



Gendered Violence: Decoding Postcolonial Memory in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*

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Abstract

The study examines the postcolonial theory and its perspectives based on the ideas proposed by Peter Barry and Edward Said. The rise of enduring and universal concepts aimed at exploring various facets of social, cultural, religious, and traditional belief systems has united communities worldwide under a common framework of ideas. However, the colonial power presented a set of preconceived ideas of the Orientals to the Westerners. The voice of the weaker section of society remains unheard due to the other dominant sections that is the Westerners. Bapsi Sidhwa, in her novel *Ice-Candy Man*, portrays the events that led to partition and the struggles of the women during that time. Women are regarded as a weaker gender, and are often exploited. Though they try to bring peace in society, ultimately, they succumb to the violence imposed on them. The memory of the narrator is decoded with the postcolonial perspective, and provides insights into the struggles of partition.

Keywords: postcolonial, colonial, orientalist, partition, violence, memory

History does not always speak the absolute truth. As Winston Churchill said, "History is written by the victors", the perspectives of the triumphant side occupy a more dominant space in the historical narratives. The voice of the failing side is most commonly overlooked. European colonial ideologies and perspectives have been prominently featured in assessing and determining the significance of the socio-cultural and religious backgrounds of colonized nations. To challenge the Eurocentric notion that European practices and culture were superior to those of colonized powers, several humanists introduced the concept of postcolonialism. This theoretical framework emerged in the 1990s, as noted by

Peter Barry, who observed, "One significant effect of postcolonial criticism is to further undermine the universalist claims once made on behalf of literature by liberal humanist critics" (Barry 187). During colonization, Europeans propagated a distorted image of colonized countries to subsequent generations, portraying the culture and civilization of the colonizers as exemplary while concealing the rich cultural heritage of the colonized peoples beneath a veneer of modernization and civilization. The advent of postcolonialism has brought about a renewed awareness of the cultural wealth of colonized nations by uncovering their glorious histories and heritage. This movement has empowered colonized peoples



to reject universal ideologies that exalt colonizers while simultaneously embracing and celebrating the richness of their own cultures. Edward Said, the first person to propose the concept of postcolonial criticism in his book *Orientalism* (1978), brought out the stark contrast between the mighty attitude of the Westerners and their lowly portrayal of the people of the East. The Western people painted an image of them being perfect and set a module for society, meanwhile, the Eastern society is filled with the qualities loathed by the Westerners.

Bapsi Sidhwa is one of Pakistan's most prominent writers during the late 1970s. She was praised by New York Times as "Pakistan's finest English-language novelist". Born on August 11, 1938, in Karachi and later migrated to Lahore, she bore witness to the brutalities of the India-Pakistan partition. Her novel "Ice-Candy Man" published in 1991, explores the events surrounding the India-Pakistan Partition and mirrors the barbarism experienced by the people. Sidhwa takes an objective stand in presenting the experiences behind the partition that affected people from both sides of the border. The novel also contains autobiographical elements, with Sidhwa being a 9-year-old experiencing the brutalities of the partition. The narrator of the novel is characterised to be a 4-year-old girl named Lenny, whose presence is felt throughout the novel. As a member of the Parsee community, Sidhwa maintains a neutral relationship with all other religions through the lens of Lenny. She dwells on the concepts of child marriage, the plights of rape victims, and the psychological imbalance in the course of partition throughout the novel. The narrator, Lenny is characterized to be suffering from polio. The plot moves on with the structuring of the Pakistani community, where people live together as a united force regardless of religion and community. The partition announcement came as a deadly blow, where people lost their rationality and became violent towards one another. Murders and abuses became a matter of common occurrence in every village. Throughout the novel, Sidhwa takes the readers through a myriad of emotions to make her point on the cruelties of partition.

The study attempts to assess the necessity and complexity encompassing the concept of decoding postcolonial memory, inclusive of the intricate

patterns of violence towards the weaker gender and its role as a catalyst for societal displacement.

When multitudes of cultures coexist with one another, there will always be similar ideas and some contrasting ideas. Decoding these different perspectives makes the postcolonial study more elegant and noteworthy. The base idea of Postcolonialism, as expressed by Peter Barry, "Characteristically postcolonial writers evoke or create a pre-colonial version of their nation, rejecting the modern and the contemporary, which is tainted with the colonial status of their countries" (Barry 196). The novel is set in the city of Lahore, "My world is compressed. Warris Road, lined with rain gutters, lies between Queens Road and Jail Road: both wide, clean, orderly streets at the affluent fringes of Lahore" (1), which supports Barry's concept of a pre-colonial setting presented by a postcolonial writer. The author brings out the contrast between present and past scenarios while neglecting the modernistic views.

The study analyses the city of Lahore as a place where people from multitudes of cultures coexist together peacefully. But on certain occasions, the memory of Lenny takes over the narrative setting a prelude of what was to come during the partition. The presence of a German soldier in the early parts of the novel suggests the idea of multicultural coexistence. But the dream of the narrator, where a Nazi soldier tries to attack her, acts as foreshadowing the latter instances in the novel. Also Lenny's initial encounter with foreign forces is through her polio, which is credited to the arrival of British forces in the country. Decoding of these memories gives rise to a crisis of how the memory works during the time of distress.

The East is often placed at a level lower than the Westerners, who believed in supremacy due to their cultural and scientific advances. The West considered Orientals as a group of uneducated and unethical people who needed to be educated. This portrays Western cultural dominance. In *Orientalism* by Edward Said,

"The power of expansion of the Western races," argued a leading geographer, La Ronciere Le Noury, "its superior causes, its elements, its influences on human destinies, will be a beautiful



study for future historians." Yet only if the white races indulged their taste for voyaging—a mark of their intellectual supremacy---could colonial expansion occur

(Said 219).

Imam Din's village, Pir Pindo, is forty miles beyond Lahore. However, the development there is far inferior to the city, where British people brought industrial advancements for their convenience. "When I return from Imam Din's village to the elevated world of chairs, tables, and toilet seats...." (68), shows the disparity of people living just forty miles apart. This brings into the picture the effects of colonisation, British-instigated development in the city; meanwhile, the villages remained backward and isolated from the innovations. This act decodes the perspective that Colonizers' idea is not to improve the lifestyle of the colonized people, but rather to gain benefits for their own. The multitude of people from the East were portrayed as primitive and inferior to the people of the West. This created a sense of Western superiority and colonial domination. The Easterners are more often regarded as collective masses rather than individuals, and they are reduced as symbols to represent the power struggle between the Orientals and the Westerners. "To such abstractions Orientalism had contributed its power of generalization, converting instances of a civilization into ideal bearers of its values, ideas, and positions, which in turn the Orientalists had found in "the Orient" and transformed into common cultural currency" (Said 252).

Once the idea of partition became a matter of discussion in the country, everyone from children to adults became aware of their religious differences. The whole mindset of people became fragmented. Even the English and Christians looked down upon one another based on their hierarchy. The unity the people had until then dissolved into oblivion, and they began categorising themselves based on social scale. This further divided the country's unity. "The Rogers of Birdwood Barracks, Queen Victoria, and King George are English Christians: they look down their noses upon the Pens who are Anglo-Indian, who look down on the Phailbuses who are Indian-Christian, who look down upon all non-Christians" (94).

The children have no regard for any particular religion, and they make fun of everything they can think of. On one side, the children remain innocent and unaware of the religious conflicts; on the other side, children are made to hate any religion other than their own. This is depicted blatantly in the novel, when Hindu children yell that the Parsees are 'Croweaters'. This shows how deep-seated the hatred among the children is and how the community is segregated based on religion.

Ayah, one of the prominent characters, whose admirers span a wide range, with various cultural, religious, and national identities. She maintains an equilibrium within her group of people and keeps them unified. In one gathering, when they discuss national politics, their conversation escalates to a more serious one. But then Ayah is not entertained by this concept of people fighting over religious conflict. Faced with Ayah's threat of not visiting them again, all the men non-verbally agree never to talk about politics again in her presence. During a gathering in the Wrestler's restaurant, all of Ayah's admirers discuss the position of Lahore during the partition. The conclusion arrived at that event is that "there are no differences among friends ... We will stand by each other" (131). Ultimately amidst all the religious divisions, there's the only exception, which is the people around Ayah, united under her presence. "Only the group around Ayah remains unchanged. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee are, as always, unified around her" (96).

Ayah's feminine power holds men from various cultures together as a single front. However, after the announcement of partition, many of Ayah's admirers moved away from her, creating a disparity among their ideologies. The men, once united under the common ideology, now stand divided, and this can be attributed to the absence of Ayah's presence in their lives. Masseur's death had a severe impact on the Ayah, who secretly mourned his death. With his death, Ayah lost trust in everyone around her, and with all the Hindus moving out of Lahore, she became increasingly agitated. It was then, one of Ayah's admirers, Ice-candy man, arrived with a group of violent men to find Ayah and then drag her out, taking her with them.



After being captured by Ice-candy man and his fellow brothers, Ayah was tortured and sold to be a dancing girl in the bar. Ice-candy man let Ayah be abused by butchers, drunks, and goondas for three months before marrying her. He married her only after knowing about Lenny's mother's plan for her to return to her family. Till then, he was taking pleasure in counting the money earned by prostituting Ayah. When Godmother and Lenny visited Ayah, they saw her wearing high heels adorned in gold and renamed Mumtaz. Her eyes are no longer bright and cheerful but are replaced with a vacant look. She was traumatised by what happened earlier when she was abducted and does not have any regard for her husband. Ayah was partially shattered by the death of Masseur, and the abduction and torture by the Ice-candy man, made her soul fall apart, and her inner self was broken. Ayah acted as an epitome of unity, but when she lost herself to the brutalities of the partition, the whole group of men around her shattered in different directions, and the equilibrium in the society was broken. She is regarded as a symbol of unity before partition, but during partition, she came to be regarded as a weaker gender by the same men who were once united under her feminine power. Her innocence is lost, and so is the stability in society. Every other character underwent the struggle of being fragmented in the dynamic process of partition, and this can be said as a quality attributed to the weaker gender of the society.

The study introduces the postcolonial theory, exploring its development based on the ideas proposed by Peter Barry and Edward Said. The colonial powers present a set of preconceived ideas of the Orientalists to the Westerners, an idea based on postcolonial concepts. However, the writer diverges from the existing ideas, creating her own identity for the nation. The concept of unity shatters when Lenny's dreams of the Nazi soldier trying

to attack her is decoded as a foreshadowing of the events that is to unfold later. Ayah takes a unifying role in holding together people from diverse religious and communal backgrounds. The religious clash and cultural conflict bring out the after-effects of colonisation. Postcolonial literature serves as a reminder to embrace diversity and lay a strong foundation for understanding the world.

Sidhwa uses a four-year-old child's perspective to further construct the realities of the age by incorporating childish innocence. The fear and trepidation experienced by people, especially women, during the partition event are deeply analyzed, and their fear of not being able to move around and speak is evident in her writing. By decoding the gendered bias of the novel, Sidhwa reflects the inequalities faced by women, especially Ayah, under the pretext of religion and gender, and it is analyzed through postcolonial lens. She glorifies the work of women during partition and their tireless efforts in maintaining peace in society, thereby holding it firmly together and preventing it from disintegrating.

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