

Quest for Self-Identity and Freedom: A Critical Study of Women Characters in Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man

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Abstract

The present qualitative study aims to analyse the women characters in Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man (1982), also known as Cracking India (1988), by using a comprehensive analysis method. After analysing in the novel, which is set during the partition of India in 1947, the study found that the women characters seek self-identity and freedom in a multicultural society and a period of socio-political turmoil. These women struggle, and sacrifice for their existence. The novel depicts the difficulties such as societal norms, personal values, and external pressures confronted by the women characters in their pursuit of self-identity and freedom. The women characters in the novel face numerous challenges in the pursuit of personal identity and liberation in a conservative society. Going against societal expectations and challenging patriarchal norms, they pursue self-respect and create independent positions in society. The present study concludes with a remark that the struggle, fights, and desire for an independent existence of Bapsi Sidhwa's women characters bring into light the underlying feminist attitude and approach of both characters and the writer per se.

Keywords: characters, feminism, freedom, patriarchy, quest, self-identity, women, etc.

Introduction

The concept of 'self-identity' often refers to an individual's perception of his/her identity. It incorporates the perception of one's personality, interests, and values. It is not a fixed but dynamic concept that can change over time as individuals grow and their experiences and worldviews widen. It is constantly being re-fashioned and redesigned in contemporary discourses (Riaz et al. 32). Self-identity is shaped by factors such as tradition, culture, experience, beliefs, relationships, and roles in various social contexts. Similarly, the concept of 'quest for self-identity and freedom' refers to the effort made by individuals, especially in the face of societal norms, traditions, and oppressive culture, to understand who they are. It is the desire for freedom that burns the light of self-determination and creating and establishing an identity and being an independent individual (Accolade 1633). It involves deep exploration of one's inner self, personal attitude, self-values, and beliefs. Literature is an important form wherein individual and socio-cultural dimensions are portrayed. Several literary works written across the globe deal with the themes of the quest for self-identity and freedom. Several studies have been conducted to analyse literary works by adopting various

critical approaches and by focusing on different aspects such as plots, characters, settings, narrative techniques, etc. Further, the works of the authors, writing in English, from the Indian subcontinent have also been explored extensively. The works of Bapsi Sidhwa, an internationally renowned English novelist from Pakistan too have grabbed the wide-scope attention of the researchers. As the present study is concerned with one of the novels i.e. *Ice-Candy Man* (1982), also published in 1988 as *Cracking India* in the USA by Sidhwa, a review of the studies undertaken by other scholars has been taken below.

Literature Review

The study by Hai (2000) explores intersections of postcolonial feminism in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1982). It is an in-depth analysis of the female protagonist Ayah's character through the lens of postcolonial feminism. The author discusses the gender structure, prejudices, and women's autonomy within a postcolonial context. Focusing on the woman character in the novel, the research provides new insights into the complexities of women's experiences in postcolonial and the challenges they face in the aftermath of colonialism. G. Sheela (2014) throws light on the circumstances of women's character during the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. The thesis attempts an in-depth analysis of Sidhwa's novels with a particular focus on the victimisation of women in Sidhwa's novels such as *The Pakistani Bride* (1990), *The Crow Eaters* (1978), *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988), *An American Brat* (1994), and *Water* (2006). It focuses on how women become victims of socio-political turmoil and traditional biases and details different forms of women's oppression in the male-dominated world. It examines the societal context within Sidhwa's works, exploring how historical, cultural, and political factors contribute to the victimisation of women. Roy (2010) examines how authors, such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Anita Desai, Manohar Malgonkar, and Salman Rushdie, who wrote during the time broadly periodized 'from Khushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh' in her study, portray the experiences and challenges of women amid historical and political upheaval. The work is an attempt to analyse literary works and narratives depicting women's circumstances, sacrifices, and contributions during the critical period. The researcher explores the dual role of women during the tumultuous period as victims of oppression, and violence and, as agents who resist the challenges imposed by the historical events. Rastegar (2006) selected two novels to analyse the theme of trauma and maturation as portrayed in women's war narratives. It is a comparative study that depicts the picture of two historical events that include, the Lebanese Civil War and the Partition of India. Both narratives have a central female protagonist. It discusses the psychological and traumatic experiences that impact the maturation process of the female and how it influences their personal growth and development.

However, although many researchers and scholars have attempted to study Bapsi Sidhwa's works in light of postcolonial feminism, the victimisation of women, women's circumstances, sacrifices, and contributions during the critical period, very few of these studies have dealt with the quest for self-identity and freedom in the context of Sidhwa's women characters. Thus, considering this research gap, the present study intended to enrich the scholarly discourse in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel and contribute to broader discussions on self-identity and freedom from a feminist perspective. The study attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

1. How do Sidhwa's female characters navigate the quest for self-identity and freedom amid the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947?
2. What are the difficulties, challenges, and conflicts faced by the women characters in their pursuit of self-identity and freedom?

3. How do Sidhwa's female characters experience male dominance, violence, oppression, and conflict to seek their autonomy and self-expression?
4. How does the intersection of various identities, such as religion, ethnicity, and gender, influence the female characters seeking autonomy and freedom?

Methodology

The researcher uses a qualitative method to provide a comprehensive data analysis. Contextual understanding is crucial for investigating the historical, socio-political, and cultural factors that influence the representation of women's identity and freedom in the narrative. Hence, after extensive reading of the novel, *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) by Bapsi Sidhwa, the present study analyses the work by keeping the themes of the quest for self-identity and freedom at centre in the context of the historical, socio-political, and cultural factors that influence the representation of women's identity and freedom in the narrative. The writer's biographical information is also provided to ascertain the correlation between her life experiences and the novel under study.

About Bapsi Sidhwa

Bapsi Sidhwa, an internationally renowned English novelist from the Indian subcontinent, was born in Pakistan. She was born in an eminent Parsi business family of Karachi in 1938, grew up in Lahore, Pakistan, and now lives in Houston, Texas. She was the only child of her parents. She contracted polio at two, which paralyzed her leg. This not only made her childhood difficult but also affected her entire life (Philip 2). Her family played a significant role in shaping her worldview and understanding of the cultural diversity around her. Sidhwa is well known for her perspective on the partition of the Indian subcontinent as a Parsi woman. She is one of the first women from Pakistan to write fiction in English and publish internationally now (Hai 386). She belongs to that group of women creative writers who have started to depict the determined women, for whom traditional roles are inadequate, a woman who wishes to affirm their independence and autonomy and are perfectly capable of assuming new roles and responsibilities (Dar 1). She is well known as a feminist literature due to her explorations of the themes related to gender discrimination, identity, cultural clashes, social constraints, etc. Sidhwa's literary career began with her first novel, *The Crow Eaters* published in 1978. Her works depict the challenges and discrimination faced by women in a male-dominated society. Sidhwa's most renowned and unforgettable works include; *The Crow Eaters* (1978), *The Pakistani Bride* (1990) (also published as *The Bride*, 1983), *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988), *An American Brat* (1994), and *Water* (2006). She received distinguished honours for her *Ice-Candy-Man* (1982), which was published in the United States as *Cracking India* in 1988, and was the recipient of the LiBeraturepreis Prize in 1991 (Sidhwa "Landscapes of Writing" 16). She added to this impressive list an anthology accenting Lahore, titled *City of Sin and Splendour: Writings on Lahore* (2005), and a collection of short stories in 2013 called *Their Language of Love* (ibid 17).

Sidhwa's novels deal with the feminist attitude and describe the picture of patriarchal biases of the society, where women are recognized as inferior, and irrational. She shows the harsh realities of gender inequality and the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies. Similarly, she shows the strong female protagonists who challenge societal constraints, struggling to find their existence in a male-dominated world. Sidhwa challenges a woman's traditional work as weak, obedient, passive, agreeable, shy, and emotional (Rehman 148). Through the female protagonists, her works throw light on the assertive nature of women characters who represent their desires, boldness, aspirations, etc., and give a feminist touch to

her character that moves forward despite many hurdles (Parmar 2912). Furthermore, her works create a space for these women to be heard, validated, and understood. Sidhwa's works amplify women's voices, and strength, challenge the patriarchal structure, express a strong critique of the power of patriarchy, and create a saga wherein the feminist consciousness comes to the core (Sanamanfra 230).

Ice-Candy-Man: At a Glance

Bapsi Sidhwa, a new and important voice in the world of Common Wealth fiction, is best known for her book *Ice-Candy-Man* (also known as *Cracking India*), which was made into a film, *1947: Earth* by Deepa Mehta. In the *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sidhwa wants to have a world free from patriarchy and hierarchy, a world that is based on the principles of justice and equality and is truly human (Parmar 2910). *Ice-Candy-Man* has a complex and multi-layered plot structure that unfolds against the backdrop of the partition of India in 1947. The story is set in Lahore, British India, just before the partition of India and Pakistan. It was introduced through the perspective of Lenny, a Parsi child girl living in Lahore. At the novel's beginning, the narrator draws the picture of Lahore as a city marked by cultural diversity, where Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Parsis coexist harmoniously. Lenny's family and Ayah (a Hindu woman) live peacefully alongside neighbours of different religious backgrounds. The complexity of the story begins when the political tension rises, and the narrator subtly hints at the coming partition. The political upheavals directly impact all the characters. Ayah, a Hindu woman from a predominantly Muslim area, becomes vulnerable. Lenny's family and their relations with one another begin to be disrupted by changes in the socio-political landscape. The narrative vividly portrays the disintegration of the once-harmonious coexistence. The narrative reaches a turning point in the story when officials announce the partition between India and Pakistan in 1947. The city of Lahore undergoes widespread violence, radical transformation, and communal riots. The characters experience the brutality of the partition, witnessing violence, displacement, and loss. Lenny's coming-of-age journey witnesses these societal transformations and matures to understand the complexities of identity, loss, and societal divisions. The central female character in the novel Ayah, sexually harassed, faces the threat due to her identity as a Hindu woman. It shows the chaos and trauma experienced by individuals and communities. The narrator depicts the difficulties faced by individuals and communities as they navigate the tumultuous aftermath of the partition. It provides insights into the long-term consequences of the partition. Throughout the plot structure, Sidhwa unfolds with a careful progression moving from the harmonious pre-partition society to the tumultuous events of the partition between India and Pakistan in 1947. It is an exploration of human experiences during a significant historical period, which emphasises themes of self-identity, loss, trauma, and freedom.

The setting of the novel is Lahore, a rich city in cultural diversity with communal spaces, and interactions that reflect the intermingling of different traditions. It captures the social, political, and cultural dynamics of this significant period in history. The novel is marked by the political division of British India into the independent nations of India and Pakistan in 1947. The setting plays a vital role in shaping the characters' experiences and the overall narrative. After the official announcement of partition, Lahore, once a city of harmonious coexistence, changed into violence, riots, and communal tensions. The impact of partition is felt on every street corner, highly affecting the lives of the characters and reshaping the city's cultural landscape. The rich cultural setting enhances the novel's exploration of themes such as identity, loss, and the enduring legacy of historical trauma.

The story is narrated in the first person by the female protagonist Lenny, a Parsi girl child with a physical disability, who portrays the situation of pre and post-partition India. This perspective provides a personal and intimate lens through the experience of political events. Through Lenny's eyes, the author has depicted unfolding events and societal changes, providing a unique insight into the complexities of the partition. The story uses stream-of-consciousness techniques to explore the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters. It not only captures the historical and cultural milieu of the partition but also provides a deep personal experience and social transformation. The technique develops the emotion and immediacy of Lenny's perspective, contributing to the overall impact of the storytelling. It provides depth to exploring trauma, identity, and difficulties faced during the historical upheavals. The narrative often delves into Lenny's inner thoughts, providing direct access to her perceptions and feelings. She decides to hold the pen and narrate the story of partition in her own words. It explores her inner voice, imagination, emotions, and observation in a continuous flow, showing her reaction to the political events unfolding around her.

Thematic Analysis of the *Ice-Candy Man*:

The novel explores several complex and interrelated themes central to the narrative. The whole story revolves around the central idea of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. The story vividly depicts the horrors and violence accompanying the partition. It shows the breakdown of inter-communal relationships, the impact of religious divides, and the atrocities committed in the name of religious and political ideologies. The partition had a terrible impact on individuals and communities. It profoundly affected the personal relationships among the Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, and Sikhs. Characters, including Lenny and her family, Ayah, Muccho, and the Ice Candy Man, experience the violence, trauma, and displacement brought about by the political division of the country. It breaks down harmony, love, and humanity and raises hatred among the different religious communities. The narrative lights on the challenges faced by characters during this tumultuous period, including violence, massacres, and the disruption of familial structures.

The novel also represents the theme of feminism. The story portrays the resilience and empowerment of female characters such as Lenny, Ayah, Lenny's Mother and Godmother. Despite the societal upheavals, these women navigate challenges, are openly opposed to women's oppression, and assert their autonomy. In the story, the women characters show feminist perspectives to create their independent existence. It exposes the confined norms and culture that are imposed on women and challenges the societal constraints prevalent in society. Throughout the novel, Lenny (narrator of the story) appears as bold, demanding, and defiant against the social custom. Her viewpoint highlights the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, and highly desires to make her self-identity and to be independent. Lenny's nanny Ayah (a Hindu woman) also resisted being subjected to marital, and domestic oppression, and a confined culture for women that represents women as passive, irrational, and submissive. It symbolizes her quest for self-identity, freedom, respect, and dignity. Additionally, Godmother's characters serve as a dynamic representation of feminist principles, advocating for women's rights, and embodying independence. She promotes collective solidarity among the women, showing the strength that arises from working together for their freedom and existence. Further, the journey of Lenny's Mother also provides the true aspiration for women, her presence represents the transformative power of feminism in abolishing the social biases and pursuing self-identity and freedom. Thus, the story shows the assertive nature of women characters, representing their desires, aspirations, and the barriers they face in a patriarchal society. Their feminist attitude and fight for women's empowerment during the partition reveal to seek for their self-identity and

freedom. They approve of their self-reliance and exhibit the capability of assuming new roles and responsibilities (Bhat 2).

The partition resulted in the **loss** of countless lives due to communal violence, massacres, and migrations. The narrator of the story, Lenny witnesses the harsh realities of communal violence hatred, and the complexities of adult relationships. Her coming-of-age journey is marked by the loss of childhood innocence. The story captures the picture of the loss of a multicultural society where Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and other communities lived together, celebrating festivals that once coexisted harmoniously. Families are forcibly uprooted from their homes and ancestral lands, leading to a profound loss of home and homeland. Characters face emotional losses, like the loss of love, companionship, and familial bonds. Thus, the novel also depicts the theme of loss on multiple levels, the profound consequences of historical events on individuals and communities.

The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* is rich with symbolism, where different elements convey deeper meanings that go beyond their literal representation. The train in the story becomes a powerful symbol of migration and the forced displacement of people during the partition. The train was filled with thousands of refugees, both Hindu and Muslim peoples, which highly symbolize the violence, chaos, and arbitrary division of communities. Similarly, the female characters also symbolize various aspects of resilience, strength, women empowerment, solidarity, and the multifaceted impact of the partition on women's transformation. The central female character of the novel, Ayah reflects aspects of female agency, resilience, and challenges in the context of the partition of India. Her feminist attitude is seen when she makes decisions to leave Lahore and establish her independent existence, and never allows men to dominate her. Her actions and decisions symbolised resilience, resistance, and female solidarity. Likewise, Lenny's mother displays strong protective instincts towards her daughter. Her ability to adapt to changing circumstances and navigate the uncertainties of the time showcases a strength often associated with feminist ideals. As she helped different religious peoples and women who were raped during the partition, which symbolized her inner quality of humanity and kind gestures toward the different religious people. Similarly, Godmother's unconventional lifestyle and her role as a mentor to Lenny and Ayah represent a break from traditional gender roles. As she provides mental and financial support to Ayah, during her critical situation. She becomes a symbol of the strength and voice of women and inspires them to listen to their inner voices who are marginalized.

Quest for Self-identity and Freedom of Women Characters in *Ice-Candy-Man*

Sidhwa's delineation of the characters, in her *Ice-Candy-Man*, as powerful and intricate elements contributes to the novel's depth. Lenny, the narrator of the novel, portrays women characters of different communities, each with distinctive natures, traits, cultures, and complexities. The analysis of each of these characters will help us understand their quest for self-identity and freedom.

Lenny (the Narrator):

A Parsi girl, Lenny, narrates the whole story. Lenny with a physical disability, grew up in Lahore, during the partition of India in 1947. There is a resemblance between Lenny, the narrator, and Bapsi Sidhwa, the author, in terms of their physical disability, family, and religious background leaving for a scope to look at the novel as autobiographical one. Lenny's Parsi background adds a layer of cultural diversity to the narrative, and her physical disability (polio) makes her a keen observer, astute, rather than a direct participant in political events. She is a quick learner as well as enjoys and lives life like other children.

She is more interested in knowing the things that happen surrounding her. The story captures her journey from childhood to a more mature understanding of the complexities of human relationships and societal divisions. She has close bonds with different religious peoples in her life, including Ayah (her Hindu beloved nanny), her Godmother, Muccho, and the Ice Candy Man. She loves to follow their different kinds of traditions and cultures. These relationships play a crucial role in shaping her experiences and understanding of the world.

Lenny faces discrimination and people's judgment in every stage of her life, who perceive her as weak because of her physical impairment. As her doctor says, "She's doing fine without school, isn't she? 'Don't pressure her... She doesn't need to become a professor,' 'She'll marry— have children— and lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams,'" (Sidhwa 23). The doctor's views represent people's views toward a physically handicapped person. Even Lenny wants to be educated, to gain more knowledge, to develop her intellectual level, and to be involved as normal people in society do but the society around her is not ready to accept her as a normal person. They never think that she has the abilities, potential, and guts to make her future bright. On the contrary, people underestimate her by talking about her disability and showing their concern and sympathy for it every time. Nonetheless, Lenny's positive approach toward her polio or lameness highlights her resilience and determination. She not only denies being defined solely by her physical limitations but she seeks personal growth and fulfillment beyond her physical limitations. She accepts her uniqueness and finds strength and potential in her individuality. Her frank nature with other characters in the story such as Ice Candy Man, Ayah, Muccho, and Godmother provides her love, friendship, and acceptance of her physical condition. It helps increase Lenny's growing self-acceptance and self-confidence. As she says, "Having polio infancy is like being born under a lucky star. It has many advantages" (ibid 18). It can be seen that she doesn't feel pity for her lameness and denies underestimating herself. Rather, she thinks of herself as a lucky girl child because she can enjoy many benefits of being lame. It demonstrates her confidence, positive attitude, and inner strength to make her unique identity as well as her desire to keep herself aloof from social biases and live and enjoy life as per her own choice.

Similarly, she is a keen observer and quick learner, that quality allows her to notice everything that happens surrounding her from various perspectives. Lenny proves that her lameness is not her weakness, as she decides to hold the pen, because writing is an intellectual exercise. She starts narrating the story of partition in her own words, which she had experienced and observed around her. As she grows and matures, her observations offer insights into the complexities of the partition. Her observations and interactions with different religious people help her to look at every situation from different perspectives and inspire her to start writing. Further, she refuses to follow patriarchal biases, customs, and the male expectations of women. Her fights for existence and willingness to be an independent person, represent her feminist attitude. It helps her to keep aloof from societal norms and expectations of women. Her viewpoint highlights the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. She desires to create her self-identity and to be independent.

Ayah:

Ayah, Lenny's Hindu beloved nanny, is a central and complex figure in the novel. She is fascinated by the different cultures, and religions and befriends a Muslim, Ice Candy seller, Imam Din. She is always curious to know their tradition and way of life. She is easily attached to Parsi girl Lenny, whom she considers her child and her family, and teaches her Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi. Thus her behaviour suggests her openness

towards different cultures and beliefs and her readiness to be free with different religious peoples. She is always eager to gain and spread knowledge and seeks to develop her intellectual level. Through her pursuit of education and economic autonomy, she empowers herself and demonstrates the importance of self-sufficiency for women. Ayah's journey involves resistance against the harsh realities of partition, violence, displacement, and injustices faced by women during the tumultuous period. She challenges oppressive gender roles prevalent during the time of the Partition. Being a Hindu woman, she is marginalized both socially and culturally and harassed by man-made laws yet she strives to establish her own identity. Ayah works as a nanny for Lenny and her family. Although she belongs to Hindu culture, she allows herself to work in the Parsi family as a maid. As she works in the Parsi family, that represents her striving for financial independence, and refusing to rely on others for her further life.

Ayah refuses to go to the cinema with Ice Candy Man, when he grabs Adi in his arm and raises it and says, 'If you don't go to the cinema with me I'll drop him.' (ibid 34). He tries to compel Ayah to go to the cinema with him. But Ayah shouts angrily 'Put him down at once, oye, badmash!' (ibid 35). Her refusal to go to the cinema with Ice Candy Man shows her assertive nature, where women are expected to follow the men's orders. While Ice Candy Man carefully lowers Adi, Ayah removes her sandal and strikes the Ice Candy Man. Her actions represent her resistance to violence and harassment. In a male-dominated world where women are expected to be passive and submissive, Ayah's bold scene challenges traditional gender roles, demonstrating that women can actively resist and protect themselves.

Ayah's quest for self-identity and freedom finds its culmination in her decision to leave Lahore. She was seduced and kept in Kotha for months, and her name was changed to Mumtaz. But her self-respect and dignity do not vanish, she remains assertive and says to her Godmother, "I will not live with him. I will go" (ibid 220). It underscores her bravery and courage in the pursuit of self-identity and justice. Ice Candy Man pleases Godmother, "Please. Please persuade her ... explain to her... I will keep her like a queen... like a flower... I'll make her happy" (ibid 222). But she is not ready to show mercy to him and never changes her decision and says, "But I cannot forget what happened" (ibid 222). Her decision to stay alone even after her family won't take her back shows her confident and positive approach toward the rest of her life. She wants to pursue her dream and live life in her own way. Her rejection to declare or accept the defeat regardless of physical and emotional marring and defacement of her determination to look into the future conveys moral courage to her (Raj 5).

Thus, Ayah's journey involves resistance against prejudices and man-made laws. She denies being subjected to marital and domestic oppression and is opposed to all social norms that represent women as passive, irrational, and submissive. Her character explores the themes of self-identity, respect, dignity, freedom, and women's emancipation in a male-dominated world.

Godmother:

Godmother is an influential and unconventional outspoken woman character who represents feminism and activism. She creates her own rules and lives life on her ideology. She refuses to follow societal expectations regarding women's behaviour and lifestyle. Her character challenges societal norms and plays a crucial role in supporting Ayah and becoming a mentor to Lenny. She is politically aware and involved in the political activities during the partition of India. She provides financial and mental support to women who are marginalised or victimised in society. Godmother navigates her relationships, particularly with men, on her terms. Her refusal to conform to societal expectations regarding women's relationships and their lives challenges stereotypes and reinforces the idea that women can define and control their personal

lives. She encourages women characters such as Lenny and Ayah to assert their agency and independence and challenge the social limitations imposed on women by society.

Godmother plays a transformative role in Lenny's coming-of-age journey, shaping her understanding of gender, and traditional and societal expectations. She plays distinct roles in Lenny's life, providing her with emotional support, cultural guidance, and a sense of continuity. Godmother tries to introduce Lenny to the realities of the world, women's life, circumstances, and their position and to make her aware of all the terrible oppressive culture of society. Lenny often turns to her godmother for solace and guidance in times of political upheavals. Her presence becomes a coping mechanism for Lenny as she navigates the challenges of growing up in a tumultuous environment. The godmothers' unconditional love and understanding offer Lenny a sense of security. Similarly, the Godmother also plays a vital role in Ayah's life, offering her support and protection. Godmother's presence encourages Ayah to fight against injustice, man-made norms, and prejudices that she suffered. She allows Ayah to live and enjoy life in her own choice and supports her to make an independent identity. It presents her efforts to challenge patriarchal norms and establish self-identity, and social status, and live freely without following any traditional and cultural norms. She blames Ice Candy Man for abusing Ayah and Ayah for allowing her to be raped. Her conversation with Ice-Candy Man is an important episode in which Godmother's feminist approach is revealed:

"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!" (Sidhwa 210).

"You're the son of pigs and pimps!"

"Get out of my sight, you whining haramzada!"

"There is no God for the likes of you shaitans!" (ibid 211).

This godmother's behavior and aggressive nature towards Ice Candy Man, who gives bad treatment to Ayah, shows her desire to give justice to Ayah and punish Ice Candy Man. Her words reflect a direct challenge to the patriarchal structure. By calling him a "low-born, two-bit evil little mouse," she dismisses his authority and questions his masculinity based on societal expectations. Godmother's refusal to tolerate the man's behaviour demonstrates her commitment to women's empowerment. Her subversive thoughts, rejection of gender stereotypes, resistance against oppressive social norms, and advocacy for women's rights represent her assertive and feminist nature. Her recognition and confrontation of patriarchal oppression reflect her commitment to abolish the imbalances that abundantly exist in society. Godmother's influence extends beyond personal relationships, as she engages in broader social and political spheres. Her dynamic and energetic personality promotes collective solidarity among women, showing the strength that arises from women working together for their existence and independence. Thus, Godmother's presence is the reflection of the strength of women's identity and independence.

Lenny's Mother:

Lenny's Mother is another female character who plays an influential role throughout the novel. The narrator depicts her as an upper-class Parsi woman, a dutiful wife, caring for her daughter (Lenny) and managing the household, a good decision taker as well as a person with an independent ideology. As a member of the Parsi community, Lenny's mother embodies a distinct cultural identity. She becomes a pillar of support for Lenny and her family during the political upheavals. She befriends Ice Candy Man, a Muslim street vendor, which allows her to escape the confines of her role as a wife. Rejecting tradition and societal expectations placed upon women, she is engaged in establishing self-identity and seeking

individual development. Her character represents liberation and resilience in the face of challenging circumstances. Education becomes a crucial aspect of her journey, empowering her with knowledge that helps her for intelligent growth and to fight against unequal treatment and position given to women in society. She treats Lenny as a good friend and gives her more space. She shows strong protective instincts toward her daughter. She gives preference to Lenny's education. It shows her progressive attitude toward the empowerment of women through knowledge.

Lenny's mother played a significant role during the partition, her involvement in socio-political activities aimed at helping targeted communities and kidnapped women, who were facing problems during the partition. Her desire to challenge oppressive forces contributes to the well-being of those who are persecuted and vulnerable. She actively participates in social movements and begins to subvert the patriarchal social order by rescuing and housing women and safely sending them back to their families or the Recovered Women's Camps (Parmar 2913). Her actions and decisions show her independent ideology, which never allows men to interfere in her life. She helps other people who are victims during the partition. She not only helps Ayah, but also the unseen and unfamiliar people, who became victims of harassment, and violence without being a part of the partition. She clears the misconception of Lenny saying, "We were only smuggling the rationed petrol to help our Hindu and Sikh friends to run away ... And also for the convoys to send kidnapped women, like your Ayah, to their families across the border" (Sidhwa 206). It indicates her helpful nature towards the people of the Hindu and Sikh religions. It suggests a humanitarian motivation that emphasizes the desire to protect people from harm, especially those belonging to religious communities facing problems. The way she explains Lenny on the misconception about petrol smuggling serves as a good example of their bounding. Her willingness to take risks to help others, including kidnapped women and those people who are seeking refuge, underscores a commitment to protecting and supporting those who are persecuted and vulnerable. Rescuing these refugee women, she has moved beyond the traditional role of a housewife to become a social activist. She finds her terms to live life with her ideology and challenges the limitations placed upon women. Thus, her character reflects the journey of women's independent existence, identity, struggles, and transformative power of feminism in abolishing the social biases to pursue self-identity and freedom.

Concluding Remarks

The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* or *Cracking India*, is set against the backdrop of the partition of India in 1947. The novel explores the impact of this historical event on various female characters and their struggles for self-identity and freedom. The narrator of the story Lenny, a Parsi girl child affected by polio, faces physical challenges that set her apart from others. Her fights for personal identity and emancipation involve coping with her physical limitations and societal perceptions of disability. Her relationships with different religious people including Ayah (her nanny), Godmother, and Ice Candy Man and becoming the witness of the violence during the partition, which shape her understanding of the world around her. Similarly, Lenny's curiosity about going to school indicates her interest in education and gaining knowledge that challenges the stereotype of women being confined to domestic roles. She refuses to follow patriarchal norms, as she is not limited by stereotypical notions of what girls should or should not do. Her character, with her innocence, observation, curiosity, and resistance to social expectation, explores the theme of women's identity and freedom. Secondly, Ayah is a female protagonist, who represents a feminist role in the novel. Her character shows the difficulties and struggles faced by women during a tumultuous period in South Asian history. In a patriarchal society, where women's voices are marginalized and

suppressed, she shows an assertive nature, indicating a form of resistance against the silencing or dismissal of women. Although Ayah faces many difficulties and challenges during the political circumstances, she strives to make her own decisions and live life on her terms. Her struggles for self-identity and freedom involves negotiating her Muslim identity within a predominantly Muslim area. Her choice and action go against traditional costumes for women, representing a willingness to challenge social constraints and pursue her self-identity and freedom. Godmother is portrayed as a woman with a feminist approach. Her presence indicates a strong sense of independence and autonomy throughout the novel. She engages in social and political activities, as well as involvement in various business ventures, demonstrating financial independence and control over her own life. Godmother plays a crucial role in the other female characters in the novel. She serves as a mentor to Lenny, to understand the women's role in the male-dominated world. Similarly, she supports Ayah to escape from social biases and motivates her to establish an independent existence. As she makes Lenny aware of the outer world and helps Ayah during the political turmoil, it reflects a sense of solidarity and support. In a societal context where women's roles are often limited, her pursuit of economic freedom is a manifestation of her quest for self-identity. Godmother's search for identity and freedom navigates as breaking free from societal expectations and prejudices imposed on women in patriarchy society. Further, the character of Lenny's Mother also plays an influential role in the novel. The story explores the complexities of motherhood, including the challenges and sacrifices she makes for her family. Throughout the novel, she makes independent decisions for herself and her family, reflecting agency in the face of societal expectations. As she provides fuel to different religious people to escape from political harm, represents her role beyond gender norms. Her actions challenge social expectations of women, reflecting a desire for personal freedom and self-expression beyond traditional gender roles. Her struggle for self-identity includes fulfilling her role as a mother, and humanity towards the various religious peoples while navigating the challenges presented by the violent and uncertain circumstances. Thus, the women characters in the novel including Lenny, Ayah, Godmother and Lenny's Mother navigate their quests for self-identity and freedom through various difficulties such as physical limitations, and gender expectations etc. The partition led to widespread communal violence in various religions including Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. Women's characters witness and experience the brutality of communal riots. Lenny's physical disability and Ayah's emotional scars from the loss of her family or loved one are constant reminders of the challenges they face. The forced migration of populations across newly drawn borders during the political upheavals created immense challenges for women. There are multifaceted challenges such as communal tension, forced migration, physical and emotional trauma, and cultural conflicts etc. faced by women characters during the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. The difficulties range from external forces like communal violence and forced migration to internal struggles against gender norms and societal expectations, creating a rich tapestry of experiences as these women navigate their quests for self-identity and freedom (Rastegar). It shows women characters in the novel navigate a world marked by male dominance, violence, and oppression to search for their freedom in the face of overwhelming challenges. The intersectionality of various identities including religion, ethnicity, and gender, plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of female characters as they strive for their self-identity and freedom during the political upheavals. The novel depicted the diversity of ethnicities and cultures in the Indian subcontinent. The Parsi identity of characters like Lenny (narrator of the story) adds another layer to the narrative. The protagonist Ayah moves from one region to another, intersection of geographic identity with other factors adds complexity to the characters' struggles. The intersection of ethnicity, religion, gender, marital status, social class, and cultural and geographic

identity shapes their pursuit of autonomy and freedom during a tumultuous period in South Asian history (Abbas and Chandio). Thus, in the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa, the themes of the quest for self-identity and freedom are interwoven with the historical, social, and political activities during the partition of India in 1947. The story vividly portrays the journey of women characters to pursue self-identity and freedom in political upheaval and cultural complexity. It depicts the complexities of individual identity in the face of societal transformations. The woman character's quest for self-identity and freedom is a dynamic and multifaceted journey shaped by political events, cultural dynamics, and personal relationships. The exploration of gender roles and societal expectations is a significant aspect of self-identity and freedom in the novel. It offers a profound exploration of self-identity and the quest for freedom in historical turbulence. Women characters in the novel such as Lenny, Ayah, Godmother, and Lanny's Mother faced difficulties and challenges for their identity and liberation within a patriarchal society. They follow their terms that reflect their desire for self-autonomy and freedom. It includes breaking away from societal expectations, pursuing unconventional relationships, or resisting imposed identities. Their resistance to oppression, whether it be gender-based or political activities, is part of their quest for personal identity and emancipation. This resistance is a kind of asserting agency in the face of external forces. Thus, the novel shows the bold and assertive nature of women characters, representing their desires, sacrifices, aspirations, and the barriers they face in a patriarchal society. It reflects the theme of quest for self-identity and freedom beyond the specific historical context of the partition.

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