

**A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF BAPSI SIDHWA'S *ICE CANDY MAN*: AN UNBOUND
PRACTISE OF LINGUISTIC DEPOSITION OF FEMININE FRAME**

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ABSTRACT

In the present paper, Bapsi Sidhwa's novel Ice Candy Man (1988) is explored and analysed as a feminist narrative. The researchers examine that Sidhwa—as a potent 'voice' among the modern feminist novelists—employs unregimented lingo for the description of the female physique. To analyse her unbound use of language and the description of the female figure, the researchers invoke Feminism (as a theoretical framework) and Close Reading Technique (as a methodology) for the understanding of the text under review. As though woman (herself), Sidhwa does not vacillate and blatantly draws on patriarchal jargon and expressions. She grants full freedom to her female characters (in a manner) that if male (in a patriarchal society) is allowed to share his feeling explicitly, then why a woman is barred from expressing that. Therefore, to give equal rights and freedom of expression to female in society, at par with males, she bluntly articulates the unsaid carnal feelings of women and their body organs through verbal semiotics. She challenges the conventional societal norms of restricted use of the unfettered language and disposes of all those obstructions that are made for women alone. Also, Sidhwa asserts that she is up against the parochial patriarchal system; so, she speaks for equal and equitable human rights and opportunities for female—most vocally. The purpose is to reconsider and restructure women's identity in a chaotic patriarchal society and parochial social thought that deny women of her birthrights; and, thus oppress her 'voice' by the dominant masculine society.

Keywords: *Patriarchy, Parochialism, Dialectal Blatancy, Feminine Frame*

INTRODUCTION

Bapsi Sidhwa is a Parsee descent author of *Ice Candy Man* (1988). She is a notable post-partition Pakistani novelist, dealing with the themes of social instability, religious riots and political impasse coming into view in the wake of Indo-Pak. partition in 1947. Ample research has been carried out on Bapsi Sidhwa's novel, *Ice Candy Man*. Each research endeavour takes up different theoretical perspectives and perceptions on the novel, like Feminism, Cultural Marxism, Stylistic and Semiotic Analysis, Marginalisation and exploitation of women, Colonial manipulation, Formalism, Structuralism, and Post-Structuralism. The diversity of interpretation portrays the complexity and uniqueness of the novel; and, thus, adds multiple meanings and messages to the narrative. However, in the ongoing context, the narrative has been probed and examined in the backdrop of Feminism and its attendant aftermath. The unreserved employment of language to describe the female torso is the core objective of the current research paper. That is analysed as a necessary and prominent feature of Feminism.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The current study seeks to explore the following:

- To explore and analyse the language being employed in the novel to depict the feminine frame.
- To foreground a new lens of looking at the Feminism while exploring the feminine figure.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study raised the following questions:

- How is Feminism employed through the description of the female physique in *Ice Candy Man*?
- How the description of female physique gives a new dimension (through the literary narrative) to Feminism?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Historically speaking, Feminism (previously known as ‘Womanism’) is the assortment of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal socio-political, economic and legal rights for women. That includes seeking, securing and disseminating equal options and choices for women in all sectors of life, whether it is a public or privately owned enterprise. A feminist advocates, supports and endeavours for the uplift of women’s rights and upholds equality of women in society. *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (1975) defines feminism as: “the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim” (Hornby, p. 560). Whereas *A New Approach Dictionary of Living English* (2000) defines, “Feminism as a belief or movement advocating the cause of women’s rights and opportunities, particularly equal rights with men, by challenging inequalities between the sexes in society” (Sohoni, p. 200). Feminism comes into existence through the struggle for women’s right against the injustice carried out in society. Feminism involves two critical aspects of intellectual commitment and political movement that lead to justice for women and ends in sexism in all forms. According to Deborah Madsen (2000), “feminism deals with women and their status in society and asks questions about oppression, consciousness and gender”. Madsen further states that the concerns of feminist theory are “the unique experience of women in history; the notion of female consciousness; the definition of gender that limit and oppress; and the cause of women’s liberation from those restrictions” (p. 200). It is a cultural and literary movement that advocates total equality of men and women in all walks of life, and thus empowers them to be at par with each other, regardless of colour, class, and creed. As remarked by Dar (2013):

Feminism is a cultural, political and intellectual movement that recognizes the fact of oppression of women and seeks ways to emancipate them. It is the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men and the struggle to achieve this aim. Feminist criticism questions long-standing dominant phallogocentric ideologies, patriarchal attitudes and male

interpretation in literature. It also challenges traditional and accepted male ideas about the nature of women and about how women feel. (p. 1)

Hence to express Feminism in its extreme form and manifestation, Simon de Beauvoir, in her notable work, titled, *The Second Sex* (1949), expresses eloquently how the womenfolk is actually on the margin in the patriarchal society when she extrapolates: “Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female—whenever she behaves as a human being, she is said to imitate man” (p. 226). That shows that a woman (despite her active role and responsibility in a society) is thought of as ignoble and futile, that further negates her existence in the society.

Over the years, Feminism has strived for and achieved (up to a considerable extent) the fundamental socio-political, economic and gender rights of women. From a literary standpoint, it has pinpointed and highlighted the gender-related issues and suggested (where possible) the solution to those concerns. In its multi-faceted types and shades of viewpoints, Feminism has raised voice against the patriarchal oppression and addressed issues closely related and relevant to the women’s societal rights—the rights that are either partially restricted by masculine domination or has wholly denied the womenfolk.

However, in the present case, an argument is developed (while invoking Feminism) to employ the unfettered use of language by Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man*. This perspective of using an unbound language by women characters (equally about men and women) is the prominent characteristic of the current paper. This article provides a new dimension in the employment of such language regarding the representation of womenfolk in a Pakistani literary milieu. Enacting such conceptual approach (and its subsequent application in the narrative) introduces new vistas and insights in the feminist literary criticism. That, in turn, counters the stereotyping, objectification, discrimination and oppression (of women folk in a phallogocentric society) through linguistic discourse—a relatively new approach to bring women at par with men to create a power balance. The article proves the ongoing line of argument in its analysis and substantiates that the novel highlights the ‘representation’ and ‘voice’ of women through ‘taboo talk’.

The present study is qualitative. While exploring the objectives above and addressing the questions being posed, secondary sources are consulted to pry the project. A Close Reading Technique (of textual analysis) is applied to probe and examine the above feature of Feminism in the novel.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Sidhwa renders feminism in all her novels and, thereby, she is a keen observer of societal inequalities, in this connection. She highlights the social sanctions against women and, in turn, voices that how they are overlooked and marginalised by the male writers. She employs the direct and free use of language in her novels, to present feminism in its distinct sense and spirit, an approach that she enacts, uniquely. She, at times, trespasses the conventional limits and limitations that are only made for and applied to womenfolk, because, to her, feminine status is marginalised in a society vis-a-visa masculine status. Therefore, she avails the liberty of using patriarchal jargon to equate the women status with that of men. She does not hesitate while doing so; instead, she feels privileged to use blatantly the female figure, in her fiction work. She grants freedom to her female characters to talk loosely and encourages them to discuss their feelings and desires overtly. Throughout her novels, Sidhwa supports and promotes Feminism, as stated by Ahmed (2009): “Bapsi Sidhwa, internationally renowned novelist from the Indian subcontinent was born in Pakistan and like her Indian counterparts gives voice to her feministic ideologies through her fiction (p. 2)”.

Sidhwa raises a voice in support of Feminism and irrevocably downplays the patriarchal-led institutions, in her novels. Conventionally, in the society under discussion, for a woman, it is quite a task to discuss womanly figure openly. Instead, it is considered taboo for them to use unbound language and go into the female physique and her inner-self. Her contribution to Feminist Literature of Post-Colonial discourse is also significant, because, in all her narratives, she concentrates on Feminism and Feminist ideology, advertently or inadvertently. Sidhwa, in the *Ice Candy Man*, portrays the British Sub-continent and its society, from a feminist perspective. Therefore, in Post-colonial discourse, she is a strong voice at pinpointing the issues related to the womenfolk and describes them as a victim of internally colonised patriarchal setup led by wretched conventions. Ahmad (2013) aptly remarks that:

A scene from the brothel streets of Hira Mandi wherein a woman covered by men is mocked at by the spectators serves as an ample evidence of this sadomasochistic attitude of men: “Now and again, a man standing with her in the enclosure shouted, “Nach, Pagli! Dance, mad-woman—and jabbed her with a cane”. (p. 2)

At the core, her novels encourage women rights and project them as capable as men, and accords them equal options and choices. Sidhwa speaks of the restrictions and boundaries levied upon a woman, wherein only men have a say and decide the fate of women. Thereby, she verbalizes that women are as intelligent and hard working as men are; however, they are kept repressed. Neither are they allowed to have access to education nor to secure a job as compared to men. Also, they are not given a choice to choose their life partner, nor can they share the validity of their choice as men can. Male considers a female as their property; she will do whatever male wants to; otherwise, she will be liable to punishment. Similarly, Sidhwa has shown the situation of Zaitoon in *The Pakistani Bride*; she was forced to marry in a feudal Pakistani society without her will, but she has been shown a courageous woman to escape from there and to live according to her sweet will, as stated by (Ross, 1991) and reported by Srivastava, S., & Singh, A. k. (2015):

Zaitoon’s escape from her brutal marriage is a victory against the male chauvinistic system. Her fleeing is a spirit of bravery and courage on the part of a woman which endorses a challenge to the structures of patriarchy. She is a survivor: She gets able to be free from the clutches of the brutal marriage, the wild hills, the honour thirsty tribesmen, and the cruel rapists. She escapes from all this hostility and survives. (p. 155)

The quote reflects how the choice of a woman is snatched away by the terrible tribal society. Zaitoon’s struggle against the tyranny of the tribesmen portrays her audacity and the will she exercises to seek emancipation from the repressive society. That, too, is the evidence to the stifling voice of women and her logical choice that has been strangled by men folk. Thus, her choice is owned by men, and she seems to be a pawn in the hands of patriarchal parochialism. Sidhwa further extrapolates that:

[A] Woman is shown as a territory to be conquered by men. The relationship becomes one of the colonizer-colonized types wherein the colonizer as if on an imperial offensive tries to possess and extend his powers so as to use and abuse this occupied territory (Ibid. p. 2).

Sidhwa has represented the female characters in her novel the way they are treated in society and the way the males reacting towards them. She has represented them in a manner that the readers consider themselves as if they are in front of them, and they can feel them. In Sidhwa's novels, woman characters are given voice to raise it against masculine characters; she has given more freedom to her female characters and broke all those obstructions which are made only for a woman. She uses a distinct language for her female characters that is considered taboo talk for female characters as well as writers of her age. In all of her novels, she does not hesitate to discuss what is going on against a female in society.

In her novels, it is observed that she is fighting a war against the patriarchal society. She has shown that women are not the weaker and inferior segment of society. She has given her female characters such a position in her storylines that they can be interpreted as equal to male. In *Ice Candy Man*, her language is the manifestation of feminism, her characters portray feminism, her themes describe feminism, and her symbols are the demonstration of feminism and the description of the female body also reflects feminism. Her primary focus is on the 'representation' of gender discrimination against women, for which she has raised her voice. She has not only herself used language like a male writer, but has also given freedom to her female characters to use language freely without any restrictions. She has pointed out the discrimination against women in her novels through females characters. For example, at one place in *Ice Candy Man*, Lenny (a four-year-old *Parsee* child) uses the phrase "damned fool", and Imam Din forbade her that "Lenny baby, don't swear, swear-words don't become you," and Lenny does not concur with him by saying that Adi can swear, then why cannot I?

Sidhwa reflected that if a male could be influential and respectable in society, then, why not a woman could be influential and respectable? Lenny says about the Godmother as: "Godmother is influential. Even Col. Bharucha visits her. Neighbors of all faiths drop in to talk: and to pay their respects" (p. 203). Here, Sidhwa has violated the traditional rules and regulation which are made by the male-oriented institution. She shows that a woman has the right that they are also capable of being influential and respectable in the family as well as in

society. Lenny has trust in Godmother, and she says about her: “Godmother can move mountains from the paths of those she befriends, and erect mountainous barriers where she deems it necessary” (p. 205).

Besides, Lenny says about her: “She has never let me down yet. I have more faith in her investigative capacities than I have in Mother’s and Electric aunt’s sorties” (p. 205). Sidhwa utters that women can be equally influential and revered in society. Sidhwa also gave a short description of God mother’s body. She employed unbound language for the description of her figure, as Lenny says:

I cannot be in her room long without in some way touching her. Some nights, clinging to her broad white back like a bug, I sleep with her. She wears only white khaddar saris and white khaddar blouses beneath which is her coarse bandage tight bodice. In all the years, I never saw the natural shape of her breasts (p. 3-4).

Sidhwa illustrates that if a man can intimately discuss his sexual organs, then, why not the woman can discuss her body, as Lenny says about Ayah that: “Ayah is chocolate-brown and short. Everything about her is eighteen years old and round and plump even her face. Full-blown cheeks, pouting mouth, and smooth forehead curve, to form a circle with her head. Her hair is pulled back in a tight knot” (p. 3). Sidhwa has thoroughly discussed Ayah’s body; she has made unfettered use of distinct language, to depict her physique thoroughly, she does not feel scared nor shy (though a woman herself) while explaining such facts. For a woman, it is challenging to discuss such issues, but she bestows an equal description of both male and female in the narrative.

Sidhwa further describes Ayah’s body, as Lenny says about her walk: “she has a bouncy rolling walk that agitates the globules of her buttocks under her cheap, colorful saris and the half-spheres beneath her short sari-blouses. The Englishman, no doubt, had noticed” (p. 3). She describes her gait when she walks; she attracts anyone; her bouncy walk also attracts not only Englishman but *Molves (Mulla)*. Sidhwa has also criticised the religious community, who are against women rights such as education, freedom, and equal position; she says that they are also corrupt people, and they also have some immoral relationships. She blames them that they are not as much righteous as they show themselves, as Lenny says, “Holy

men, masked in piety, show aside their pretences to ogle her with lust” (p. 3). When the novel starts, Lenny is a four years old child, but as the novel proceeds, she is converted into a grown-up child. Through the story, she experienced several odd things. She comes to know about the different attitudes of the people; she came to know that how Ayah is treated in the park by the male as Lenny observes:

His fingers work deftly, kneading, pummeling, soothing. They are knowing fingers, very clever, and sometimes, late in the evening, when he and Ayah and I are alone, they massage Ayah under her sari. Her lids close. She grows still and languid. A pearly wedge gleams between her lips, and she moans a fragile, piteous sound of pleasure. Very carefully, very quietly, I manoeuvre my eyes and nose (p. 18).

Lenny further describes Ayah’s body that, “Ayah has just washed her long hair and, having brought it forward over her shoulder, is running a combative wooden comb through the wet tangles” (p. 119). As a woman, it is challenging to discuss a female torso, but Sidhwa is brave to cross all the boundaries and limitations made only for woman.

Though Lenny is a child at the beginning of the novel, she can observe what Masseur and Ice Candy Man (Dilnawaz) are doing to Ayah. How the bouncy buttocks are attracting them and how they want to get advantages of Ayah’s chocolate body. Like Lenny says about Ice Candy Man: “I also learn to detect the subtle exchange of signals and some of the complex rites by which Ayah’s admirers co-exist. Dusting, the grass from their clothes they slip away before dark, leaving the one luck, or the lady, favour” (p. 19).

Ayah works in Lenny’s house. She is sharp, beautiful and responsible. She is Lenny’s monitor and guide. Ayah has got several admirers irrespective of their religious faiths—in Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Sikhism. The communal riots in Lahore considerably transform Ayah. She becomes an easy victim and is raped by angry Muslims. Later on, she is married to Ice Candy Man, and he keeps her in Hira Mandi (diamond market in Lahore), the place of dancing girls. Ice Candy Man has strangled her soul, and her emotional warmth has waned. He severely mars her dreamy and romantic life. In the narrative, when the Muslims realised that Hindus had tortured the Muslims, especially after the train-coming scene, the Muslims become angry, and they started taking their revenge upon women. Thus,

Lenny's Ayah becomes the victim of partition. Sidhwa, too, sheds light on Cousin's lusty feeling towards Lenny, as Lenny says of him that:

Cousin, unbuttoning his fly in Electric-aunt's sitting room. Treating me to a view of his uncircumcised penis, he stretches his foreskin back to show me how Hari's circumcised penis must look. I recall Hari's dark genitals, partially obscured by the dust and dusk and crumpled with fear as he stood in the circle of his tormentors. My imagination presents unbearable images. I shake my head to dispel them and revert my attention to Cousin's exposed flesh..... (p. 57-58).

Sidhwa is a potent voice in Pakistani literary annals, in particular, and in Sub-continent history, in general, for the reason that there had been no woman writer who could discuss sexuality so explicitly. She has unreservedly exposed the feminine frame and the pent-up feelings of women without any regret or penitence. For a woman, it is quite a task to talk of such stuff in Pakistani society, but she does not care of the dated notions about the concept of women's freedom of expression but bestows equal status and opportunities to women. She advocates and fights for women's societal rights, for their due social position and status, and asking for the right treatment with women. In a nutshell, Sidhwa has become the 'voice' of women.

From the above discussion, it is deduced that Sidhwa is fed up of the overused patriarchal society and decayed traditions. She has projected that both male and female are equally important and responsible for running the affairs of a society, and the gender difference(s) created are only a social construct. She, in the true spirit, has encouraged women in their endeavours and raised voice for the promotion of their birthrights.

Sidhwa is apt in the portrayal of her characters. She gives such a sharp and evocative description of their torsos that the reader can see and feel them intimately. The way she depicts the feminine frame and emotions are frankly suggestive and, thus create imaginative imagery in the minds of the readers. As Lenny says about Rosy that, "Rosy is obnoxiously smug and swollen these days. She may walk about with a grown-up air—buther cotton knickers, I notice, remain wet" (p. 68). Readers can feel the characters (through their verbal imagery) as if they had existed before their eyes, and they (the characters) are presented stark-naked before the viewers. In the ongoing context, Lenny's feelings are expressed as:

Cousin squeezes my breasts and lifts my dress and grabs my elasticized cotton knickers. But having only the two hands to do all this with he can't pull them down because galvanized to action I grab them up and jab him with my elbows and knees: and turning and twisting, with my toes and heels (p. 232).

As for male has the patriarchal authority over the exposition of his anatomy and physical stature, and expression of their carnal feelings mostly go uncensored. Similarly, Sidhwa sees a woman as the possessor of the same anatomy as man has, so she should equally reveal whatsoever a man does. To whom they want they can permit them to touch their figure, as Lenny gets angry when cousin touches her, she says: "Cousin will stop wooing me and wait a couple of years before touching my breasts again. We shall see how I feel about it then" (p. 225). Sidhwa grants full support and reposes confidence in her female characters in the storyline about the display of their stifled feelings. She accords woman her due place in society and enables her to realise her roles and responsibilities. That goes without saying in Sidhwa's opinion that womenfolk are not inferior and men as superior, instead both are held responsible for setting up a peaceful society.

Hence, it is inferred that Sidhwa's primary objective is to see a woman being justly treated in a parochial patriarchal society. They should not be looked down upon and not be considered as an emaciated faction of the society. Women are equally intelligent, intellectual, and powerful in exercising their opinion as men do. Therefore, they must be treated equally and equitably. Further, the researchers analysed that Sidhwa projects woman to be an individual with mindful thinking. They are neither parasitic nor incapable of rendering anything in society. Chronologically, without the functional presence of a woman, society cannot survive nor could sustain.

CONCLUSION

The researchers conclude that Sidhwa, as a feminist novelist, has always demanded and fought for the women rights and has portrayed that woman are as capable as men are. She has squarely presented the socio-cultural limits and limitations that bar women to exercise all that they can do. It is pinpointed that they are gifted and have the forte to prove their worth in all fields of life, including 'taboo talk' and all that is only associated with men. Owing to their equal and equitable standing in society, they should share their views about the

proscribed subject(s) in a male-led set-up. Selecting their life partner and living an independent life is their fundamental human right. Their opinion and consent in various matters of life are equally significant as that of men are. Male has no such prerogative that ensures woman as her property and possession. The current study provides a different perspective and perception to analyse feminism and its after-effects. Exploring and analysing the employment of unregimented lingo makes the study prominent and different from the other feminist approaches. Sidhwa's unrestricted and spontaneous description of female physiques is a cutting-edge advancement in feminism. In a society where a woman is not allowed to use such language is to bar her from the right of verbal expressions. That, in turn, leads to the stunted growth of women and gives birth to a tilted society where men would speak and express the way they want whereas women would not have access to such verbal demonstration. She encourages and supports her women characters to be proactive and representative of their real sentiments. Likewise, it is observed that through the open description of the female figure, she detours from the established tattered norms in which a woman should remain docile and submissive to men's verbal semiotics and linguistic countenance.

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