mother and little brother Adi fill her world. The Sethi house gives an impression of a well-to-do household with all its flock of servants – the cook, the gardener, the ayah etc. The presence of a second-hand Morris- Minor adds to dignity of the house.

Mr. Sethi is government servant and goes to office on his bicycle. He is stereotypical breadwinner, the tough 'macho' master of home, fulfilling gender-biased duties. His central, yet remote, existence keeps the women in family at periphery. He has a time-bound schedule and likes to take a nap for twenty minutes, when he comes home for lunch. He appears to be a typical patriarch with his grand Parsee personality. He is a man of very few words and moves about with a stern air. When he is home, Lenny and her mother often move around him trying to please him. He has good relations with people of other communities and his neighbors-like the Singhs and the Rodgers; and likes to give occasional parties. He seems to have sympathy for the Indians; but has decided to take a neutral position in the political matters.

Lenny is very much impressed by her father's presence in the house. But, it is her mother who enwraps Lenny's childhood with dazzling glamour. Lenny is in awe with her. Mrs. Sethi is a woman of substance; but has devoted herself to her family-her husband, whom she always tries to appease and her children. At different places in the novel, Lenny sketches this elegant

woman vividly who is a kind of an icon of womanhood for Lenny. She is very concerned about her lame child's future and always gets overwhelmed when finds her child in pain. She feels guilty for Lenny's disability and accuses herself for neglecting her and leaving her to the care of ayahs when she was a baby. Again, this is an indicator of the burden gender roles put on women. If they fail to perform their duties as 'mothers' of the nation, they are looked down upon and their virtues get shadowed.

Traditionally, Parsee families are patriarchal and the Sethi house hold is no exception to it. But Lenny's mother is an example of the times when free association of women with men at public, social and other gatherings had become normal. She moves around with a serene dignity fulfilling her duties assigned by her position in life. Lenny learns much about a woman's place in family, when she observes her parents together. The married life of the two Sethis is a reflection of the duties and morals imposed upon the Parsee women and men by the community.

Though the household is under dutiful and powerful supervision of Mrs. Sethi, somehow, when Mr. Sethi enters the scene, she takes a second lead. Even her expression of her love for him presents more of her servile attitude than her caring nature. She calls him 'Jan', 'Janoo', 'Jana' meaning life. It is said that man's sense of superiority and woman's clever understanding of his needs and her attempts to earn his love through pandering to his male ego constitutes the language of love between man and woman. When he comes home for his twenty minutes nap after lunch, she removes his sandals and socks, blows tenderly between his toes and with cooing noises caresses his feet.

"With a stern finger on her lips she hushes the household." (67)

A woman handling a busy house full of servants and occasional guests with grace and skill; she has to exert her seductivity to keep her mercurial husband connected with her. When Mr. Sethi is in a good mood, she too is in a good mood. Her voice teeters-

"Janoo! Don't tease me like this---"(67).

She is skilled at juggling the range of her voice and achieving the exact balance with which to handle father.

Mr. Sethi is not much affected by his wife's charms. Yet, Lenny is always dazed by her mother's beauty. (A woman's body 'is always given much attention in any literature.) Her flesh is like satin and she has sharp features. She wears a scarf, which is a part of traditional Parsee clothing (which they adopted along with the Gujarati sari). Her sensuous beauty lies in her tipped and curved chin, full and firm lips, slender but slightly bumped nose, curved cheekbones and a delicate, oval jaw. Lenny thinks-

"The hint of coldness, common to such chiselled beauty is overwhelmed by the exuberant quality of her innocence. I feel she is beautiful beyond bearing" (8)

The harsh angry sounds coming from her parent's bedroom are not unfamiliar to Lenny. They still her with dreadful thoughts. During tense days after the partition, these voices of her parents fighting upset her. She knows that they quarrel mostly about money. However, her father's terse, brash sentences,



terrifying thumps and her mother's pitiable persuasions also make her aware that there are some other things they fight about. She hears her mother pleading-

"No, Jana; I won't let you go to her!" (212)

Her father goes out in the middle of night. Is there another woman? Lenny cannot guess why her father would go to anyone else when her mother loves him so much. She is shocked one day, to see her mother at her bath. There are bruises on her body. A father, who has never raised his hands to his children, behaves differently in the privacy of his bedroom with his wife. This incident has a deep impact on the girl who is shaken by the nature of the relationship between her parents.

Mrs. Sethi shows her iron-will when the mob comes to abduct the ayah. Lenny's father is out on work and the woman is in charge of the house with children and servants. The tension is unbearable for Lenny. But she finds courage in her mother.

"Mother---is alert. In charge. A lioness with her cubs. --- Our pride---
--swells---"(178).

Her grace and bravado makes the men hesitate for a few moments. Lenny's description of her mother is full of pride and awe for her.

"Flanked by cubs, her hands resting on our heads, she is the noble
embodiment of theatrical motherhood. Undaunted. Endearing. Her
---lips bent in a defiant pucker---."(179)

The elegant lady has an everlasting image engraved on the little girl's heart.

Apart from her parents, there is another imposing figure in her close family circle, who has created haven for Lenny. It is Godmother-Rhodabai. Her house is Lenny's refuge from the perplexing unrealities of her home. Godmother is childless and showers all her love on Lenny, who is lonely at heart. There is a great communication between the two. Lenny adores and worships Godmother – kisses her insatiably and excessively- and expresses her love.

“The bond that ties her strength to my weakness, my fierce demands to her nurturing, my trust to her capacity to contain that trust- and my loneliness to her compassion- is stronger than the bond of motherhood.”(4)

She is sure that only Godmother can appreciate her pain and comfort her. The intensity of her tenderness is narcotic and Lenny requires no one else- not even her mother. She finds herself safe in physical vicinity of Godmother. She cannot hold herself from touching her angel when near her and on some nights, sleeps with Godmother “clinging to her broad white back like a bug”. She wraps herself about Godmother like a rope. This extreme attachment is both physical and psychological. Being left alone in her own house, in the company of servants, Lenny needs to fulfill the empty spaces within her child’s mind. Godmother fills up these gaps perfectly. The unknown attraction and selfless love between the two supports Lenny in her troubled and confused periods.

“She is my very own whale- and her great love for me is plain in her shining eyes.”(257)

At the periphery of Lenny's world are her Electric Aunt and her son. Cousin is the only friend of her who has a fluctuating existence. Her relation with Adi her brother is not much developed. But she is fascinated by his fragile beauty and adamant, free will and shares some adventures with him.

These people keep visiting each other to enhance familial relations and community spirit. The bond of love and unity among family members is a sign of the strong bond between members of community. The family analogy of nation has the aim of projecting this feeling of belonging and staying together as a homogeneous group. Thus, while commenting on different aspects of family and relationships, *Ice-Candy-Man* also reveals a picture of a group of people and their lives as they lived in a certain segment of time and also of the time and tensions which have a great share in shaping the institution of family.

IV

THE PARSEE COMMUNITY

The people to whom he or she belongs influence the writer's cultural heritage for the major part. While narrating a nation, along with the social and political milieu, the 'self' of the writer also gets an expression. This 'self' is the product of community to which the person belongs. The social, cultural and behavioral norms of this community contribute in development of the writer's personality. To study the community is to study one of the nation's contributors.

Ice-Candy-Man draws in detail a picture of the Parsee community.

It is one of the very few novels depicting beliefs, traditions and life-style of the Parsees. So far, very few Parsees have dealt with novel writing and that too about the Parsee people. Bapsi Sidhwa was the first Parsee to write a novel about the Parsees, when she wrote *The Crow-Eaters*.

The Parsees or Zoroastrians are one of the ethno-religious minorities in India. Their ethnic and racial differences from the 'other' communities in India are always marked by a particular life-style of their own. They still exhibit the national longing for their lost homeland, though they are now settled and have accepted India as their new country. They have preserved their customs, traditions and beliefs by strict segregation. Until recently, they insisted upon the marriages within the community. But on a close observation, we find that the Parsee people have acquired the manners and even dress-code and language of local communities. This has helped them to assimilate with the host culture, though they remain politically a minority.

The word 'Parsee' means a native of 'Pars' or 'Fars' - an ancient Persian province, now in Southern Iran. They are the followers of the prophet 'Spitaman Zarathushtra' or 'Zoroaster' (as called in Greek and 'Zardushi' in Persian). Zoroaster was the founder of the national religion of Iranian people - Zoroastrianism. He lived and preached somewhere around the Aral Sea, about three and a half thousand years ago (1700 to 1500 B.C.). Zoroastrianism was the state religion of various Persian empires (from the Achaemenians to the Sassanian) until the 7th century C.E. when the Arabs, followers of Islam, invaded Persia in 650 C.E., a small number of Zoroastrians fled to India to save their

religion. Those who remained behind have survived centuries of persecution, systematic slaughter, forced conversion, heavy taxes etc.

In nation building process, people need to glorify their common past and hand over their heritage to the next generation. It becomes important more than anything else does, when a nation has to be built away from the original nation. Its members hold myths of the lost nation dear. In the novel, there is an account of the Parsee history. In the Jashan Prayer, held to celebrate the British victory in the World War, Col. Bharucha tells the story of arrival of the Persian Zoroastrians in India.

“When we were kicked out of Persia by the Arabs thirteen hundred years ago---we got into boats and sailed to India! “ (37)

According to the history of Zoroastrians, in 632 AD, during the reign of last Sassanian ruler Yazdegard III, Arabs attacked Persia and Zoroastrianism was completely rooted out from the country of its birth. After the Arab conquest, many Zoroastrians were converted to Islam to escape persecution and poll taxes. A small group of devoted Zoroastrians sailed to India and landed in Diu, an island on the west coast of India, off the state of Gujarat. After 19 years of stay there, they sailed to Sanjan (Gujarat). According to a chronicle written in the 17th century, the “Kissah-i-Sanjan”, this happened in 8th century either in the year 716AD or 936AD. They were permitted to settle there by the local Hindu ruler Jadhav Rana. These newly arrived strangers were called Parsees- to denote the region from where they had come- Pars (Persia).



Col. Bharucha at the Jashan Prayer narrates the folk-tale. He says that their ancestors waited for permission from the ruler. Then, the Grand Vazir came with a glass full of milk symbolizing that the land was full and prosperous with no space for the outsiders. But the clever forefathers carefully stirred a teaspoon of sugar into the milk and sent it back. He meant that the refugees would get absorbed into the country like the sugar and with their decency and industry, sweeten lives of native people.

Bapsi Sidhwa says, " We Parsees adopt the flavour of whichever country we are in, we have to--- we are a people who have no land---." ⁵ The ethnic minority adopts norms of the dominant ethnic society. This need to assimilate with the host nation is common to all immigrant minorities. *Ice-Candy-Man* flashes on the activities, rituals and life-style of the Parsee people. The Parsees are staunch followers of their religion and beliefs. Though they have accepted some local Hindu customs, they practice the Zoroastrian norms devotedly. By being faithful to their Zoroastrian faith, they have maintained their racial purity and separate identity.

The novel provides an account of Lenny's visit to fire temple where Parsees worship fire. (Fire is the highest and purest symbol of the Divinity, according to the Zoroastrian belief.)⁶ All the Parsees of Lahore hold a Jashan prayer to celebrate the British victory in the war. When Lenny, accompanied by her mother and Adi, enters the main hall of the temple, it is full of smoke. Two priests, in their starched white muslin robes and cloth masks, are sitting across

⁵ An interview with Julie Rajan, on www.monsoonmag.com/interviews/i3inter_sidhwa.html

⁶ Karaka, Dosabhai Framji, *History of the Parsis*, Discovery Publication House, New Delhi, 1986.

the fire altar. They chant hymns, stoke the fire with silver tongs, and feed it with sandalwood and frankincense (33). There are offerings-silver trays heaped with fruit and flowers and 'malida' cooked by the priest's wife. Opposite to the altar are rows of seats where people are sitting. There is an inner sanctum where the main fire altar is present.

During his speech in the Jashan prayer, Col. Bharucha also refers to Ahura Mazda.

"Ahura Mazda has looked after us for thirteen hundred years; he will look after us for another thirteen hundred!" (39)

Lenny says that Ahura Mazda's name elicits enthusiasm among the Parsee congregation who are worried about their lot in the independent Pakistan. Ahura Mazda is the miracle word. Zoroastrianism believes in the single god Ahura Mazda (Ormazd) who is supreme. ('Ahura' – sublime, awful, divine. 'Mazda' – the wise. Ahura Mazda or Ahura Mazdao – the Wise Lord.)⁷ The Parsees worship natural elements- the sky, waters plants fire etc. as manifestations of Ahura Mazda. On different days they worship different spirits. Lenny finds her mother performing one of such rituals. On Fridays, the great Trouble Easers (the angels Mushkail Assan and Behram Yazd) are invoked. The Parsees frequently evoke them in troubled times. Lenny's mother spreads a white sheet on the floor and places a small fire altar and photographs of the saints on it. She kneels and lights the joss sticks. Then sandalwood shavings and small sticks are placed on the altar. (241-242)

⁷ Karaka, Dosabhai Framji, *History of the Parsis*, Discovery Publication House, New Delhi, 1986.

When Lenny asks Godmother about the 'Tower of Silence', she provides Lenny with information about the Zoroastrian doctrine of Death. She tells Lenny that Tower of Silence is a big round wall without any roof (113). The Parsees call it 'Dungarwadi'. The dead body of a person is put inside the wall for the vultures to pick it clean.

It is against the Parsee Zoroastrian faith to either bury or burn or drown their dead in water. According to them, death is the work of the devil (evil) and as the elements- fire, water and earth- are regarded as sacred, death cannot defile them. Godmother tells Lenny that-

"---- Instead of polluting the earth by burying it (the dead body) or wasting fuel by burning it, we feed God's creatures. ---."(114)

Therefore, the Parsees dispose off their dead by keeping bodies in the Tower of Silence, which they also call as 'Dakhma Nashini'. Godmother then comments that-

"It's only the body that's dead. ---The soul's in heaven, chatting with God ---or boiling in hell---"(114)

The Zoroastrians believe that the world of Ahura Mazda is essentially good. To live and enjoy a prosperous life, a Zoroastrian is encouraged to lead an active, industrious, honest and a charitable life. Lenny's obsession with truth can be explained by the way Bapsi Sidhwa was brought up as a Parsee girl. She says in an interview,

" There was a great emphasis on truth in the family. Truth was always rewarded so that it was easier to speak the truth rather than lie."⁸

Since the Parsees are truth loving, Godmother also reminds Lenny "lieing doesn't become her". (84)

The Parsees are fun loving too. To lead a happy and prosperous, bountiful life and to enjoy it to the fullest is one of the teachings by Zoroaster. Earthly renunciation and asceticism are condemned by him because they indirectly support the evil. Therefore, we find the Parsees in Ice-Candy-Man, often giving parties, celebrating birthdays. Lenny says,

"My parents entertain often---"(p, 58).

On such occasions, there is a splendid show of silver cutlery, embroidered dinner cloth, fancy peacocks made from the starched white napkins, long-stemmed crystal glasses and blazing flowers in silver vases.

Following age-old rituals and having a deep faith in beliefs of community ties a group of people together and the will to stay together in future keeps the communal bonds strong. Sidhwa's narration comments on how pride in culture of the lost nation and attempts to enliven it in the host nation to preserve their identity has shaped the Parsee character.

During the Indian national movement, Parsee ethnicity took a neutral stand. Belonging to elite class, they chose to maintain harmonious relations with the British rulers, which helped them, prosper. Apart from some

⁸ An interview with Shoma Choudhary found on www.sawnet.org/books/authors.php?Sidhwa+Bapsi

exceptions, they kept themselves aloof from freedom struggle and ethnic conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims and “adopted a discreet and politically naïve profile”. (16) Col. Bharucha says,

“ We must tread carefully.--- we are the smallest minority in India.--
- we have to be extra wary, or we’ll be neither here nor there---. “
(16)

“We must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare!” (16)

At community meetings, they discuss political developments and criticize the Indian leaders with a light tone. They are told -

“Who’s going to rule once we get Swaraj? Not you--- Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power. and if you jokers jump into the middle you’ll be mangled into chutney!”
(36)

So, they choose to stay out of trouble. Bharucha advises them,

” There may be not one but two- or even three- new nations! And the Parsees might find themselves championing the wrong side if they don’t look before they leap!”

“Let whoever wishes rule! --- we’ll abide by the rules of their land!”(37)

This sense of ever-attentiveness and getting themselves accustomed according to the circumstances has enabled this minor ethnic group survive in India for so many years through all political and social disturbances.

They have succeeded in building up their own identity among the several nationalities here.

V

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGES

More than anything else, *Ice-Candy-Man* is a harrowing narration of the past of a nation- a past which cannot be forgotten at any cost because it has a long-lasting influence not only on the people who were a part of it, but also on those who inherited it. The novel was published in America under the title *Cracking India* (1990). As the name suggests the novel gives an account of the 'cracking' of the nation into two new ones as a result of communal differences. It discusses gender issue through description of social and political disaster and becomes a combined study of gender and ethnicity.

'Cracking' refers to the partition or division of British India in 1947 and the establishment of India and Pakistan. The partition was signaled in the Lahore resolution (March 1940) which put forth the demand of Muslim leadership for "a state of their own". Over the next seven years, it was articulated more and more by the members of the community across the subcontinent and was realized by inauguration of the nation-state of Pakistan in 1947. The concept and history of partition also includes partition of families and local communities. Millions of people were torn from their ancestral homes, land and property, life-

long friends and childhood memories, relatives and loved-ones. It was a rupture from "the knowledge of the familiar and the comfort of the known."⁹

Ice-Candy-Man tries to catch the turmoil and atrocities of these times through Lenny's eyes. The four years' span witnesses the development and culmination of the process of partition. These four years in Lenny's life as a growing child tear apart her world too. When her story begins, we are ushered into the throbbing and full-fledged avenues of the pre-partition Lahore.

The Lahore society is enlivened by a wide range of people belonging to different social strata and communities. They live in harmony following their respective faiths and traditions handed down to them through hundreds of generations. Apart from the major Parsee characters that we have already discussed, others add colour to the little girl's world. Those who are attracted by her galvanizing beauty always surround the voluptuous Hindu ayah, Shanta. This group of her admirers contains members of almost all religions and communities- the Muslim Masseur and Ice-candy-man, the Fallettis Hotel cook, the Government House gardener, Ramzana the butcher, the zoo attendant Sher Singh etc. there is a kind of understanding among these people and the ayah who needs to meet her friends; even at fairs, cheap restaurants and slaughter houses. Lenny has observed-

"--- the subtle exchange of signals and some complex rites by which ayah's admirers co-exist. ---they slip away--- leaving the one luck, or the lady, favours." (19)

⁹ Pandey, Gyanendra, *Remembering Partition*, Cambridge University Press, (2001), p.14.

This co-existence continues until the communal risings and riots begin. The Sethi household is a shelter for a similar diversity of people who try to help each other and lead a life of fraternity- Imam Din the cook, Hari the gardener, Moti the untouchable sweeper and his wife macho and daughter Papoo, Yousaf the odd-job man. All live together irrespective of their faiths. Its only when the communal fire irrupts, that the tensions among them take a sharp and visible turn and they are suddenly Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs.

The settled and routine lives of all these people, with their own everyday worries and their own philosophies about the life, are suddenly disrupted by a jerk. Once, the evil of communal hatred is unleashed, nothing is the same again. Until then, the sense of being different from each other is suppressed under the garb of fellowship. However, these differences become acute and rivalry intensifies as never before. This simultaneous change in the social and, of course in the political environment becomes clear through interactions between these people and Lenny's reflections over them.

The time, when the narration begins, is approximately four years before the actual manifestation of political and geographical division of the nation. To understand social-psyche of the time and to know what flared the hatred between these communities to such a bestial level, we must have a quick survey of the political development until 1940-44.

The early Muslim leaders like Sir Sayed Ahmed wanted to raise the dignity and the political status of the Muslim community in the British India, which had fallen extremely after the revolution of 1857. They wanted to achieve revival

of the Muslims through education and maximum participation in government. But objectives of the Muslim leader always conflicted with those of the congress party, which was considered to be a party of the Hindus. Sir Sayed Ahmed, founder of the Aligarh movement, proclaimed that it was now impossible for the Hindus and the Muslims to progress as a nation. It was realized that there were two nations in India. In 1933, Choudhary Rahmat Ali coined the word 'Pakistan', for a land where Muslims and ideals of Islam would be safe. Leaders like Jinnah, Iqbal etc, later tended these seeds of separatist tendencies. After the Muslim league's defeat in 1937 elections, the rift between Jinnah, who had become a potential Muslim leader by now, and the Congress leaders widened. In March 1940, the League formally proposed establishment of separate states for the Muslim-majority regions of the North-West and North-East India, in the Lahore session of Muslim League. By 1945, the movement for Partition became the independence movement for the Muslims and the spirit had reached all over the subcontinent, which by that time was on the peak point of its struggle for the national independence. The possibility of a Muslim state in the subcontinent- a ^estat, where Islam would reign; at a time when Muslim power was at a low ebb the world over- made the educated Muslim middle class support the idea of Pakistan and a complete provincial autonomy. Yet, in spite of all the militant propaganda by league leaders and their extremist stand, the idea of Pakistan was vague. It was not clear how the Muslims scattered all over the subcontinent would be included in one separate country and where this new state Pakistan would be.

In Lenny's first visit to Imam Din's village Pir Pindo, The mullah tells their Sikh neighbours,

" I hear there is trouble in the cities ---Hindus are being murdered in Bengal—Muslims in Bihar. It's strange --- the English Sarkar can't seem to do anything about it." (55)

S / In the election^s of 1946, the Muslim league performed very well in the majority of Muslim constituencies and claimed to be the sole representative of the Muslimsⁱⁿ of India. But the united attempts of League and Congress to form an interim government failed. The British helped to sever the relations between the two parties and declared division of Punjab and Bengal. Annoyed by the dominance of the congress leaders, Jinnah gave a call of 'direct action' on 16th August 1946. Violence broke out between the Hindus and the Muslims in Calcutta killing thousands; and it spread towards Bombay, East Bengal, and Bihar and UP. The fire spread to the North-West frontier in January 1947 and in March to Punjab. The communal frenzy took the lives of thousands of innocent people. The British government did nothing to stop the spreading violence.

So the mullah in Pir Pindo says,

"I don't think it is because they can't--- I think it is because the Sarkar doesn't want to!"(55)

The Sikh granthi stresses that Sikhs and Muslims are of the same race-Jats. Brothers cannot fight each other. The Choudhary agrees that they can't afford fighting with the Hindus because both of them were dependent on each other. But at the same time he clears the enmity against the city Banyas-

Hindus. Hindus in the city, being the prosperous community, became target of uneducated, financially backward Muslim people during the days of unrest. Inmates of Pir Pindo are somewhat afraid and worried about their future, yet they are sure that their Sikh neighbors will help them. The Muslims and Sikhs end up by taking oaths of protecting each other's lives. The mullah-assures the communal fraternity

"We have no need for oaths--- brothers don't require oaths to fulfill their duty" (57)

After Lenny's return, her parents give a party where Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Singh break into a quarrel. They argue about Gandhi's fast and the home rule. Mr. Rodgers, the Inspector General of Police, teases Mr. Singh by saying that he will celebrate if the 'Willy Bunya' (Gandhi) dies. This infuriates Mr. Singh who threatens him that river of the British blood will flow if this happens. This is the only point in the novel when the hatred between the whites and the blacks is referred to. Mr. Rodgers replies that the rivers of blood will indeed flow but the blood will be of Indians.

The atmosphere around Lenny is changing fast; she senses tension in the group of ayah's admirers. Their focus of interest is now shifted from the ayah to the current happenings. The disturbing talk among the elders unnerves the children's world. India is going to be broken. Lenny is not sure about how they are going to break a country.

"What happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris road?"(92)



The sense of security of her small world is threatened. Lenny suddenly gets aware of religious differences among the people around her.

“It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves- and the next day they are Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians. People shrink, dwindling into symbols.” (93)

There is a subtle change in the behavior of people at social gatherings and public places. Lenny realizes that in the Queen’s Garden the people from different communities sit apart from others, keeping mostly to themselves- the Sikhs, Muslims, and Brahmins. Only the group around ayah remains unchanged---unified around her.

Once the establishment of a separate Muslim state was declared, it was obvious that the ‘minority’ or the ‘other’ communities did not belong in lands designated to the Muslims and vice versa. Everywhere there was chaos and confusion. The killings were brutal and bizarre. People from all communities had little desire to move from their long established homes, properties and the native places. Both the sides were determined to take revenge of the killings and wipe out the ‘other’ community. The mass movement of people from one side to the other began. Thus, an army truck brings a family of villagers to the Sethi household. These are distant kin of Imam Din from Pir Pindo. They take shelter in the servants’ quarters.

Lahore starts burning; people splatter each other with blood and skyline of the city ablaze. Lenny watches horrifying scenes of brutal killings. The descriptions are blood – curdling.

“--- a mob of Sikhs, their wild long hair and beards rampant, large fevered eyes glowing in fanatic faces--- holding curved swords--- a naked child, twitching on a spear struck between her shoulder, is waved like a flag: her scream less mouth agape---staring straight up at me.--- a mob of Muslim goondas---roaring ‘Allh-o-Akbar! Yaaa Ali! Pakistan Zindabad!’--- An emaciated banya --- knocked down--- his legs tied to a jeep—his lips are drawn away —in a scream---.”(135)

In this hell, Lahore burns for weeks. In Lenny’s conscience, it burns for months and months. Her mind shaken, she thinks,

“---despite the residue of passion and regret, and loss of those who have fled in panic--- the ruptured dreams, broken lives, buried gold, bricked-in rupees, lingering hopes--- the fire could not have burned for months and months--- but in my memory to is branded over an inordinate length of time---.”(139)

People flee abandoning their belongings and houses, which were owned by them for generations. Lenny’s acquaintances and neighbors- the Daulatrams, the Sharmas, and the Singhs- disappear all of a sudden. Their houses are deserted. One by one, members of ayah’s group also vanish. The Muslim refugees who flood Lahore now take the empty spaces of the deserted houses and the run-away neighbors.

“Within three months, seven million Muslims and five million Hindus and Sikhs are uprooted in the largest and most terrible exchange of

population known to history. The Punjab has been decided ---
dealing out the land village by village, city by city. ---"(159)

"I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that" (140)

Though until August 1947, leaders of both communities had opposed any large-scale transfer of population, by September, millions of refugees from both sides had crossed the borders. The events of August provided the final blow to the confusion and violence. What resulted was a kind of 'civil war'. Hundreds of thousands were uprooted, slaughtered, raped and forcibly 'converted'. Everything was unimaginable and the 'partitions' people would have to live with for decades to come had begun. Minorities from both sides were in a state of panic.

One day, the dead body of the handsome Masseur is found in gunnysack in the street. Ayah moves around with a sense of emptiness, her lover is dead and the closest friends have fled the city. She trusts no one; even Lenny has stopped believing in people the way she used to. Nothing is same and she knows it will not be same again. One day, the ayah is abducted by Ice-candy-man who comes in a cart full of 'goondas'. Lahore is swarmed by hordes of Muslim refugees. The city is emptied of the Brahmins and the Sikhs. The looting goes on in the city. The neighbour has deserted houses show signs of occupations.

"Frightened, dispossessed--- coping with grief over dead kin and
kidnapped womenfolk. --- grateful for the roof over their heads---

quietly going about the business of surviving , terrified of being again evicted.”(176)

For many months after partition, large groups of refugees traveled miles to reach the country they had either opted or forced to live in. The influx of these helpless people, who had fled from their homes with nothing but clothes on their backs, created many problems in both the newborn nations. The exodus of migrating Hindus and Muslims was occasionally attacked by the ‘other’ communities on the way. Many refugee camps were established on both the sides of the border. Among these people were those who had left all their possessions behind; from prosperous backgrounds; who had lost their friends, relatives and loved-ones in slaughter; who had escaped death but were wounded and scarred forever. A large number consisted of orphan children and humiliated, dishonored and raped women.

Among these orphan children is Ranna- the boy from Pir Pindo, who narrates the horrible, nightmarish experience of community-slaughter in the village. The Muslim village is attacked by the Sikhs from near by villages. Ranna watches his father and other men being killed brutally and himself is severely injured. He also sees his eleven-year-old sister running stark naked- her body bruised, lips cut and swollen, front teeth missing. He hears screams, wails of women being raped, and witnesses his mother’s rape and murder. Miraculously, he survives two fatal assaults and manages to reach Lahore only to see that –

“---men copulated with wailing children --- old and young women.

He saw a naked woman, her light Kashmiri skin bruised with purple

splotches and cuts, hanging head down from a ceiling fan— as jeering men set her long hair on fire. He saw babies, snatched from their mothers, smashed against walls and their howling mothers brutally raped and killed.” (207)

Women are victimized irrespective of their ethnic identities and newly attributed nationalities.

“The range of sexual violence— stripping, parading naked, mutilating and disfiguring, tattooing or branding the breasts and genitalia with triumphal slogans, amputating breasts, knifing of the womb, raping, killing foetuses— is shocking not only for its savagery, but for what it tells us about women as objects in male constructions of their own honour — they never allow her the possibility of forgetting her humiliation.”¹⁰

When riots calmed down and refugees from both sides were being rehabilitated, the problem of abducted, raped and deserted women became a serious matter. Being raped, they were considered the cause of dishonour to their families. The impurity of their exploited ‘bodies’ was not forgiven to them even in times of chaos. The two nations were built on the bodies of these innocent women who were victims of the revenge taken upon ‘others’. Yet, they survived- only to suffer life-long tortures of the traumatic and haunting memories along with their bruised and mutilated bodies.

¹⁰ Menon, Ritu, Kamala Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1998.

Lenny observes the 'women's jail' which is actually a rehabilitation camp set in her neighbourhood. It is a camp for 'fallen women' (214). These

of women carry out their daily chores in a haunted silence.

"There is very little chatter--- apathetic movements to and fro."(189)

Lenny feels a 'nervous, nauseous thrill' to see the women lethargically moving in the dim, smoke filled cubicles. At nights, one can hear hideous wails from their dwellings. She remembers a face-

"--- the eerie desolation of that pallid face remains stamped on my mind."(190)

Her husband also deserts Hamida, Lenny's new ayah, because she is raped by the Sikhs. She carries a sense of guilt in the nervous, apologetic smile on her face. Lenny is filled with compassion for her and finds her like-

"---a starved and grounded bird and I can't bear to hurt her." (193)

Whenever Lenny shows affection to her, she starts weeping-

"When the eye is wounded, even a scented breeze hurts."(193)

She pours her thwarted love on the orphan- Ranna. Lenny wonders why her family does not take her back when she has no fault in her kidnapping. She is told-

"Some folk feel that way---they can't stand their women being touched by other men." (215)

A woman's rape is considered as an assault on the honour of family and community at large. The community treats raped women with such humiliation that the sense of 'self' of these women is destroyed and their morale is shattered. From gender perspective, it is a way of subduing and controlling the female 'other' by the male. Rape of the ayah is the climax of this narration. The Hindu ayah is a representative of female violation and her body becomes the female national body. The 'cracking' or 'rape' of her body symbolizes 'cracking' of the nation. Nation ravaged and violated by the 'other' is paralleled by the rape of this Hindu domestic servant by people of 'other' community. Her own 'otherness' is doubled by the fact that she is a 'woman' and that too a 'Hindu' woman. The ayah's story becomes a gendered national allegory. From the beginning, her body plays an important role in this regard. Time and again, we are told about her stunning looks and 'rolling bouncy walk that agitates the globules of her buttocks--- and the half-spheres beneath her short sariblouses.'(13). Her sexualized servant body is made available to men around her. Before partition, she is the binding factor of racial harmony among her admirers--the border terrain that neutralizes ethnic and religious differences. However, at the outbreak of ethnic genocide, she is kidnapped from her protected domain, raped and forced into prostitution. But her rape is nowhere mentioned as if it is something unspeakable. As she is being dragged by Ice-candy-man's mob, Lenny reports,

" The last thing I noticed was Ayah, her mouth slack and piteously gaping, her dishevelled hair flying into her kidnapper's faces,

staring at us as if she wanted to leave behind her wide-open terrified eyes.”(184)

After a long search, she is found and is now converted into a Muslim prostitute- Mumtaz from the Hira Mandi. The silence about what has happened to her is never recovered. Godmother’s scolding at Ice-candy-man reveals to us the truth, but only in parts.

“— can’t you bring yourself to say you played the drums when she danced? Counted money while drunks, peddlers, sahibs and cut-throats used her like a sewer?” (262)

Later, it is clear that the Pathan, the cook and the butcher, too, who used to be her friends and admirers, have exploited her. However, due to the lack of actual description, Ayah’s rape remains ‘absent and untold’.¹¹ The upper class Parsee women who rescue her from Ice-Candy-Man and send to her ‘own’ folk in India decide her destiny. She never expresses her pain, anger or humiliation, except for once when she pleads Godmother to rescue her. In fact, after her recovery, she has been given no dialogues in the narrative and she is portrayed as something like a shadow of her previous being. *Ice-Candy-Man* impels the reader to peep into the wounded and silenced psyche of women like Ayah and Hamida.

In masculine narratives, women are ascribed marginal roles. Ayah is doubly marginalized because of her status as a minor working class woman and as a Hindu woman. Lenny is also at a marginal position as she belongs to

¹¹ Hai, Ambreen. ‘Border work, border trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*.’ *Modern fiction studies* 46:2(summer 2001), 379-416.

the Parsee ethnic minority and is a child narrator. Her liminality gives her voice an authority to comment on female subjection in patriarchal nation. A nation's control over the existence of its women limits their identity as individuals. Family, society and nation unitedly give birth to gendered identities. *Ice-Candy-Man* proves this.

Dealing with the narrative of partition in *Ice-Candy-Man* is like -

“---dealing with the tearing apart of individuals, families, homes, villages and linguistic and cultural communities that would once have been called nationalities;-- this tearing apart was permanent--
- and it necessitated new borders, communities, identities and histories.”¹²

It can thus be seen that through its portrayal of childhood, familial relationships, the Parsee community and socio-political changes, *Ice-Candy-Man* turns out to be a fictional site where the problematic of nationality and narration meets a point of tragic convergence. The fact that Lenny is a girl-child indicates a double bind between gender and innocence. This double bind indeed turns into a sustained narrative trope, which, mediated through sharp irony, black humour and violence of passions, deals with the collapse of history, loss of space, indeterminate location of culture and the consequent emergence of periphery taking over the centre.

¹² Pandey, Gyanendra, *Remembering Partition*, Cambridge university press, (2001), p.43.