

Bapsi Sidhwa: Introduction to the author

Bapsi Sidhwa is a Pakistani novelist of Gujarati Parsi Zoroastrian descent who writes in English and is a resident in the United States. she was born in Karachi in 1938 and later moved to Lahore, where she witnessed the partition of India and Pakistan as a child. she has written four novels that reflect her personal experiences of partition, women's rights, immigration, and Parsi culture. she is best known for her collaboration with filmmaker Deepa Mehta, who adapted her novels *Ice Candy Man* and *Water* into the films *Earth and Water*. she has received many awards and honours for her work, including the Sitara-i-Imtiaz (star of excellence) award by the government of Pakistan in 1991 and the Premio Mondello for foreign authors for *Water* in 2007.

Ice-Candy-Man: overview of the novel

Ice-Candy-Man (also published as *Cracking India*) is Sidhwa's third novel, published in 1988. it is a historical fiction that narrates the events of partition through the eyes of a young Parsi girl named Lenny, who is based on Sidhwa herself. Lenny lives in Lahore with her affluent family and their Hindu ayah (nanny), who is courted by men of various religions. Lenny observes the changes in her society as communal violence erupts between Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. she also witnesses the horrors of partition, such as mass killings, rapes, and migrations. the novel explores themes such as identity, loyalty, betrayal, innocence, and violence. it also portrays the diversity and complexity of pre-partition Lahore and the impact of partition on women and minorities.

Setting

the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa is set in pre-partition India in Lahore. the novel describes events of turmoil on the Indian sub-continent when it was divided into two countries: a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan in 1947. the novel is narrated by Lenny Sethi, a Parsee girl who is about 4 years old when the novel begins and approximately 10 years old at the end. she witnesses the violence, killings, rapes, and displacement of millions of people due to religious intolerance and hatred. the novel also explores Lenny's sexual awakening and her relationship with her ayah Shanta, a Hindu girl who is abducted by a Muslim mob during the partition riots. the novel portrays the ethnic and religious diversity of Lahore before partition and the tragic consequences of dividing one country into two along brutally enforced religious lines.

Character

- **LENNY SETHI:** The narrator and protagonist of the novel, a Parsi girl who suffers from polio and witnesses the horrors of Partition in Lahore.
- **AYAHA:** Lenny's beautiful Hindu nanny who attracts many admirers from different religions and becomes a victim of communal violence when she is kidnapped and forced into prostitution by *Ice-candy-man*.
- **ICE-CANDY-MAN:** A Muslim popsicle seller who is in love with Ayah and betrays her to a mob after witnessing the massacre of Muslims in India. He later marries her and tries to keep her from leaving him.
- **GODMOTHER:** Lenny's maternal grandmother who is a strong and wise woman and helps Lenny find Ayah and rescue her from *Ice-candy-man*.
- **MASSEUR:** A Sikh man who is one of Ayah's suitors and a friend of Lenny's family. He is killed by a Muslim mob during Partition.

- SHARBAT KHAN: A Pathan wrestler who is another suitor of Ayah and protects her from Ice-candy-man's jealousy. He also dies in the violence.
- ELECTRIC-AUNT: Lenny's paternal aunt who is married to an electrician and lives in Amritsar. She visits Lenny's family occasionally and brings news of the atrocities happening in India.
- RANNA: A Muslim boy who lives in a village near Lahore and is friends with Lenny's Cousin. He survives a brutal attack by Sikh militants on his village and tells his story to Lenny.

Theme and Motifs

Some of the themes and motifs of the novel Ice-Candy-Man are:

- PARTITION: The novel depicts the political and social turmoil that resulted from the division of India into two separate nations based on religious lines. The novel shows how Partition affected the lives of millions of people who were displaced, killed, or traumatized by the violence and hatred that erupted between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs¹².
- RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: The novel explores how religious affiliation becomes a marker of difference and a source of conflict among people who used to coexist peacefully. The novel also shows how some people change their religious identity to survive or escape persecution, such as Hari who converts from Hinduism to Islam³².
- CHILDHOOD AND INNOCENCE: The novel portrays the loss of childhood and innocence that Lenny and other children experience due to Partition. Lenny witnesses the horrors of war, betrayal, and rape that shatter her idyllic view of the world. She also grows up faster than normal as she learns about sexuality, violence, and death¹³.
- WOMEN AND VIOLENCE: The novel exposes the vulnerability and oppression of women in a patriarchal society that is torn by communal strife. The novel focuses on the plight of Ayah, who is kidnapped, raped, and forced into prostitution by Ice-candy-man. The novel also reveals the resilience and courage of women who resist or escape their abusers, such as Godmother who helps Lenny rescue Ayah¹³.
- CRACKING INDIA: The novel uses the image of "cracking India" as a symbol of the fragmentation and destruction that Partition caused. The novel also suggests that India was already cracked by its colonial history, its social inequalities, and its

Symbolism and Imagery

Some of the symbolism and imagery of the novel Ice-Candy-Man are:

- RELIGIOUS MARKERS/EMBLEMS: The novel uses various symbols that identify each person's religious affiliation, such as names, clothing, hairstyles, and circumcision. These symbols become more prominent and divisive as Partition approaches and religious differences lead to violence and hatred.
- CRACKING INDIA: The novel uses the image of "cracking India" to symbolize the fragmentation and destruction that Partition caused. The novel also suggests that India was already cracked by its colonial history, its social inequalities, and its religious divisions.
- ICE-CANDY: The novel uses ice-candy as a symbol of both sweetness and coldness. Ice-candy-man, who sells popsicles, is initially a charming and humorous character who brings joy to Lenny and Ayah. However, he later becomes a cruel and vengeful person who betrays Ayah and forces her into prostitution. Ice-candy also symbolizes the fragility and impermanence of life, as it melts quickly in the heat.
- BIRDS: The novel uses birds as a symbol of freedom and captivity. Ice-candy-man often frees caged birds as a gesture of kindness and generosity. However, he also cages Ayah in his

house and deprives her of her freedom. Birds also symbolize the flight of refugees who leave their homes and cross the borders during Partition.

- POLIO: The novel uses polio as a symbol of Lenny's disability and difference. Lenny suffers from polio, which affects her leg and makes her limp. She undergoes many surgeries and treatments to cure her condition. Polio also symbolizes Lenny's isolation and alienation from other children and from normal life. She spends most of her time with adults and witnesses the horrors of Partition

Social and Historical commentary

The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* provides a social and historical commentary on the Partition of India in 1947, which divided the country into two nations based on religious lines: India and Pakistan. The novel depicts the impact of Partition on the lives of ordinary people, especially women, who suffered from violence, displacement, and oppression. Some of the aspects of the novel's social and historical commentary are:

THE PARSİ PERSPECTIVE: The novel offers a unique perspective on Partition from the point of view of a Parsi girl, Lenny, who belongs to a minority religious community that practiced Zoroastrianism. The Parsis were neutral and loyal to the British rule, and they tried to avoid taking sides in the communal conflict. The novel shows how the Parsis faced discrimination and insecurity in the newly formed Pakistan, where they were seen as outsiders and infidels.

THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE: The novel exposes the patriarchal and misogynist nature of the society that oppressed and violated women during Partition. The novel focuses on the character of Ayah, who is a Hindu nanny and a symbol of beauty and harmony. She is kidnapped, raped, and forced into prostitution by Ice-candy-man, who is a Muslim popsicle seller and a symbol of betrayal and cruelty. The novel also portrays the resilience and agency of women who resist or escape their abusers, such as Godmother, who is a Parsi matriarch and a symbol of wisdom and strength.

THE HISTORICAL REALISM: The novel incorporates many historical facts and events that occurred during Partition, such as the Lahore Resolution, the Quit India Movement, the Direct Action Day, the Great Calcutta Killings, the train massacres, the refugee camps, and the formation of Pakistan. The novel also depicts the political leaders and figures who influenced Partition, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lord Mountbatten, and Cyril Radcliffe.