

From Silence to Speech: Ice-Candy-Man

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Abstract

In the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988), Bapsi Sidhwa showed the life that she had experienced and witnessed in Lahore at the time of Partition of India, which affected many lives. It was introduced as *Cracking India* to American readers for giving an accurate comprehension of the meaning of the novel at first sight. To them, Ice-candy-man means a peddler, but in India it means a Popsicle man. In the novel, a Popsicle man (Ice-candy-man) played one of the lead roles. He was the representative of typical Indian men who profoundly indulged in the political, religious and social matters. The thought of Partition and the consequences of Partition made him turn a religious zealot, and created great turbulence in the life of Ayah, who was his companion and beloved. The bifurcation of India left sad and haunting memories not only to Ayah but also to many people. Men were butchered, women were abused and raped, and children were left orphans. The impact of the geographical partition was immense on the people's psyche. In fact, the horrible events stood out as a cruel testimony of communal frenzy and insanity of people. The loss was irreparable. Gradually, the villain, Popsicle man emerged as a refined man. He realized his sins and mended his behaviour. Hence, as far as Indian context is concerned, the title of the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* is apt.

Keywords: Ice-Candy-Man – Emancipation of women.

Introduction

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turbulence in the life of Ayah, who was his companion and beloved. The bifurcation of India left sad and haunting memories not only to Ayah but also to many people. Men were butchered, women were abused and raped, and children were left orphans. The impact of the geographical partition was immense on the people's psyche. In fact, the horrible events stood out as a cruel testimony of communal frenzy and insanity of people. The loss was irreparable. Gradually, the villain, Popsicle man emerged as a refined man. He realized his sins and mended his behaviour. Hence, as far as Indian context is concerned, the title of the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* is apt.

In-text citations

Sidhwa, Bapsi. *Ice-Candy-Man*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1988. Print.

I.

Ice-Candy-Man was one of the Sidhwa's major contributions to Women's Empowerment and Women's Emancipation. She showed that the women were forced to experience unbridled violence down the ages in different dimensions for different reasons. She revealed that the men, the society and the various institutions of the society that deal with the social, religious and cultural aspects had their optimum share to torment and distress the women. She also presented the so-called sexual superiority of men over the women. In fact, she used it as one of the prominent themes in the novel. She discussed the effects and consequences on the minds of people and their actions. She felt that all sorts of feelings and emotions of humans were the results of their upbringing. Sexual superiority or inferiority, egoistic behaviour and sexuality were instilled in the minds of people from childhood directly or indirectly. In the process, the dominant feelings had been vested in men and sensitive feelings in women. Hence, the men struggled to preserve their superiority and influence the society in all the possible ways they could.

As the general populace was led with the notions of inequality, there was a great threat to women's identity in the society. Women were ill-treated in every sphere of life. In domestic sphere, women were forced to maintain household without complaints. They were deprived of all sorts of freedom that were enjoyed by men. They were treated as subordinates and sexual objects. Men believed that they were superior to women in every aspect of life. Besides this practice, men made their counterparts think in the same way. From such abject existence, a few women emerged as powerful and outspoken: new women or modern women. Sidhwa depicted them as different from the women of the older generations, who assumed that they were inferior and had no right to seek equality. Though the new women were not against the customs and traditions, they refused to perceive the things as the conservative society had perceived. Though they were not rebellious in nature, they did not agree that their suffering

was due to their fate. They had trust in their inner strength. They tried to question their exploiters. They were united to oppose the evil in the society. Their collective effort and changing perception helped them move from misery to triumph.

Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* depicted women of divergent ideologies. On the one hand, she showed the different sources of women's subjugation, victimization and suffering, and on the other hand, she displayed the gradual emergence of women's emancipation and empowerment. She also showed how their strides helped them to expand their growth of mind and attain freedom in different spheres. Their struggle engendered the fruits of their individuality, their independence and their self-identity. The saga moved from their dreams of freedom to their exercise of freedom. In addition to her discussion on attaining freedom by women, Sidhwa conversed about the attitudes and approaches of women to reach their destination in the novel. In her opinion, the society's attitude towards women's submissiveness was ill-justified. She also strongly felt that in real life situation, the womenfolk were beyond the estimation of the men in the society. They endured the pain to some extent. If it hurt their identity or self-respect, they would be no longer humble creatures. Their sensitivity triggered unimaginable consequences: they might be silent or even aggressive to create space for themselves. The approaches for protesting against the cruelty of men were either submissive silence or speech in revolt. Silence is to reinforce their attitude and acquire persistence in their moves. Speech is their ultimate tool to resolutely realize their dream of freedom.

As far as the story of the novel is concerned, the narrator was a little Parsi girl named Lenny. She was a shrewd and keen observer of the events that took place around her during the course of time. She observed the transitional society and changing human relations and bonds and narrated them in an effective dramatic narrative mode with a great verve. Her lameness kept her away from school and made her move with Santha, the beautiful Ayah, who was in charge of her. Ayah had a circle of admirers. She often visited them with Lenny. This made Lenny encounter and understand the masses, especially working class people. She also observed the transitional society where situations became topsy-turvy. At one point of time, she witnessed the strengths of the society: amicability, unity, innocence and supporting. As time went by, such positive aspects of the society were gradually replaced by the negative aspects of the society: religious fervour, patriarchal conventions, revenge, riots and massacres as a result of the Partition.

Lenny witnessed the close-knitted society bifurcating into two halves and then into many pieces. The people in the society were separated by matters of caste, gender and nation. Their primitive instincts killed the values of human life. They cheated and hurt one another. The transitional phase took them neither to growth nor to happiness. It led them only to destroy the different facets of life:

individually, socially, culturally, physically, mentally, psychologically, emotionally, politically, geographically and economically. Especially, women and children were affected more in the Partition turbulence. Success and failures of men's mission during the cultural chaos were determined through their actions towards women. Men fought against one another to settle their personal scores and satisfy their internal primitive evil instincts under the mask of religion.

Gradually, the tumult and turbulence in the society came to an end. The attitude of the exploiters and the sufferers changed. The former category felt sorry for their sins and the harm they had done towards the weaker sections of the society. The latter category tried to emerge out of their deep sorrow. Most of the women during that time and in that society came under the second category. Through their steadfastness, their reformative attitude towards their lives, their collectivity, their measures to rescue the fellow women, their recuperation, they attained liberation and empowerment in different domains.

Lenny's childhood observations and impressions on the society made up the framework of the story. The transitional life of Ayah was the flesh of the story that described her journey from happy days to sad days, amicability to abrasiveness and sustenance to struggle. Ayah's redemption as well as the collective effort of all the fallen women in the Women's Rescue camp for supporting a cause was the soul of the novel.

Being a Parsi by birth, Lenny was not so much restricted as the other children were. She was treated very dearly by her mother, and was never made conscious of her lameness. She was provided care and assistance through Ayah. Their family doctor, Col. Bharucha told Lenny's parents that she could not become a Professor but could lead a good family life. This was an example of not only opinion of the doctor on Lenny, but also common expectation of society on women. Getting married, giving birth to babies and looking after the family was the inescapable duties of a woman. Female education was discouraged by the society.

Because of Lenny's limp, Santha, the Ayah took care of Lenny. She was carried by the Ayah wherever she went. This allowed her to see the world of adults who belonged to different religions very closely. They represented the typical people of the Indian subcontinent. Gradually, she became aware of men's sexuality. She found that Ayah was admiringly gazed at by the men for her feminine physical grace. Lenny also noticed that many times, Ayah was disturbed by their annoying advances at her, but somehow she used her tactics to escape from them. In her own case, Lenny experienced her cousin's carnal cravings, her little brother's attempt to see her nakedly through the holes in the bathroom door, and Imam Din's dirty tricks to satisfy his carnal longings in the kitchen.

Lenny agonized to see the rapid changes around her during Partition. Before Partition, there was a great unity among the people of divergent faiths.

When the thoughts of Partition had begun to take roots, all this bonhomie came to an end. People perceived themselves as symbols of their faith. They divided themselves based on geographical, cultural, and religious grounds. They killed, plundered and raped the people of other communities. They strove for keeping and preserving their community's honour and bringing disgrace to other communities' honour. Success or failure was decided on the range and intensity of exploitation and subjugation. A community that suffered maximum loss of lives, chastity of women and property was considered as losers. People enjoyed in taking revenge on behalf of their community. They forgot the basic humanity and behaved as if they were blood-thirsty barbarians.

The thought or idea of partition brought a tremendous change in the attitude of people, who soon underwent a complete transformation and got involved in mutual verbal abuse. The unity among them was shattered. This disintegration was caused by differences of faith and nation. Each community imagined that they were superior to the people of other faith. This led to explosive consequences. The theory of fraternity was replaced by the theory of enmity. Many were left homeless and orphans.

People reduced themselves to symbols of their respective religions. They strictly followed their religious practices and offered prayers to God. Their devotional fervor had, sadly, resulted in chaos and tragic happenings. The religious practices were observed more to show their differences than to show their reverence and devotion towards their faith. For example, when the religious fervor was at its peak level, the Hindus visited temples and the Muslims Mosques. They only talked about the differences. The religious talks dissipated the unity and friendship among the people. The people were segregated and did not try to meet one another. The people were holding their knives, choppers, daggers, axes, staves and scythes and queued in front of Sharbat Khan to get them sharpened. Ice-candy-man was shocked to see the gunny bags full of women's breasts of his community in the train from India (Gurdaspur). The passengers including his relatives in the train were butchered and killed. This incident caused unbearable and inexplicable agony and frustration in his mind. He shared the tragic news with his community men. They were deeply agitated and were determined to take revenge against the people of other community.

Religious differences made the writer to feel utter degradation and unspeakable agony. She described the chores of the working class people and how they skillfully used tactics to be successful in their businesses. She also recorded how they mocked and insulted the religious practices of the people of other community and how they cheated in the name of God. They behaved as if they were enemies. In order to trouble his Sikh neighbours, Ice-candy-man went to their residence with his Muslim companions and created some fuss: they booed the Sikh women and showed their naked bottoms. The reason behind their

act was to insult the Sikhs. Their way of insulting or humiliating women was stripping clothes. The act extended to the whole community in later stages.

The people of the two different religions showered great fury on each other without any reason. For example, when Lenny and Yousaf were on the way to their home through Lawrence Gardens, they saw a Brahmin Pandit sitting cross-legged and eating something out of a leaf-bowl. On seeing Yousaf, the Brahmin unleashed his hatred and threw his food away. The glances and reaction of Yousaf was as same as Brahmin's. "His face is drained of joy, bleak, furious. I know he too feels himself composed of shit, crawling with maggots./ Now I know surely. One man's religion is another man's poison." (117)

The religious meetings were headed by renowned politicians and the people thronged in the given venue. A stir of excitement, an increase of volume of noise, a great number of steadfast vows etc were common elements in such meetings. People fought to own the nation. Their strategies to defeat the people of other religions showed their cruelty. They plundered, looted, burnt, harassed, exasperated and assaulted the people of other religions. The men in procession knocked down Banya who wore a white Gandhi cap. His legs were tied to jeep and he was killed by separating his two legs. In the name of God and religion, the mob created horrors and quenched their sadistic thirst:

'Allah – o – Akbar!' and beneath it the growl of revving motors. "The terror the mob generates is palpable – like an evil, paralyzing spell. The terrible procession, like a sluggish river, flows beneath us. Every short while a group of men, like a whirling eddy, stalls – and like the widening circles of a treacherous eddy dissolving in the main stream, leaves in its centre the pulpy red flotsam of a mangled body." (135)

Until the political upheaval had swept the people off their religious, ethnic and racial grounds, they were amicable with one another. When they were disintegrated, they became either predators or victims. The jealousy, revenge and cruelty of the people were the causes of their misery. Throughout the novel, Sidhwa showed the extreme moves of Fundamentalist forces during the Partition of India and its impact on women's lives in a heart-rending manner.

In the novel, many women were shown to be driven away from their normal life. They were abducted, raped, insulted, beaten and killed. They were deprived of their small wishes and were denied to exercise their independent and individual thoughts. They were taken away from their kith and kin. They were forced to bear humiliation and ignominy. They were reduced to live like puppets with no emotions. Their innocence, beauty, happiness and patience were trampled and ruined. Their psyche was affected miserably. They were used as pawns and were left to suffer the mental agony forever. Consequently, they refused to behave in a normal way. The bitter truth compelled them to behave rigidly and insensitively. They withdrew to the world of silence. They stopped responding or reacting until they got solace and support.

The haunting impressions and memories made them lead their lives in an indifferent manner. Though some of the fallen women were rescued and united with their families, the majority of them were left in a hapless situation. Their families were not ready to accept them. The men refused to allow their children to meet their mothers. They felt that such women were a disgrace to their personal honour and to their family reputation.

The internal problems of a country pertained to socio-political issues affect the women in various ways. In *Ice-candy-Man*, Sidhwa depicted it through her characters and scenes vividly. Communal perversion during partition caused many women to lose their lives, and get assaulted physically and emotionally. For example, Santha and Hamida, *Ice-candy-man's* sisters and Ranna's mother and sisters, and many other women of PirPindo suffered due to the communal rage. These incidents uprooted them from their smooth mundane life. In the case of Ayah, her hope of getting married to her beloved, Masseur was ruined. He was killed and his dead body was left in a sack on the other side of the Salvation Army Wall. Hamida was no more needed by her husband after her abduction. She represented the women who have lost their own children, and were forced to be separated from their families and communities. As women were treated as the objects of honour by the family and community, they were rejected when they fell in the hands of men who belonged to some other community. The conversation between Lenny and Rodabai (Godmother) substantiates this:

'Hamida was kidnapped by the Sikhs,' says Godmother seriously. On serious matters I can always trust her to level with me. 'She was taken away to Amritsar. Once that happens, and sometimes, the husband - or his family - won't take her back.'

'Why? It isn't her fault she was kidnapped!'

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

Veena Das commented on the tragic effects of communal riots on women as follows:

The women's bodies...became a sign through which men communicated with each other. The lives of women were planned by the notion of that they were to bear permanent witness to the violence of the partition. Thus, the political programme of creating two nations India and Pakistan was inscribed upon the bodies of women. The sexual and reproductive violence to which they were subjected cannot be understood as belonging only to the discourse of the family. It has to be understood as doubly articulated in the domains of kinship and politics. The formal and informal discourses of assimilation to which the women, their pregnancies and their children "born of wrong fathers" were subjected were marked by raptures and uneven folds of surface rather than smooth riding from one surface to another. (Das 56)

Lenny also recognized her mother's conflict. Though Mrs Sethi tried not to reveal her personal life with her husband to anyone, Lenny overheard the conversation and fighting between her parents. Mrs Sethi protested against his infidelity. The next day, Lenny found that she had been battered and abused as a result of the protest. Moreover, she had observed that her mother was almost like a slave to her husband, who dictated her on every issue. Thus, Lenny could see that her mother was a victimized woman inside her private room. In course of time, she noticed transformation in her mother's attitude. Though Mrs. Sethi did not retaliate against her husband's brutality, she emerged as an ideal non-threatening and liberated woman. She diverted her attention from domestic sphere to social arena. She actively participated in rescue missions to help the victimized women to rehabilitate their lives. She gave employment to Hamida, a fallen woman. Mrs.Sethi hit and humiliated her cook Imam Din for tormenting a cat. The act symbolized her anger and protest against aggressive male behaviour. The following instances proved mother as a potent symbol of women's strength behind her private room.

Lenny admired Godmother Rodabai for her empowerment and her absolute control over her own life. She had benefitted greatly from Rodabai for her timely help and guidance that shaped her psyche. It helped Lenny to give support to Hamida and other victims of Partition. With Rodabai's aid, she helped her favourite ayah, Santha to come out of the traps and tyranny of Ice-candyman. She rejected Hamida's concept of life that a woman's life was predestined and tried to convince her that one could change one's life with absolute will-power and positive attitude. In later days, she implemented the two ideas in her life and became a strong personality. In her own case, Lenny was able to prevent the sexual advances of her cousin. She did not succumb to her cousin, who was craving to have the adolescent sexual experimentation with her. She came to know about the world of prostitutes and pimps from him. She realized that men exploited women sexually by patronizing beautiful dancing and singing girls in Hira Mandi. As she was clever enough to understand the male gaze and grope, she saved herself from her cousin's advances of passion. She did not even blame him for his misguidance. As she understood the different shades of life in patriarchal society, she forgave him. She considered his act of making her know about the dark sides of adult world and his sexual advances as the outputs of his craze and craving for sexual experience, which was primarily aroused due to his exposure with the male dominated society.

Lenny's surveillance and understanding of the society helped her to overcome her own limitations. She did not remain a susceptible youth. She believed in herself and her strength of mind and character. Her relationship with her cousin strongly supported the principle of equality because she did not allow him to manipulate her sexually and at the same time, she attracted his attention for her individuality and great charm in her personality. She never allowed

anyone to pity on her lameness. She also remained a self-confident and outspoken person. In this way, Sidhwa portrayed a young girl's mental maturation in a country like Pakistan where the measure of freedom for a woman is noticeably less than what it is in India. In the blurb of *Ice-Candy-Man* the central character was described as "about the slow awakening of the child heroine both to sexuality and grown up pains and pleasures and to the particular historical disaster that overwhelms her world."

The narrator, who was leading an unrestrained and merry childhood, could not understand Muccho's cruelty towards her own daughter. Lenny witnessed the reactions of the society against the issue in different ways. In order to attract the attention and admiration of his circle of acquaintances, Imam Din, Lenny's cook intimidated Muccho for her harsh behaviour. Being a henpecked husband, Moti, Papoo's father did not dare to stop her. Moreover, Muccho was an obedient wife in every respect, except for her irrational resentment against their daughter. Hari and other working men tried to protect her from Muccho by setting up a protective barrier of arms and saying, 'Forgive her, Muccho, she's just a child... You're too hard on her...' (46). Lenny's mother and Ayah treated Papoo compassionately and rendered their service in times of need. They were very much concerned about her well-being. Though Muccho was asked frequently to change her behaviour towards Papoo by the people who live around her, she tended to turn a deaf ear to their suggestions.

As far as Muccho's harsh behaviour towards her daughter was concerned, it was perhaps due to her conservative upbringing. In a patriarchal society like India, irrespective of their gender, people considered a female child a burden. Moreover, they were not ready to accept that a female child too could be individualistic and self-willed. Such traits were treated as abnormal qualities of a female child. Muccho was not an exception in this matter. She was a replica of women who supported male chauvinistic ideology. In this context, Muccho's reply to Ayah's accusation of her step-motherly treatment towards Papoo reinforced the argument: 'What do you know?' Muccho screams. 'She's no innocent! She's a curse-of-a-daughter ... Disobedient, bone lazy, loose charactered ... she'll shame us. She'll be death of me, the whore!'" (46).

Sidhwa depicted Papoo as an ill fated girl. She was not given any parental care. Her mother became an evil force in her life. Her vindictive and irrational attitude crushed Papoo completely. She did not have any freedom to live as she liked. Her initial struggles to enjoy her childhood brought her unending sorrows in her life. As she was not of proper age, and was devoid of strength and support, she was compelled to accept everything that happened in her life.

Sidhwa's *Ice-candy-man* brought out the women's issues in different dimensions. She elevated women's new approach to deal with the problems. At this juncture, she showed the new women who were no longer meek and stereotypical. Their intense suffering made them revolt against the root cause of

the problems. They refused to play the roles that society or men had set to follow. They challenged some of the unquestionable institutions like marriage and male domination. For example, In order to preserve her identity, Ayah refused to live with Ice-candy-man who was the sole reason to bring her shame and emotional turmoil. Ayah was not content with the role of the wife of a cheat. She could not forget her shame and suffering, which were entirely due to Ice-candy-man's passion and jealousy. He made a mockery of her friendship and faith. He killed her lover and later raped her along with his Muslim companions. Thus, he wrecked her life completely and left her dejected. Later, he regretted his brutal behaviour towards her and married her and tried to convince her that it was a fresh start to both of them. However, she was not inclined to live with him. She felt she was alive physically but not mentally. His friendship that had driven her into troubles haunted her thoughts where he was a culprit and what he had done to her was never forgivable.

So, she asserted her opinion of leaving him in Godmother's presence and sought her help. She requested Godmother to release her from his clutches and make arrangements for her to set off to her home in Amritsar. She refused to be bound by the institution of marriage. Through her act, she showed us that a loveless marriage was a kind of hell. Ayah's decision reflected her deep longing for liberating herself not only from physical shackles, but also from emotional fetters.

Her emotional alienation compelled her not to compromise with the conventional thinking and practices. So, she opted for freedom from his hold as well as from the haunting past. She was ready to face even the most unfavourable conditions for the sake of liberation and the life that she planned in India. Hence, her desire to reach her people in India demonstrated a few important things about her: her deep craving for uniting body with soul; her sense of urgency for keeping herself away from the nightmarish life, and her profound longing for cleansing her mind from the haunting thoughts of her past.

Sidhwa also portrayed how a woman emerged as an individual and independent out of her woes through one of the two major Parsi female characters named Mrs. Sethi. Being a Parsi woman, Lenny's mother, Mrs. Sethi enjoyed a respectable status in the society but her place at home was next to her husband. She was not respected by her husband and her opinions were never taken into consideration by him. He had no emotional involvement when she was speaking to him. In spite of this, she devoted her time to serve her husband and tried to attract his attention. When he entered the portico of their house, she gave him a warm welcome and paid attention to relieve his burden. She showed her servitude and responsibility towards him at every moment of her life. Sidhwa describes this in the following manner:

Mother removes his sandals, his socks if he is wearing socks, gloves tenderly between his toes, and with cooing noises caresses his feet.

With a stern finger on her lips she hushes the household, until father's eternal alarm clock causes him to jump out of bed, and within four minutes on his bicycle. (67)

Mrs. Sethi was not given any financial freedom either. In order to look after the domestic matters smoothly, she cajoled, entertained and pleaded her husband, who was the source of money. If she took money from the brief or from his pocket, he abused her with filthy words like 'Stupid twit!', 'uloo!', 'crazy!' 'Madwoman!' etc. She was beaten severely when she prevented him from visiting Hira Mandi, a red-light area.

Though Mrs. Sethi did not show any sign of her anger and disappointment, she proved that she could do anything if she intended to. She tried to resolve the problems tactfully. In order to control the servants at her home, she feigned anger at them. She let it be known to everyone that she was disgusted with the quarrels. She created an impression that she did not tolerate their impudent and indecent behaviour. This made the servants behave well and politely in her presence. They also tried to keep themselves away from disputes to maximum extent. There were many instances that supported this view: her Muslim servants did not take part in riots. Moreover, they tried to save their Hindu co-workers from the rioters. In another instance, when Ice-candy-man was beaten by a Sikh guard at the Women's refugee camp, her servants, Imam Din, Himmat Ali and Yousaf tried to save him from the guard. As soon as they saw their lady's arrival, they disappeared from the place.

With her astute approach and humanitarian deeds, she brought a good deal of transformation in the people around her. Once, she thrashed her cook, Imam Din for tormenting a cat. Though she made the others believe that her anger was not real at that juncture, it revealed that she did not accept the cruelty of man. This incident not only warned her servants but also her husband who had abused her psychologically. She made her husband learn that a woman was not inferior to man. She respected her husband and endured his insults because she wanted to abide by the tradition. This brought a change in his way of thinking and behavior towards her. He started treating her respectfully and as an equal.

Lenny's mother had great sympathy to the people who were in trouble. Her talk, gestures and assurance generated a great deal of geniality in the circle of her friends who belonged to different religions. She was aware of the contemporary politics and the consequences. She rendered her aid to the Hindus and Sikhs who were ready to leave Pakistan to save their lives. She promised them that she would keep their belongings that they couldn't carry. She also assured them to return their things to them when they came back.

Mrs Sethi found immense solace in helping the distressed and needy people in the havoc of Partition. She risked her life to restore the normalcy in the lives of victims of the communal riots. She smuggled petrol along with Mini popularly known as Electric Aunt to help Hindus and Sikhs to flee from the

nation where their lives were under great threat. She also helped the kidnapped women to reach their families across the borders. She explained her mission to her daughter thus: “We were only smuggling the rationed petrol to help our Hindu and Sikh friends to run away.... And also for the convoys to send the kidnapped woman, like your Ayah to their families across the border.” (242)

Sidhwa portrayed Mrs Sethi’s character in two different angles. Mrs. Sethi enjoyed both the traditional and modern roles. On the one hand she accepted her role as a submissive wife, but on the other hand she rejected her husband’s cruelty and adultery. As she did not fall a prey in communal riots, she took a social responsibility to help her fellow women who were in great distress. Her humanity, social responsibility and valour carried her from victimization to empowerment. Moreover, she became liberated from her husband’s despotic behaviour.

Sidhwa’s insights for new women was exemplified through another major Parsi woman character Rodabai, popularly called Godmother, was very influential. She talked to the people of all faiths and used to counsel them often and help them to lead better lives. She rendered her aid to the people who were in dire need in various ways: she donated her blood to save many injured people in the communal riots, she provided education to Ranna, who had lost his parents, siblings and uncles in the riots, and she also promised the parents of the students who were pursuing Medicine that she would take care of their education and welfare. On Lenny’s request, she took up the responsibility of searching for Ayah. Hence, she was rightly felt to be an embodiment of knowledge, power and influence by Lenny:

And this is the source of her immense power: this reservoir of random knowledge and her knowledge of ancient lore and wisdom and herbal remedy. You cannot be near her without feeling her uncanny strength. People bring to her their joys and woes. Show her their sores and swollen joints. Distilling the right herbs, adroitly instilling the right word in the right ear, she secures wishes, smooths relationships, cures illness, battles wrongs, solaces grief, and prevents mistakes. She has access to many ears. No one knows how many” (211).

Whenever Lenny asked any question, Godmother gave her a rational answer and tried to give her a good understanding of that issue. She made her think beyond the conventions. Such sagacious guidance led Lenny to think shrewdly and practically at a very young age. Godmother decided to locate Ayah to help Lenny to recuperate from her mental turmoil, as she was the sole reason to Ayah’s kidnap. She received the information that Ayah was in Hiramandi and was married to Ice-candy-man and took up dancing profession. She was such a bold person that she did not hesitate to take Lenny to Hiramandi, a red-light area because that was where Ayah lived. As the thought process of Lenny was conservative, she felt that Ayah might be ashamed due to her victimization. Her orthodox opinion towards Ayah’s victimization expressed in the presence of

Godmother as “I know Ayah is deeply, irrevocably ashamed. They have shamed her. Not those men in the carts – they were strangers - but Sharbat Khan and Ice-candy-man and Imam Din and cousin’s cook and butcher and the other men she counted among her friends and admirers.” (253-54) However, her perception on shame was corrected by Godmother, who told her that Ayah need not be ashamed of her victimization; it was the men who should feel guilty of their actions. This sort of fairly outlook and guidance made Lenny grow as a strong-willed individual with broad thinking.

Godmother pinpointed Ice-candy-man’s behaviour and his evil actions towards Ayah. His confrontation with her made him think over his misdeeds and he started to repent. The signs of his mental turmoil were seen in his face. He tried to please Godmother and even himself with his answers that he looked after Ayah well since their marriage. In this context, he revealed that he married Ayah, whom he loved very much and now she need not fear any harm from him or anyone else. Then, Godmother questioned his assertion over his harmlessness: ‘You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks, and goondas and say she has come to harm?’ (248). She also scolded him for her dancing profession in Hira Mandi:

‘Is that why you had her lifted off – let hundreds of eyes probe her – so that you could marry her? You would have your own mother carried off if it stupid you! You are a shameless badmash! Nimakharam! Faithless!’

‘Oh? What kind of man? A royal pimp? What kind of man would allow his wife to dance like a performing monkey before other men? You’re not a man, you’re a low-born, two-bit evil little mouse!’ (248)

She went on admonishing him in the following way: ‘You have permitted your wife to be disgraced! Destroyed her modesty! Lived off her womanhood!’ (249)

Godmother told Ice-Candy-Man that his marriage with Ayah was no longer valid because he was the man who had brought so much disgrace to her. She averred that he was perfidious, perilous, and despicable. He was a vicious creature, who ruined her sensitivity and peace of mind. So, she wanted to take Ayah back to her family in Amritsar. As she understood the mind of Ayah and her desolated heart, she turned a deaf ear to his appeal to let him live with her. Ice-candy-man defended himself saying that he satisfied her needs and loved her much. While saying this, he was thinking of only the material riches that he had provided her, but conveniently ignored the harm that he had done to her. He felt that he had protected her from the other men. He said:

‘What if she refuses to leave me? Says Ice-candy-man, as if dredging from a deep doubt in her chest a scrap of hope. ‘I have been a good husband...Ask her. I’ve covered her with gold and silks. I’d do anything to undo the wrong done her. If it were to help to cut my head off, I’d cut my head and lay it at her feet! No one has touched her since our nikah.’ (250)

However, Godmother did not accept his explanation. Ignoring his half-hearted apologies, Godmother decided to help Ayah. She told Ayah to be patient and to have faith in her, and she would certainly deliver her from the clutches of her despotic husband, who was the reason for her incessant sorrow. In course of time, she fulfilled her promise. In Lenny's words, Godmother's involvement in Ayah's deliverance was described as follows:

The long and diverse reach of Godmother's tentacular arm is clearly evident. She set an entire conglomerate in motion immediately after our visit with Ayah and single-handedly engendered the social and moral climate of retribution and justice required to rehabilitate our fallen Ayah. (274)

In this way, throughout the novel, Sidhwa showed Godmother as an independent, assertive and authoritative woman, who exercised her freedom completely to promote good and render aid to the weak and victimized people.

Sidhwa portrayed a typical Indian woman character Hamida, whose meekness and conventional outlook stood in striking contrast to the traits of strong personality of Godmother. Hamida was not allowed to see her children after the rape; still she thought that her husband was good. She blamed fate for her life a misery. She spent hours sitting in the Women's Refugee Camp with Lenny and tried to console the women at the camp by her presence and through gestures despite her painful condition. She was profoundly empathetic to their suffering. She understood the value of life, so she showed her interest to meet Lenny's mother with a request to give her a job. Though she had a traditional outlook, she did not impose her feelings on others. This was evident from the fact that she respected Lenny's feelings about self-will. Along with Lenny, she tried to tell the victimized women that they were with them, though their grief and misery were inconsolable and irrevocable.

The women at the camp realized the importance of shared grief and responded to Hamida's and Lenny's gestures gradually. In course of time, they left their cocoon of silence and indifference. They forgot their miseries and at the same time, they tried to give shape to their hopes. They worked collectively for Ayah to fulfill her wish to leave Ice-candy-man. This incident was a paragon to women's liberated ideology. They indirectly rejected the men who were solely responsible for their ruin and mental turmoil. They also proved that they were supporting one another when the time and situation demanded. It was proved that their emancipation was both emotional and intellectual.

The revolutionary ideology of women against male chauvinistic society engendered a great change in the attitude of the society. Women showed their impatience against the deeds of insensitivity and inhumanity by men. The emotional strength of women helped them to fight against the institutions that had severed their freedom and happiness. They tried to root out the evil that had affected their identity and freedom. Consequently, men regretted their sins, perverted sexuality and brutality. They gradually understood the real charm of

the women. They paid their respects too. The veil of their superiority complex and egoistic attitude was removed. Hence, they started treating women equally and sometimes more respectfully.

Initially, the victims protested against the institutions that made them suffer with their silence, and later with their speech. They took some time to voice their emotions. The women who were victims of the cruelties of men were not despondent. They sought to build their lives again. They tried to put themselves in some useful and meaningful activities. The women who were not affected became a victim support group. In this way, they were resilient – they shed their passivity, silence and misery. They resolved their problems gradually by showing resistance to the existing cruel institutions in the society.

Conclusion

Hence, Silence in the novel is designed very eloquently and powerfully. It is a tool of revolt or a weapon of discord against the harm that was done by the men. They refused to speak up their suffering. Their silence was more eloquent than their words. The absence of speech spoke of untold cruelties of men. Hence, they made the predators and exploiters realize their mistakes. At the end, they opened their hearts through the act of rejecting their foes through speech. That was obviously a strong verdict against the crimes or past sins of the men, who were the prime reason for their misery and suffering.

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