



# The Portrayal of Distress, Destitution, and Loss of Identity During the Partition of India: A Study of Bhisham Sahni's Tamas and Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man

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**Abstract**— The trauma of partition and the agony experienced by it still continues to haunt millions of direct and indirect victims of the event in both India and Pakistan. This agony was expressed in partition literature written by writers from both countries. Muslims in India went to Pakistan, and Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan migrated to India, leaving behind everything, including their ancestral houses, traditions, and culture, and became refugees with nothing. Women became the most vulnerable victims, being assaulted, tormented, sexually molested, and abducted by men from different communities in the guise of religion. This sorrow of partition spawned a new literary genre known as "Partition Literature" in almost all Indian subcontinent languages. The opinions and experiences of refugees, victims of community violence, and political leaders are all represented in these stories. Sadaat Hasan Manto, Khuswant Singh, Amrita Pritam, W.H. Auden, Jyotirmoyee Devi, Chaman Nahal, Bhisham Sahni, Bapsi Sidhwa, and many attempted to address a variety of socio-political, cultural, and religious issues, causes, and their legacies in their writings. These writers have documented the horror of Partition in numerous amazing ways, based on their depth of experience, observation, and understanding of the tragic event. The present research offers a critical analysis of Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* in order to investigate the socio-political ramifications, pain, and trauma endured by the people during India's partition. The paper will make an additional effort to comprehend the political, social, and cultural transformations that both the countries experienced as a result of the division.



**Keywords**— Agony, terrifying, narratives, harmony, victims

On August 15, 1947, the long-awaited dawn of freedom was marked by the partition of the Indian Subcontinent. The political elites of England and India, including the British Crown, the Muslim League, the Akalis, and the Indian National Congress, came to this decision collectively. The "Divide and Rule" strategy allowed the British Raj to continue in India. The British Raj split the country in two before they left in order to accommodate their diplomatic aspirations. Terrifying images of a country come to mind when we hear the word "Partition." It also conveys a story of failing relationships, disorder and unrest in the community. Families were split apart,

and blood relationships were seriously strained. It turned neighbors into foes. Muslims and Hindus continue to hold each other responsible for it. It was an unpleasant gift that divided the nation into India and Pakistan. On both sides of the border, a significant portion of population was forcibly displaced during the event which resulted in an unprecedented wave of violence. A preview of the situation can be seen in Nisid Hajari's book "Midnight's Furies: The Deadly Legacies of India's Partition".

Gangs of killers set whole villages aflame, hacking to death men and children and the

aged while carrying off young women to be raped. British soldiers and journalists who had witnessed the Nazi death camps claimed Partition's brutalities were worse : pregnant women had their breasts cut off and babies hacked out of their bellies; infants were found literally roasted on spits . . . Special refugee trains, filled to bursting when they set out, suffered repeated ambushes along the way. All too often they crossed the border in funeral silence, blood seeping from under their carriage doors. (Hajari xvii)

The partition of the Indian Subcontinent went beyond a mere geographic division. Through widespread migration, death, murder, and loot, it vividly stained the years of shared cultures, brotherly bonds, emotions, love, and obligations. People from both the countries were physically and psychologically affected because of the religious fanaticism that uprooted them from their previous place and caused them to lose their feeling of security and belongingness. Even with the establishment of the Radcliffe line, Partition was unable to stop the violence between communities on either side of the borders. While Pakistan viewed the partition as an essential milestone in the development of a country with a majority of Muslims, India frequently remembers it as a painful event marked by violence and suffering. Both nations have shaped their national identities and political agendas by drawing on the memories of the division. In actuality, Partition caused irreversible harm to the lives of both India and Pakistan, and even now, over seventy five years later, the memory of it still lingers in the public mind. The country's eventual division cannot be attributed to a single cause because a variety of political, religious, social, and economic issues were involved.

As an action-packed event it continues to haunt not only millions of direct and indirect victims of the event but also it has a significant impact on the understanding of historians, researchers, scholars and writers from time to time till date. The stories and narratives of India's partition in 1947 led to the creation of the sovereign nations of India and Pakistan are known as partition novels. These narratives lively portray the emotional impact of the incident and the perspectives of people who were directly impacted by this unfortunate incident. It further illustrates the persistent hostilities that exist between India and

Pakistan. In general, the stories surrounding the partition serve as a reminder of the human predicament associated with political choices and the significance of comprehending the historical setting in which they were made. These writers through their novels addressed a wide range of topics, including social, political, philosophical, and psychological impact of partition on the people of both the countries who lived in harmony but all of a sudden they turned to be enemies under this disconsolate circumstance. These authors attempted to identify this communal disharmony from a humanitarian perspective in addition to capturing the haunting atmosphere of those gloomy times through their works. The storyline and characters found in these narratives projected the nature of violence, which is largely "socio-political," "cultural," and "communal" in origin. In addition to being a political movement, partition is also a literary repository of the emotional turmoil that the Indian subcontinent underwent during its resurgence. This paper examines two partition novels; *Tamas* by Bhishma Sahni and *Ice-Candy-Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa in order to fully understand the intricate consequences of partition on the social, political, cultural, religious, and emotional traits of the adversely affected people. Since these writers came from various regions of pre-partition India, it makes sense to look at their works from this perspective.

### **Bhisham Sahni's Tamas**

Bhisham Sahni's work *Tamas* vividly depicts the horrific tragedy of India's pre-partition communal violence. The novel aims to expose the ignorance and depravity that fuel communal violence on the eve of Partition. The book emphasizes the ways in which the radical socialists manipulated innocent people into carrying out their orders in order to promote their own agendas at the expense of communal harmony and the ways in which fundamentalist forces encouraged violence within communities. The stories in the book serve to remember and depict significant events as they were experienced and perceived by the victims, as well as to help bring human suffering and the voices of the voiceless back to life. The killing of a pig and a cow sparked the inter-communal conflict that led to the loss of several human lives. People from both India and Pakistan had to lose both their homes and the near and dear ones they had lived with throughout their lives during this sad incident. Little children were left defenseless and women were sexually assaulted. Even the elderly were ruthlessly murdered without mercy. A great number of women had killed themselves and their daughters in an attempt to safeguard them from being raped. Even people who are quite aware of the turmoil that could follow the division of both the countries were not spared being victimized as everything happened so quickly, they hardly

got time to find ways to tackle the situation. People were forced to leave their homes in order to save their lives within no time. Romesh Chopra writes the following regarding the events that occurred during the partition:

Riots had spread like wild fire, especially in Punjab, U.P., Bihar and Bengal. When Mountbatten took over, law and order had already broken down in many states, but got awful momentum during the Muslim Leagues campaign, in August, 1946 in the city of Calcutta...Anybody could murder anyone. No FIRs, no court cases, no police investigation took place, and of course it had the religious sanction (Chopra 913)

Tamas challenged the common misconception that religious organizations were behind riots by revealing the true politics behind them. The problem starts with Murad Ali, who hires a poor butcher Nathu to kill a pig and place the carcass on the entrance of a mosque, that erupts a communal riot as the Islam considers pigs to be impure and forbids its consumption. Although Mahatma Gandhi tried to pacify the event by instructing congressmen to clean up the mess, Mahhmood Saheb objected to it with a belief that congress party is solely for Hindus and Muslim Leagues is for safeguarding the interest of the Muslims. Even the British government did not take adequate measures to maintain law and order to avoid this unforeseen incident and it is quite evident in the reply given by the Deputy Commissioner Richard :

The administration does not enjoy a hood reputation with you gentlemen. I am a British officer, and you have little faith in the British government. You won't very much care to listen to what I have to say. (Sahni, 94)

This conflict showcased the discord and mistrust between both the communities as well as their preference of racial affiliation over national identity. Jarnail Singh, a Sikh Congress activist in his attempt to rebuild the communal harmony was ruthlessly murdered:

"You, son of a..." shouted someone standing behind him, and with one swing of his lathi, hit the Jarnail on his head and broke his skull into two. Jarnail fell down in a heap, with his cane, his green 'military' uniform, his torn turban and his torn chappals, before he could finish his sentence. (Sahni, 190-1)

Sardar Harnam Singh and his wife Banto are the only Sikh family in Dhok Ilahi Baksh, running a tea-shop. As the situation worsens, they consider leaving to Khanpur, where their relatives live. Harnam Singh refuses to leave, showing faith in his fellow villagers, the muslim community. Very soon he has to change his decision when Karim Khan cautioned him "Your welfare lies in leaving the place" (Sahni 216). As soon the elderly couple leaves their house, rioters robbed their shop and set it on fire before their eyes. Being homeless, they walked all night long till they arrived in Muridpur early in the morning in the hopes of finding shelter in the village.. The pathetic turmoil inside the Sardar gets expression when he said to her wife:

'Don't you know anyone in Muridpur?'

Harnam Singh smiled. 'No one gave us shelter where I knew everyone, our shop was looted and our house set on fire. Many of the villagers had been my childhood playmates, we had grown up together.' (Sahni 226)

Rajo, Ehsan Ali's wife and Ramzan's mother, provides shelter for the Sikh couple. Ehsan Ali, who looted the Sikh couple's shop becomes angry discovering both of them taking shelter in his own house. This further aggravated the situation and Rajo had to let Harnam Singh and his wife Banto out of the house to continue their journey of finding shelter. The bitter fight between the Sikhs and the Muslims at Sayyedpur gurudwara continued for two days and the Sikhs succumb to defeat leading to the mass massacre many women committed suicide learning it will be futile to escape the carnal desires of the rioters.

*Tamas* explores the theme of partition in Indian literature, presenting an emotional and realistic study of the time. It vividly portrays Hindu-Muslim communal harmony and disharmony through various characters. During riots in West Punjab, Hindu and Sikh shops were targeted for burning and looting, while Muslim properties were targeted in East Punjab. Thousands of people experienced extreme upheaval and psychological distress due to dislocation, leading to feelings of insecurity. Humans, like plants, adapt to their surroundings to gain security and belonging. Relocating due to caste, religion, or lifestyle challenges can result in insecurity and disorder. Bhisham Sahni highlights the Hindu-Muslim relationship, where distrust exists between Hindus and Muslims, despite living side by side for generations. It depicts horrifying scenes, such as Sikh women jumping into a well to save themselves from rioters and an old man killed by a 15-year-old boy, reflecting the current state of violence and the potential for political gain.

The book explores human life, highlighting the struggle for freedom and identity, as well as the challenges of

maintaining peace and respecting different beliefs within communities. The conclusion of *Tamas* is crucial since it emphasizes how common people suffer the most during riots. Politicians, elites, and the rich don't actually care about it. Surprisingly, Murad Ali, the person responsible for the intensification of violence between communities, is leading this peace initiative. The symbolic conclusion of the novel thus functions as a warning as well as an attempt to inform the public about the dangers of bringing religion into politics and to make them aware of the ways in which they are always being used as props and tools in the plans of the ruling class.

### **Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man**

Bapsi Sidhwa, a prominent Pakistani literary figure, explores her Parsi roots, past, and community in her major novel, *Ice-Candy-Man*. The story revolves around the Parsi community's dilemma over support and loyalty amid the impending Partition of India. It depicts the tragic history of India's partition into India and Pakistan, highlighting the aftermath of colonialism. The story follows the lives of friends like Lenny, Imam Dinn, and Aaya Ice Candy Man, and employs a child narrator to provide impartial and non-prejudiced accounts of the partition, highlighting the harsh realities of colonialism. History clearly shows that Hindu nationalism was the main source of power for British rulers, who consistently employed the divide and rule strategy. There are well-known tales of brotherhood and close ties between the Muslim and Hindu communities in Indian history. However, the British rulers' cunning methods contributed to a partial breakdown of this strong solidarity between Muslims and Hindus. The relationship between the Ice Candy Man, Masseur, and Aaya allows us to examine this horrific circumstance in the *Ice-Candy Man*. Ice Candy Man is a Muslim, but Aaya and the masseuse are Hindu. "I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train," admits Ice Candy Man in the book. I tell you, I went crazy that night! I threw grenades through Sikh and Hindu windows... I want to murder someone for every breast that Muslim women are deprived of-the penises! (Sidhwa 156).

The novel depicts a reversed relationship between Hindus and Muslims, with the former becoming violent and the latter becoming enmity. The British rulers' policy of divide and rule creates an uncertain atmosphere, leading to thousands of innocent people being mercilessly killed by both groups, without identifying the true cause. This violence highlights the underlying issues between the two groups. Throughout history, women have been the victims of violence, whether it stems from riots motivated by religion or caste. As a result, they are not affected negatively by postcolonialism. The story illustrates how

rioters victimize women and how this is how revenge is carried out. During the partition, women are raped and slaughtered in broad daylight:

Setting fires, looting, parading the Muslim women naked through the streets - raping and mutilating them in the centre of village and in mosques. The Bias, flooded by melting snow, and the monsoon, is carrying hundreds of corpses. There is an intolerable stench where the bodies, caught in the bends, have piled up (Sidhwa, 172).

Occasionally, she finds herself unable to identify the source of the women's cries "The mystery of the women in the courtyard deepens. At night we hear them wailing, their cries verging on the inhuman. Sometime I can't tell where the cries are coming from. From the women or from the house next door infiltrated by our invisible neighbours"(Sidhwa 212). Not only are Aaya and the sisters of *Ice-Candy Man* fictional characters, but they also stand in for the innocent people who lose their lives as a result of the partition of India, which was engineered by British colonisers. The novel exposes the British government's covert interest in India's economic growth and how they purposefully introduced laws that served their own interests. The characters in the narrative lack a defined development, yet they are all from low-income families without steady employment and no intention to create jobs for the general public. The British Government ships all resources into England.

The novel critiques stereotypical images of women and advocates for their empowerment. It highlights the gynocentric view of reality and feminist concerns about women's victimization and suppression within patriarchal societies. Lenny, a young Parsee girl suffering from polio, reflects on the societal expectations placed on women, particularly in the realm of writing. She observes men's degrading attention towards women and their sexual desires. Lenny learns that marriage is crucial in society, and she is often told that being beautiful is desirable. Her doctor, Col. Bharucha, suggests that women should focus on marriage, raising children, and being efficient in household duties. This patriarchal society views women as physically weak and confined to the domestic sphere, limiting their opportunities for growth and development.

Lenny's Hindu idol, Ayah Shanta, symbolizes femininity and freedom. She attracts admirers like the *Ice-Candy-Man*, the Government House gardener, and the Masseur. Ayah's natural beauty and sensuality attract men, creating power. Lenny observes her admirers' gaze reveals a desire for ownership, highlighting the objectification of women's



bodies. In Lahore, communal riots occur as Sikhs and Hindus migrate to Amritsar, while Muslims are asked to leave. Women and children suffer the most during this time. A train from Gurdaspur arrives, carrying dead bodies and butchered women's breasts. This event questions the hypocrisy of glorifying Indian women as goddesses during upheaval. The bag of severed breasts becomes a public form of communication, verifying nationalist power. Dilnawaz, the Ice Candy Man, becomes blood thirsty and takes Ayah, a Hindu girl, into the hands of the Muslim mob. Ayah is raped, beaten, and thrown away among brothels. She is forced to marry Dilnawaz, renaming her Mumtaz, highlighting the lack of a woman's right over her identity.

In the episode of Ice-Candy-Man and Ayah, Lenny is shocked by the violence and rape committed against women during the riots. This violence destroys Lenny's conceptions of love and male honor, as women have no rights on their own bodies. The community of Ranna in Lahore plans to protect women from public shaming by allowing them to start a fire. The story highlights the importance of women's purity and the loss of feminine power. Sidhwa uses the figures of Lenny's caretakers to explore the fates of women who survived these acts of violence. The loss of feminine power in the story could be seen as a traditional Partition novel, with men as victors and women as victims. Sidhwa's novel, *Partition*, emphasizes the importance of women utilizing their potential beyond domestic life and asserting their individuality. The novel features two strong examples of feminine power: Lenny's mother, who moves beyond her traditional role as a housewife to rescue and house women during Partition, and her Godmother, Rodabai. Lenny's mother and aunts provide shelter and support for women who have been raped or forced into prostitution. Rodabai's authority and self-confidence are evident in her handling of extreme situations, such as the Ice-Candy-Man's disgrace of the Ayah. She rescues Ayah and sends her back to her people, showcasing the power of women in bringing order to a chaotic world.

Sidhwa exposes the perpetuation of violence against women by patriarchal culture and norms, highlighting the role of women in causing the suffering and exploitation of others. In her novel *Ice-Candy-Man*, a slave-sister is harassed by her sister Godmother, leading to her suppression and bonded to her. Sidhwa emphasizes that women can also be instrumental in perpetuating violence against others, as seen in the relationship between Pappo and her mother Muccho. Muccho's manipulation and drugging of Papoo's spirit suggest that women are unconsciously bound by their conditioning, treating marriage as a cure for all ills. Sidhwa explores the

emancipation of women and ends with Ayah returning home. Lenny, a courageous and bold girl, navigates life despite obstacles. Ayah's suffering represents thousands of women's suffering in patriarchal society. Lenny, her Ayah, and her family demonstrate the ability to assume new roles. Lenny's relationship with her cousin upholds equality, as she refuses to be dominated by the male and expresses her preferences.

Sidhwa, set in the context of communal violence, explores postcolonial history from the perspective of marginalized women. *Cracking India* critiques stereotypical images of women, advocating for a social transformation that acknowledges their desires, feelings, ambitions, and potentials. The novel explores the desire for power and influence, which fuels religious intolerance, leading to violence and division among different religious and ethnic groups. It also highlights the subjugation of women, such as Ayah, who is taken prisoner by a man and subjected to extreme sexual violence, including rape and sex slavery. Lenny's intense sexual desire for her Cousin, similar to the Ice-candy-man stalking Ayah, shapes her understanding of lust and desire as powerful motivators.

Betrayal is a central theme in the novel, as India betrays its people by enforcing a hasty plan to move millions of refugees. The loss of life, lands, and kinship is a reminder of this betrayal. Sidhwa uses betrayal to reveal hidden character traits, loyalties, and truth through characters like Lenny, who learns the lesson that even loved ones may not always come to aid. Lenny betrays her beloved Ayah, using her relationship with the Icecandy-man to kidnap her. She is devastated and her family is shocked. Ayah is forced into prostitution, and Lenny blames herself. However, her family, including Godmother and mother, rescues Ayah from her terrible life. The novel depicts the oppression and sexual victimization of women, including Papoo's child marriage, Partition violence, and Hamida, Ayah, and Ranna's stories. The only hope comes from Lenny's mother and her gang, who rescue women and return them to their families, despite their brokenness. As Lenny's ayah manages to flee, religious and social bigotry beats the ice candy vendor. Fighting and Partition have cost the Parsees everything, and everyone involved must move on. With a small girl's perspective, the story is painful and funny at the same time. As Lenny matures, the ugliest aspects of humanity and bloodshed taint her perceptions. She had to persevere in order to save her ayah, demonstrating her growing care for the welfare of others.

## Conclusion

The genre of Partition Literature is dominated by representations of violence against religious minorities in

communities. Bapsi Sidhwa tells the story of Partition with a critical eye towards religion, just like Bhisham Sahni. She complains to God in the start of the book *Ice Candy Man*. She learns the truth from Lenny via observation: "One man's religion is another man's poison" (Sidhwa 117). The young narrator, Lenny, felt that her universe had been constricted by the Partition and expressed her regret to God, saying, "I'm sorry to say it so boldly." Are you any less erratic than we are?(Sidhwa 1). Beverly Milton Edward quotes Salman Rushdie as saying, "Where religion intervenes, mere innocence is no excuse" (Edward 22) in reference to the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002. The author demonstrates how naive Lenny was tricked by the popsicle man and unintentionally exposed Ayah's hiding place by taking part in the fighting. She was unable to flee and her innocent infantile behavior was not justified. But *Ice Candy Man* also realistically portrays the horrible story of Partition. The partition of the Indian subcontinent into two nations based on religion was seen as a necessary sacrifice for freedom from British colonial powers. Partition literature depicts the suffering of common people, including violence, trauma, and brutality. Despite the division, language and literature were not partitioned, as the Two-Nation Theory claimed Hindi was Hindu and Urdu Muslim, preserving both languages in both countries.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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