



## Feminism and Gender in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*

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**Abstract:** *Feminism is a social theory that considers gender, gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexuality in its quest for justice and equality. Feminism refers to a set of political, economic, and social ideals that seek to define and defend women's equality. This involves working toward gender parity in classroom size and pay scale. Feminism is based on the principle that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities in all areas of society. This principle is central to feminist movement's advocacy for women's rights. Bapsi Sidhwa is a staunch feminist through and through. She advocates for the empowerment of all women, especially those who are helpless in the face of societal pressures and have fallen victim to male idealism. Women are defenseless and would never dare oppose men's vices, but Sidhwa's completely dismantled this notion and opened up new opportunities for women. Ice-Candy-Man is a powerful testament to an accurate picture of society through the different male and female characters. She has just presented the reality of how a magnetic female character connected the male with females and caused great destruction among the fellows just because of the female character's sexual figure. She describes the theme of marriage and women's problems regarding different aspects of their lives. Feminism also wants to rebel against patriarchal society, which equates "masculine" with "strong," "active," "self-assertive," and "dominant," and "feminine" with "weak," "passive," "obedient," and "self-negating." Feminism tries to free women from the chains of being housewives and being controlled by men. Feminist writers try to give women a sense of rebellion and self-identity by showing domestic violence, sexual harassment, and male ego in their works. They do this by writing about things like domestic violence, sexual harassment, and male ego. This paper aims to examine Ice-Candy-Man as a feminist book emphasizing the marginalization of women in a patriarchal society and their resistance to ludicrous gender inequality.*

**Keywords:** *Feminism, women, gender, female, male, feminist*

### I. Introduction:

*Ice Candy Man* is a groundbreaking demonstration of a geocentric worldview, in which the female mind and experience are shown in a new and exciting light. While most of the male characters in Sidhwa's story are either passive bystanders or violent perpetrators, the female protagonists take on the role of moral compass.

The female characters in *Ice Candy Man* are far more powerful than their male counterparts. Even when the masculine characters imitate, they are minor and weak. The experience given by these female characters is really fresh and novel. The novel's female protagonists are strong, independent, and not easily cowed. All four main characters—Lenny, her Ayah Shanta, her mom, and her godmother—demonstrate independence and the capacity to take on new duties. In this work, Bapsi Sidhwa highlights the patriarchal attitudes that shape modern views. The novel's protagonist is an eight-year-old girl named Lenny who has a damaged limb. The story has several female characters with differing temperaments. The emotions and answers of the female characters, such as Lenny, the Ayah Shanta, and Godmother, are significant, as they continue to assert their own authority and serve as representatives to reveal the patriarchal society's prejudices. The female characters are extremely self-assured and self-aware, and they are not readily dominated. The *Ice-Candy Man's* female characters resound with daring and drive. It is known that Ayah takes eight-year-old Lenny, who is paralyzed due to polio, all around Lahore in search of pain treatment.

Bapsi Sidhwa comments that, "As a woman, one is always marginalized. I have worked among women to create an awareness of their rights and protested against repressive measures aimed at Pakistani women and minority communities" (3) Sidhwa admitted in one of her interviews, "the Hindu Ayah is symbolic of the Indian earth"



(143).When Lenny and Ayah venture outdoors, Lenny watches as Ayah interacts with many individuals, including the Ice Candy Man (Dill Nawaz), the Zoo Keeper, Sharbat Khan, the Masseur (Hassan), Sher Singh, Totta Ram, Hari, the Cook, and Imam Deen. According to Sidhwa, Ayah is a carefree woman who can be found strolling the streets of Lahore at will. A tight sari is one of the many reasons she is so adored. As a result, Lenny's observations on Ayah's physique become increasingly essential to the plot:

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. And, as if her looks were not stunning enough, she has a rolling bouncy walk that agitates the globules of her buttocks under her cheap colorful saris and the half- spheres beneath her short sari-blouses". (3)

Lenny had a deeper self-awareness after studying Ayah's body. No longer does Lenny accept the label of 'handicapped' for her body. Lenny says:

I am skinny, wizened, sallow, wiggly-haired, and ugly. He is the most beautiful thing, animal, person, building, river or mountain that I have seen. He is formed of gold mercury. (22)

This image of her is also symbolic of men taking advantage of women's sexuality. Assisting himself with criminals, *Ice-Candy-Man* abducts her and sells her into prostitution. She believes she is clean now, but that doesn't dampen her desire to return. In order to start a new chapter in her life with her loved ones. When the plot took a dark and violent turn, Ayah was one of the unfortunate casualties. Ex-lover Dilnawaz dragged her to the worst possible endings. He was giving her over to the prostitute industry. Furthermore, Ayah's previously vibrant personality eventually the same as a lifeless corpse. Ayah's appearance changed drastically between when Godmother and Lenny visited and when she was alive.

Where have the radiance and the animation gone. Can the soul be extracted from its living body? (260)

When on the one hand, men had Ayah as a dummy they could control, Ayah became a puppet. As her story unfolded, she became a live symbol of how women can put men in their place as destructive forces. In this respect, Ayah represents the oxymoron of the ill sexuality shared by males of every culture, creed, and socioeconomic background. The most defenseless members of society, including Ranna and other women and

children, were used to fulfill not just sexual need but also a want for power.

All of this demonstrates a feminist point of view, too. Ayah is a Hindu single lady who does yoga and meditation. As we watch, the Ice Candy Man forces her into prostitution. It demonstrates that men, once married, believe they have complete freedom to do as they like with their wives. Because they view women as property and will go to great measures to acquire that property, like in the case of the *Ice Candy Man*, who turns his wife into a prostitute while knowing full well how dreadful it may be for her to engage in such activities with men.

Ayah's need for space from the *Ice Candy Man* and her statement to the godmother, "I want to go to my family," offer another feminist take on the character. Godmother responded,

'What's happened has happened, says godmother 'but you're married now. You must make the best things. He truly cares for you.' (200)

Godmother is one character who knows who she is and where she stands. She's the one who breaks the mould of the typical female. She was a member of a privileged socioeconomic class and made significant contributions to her community. She has the esteem of the locals of all faiths. She utilizes her position to aid the underprivileged, particularly women.

Godmother is influential. Even Col. Bharucha visits her. Neighbours of all faiths drop in to talk: and to pay their respects. But Godmother seldom ventures out. She only visits if someone is very sick or in extreme need of her. (196)

Lenny in the novel is profoundly impacted by her personality. She takes comfort in her exemplary moral fiber and looks up to her as a role model in all situations. Her judgments are respected because of her commitment to them. As Lenny puts it, their relationship is represented via words:

The bond that ties her strength to my weakness, my fierce demands to her nurturing, my trust to her capacity to contain that trust – and my loneliness to her compassion – is stronger than the bond of motherhood. More satisfying than the ties between men and women. (16)

Godmother is a woman who can handle and solve any issue. Yes, she is able to assist. This is evident throughout the book, as whenever Lenny has fear or anxiety she tries to consult her Godmother instead of any male character (even her father). The confrontation between Godmother and Ice Candy Man is the finest example of Godmother's authoritative nature.

Affected at last by Godmother's stony silence, Ice-candy-man lowers his eyes. His voice divested of oratory, he says, 'I am her slave, Baijee. I worship



her. She can come to no harm with me.”“No harm?” Godmother asks in a deceptively cool voice – and arching her back like a scorpion its tail, she closes in for the kill. ‘You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks, and goondas and say she has come to no harm?’ (229)

This exemplifies her position as a communal godmother and the impact she had. However, Bapsi Sidwa only showed us this side of her character via Lenny's eyes in the story.

In spite of the younger sister's slavish loyalty, she is treated repeatedly with humiliation by Rodabai, who is the godmother. When slave-sister is publicly shamed, it becomes inappropriate. She is living like a slave, repressing her feelings and acting submissively toward the elderly woman at all times. Sidhwa uses the dynamic between the slavesister and the Godmother to stress the point that oppression, manipulation, and exploitation may occur between any two people, regardless of gender. Such bonds are possible between two women.

Lenny's mother comes from a comparatively affluent social class. For help with the kids and the housework, she can hire multiple maids. Her social commitments, including hosting dinner parties and attending other events, keep her very busy. Lenny's remorse for her physical disability is something she talks about frequently. She then addresses Col. Bharucha as follows:

It's my fault, I neglected her—left her to the care of Ayah. (200)

She is beautiful and fragile, but Lenny resents her “all-encompassing” motherliness. Though she struggles at first, she eventually overcomes her possessiveness toward her mother. Subtle feelings of envy arise as she thinks of her mother's sexual allure:

The motherliness of Mother...How can I describe it? While it is there it is all encompassing voluptuous. Hurt, headache and fear vanish . . .The world is wonderful, wondrous and I perfectly fit in it. But it switches off, this motherliness . . . (222)

On the other side, the novel's female protagonists have become its moral compass. In *Ice-Candy-Man*, no female character ever resorts to physical force. Pappo's mother is emotionally abusive toward her son. Pappo is an abused young woman whose mother often beats her and who was married off to an older guy without her will. This episode highlights the author's feminist stance. Ayah, our protagonist, is a Hindu woman of eighteen in modern-day India. She personifies the power of women, and it is Ayah who instills the concepts of independence and determination in Lenny. Another

male character or people in the narrative likewise mistreat her. Bapsi Sidhwa uses the character of Ayah as a parody to poke fun at the emptiness and cruelty of a patriarchal system that makes a woman's life difficult. When the riots start, she falls prey to the ravenous, barbaric crowd. Dilnawaz (Ice-Candy-Man) leads a Muslim mob into Godmother's home, looking for the Hindus. In a fit of wrath, he abandons Ayah to the hands of the angry crowd:

They drag Ayah out. They drag her by arms...her bare feet- that want to move backwards – are forced forward. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like the dead child's scream . . . Four men stand pressed against her...their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces. (211)

Rape is the worst form of violence because it says women have no control over their own bodies and may be used as a weapon against anybody. The novel's Godmother's character is a striking embodiment of the author's feminist strain, which sees in such acts of violence an intimate devastation of the feminine and, by extension, an attempt to eradicate male dignity.

By the end of the book, Lenny's mother has changed in significant ways. During the India-Pakistan partition, she learns about the political shifts taking place in the country. At this point, she appears to be a social worker. She aids the victims of the 1947 riots with Lenny's aunt.

For those who needed gas to make the journey across the border, she was there, and she also aided the abused and exploited women. It's easy to see parallels between Lenny's mom and Monju, the female protagonist of Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers*.

Through the connection between Lenny's parents, Bapsi Sidhwa beautifully depicts the suffering and brutality that women experience in a patriarchal society. Sidhwa portrays Lenny's father as a cruel guy who mistreats his wife:

As upsetting the caged voices of our parents fighting in their bed room. Mother crying, wheedling Father's terse, brash, indecipherable sentence.

Terrifying thumps...Although Father has never raised his hands, to us, one day I surprise mother at her bath and see the bruise, on her body. (221)

Bapsi highlights the ingrained societal stereotypes that see women as nothing more than a sexual object. Lenny's assertion that a man is free from such conditioning and that a woman must be attractive to be wanted demonstrates the patriarchal bias:



Drinking tea, I am told, makes one darker. I'm dark enough... It's a pity Ad's fair and Lenny so dark.

He's a boy. Anyone will marry him. (222)

In *Ice Candy Man*, almost all of the male characters are portrayed as being uncaring, apathetic, or destructive. Bapsi Sidhwa has depicted the patriarchal powers' brutal, irrational, heartless, and destructive attitudes in the work in a beautiful way.

Bapsi Sidhwa has spoken extensively about the incident in which Ranna, a little kid, gets injured and flees for her life when riots break out in order to draw attention to and denounce the damage done by the dominating patriarchal forces. (225)

Chaudhary's house and pour the kerosene oil around the house to burn themselves, the patriarchal prejudices of the male-dominated society receive a realistic and artistic embodiment. By include this incident in the story, Bapsi shows the hollowness and hypocrisy of the patriarchal culture in which women are viewed as unimportant. Throughout addition, several women are gang-raped, assaulted, and killed in the book. Bapsi Sidhwa draws attention to and denounces this callous behaviour on the side of the male population.

One day, Lenny's cousin declares that he spotted Ayah in a car and adds that she has become a call girl. He continues by saying that he saw her working for someone else. Lenny finds out that Ice-candy-man raped Ayah and permitted the guys to rape her, and that he has become a pimp in the red light district as a result of these revelations through the conversations that take place between Godmother and Ice-candy-man. Ayah, once known as Shanta, is now known as Mumtaz since Ice-Candy-Man changed her identity, seized her both physically and psychologically, and married her without her will.

Bhalla draws attention to the horrifying predicament that minority women find themselves in:

Women were literally soldsettled on these apertures. And the moment the women had passed ahead, the eyes were settled on the bruised buttocks. (261)

On the other hand, the moral heart of the work has been made up entirely of female characters. In *Ice-Candy-Man*, no women are seen using violence. The mother of Pappo is harmful in her own life. Pappo is a girl who has been mistreated, beaten by her mother, and forced to wed an older man. This episode emphasizes the author's feminist stance. Ayah, the book's protagonist, is an 18-year-old Hindu woman. She is the definition of a strong, independent woman, and it is Ayah who gives

Lenny the concepts of choice and freedom. Other male characters in the book also mistreat her. Bapsi Sidhwa satirizes the callousness and hollowness of patriarchal culture, which make a woman's life unpleasant, via the caricature of Ayah. She falls prey to the ferocious and uncivilized mob's lust as the riots start.

## II. Conclusion:

True to its name, *Ice Candy Man* makes an honest effort to centre the anguish of its female protagonists. All the women in this story are victims of the male-dominated, fundamentalist society created by the novelist's realistic portrayal of the female characters. As Bapsi Sidhwa sees it, the message that has to be in contrast to communalism, humanism is more crucial. Women could have any religious affiliation, but are still human creatures, so why should they be expected to take it all in stride and be victimized?

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