

CHAPTER-IV

ICE-CANDY-MAN: THE TRAUMA OF BETRAYAL

...no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded.

-Pierre Nora

This chapter examines Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man (ICM)* and seeks to concentrate on the figure of Ayah in the novel and interpret her experiences of abduction and rape against the backdrop of Partition. The resulting trauma, and also questions of belonging and rehabilitation have been explored. Ayah's experience calls attention to the manner in which trust between communities is betrayed and how women become pawns in wars that men wage against each other.

Bapsi Sidhwa (1938-) is a Pakistani novelist of Parsi origin who emigrated to the USA in 1984. Sidhwa's *ICM* (1988) is a Partition novel and its story is presented from the perspective of eight year old Lenny who is a Parsi. Sidhwa was herself eight years old at the time of Partition and she revisits the event four decades later. Although the novel places the child narrator Lenny at the centre and the readers see the world around her through her eyes, this chapter will focus primarily on the experiences of Lenny's Hindu Ayah and try to uncover the many layers that lie embedded within them. At the centre of Sidhwa's memory of Partition has been the victimisation of women. Recalling Partition, Sidhwa (2016, April 6) has this to say about women affected by the event:

I was a child when Partition took place and Ice Candy Man (ICM) stayed in me for a long time. It struck me also that I heard hushed conversations not meant

for my ears about someone's daughter-in-law, sister, or mother which bewildered me. I didn't know what they were whispering about, but as I grew up, I discovered they were talking about hundreds of thousands of women who were kidnapped and raped during Partition. I never met anyone who admitted to having a family member taken away. This was because it would dishonour the family. In fact the brutality the women were subjected to was meant to not only dishonour the family, but to also dishonour the race, the tribe and the religion the women belonged to, whether Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim.

In an interview to Bhalla (2007), Sidhwa reiterates her views on what women faced during Partition and why:

It is the women who bear the brunt of violence that accompanies these disputes. They are the ones who are rooted in the soil; they are not interested in politics. But suddenly they find that their bodies are being brutalised. Victories are celebrated on the bodies of women. So, it is not surprising that women became the targets of brutality during the Partition also. They were seen as the receptacles of a man's honour. When women are attacked, it is not they per se who are the targets but the men to whom they belong. It is humiliating for a man to see his woman being abused before him. (pp. 232-233)

A similar view is found in Menon and Bhasin's (1998) observation on the range of sexual brutalities that women were subjected to. They find it to be "shocking not only for its savagery, but for what it tells us about women as objects in male constructions of their honour" (1998, p. 43). Elaborating upon this they add:

Women's sexuality symbolises "manhood"; its desecration is a matter of such shame and dishonour that it has to be avenged. Yet, with the cruel logic of all such violence, it is women ultimately who are most violently dealt with as a consequence. (p. 43)

A lot of what Bapsi Sidhwa had seen of the events of Partition has gone into the creation of *ICM*. The fight for nation and territory did not directly involve the Parsis who are a minority community, but to be embroiled to some extent was inevitable. The novel not only gives an account of the response to Partition of a community situated on the cultural periphery, but also records those little histories, such as Ayah's and Hameeda's and that of the 'fallen women', otherwise consigned to oblivion by the national narratives. What emerges is the recapturing of the Partition story through the eyes of a female child who is sensitive to divisions which crop up due to religion, the unimaginable magnitude of the riots and violence and the price women had to pay to appease the appetite for men's revenge.

In the novel, Lenny's Ayah is eighteen year old Shanta, a Hindu. The seductive attractiveness of Ayah's body becomes the object of the male gaze and later during Partition, this body becomes the territory to be conquered. Sufficient space is assigned to the description of Ayah's beauty which draws men towards her. Men from different religions gather round her making a circle of which she is the centre. Very early in the novel we are given an elaborate description of the physical features of Ayah's body. The sensuous description of a woman's beauty is used as a justification of all sorts of male gaze thrust on her. She becomes an object of desire which includes the so-called religious men as well as the commoners and sometimes even the elite, "Holy men, masked in piety shove aside their pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart drivers,

cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships” (Sidhwa, 1989, p.3). Even the Englishman at the head of the Salvation Army cannot but be attracted to her however unconsciously, “of its volition his glance slides to ayah and, turning purple and showing off he wields the flag like an acrobatic baton” (Sidhwa, 1989, pp. 17-18). Ayah is objectified as an image to be looked at, but interestingly she retains power and control within the circle of assorted male admirers. Though Ayah does not resist this build up of feminine identity, nor does she surrender to it. She retains her sexual autonomy, lifestyle choices and financial independence. She is successful in fending off both the overt and the covert advances that Ice-candy-man makes upon her. This control and autonomy can be taken away only by force which the Ice-candy-man will exercise later on the pretext of love and revenge. The description of Ayah’s beauty is comparable with the peace and harmony in the Parsi household, occasionally disturbed by the squabble of godmother and slave-sister. The beautiful image of Ayah and its later desecration find an echo in the beautiful topography of the garden and the park in Lahore and the harmonious demographic existence of men and women along with the beautiful rural landscape both physical and social. Later, the change in the Ice-candy-man’s treatment of Ayah finds a reflection in the imagery of the changing landscape and demography that accompanied Partition. Corresponding to these changes is the change in the admirers of Ayah.

The number of Ayah’s admirers is not only large but also comprises men from a variety of religions. This group forms more or less a harmonious society, “the group around Ayah remains unchanged. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsi are, as always, unified around her” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 97). Suspicion and jealousy among her admirers is a

natural aspect of their conduct. But, it is Ayah who remains the star attraction, “Where Masseur is, Ayah is. And where Ayah is, is Ice-candy-man” (Sidhwa, 1989, p.121). However, with the news of violence spreading around there occurs a change among the group surrounding Ayah. The friction that caused conflict between different communities is also reflected in the behaviour of Ayah’s admirers, “Things have become topsy-turvy. We’ve stopped going to the Queen’s Garden altogether. We’ve also stopped going to the Wrestler’s Restaurant. There is dissension in the ranks of Ayah’s admirers” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 147). Now instead of being competitors, they have become rivals caused by their religious affiliation, “The men appraised each other with cautious suspicion as Masseur, hitching up his lungi, hunkers down on the floor.... They look as if each is a whiskered dog circling the other – weighing in and warning his foe” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 151). Consequently, the number of Ayah’s admirers is reduced. As Masseur remains the sole visitor, both Lenny and Ayah become anxious as to where the others have gone:

I am disturbed. So is Ayah. ‘Where is everybody?’ She asks Masseur: meaning the Government house gardener, the wrestler, the butcher, the zoo attendant, Ice-candy-man and the rest of the gang. Even Yousaf and Imamdin appear to have become less visible. (Sidhwa, 1989, p.152)

This dwindling of Ayah’s circle is ominous. The normal course of people’s life has been disturbed by the religious nationalism bringing about Partition. Parallel to the violence all around, there is a state of conflict that is generated among Ayah’s admirers. While there has been a breakdown of the communal harmony leading to large scale murder and destruction, there is Ice-candy-man who “has openly expressed his jealousy of Masseur,” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 125) which has shocked both Ayah and Lenny. They were

aware of the hostility between the two but they were not conscious of the intensity of Ice-candy-man's acrimony. The growing dissention in the rank of Ayah's admirers focuses on the disruption of the personal relationships. This disharmony and dissention which was limited to the level of Ice-candy-man's jealousy of Masseur, culminates in the Ice-candy-man's 'exhilaration' at the mutilated dead body of the Masseur. It also anticipates Ice-candy-man's role in the abduction of Ayah.

As the violence has been spreading, Hindus and Sikhs have been migrating to places which were to be part of India. However, a large number of the poor people from the Hindu community convert to Islam as a survival measure. Ayah as Hindu has been protected by the Parsi household including the Muslim inmates. However, Ice-candy-man knows that Ayah is in the Parsi house. He leads a host of Muslims and raids Lenny's house. Ayah is kept in a hiding place. The secret is religiously guarded and Ice-candy-man is not able to extract any information about Ayah even from the Muslim Imamdin. However, he takes advantage of Lenny's innocence and elicits the information as to where Ayah has been hiding herself. With his Muslim followers, he forcibly takes away Ayah, makes a prostitute of her and then later marries her against her wishes. As Lenny is the narrator and Shanta her Ayah, it is but natural that most of the events narrated in the novel are 'jointly' witnessed by Ayah and Lenny. This provides a unity to Lenny witnessing the Partition as well as the events relating to Ayah and linked to the Partition. Lenny witnessing smaller frictions and jealousy among the admirers of Ayah foregrounds the conflict and violence that was to take place in the wake of the Partition at a larger community level. The circle of the admirers of Ayah centring round her during the pre-Partition period presents her as a unifying force irrespective of religious denominations. However, the post-Partition 'Hindu' Ayah

becomes a site for revenge and violence. This journey from pre-Partition to Partition is reflected in the Ice-candy-man's pre-Partition attraction for her as a beautiful woman and his post-Partition 'attraction' for her as a Hindu transforms her from an object of desire into that of revenge. In the process, there is a transition in the Ice-candy-man's attitude towards Ayah, which results in his perception of her identity. First, she is seen by him only as a woman but later she is seen as a Hindu. It is the later identity of Hindu Ayah that leads to her abduction.

Ayah's abduction by one of her own admirers and her subsequent subjection to multiple rapes results in a trauma that has a haunting effect on the readers. Caruth (1995) defines trauma as that which "involves intense personal suffering" (p. vii). A very disturbing reality pointed out by Brown (1995) about trauma in women's lives is that "we might be next" (p.108). It is also a reality that most women think themselves safe from "its presence and potential" (Brown, p. 109) in their lives because "No one has yet beaten or raped me, or torn me from my home or taken my job or threatened my life" (Brown, p.109). This kind of pretence is a denial of the fact that everyone is vulnerable. Khan (2007) makes a very pertinent observation about the late awareness about the nature of trauma:

In the 1940s and 1950s people were not well equipped with the language of psychiatry and psychoanalysis; it was too much to hope for any systematic understanding of the collective trauma which a generation had experienced. Partition had a widespread psychological impact which may never be fully recognised or traced. (p. 187)

Caruth (1995) also points to the fact that American psychiatrists and psychologists also took note of the problem of trauma only as late as 1980, taking into account not only the consequences of war and natural disaster on the human psyche but also including responses to “rape, child abuse and a number of other violent occurrences...” (p. 3).

Commenting on post-event trauma of recovered women, Butalia (1998) observes that, “there was another trauma to face” (p. 159) because their families could be unwilling to take them back. Ayah is warned by Lenny’s Godmother of the very same possibility when she expresses her determination to go back to her family in India. Ayah is willing to face that rejection because after the experience of rape and abduction there cannot be another event that could be more traumatic. There is a resistance in Ayah to erase her experience because she “cannot forget what happened”. In Caruth’s (1995) opinion, “To be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (pp. 4-5). Ayah’s inability to forget is an indication that the horror of past events returns. Lenny observes that her “radiance” “animation” and “soul” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 260) have all gone. Caruth (1995) believes that a post-traumatic response can be “sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events” which may appear in the form of, among other things, “numbing that may have begun during or after the experience” (p. 4). Ayah’s “vacant eyes are bigger than ever: wide-opened with what they’ve seen and felt” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 260). Her eyes are like the “exile eyes” so hauntingly described by the Latvian novelist Nesaule, who was a witness to Nazi and Soviet atrocities during World War II:

I am afraid to look into the women’s eyes, and when I finally do, it is as bad as I have expected. They all have exile eyes: eyes that have lost everything and seen

the unspeakable but are determined nevertheless to keep looking, eyes that remain wary and disillusioned... (2003, p. 284)

Ayah's marriage to Ice-candy-man is traumatic and it has transformed her identity to the Muslim 'Mumtaz'. She looks "frenziedly, starkly" when she asserts "I want to go to my family" and her voice sounds "as if someone has mutilated her vocal cords" (Sidhwa, 1989, p.261). She cannot forget her experience of rape and is traumatised to the extent that she no longer feels alive. Numb and withdrawn, her experiences have taken a toll on her spirit. Recounting an interview published in *The Sunday Times of India Review* in 1997, Kaul (2016) quotes a woman called Rajendra Kaur who while fleeing the riots "had no *chunni* to cover my head. Suddenly I was exposed to so many men's gaze. It was so frightening" (p. 6). Kaul aptly sums up this feeling of extreme anguish, "Rajendra Kaur's sense of violation is massive: neither the self nor the private or public sphere will ever be the same" (p.6). Ayah's violation can be seen as many more times magnified. Even after she is rescued from the clutches of Ice-candy-man, the numbness induced by her trauma continues and she remains "unseeing and unfeeling" which calls to mind Khan's (2007) remark that "The immediate trauma of the refugees was well testified in their frozen and fixed faces, uncontrollable tears and shocked inertia" (p.187). Though Ayah's violation can never be repaired, yet she requires a complete break from the place where she has experienced the annihilation of her inner being. Godmother's perspective that Ayah should make the best of her present situation and forgive Ice-candy-man so that life can go on is not the same as Ayah's own. Erikson's (1995) opinion is quite relevant that, "Traumatised people calculate life's chances differently. They look out at the world through a different lens" (p. 194). Ayah has revised her views of Ice-candy-man, her trauma

having damaged beyond repair her basic trust. The history of the experience that she carries within herself is also the history of all the women abducted and raped during Partition.

Ayah's consciousness as a person remains intact. She will have to renegotiate her relationship with society and for that Ayah knows she will need a foothold which lies somewhere on the other side of the Wagah border. Ayah is able to establish her choice and is willing to bear the brunt of her own family's possible rejection. In this she proves that she is a free agent and still has liberty of mind. Her fervent appeal to Godmother is also the articulation of her determination to escape her predicament. Ayah is not resigned to her fate and despite Godmother's fatalism will not remain the passive victim figure. Ayah's experience of trauma stems from not one but multiple horror inducing situations. She is a witness to the bestiality unleashed on the streets. She "collapses on the floor" pulling Lenny down and covering her eyes when she sees the gory scene of a Hindu man's body being ripped apart. Her admirer Masseur's murder with the mutilated body found in a gunnysack on the road shocks and stuns her. Grieving, she keeps going back to those places that she and Masseur visited. The abduction, multiple rapes and the forced prostitution, the conversion to the Muslim Mumtaz, exile in Hira Mandi and marriage to her tormentor, the Ice-candy-man, all serve to foreground the manner in which women were used to settle scores during Partition.

Sidhwa's perception of Partition is through Parsi eyes with a leaning towards the Pakistani position and she "didn't see Jinnah as an evil man" admitting that the Parsis in Lahore had great sympathy for Jinnah (Bhalla, 2007, p.229). However, Sidhwa's narrative does include an insight into what the Hindu women went through as

part of the communal backlash in Muslim Pakistan. Kothari (2009) calls such narratives “essentially transborder and are not confined by religious and national boundaries” (p. xi). Ayah’s abduction and rape is a combination of two factors. One is Ice-candy-man’s personal desire for Ayah and the other is his deep-rooted prejudice and religious antagonism towards Hindus. Ice-candy-man has coveted Ayah in the pre Partition days of relative harmony. Having to compete with the genuine liking and attraction that Ayah has for Masseur, Ice-candy-man loses out, but his pursuit of Ayah continues. His constant secret surveillance of Ayah and Masseur imparts on him an eeriness as his “stealthy presence” “lurks”, “prowls” and “conceals himself” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 121) as he follows both on the sly around Shalimar Gardens. The second is motivated by reprisal for the killing and mutilation of Muslim women’s bodies. Menon and Bhasin (1998) rightly argue that communal prejudice lies “Latent in “normal” times, it erupts with extreme virulence during communal conflict and remains lodged in collective memory, to surface with renewed intensity in the next round” (p. 39). They also term this the “brutal logic of reprisal” (p. 39). This results in an exchange of violence and once again as Menon and Bhasin (1998) read it, there emerges “the language of feud” (p. 40). The ones caught in this language of feud are primarily the women through whom this violent deal is sought to be continued. This is how women like Ayah become part of the Partition story or for that matter any war or conflict story. Not having participated in any way in the Partition debate or the conflicts gripping the city, Ayah however is caught in Ice-candy-man’s ‘moment of war’. The news of a train from Gurdaspur arriving with the dead bodies of Muslims including “two gunny-bags full of women’s breasts” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 149) has an emasculating effect on him. Seemingly, his relatives were also on the train. The train arrives with the butchered

bodies of Muslim people but what stays etched in Ice-candy-man's mind is particularly the women's breasts. This forces corresponding reaction which comes in the form of the proclamation, "I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur...that night I went mad I tell you! I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 156). There is also a contradiction in the changing conduct of Ice-candy-man. As Lenny observes, "I cannot believe the change in him. Gone is the darkly grieving look that had affected me so deeply the evening he emerged from the night and almost crashed into us with the grim news of the trainload of dead Muslims" (Sidhwa, 1989, p.154). The dehumanisation of the Ice-candy-man is complete when he leads in the organised abduction of Ayah to be made into a prostitute. This appeases his desire for avenging the mutilation of the Muslim women. His marriage to Ayah some months later is the appeasement of his own desire for her. While it is true that during Partition the men of the 'other' community treated the women "with a sexually nuanced violence" (Bannerji, 2011, p. 84), in the case of the Ice-candy-man such a simple reading is not enough. More than merely avenging his religious hurt, he sees an opportunity in the conflict to finally achieve the woman whom he has unsuccessfully courted in the past.

The reading of the issue of Ayah's abduction gets further complicated by the author's perception of the Muslim role in Partition violence. It is interesting to note that while Sidhwa has fore-grounded the violence against women and has presented the trauma of a Hindu woman yet an absolute objective representation of the Partition story is missing. The description of the train from Gurdaspur, a Sikh dominated town, coming to Lahore with the dead bodies of Muslims, shows that Sidhwa has highlighted the greater magnitude of the violence against Muslims. She has perhaps deliberately

underplayed the communal violence by the Muslim community as against the Sikh community. Whereas she appears to suggest that the violence from the Muslim side was by Muslim *goondas*, who were “outside the boundary of the community”, (Pandey, 2009, p. 135) the violence by the Sikhs stereotypes the community as a whole being prone to violence by nature. Saint (2010) believes that “the commonplace caricature of the Sikh as lacking in self-restraint, fiery and prone to sudden outbursts of violence” indicates “Sidhwa’s inability to distance her narrative from dominant frames of perception” (p. 219). The narrative tilt towards the Muslim to the disadvantage of the Sikh is also perceptible in the larger space and magnitude assigned to violence by the Sikh on the Muslim. This is perceptible in the linguistic pattern where a reference is made to “a mob of Sikhs” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 134) as against the “mob of Muslim *goondas*” (Sidhwa, 1989, p.135). The use of mob for Sikhs as a whole apparently is an arraignment of the entire community with a tendency to violence. However, with reference to the Muslims the mob consists of not the entire community but of the *goondas* only. Ice-candy-man is also classified as a “chest-thrusting, *paan*-spitting and strutting *goonda*” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 245) which would suggest that he falls in the category of *goondas* in general and not as a part of a Muslim mob and therefore his part in Partition violence is an aberration.

One is left with the feeling that the very easy manner choreographed by Godmother leading to Ayah’s rescue to the Recovered Women’s Camp is a simplified representation by Sidhwa. The accounts of rescued women presented by Butalia speak of the process being far more complex. Ayah’s marginalised status would perhaps have made it difficult for her to have been rescued and recovered on her own from the depths of a zone like Hira Mandi had it not been for the resources that Godmother had at her

command. It would not have been possible for her to reach a location to claim asylum, with no control over any resources. The repatriation of Ayah and rehabilitation of Hamida is due to the Parsi family's emotional support, which does not throw their future into complete disarray. In the midst of her trauma, Ayah seeks Godmother's intervention in being rescued and restored to her family. Erikson's (1995) observation is pertinent in this context:

...trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It draws one away from the center of group space while at the same time drawing one back. The human chemistry at work here is an odd one, but it has been noted many times before: estrangement becomes the basis for communality..." (p. 186)

It is essential to interpret Ayah's voice and also her inability to voice her suffering. Why is it that Ayah is incapable of accepting Ice-candy-man even after he has married her? Why does she convince Godmother that she cannot live with her abductor who from her own admission does not mistreat her any more but cares for her? The last image we have of Ayah is of her having crossed over the Wagah border to be restored to her family in Amritsar – hunted, haunted and lonely. This is a conscious step towards a freedom from the past and its memories. It is the only way she can reclaim herself and break away from the shackles of Ice-candy-man's domination. Ayah's concept of home and community is with her own people in India. It is within her that she must find the strength to meet the challenge of a future, which could still end up bleak. To borrow a term from Mohanty (2003), Ayah must look towards the "emancipatory potential" (p. 2) that crossing of borders has. But the crossing of this threshold is also fraught with risks, and questions about her survival as a traumatised refugee remain unanswered at the end of the narrative. There is no closure, no healing.

This is the truth about Partition's legacy – that the subcontinent is still besieged by the events of 1947.

Bapsi Sidhwa is silent about Ayah's background and home. All we know about Ayah is that she is Punjabi Hindu, with relatives in Amritsar. Her original home is never mentioned. It is so because Sidhwa does not want to enter into the closure of Ayah's migration. Ayah stays in Lahore out of economic necessity. As explained by Behera (2006), "Home is the source of primary identity for women not only because both are associated predominantly with the private sphere, but also because home is the locus of self, culture and belonging" (p. 36). It is difficult to place Ayah in any definite territory and she cannot be assigned a definite 'home' to which she belongs. As the communal tensions markedly rise Ayah, worried about her safety says, "I have relatives in Amritsar I can go to" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 158) but does not speak of a 'home'. For women who venture out into the public sphere – as Ayah has done in seeking employment which involves moving in public spaces – the boundaries between the public and private become blurred. Ayah is not under her family's protection as she has stepped outside the boundaries of home and hearth to make a living in Lahore. During Partition Amritsar represents the only refuge she knows. As a Hindu she is compelled to locate her 'home' and 'nation' in India. It is akin to a forced pursuit of her 'roots' in Amritsar. Faced with the challenge of living in a land, which is no longer native and friendly, she must connect to her 'roots', however tenuous and flimsy they might turn out to be. Ayah has experienced multiple displacements – as migrant to Lahore; as abducted and abused woman to the brothel, Hira Mandi; as the rescued victim to the Recovered Woman's Camp and finally as a refugee to India. Her condition of being without 'home' in Lahore at the time of her displacement is what sets her apart from the

narratives of displacement, exile or migration of other women protagonists taken up in this study. For example, Sutara, Roop, Pooro and Bibi, are displaced from their home and have a root. But Ayah's displacement during Partition occurs from a site which is not her home. The journey of the other protagonists is away from their home whereas that of Ayah is towards her home, wherever it might be. While Ayah is not forcibly recovered as was the fate of thousands of other abducted women during Partition, yet her 'belongingness' to Amritsar also has not been definitely established and so one can ask the same questions in relation to Ayah that Butalia (2006) has asked about abducted women with undecided futures, "where, and to whom, did these women belong?" (p. 145). Ayah's story raises other pertinent questions also raised by Butalia about women like her, such as whether she is "a migrant? Or a refugee? Or a dislocated person? Or all of those? How do we understand her experience?" (Butalia, 2006, p.145). The unease that is associated with such ambivalence regarding the belongingness of abducted women has been finely summed up by Butalia:

I have no easy answers to these questions except to say that the more deeply one begins to address the questions of migration, and in particular of its gendered nature, the more difficult and ambivalent become the issues of nation, belonging, home and family, especially for women. (2006, pp. 145-46)

Menon (2004) calls such refugees "the nowhere people" (p. 11) an outsider in 'other's' territory, and a migrant/refugee in one's own country. Ayah no longer belongs 'here' i.e. on this side of the border and will belong 'there' in Amritsar depending on her relatives' acceptance. The crossing of the border signifies the closing of old spaces and the opening of new spaces. The old spaces included the condition of being financially independent, of revelling in her femininity, of a special mother-daughter bond shared

with Lenny. It also included the witnessing of Partition brutalities not only on others but also on herself.

The experience of the displaced Partition refugees has been variously approached. For example, Behera points out some facts about this issue:

Whereas people fleeing with precious belongings could reconstruct their lives on the other side of the border in a relatively easy way, for those belonging to the middle class, it was not at all easy, and sometimes almost impossible (2006, p. 158).

In the light of this observation we can well imagine the challenges that await Ayah in trying to reconstruct her life in India, with or without the help of her relatives, as she has only “her scant belongings wrapped in cloth bundles and a small tin trunk” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 275) when she is brought to the Recovered Women’s Camp. On both the eastern and western borders there was “anticipatory migration” (Talbot and Singh, 2009, p. 105) by the wealthy who could ensure for themselves a safe migration along with much of their assets, “sometimes even by air” (Talbot and Singh, 2009, p. 105). The process of claiming compensation was also not too difficult. However, it was the people from the lower classes who crossed over with nothing or almost nothing who were vulnerable to violence and uncertainty. Talbot and Singh (2009) observe that “In many ways the standardised refugee experience in Punjab has tended to overlook the enormous variations that occurred as result of class, gender, caste and community” (p. 105). Seen in this light, Ayah’s being a woman from the lower class with no family exposes her to the dangers of the unknown during her migration and rehabilitation. Butalia (2006) also points to a “crucial dimension of the process of migration which is

the aftermath. The process of migration/ dislocation is the actual process of movement, but it does not end there, for movement has to be followed by some kind of settlement...” (p.143). Basu Raychudhury (2006) also observes that life for the displaced was disoriented:

The refugees had to renegotiate with various new choices, and women refugees were no exception to it. In fact, the communal violence that occurred during and after Partition always made women the victims of double jeopardy. The displaced women were victims both as displaced persons and as women. For them, the economic uncertainty associated with a life beginning almost from scratch spelt disaster, and they faced different kinds of atrocities, in the form of sexual abuse and violence – atrocities that usually only women face. (p.171)

Ayah’s history after her crossing the border will remain hidden forever, just as the histories of countless other women. Butalia (1998) throws light on abducted women and their fate in refugee camps:

Ashrams were set up in north Indian cities to house abducted women: in Jalandhar, Amritsar, Karnal, Delhi. Some of these were meant to hold women in transit until their families took them back. Often, families didn’t: the women were now soiled. (p. 162)

Butalia (1998) states another grim reality about such women which could easily be Ayah’s too, “But what sort of lives were actually built for many women who lived on in the ashrams, or were rejected by their families, is something we are not likely to ever know” (p. 163). Van Schendel (2005) speaks of the Bengal borderland but his

comments are appropriate in the context of all immigrants during Partition, Ayah being one of them:

...the tragedy of the immigrants was that they were members of a nation whose territory had suddenly become confined between new borders and who found themselves excluded from that territory. They were citizens by proxy and their trek across the boundary line – the spatial delimitation of the nation – was a homecoming: they joined the nation to which they belonged and to which they had full rights. (p. 193)

Ayah's going to her family across the Wagah border to Amritsar is a going 'beyond' and according to Bhabha (1994) " 'Beyond' signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future ; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary – the very act of going *beyond* – are unknowable, unrepresentable..." (pp. 5-6). Sidhwa too admits in her interview to Bhalla (2007) that she thought she was "ending the novel on a hopeful note" (p. 239). If we go by the writer's intentions Ayah's crossing of the boundary may be seen as a beginning quite in keeping with Heidegger's (2012) views that "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding" (p. 250).

Ayah's identity comprises many elements: her professional identity as Ayah, the identity arising out of differentiation on the basis of religion, the identity arising from locality, the identity that is thrust upon her after her abduction, the identity of a traumatised woman, and ultimately of a refugee. Partition forces on Ayah a reconstruction of identity. The shift in identity has already taken place when Shanta becomes the religion-neutral Ayah, Lenny's nanny. The Hindu part of her remained

invisible till communal tensions began. Her already constructed identity of the caregiver to Lenny in the Parsi household is not religion specific. That she is Hindu is not of much consequence and her beauty serves as a binder that brings the men of all communities to her vying for her attention. It is after the communal riots that tensions set in and religious boundaries become well defined. Ayah's identity as a Hindu becomes visible. She also becomes acutely conscious of her identity as Hindu which acquires greater significance because of Partition. Ayah has earned a fair amount of economic independence and in order to consolidate it she refuses to wear her traditional Punjabi *shalwar-kamize* and instead dons the *sari* as it places her on a par with the more elite "Goan Ayahs" (Sidhwa, p. 29) who draw higher salaries. By her own admission she is "not so simple" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 29) and understands the local prejudice that is attached to the figure of the Ayah who did not come from a western environment, as if that would amount to a disqualification. She realises that the locality in Lahore prefers to employ an Ayah in *sari* and so she gives up the traditional for the more modern. Ayah's discarding the "Punjabi clothes" which would be a marker to identify her with a certain region and therefore limiting, is guided by practical concerns which she readily voices. Her sartorial choice also suggests that the more modern and cosmopolitan urban Lahore has had a transformative impact on her traditional cultural patterns of behaviour. Ayah's mobility can be seen not only in terms of physical but also cultural. She, therefore, can be termed a migrant who has adapted herself to the needs of her new place and profession. The Ayah of the pre-Partition days is therefore empowered being gainfully employed and with a degree of economic autonomy, with the ability to make personal choices in addition to being mobile.

Lenny becomes aware of the shifting and reduction of identities, “It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing ayah- she is also a token. A Hindu” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 93). The narrowing of identity is all pervasive. It includes the high and the low, the great and the small, “Cramped into a narrow religious slot they too are diminished: as are Jinnah and Iqbal, Ice-candy-man and Masseur” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 93). People have taken to ostentatious assertion of their identity and caste. Ayah has become enthusiastic in making offerings to the gods and goddesses in the temples. When mobs of Muslim men ransack houses the fact that “Ayah is Hindu” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 179) begins to have sinister implications. The other Hindu servants resort to conversion to stay back in Pakistan. Ayah, though protected by Lenny’s family, is doomed to be discovered by the mob led by Ice-candy-man and Lenny’s innocent betrayal. Her association with marginality continues as she is pushed into the space that is traditionally out of bounds for women of ‘honour’. Hira Mandi gives her an identity beyond recognition and where she is totally transformed from the sensuous Ayah to the heavily made up dancing girl to entertain men in Lahore’s brothel. Battered from within and without, she becomes a body used for fighting out men’s territorial and political wars.

Ayah’s ending up at Hira Mandi after her abduction is a fate visiting many women during Partition and also echoed in the accounts of Menon and Bhasin. According to them “Some changed hands several times or were sold to the highest or lowest bidder” and “some became second or third wives” (Menon and Bhasin, 1998, p. 90). Ayah has suffered both – not only has she been sold many times over to “any man who has the money” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 241) but also forced to become the second wife

of Ice-candy-man. Hira Mandi's history as narrated by Ice-candy-man is a testimony to the ways in which the Moghul emperors used women's bodies to inscribe their power and privilege. It was set up on the margins, "in the shadow of the Old Mogul Fort" (Sidhwa, p. 246) to "house their illegitimate offspring and favourite concubines" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 246). Hira Mandi still survives allowing men like the Ice-candy-man the place and the space to carry out those patriarchal agendas set in motion centuries ago. In the guise of "artists and performers" (Sidhwa, p. 247) young girls trade their finesse in singing and dancing and various other skills involving the female body and in return "command fancy prices" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 247). The brothel has always been the place where the body is the centre of identity for the woman. The woman becomes an object to be disciplined and manipulated. Ayah is discovered by Ice-candy-man to have been bestowed with "divine gifts" with the "voice of an angel and the grace and rhythm of a goddess" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 247). Underneath his admiring "You should see her dance. How she moves!" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 247) is the gaze which reduces Ayah to a sexual figure. It is also a throwback to the times before Partition when Ayah was the cynosure of all male eyes but with her sexual autonomy intact. Let loose to the public gaze with all the paraphernalia of her trade visible on her body, Ayah becomes "the flashy woman with the blazing lipstick and chalky powder and a huge pink hibiscus in her hair and unseeing eyes enlarged like an actress's with kohl and mascaraed eyelashes" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 233).

Ice-candy-man projects the commodified and exploited figure of Ayah, to put in the words of Mufti (2000), as "the high cultural figure of the courtesan (*tavaiif*) through which narratives of a distinct 'Muslim' cultural experience have so often been mediated in Indian modernity" (p. 4). Mufti mentions Mirza Muhammad Hadi Rusva's novel

Umrao Jan Ada and remarks that “The tavaif belonged in very concrete ways to the pre-colonial social elites of cities like Lahore and Lucknow” (p. 26) and “neither ‘salon’ nor ‘brothel’ can quite capture the complex cultural and sociological signification of this word” (2000, pp. 26-27) referring to the term *kotha*. To legitimise his misdeeds Ice-candy-man exploits the pre-colonial myth of the culturally imbued *kotha* and the valorised figure of the courtesan. A product of royal sexual misdemeanours he represents himself as belonging to “the House of Bahadur Shah” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 247) with royal blood in his veins. Projecting himself as a connoisseur of the arts, he is caught in his act by a furious Godmother who accuses him of allowing Ayah “to be raped by butchers, drunks and *goondas*” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 248) at Hira Mandi. In his reducing Ayah to the sexual figure of a prostitute Ice-candy-man continues to perpetrate the patriarchal practice of subordinating women to mere bodies to satisfy the male sexual appetite. Ice-candy-man’s belief that since “I’ve covered her in gold and silks” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 250), Ayah in keeping with the set gender roles, would only be too willing to remain his wife. Ayah, however, subverts this age old presumptuous attitude of society towards women by refusing to barter her freedom and dignity for the sake of the material comforts that Ice-candy-man promises her. Ayah’s situation was faced by many other abducted women and some did make their choices different from hers for the sake of a life of security. Quoting Anis Kidwai, Menon and Bhasin (1998) say that the girls who were from poor families readily accepted the generosity of men who “gave them silk salwars and embroidered dupattas, and introduced them to the taste of ice-cream and hot coffee! Why would they leave such nice men and return to a life of drudgery and poverty?” (p. 90). This speaks not only for the very varied profile of the abducted women but also for the varied survival

strategies adopted by the women. Ayah does not succumb to any psychological power that Ice-candy-man may have had over her; in her eyes he has descended a long way down the evolutionary ladder and she liberates herself from the twisted vision of love that he wishes to impose upon her.

Sidhwa has revived images of a myth that pervaded Victorian narratives – that of the ‘fallen woman’ exemplified in the literary characters of Thomas Hardy’s Tess Durbeyfield and George Eliot’s Hetty Sorrel. The Victorian fallen woman was called so not because she was believed to be a victim but was considered to be the agent of her own fall, i.e. she was supposed to have committed sexual trespass. Condemned by society she would be cast beyond the human community – to a life of isolation or death. The rescued women brought to the neighbouring house which is transformed to a “camp for fallen women” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 214) certainly call to mind the Victorian society’s attitude towards such women. When Hamida categorises herself and the other recovered women at the camp as “fallen women” she is subscribing to the view that women are the repositories of morality. She does not ascribe blame to “the will of men” as Lenny does. Godmother explains to Lenny about Hamida’s abduction and later being rescued and brought to the camp, “Hamida was kidnapped by the Sikhs” and “She was taken to Amritsar. Once that happens, sometimes, the husband – or his family – won’t take her back” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 215). The way Hamida sees it, she and the other rescued women with the horrifying experience of rape and abduction, are “poor, fate-smitten” women and are “*khut-putli*, puppets” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 213). Hamida is rescued but her ‘fallen’ status has denied her the chance to be restored to her husband, suffering a permanent separation from her children. In an interview to Alok Bhalla (2007), Bapsi Sidhwa says that the scene of the women in the camp was drawn from

memory of a similar happening, “that was based on what I saw in our neighbour’s house. It was converted into a camp for ‘recovered’ women” (p. 232). She goes on to add:

Thinking about those women refugees as an adult, I would say that the scenes I have described are typical of the fate that awaits women and children in any civil and political turmoil. This is so especially when the earth is partitioned anywhere in the world – in Bosnia, Palestine or Israel. It is as if the earth then demands blood, borders demand blood. (pp. 232-233)

It is significant that Hamida replaces Ayah as Lenny’s caregiver. Sidhwa has achieved continuity in the abducted woman narrative while also giving us a glimpse of what might happen to Ayah once she is restored to her family in Amritsar. Whether it is Hindu Shanta on the Indian side of the border or Muslim Hamida on the Pakistan side, the abducted woman carries the stigma of being ‘fallen’. It is through Lenny that Sidhwa challenges such patriarchal notions, “I’ve seen Ayah carried away – and it had less to do with fate than with the will of men” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 214).

The camp housing the ‘fallen’ women remains silent by day but the collective grief of the women finds expression in the night in their wails and screams. It is a transit zone for the women from where they are restored to their families. It can be seen as a paradoxical space where the confined women hope to achieve freedom. The camp though seen at first as a “jail” by Lenny becomes the medium for the women through which to re-establish contact with the world. It however remains an area excluded from the knowledge of the neighbours, carrying with it an air of mystery which Lenny is desperate to solve. When her stealthy efforts bear fruit Lenny is struck by what she

sees. A female occupant that she lays her eyes on has a “face that looks up unseeing through the veil of smoke and the eerie desolation of that pallid face remains stamped on my mind” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 190). The silence suggests that their grief cannot be articulated in words. But their brutalised memories take over in the night expressing untold traumas. Hamida’s own experience as a woman abducted and rescued finds an echo in Ayah’s. When Ayah is brought to the same camp that Hamida had been brought to, it is only Hamida who is able to fully sympathise with the former’s situation. Exhausted and freshly brought to the camp Ayah cannot be accessed. While tracing the impact of Partition on ordinary people Butalia states in *The Other Side of Silence* that “there was virtually no way in which I could speak to women who had been raped and/or abducted” (1998, p.354). She also goes on to say that “Not only had they very effectively been rendered invisible, but many of them wanted to stay that way, their stories held closely to them” (1998, p. 355). By saying, “Let her be. It’ll take hours if she’s being registered” (Sidhwa, 1989, p.273), Hamida becomes Ayah’s voice. She relives her own trauma involved in the process of being registered as an abducted woman, “They’ll be asking her a hundred-and-one questions, and filling out a hundred-and- one forms” (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 273). Hamida has undergone the insensitivity of the bureaucratic process which was more concerned with the formalities to be completed. Though such camps protect the women, but at the same time, they control and dominate conveying the idea of enclosure, confinement and surveillance. The rescued women hand over their leftover identities to the clerks manning the camps. In Muslim Hamida’s empathy for Hindu Ayah the boundaries that were created between Muslim Pakistan and Hindu majority India, collapse. Ayah is travelling the same route that Hamida has already travelled. While Ayah still undergoes the process of silence and

pain, Hamida has reached a stage where speech is possible and a healing of sorts has begun. The women in Sidhwa's novel, unlike the men obsessed with notions of difference on the basis of religion, recognised themselves in the 'other'. Hindu Ayah, Muslim Hamida and the other abducted women of their ilk, are rescued and rehabilitated by Lenny's mother and Godmother who are Parsis. Hamida empathises with Ayah when she is brought to the camp, recognising herself in the latter. Their plight finds a mirror in the collective consciousness of the other rescued women in the camp who have traversed the same journey of abduction, rape and displacement. The women's Partition experience in addition crosses temporal borders as they are seen to be connected to all the Indian women of yore who took upon themselves to preserve their and their community's honour undergoing a literal test by fire.

The voices chanting in unison – those of Lenny, and those of the women and children all around the house that has been converted into a camp – is the expression and articulation of the anguish that women in India have experienced since centuries trying to uphold their honour and thereby their nation's honour. Rossington states that “the phrase ‘collective memory’ proposes that practices of remembrance are shaped and reinforced by the societies and cultures in which they occur” (2007, p. 134). The women remembering and mourning the past is not a solitary act. Their recollection is significant because of what they remember and how they remember. These women share a group identity. Their cries merge with the children chanting, “Ayah! Ayah! Ayah! Ayah!” and as Lenny describes:

...our chant flows into the pulse of the women below, and the women on the roof, and they beat their breasts and cry, Hai! Hai! Hai! Hai!’ reflecting the history of their cumulative sorrows and the sorrows of their Muslim, Hindu,

Sikh, and Rajput great-grandmothers who burnt themselves alive rather than surrender their honour to the invading hordes besieging their ancestral fortresses. (Sidhwa, 1989, pp. 273-274)

To borrow a remark from Ghosh (2016) made in another context, Sidhwa “retrieves subaltern cooperative agency” (p.115) in the poignant moment of the women wailing for all women past and present. The women are able to connect across temporal, material, political and symbolic borders. This is an act of transgression enabling them as O’Kane (2006) suggests, to “form a new collective female-dissident identity” (p. 228). The tragedy of Partition distils into the tragedy of Ayah and expands into the story of women in general in history. This continuity is real and the group of women keeps this memory alive.

These women in the novel are a community bound by their experiences as women. Subramanian talks of “alternative imagined communities composing people at the margins of violent hegemonic orders” (2013, p. xiii). She looks into the existence of community “that lies outside the more commonly understood parlance of community” (p. xiv). Women who have borne the brunt of patriarchy induced violence form such “imagined communities” that even “cuts across the worlds of the living and the dead” (Subramanian, 2013, p. xiv). What bind them together are not the categories of culture, religion or class, but their shared torment as female citizens at the margins of the nation. Lenny’s description of the chants reaching the pulse of the women also calls to mind their pulsating unified wailing. The community of women at the camp collectively mourns not only for themselves, but also for those women who have had no place in the nation’s history, those who are not in sight but are in “a state of absent presence” (Subramanian, 2013, p.71). They form an imagined community with the

dead. The children's chant becomes a contagion of melancholy which the women recognise and pick up connecting in their common sorrows and also crossing over from the living to the dead. Lenny, Ayah, Lenny's Mother and Godmother form their own coterie of sisterhood although all the women have voices with polyphonic differences. Their feeling of empathy for their kind provides the matrix for female bonding. Marginalised in one way or another they share a deep solidarity. Lenny's mother and Godmother are the voices of the Parsi community at the time of Partition. They provide Ayah the community required to help her find her release.

The plight of Ayah and similar other women could never hope to make it to history books. Ayah's position as the marginalised figure is unique in that it is multi-layered. She is the lower class employee, a woman who becomes a prostitute, a courtesan and a refugee. It would not be any wonder if by the end of the novel she would not have any voice left. But interestingly, Ayah still has a voice while remaining voiceless. Despite her experience going unarticulated, yet the fact that she wants to escape into a world not regulated by Ice-candy-man is conveyed in no uncertain terms to Godmother. Ayah's will and tenacity predominate – her choice is to alter her narrative of oppression.

The above analysis foregrounding Ayah's abduction and rape deals with the way the female body became objectified during Partition. Such objectification that Ayah is subjected to invites a further set of complex questions – Is the sexual violence against her only motivated by inter-community hatred? Is it that Partition and communalism become mere pretexts for men like Ice-candy-man to fulfil their own personal desires? This chapter has also sought to grapple with issues of belonging, migration and rehabilitation of women post-Partition. Women's traumatic experience of violence

through the ages finds an echo in the Partition experience of rape and abduction of Ayah, Hamida and the other women sheltered in the camps forging a mournful solidarity among these women of the past and the present.

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