

**PARTITION HOLOCAUST AND HUMANE ELEMENTS IN *ICE-CANDY-MAN* AND *SUNLIGHT ON A BROKEN COLUMN*:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

The present paper is based on partition holocaust and the humane elements projected in Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man and Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken column. Sidhwa is a Pakistani Parsi whereas Attia Hosain is an Indian Muslim. The reaction, resentment and anger of the masses that lived with co-existence earlier and parted in ways overnight experiencing the bloodcurdling cruelty inspired these writers to write on the partition holocaust. Sidhwa has sensitively portrayed the political disturbance and social insecurity experienced by all the divided people while describing the tales of the partition in her novel while Attia Hosain concentrates her attention in depicting the destruction of the strong edifice of her big feudal family due to partition and goes on to diagnose the maladies of the partition days. Giving exposure to the terror of the aftermath, both the novelists reflect the beastly behaviour of the human beings. Both the novelists throw sufficient light on this aspect of the changed attitude of the Government servants and the entrapment by the newly enacted laws during the period of partition. Both the novelists have projected the female characters that either help the partition victims or come forward daringly in adverse circumstances. Bapsi Sidhwa also underlines the futility of war and destruction making her novel a vehicle to preach the ideal of love and humanity. Attia Hosain indirectly preaches the doctrine that it is the love and not religion that maintains the sense of unity, equality and brotherhood among the Indian communities.

Key Words : holocaust, bloodcurdling, maladies, entrapment, victims, futility, doctrine.

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Introduction:

India and Pakistan parted ways in trends and achievements after partition enjoying a common cultural and literary heritage until 1947. "The Radcliff Axe" was demarcated with blood as a product of the communal riots in the aftermath of the partition. The shared thoughts and heritage inspired many creative writers in India and Pakistan to write their experiences of bloodshed and cruelty on the border in the light of their own perspectives. The present paper is based on a comparative analysis of the partition holocaust and elements of Humanity reflected in *Ice-Candy-Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani Parsi and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hosain, an Indian Muslim. Both the female writers have penned the agonizing experiences of the after effects of the partition across the border in their respective novels. Experiencing the divergent ideologies that divided the subcontinent into two, both the novelists were acquainted with the diametrically opposite reactions of the masses on both the sides of the border. The reaction, resentment and anger of the masses that lived with co-existence earlier and parted in ways overnight experiencing the bloodcurdling cruelty inspired these writers to write on the partition holocaust. Doubtlessly, Sidhwa changed her nationality to become Pakistani after the partition, nevertheless, the trauma of chilling cruelty just after the announcement of partition was identical for both of them.

Sidhwa has sensitively portrayed the political disturbance and social insecurity experienced by all the divided people while describing the tales of the partition in her novel while Attia Hosain concentrates her attention in depicting the destruction of the strong edifice of her big feudal family due to partition. Both the novelists move on to diagnose the maladies caused by the trauma and upheaval of partition in their respective novels. Sidhwa projected how the British gave a serious thought to the partition of the united Indian subcontinent but how they ignored the same seriousness in awarding the cities to either country that resulted in the discontent of the people. The announcement of the news of

'Gurdaspur's gone to India' on radio made people initiate 'uncontrollable butchering' in Gurdaspur. Mr. Singh says, "I hear they had hoisted the green Pakistani flag and all. There's bound to be trouble." (*Ice-Candy-Man*, p. 146) It had become difficult to discern friends from foes when the people of opposite religious groups were burning with revenge. Taking decision to migrate was easy but the actual migration was a challenging task. The Ice-Candy-Man, knowing the news of Mr. Singh's plan to leave, says pathetically, "Well, they had to leave Lahore sooner or later... After what one hears of Sikh atrocities it's better they left sooner! The refugees are clamouring for revenge" (p. 156). Similarly, Attia Hosain reflects the migration of her some characters. Zahra, Saleem and Nadira migrate to Pakistan. The writer refers to the evils of migration and its bloody sides.

Train massacre is one of the aspects of the violent aftermath of partition presented by both the female writers. In Sidhwa's novel the Ice-Candy-Man brings the news of the arrival of train full of dead bodies of Muslims at Lahore from Gurdaspur. He says, "I'll tell you to your face- I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur. ...I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women." (*Ice-Candy-Man*, p.156) In the same way Attia Hosain retrieves that people, leaving their home and hearth as well as the land of their ancestors, resume their journey by train to rebuild their bright future in new homeland. Unfortunately, they became victims to the malice and hatred of the people of the other communities. Laila's cousin, Zahid, after partition, boards on the ill-fated train and become the victim of train massacre. Laila comments, "Full of bright hope and triumph Zahid had boarded the train on that thirteenth day of August, which was to take him to the realization of his dreams, on the eve of the birth of the country for which he had lived and worked. When it had reached its destination, not a man, woman or child was found alive." (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* p. 310)

The perplexing reality of the partition days was that people, getting blind in the name of religion, proved more horrible than the wild beasts. Giving exposure to the terror of the aftermath, both the novelists reflect the beastly behaviour of the human beings. Sidhwa has shown that Pir Pindo is attacked at dawn and swamped by the Sikhs. Jagheet Singh visits the Muslim village, Pir Pindo, under the cover of darkness to warn the villagers of the coming Akali attack. Men, women and children are killed. Similarly, Sikh families are attacked in Lahore. Sher Singh, the zoo attendant, flees from Lahore scared by the murder of his brother-in-law due to insecurity. Similarly, Attia Hosain presents the dark side of the partition by presenting the picture of the revengeful mob moving about in the streets in search of the people of their opposite religion. Laila says, "I had known the fear of violence,

murder, rape and mutilation, as hate-blinded men had streamed over the border... the terror would not have been greater than waiting with my child for the beasts that had been men. (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* p. 304)

Sidhwa narrates the sense of aloofness among the evacuees as a result of the fear of eviction in their minds from the newly occupied houses in the new homeland. In fact, their journey of migration was full of ordeals that made them horror-stricken. "They keep themselves, unobtrusively conducting their lives, lurking like night animals in the twilight interiors of their lairs, still afraid of being evicted from property they have somehow managed to occupy. (*Ice-Candy-Man*, p. 190) Attia Hosain also delineates the ardent change brought about by the throes of partition in the city of Lucknow. Overpowered by the shock to see the ardent changes, Laila says, "Tattered settlements for refugees had erupted on once open spaces. Ugly buildings had sprang up, conceived by ill-digested modernity and the hasty needs of a growing city." (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* p. 270) Laila visits her ancestral home after fourteen years of the event of partition.

Partition created the situation of anarchy and disorder that made people hard to differentiate friends from the foes. Being affected by the communal frenzy most of the Government servants also acted as irresponsible commoners which added to the problems of the people. Both the novelists throw sufficient light on this aspect of the changed attitude of the Government servants and the entrapment by the newly enacted laws during the period of partition. Sidhwa narrates the attack of Sikh mob at least on five villages around Dehra Misri. When the mob is engaged in killing the Muslims, looting and parading Muslim women naked through the streets, raping and mutilating them, the police also join the mob to perpetrate violence. The words of Dost Mohammad make this act bare, "The Muslims in the force have been disarmed at the orders of a Hindu Sub-Inspector; ... 'The Sikh and Hindu police have joined the mobs'" (*Ice-Candy-Man*, p. 197) Attia Hosain also shows how the officers make misuse of the new laws enacted after the partition as a whip in their hands for the harassment of the people. After Saleem migrates to Pakistan, the Government puts seal on his share in property. Luckily, Kemal gets share of his property without undergoing lots of searches and cross-examinations. Thus, the government servants look at the horrors unleashed by the people of one community over the other like mute spectators and show their indifference to refrain these people from such terrified acts. Most of the government servants acted on the dictates of their bosses.

Both the novelists show the impact of the partition on the children, weak and the vulnerable that can do nothing but express the pathos of the event when they undergo the

pains of the partition. In Sidhwa's novel the massive explosions and flashes of burning Shalmi is so shocking and horrifying to the sensitive child, Lenny, that melts her heart. She says, "The whole world is burning. The air on my face is so hot I think my flesh and clothes will catch fire. I start screaming; hysterically sobbing." (*Ice-Candy-Man*, p. 137) Attia Hosain, on the other hand, exposes the similar plight of the weak and the old. The old servant, Ram Singh, who is still living in the house of Laila, with "tears welled up in his sunken eyes," laments the great changes brought about the unhappy developments and says, "The house, Bitia, this is not how you should have come to the house. ... Bhagwan should have taken me from the earth before I saw this happen. (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* p. 273)

Presenting the picture of the plight of women and the exploration of the human toll of life and degradation of values, Sidhwa depicts the picture of physical violence against women whereas Attia Hosain narrates the mental suffering of her female characters caused by the partition. In *Ice-Candy-Man*, the Ayah is a maidservant in Lenny's house who becomes a victim to the search operation of the Muslim mobs whose only aim is to search out the Hindus. In spite of all sorts of attempts to hide Ayah from the brutal eyes of the fanatics searching the Hindus, she falls victim to her own ill-fortune. Lenny narrates her plight, "The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her own careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces (p. 183). On the other hand, Attia Hosain emphasizes the mental suffering of her protagonists for the loss of the glory of the *Taluqdars* due to the event of the partition. Laila's aunt, Aunt Saira, feels grievously irritated at the ways of the government as she believes that the implementation of the new laws is nothing but a part of planned strategies of the government to help the Hindus and to harass and molest the Muslims stayed in India after the partition. She says, "What right have they to steal what is ours? Will they never be content with how much they rob? Is there no justice? Is this a war with Custodians for enemy property? Did they not content to the partition themselves? ... If they want to drive out Muslims why not say it like honest men? (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* p. 279) Kemal, her son, tries to pacify her but she blames him saying he married a non-muslim- a 'kafir'.

Sidhwa has depicted the orgy of violence engineered and perpetrated by hot-headed people to whom nothing was sacred except their selfish ends. She brings forth the dislocation of settled life by Lenny's understanding of the demographic change in Lahore. The student-fraternity of the King Edward's Medical College get disrupted. Prakash and his family migrate to Delhi and Rahoo Singh and his pretty sisters are escorted to a convoy to

Amritsar. In Lenny's household, the gardener, Hari, is converted to Islam for protection and Moti, the sweeper, becomes David Masih, a Christian following the politics of compromise and survival. Masseur, Ayah's lover is killed grotesquely and his mutilated dead body is found in a gunny sack. Thus, in Sidhwa's novel the consequences of the partition are portrayed as a series of images and events that reveal the bloodiest upheavals of history. In contrast to it, Attia Hosain depicts the changes after the partition in the form of settled life of people as refugees and evacuees. However, her centre of focus is the destruction of the strong edifice of her big *Taluqdars* family due to the calamity brought by India's independence and the partition of the subcontinent. R. K. Mathur writes about the *Taluqdars* family in the novel, "its primary concern is with the destruction of the strong edifice of the Muslim family and how ultimately it is shaken to its very foundation by the impact of the unexpected, undesirable partition of the country" (Mathur, R. K. p. 192).

Both the novelists have projected the female characters that either help the partition victims or come forward daringly in adverse circumstances. In Sidhwa novel, it becomes obvious from the mention of the secret help and sympathy extended to the victims of partition by Godmother, Lenny's mother, Mrs. Sethi, and her aunt. Similarly, Attia Hosain displays the same amount of courage and confidence among the female characters during the grotesque situation of the partition. The female characters of Bapsi Sidhwa uphold the ideal that religion is not as important as that of human sorrow and suffering. It becomes clear from the secret help extended to the victims of partition by Godmother, Lenny's mother, Mrs. Sethi, and her aunt. Lenny's mother becomes very sad to know that in about two hours, 'the Guptas too' would also be joining an escorted envoy of cars. The calamity of the partition had changed the neighbours into refugees. When Mr. Singh apprises him of his problem of keeping their things for some time, Mr. Sethi readily agrees to it. Commenting on the complex attitude of the Parsis towards the Partition, M. F. Salat observes, 'Sidhwa has shown the silent but positive role played by Lenny's parents in helping both the Hindus and the Muslims.' He further says, "the Parsis too were involved in their own ways in the event of the time and that they were not just indifferent and passive onlookers to the awful human tragedy". (*The Parsis: Madyan to Sanjan*, p. 102)

Similarly, when the Ayah is brought to the rehabilitation camp, the female members of the Parsi Community make necessary arrangements for her safe escape to Amritsar. Lenny's parents acquire a strange black box containing a gun to escort their neighbours to safer places. Thus, female characters of Sidhwa are seen busy in softening the wounds of the victims of partition without maintaining any sort of hatred towards any community. The same amount of courage and confidence during the grotesque situation is displayed by

the female characters of Attia Hosain. This becomes clear when Zahra, who becomes Pakistani after partition, accuses Laila that Urdu language and its culture are at stake in India, Laila blames the Muslim leaders who migrated to Pakistan without bothering for the safety of the Muslim brethren in India. She praises the Hindus like Sita and Ranjit who save the lives of Muslims even putting their own lives in danger, not even hesitating to kill their co-relations. She says, "Do you know who saved me and my child? Sita, who took us to her house in spite of putting her own life in danger with ours and Ranjit, who came from his village, because he had heard of what was happening in the foothills and was afraid of us" (*Sunlight on a Broken Column*, p. 304). The elements of humanity were still at work among the orgy of violence and anarchy.

Sidhwa, through her novel, communicates her desire to the readers that one should learn lesson from the experiences of the past. She says, "If we are not going to learn lessons, we are doomed to repeat our evils (An Interview with Julie Rajan)." Attia Hosain also brings home the cult of love, the supreme gift of God among all virtues, that it binds all human beings irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, and sect. By projecting the identical situation on both the sides of the border that there were some dregs of humanity busy in helping the people of their opposite religion in spite of spurt of the communal virus was seen everywhere. Saleem, now Pakistani, comes back to India and becomes shocked to see the Hindus and the Muslims living together happily forgetting the worst memories of the past and his old friends still loving him as before. Thus, Hosain brings home the truth that the agonizing events of the event are forgotten but the long cherished love is always alive which brings tears in eyes at the meeting after a long separation.

Bapsi Sidhwa also underlines the futility of war and destruction making her novel a vehicle to preach the ideal of love and humanity. She concludes her novel with an optimistic note through her character of the Ice-Candy Man. She brings an ardent change in him. From a rough and rustic man, Ice-Candy-Man becomes a person of refined sensibility. When the Ayah is sent to Amritsar after being separated from him, he follows her across the border and becomes ready to leave his own land for the sake of his Hindu beloved. Doubtlessly, Sidhwa incorporates this last scene with the hope of a mixing together of the two warring communities – The Hindus and the Muslims, sometimes in future. The optimistic conclusion of the novel reinforces the phenomenon that destruction brings victory to none. All sorts of religious obscurantism and fundamentalism should be abjured because they divide men and make them fight with one another by rousing passion and hatred. By posing an example of the Muslim leaders who left India leaving their Muslim brethren in India and the picture of the people of opposite religion helping the victims of

the partition at the time of cataclysmic event, Attia Hosain indirectly preaches the doctrine that it is the love and not religion that maintains the sense of unity, equality and brotherhood among the Indian communities.

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