Chapter IV

*Ice-Candy-Man: Impact of Partition on Women*

In 1980, after receiving a copy of Sidhwa’s self-published *The Crow Eaters*, Britain’s Jonathon Cape decided to publish it. It was at that time Sidhwa felt encouraged enough to pick up her pen and write again. Though the first two novels brought her recognition, it was her third novel, *Cracking India* (also published as *Ice-Candy-Man*), that earned Bapsi Sidhwa international acclaim and acceptance as one of the most promising English novelists from South Asia, playing her among the likes of Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, and R.K.Narayan.

The sub-continent was turned into a diabolical region in August 1947, when British announced the division into India and Pakistan. This resulted in massive and violent migration of the people across the border. This mass scale of migration led to violence, murders, rapes, bestiality and so on. This tragic event stirred the creative imagination of many writers who weaved the fabric of tragic tale highlighting untold and unbearable atrocities of violence among the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, which reflects on the women.
The *Ice-Candy-Man* is a politically motivated novel. Sidhwa admits this in a conversation:

> 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 would do to correct an injustice I would like to do. I don’t think I have just let facts speak for themselves, and through my research I found out what those facts were. (36)

Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man* is an example to give us insight into the public frenzy, communal hatred, exploitation of women, extreme disintegration and large scale sectarian violence. Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man* describes the series of events with such artistry that the tragedy comes alive. What distinguishes Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man* is the passive sensitivity through which the tragic event is depicted. The novelist has realistically illustrated the women’s plight and exploitation in the patriarchal society.

*Ice-Candy-Man*, also known as *Cracking India* by Sidhwa’s American publisher, is the third novel, which
opens several layers of interpretations. It is her most serious political novel till date and is written on the theme of partition. Effectively using the persona of a child narrator, it critically presents the kaleidoscopically changing socio-political realities of the Indian subcontinent just before the partition. Sidhwa’s humorous tone, subtle characterization and irreverence to established traditions import a very specific charm to this novel. Indeed, Bapsi Sidhwa becomes a household name in India, when this novel is recently made into a successful Mumbai film, *1947: Earth*.

There are books written about boys growing up. The best example is *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain where he comes to knowledge about himself and his country.

Sidhwa’s novel is unique as it establishes the girl child’s point of view. Told in the present tense and first person through the voice of a young girl named Lenny, eight years old at the beginning, the history of the partition struggle becomes secondary and women’s victimization is the foremost.

With the publication of her third novel, *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sidhwa established herself as Pakistan’s leading English language novelist, a position she conformed with the publication of her another novel
An American Brat, which also heralds a new direction in her career.

Ice-Candy-Man is a significant testament of a geocentric view of reality in which the feminine psyche and experiences are presented with unique freshness. In this novel Sidhwa turns the female protagonists into the moral centre, while most of the male characters rather remain passive or indulge in violence.

Lenny as a girl “child” is the most significant female character in this novel. In the literature of partition in English, she is the only prominent girl-child narrator, beside Attia Hosain’s ‘Laila’ in Sunlight on a Broken Column. As a girl-child she addresses the issues of children’s forced marriage to old and morally degenerate men and the gender bias to which girl children are subjected even by their own families.

In partition literature, the paradigm of “woman as victim” has been used as an important device in the depiction of violence. In Ice-Candy-Man, the extensive featuring of women’s shared experiences of victimization in the communal riots is complemented by the presentation of their victimization. Women are presented as victims. The novel foregrounds women’s consciousness as they are affected by political battles. It also highlights their
individual characteristics and experiences. Sidhwa has recreated a universe where women appear as biological beings. Each woman character represents a way of life. Lenny, her mother, her Godmother, Shanta – the Ayah are the major female voices in the novel.

Unlike Qasim in *The Pakistani Bride*, Lenny cannot maintain an impersonal distance from the violence she witnesesses. Indeed, that violence gradually disrupts the very centre of her own small world, as first she comes across the gunny-saked body of Ayah’s preferred admirer, Masseur, and then sees Ayah herself abducted from the family home by an angry Muslim mob. Alamgir Hashmi does not share Marianne Wiggins’s hostility towards Sidhwa’s narrator, but he too has some reservations about the historical content of the novel:

*Ice-Candy-Man* concerns the partition events of 1947, and is more interesting for its characterization, developing narrative techniques and the child’s point of view than what is actually has to tell about the events.(129)

However, this is far from being a case of inaccurate historical detail; rather memory is playing a part here—what Lenny is told and what she remembers hearing first-hand merge at times, as is common with our childhood memories.
Similarly, she confuses the burning of Lahore with the celebration of Holi—a spring festival which would have taken place some months earlier. The introduction of such tricks of memory shows how thoroughly Sidhwa understands her young narrator, and makes her a more rather than less reliable witness. The signposts or references in this novel are necessarily limited because Lenny does not understand much of what she hears. Lenny herself says:

Obviously he’s quoting this Bose (Sometimes he quotes Gandhi, or Nehru or Jinnah, but I’am fed up of hearing about them. Mother, Father and their friends are always saying: Gandhi said this, Nehru said that. Gandhi did this, Jinnah did that. What’s the point of talking so much about people we don’t know?)(29)

The most interesting literary reference, which occurs early in the novel, links Sidhwa’s title to Eugene O’Neill’s play *The Ice-Candy-Man Cometh*:

The novelist observes thus:

Ice-candy-man is selling his popsicles to the other groups lounging on the grass. My mouth waters. I have confidence in Ayah’s chocolate chemistry...lank and loping the Ice-candy-man cometh. (18)
In O’Neill’s play, Sidhwa has found a framework for her dramatic re-creation of Lahore during the months of riot.

Sidhwa shifts the predominant “locale” of her work from Lahore and Pakistan to various cities across America as she explores the Parsi / Pakistani diaspora. Her first three novels, however, are all set in Pakistan, and in each there is a strong theme of victimization of women. Oppression of and discrimination against women is a recurrent motif in Bapsi Sidhwa’s fiction.

In this novel, Sidhwa represents a series of female characters who survived in a chaotic time of 1947 in India which can be registered as a period of worst religious riots in the history of human kind. Emotional turmoil, individual weakness, and barbarities of communal riots inflicted on women have been faithfully projected by Sidhwa. The whole story has been narrated by Lenny who relates the horrors of violence and her personal observation and reactions. She not only observes but analyses man’s degrading attention towards woman.

Sidhwa narrates how women are reduced to the status of sexual objects and relates the peculiar disadvantages, social and evil, to which they are subjects. *Ice-Candy-Man* is a saga of female suppression and
marginalization. It projects realistically women’s plight and exploitation in the patriarchal society. It exposes how men establish their masculine power and hence fulfill their desires by brutally assaulting women. While as on the other hand, it poignantly depicts how women endure the pain and humiliation enacted upon them.

The narrator, who is recovering from polio, announces at the outset: “My world is compressed” (1). Sidhwa works this self-imposed limitation to her advantage by placing the privileged and spoiled Lenny in an adult world, which she apprehends and reports in a naive manner.

Lenny can also be compared to the character that Chaucer adopts in his *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, rendering credibility by being almost a part of the reader’s conscience. With the wonder of a child, she observes social changes, human behaviour interesting sidelights and opinions and occasionally makes judgements. Her childish innocence is like the seemingly naive display of Chaucer’s persona, a source of sharp irony.

The fall from this child’s paradise of colonial harmony occurs when political and sexual violence bursts not upon Lenny but upon her Ayah. Mother India’s body
cracks into Modern India and Pakistan, and the outbreak of religious and ethnic genocide follows upon
decolonization and racial harmony turns into racial murder. Villages on both sides are plundered and burnt,
and women are mutilated.

When the partition riot erupts, the Ice-candy-man
seizes his chance to debase the Ayah and leads a Muslim
mob to Lenny’s house. The Parsi family and its Muslim
servants hide the Ayah, but Lenny unwittingly betrays
her. Ayah is dragged away by the mob and raped. After her
degradation, the Ice-candy-man sets her up in a house in
the prostitute’s quarters in Lahore. Having proved his
mastery over her, he now professes to be crazily in love
with her and wants to marry her. She, having been
betrayed by him and physically abused by the mob, refuses
to accept him. The women from Lenny’s family eventually
rescue her and she becomes a candidate for rehabilitation.

Lenny is thus a witness to the varied women
victimization in the time of partition of India. Sidhwa
depicts the events overtaking the partition in their
naked cruelty and ruthlessness. Subash Chandra writes
thus:
In a “patriarchal social set up,” ‘masculinity’ is associated with superiority where as ‘feminity’ is linked with inferiority, and while masculinity implies strength, action, self-assertion, and domination, feminity implies weakness, passivity, docility, obedience and self-negation. (88)

*Ice-Candy-Man* has thirty two chapters and gives us glimpses into the events of turmoil on the Indian sub-continent when it was disintegrated. Historic truth is only a backdrop of the novel. Ice-candy-man is a close associate and admirer of an eithteen-year old Ayah working in a Parsi household to look after Lenny, a polio child of four. Through the character of Lenny, Sidhwa explores a female universe hemmed by the restriction and reductive force of patriarchy and blind customs. It is through Lenny that we come to know of the action of the novel and the seriousness of the narration. It is an adult that speaks through the child’s memory and keeps the reader on guard and creates a sense of impressions that the child is capable of reminiscing. It also shows the readers how the child heroine enters into the world of grownups. Jaydipsinh Dodiya rightly observes:

Sidhwa’s this self-imposed limitation places the privileged and spoiled Lenny in an adult world. Through Lenny, she observes social
changes, customs, beliefs, human behaviours, interesting sidelights and opinions and occasionally makes judgements. Both local and national politics play a prominent part in Ice-Candy-Man. (64)

It is a bold attempt on the part of a woman writer to take up a theme - the cruelty caused due to religious fundamentalism which is different from the traditional issues the women writers generally assays, the issue of romantic involvements and the sentimental stuff.

The narrator Lenny is the eye through which we observe these divisions. At first, she moves with her Hindu Ayah freely through the city and particularly to the park where she used to sit under the shadow of Queen Victoria’s Statue. Lenny’s Ayah is the central figure of all her female characters. Ayah’s amorous adventures become central to Lenny’s perceptions. Initially her world is made secure by strong, courageous and loving women like Rodabai and the young Ayah. Sidhwa very clearly establishes in the narrative that Parsi women are quite strong and their strength is revealed in moments of crisis.

For Lenny, the process of growing up, of seeking to understand the pains and pleasures of the adult world is largely an attempt to make sense of the senseless
violence. Lenny, at least to some extent, takes after Sidhwa and most of the incidents did take place in her own life though, she only fictionalizes them. The personal and public elements of this growth are brought together by the abduction and rape of Ayah, the person who is the protector of Lenny’s childhood.

Sidhwa provides Lenny with a privileged insight into adult behaviour, allowing her to observe it without being implicated in its turmoil. Ice-candy-man, who violated the chastity of Ayah, however repents and marries her. Even her name is changed to Mumtaz. Thus, Sidhwa shows how the tradition-oriented patriarchy deliberately deprived women of liberty, ultimately resulting in a crisis of identity. But Ayah rejects the new identity which her marriage offers. Lenny feels the pain of Ayah since it is she who perpetrates it, though in innocence.

Underlying the basic unity among the various religions of India, the Hindu Ayah and her admirers turned to be different. Lenny says:

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. (98)
These changes should have imprinted in the mind of the immature Lenny. In the world of Lenny, the Ayah is a flame of sensuousness and female utility around whom the moths hover constantly and hanker for the sexual warmth she radiates. She acts like the queen bee who controls the actions and emotions of her male admirers.

Even when she is in the midst of her admirers, she is fully aware and confident of herself as an individual, who cannot be taken advantage of. At the same time, she is fiercely loyal to the interests of the family; she serves and is extremely protective of Lenny. She suffers during the riots, as she is abducted by the cronies of the Ice-candy-man. It is Lenny’s probity which brings about the ultimate catastrophe—the abduction of Ayah by a Muslim mob led by Ice-candy-man.

The most tragic aspect of the abuse of Ayah is that it is set off by Lenny’s “truth infected tongue.” It is Lenny who betrays Ayah to the mob which had come looking for her at Lenny’s house. Believing the flowery language of the Ice-Candy man, she shows him her hiding place and regrets later. Her sense of guilt is acute:

I have betrayed Ayah
Even Imam Din’s desperate lie fails us save her,
I am the money-man performing money, the trained circus elephant, the snake-man’s charmed cobra, an animal with conditioned reflexes that cannot lie. (169)

Lenny has been brought up firmly on the path of truth, and it is her truthfulness that spells doom for Ayah. Her betrayal of Ayah is the last act of her childhood. She works with her family to rescue Ayah from the captivity and sexual exploitation of the Ice-Candy-Man. When Lenny finally sees her again, she is forced to realize that her old Ayah is dead although Ayah submits herself to Lenny’s embrace.

Lenny’s Ayah Shanta is focused upon in a serious manner. She is a Hindu girl of eighteen and Sidhwa depicts Ayah through the eyes of Lenny:

Ayah is chocolate-brown and short. Everything about her is eighteen years old and round and plump. Even her face. Full-blown cheeks, pouting mouth and smooth forehead curve to form a circle with her head. Her hair is pulled back in a tight knot.... (3)

Her portrayal also represents the male exploitation of female sexuality. Though she is employed by considerate masters, her condition is that of an unprotected girl whom everybody treats only as a sex object. She has accumulated a good number of admirers:
Up and down, they look at her. Stub-handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships.(3)

Lenny’s mother belongs to the privileged economic strata of the society. She engages several servants to look after the children and other daily chores. She is kept busy with her social obligations - entertaining guests and partying - use up her time. Lenny’s physical handicap has generated a sense of guilt in her which often surfaces in her conversations. She says to Col. Bharucha: “It’s my fault. I neglected her - left her to the care of Ayah!” (63). Lenny admires her delicate beauty:

The tipped chin curves deep to meet the lower lip. The lips, full, firm, taper from a lavish ‘M’ in wild wings, their outline etched with the clarity of cut rubies. Her nose is slender, slightly bumped: and the taut curve of her cheekbones is framed by a jaw as delicately oval as an egg. The hint of coldness, common to such chiselled beauty, is overwhelmed by the exuberant quality of her innocence. I feel she is beautiful beyond bearing. (41)
Lenny is given ample personal space by her mother though decisively controlling and channelizing her children lives, she allows them to frolic around and view life from their own standpoints. Lenny is permitted to accompany Iman Din twice to his village Pir Pindo, her visits to parks and restaurants with Ayah are also unchecked. Despite her liberated handling of children and a modern life-style, she is very much a traditional wife, humoring constantly the wishes of her husband. She is almost smiling in her attitude towards her husband and trying to create an atmosphere of pleasant mirth around him. Lenny is initially possessive about her mother, but soon learns to cope with it. Sidhwa narrates:

Mother’s motherliness has a universal reach. Like her involuntary female magnetism it cannot be harnessed. She showers maternal delight on all and sundry. I resent this largesse. As father does her unconscious and indiscriminate sex appeal. It is a prostitution of my concept of childhood rights and parental loyalties. She is my mother flesh of my flesh – and Adi’s. She must love only us! Other children have their own mothers who love them... Their mothers don’t go around loving me, do they?(42)

The Sethi family belongs to the privileged upper class in pre-partition India, mixing socially with other affluent Indians and with representatives of the British
ruling class, like the Inspector General of Police. Mrs.Sethi has a routine of servants to take care of her children and her household. But behind the closed doors of the marital bedroom, she is under her husband’s thumb, and has to wheedle her husband to get enough money for household expenses.

The particular instance of Mrs.Sethi cajoling money out of a reluctant husband is though treated in a fairly light-hearted way, it is highly treated as indignity on the part of her as a wife. Her relationship with her husband progresses to the realm of outright abuse later in the narrative. Ironically, the revelation of her status as a battered woman comes in the context of her activism on behalf of abducted women.

Reaping the benefits of class and of being a member of the “Neutral” Parsi Community, Mrs.Sethi engages in humanitarian efforts to assist women who have been victimized by partition violence. She participates in efforts to help Hindu and Sikh families cross the border safely to India, and to recover and shelter kidnapped women. As Lahore erupts into communal violence, Mrs.Sethi oversees the housing of abducted women in a house abandoned by a departed Hindu family. She even employs one of the refugees from a camp for fallen women, a woman
named Hamida, to replace the abducted Ayah as the children’s nanny. While she is an empowered figure out in public, behind closed doors, Mrs.Sethi is herself an abused woman. Lenny’s fragmentary understanding of her parents’ marital discord is worth quoting at length:

And closer, and as upsetting, the caged voices of our parent fighting in their bedroom... I know they quarrel mostly about money. But there are other things they fight about that are not clear to me. Sometimes I hear Mother say, “No, Jana; I won’t let you go! I won’t let you go to her!”.(224)

Mrs.Sethi protests her husband’s infidelity. Thus, it is clear that Mrs.Sethi leads a dual existence: while she recues women from the clutches of other predatory males, she has to do the helpless feminine persona to maintain her status as a wife. She has not put an end to victimization of women.

The life of Ayah after her marriage is pathetic. After her abduction, her name Shanta has been changed to Mumtaz. She is kept as the Ice-candy-man mistress for a few months and then is forced to become the Ice-candy-man’s bride. She is kept at Kotha even after her marriage. But as soon as opportunity presents itself, she seizes her freedom and gets away from the man she
does not love. She vehemently opposes the old custom of a woman remaining faithful to the man, she marries. She is firm and decisive. She tells her Godmother: “I want to go to my family...... I will not live with him”. (261)

She weeps, and pleads humbly with the Godmother to let her remain single. Without male’s company, Ayah’s amorous adventures become central to Lenny’s perceptions. She spent her childhood under the care of her loving Godmother and the young Ayah, “They have shamed her, Not those men in the carts-they were strangers.... but I’m certain of her humiliation” (102).

Thus, Sidhwa effectively establishes how religious fundamentalism with its stinking tradition affected the two nations in general and women in particular. In Sidhwa’s point of view, women are often the victims, as in the case of Ayah women who have been raped, are placed in the recapitulation quarters next to Lenny’s family home. Sidhwa’s girl child Lenny in Ice-Candy-Man is rather different, as she is the creation of a woman writer. Nirupa Rani has remarked:

If artistic creativity is likened to biological creativity, the terror or inspiration for women’s experienced quite literally as the terror of being entered, deflowered, possessed, taken, had broken, ravished—all words which
illustrate the pain of the passive self whose boundaries are being violated. (148)

Lenny, the girl child is herself a wounded creature. She is maimed by polio, thus to the biological disadvantages of being a crippled female in a male-domineering world is quite difficult. However, it also operates as a feminist allegory. The question of education to the female child is also touched upon in this novel. Lenny’s handicap is piled one on top of the other and her lameness is allied to her femaleness to deprive her of a proper education. The doctor tells her parents:

‘She’s doing fine without school, isn’t she?’ says the doctor. Don’t pressure her.... her nerves could be affected. She doesn’t need to become a professor’. He turns to me. ‘Do you want to become a professor?’... She’ll marry - have children - lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams’ he advises: thereby sealing my fate. (15)

Thus, deprived of schooling, Lenny is thrust more and more into the company of her Ayah with whom she explores the multifaceted modern world of Lahore. It is this association which forms the core of *Ice-Candy-Man*. Lenny has strong female models with whom she has a woman-
to-woman bonding. She also shares a strong bond with her Godmother Rodabai and her Ayah.

Towering high among the women protagonists is the vibrant figure of Lenny’s Godmother Rodabai who sparkles with razor-sharp wit, her unimaginable stamina, her boundless love for fellow human beings and her social commitment, her sense of humour, her deer-like agility, in spite of her old age, and her power to mould, modify and order not only individuals but even the system, when she so desires, earn her respect and admiration of people around her. Her wisdom is revealed when she consoles the Ayah, in the aftermath of what has been done to her. The worst fate of Ayah has been revealed in the words of Godmother:

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 debirs of our pasts. Hurt happiness... all fade impartially... to make way for fresh joy and new sorrow. That’s the way of life. (105)

The most glorious example of her self-confidence, authoritativeness, in opposing religious fundamentalism against women’s victimization and the capacity to handle critical situation cleverly, is shown when she rescues
Ayah: “The much loved Ayah now becomes what Lenny’s boy cousins calls the opposite of virgin Mary a whore” (88). Moving from innocence to maturity, Lenny ends her account on a positive note. Godmother strives to rehabilitate Ayah and thousands of other violated women like her.

The little Lenny slowly gains knowledge about the larger world. By making Lenny the narrator of the novel, the novelist lends weight and validity to the feminine perspective on the native of surrounding reality. Lenny’s world is also populated by other deprived female characters. Lenny’s betrayal of Ayah is the last act of her childhood, but she works with her family to rescue Ayah from the captivity and sexual exploitation of the Ice-candy-man.

Lenny retains her independent identity in diverse situations. Lenny, the child narrator of the novel, witnesses the barbaric cruelties against women during partition days. What emerges as the dominant note or thematic motif in the novel is the victimization of women.

Most of the other partition novels in English have concentrated largely on the helplessness of women pitched against oppressive male forces. Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, and Manohar Malgonkar’s
A *Bend in the Ganges* highlight the trauma women had to undergo during the catatonic times of partition. The women characters of *Ice-Candy-Man* draw our attention to the facts of victimization of women and their being forcefully compelled to define their lives according to the pre-fixed gender roles. Lenny as a narrator records the multi-faceted trauma women had faced during the unsettling and devastating days of partition.

Lenny’s mother exhibits a change in her personality by the end of the novel. She becomes acquainted with the political changes occurring in the country during India-Pakistan division. She emerges as a social worker. Along with Lenny’s Aunt, she helps the victims of 1947 riots. She provides people with petrol who wanted to cross the border and helps the raped and exploited women. Lenny’s mother shows a lot of similarity with Bhabani Bhattacharya’s female character Monju in *So Many Hungers*. Monju appears as a fuller and mature woman by the end of the novel. In the beginning, she projects the womanly traits of being happy and content with her life and family. But gradually, with the passage of time, the pathetic incident of Bengal famine and pictures of human life transform her. She learns to think beyond the realms of her own life and as a human she
cannot remain blind to and detached from the miseries and traumas of others. With a soul to feel and a mind to think it is very difficult to shut oneself behind the door when people are screaming for help and rescue. Similarly Lenny’s mother could not resist herself from helping the victims of 1947 riots.

The eventual rehabilitation of Ayah which is chiefly the work of Godmother, the good Samaritan as she is. The repentance of Ice-candy-man gives Lenny a glimpse of the power of love and the pain of separation. In one of her interviews, Sidhwa admitted that “the Hindu Ayah is symbolic of the Indian earth” (143). Godmother has the power of individual courage. When people bring to her their sores and swollen joints, she distils the right herbs and she cures illnesses, battles wrongs, solaces grief and prevents mistakes.

Godmother makes it her business to know everything about everybody, and tries to help people whenever she can. She donates blood, seeks admission to a boarding school for Ranna, traces the Ayah and manages to send her back to her people. She is also a formidable person, and scolds the Ice-candy-man for disgracing the Ayah:

’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 suited 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!” Despite slave sister’s protest she permits Lenny to accompany her to Ayah’s place. She is also a sensitive person. (248)

When she realizes that Ayah, despite her marriage to the Ice-candy-man, does not want to live with him, she decisively sets about to rescue her. Her visit to the Ayah has the trappings of a trial. She sits and acts as a judge. Unlike other female figures of the novel, Godmother has transcended her sexuality and emerges as an authoritative presence, and is able to achieve her desires. She embodies the ideal strength in female characters and tries to save other female characters who are victimized.

Other female characters are Muccho, the sweeper, and her daughter Papoo. Muccho takes Papoo as her rival and saddles her with all the household chores and beats her on the slightest of pretexts.

Early in the novel, we are introduced to Papoo, the sweeper’s daughter who live with her family in the
servants’ quarters behind the Sethi’s bungalow. While the polio-stricken Lenny is doted on, Papoo lives a life of deprivation, a life all too routine for most sub-continental girls. We find out that her mother Muccho routinely maltreats her daughter. She is hospitalized for two weeks after a presumed beating by her mother results in a concussion. The underlying cause of Muccho’s wrath is never explicitly identified, but one concludes that Papoo is a subject to abuse simply because she is a girl and thus a liability to the family. In a subsequent episode, we see Maccho’s anger explode at her errant daughter for not doing her household chores:

‘Wait till I fix you, you shaitan! You choorail! ‘Macho screams vindictively. ‘You’ve got a jinni in you.... but I’ll knock it out or I’m not your mother! Just you see what I have in stone for you... It’ll put you right! You’ll scream to the dead... May you die!’ (47)

Despite her mother’s ill-treatment, Papoo displays a remarkable resilience. Papoo is “broken” when her family marries her off to an unappetizing older man. Papoo is drugged with opium at the time of the ceremony to suppress her revolt. Lenny curiously studies Muccho’s face during the wedding ceremony and is startled to find a pretended smile on her lips. The sketch of Muccho
suggests that women themselves are unconsciously bound by their conditioning and saddle their daughter with a repetitive fate, treating marriage as a panacea of all ills.

The story of Papoo’s coercion marriage reflects accurately the misfortunes of millions of sub-continental girls married off before the legal age. It also draws our attention to ways of sub-continental society in general conceived at the subjugation of women, affording societal consent to sexual enslavement. It is especially ironic that Papoo’s mother is the primary agent of her daughter’s plight. Papoo’s life is left to the readers’ imagination. We assume the worst; in all likelihood, she will have to endure continuing violence, both sexual and physical. No voices are raised in protest against the coercion of marriage on young girl; indeed, the marriage is attended and celebrated by the extended family and the community at large.

In this novel, Sidhwa again draws our attention to the facts of victimization of women but here the victimization is a result of collective action viz. the communal riots that followed the partition. Riots are largely orchestrated by mobs and become a signifier of a collective male victimizer. The maid in the Parsi family
at Lahore, the Ayah is the one who suffers the impact of partition the most. Partition is an upheaval which changes the status of millions of hapless people on either side of the border in the subcontinent into refugees.

In *Ice-Candy-Man*, partition becomes the moulding principle, a shaping force in the evolution of consciousness of Lenny, the Parsi child-protagonist. If partition is a traumatic experience for Bhisham Sahni and Amrita Pritam, it is an integral part of Bapsi Sidhwa’s writing, since she places victimization of woman as her major theme. Here, for the first time she uses a child-narrator like Firdausi Kanga in *Trying to Grow* and Adam Zameenzad in *Gorgeous White Female*.

Sidhwa’s middle and upper-class female characters are more clearly able to help those less fortunate, while lower-class women like Ayah functions merely as passive receptors of the benevolent action undertaken on their behalf.

While the main plot of the Ayah’s story focuses its attention on the abduction of women as the symbolic epicenter of communal violence, other ancillary episodes, especially involving women, show how the sexual exploitation of women is an accepted, almost routine element in the society. At the novel’s outset, the Ayah is
a sexually empowered woman, deploying her sensuality to rule over a circle of religiously diverse suitors. Even as Sidhwa celebrates this sensuality, she implies through the Ayah’s fate and through that of the other women in the novel, that sexual violence is a pervasive presence in these women’s lives. It is precisely the pervasiveness and habitual acceptance of sexual violence that eventually leads to the proliferation of violent acts enacted on the bodies of women; the turbulence of 1946-47 re-labels or re-calibrates rape and other acts of domestic violence against women as acts of “communal” aggression.

It is the only novel written by a Parsi on the theme of partition while the novel shows in the beginning the non-committed attitude of the Parsi community towards the flux in which the various communities of India found themselves at the beginning of the twentieth century. It does reveal the love-hate relationship between the Hidus and the Muslims through the consciousness and point of view of Lenny, an unusually precocious eight-year old Parsi girl.

*Cracking India* or *Ice-Candy-Man* is among the first to address an event that shall remain shrouded in silence. Sidhwa effectively establishes how women survive in the midst of oppressive male chauvinism.
By remaining silent, Ayah becomes the representative of female victimization. The silence here suggests that the dishonour of upper class women is different from women of lower-class.

Ayah is an impressive character who becomes a victim of fanatics. Her character represents those women who had to face horrible situations at the time of communal riots. Even today, women have to pay a very heavy price whenever communal riots break out in India. Innocent women who have nothing to do with communal disturbances are kidnapped, abducted and raped, and fall prey to the fanatics.

Bapsi Sidhwa wants to convey the message that humanism is more important than communalism. Women may belong to any religion but after all they are also human beings, and so why they should silently bear all the victimization.

*Ice-Candy-Man*, in the true sense of the term, successfully attempts to bring to the central stage the suffering of the female protagonists. The novelist with her realistic presentation gives them identity and all the female characters are the victims of the society that has been blinded by fanaticism and fundamentalism, in the male chauvinistic society.