

**THE NEED TO FICTIONALIZE HISTORY: A NOVEL PERSPECTIVE OF
THE HISTORICAL EVENTS PRESENTED IN THE CRACKING INDIA.
(THE ICE CANDY MAN)**

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“Nations, like narratives, lose their origin in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye.”

Homi.k.Babha, Nation and Narration.

Histories change societies, culture, civilization and nations. Some events become very important in a nation’s life and cast an indelible mark on the native as well as the world citizens. History becomes history with time and the poignancy of the trauma or the intensity of emotions either cools down or becomes fierce and gain a new perspective with time. Time is an important factor in writing history. The sudden reaction towards an event is the impulsive reaction and is not an intellectual, rational and wisdom tic step towards the problem. This is the approach of a layman towards any event or issue, but a creative writer is different from a common man. He is more sensible than common man and can feel and convey precisely and exactly than others. A Historian writes about the wars, the historical events, but it is the creative writer who provides a perspective for that event and makes it approachable and comprehensible to common man. Wordsworth’s poem *The French Revolution as it Appeared to Enthusiast at its Commencement* propagated the ideas of Equality, Fraternity and Liberty more pleasantly than the historical writings. “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive / But to be young was very heaven!” (Wordsworth 4-5)

The creative writer gains an advantage over the historian; he provides the local events with a global perspective, studies the aftermath, the affected victims and its effect on the life of individuals as well as the future of a nation. The historian needs to be selective and he presents only the significant events important from political, social or national perspective. On the other hand the creative writer paints the details left by the historian, wraps the factual details of the historical events with a coating of fiction and makes the events interesting and appealing to the readers worldwide. The historian presents what was? While the creative writer answer the past, present and future aspects of a historical event. The impetus to write comes from within. The creative writer is “guided more by intuition and an itch to write, than by an exercise of intellect”. (Sidhwa “Why do I write?” 29). Sidhwa, further adds-“I have loved to commemorate in my fiction, about my concerns. That is the nature of writing, if you have things to say, you need no other reason to write”. (Sidhwa “Why do I write ?” 31)

Historical events which shook the world also have an indelible impression on the mind and psyche of the laymen and the creative writer. It is the sensibility, the empathy of the writer to

experience the fellow's agony, pain, the loss and devastation, the importance of the occasion and to convey it exactly to the readers. Historiography concentrates solely on historical facts and time. Time is an important and decisive factor in the writing of history, but in case of literature (historical fiction) at times, the author exploits the situation and time according to his artistic purposes. Sidhwa reveals- "The storyteller naturally gravitates to the dramatic. She (he) has a passion to recreate the momentous occasion, whether it be fantasized or personally experienced, of a domestic nature or of historical dimension... and record events for the posterity as filtered through her unique vision".(Sidhwa "Why do I write ?" 31)

Two events are the important episodes in the Indian history which changed the whole course of the life, culture, communal harmony and the future of the nation. The two events- Independence and Partition not only affected the fate of an individual, but nation, religion and culture are still paying the price. The partition of India and Pakistan soon after India's independence was a painful ending episode which led to great upheaval, a brutal massacre and exodus of masses over the borders. Thousands of the natives were uprooted from their homelands, many women widowed, raped and murdered and, children became orphans. This cataclysmic incidence has created gaps and boundaries and, ever since a feeling of suspicion and misunderstanding has been developed among the two concerned countries.

The portrayal of history in fiction, with an air of reality provides ample scope for the novelist to comment upon the events and their outcome. They develop a universal viewpoint and become the representative of humanity. The theme of partition with multiple aspects and perspectives has been described with the horrid atrocities and terror in literature of various languages in an impressing and varied fashion. *Train to Pakistan* by Khuswant Singh, *Ice Candy Man* or *The Cracking India* by Bapsi Sidhwa, *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgonkar, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* all deals with the same theme variously. Apart from these, many films such as *Pinjar*, *Gadar: ek Prem Katha* are also the witnesses to the gruesome episode in the history of India and Pakistan. *Train to Pakistan* presents the sacrifice of a Sikh to save a train full of Muslims; the novelist succeeds to draw the barbarism of both the communities in all hue and color. He, being a Sikh presents the Sikh viewpoint of the partition. *The Cracking India* (American title) or *Ice Candy Man* presents the neutral attitude adopted by the Parsees during partition and also delineates partition with a Pakistani point of view. Col. Bharucha reveals the Parsee dilemma and fear of being a minority among others:- "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!" (Sidhwa. *Ice Candy Man* 36)

A Bend in the Ganges starts with the struggle of freedom, the infusion of communal hatred in the mind of the people and finally delineates the communal riots broken on the very eve of independence and the effect on the thought and action of the public. It also gives voice to the dichotomy between violence and non-violence and also describes the ideological conflict between the violent freedom fighters and the non-violent group. A nation which is now free with many problems to solve. *The Shadow Lines* like *Train to Pakistan* puts forth the sacrifice of Tridib to save May from the "riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka"("The Shadow Lines". Wikipedia). The novel is set against the backdrop of 'Swadeshi movement, Second World War,

Partition of India, and Communal Riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka and Calcutta' ("The Shadow Lines" Wikipedia) which provides a historical perspective for the novel.

Rushdie's *Midnight Children* discusses the political events from the British colonialism, the moment of Indian independence and a curse of partition to bear and moan forever. The narrative begins long before the birth of Salem Sinai with the story of the three generations: Salem's Grandfather Adam Aziz, Salem's father Ahmed Sinai and the birth of his son Adam. The novel deals with the nationalist movement as well as with the two partitions of India in 1947 and 1971. The characters move and breathe in the atmosphere of the three newly formed nations: divided India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The atmosphere is charged with mystical superpowers having allegorical connotations. All the babies born at the hour of midnight can be the newly independent nations and the midnight children conference can be a council or the stage for mutual cooperation (Non-Alignment). *The Shadow Lines* along with partition encompasses the Bengal riots as its theme. Ghosh treats the theme and subject from psychological point of view, though divided and away from ones home, the image of the home in ones conception remains unfractured, how the creation of nation proves useless and how absurd it is to draw a line and give it a name. Ghosh thus, treats the subject differently and in a new perspective.

Bapsi Sidhwa's treatment of the theme and her female-oriented perspective is unique. The character of *Ayah* and *Ice Candy Man* are complex characters and the axis on which and around which the whole events of the novel revolves around. She chooses Lenny, a Parsee girl of eight, as the narrator of the cataclysmic drama. The ice candy man is the reporter and the linking element of the plot. Queen Victoria's Garden is a type of confluence where all the suitors of *Ayah* meet (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian). Being a Parsee, and loyal to her motherland, she praises Jinnah and criticizes the hero of Indian independence, Mahatma Gandhi. The butcher names him as "nonviolent violence monger (Sidhwa. *Ice Candy Man*.91) and the masseur sarcastically says-"He's a politician yaar. It's his business to suit his tongue to the moment" (Sidhwa. *Ice Candy Man*.91). Sidhwa presents the female oriented picture of partition which was left by majority of authors. The character 'Ayah' is a Hindu and abducted, gang-raped and at last settled as a prostitute in Hira Mandi. She not only loses her religion, her home, but she becomes Mumtaz and suffers the agony of disrespect and humiliation. When Rodabai tries to comfort *Ayah*-"Worse things are forgiven. Life goes on and the business of living buries the debris of our pasts. Hurt, happiness... all fade impartially ... to make way for fresh joy and new sorrow. That's the way of life" .She has lost faith and finally replies-"I am past that I'm not alive". (Sidhwa. *Ice Candy Man*.262)

Sidhwa chooses the title *Ice Candy Man* as ice candy man is the binding force and a type of messenger who reports the horror, the atrocities, and the massacre to the garden people. He is an Iago type of complex villain who murders the Masseur, abducts *Ayah*, rapes her and finally marries her. Partition was also result of the policy failure of the politicians. It also became an opportunity for revenge, as in the case of Masseur murdered by the ice candy man. From a Marxist point of view partition can be viewed as a strategy based exploitation of the helpless and minority. It was the cruel plan of the British government to satisfy the demands of both the communities (Hindu and Muslims) and when the partition became inevitable then the division of states and cities were unjust. Sidhwa asserts-"I am a Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that. (Sidhwa. *Ice Candy Man*. 140)

Before the independence and the execution of this crooked strategy of the Raj, no one knew about what religion was, but suddenly the attitude changed and the group round Ayah became Hindus, Muslim and Sikh. Sidhwa narrates-“One day everybody is themselves- and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all encompassing Ayah—she is also a token—a Hindu.” (Sidhwa. *Ice Candy Man* 93). This strategy led the once friends to kill one another. The Britishers exploited the strength (unity among masses) of India and after declaring independence too, sowed such seeds of suspicion and hatred which has become a canker for both the countries.

Sidhwa treats the theme of partition from women perspective. The women sufferings were left unnoticed by the historians and literary authors. Sidhwa becomes a spokesperson of the women and creates a character Ayah, and presents the calamity befallen on her (abduction, gang rape, conversion, marriage and prostitution). Sidhwa dismantles the male narrative i.e. partition. Writing from Pakistani perspective, she chooses to present incidents authentic to the very core. She chooses Ayah, Hindu women, as she is marginalized after partition. She becomes the subaltern, the slave, the black, the laborer and ultimately a minority among the major Muslims.

Considering Partition as a male narrative, Sidhwa attempts to dismantle the colonial discourse and puts forth a women-oriented study of the historical event. Hers is an attempt to give voice and vigor to the subalterns deprived of power, right and respect in society. The canvas of the novel like Shakespeare’s comedies is full of strong women characters. Lenny: a polioridden girl of eight is the narrator, Ayah is described as- “everything about her is eighteen years old and round and plump” (Sidhwa. *Ice Candy Man* 03). Rodabai (Godmother) is a strong character who helps the ladies during partition and finally tries to help Ayah. Muchoo and Papoo the two women characters are from the lower strata of society i.e. they are sweepers. Muchoo is a cruel mother careless about her girl’s future. Papoo is the victim of the age old custom and the authoritarian approach of her mother. Exploitation is common among all classes in the male-dominated society, the very first line of the novel sums up the attitude of women which is developed by the male society- “ My world is compressed”(Sidhwa. *Ice Candy Man* 1). Dr.Col.Bharucha anticipates women to be made for marriage, reproduction and breeding of children-“She’ll marry-have children—leads a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams... Thereby sealing my fate (Lenny’s voice)” (Sidhwa. *Ice Candy Man* 15)

Sidhwa realistically paints the horrors, the humiliation and the injustices from a Pakistani and Parsee point of view. She picks up the neglected aspect (the injustices on women) of partition, and dared to write about women in a country ruled by fanatics. The title, she chooses is ironical, she writes about Ayah and names the novel *Ice Candy Man* to divert the attention of the fanatics and the so called rulers. She also expresses the lot of a women in a male dominated world in the very first line of the novel .Thus *Ice Candy Man* can be studied with the novel perspectives of partition, all the victims (children, men as well as women) become the have-nots and the subaltern while the whole traumatic drama; a strategy to suppress and exploit the weaker sections (racially, sexually and physically) of the independent society. *Ice candy man* surpasses other novels on the theme of partition for its various approaches of studies - feministic point-of - view, Marxist approach, anti-colonial approach (writing by a colonized about the strategies of the colonizer to exploit the colonized), psychological approach (the psychology of the society

towards women especially on the basis of class). She uses a eight year old girl Lenny as the narrator and provides objectivity to the narrative. She is very cautious in the delineation of spatial details and the names of the places. Time plays a pivotal role in a historical narrative. Sidhwa is a realist in the projection of time. The time, she portrayed, was really out of joint, people once friends were now cautious of the communal differences, and were ready to kill their friends too. Times literary Supplement acclaims the novel as-“ Sidhwa’s Ice Candy Man is a bold experiment in narrative strategies and in time”. (“Times Literary Supplement”)

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