

## Transnationalism and the Languages /Literatures of the Global South: South Asian Perspectives

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### Delineation of Inner Spaces and Angst: A Comparative Study of Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice – Candy – Man*

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#### **Abstract:**

The recent women writers from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh exemplify the issue of gendered self-representation and feminist concern. Their works realize not only the diversity of women but the diversity within each woman. They are incorporating their experiences to make a new, empowering image for women, instead of limiting the lives of women to one ideal; they push the ideal towards the full expression of each woman's potential. Indian land is known for its unity and diversity. It has been a witness to the most horrific as well as terrible atrocities that have ever been committed in the history of humanity. The harrowing situation of women during partition has been quite popular among the literary writers. The present study tries to delineate the wounded souls of women during the partition of India in 1947. It has described the condition of women as delineated by Amrita Pritamin *Pinjar* and Bapsi Sidhwa in *Ice– Candy Man*. It will also aim at presenting a comparative study as to how both the writers share different perspectives of women during partition in their masterpieces- *Pinjar* and *Ice-Candy-Man* respectively. In both the novels we get a clear glimpse of the atrocities of partition and the ultimate tragedy shattering the lives of women across the boundaries. Both the novelists have

described the pangs of women's suffering in a realistic way. Amrita Pritam has tried to present an Indian identity in her description of Pooro's journey of transformation from Pooro to Hamida, her loss of identity and agony while on the contrary Bapsi Sidhwa has given her own description through the character of Ayah, who was kidnapped by the Ice-Candy-Man.

Though both the novels centre around the theme of partition and the plight of women, their struggle and suffering due to the perpetrators of violence either in the name of culture, religion or societal norms during partition, the writers have tried to analyse the situation in their own way. Of course, in presenting the condition of women during and after the partition both the writers have the same views. However, Sidhwa has delved deeper by depicting the trauma in a more realistic way through her feminist lens. The present paper intends to present a comparative stance of both the characters –Pooro on the one hand and Ayah on the other in terms of pangs and trauma they suffer in the hands of their near and dear ones against the background of partition.

**Keywords:** Trauma, Oppression, Atrocities, Identity Crisis, Tortured Self

### **Research Goals**

The objective of the paper is to present a comparative stance of the efforts made by two great writers– Amrita Pritam and Bapsi Sidhwa and their concern for the status of women in contemporary society with a view to helping them cross the threshold of societal norms. The paper also focuses on depicting the atrocities committed on women during and after partition.

## Methods

The researcher has used a direct method to bring forth the various nuances of partition. She has discussed the impact of partition on women. And for this purpose, the primary sources and the secondary sources both have been taken into consideration.

In the history of the twin nations, India and Pakistan the political act of partition remains a drastic event which still brings fears and tears into the eyes of people who recall it. The partition led to hostility, distrust, religious enmity, attacks and counter-attacks culminating into wide spread massacre and rape. These all constitute the major parts of the subject matter of the partition novels. These novels depict not just the story of bloodshed but also delineate the anguished cry of helpless and hopeless multitude caught in the vortex of death and destruction which was based on insane and pseudo dogmatic religious practices and more inaudible afflictions of sensitive mind who suffered the most. The novels like *Train to Pakistan*, *The Shadow Lines* and *Ice – Candy-Man* and short stories like *Pinjar* record the ghastly tragedies of the partition and its impact on the common man on streets. These novels, moreover, present as to how the borders of India and Pakistan came to know violence that destroyed the very bond of brotherhood. As far as women writers are concerned they besides portraying the partition experience in general specifically record the women's experiences, thereby presenting a gendered perspective of partition. The women writers like Amrita Pritam in *Pinjar*, Bapsi Sidhwa in *Ice – Candy Man*, Jyotirmayee Devi in *The River Churning*, and many others seem to be propelled by an inner space to articulate the painful experiences of women during partition. They have delineated their characters in such a way as the people experience the situation as women perceive it. They not only portray the victimization of women but also their resilience.

The trauma of partition has been scripted with blackest letters on the darkest pages of human cruelty and bloodshed. Women have suffered violence within and without men's pre-structured security

around them. The records show and history narrates that women were massacred inside and outside their homes. They were abducted and forced to accept brutality, were victimized in communal riots and even were made them the easy prey of lynch-mob frenzy and were psychologically traumatized to the extent of being driven to jump into wells and commit suicide to preserve their dignity as women.

Amrita Pritam is a renowned Punjabi poetess and novelist of the twentieth century. Her most of the works centre around the sufferings of women and afflictions of multitudes caught in the hell of communal violence. *Pinjar*, [written by her in Punjabi and translated by Khushwant Singh in English is an unprejudiced depiction of author's anguish over massacres during the partition of India. It shows that communal hatred was mainly and deeply rooted in the minds of Hindus and Muslims. It is a story of a young girl, Pooro who has been abducted by a man, Rashid in order to avenge the family enmity and when she escapes back to her parents she is disowned.

The novel revolves around Pooro and her happy family of two sisters and a brother. She unquestioningly accepts whatever her parents decide for her marriage. Her marriage has been fixed with Ramchand. Their wedding ceremony is going to be held very soon. But destiny has decided something different for her. The turning point of the story and Pooro's life arrives when she is abducted by Rashid, a Muslim boy who wanted to avenge for the similar act committed by her uncle. Rashid does not rape her though he traps her many days in his house. After struggling a lot, she manages to escape and goes home but there is no place for her in the family as she had been abducted which puts her chastity and fidelity to question, "You have lost your faith and birthright. If we dare to help you, we will be cut down and finished without a trace of blood left behind to tell our faith" (Pritam, 2013, p. 23). Being rejected by her family, she returns to Rashid to lead an identity-less life. He forces her to marry and changes her name Hamida from Pooro, "She became Hamida by day and turned back Pooro by night. In reality, she

was neither Hamida nor Pooro; she was just a skeleton, without a shape or a name (Pritam, 2013, p. 25).

She is a classic example of a traumatic psyche which is the result of divided and tortured identity. Priyadarshini Das Gupta in her article, "Re-covering Women: Reading Two Partition Stories", rightly points out the predicaments of Pooro, "Now she is Pooro only in her dreams and in her reminiscences of her parents' home. This duality she cannot take affably to and is soon reduced to mere skin and bones" (Dasgupta, 2013, p.5). She strongly feels that she is now attached to her husband yet there always burns the flame of desire that one day she might see her mother. Pooro does not kill her memories of family, friends and fiancé but keeps them intact in her subconscious mind and in her dream only. Rashid repents for the crime of her abduction and seeks redemption. He tries to provide love and care to her but she is unrelenting as the wounds inflicted by him are really unforgivable. She bitterly accepts the fact that now she has no family to go to but Rashid with whom she has to spend the rest of her life. Being a mother of a son makes it easier for her to accept the tortured identity. Amrita Pritam highlights that women are considered merely bodies of violence, nothing more than bodies. Puro's dilemma is repeated when Lajo is abducted by Muslims and kept in captivity in her own house and Ramchand comes to Pooro seeking her help to relieve Lajo. She shows immense strength with the help of Rashid in the hour of crisis to help Lajo to escape from the clutches of abductors and to hand over her to Ramcharad at the Refugee camp for a fresh start. Hamida as a wife knew the agony through which Rashid had gone through these years and also his repentance. This developed respect for him in her heart and she accepted him as husband and she did not want to go through the same pain of separation through which she had already been with Ramchand. She wanted to stay back to help all the helpless women who were left behind to reunite with their family. The anguished outcry of Amrita Pritam is remarkable, "It was a sin to be alive in a world so full of evil...It was a crime to be born a girl" (p. 87).

Delineation of the wretched lives of women in *Pinjar* may be compared to the condition of Sita in *The Ramayana* where women's miseries continue even in the present time. Pooro's life is compared to Sita's as she is also abducted and later abandoned by the society but she emerges as a strong feminist when she decided to stay back to help other victims of partition. Amrita Pritam's depiction of Pooro is very much similar to the portrayal of the character of Nooran in *Train to Pakistan* as well. She is the beloved of Jugga, a criminal turned humanist. She shares the sufferings of the women caught in the vortex of communal hatred. She does not want to leave the village as she feels herself to be deeply rooted in the soil of Mano Majra. Her home is the land where her forthcoming child would be with its father. She offers prayers for Jugga's return from police custody. She goes to Jugga's mother and reveals that she is in a family way and has conceived the child of her son. She implores her to give her and her child shelter expressing apprehension that if the child is born in Pakistan it would be killed. She begs her for mercy for herself and the child. Her hope is shattered when her plead is rejected by Jugga's mother. She has to go to the refugee camp for shelter with her thwarted dream.

Pooro feels herself to be disconnected not only from her home and health but also from her social and religious mooring and hence an agonized soul. In the meantime, India gets Independence with the partition. She is severed off from her last connection with the native land. The partition aggravates her afflictions like anything. An identity of Hamida is imprinted on her soul. She writhes within and finds no escape from her predicaments. Her anguished cry is subdued and she becomes merely bones and skeleton. Though Rashid has always been good since kidnapping and did not call her Hamida, Amrita reveals her soul, "In her dreams, when she met her old friends and played in her parents' home, everyone still called her Pooro" (p.25)

Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the major writers writing on partition. She belongs to India, Pakistan and the United States simultaneously but she likes herself to be called as a Punjabi – Pakistani – Parsee

woman. Her novel *Ice – Candy-Man* examines the inexorable logic of partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by hardening communal attitudes. The novel captures the effects of communal frenzy that follows partition through the innocent eyes of Lenny, the child narrator of the novel. She is polio-ridden, precocious and a keen observer of the happenings around. The story of the novel has been presented from her point of view. She has a deformity in her foot. She is apprehensive that Dr. Bharucha may finally be able to correct her leg by repeatedly putting it in a cast. Her deformity imparts a special status to her. She is rather happy with her deformity. She uses it to gain sympathy and favour. She grows up in comfort and tranquility in her house on Warris road in Lahore. Col. Bharucha is the spokesman of the Parsee community in Lahore. He advises his people to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare to safeguard their interest. The Parsee paradox of whether to 'Swaraj' or to maintain their loyalty to the British Raj is also humorously delineated. A piquant touch is given to his dilemma. The Parsees in Lahore at a special meeting at their temple hall in Warris Road have an acrimonious debate on the political system. If India is divided and independence is achieved, political glory, fame and fortune will be acquired by the two major communities-Hindus and Muslims. Col. Bharucha says, "Hindus, Muslims and even Sikhs are going to jockey for power and if you jokers jump into the middle you will be mangled into Chutney" (Sidhwa, 1987, p. 36).

Shanta, the eighteen year old Hindu Ayah of Lenny has a seductive appearance and attracts many admirers. When Ayah takes Lenny in the evening to the park, her several admirers assemble around her. Among them is Hotel cook, the government house gardener, the head and the body Masseur, the Zoo attendant Sher Singh and Ice– Candy man—all vying for her attentions and her favours. Ayah has such stunning looks that she draws covetous glances from every one. Beggars, holy men, hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes and ogle at her. Of these Masseur and Ice – Candy Man are Ayah's most favourite. In an interview, Bapsi Sidhwa declared, "Part of my title

*Ice – Candy Man* did reflect on Ice – Candy Man that is manipulative politician who hold out false candies to people" (Interview).

Even the English men are not able to resist her magnetic charm. They are people of different faiths—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs—yet they live together amicably in a spirit of oneness. Gradually things change and this change is depicted in the dwindling of the group around Ayah. Things start turning ugly and violent. Houses are looted and burnt. There are riots – English soldiers being chased by Sikhs. Ayah moans at the horror of the scene and collapses but the violence excites many including the Ice – Candy man. The entire area is set on fire. The Hindu and Sikh families leave Lahore as communal trouble brews. Ice – Candy man would like to avenge those deaths, those rapes and mutilations. He becomes a communalist. He joins the gangs of Marauding hooligans in their looting and killing spree. He not only abducts Ayah but also throws her to the wolves of passion in a Kotha:

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.

(Sidhwa, 1987, p. 183)

Ayah is taken to Hira Mandi where she is transformed from Ayah to Mumtaz and is forcibly married to him. Though she is afterwards rescued by Godmother, a departure from *The Bride* where the rescue of Zaitoon was affected by a man and was sent across the border. She is completely shattered and disillusioned. Lenny also gives an account of the village of Pir Pandas where she frequently visited. She helps the Hindus during riots and even donates blood. She very rightly comments on Ayah's situation:



That we fated, daughter. It can't be undone. But it  
can be forgiven... Worse things are forgiven. Life goes  
on and 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.

(Sidhwa, 1987, p. 262)

Lenny is like the persona that Chaucer adopts in his *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. With the wonder of a child, she observes social change and human behaviour, seeking and listening to opinions and occasionally making judgements. The subtle irony and deft usage of language creates humour which does not shroud, but raucously highlights the trauma of the partition. The author sensitively shows the human toll of the partition, when Lenny asks, "Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it, where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother's then?" (1987, p. 92).

*Ice – Candy-Man* not only presents the barbaric details of atrocities perpetrated by one community over another, but also delineates various manifestations of pettiness and degenerated values which had hollowed the inner structural strength of the society. Though Lenny is baffled by various questions, she simultaneously becomes aware of religious differences. She worriedly remarks, "It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves-And the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, people shrinking, dwindling into symbols" (1987, p. 93).

*Ice – Candy Man* also presents friends turning foes. In an attempt to save their lives, many convert– some Hindus become Muslims and some Christians. Nobody is safe. Hari is humiliated; Ayah is abducted, Masseur is killed. Personal scores are settled. The writer brilliantly contrasts earlier playful games with cruelty and brutality after religious differences begin separating Hindus from Muslims, Christians from Sikhs. Sidhwa also suggests that though the past cannot be forgotten, it can be forgiven. The novel, though politically motivated, is also a work of art; it is a good blending of

realism and autobiographical form. However, she fails to present a subtle exploration of events. She only presents a kind of truth telling history; in portrayal and narrative she becomes pedantic. Her expression of despair and hopelessness to some extent belongs to savage irony that suggests an existence without hope, warmth and humanness. The novel distills the love-hate relationship of the Hindus and the Muslims. Indeed, Sidhwa's depiction of holocaust presents her Pakistani perspective and to some extent her biased point of view. Her main concern like that of Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* is to expose a brutal fact of how Muslims suffered in the hands of Sikhs and how Sikhs were killed by Muslim fanatics. But the treatment of partition does not arouse genuine pathos.

Partition was really a traumatic experience. The psychological trauma constituted partition with crucial factors of violence, loot and murder. A trauma, in the words of Sukeshi Kamra, "is a psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experience" (2022, p. 178). Sidhwa shows that the communal frenzy has a distorting effect on the masses and leads to feelings of distrust and frenzy. The novel conveys a serious warning of the dangers of communalism and religious fanaticism. Revenge becomes the major motivation for the Ice-Candy man and his friends. The novelist shows that during communal strife, sanity, human feelings and past friendships are forgotten. Here we are reminded of the message in Bhisham Sahni's novel *Tamas* that "those who forget history are condemned to repeat it." Bapsi Sidhwa represents those women who are kidnapped and raped, then rejected by their families and relegated to rehabilitation centre where they are subjected to all kinds of inhuman treatment. The novel raises an issue that is always of serious concern for both the countries. Sidhwa's treatment of the subject is so fresh and refreshing that this dark and sordid tale of partition turns into a powerful truth telling narrative.

## Results

Women have always been considered as subaltern in the patriarchal society, be it India, Pakistan Bangladesh or any other South-Asian country. Here both the novels – *Pinjar* and *Ice-Candy-Man* present Amrita Pritam and Bapsi Sidhwa as feminists and idealists who see in their women characters the strength of passion, the tenderness of love and the courage of one's convictions. The protagonists, Pooro and Ayah are portrayed not only as victims but also as saviours, thereby highlighting their contribution as agency in redeeming the distressed. Generally in male narratives, it is men who embrace action, seeking to shape circumstances to their will. But in the partition discourses by women writers, roles of women emerge paramount. Moreover, they have presented women characters as stereotyped victims, drawing on the easy pathos of helpless suffering. They refuse to accept passively an imposition of suffering as destiny. The impact of partition is psychologically understood and narrated through the feelings of women. Despite both the writers being feminists the way of depicting the atrocities during the partition period is different. Their approach to the treatment of the subject is dissimilar. Whereas Amrita Pritam has focused on the theme against the background of marriage, Bapsi Sidhwa has tried to highlight the incidents which took place with Ayah. However, both the writers have depicted the trauma and turbulence, especially in the context of women who became easy prey to violence during partition.

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