

ISSN : 2395-4132

# THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

**Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal**



**Impact Factor 6.4**

**Vol. 11 Issue 6 December 2025**

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**[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com)**



**Partition Trauma and Gendered Violence in  
Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*  
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### **Abstract**

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988), also known as *Cracking India*, does not merely narrate the 1947 Indian Partition as a political event; rather, it depicts this era through the lenses of human emotions, memories, trauma, and especially gendered violence. This paper attempts to analyse how the trauma of Partition affected the lives of citizens of both countries India and Pakistan—shattering bodies, minds, and relationships. It explores how long-standing friendships and love turned into animosity as people witnessed the dead bodies of their own people. The fire of hatred was flared in both India and Pakistan. This paper highlights how Lenny's "truth-telling tongue" becomes her own enemy; as a result of trauma for Ayah, she feels repentant for sharing information with the Ice-Candy-Man. Ayah's body becomes a battleground of revenge. She is turned into a commodity as and when violence outbursts; her kidnapping and collective rape show how the Partition took the honour and even the lives of numerous women. She has been depicted as a representation of all those women who suffered a lot or sacrificed their lives during Partition. She is dragged into the furnace of prostitution also. The treachery of people like the Ice-Candy-Man becomes the cause of loss of honour for Ayah. Earlier, he was Ayah's passionate lover, but communal hatred changes him into a violent attacker as he leads the Muslim mob in Ayah's kidnapping. His repentance cannot mend Ayah's shattered existence. Through the character of the Godmother, Sidhwa depicts how powerful women worked hard to safeguard victimized women, showing that even during Partition, human emotions were not entirely dead. Some people were still working for the victims. Overall, this paper shows how Partition was not only the division of land, but rather a story of women's exploitation. It uncovers the muffled screams of uncounted women buried behind the sterile statistics of history books, focusing on the devastating impact of power-hungry politics on the vulnerable sections of society.

### **Keywords**

Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, Partition, Trauma, Gendered Violence, Pakistani Diaspora Literature, Patriarchy, Communal Hatred.

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Bapsi Sidhwa is a prominent voice in South Asian literature. She was born in a Gujarati Parsi family on 11 August 1938 in Karachi in undivided India. She was born into a minority group in Pakistan and brought up mainly in Lahore. That is why she is considered a Pakistani diaspora writer. She was suffering from polio due to which she received her primary education from Lahore. She earned her BA in 1957 from Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore. She witnessed the socio-political changes of the Partition of India which she has depicted beautifully in her writings.

Bapsi Sidhwa began her writing career with *The Crow Eaters* (1978) in which she wrote about the culture and traditions of the Parsi community at the global platform. She published her next novel *The Bride* (1982) in which she depicted the struggle of an orphaned child. Her most famous novel *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) was published in America with the title *Cracking India* (1991). In this novel, she presented the trauma of Partition through the eyes of a small child. Her novel *An American Brat* (1993) is based on the immigrant experience and is a coming-of-age story. Her novel *Water* (2006) shows the struggles of widows, societal hypocrisy, and women's exploitation. She has received many prestigious international awards, such as Sitara-i-Imtiaz (1991), LiBeraturpreis Award, Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award, and Premio Mondello. Her works are being taught in many universities across the world under South Asian studies and diaspora literature. She is a woman who gave a new direction to South Asian literature. She calls herself a "Punjabi-Pakistani-Parsee woman" (212) with pride. According to her, writing was "...an obsession to express herself because her childhood was lonely. It was full of a lot of silences" (212).

Her novel *Ice-Candy-Man* is set in Pir Pindo. The story is about an eight-year-old girl Lenny. Sidhwa accepts that Lenny's character is inspired by her own childhood experiences. To quote from the book *Literature, Gender, and the Trauma of Partition: The Paradox of Independence*, "Writings about children's experience of the Partition are scarce" (Mookerjea-Leonard 166). Sidhwa sees herself as a "feminist postcolonial Asian author" (76) who sees history, politics, and culture from a different perspective. Sidhwa's perspective is Parsi in this novel because only a Parsi narrator can give a

justified narration of the havoc of the Partition of India. The Parsi community was not connected with these riots; Lenny is a Parsi narrator and she does not have any preconceptions which a writer from an affected community may have. The novel is a trauma fiction and is set in Lahore from 1946 to 1948. Whitehead writes that “‘trauma fiction’ represents a paradox or contradiction: if trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativized in fiction?” (3). This novel begins with an Iqbal quote from a complaint to God which shows the tumultuous atmosphere of the novel.

Lenny is an extraordinary narrator of this novel. She is a “lame Lenny” whose inability is not a burden for her, rather a privilege. She does not go to school and gets her education from home but she sees the outside world much deeply. Her physical impairment is a key to freedom. Her weakness gives her others’ attention. Bapsi Sidhwa writes, “The sudden emergence from its cocoon of a beautifully balanced and shaped foot could put her sanguine personality and situation on the line” (79). She easily understands people and recognizes the carnal attraction men feel toward ‘Ayah’ (Shanta) through her innate intuition. The novel has four female characters: Lenny, Ayah, Mother, and Godmother. Ayah is an eighteen-year-old beautiful woman who is the centre of attraction of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh people. Mother and Godmother represent the mature women of the Parsi community. Although these women belong to different age groups, the trauma of Partition has affected them all differently. Bapsi Sidhwa writes how the Parsi community lived a safe and rich life but it was not untouched by the political changes. Sidhwa has depicted the political awareness of the Parsi community through Colonel Bharucha. It has been aptly stated:

Literary texts and their fictional worlds allow for nuanced engagements with the subject of trauma, which is often personalized and contextualized, fictionalized and historicized, as well as psychologized and metaphorized at the same time. Literary approaches to trauma, then, have the potential to engage readers’ powers of emotional identification and sympathy on the one hand and critical reflection on the other. (Schönfelder 29)

Colonel Bharucha has a kind of anger and doubt regarding the demand of Pakistan. When he sees that a Muslim father is careless of his child’s illness, he gets angry. He says, “She didn’t tell you? Are you a father or a barber? And you all want Pakistan! How will you govern a country when you don’t know what goes on in your own house?” (12). This conversation is a satire on the political turmoil and administrative inability. Colonel Bharucha was aware of the uncertainties and risks which the people were facing. He told that the British were responsible for it. When Lenny’s mother takes the blame on herself that she could not take care of her daughter properly, Colonel Bharucha says, “If anyone is to blame, blame the British! There was no polio in India till they brought it here” (16). Colonel Bharucha’s anger shows the outburst that Lenny understands for the first time—anti-British sentiments against the British Empire. Lenny observes silently everything during the Partition; she learns about “human needs, frailties, cruelties, and joys” (Batra 63). Colonel Bharucha cautioned everyone during the Partition and he calls it a nationalist stunt. He tells the people not to take trouble. He says, “No one knows which way the wind will blow...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!” (37).

# The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 6.4)

[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com) ISSN: 2395-4132

Bharucha suggests the Parsi community to stay away from any nationalist movement. He even holds the view that nobody knows about the Partition and there may be chances to become two or three nations. He advises Parsis that they must think carefully before they 'leap' so that they do not end up supporting the wrong side. He says it to save their existence. Parsi people are jovial, business lovers, and respecting women, but during this Partition, they are much concerned about their safety.

This novel is not only a story of the Indian Partition; it is also a story of Indian emotions, the unsafety of the minority, and a document of the changing scenario of the world. Bapsi Sidhwa has broken the silence through her pen which she experienced in her childhood. This novel forces us to see how big political decisions change a common man's life, especially that of women and children. Sidhwa has presented the image of a society where humanity and cruelty go side by side.

The novel also is about Lenny's mental and emotional development. She is not a curious child now; rather, sexual awakening is shown in it. She registers the needs of the young men's requirements, weaknesses, cruelties, and happiness. She silently observes the admirers of Ayah and notices the methods they adopt to impress Ayah. Lenny is quite intelligent. Her knowledge of the Nazi genocide and about German soldiers impresses the readers. Her nightmares are the symbol of her extraordinary childhood; she sees violent scenes where innocent children's limbs are being torn apart, which shows how the roots of violence were so deep even before the Indian Partition. The novelist also writes about the character of Ice-candy-man whose introduction is about a man who changes his profession according to weather and requirements. He becomes a bird seller, a wrestler, or a popsicle vendor. He tried different tactics to woo Ayah. He shares the news about the World War and the political issues related to Mahatma Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose, and Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Although his character is weak, he pretends to be steadfast in his loyalty to Ayah even if he is repeatedly rebuffed.

Bapsi Sidhwa writes about the Parsi community. Through the cook Imam Din, she has depicted a glimpse of rural India. Imam Din is a mature, trustworthy, and respectful character. When Lenny goes to Pir Pindo village, 40 km away from Lahore with him, she comes to realize the difference between rural life and city violence. The villagers hold the view that communal violence is limited only to cities. In villages, people have good coordination, and nobody can harm them. Bapsi Sidhwa depicts the patriarchal structure of these people. She depicts the naivety, trust, and simple nature of these people, showing the innocence and simplicity of those people who did not know about the serious nature of the matter. Bapsi Sidhwa writes that the cruelty of the Partition has absolutely ended it.

Bapsi Sidhwa has also attacked the patriarchal structure of society. She writes about the lack of education, gender discrimination, child marriage, and the patriarchal structure. Bapsi Sidhwa has depicted the political issues through the dinner party thrown by Lenny's parents. Mr. Singh and a British police officer, Mr. Roger join it. Mr. Roger calls the three Indian leaders Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah "three monkeys" and warns that in their hunger for power, these leaders are losing the only opportunity for an undivided India. "Mr. Roger addressed the three prominent political leaders of that time as three monkeys: Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah as they did lose the only chance for an undivided India" (85). Mr. Roger says that Indians will stop blaming the British

because the struggle between Congress and Muslim League will result in a bloodbath. It was an accurate prophecy about the future. Mr. Roger also says that the Britishers' policy of 'divide and rule' is responsible for all this destruction. The novel shows how common men and intellectuals have premonitions about something negative, and they find that there is no option to stop the destruction.

Through this novel, Bapsi Sidhwa attempts to depict that if there had been gender equality in India, the Partition would not have been so violent and colossal. The very touching story is in Lenny and her cousin's conversation. Lenny is not able to understand the cruel game of politics. Her inner turmoil is explicit in these words, "India is going to be broken. Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road?" (88). Ayah says that it is a tough time for both the countries and suggests, "This side for Hindustan and this for Pakistan... they'll have to do—crack India with a long long canal" (88). She sees the partition of India as a crack; Lenny is afraid if there is any crack on Warris Road, how will she meet her Godmother.

Bapsi Sidhwa writes about the incidents of riots in Kolkata and Delhi, and when its news reaches Lahore, the total scenario changes. Sharbat Khan warns Ayah that the dead bodies of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs are being found in gutters. The Hindu-Muslim hatred becomes so fierce that it takes the toll of many lives. Lenny gets a chance to meet Mahatma Gandhi. She goes with her mother to the place where Gandhi was staying. Her meeting with Gandhi changes her mentality and way of thinking. She comes to understand the real meaning of fasting, non-violence, and sacrifice, which gives a new direction to her life. Jharna Choudhury writes in her paper "Study of Trauma and Transgression of the 'Adult-child' in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*":

Pain and trauma is still a discursive topic when it comes to the linguistic scopes of its narrativity. In the context of the turbulent event of partition, variegated acts of transgression finds place. Some of them are forced maiming, sights of unpredictable slaughter by children, oppressive inspection of circumcision, mob violence, etc. (3)

*Ice-Candy-Man* is about political instability and violence; it depicts how communal politics had penetrated the lives of common people. There was doubt about Hindu-Muslim communal violence. Muslims had doubts that the Partition would be in favour of the Hindus. This creates some unknown fear in the Muslims' minds. The common man who was struggling for bread and butter was now talking about politics and Partition. Bapsi Sidhwa writes that the lack of common consciousness and trivial political matters put India into Partition. Imam Din is very serious about the Partition. He gets worried to see the trucks in his village. When Mr. Roger, the Inspector General of Police's dead body is found in the gutter, which spreads terror in the village, everyone was terrified and wanted to find a safer place for himself. Hindus and Sikhs were leaving their houses and property in Lahore, and they were going to Punjab.

Master Tara Singh's speech also plays an important role in this novel. His provocative words and the slogans of the Muslim crowd in response acted as fuel to the fire. "We will see how the Muslim swine get Pakistan! We will fight to the last man!" (92). Sidhwa gives him the title of a "Sikh soldier-saint," whose speech was proof of the failure of nationalism. After this, the violence and fire did not stop in Lahore and the "Orgy of death" began in the streets of Lahore (92).

The ghost train is also a turning point in this novel when the train comes from Gurdaspur with dead bodies. When Ice-candy-man sees the sacks full of women's body parts, he gets totally transformed. He changed from a whimsical 'popsicle' seller to a dreaded and fanatic criminal. His confession "I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women... the penises!" (95) shows how his love for Hindus changes into communal hatred. When Lenny also comes to know about the Gurdaspur violence, the "gunny-bags full of women's breasts" (Sidhwa 149), she calls it the eccentric behaviour of the people, what Mikhail Bakhtin terms as the "carnavalesque" (Bakhtin and Iswolsky 10). The otherwise socially unaccepted behaviors are arbitrarily accepted in the face of mob brutality.

The novel also depicts a large-scale migration. Lakhs of people had migrated by September 1947 and one-fourth of the population was filled with refugees. It was not merely a number of refugees; rather it was the story of millions of shattered dreams and an uncertain future. The Partition of India was not only a political decision; rather it was the biggest and most terrible exchange of population. She writes about it, "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" (97).

This displacement was so fast and unplanned that it changed all the dimensions of education, gender, and livelihood. Some people think that the British administration was the reason behind this tragedy. Sidhwa writes that the English cunningly took favour of Jinnah and then Nehru. They gave Kashmir to Nehru while Jinnah could only keep protesting. The poison of Partition also affected the family relationships. Even Lenny started doubting her mother; when she came to know that her mother and Electric Aunt were secretly hoarding petrol, she considered her own mother an 'Arsonist.' Even the murder of the Masseur was another shock. The cruelty of the Partition made Lenny mature even before her time.

When the Muslim crowd comes in front of Lenny's house and asks if there is any Hindu servant in the house, Imam Din refuses but Ice-candy-man comes forward and he asks the same question to Lenny. She tells about Ayah's hiding place. The mob misbehaves and drags Ayah. Lenny feels remorseful of her truth and she realizes her mistake how a truth can spoil someone's life. Muslims were being attacked in Pir Pindo village and they decided that the Muslim women would set themselves on fire by pouring kerosene oil on their bodies. The men and children would take shelter in the Chaudhary's house. Lenny is shocked to see that the Ice-candy-man who loves Ayah so much has become her enemy. She is not his love but an enemy for him. Ice-candy-man takes Ayah to Heera Mandi where he sells her. His mother was also a prostitute. This shows how women are considered nothing more than commodities. This incident shows how it impacts the psychology of Lenny. Lenny considers herself responsible for whatever happened with Ayah. She punishes her truth-infected tongue also. V. Sathya writes in her paper, "Delineation of Cultural Partition Issues in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man: A Study*," "This episode of *Ice-Candy-Man* and Ayah destroys Lenny's conceptions about love" (83). One day Lenny's cousin tells her that he had seen Ayah in an auto in a splendid dress. One day Lenny also sees Ayah in the car. Ice-candy-man marries Ayah. The Godmother reprimands him for not taking care of Ayah. But Ice-candy-man says that he is a man, not a dog, so nobody should expect loyalty from a man. Godmother and Lenny go to Heera Mandi to meet Ayah. They find that Ayah is very

weak and helpless. Ayah requests Godmother to somehow take her out of this prison. Ayah's pain reaches at its peak where she becomes so silent where language plays no role. Elaine Scarry also writes in her book, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, as "reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans... witness the destruction of language" (Scarry 6). Godmother promises Ayah to help her be sent to Amritsar. The Godmother goes to the administration and tells how the illegal prostitution is being run there and many women are entrapped there. Ayah safely comes out from Heera Mandi and is sent to the refugee camp. The Sikhs beat him when they suspect his activities and make him run away. Ice-candy-man comes daily to take flowers in his hands singing a song in the hope that Lenny will meet him but Lenny is shifted to Amritsar and Ice-candy-man also reaches India following Ayah. To quote, "As a fictional Partition narrative, *Cracking India* presents alternatives to dominant historiographical paradigms through the characterization of Lenny as an in-between and, at times, subversive figure" (Barker 99).

Thus, this novel shows the pitiable plight of women in the patriarchal society. Sidhwa has depicted how women's honour was lost during the Partition. Women are considered pious in Indian society, but during the Partition they were used just as weapons. The novel also shows how the Pir Pindo village society was dominated by men. Only men and boys were allowed to visit the Baisakhi fair, and women were kept only in their own houses. "The men go to the Baisakhi Fair every year: before Ranna was born—before his great-grandfather was born! The women and girls... stay behind as always" (89).

Through the novel *Ice-Candy-Man*, Bapsi Sidhwa has depicted how the Partition not only divided land but also made man a slave of preconception, fanaticism, and cruelty. M. Natarajan and G. Muniyaraj write in their paper "The Impact of Partition as Revealed in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*," "Though Bapsi Sidhwa shows the possibility of the emergence of a harmonious pattern of communal relations between the Hindu and Muslim sometime in the future, yet she leaves much unsaid about how the change in the Ice-Candy-Man's personality comes about" (24). From the perspective of an immensely oppressed category, as a female child, Lenny offers resilience in the text, which is an intrinsic part of her "developmental process of psychopathology" (Buchanan et al. 18). The 'adult-child' Lenny Sethi engages in a "personal narrative of disabled embodiment" (Barker 95).

The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* conveys the message that violence and communalism cannot bring a solution to any problem. This novel is a clarion call for the future generation that they must not become victims of the power-lust of politicians. Pamela Fernandez writes in her paper "Reconstructing the Narrative in the Aftermath of Partition: A Decolonial Analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's Novel *Ice-Candy-Man*":

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* stands as a powerful counter-narrative to the dominant representations of the Partition of India in 1947, offering a comprehensive and empathetic perspective that centres on the voices of the subaltern, particularly women and marginalised communities. The novel, through the character of Lenny, Ayah, and the Parsi community, challenges the historical oversimplification and marginalisation of the experiences of minority communities, often overlooked in mainstream narratives. (314)

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