Chapter IV
Partition Crisis

The Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 is one of the greatest tragedies, the magnitude, ambit and savagery of which compels one to search for the larger meaning of events, and to come to terms with the lethal energies that set off such vast conflagrations. In 1947, freedom came to the Indian subcontinent but in a fractured form. India was divided into two countries – India and Pakistan, and the border between the two was drawn with blood as nearly half million people were slain in communal clashes. Twelve million people fled their homes and over a hundred thousand women were abducted, raped and mutilated. Tens of thousands of houses, shops and other establishments were set on fire. Every right-minded person alive at this hour was outraged at the brutality. There have been a number of novels written on the horrors of the Partition holocaust on both sides of the Radcliffe line. Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan (1956) Attia Hosain’s Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961) and Chaman Nahal’s Azadi (1975) present the Indian perception of the traumatic experiences while Mehr Nigar Masroor’s Shadows of Time (1987) projects the Pakistani version of the tragic events. Though both the versions are free from religious bias and written more in agony and compassion than in anger yet Ice-Candy-Man is different from these works as it presents the turbulent upheaval of Partition from the viewpoint of a handicapped Parsi girl child. Stressing the vulnerability of human lives, and maintaining a fine balance between laughter and despair, Sidhwa presents various nuances and complexities related with a decision of political pragmatism through Lenny, a child narrator and chronicler. Lenny looks at characters belonging to different communities through the prism of her own Parsi sensitivity. Shorn of biases the child’s narration also imparts an authentic credibility to the novel. Like most of the other Partition novels, Ice-Candy-Man also presents the horrifying details of cruelty, human loss and dislocation, but it does so with a subtle irony, witty banter and parody, forcing the readers to desist from maudlinly sensitive reactions, and to concentrate more on the inscrutability of human behaviour. It also describes a society which has lost its courage, and therefore only crumbles away. It not only presents the barbaric details of atrocities perpetrated by one community
over other, but also delineates various manifestations of pettiness and degenerated values which, like termite, had hollowed the inner structural strength of the society. *Ice-Candy-Man* narrates a society which has deflated chivalrous attitudes, encourages petty self-serving tendencies and indifferent tolerance of pogroms so long that self stays alive with a whole skin; a society which was given what it deserved—a sanguine and blood-curdling mindset, which made Partition of India a grim reality. The characters and events of the novel suggest that “vanity, hypocrisy and self-deception . . . somehow constitute a truer reality than altruism, self-sacrifice and heroism, even when these are known to have existed” (Rutherford 3). This reinterpretation, Andrew Rutherford argues, of historical and psychological reality by art involves an opposition not only between high and lower mimetic modes, but between the low mimetic and the ironic, highlighting what he terms as “a disbelief in the psychological probability of the ideal” (Rutherford 3–4).

The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* deserves to be ranked as the most authentic and best on the Partition of India. In the novel, Sidhwa has captured the turmoil of the times, with a brilliant combination of individual growing up pains and the collective anguish of a newly independent but divided country. Seen through the prism of a marginalised minority girl-child, it focuses on the deteriorating communal climate in pre-Partition days. “Lenny’s naiveté, her privileged position, and her religious background lend her version of Partition a quality that other novels about this tempestuous period in Indo-Pakistani history lack” (Ross 183). Protected by her religious background and her parents’ status, Lenny is not directly affected by the contumelious situation of Partition days, but she keenly observes and comments on the events happening around her. The tone of a reporter which she adopts for recording the events or commenting on them enhances the poignancy of the emotions which are linguistically underplayed.

Like Lenny, the child narrator of the *Ice-Candy-Man*, Bapsi Sidhwa at the time of Partition was an eight-year-old girl living in Lahore. Recalling the nightmarish experience of those days, Sidhwa tells Feroza Jussawalla:

When I was a child living in Lahore at the time of Partition, my maiden name was Bhandara, which sounded like a Hindu name. After most of the riots were over, a gang of looters came in carts into our house thinking it’s an abandoned house. They were quite shocked to see us and my mother and everybody there. At that time our
Muslim cook came out and said, ‘What do you damn people think you’re doing? This is a Parsi household,’ and they said, ‘we thought it was a Hindu household,’ and they went away. I decided to write a story about Partition because this scene was vivid in my mind (Singh 37).

She further says in the same interview:

Another scene that haunted me was one when as a child I was walking with my gardener to my tutor. The gardener just pushed a gunny sack lying on the road and a body spilled out of it. The man was young, good looking, well-built. There was no blood, just a wound as though his waist-line had been trimmed. These scenes and the fires all over Lahore were part of my memory. The fires were like blood colouring the sky. It was a fearful sight. The chanting of slogans was again something very horrific to my child’s ears. It was a threatening noise, full of danger to my family and my friends. So these emotions and images were in my mind, and I wanted to write a story of partition (Singh 37-38).

Partition figures in all her novels set in the Indian subcontinent. It forms the tail of *The Crow Eaters*, the head of *The Pakistani Bride* and the main body of the *Ice-Candy-Man*. As it is already said that Sidhwa was not the first to foray into this field of Partition but what distinguishes Sidhwa is that she does not belong to any of the three major communities – Hindu, Muslim and Sikh – that played key roles in the cataclysmic events preceding and following Partition. She is a Parsi and Parsis always believe in allegiance to the State. They are loyal to the land they inhabit and that is why they stay wherever they are. After Partition most of the Hindus and Sikhs left Pakistan, and a large number of Muslims left India but Parsis remained at their place both in India and Pakistan. They were not targeted by the mobs nor forced to flee across the new frontiers that divided their country. Their non-committal attitude has been typically expressed by Faredoon Junglewalla at the close of *The Crow Eaters*. In this novel, Bapsi Sidhwa portrays the dying businessman Faredoon Junglewalla vehemently protesting against the nationalist movement and exhorting his offspring to remain loyal to the British Empire. It was 1940. Independence and Partition were seven years away but they were very much on the horizon. The whole country was caught up in the political
frenzy. Even some Parsis like Dadabhoy Navroji of Bombay and Rustom Sidhwa of Karachi had entered the fray. Faredoon was not very happy with their role and got very angry:

Do you know who is responsible for this mess? asked Faredoon, not expecting an answer, and his listeners waited for the rhetoric that usually followed. I’ll tell you who: that misguided Parsi from Bombay, Dadabhoy Navroji! Things were going smoothly; there has always been talk of throwing off the British yoke—of Independence—but that fool of a Parsi starts something called the Congress, and shoots his bloody mouth off like a lunatic. ‘Quit India! Quit India!’ You know what he has done? Stirred a hornet’s nest! I can see the repercussions.

What happens? He utters ideas. People like Gandhi pick them up—people like Valabhai Patel and Bose and Jinnah and Nehru. . . and that other stupid fool in Karachi, Rustom Sidhwa, also picks them up! What does he do? He sacrifices his business and abandons his family to the vicissitudes of chance and poverty. He wears a Gandhi cap, handloom shirt, and that transparent diaper they call a dhoti. He goes in and out of jail as if he were visiting a girl at the Hira Mandi! Where will it get him? Nowhere! If there are any rewards in all this, who will reap them? Not Sidhwa! Not Dadabhoy Navroji! Making monkeys of themselves and of us! Biting the hand that feeds! I tell you we are betrayed by our own kind, by our own blood! The fools will break up the country. The Hindus will have one part, Muslims the other. Sikhs, Bengalis, Tamils and God knows who else will have their share; and they won’t want you! (Sidhwa, The Crow Eaters 282-283)

His son-in-law, Bobby Katrak, asks him in alarm, what will be their fate in such a situation? What will happen to us? Sinking back in the pillows Faredoon says softly: “Nowhere, my children. . . We will stay where we are . . . let Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or whoever, rule. What does it matter? The sun will continue to rise—and the sun continues to set—in their arses . . .!” (The Crow Eaters 283)

Following the advice of their elders like Faredoon, the majority of the Parsis adopted a discreet politically naïve profile and directed all their efforts towards achieving success in their personal lives. But within the next four years the freedom movement gathered such
momentum that some Parsis like Dr. Manek Mody of the *Ice-Candy-Man* found it difficult to remain uninvolved.

At a Jashan prayer meeting to celebrate the British victory in the Second World War, the Parsis of Lahore exchange their views freely on the political situation prevailing in the country. A wag proposes that they should join political agitation, march to jail and enjoy the facilities of free board and lodging meant for class prisoners. Col. Bharucha, a doctor and president of the Parsi community in Lahore, rebuffs his offer and warns against joining the struggle for power: “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)

One impatient voice expresses his distrust of the three major communities: “If we’re stuck with the Hindus they’ll swipe our businesses from under our noses and sell our grandfathers in the bargain: if we’re stuck with the Muslims they’ll convert us by the sword! And God help us if we’re stuck with the Sikhs!” (Ice-Candy-Man 37) Col. Bharucha asks them not to develop rancour against any community. He says that they will cast their lot with whoever rules Lahore: “Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land! . . . As long as we do not interfere we have nothing to fear! As long as we respect the customs of our rulers—as we always have—we’ll be all right! Ahura Mazda has looked after us for thirteen hundred years: he will look after us for another thirteen hundred!” (Ice-Candy-Man 39) To a question whether they should move to Bombay in case the Muslims rule Lahore, Col. Bharucha replies that they should remain where they are: “As long as we conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present no threat to anybody, we will prosper right here” (Ice-Candy-Man 40). Through this animated conversation, Bapsi Sidhwa reveals the implicit, lurking fear of the Parsis, a vulnerable minority fearing the loss of their identity and getting swamped by the majority communities—either Hindus in India or Muslims in Pakistan. So even amongst the Parsis, the smallest minority in undivided India, the Partition sparked off an impulse for migration from their homelands. Bombay was opted for, primarily due to safety in numbers rather than the safeguards of democratic India. Historically, however, the movement to Bombay, as the novelist also indicates, was minimal. The Parsis remained in urban areas of India and Pakistan, trying to preserve their identity by not meddling in political matters. The advice of
Mr. Toddywalla is followed, “But don’t try to prosper immoderately. And remember, don’t ever try to exercise real power” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 40).

Amidst banter, repartee and humour Bapsi Sidhwa subtly portrays the underlying fears of the Parsis about Partition and Independence. The depiction of their mental turmoil can be compared to John Masters’s depiction of the plight of the Eurasians commonly called Anglo-Indians before the British left the subcontinent. In his novel *Bhowani Junction*, John Masters aptly depicts the identity crisis of the Anglo-Indians. For instance, the loud-mouthed and arrogant Peter Taylor had talked of going ‘Home’ to England (which he has never seen) and wore his solar hat all day to be recognized as an Englishman. Even the anglicized Peter Taylor has a foreboding of impending Independence. He asks Victoria in sheer frustration, “What are we going to do?” (Masters 42) Knowing that they could become neither English nor Indian, Taylor’s conclusion is “we could only stay where we were and be what we were” (Masters 21). This shows how Taylor and the Anglo-Indian community have become total prisoners of circumstances. Bapsi Sidhwa shows how the Parsis are similar captives of circumstances in the upheaval of Partition. So it is finally resolved that they will not meddle in political matters, will keep equidistance from the three major communities contending for power, and in the event of Partition they will live where they are. And it is this neutrality that makes Sidhwa choose a Parsi girl as the narrator of the *Ice-Candy-Man*. It is the first Partition novel from a Parsi perspective.

Lenny is like the persona that Chaucer adopts in his Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, rendering credibility by being almost a part of the reader’s consciousness. With the wonder of a child, she observes social change and human behaviour, noting interesting sidelights, seeking and listening to opinions and occasionally making judgements. Her childish innocence is like the seemingly naive display of Chaucer’s persona, a source of sharp irony. The device of the child narrator enables Bapsi Sidhwa to treat a historical moment as horrifying as Partition without morbidity, pedanticism or censure. The highlight of the novel is that the author throughout maintains a masterful balance between laughter and despair. The subtle irony and deft usage of language creates humour which does not shroud but raucously highlights the traumas of Partition. Sensitively the author shows the human toll of Partition, when a concerned Lenny asks: “Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is?” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 92)
When the novel opens, the narrator Lenny is just a four-year-old child. Her parents are quite well off as they live in a big house on Warris Road, an affluent corner of Lahore, and have a large staff of servants. She has a brother, Adi, who is one year and a month younger than her. As Lenny’s right leg is afflicted with polio, she is pampered by everyone everywhere. Because of her limp, her world is compressed and her movement is limited. Her eighteen-year-old Ayah, Shanta, takes her out to her godmother’s and electric-aunt’s house on the opposite sides of Jail Road to the Queen’s Park, the zoo and other places from time to time. Lenny, however, loves visiting her godmother most.

Ayah has such stunning looks that she draws covetous glances from everyone. Beggars, holy men, hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes and ogle at her. Even the Englishmen are not able to resist her magnetic charm. But the real coterie of her friends and admirers consists of the Falettis Hotel cook, the Government House gardener, Masseur, Ice-Candy-Man, restaurant-wrestler, a knife-sharpener Sharbat Khan, Ramzana the butcher, Imam Din, Sikh Zoo attendant Sher Singh and a Chinaman. They are people of different faiths — Hindu, Muslim, Sikh—yet they live together amicably in a spirit of the syncretic culture characterizing the pre-Partition India. Of these, Masseur and Ice-Candy-Man are Ayah’s most favourites. While others just talk to her, these two have the privilege to touch her. Masseur massages Ayah under her sari and Ice-Candy-Man lets his toes crawl along her leg and sometimes even to her private parts. Lenny takes advantage of their weakness. She sometimes asks Masseur to massage her legs and Ice-Candy-Man to give her popsicles free.

Lenny is soon jolted out of her jollity by her nightmares about a German soldier “coming to get me on his motorcycle” (Ice-Candy-Man 22). Her another ominous nightmare is that “men in uniforms quietly slice off a child’s arm here, leg there” (Ice-Candy-Man 22). She dreams of herself being dismembered while her godmother is stroking her head. Filled with dismay she exclaims, “I feel no pain. Only an abysmal sense of loss—and a chilling horror that no one is concerned by what’s happening” (Ice-Candy-Man 22). This nightmare about her dismemberment portends the impending vivisection of India. The chilling horror that she feels over no one being concerned about what is happening is symbolic of the general lack of sensitivity to the bloodbath of Partition.
Yet another nightmare that Lenny has is that of the zoo lion breaking loose and sinking his fangs into her stomach:

… the hungry lion, cutting across Lawrence Road to Birdwood Road, prowls from the rear of the house to the bedroom door, and in one bare-fanged leap crashes through to sink his fangs into my stomach. My stomach sinks all the way to the bottom of hell. Whether he roars at night or not, I awake every morning to the lion’s roar. He sets about it at the crack of dawn, blighting my dreams. By the time I dispel the fears of the jungle and peep out of my guilt, Adi is already out of bed. A great chunk of his life is lived apart: he goes to a regular school. *(Ice-Candy-Man 23-24)*.

The hungry lion foreshadows the lust for blood and the murderous cruelty with which people of different communities will treat one another at the time of Independence and Partition. With these personal nightmares of Lenny’s, Sidhwa sets the stage for the lurid details of real violence in public life.

The atmosphere in towns and cities starts getting charged with political tension. Ice-Candy-Man who reads Urdu newspapers, the *Urdu Digest*, and the headlines in the English daily, gives Ayah and Lenny, news of the world. He says, “The Germans, have developed a deadly weapon called the V-bomb that will turn the British into powdered ash” *(Ice-Candy-Man 28)*. A little later, drifting closer to home, he talks of Subash Chandra Bose seeking the Japanese help to liberate India from the Angrez. His description of Bose as “a Hindu patriot” *(Ice-Candy-Man 28)* is a sign of the gradual widening of communal rift. Sometimes he quotes Gandhi, Nehru or Jinnah. At home too, Lenny’s father and his friends talk about Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah.

As Lenny’s parents are fond of entertaining guests, one evening they invite their Sikh neighbour Mr. Singh, Mr. Rogers, the inspector General of police, and their families to dinner. The dinner party begins with Lenny’s father making a joke about a British soldier. Mr. Singh lets out a loud guffaw but the Rogers don’t relish it. It is enough to show that the British hold on India is on the wane. With Lenny’s father’s saying that “there was no syphilis in India until the British came …,” *(Ice-Candy-Man 61)* their discussion veers round to politics. Mr. Singh asks Mr. Rogers to quit India. Mr. Rogers says that rivers of blood will start flowing the moment the British leaves India as all Indians will tear one another’s throats.
Mr. Singh accuses the British of following the “divide-and-rule” (Ice-Candy-Man 63) policy and says, “You always set one up against the other … You just give Home Rule and see. We will settle our differences and everything!” (Ice-Candy-Man 63) Their heated argument takes an ugly turn when Mr. Rogers blurts out, “The Akalis are a bloody bunch of murdering fanatics!” (Ice-Candy-Man 63) Mr. Singh picks up the fork and tries to stab his eyes. Lenny’s father snatches the fork from his hand and asks Mr. Rogers to apologise to Mr. Singh. Then, he cracks some jokes to normalise the situation.

Luckily, the villages are unaffected with communal fever. The villagers live together in perfect harmony. On her first visit to Pir Pindo, a Muslim village, forty miles east of Lahore, Lenny has her first experience of communal amity in rural India. The Muslims of Pir Pindo and the Sikhs from the neighbouring village of Dera Tek Singh sit together and share their concern over the deteriorating communal situation and the outbreak of hostilities in the cities. When Lenny’s family cook and a townsman Imam Din broaches the subject of Sikh and Muslim trouble, the villagers, both Sikh and Muslim, erupt in protest. After the tumult subsides, the Sikh granthi, Jagjeet Singh says, “Brother, our villages come from the same racial stock. Muslim or Sikh, we are basically Jats. We are brothers. How can we fight each other?” (Ice-Candy-Man 56) Seconding the views of the Sikh granthi, the Muslim chaudhary of Pir Pindo tells Imam Din:

Our relationships with the Hindus are bound by strong ties. The city folk can afford to fight … we can’t. We are dependent on each other: bound by our toil; by Mandi prices set by the Banyas—they’re our common enemy—those city Hindus. To us villagers, what does it matter if a peasant is a Hindu, or a Muslim, or a Sikh?” (Ice-Candy-Man 56)

Their avowal of love for each other allays Imam Din’s fears. He feels sure that communal frenzy will not affect the villages. In order to make him doubly sure, the Sikh granthi says, “If needs be, we’ll protect our Muslim brothers with our lives!” (Ice-Candy-Man 56) The Chaudhary declares, “I am prepared to take an oath on the Holy Koran that every man in this village will guard his Sikh brothers with no regard for his own life!” (Ice-Candy-Man 56-57) The Mullah in a fragile elderly voice says, “Brothers don’t require oaths
to fulfill their duty” (Ice-Candy-Man 57). The fortress of communal concord in the villages seems to be impenetrable at the moment.

But things in Lahore are going from bad to worse. The impact of the struggle for power between the Congress and the Muslim League on the common man is rightly visualized by Sharbat Khan when he cautions Ayah: “These are bad times – Allah knows what’s in store. There is big trouble in Calcutta and Delhi: Hindu-Muslim trouble. The Congress-wallahs are after Jinnah’s blood. . .” (Ice-Candy-Man 75). When Ayah remarks casually that Jinnah, Nehru and Patel are not fighting their fight, Sharbat Khan says, “That may be true but they are stirring up trouble for us all” (Ice-Candy-Man 75-76) and reports to her some stray incidents of violence and arson taking place in parts of the old city.

The friendly discussion in the Queen’s Park takes on a communal colour. When the Government House gardener reveals that Lord Wavell has been sacked at the instance of Gandhi, Nehru and Patel, Masseur, who is a Muslim calls them “The bastards” (Ice-Candy-Man 90) and says bitterly: “So they sack Wavell Sahib, a fair man! And send for a new Lat Sahib who will favour the Hindus!” (Ice-Candy-Man 90) Ice-Candy-Man remarks that this is not something unexpected and in a contemptuous tone asks the gardener, “but aren’t you Hindus expert at just this kind of thing? Twisting tails behind the scene … and getting someone else to slaughter your goats?” (Ice-Candy-Man 91) The butcher, who has been listening to them in silence, suddenly snorts and says: “That non-violent violence-monger—your precious Gandhijee—first declares the Sikh fanatics! Now suddenly he says: “Oh dear, the poor Sikhs cannot live with the Muslims if there is a Pakistan!” What does he think we are—some kind of beast? Aren’t they living with us now?” (Ice-Candy-Man 91)

The Government House gardener tries to assuage their bitterness by holding the English responsible for the rift between the Hindus and the Muslims: “It is the English’s mischief … They are past masters at intrigue. It suits them to have us all fight” (Ice-Candy-Man 92). Not subscribing to the gardener’s views, the butcher remarks:

Haven’t the Hindus connived with the Angrez to ignore the Muslim League, and support a party that didn’t win a single seat in the Punjab? It’s just the kind of thing we fear. They manipulate one or two Muslims against the interests of the larger
community. And now they have manipulated Master Tara Singh and his bleating herds of Sikhs! (*Ice-Candy-Man* 92)

The Sikh zoo attendant, Sher Singh, shifts uncomfortably and, looking as completely innocent of Master Tara Singh’s doing as he can, frowns at the grass. Ayah stands up and says that she’ll stop coming to the park if they all talk of nothing but Hindu-Muslim business. To placate here Ice-Candy-Man says: “Such talk helps clear the air … but for your sake, we won’t bring it up again” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 92). The air instead of getting clear becomes more vitiated and clamorous. Everywhere there is some talk of India going to be cracked. Constant references are being made to Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Iqbal, Tara Singh and Mountbatten. Lenny suddenly becomes aware of religious differences: “It is sudden. 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. Carried away by a renewed devotional fervour she expends a small fortune in joss-sticks, flowers and sweets on the gods and goddesses in the temples” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 93).

She notices a change in the behaviour of people around her. Ayah starts visiting temples. Imam Din and Yousaf turn into religious zealots and they take Friday afternoons off for the Jumha Prayers. The Sharma and Daulatrams flaunt their caste-marks. The caste and religious differences having come to the fore, discriminating behaviour becomes more obvious: “Hari and Moti – the sweeper and his wife Muccho, and their untouchable daughter Papoo, become ever more untouchable as they are entrenched deeper in their low Hindu caste” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 93). Even the Christians get infected: “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 theirs on the Phailbuses who are Indian-Christian, who look down upon all non-Christians” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 94). Parsis being a minuscule community are reduced to “irrelevant nomenclatures” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 94). Even jokes get tainted: “Cousin erupts with a fresh crop of Sikh jokes. And there are Hindu, Muslim, Parsee, and Christian jokes” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 95).

Eight years old Lenny senses a subtle change in the Queen’s Garden. The people of different communities are sitting apart. “Only the group around Ayah remains unchanged. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee are, as always, unified around her” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 97). The
most shocking thing is that even children are not being allowed to interact with one another. When Lenny goes to play with a bunch of Sikh children, Masseur follows her and drags her away. People have become so ghettoized that the Sikh women ask little Lenny what her religion is, and when she says she is Parsi, they express surprises at the discovery of a new religion. These incidents are just a specimen of what was happening on a large scale in Lahore and other cities of India before Partition.

Through Ice-Candy-Man posing as a sufi saint and claiming to be “Allah’s telephone” (Ice-Candy-Man 98) Sidhwa conveys the message that in a society where different religions start vying with one another for superiority, genuine faith gives way to religious exhibitionism and people become so gullible that they take charlatans for holymen:

Suddenly he springs up. Thumping his noisy trident on the ground, performing curious jumping dance, he shouts: ‘Wah Allah! Wah Allah!’ so loudly that several people who have been watching the goings-on from afar, hastily get up and scamper over. Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims form a thick circle round us. I notice my little Sikh friend. I can tell from the reverent faces around me that they believe they are in the presence of a holyman crazed by his love of God. And the madder the mystic, the greater his power. ‘Wah, Allah!’ There is no limit to your munificence! To you, king and beggar are the same! To you, this son-less woman is queen! Ah! the intoxication of your love! The depth of your compassion! The ocean of your generosity! Ah! the miracles of your cosmos! . . . And, just as suddenly as he leapt up to dance before, he now drops to the ground in a stony trance …. The woman in the burka, believing that the holyman has interceded successfully on her behalf, bows her body in gratitude and starts weeping. The bearded man fumbles in the gathers of his trousers and places two silver rupees—bearing king George’s image—at the holyman’s entranced toes (Ice-Candy-Man 99).

As the time of Independence and Partition draws near, Lenny notices “a lot of hushed talk . . . In bazaars, restaurants and littered alleys men huddle round bicycles or squat against walls in whispering groups” (Ice-Candy-Man 101). The atmosphere of fear, suspicion and distrust takes its toll on general health especially that of children. Cousin, Rosy, Peter and even Papoo start wasting away. Their mothers get terribly distraught and start force-feeding
their children though they are all past that age. The concern of Papoo’s mother is altogether different. Chasing Papoo with a broom, Muccho shouts, “Hai, my fate! If that accused slut dies on me, how will I show my face to Jemadar Tota Ram?” *(Ice-Candy-Man* 103)

More than a year has passed since Lenny’s visit to Ranna’s village, Pir Pindo. As the tension in the cities is likely to infect the villages, Imam Din decides to pay his kin another visit. Lenny also goes with him. On Baisakhi day, she along with the male members of Imama Din’s family goes to the Sikh village, Dera Tek Singh. When they arrive at the village, the festival is already in full swing. While, grown-ups are singing and dancing, the children are riding the round-about and enjoying dainty dishes. Amidst these joyful celebrations, Ranna notices the presence of strangers, and senses distrust and fear:

And despite the gaiety and distractions, Ranna senses the Chill spread by the presence of strangers: their unexpected faces harsh and cold. A Sikh youth whom Ranna has met a few times, and who has always been kind, pretends not to notice Ranna. Other men, who would normally smile at Ranna, slide their eyes past. Little by little, without his being aware of it, his smile becomes strained and his laughter strident *(Ice-Candy-Man* 106).

Ranna’s father, Dost Mohammad, has also noticed the presence of the blue-turbaned strangers with staves and long *Kirpans*. In the afternoon, when he visits the Sikh *granthi*, Jagjeet Singh, he comes to learn from him that they are Akalis. Jagjeet Singh himself is annoyed at their presence in his village but he is helpless. Moving closer to Dost Mohammad, he reveals to him in a subdued voice their sinister designs. “They talk of a plan to drive the Muslims out of East Punjab …. To divide the Punjab. They say they won’t live with the Mussulmans if there is to be a Pakistan. Owlish talk like that! You know, city talk. It’s madness … It can’t amount to anything … but they’ve always been like that. Troublemakers. You’ll have to look out till this evil blows over” *(Ice-Candy-Man* 107). The fortress of communal amity that seemed impenetrable only a year ago, has now been breached by the Akalis. A fortnight later, the Sikh villagers, despite their goodwill, fail to protect the Muslim brothers from the marauding bands of the Akalis who pounce on Pir Pindo and other Muslim villages to massacre the males, and rape the girls and women. In *Ice-Candy-Man*, Bapsi Sidhwa tries to balance the account of Partition riots by showing both Muslims and Sikhs
indulging in violence, yet the Muslims pale beside the Sikhs in their atrocities. Ice-Candy-Man’s account of the two gunny-bags full of women’s breasts in the train from Gurdaspur is remarkable.

Sidhwa describes the mass murder of Muslims in Pir Pindo as Ranna saw it:

Ranna saw his uncles beheaded. His older brothers, his cousins. The Sikhs were among them like hairy vengeful demons, wielding bloodied swords, dragging them out as a sprinkling of Hindus, darting about at the fringes, their faces vaguely familiar, pointed out and identified the Mussulmans by name. He felt a blow cleave the back of his head and the warm flow of blood. Ranna fell just inside the door on a tangled pile of unrecognisable bodies. Someone fell on him, drenching him in blood. Every time his eyes open the world appears to them to be floating in blood. From the direction of the mosque come the intolerable shrieks and wails of women. It seems to him that a woman in sobbing just outside their countryard: great anguished sobs—and at intervals she screams: ‘You’ll kill me! Hai Allah … Y’ all will kill me!’ (Ice-Candy-Man 201-202)

The massacre of Pir Pindo narrated in the words of a young boy Ranna presents perhaps the vilest side of adult nature which continuously haunts the reader.

Bapsi Sidhwa’s second novel The Pakistani Bride, though primarily concerned with the depiction of women in the tribal society of Pakistan, it nevertheless begins before independence, describes a train massacre, moves on to a refugee camp in Lahore and only then takes up the story of Zaitoon and her adopted father Qasim. In The Pakistani Bride, Sidhwa gives a vivid description of Sikhs ambushing a train going to Pakistan and killing the hapless Muslims most ruthlessly:

Only now does the engine-driver realise there is something farther down the track. A roar rises from the mass of jolted refugees. The train’s single headlight flashes on. It spotlights the barricade of logs and some unaligned rails. White singlets flicker in and out of the glare. The train brakes heavily and the engine crashes into the logs. People are flung from their scant hold on footboards, roofs and buffers. Women and children pour from the crammed compartments. Now the mob runs towards the train with lighted flares. Qasim sees the men clearly. They are Sikh. Tall, crazed men wave

Bapsi Sidhwa again highlights some more incidents of atrocities in the novel. She describes that Sikhs sitting on the rail-tracks waiting for the train to come are “lean and towerling, with muscles like flat mango seeds and heads topped by scraggy buns of hair, loose tendrils mingling with their coarse beards” (*The Pakistani Bride* 15). They are galvanized into action by the horrible tale of Moola Singh, an old Sikh, about the atrocities committed in his village:

Seething with hatred, his hurt still raw, Moola Singh resents their apathy. From the depths of his anguish, his voice betraying tears, he shrieks: ‘Vengeance, my brothers, vengeance!’ . . . Oh, the screams of the women, I can hear them still . . . I had a twenty-year-old brother, tall and strong as a mountain, a match for any five of them. This is what they did: they tied one of his legs to one jeep, the other to another jeep—and then they drove the jeeps apart . . . (*The Pakistani Bride* 15-16).

During the consequent carnage in the novel the Sikhs kill and rape helpless women. The whole depiction is blood curdling and shows the brutality unleashed by Sikhs on vulnerable victims:

A Sikh, hair streaming, lashed a bloody swords. Another slowly waved a child stuck at the end of his spear like a banner. Crazed with fury Sikander plunged his knife into the Sikh’s ribs. He stumbled over soft flesh and the mud slushy and slippery with blood. . . . He is moving towards a young woman. The flap of her burkha is over her head. A Sikh, sweat gleaming on his naked torso, is holding one breast. She is screaming. Butting a passage with his head, Sikander pushes past the woman and stabs her tormentor (*The Pakistani Bride* 28).

The killings end with Sikhs “herding and dragging the young women away” (*The Pakistani Bride* 29). During the communal violence in Lahore in the *Ice-Candy-Man*, the narrator sees “a mob of Sikhs, their wild long hair and beards rampant, large fevered eyes glowing in fanatic faces” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 134) who are
unleashing “a manic wave of violence” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 134), the most gruesome sight is that “a naked child, twitching on a spear struck between her shoulders, is waved like a flag” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 134-135).

As the sun of the British Empire begins to set on the Indian subcontinent, the lumpen elements become more active and audacious. The inspector General of Police, Mr. Rogers, is murdered and his body is discovered in a gutter. Lenny senses the changing situation and is perturbed. She says in frustration, “I close my eyes. I can’t bear to open them: they will open on a suddenly changed world. I try to shut out the voices” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 129). Ayah’s admirers meet less and less at the park and more frequently at the wrestler’s restaurant. The shift in their place of meeting is symptomatic of peace giving way to hostility. The tentative border between India and Pakistan will soon turn into a vast wrestling-pit. The talk of Partition is very much in the air. Masseur hopes that Lahore will go to Pakistan if the Punjab is divided. The government house gardener, however, thinks that Lahore will not be given to Pakistan as Hindus have invested too much of money there. The Sikh Zoo attendant, Sher Singh, shouts “And what about us? The Sikhs hold more farm land in the Punjab than the Hindus and Muslims put together!” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 129) Masseur advises Sher Singh that it will be better for his community to join one country, preferably Pakistan, rather than live in both India and Pakistan because in latter event, they won’t have much clout in either place. Sher Singh gets furious like the lion in his name and roars out, “You don’t worry about our clout! We can look out for ourselves … You’ll feel our clout all right when the time comes!” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 129) The butcher and Sher Singh exchange some angry words. The restaurant-owning wrestler intervenes and makes a dreadful declaration: “Once the line of division is drawn in the Punjab, all Muslims to the east of it will have their balls cut off!” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 130) They all get stunned for a while. In a bid to restore normalcy, Masseur says: “The holy Koran lies next to the Granth Sahib in the Golden Temple. The shift Guru Nanaik wore carried inscriptions from the Koran …. In fact, the Sikh faith came about to create Hindu-Muslim harmony!” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 130-131) and then by way of a postscript he adds: “In any case, there are no difference among friends … We will stand by each other” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 131).

This is something akin to what Chaudhry of Pir Pindo and the Sikh *granthi* of Dera Tek Singh avowed. But in times of communal strife friendship becomes secondary to faith.
Ayah’s anonymous friends – Masseur, Ice-Candy-Man, the restaurant owning wrestler, the Falettis Hotel cook-have suddenly become conscious of their religious identity. It is in this atmosphere charged with communal passions that the Akali leader, Master Tara Singh, visits Lahore. Addressing a mammoth rally outside the Assembly Chambers, he shouts: “We will see how the Muslim swine get Pakistan! We will fight to the last man! We will show them who will leave Lahore! Raj karega Khalsa, aki rahi na koi!” (Ice-Candy-Man 133-134) His address is greeted with shouting of slogans, “Pakistan Murdabad! Death to Pakistan! Sat Siri Akaal! Bolay se nihaal!” (Ice-Candy-Man 134) The Muslims in turn shout: “So? We’ll play Holi-with-their blood! Ho-o-o-li with their blo-o-o-d!” (Ice-Candy-Man 134)

So, they at holi make a bonfire of the vulnerable localities of the old walled city and instead of splattering everybody with coloured water and coloured powders, splatter one another with blood. Savagery is let loose everywhere. From the roof of Ice-Candy-Man’s tenement in Bhatti Gate, Lenny watches Delhi Gate, Lahori Gate, Mochi Darwaza and Gowalmandi in flames. She looks down and finds English soldiers being chased by a mob of Sikhs:

Their wild long hair and beards rampant, large fevered eyes glowing in fanatic faces, pours into the narrow lane roaring slogans, holding curved swords, shoving up a manic wave of violence that sets Ayah to trembling as she holds me tight. A naked child, twitching on a spear struck between her shoulders, is waved like a flag: her screamless mouth agape she is staring straight up at me” (Ice-Candy-Man 134-135).

Bestiality has annihilated their individuality and they have become one creature with “too many stony hearts, too many sightless eyes, deaf ears, mindless brains and tons of entwined entrails …” (Ice-Candy-Man 135). And then a slowly advancing mob of Muslim goondas appears. They are shouting slogans such as “Allah-o-Akbar! Yaaaa Ali! and Pakistan Zindabad!” (Ice-Candy-Man 135) They knock down a Banya and tie his legs to two jeeps pushed back to back. As the jeeps move, his body is ripped asunder. Ayah, covering Lenny’s eyes with her hands, collapses on the floor and pulls Lenny down with her but the muscles in the face of Ice-Candy-Man get tight with a strange exhilaration. When Shalmi, a Hindu locality covering about four square miles, is set ablaze, the Muslim men and women on the roof pat each other’s hands, laugh and hug one another. Charred limbs and burnt bodies are
falling from the roof-tops but for Ice-Candy-Man it is nothing but a Tamasha. This shows how the communal hatred has hardened the hearts of people.

Bapsi Sidhwa also subtly delineates the psychological impact of the horrors of Partition on the lives of people. The communal frenzy has a distorting effect on people—and leads to feelings of suspicion, distrust and susceptibility to rumours. Even the children, Lenny, Adi and their cousin are intrigued and suspicious of any minor deviations from normal behaviour. Mrs. Sethi and Aunt Minnie travel all over Lahore in the car but do not take the children with them. Deprived of long drives, Lenny and her cousin are intrigued at the movements of their mothers. Ayah enhances the sense of mystery when she states that the dickey of the car is full of cans of petrol. The author shows that in a highly surcharged atmosphere, suspicion and distrust become inevitable. The Ayah is also suspicious about the cans of petrol carried by the two Parsi ladies. If she suspects that they are distributing petrol to the arsonists she does not state so. The three children are stupefied by this revelation and let their imagination run wild. Finally they come to the same conclusion. “We now know who the arsonists are. Our mothers are setting fire to Lahore! … My heart pounds at the damnation that awaits their souls. My knees quake at the horror of their imminent arrest” (Ice-Candy-Man 173).

Bapsi Sidhwa cleverly parodies the feelings of suspicion and distrust of the children for their mothers. The imaginary fears of Lenny, Adi and their cousin are a source of humour but also a grim reminder of how rumour becomes institutionalized in a highly surcharged atmosphere. The children only fantasize about their mother’s dangerous acts but the author shows how rumour preys upon the frenzied minds of men vitiated by communal hatred. The scenes of violence have a baleful influence on children. When Lenny reaches home, she picks out a big, bloated celluloid doll and pulls its legs apart. As they come off easily, she does not feel satisfied. She takes another doll with “a sturdy, well-stuffed cloth body and a substantial feel” (Ice-Candy-Man 138). She pulls its pink legs apart. The knees and thighs bend unnaturally but the stitching in the centre stays intact. She holds one leg out to Adi and asks him to pull it. She and Adi pull the doll’s legs in opposite directions until it suddenly splits making a wrenching sound. Holding the doll’s spilled inside in her hands, Lenny collapses on the bed sobbing. Infuriated by her pointless brutality, Adi asks her, “Why were you so cruel if you couldn’t stand it?” (Ice-Candy-Man 139) Poor Adi does not know that his
sister has only re-enacted the scene she witnessed earlier in the street. This violent act by Lenny is an apt allegory on the mindless violence of Partition. With a morbid sense of humour, Bapsi Sidhwa reveals how the violence of Partition has serrated the roots of people of different communities, irrespective of ideology, friendship and rational ideas. In such a depiction, Bapsi Sidhwa resembles the horror portrayed by William Golding in The Lord of the Files. Golding indicated that there is a thin line between good and evil in human beings and it is only the structures of civilizations which prevent the lurking evil from being rampant. At the end of The Lord of the Flies, boys of Jack’s tribe like barbarians got a sadistic delight in hunting Ralph. The situation is saved as a Naval officer reaches the island and by his presence curbs the pointless brutality of the abandoned boys. Golding had written this novel after World War II and the allegorical meaning was evident. In the world of fiction, a grown-up stepped into curb the atrocities and brutality of the boys, but when countries commit atrocities there is no restraining power. Lenny’s destruction of the doll also has allegorical significance. It shows how even a young girl is powerless to stem the tide of surging violence within, thereby implying that grown-up fanatics enmeshed in communal frenzy are similarly trapped into brutal violence.

Finally, India is divided and a new nation, Pakistan, comes into existence. As Lahore has been dealt to Pakistan, it is no longer a safe place for the Hindus and Sikhs. Most of them, especially the rich, have already fled and of those who have stayed behind, a few are determined to ride out the storm while others are preparing for a showdown. Both sides are getting their knives, choppers, daggers, axes, staves and scythes sharpened. The knife sharpener Sharbat Khan tells Ayah, “I never knew there were so many daggers and knives in Lahore!” (Ice-Candy-Man 151) Vicious rumours add fuel to the flame of communal frenzy. While Masseur, Hari, Sher Singh and the Government House gardener sitting on Shankar’s neglected verandah at the back of Lenny’s house, are listening to the news on the radio, Ice-Candy-Man comes panting after a frantic cycle ride and announces “A train from Gurdaspur has just come in. Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women’s breasts!” (Ice-Candy-Man 149)

He looks hatefully at his longstanding friend, Sher Singh, as if he is the culprit. A few days later, Sher Singh flees from Lahore as one of his sisters is raped and her husband is
killed in scuffle with their erstwhile tenants and some goons including Ice-Candy-Man. This is the height of communalism. Friends have turned into foes. Only a few months before, Ice-Candy-Man had helped his friend Sher Singh in getting his tenants evicted from his house. At that time he had said: “I’m first a friend to my friends . . . And an enemy to their enemies . . . And then a Mussulman! God and the politicians have enough servers. So, I serve my friends” (Ice-Candy-Man 122).

But now things have gone topsy-turvy. Ice-Candy-Man confesses to the Government House gardener. “I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur … that night I went mad, I tell you! I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I’d known all my life! I hated their guts … I want to kill someone for each of the breast they cut off the Muslim women … The penises!” (Ice-Candy-Man 156)

The Government House gardener feels completely dismayed and disillusioned. He goes to Delhi where he has already sent his family. The Falettis Hotel cook also runs away from Lahore. Hari gets his bodhi shaved, becomes a Muslim and acquires a new name Himat Ali. Moti becomes David Masih as he and his family convert to Christianity. Thus, of all Lenny’s friends and acquaintances it is only Ayah who is a Hindu and still living in Lahore. She, too, wants to go to her relatives in Amritsar but Masseur whom she loves, doesn’t let her go saying, “Why do you worry? I’m here. No one will touch a hair on your head. I don’t know why you don’t marry me! You know I worship you . . .” (Ice-Candy-Man 158). But one day Masseur is murdered most probably by Ice-Candy-Man and his mutilated body is discovered in a gunny sack by Hari – alias Himat Ali and Lenny. Ayah is terribly shocked at the news of his death. She stops receiving visitors. She now trusts no one and with Lenny visits all those places she and Masseur used to haunt. Ice-Candy-Man follows them everywhere without their knowledge.

Ice-Candy-Man joins the marauding ruffians out to ransack the abandoned houses, and also to wipe out the name plates on the gates of Hindus and Sikhs present in Lahore. One day they zero in on Lenny’s house, mistaking it for a Hindu house. Imam Din the cook shouts at them: “The Sethis are Parsee. I serve them. Sethi is a Parsee name too, you ignorant bastards!” (Ice-Candy-Man 180) They query about Hari and Moti but they are disappointed to learn that Hari has become a Muslim and Moti, a Christian. And then someone asks about Ayah. Imam Din lies to them that she left Lahore the previous day. They ask him to take an
oath before Allah and Imam Din says, “Allah-ki-kasam, she’s gone” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 182). In these troubled times people like Imam Din and the medico Yakoob, who escorted his friend Roshan Singh’s sisters and the whole family to a convoy, are a few rays of hope.

Suddenly Ice-Candy-Man appears on the scene, cajoles Lenny into telling the truth about Ayah’s whereabouts and gets her forcibly carried off. Sidhwa through Lenny’s eyes relates the scene of Ayah’s abduction:

They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet—that want to move backwards—are forced forward instead. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like the dead child’s screamless mouth. Her violet sari slips off her shoulder, and her breasts strain at her sari-blouse stretching the cloth so that the white stitching at the seams shows. A sleeve tears under her arm. The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces (*Ice-Candy-Man* 183).

She is gang-raped and then taken to Hira Mandi, the red-light district of Lahore, where she is made to serve as dancing-girl-cum-prostitute. Not to talk of countless merchants, peddlers, coolies, drunkards and *goondas*, she is sexually exploited even by Imam Din, cousin’s cook, the Butcher and Ice-Candy-Man whom she always counted among her friends. At the end of three months Ice-Candy-Man marries her. She has now a new name, Mumtaz.

The brutal realities of Partition depicted in *Ice-Candy-Man* with a candour, do not overshadow the resilience of spirit exhibited by several characters in the novel. When Lenny’s Godmother comes to learn about Ayah’s presence in the Hira Mandi, she swings into action to get her rescued. First she calls Ice-Candy-Man to her house and then she herself visits Ayah. She tries to console and comfort her. She says: “That was fated, daughter. It can’t be undone. But it can be forgiven ... 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” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 262). Dormant possibilities of the resurgence of human spirit can also be sensed in Ayah as, taking a bold decision, she determines to go back to her family whether they accept her or not. She
rejects the constricting present and decisively wants to face future in all its tentative probabilities. She tells Godmother that she’ll not live with Ice-Candy-Man and entreats her to get her away from him. Within a fortnight Godmother gets her liberated from the Hira Mandi and brought to the Recovered Women’s Camp. Ice-Candy-Man with his cronies comes to take Ayah away but gets thrashed severely by the hefty Sikh guard. After a few days Ayah is taken to her family in Amritsar. The love-lorn Ice-Candy-Man turns into a mad fakir and follows her across the border.

It is not only Ayah who receives help from Lenny’s family. They help everyone who is in distress. Hamida, a fallen woman is rehabilitated. Lenny’s mother employs Hamida, as the new Ayah. She and the electric-aunt smuggle the rationed petrol not only for their Hindu and Sikh friends fleeing Lahore but also for the convoys to send kidnapped women to their families across the border. Rodaba, the Godmother arranges free education for Imam Din’s great grandson, Ranna. He is admitted to the Convent of Jesus and Mary as a boarder. She is an old woman but she still donates blood to save the lives of the wounded. The Parsis, thus, emerge at the end of the novel as the Messiah of the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs bogged down in a morass of communal hatred and violence. In fact, it is the strength of charity that makes the Parsis both venerable and invulnerable. Bapsi Sidhwa’s Parsi perspective makes her account of Partition largely free from religious bias that other writers like Khushwant Singh and Manohar Malgonkar exhibit, but she has a different bias owing to her Pakistani nationality.

Sidhwa was not happy with the literature on the theme of Partition written by the British and the Indian writers, and the film Gandhi because she thought they had unduly glorified Gandhi, Nehru and Mountbatten, and caricatured and portrayed Jinnah as a monster. Thus Ice-Candy-Man also includes several comments on contemporary political figures. Sidhwa has presented the Pakistani perspective regarding these figures and almost all the major contemporary Indian political figures are either caricatured or presented in an unfavourable manner. During her interview with David Montenegro, Sidhwa comments:

The main motivation grew out of my reading of a good deal of literature on the Partition of India and Pakistan. . . . What has been written has been written by the British and the Indians. Naturally they reflect their bias. And they have, I felt after I’d researched the book, been unfair to the Pakistanis. As a writer, as a human being, one
just does not tolerate injustice. I felt whatever little I could do to correct an injustice I would like to do, I have just let facts speak for themselves, and through my research I found out what the facts were (Montenegro 36).

Gandhi is venerated throughout the world but in *Ice-Candy-Man* he has been described as a tricky politician. Masseur says of him: “He’s a politician, yaar. It’s his business to suit his tongue to the moment” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 91). Lenny views him as an “improbable toss-up between a clown and a demon” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 87) and is puzzled as to why he is so famous. She recalls how he interminably talks about enema, personal hygiene and sluggish stomachs. During the heated discussions among Ayah’s admirers the butcher snortingly terms him as “that non-violent violence-monger—your precious Gandhijee” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 91). Lenny remembers him as a small, dark and shrivelled old man very much like her gardener Hari. Thus the sublime figure of Gandhi is reduced to a ‘bania’ and an eccentric politician whose unnatural association with women and his obsession with enemas become a source of ridicule: “Unlike most of the Indian historians who credit Gandhi for single-handedly ousting the British from India, in *Ice-Candy-Man* Sidhwa reduces him to the role of an eccentric dietician” (Sapra 201).

Kashmir has always been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan. Sidhwa thinks that the English have shown favour to Nehru by granting him Kashmir:

For now the tide is turned—and the Hindus are being favoured over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favour Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri; they grant him Kashmir. Spurning logic, defying rationale, ignoring the consequence of bequeathing a Muslim state to the Hindus: while Jinnah futilely protests: ‘Statesmen cannot eat their words!’” Statesmen do. They grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot, without which Muslim Kashmir cannot be secured (*Ice-Candy-Man* 159).

Bapsi says that Nehru has got preferential treatment because he was young and handsome, and more importantly, he was a favourite of Mountbattens. Sidhwa further says in derogatory terms:
Nehru wears red carnations in the buttonholes of his ivory jackets. He bandies words with Lady Mountbatten and is presumed to be her lover. He is charming, too, to Lord Mountbatten. Suave, Cambridge-polished, he carries about him an aura of power and a presence that flatters anyone he complements tenfold. He doles out promises, smiles, kisses-on-cheeks. He is in the prime of his Brahmin manhood. He is handsome: his cheeks glow pink” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 159).

On the other hand, Jinnah has not been given even his rightful due by the British because he is an old, ailing, scholarly man who, rather than currying favour with some individual, believes in law and constitutional means. Depicting him sympathetically Sidhwa says:

Jinnah is incapable of compliments. Austere, driven, pukka-sahib accented, deathly ill: incapable of cheek-kissing. Instead of carnations he wears a Karakuli cap, sombre with tight, grey lamb’s-wool curls: and instead of pale jackets, black *achkon* coats. He is past the prime of his elegant manhood. Sallow, whip-thin, sharp-tongued, uncompromising. His training at the Old Bailey and practice in English courtrooms has given him faith in constitutional means, and he puts his misplaced hopes into tall standards of upright justice. The fading Empire sacrifices his cause to their shifting allegiances (*Ice-Candy-Man* 159-160).

Bapsi laments the way Jinnah is still being treated by British and Indian scholars. She observes: “And today, forty years later, in films of Gandhi’s and Mountbatten’s lives, in books by British and Indian scholars, Jinnah, who for a decade was known as ‘Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity’, is caricatured, and portrayed as a monster” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 160).

In support of Jinnah, Sidhwa puts in a quote from Sarojini Naidu, an eminent Indian poet and freedom fighter: “… the calm hauteur of his accustomed reserve masks, for those who know him, a naive and eager humanity, an intuition quick and tender as a woman’s, a humour gay and winning as a child’s—pre-eminently rational and practical, discreet and dispassionate in his estimate and acceptance of life, the obvious sanity and serenity of his worldly wisdom effectually disguise a shy and splendid idealism which is of the very essence of the man” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 161).
The analysis of the political leadership during the Partition days by Sidhwa is subjective and at times seems even prejudiced. The contrast between Nehru and Jinnah is seen as the opposition between superficiality and worth, the appearance and reality. The charm of Nehru is presented as deceptive while the austerity of Jinnah is seen as his virtue. Here the writer sheds all the pretensions of using Lenny as an objective narrator, and uses her authorial voice directly to stress the disparity between Nehru and Jinnah. *Ice-Candy-Man* thus presents a Pakistani version of Partition. Sidhwa’s Parsi faith keeps her out of the religious imbroglio of Partition but as regards nationality, she is definitely a Pakistani and it biases her in favour of Pakistan.

Sidhwa’s conscious identification with Pakistan, as revealed in the treatment of the theme and characters, becomes a strategy to assert her parochial identity for the deliberate purpose of popularizing the novel in the country of her origin. She caters to the public taste in Pakistan by whitewashing certain political personalities and events while blackening others in the process. It gives the impression that in the name of giving a voice to the marginalized people Bapsi Sidhwa is playing upon populist politics to attain credibility and popularity: “I think a lot of readers in Pakistan, especially with *Ice-Candy-Man*, feel that I’ve given them a voice, which they did not have before. They have always been portrayed in a very unfavourable light. It’s been fashionable to kick Pakistan, and it’s been done again and again by various writers living in the West. And I feel, if there’s one little thing one could do, it’s to make people realize: We are not worthless because we inhabit poor country that is seen by Western eyes as primitive, fundamentalist country only” (Sapra 208). The problem is that when the commitment to a certain ideology or a point of view becomes too apparent, the art degenerates into propaganda. Bapsi Sidhwa’s plunge into politics seems to divert her from principle of artistic neutrality and gives a false ring to her novel.

Despite the writer’s defence of her picture of alternate reality based on historical veracity, there are many factual errors in *Ice-Candy-Man*, as pointed out by Rashmi Gaur: “There is no historical record of Gandhi’s visit to Lahore during the pre-partition days. Similarly, the reference to the famous Dandi March by Col. Bharucha dates it in 1944, whereas it had actually taken place in the early months of 1930. The vivid description of the Sikh attack on the Muslim village of Pir Pindo is also historically inaccurate” (Gaur 49).
Shashi Tharoor in the review of Ice-Candy-Man notes that the weakness of the writer in the novel lies in her enthusiasm to give a political orientation to her theme:

What she [Bapsi Sidhwa] doesn’t handle as well is politics: when her characters discuss the issues of the day, Ms. Sidhwa’s deftness collapses in clichés. Don’t look for historical accuracy in this seemingly realistic tale: Mahatma Gandhi’s march to the sea protesting the British tax on salt is displaced by a decade and a half, and when Ms. Sidhwa uses her authorial authority to inform the reader that ‘the British favour Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri, they grant him Kashmir,’ it is not simply wrong (the Maharaja of Kashmir acceded to India a year after Partition), it undermines her narrator (Sapra 209).

Lastly, Ice-Candy-Man presents a feminine view of Partition. The narrator of the novel is a little Parsi girl, Lenny. Because of her lameness caused by polio, her world is very small but it full of colour and variety. Her eighteen-year-old, voluptuous and coquettish Ayah, who is always with her, has friends and admirers of all races and faiths. Ayah keeps them united but as the communal tension mounts, the group disintegrates. They get polarized along communal lines. Riots start and the worst victims are women. They are kidnapped and raped. Ice-Candy-Man gets Ayah abducted and forces her into a life of prostitution. She is shocked to find her own friends and acquaintances gratifying their lust on her body. Eventually Ice-Candy-Man forces her to embrace Islam and marries her but she has not even an iota of love for him, and when Lenny’s godmother visits her, she entreats her to get her away from him. Godmother rescues her and arranges to send her to her family in Amritsar.

Hamida is another victim of men’s atrocity. She represents those women who are kidnapped and raped and then rejected by their families. They are relegated to rehabilitation centres where they are subjected to all kinds of inhuman treatment. Hamida is a bit lucky in the sense that she gets employed as a nursemaid by Lenny’s mother. Lenny’s mother, godmother and electric-aunt do all they can for the riot-victims. Sidhwa’s portrayal of men as perpetrators of dreadful outrage, and women as sufferers and saviours conforms to her feminine perspective on Partition. The resilience of women characters saves the novel from being a heart-rending depressing rendition of journalistic reporting.
Although there are so many historical inaccuracies in *Ice-Candy-Man*, it stands apart in its rendering of the theme of Partition. Such inaccuracies are, however, fictionally justified as these events are imaginatively used to impart an easy continuity and flow to the narrative and communicate the author’s point of view successfully. *Ice-Candy-Man* presents a fictional account of Partition from three perspectives—Parsi, Pakistani and feminist and therein lies the uniqueness of this novel. Though it is a piece of fiction which conveys the human suffering of Partition far more effectively than a dozen history books. The novel poignantly describes the mindless Partition violence and focuses on its socio-historical consequences upon women. The tragic events combine with the witty freshness characterizing the narrator’s attitude of a distanced watcher. Moreover, the craft of describing violent and humorous scenes alternatively and of freely mixing historical tragedy with witty comedy is not the result of a compromise but it rather displays a lively authenticity which very few novels can be credited with.

Bapsi Sidhwa handles the delicate theme of Partition through subtle insinuations, images and gestures. So the stark horror of loss, bloodshed and separation is portrayed without verbosity, sensationalism, lurid details and maudlin sentimentality. The sensitive portrayal of the horrors of Partition enhances the poignancy and cruelty of the event even without the author ever appearing pedantic or pretentious. She reveals the trauma of Partition with a sprinkling of humour, parody and allegory, describing how friends and neighbours become helpless and ineffective in the face of the mob frenzy. Sidhwa also describes how political leaders manipulate the ideals and generate feelings of suspicion and distrust in the psyche of common man. Once communal and obscurantist passions are aroused, the social fabric is torn asunder, leading to wanton and reckless destruction. Sidhwa has also commented on the historical inevitability of social process, suggesting that people who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. Bapsi Sidhwa enables the readers to understand the extent of the trauma of Partition and thus suggestively delineates the horrible impact of violence on individual and collective lives.


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