

**REVELATION OF HUMAN PREDICAMENT
THROUGH LENNY IN SIDHWA'S
*ICE CANDY MAN***

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Judith Hermann in her classic *Trauma and Recovery* emphasizes that:

To study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events. When the events are natural disasters of 'acts of God', those who bear witness sympathize readily with the victim. But when the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides. (7)

There is no doubt that some of the literary writers respond to this act in various ways. These literary artists represent the miseries of fellow human, by giving voice to put an end to violence and anguish. The fictional narratives of violence portray the multi-layered experience of the sufferings of common man during a war between nations or communal holocaust in the society trying to find meaningful articulations.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice- Candy- Man* (1989) presents the political reality of India-Pakistan partition through the lives of the various characters in the novel. The traumatic situation of the colonised land is enhanced through the narrative presented by a child. The child Lenny observes the changes around her with a child's wonder and innocence. She is the first person narrator in the novel, and is a four year old child at the beginning of the novel. The complete story is narrated by Lenny presenting the trauma and violence during partition of 1947. She is a polio stricken child, living in Lahore with her father, mother and her younger brother Adi. They are rich and belong to the Parsi community. It is an extended family consisting of

her Godmother named Rodabai, Old husband, Slave sister, Electric-aunt, Cousin and other characters. Servants who work under Sethi's family are Shanta, whom Lenny calls as Ayah affectionately, Imam Din, Hari, Moti, Papoo etc.

According to *Collins Dictionary*, Bildungsroman is a novel that details the maturation, and specifies the psychological development and moral education, of the principal character. Bildungsroman and Erziehungsroman are German terms signifying “novel of formation” or “novel of education”. In Bildungsroman, the protagonist grows intellectually and physically and progresses to maturity. They also recognize their identity in the world.

Lenny is not put in school because of her physical disability, whereas her brother Adi is sent to school. She is tutored by Mrs. Pen. Lenny spends most of her time with her young Ayah, who has many admirers like the Ice-candy-man, Masseur, Sikh zoo attendant, Government House gardener and other characters. It is from these working class characters Lenny learns about the religious differences and intolerance.

Lenny shares a strong bond with Ayah. She later learns about the pain, sufferings and betrayal of life. She is bestowed with capacity to comprehend and make logical connections. As Lenny grows up from childhood to adolescence, she starts to understand about the socio-political turbulence of the country. She realizes the hazardous borders between men and women, when she begins a relationship with her cousin. Lenny's search for identity is autobiographical echoing the search experienced by the author. Unlike Sidhwa, Lenny suffered from polio and had to spend a lot of time with servants at home. The novel opens with the beginning statement of Lenny, “My world is compressed” (1). Her world is confined. Her physical disability makes her an introvert child. She is often engrossed in her

own world but she is a keen observer. She moves to Warris Road where she dwells and frequently visits Jalil Road, where her Godmother Rodabai lives. Both are wide, clean orderly streets of Lahore. Her disability is an obstacle to her which makes her sad because she is not able to travel around. Her loneliness makes her observe the Army Salvation House on Warris Road “I feel such sadness for the dumb creature, I imagine lurking behind the wall. I know it is dumb because I have listened to its silence, my ear to the wall” (1). In Sidhwa's novel the 'I' is the speaking character. It is fabricated in order to state the “chronological truth”. Lenny narrates the facts and incidents in the present tense.

Usually, it is Ayah who takes Lenny to Queen's Park, where Ayah and her admirers interact. Lenny's private world is rudely shattered by the sudden appearance of an English man who demands to know why “such a big girl in a pram! She's atleast four” (2). Shanta, Lenny's Ayah tries to tell him about Lenny's disability in broken English. Meanwhile, Lenny tries to reveal the leather straps and steel callipers harnessing her right boot. Still the Englishman insists and tells her about the importance of self reliance. Indirectly the Englishman has enacted a political drama. Ayah could not recognize his drama. But Lenny who sees him as a “leathery and middle-aged gnome” (2) acts as a medium for Sidhwa to present her perceptions on individuals and relationships.

Another incident in the novel shows Lenny's progression towards maturity. One morning Lenny tells her mother, 'Poor Daddy works so hard for us. When I grow up, I will work in the office and he can read his newspaper all day!'(79). In another circumstance she says “as the years advance, my sense of inadequacy and unworthy advances. I have to think faster on my toes as it were offering lengthier chatter to fill up the infernal time of Father's mute meals” (80).

Lenny starts getting aware of her inferior status as a girl in a patriarchal society and the different and unequal expectations of her parents from her and her brother. Her subservient position in marriage also drives home this point. According to Sangari, Lenny's mother's behaviour “often placed in overly individualized private resolutions” (867) becomes a source of inspiration to Lenny. Both have a strong bond of intimacy that challenges patriarchal, racial and bourgeois conventions.

According to Ann Stoler, the “education” that Lenny learns from the interactions with Ayah, is an example of an uncontrolled attached relationship between a servant and child that she terms as “education of desire” (109). Foucault's phrase “education of desire” means that the subject learns about the “correct” expression of his/her sexuality. The word “correct” refers to the methodological analysis that describes any discourse of sexuality in a given culture. In her book *Race and the Education of Desire* Stoler takes Foucault's phrase “education of desire,” which refers to the development of emotional attachment between children and their babysitters. This emotional attachment can be seen in the case of Lenny and Ayah, where they interact within the “carefully marked boundaries of class and race” (191).

Lenny is bestowed with keen powers of observation. She visualizes all the changes happening in Lahore. Anita Desai, the Indian novelist compares Lenny to Oscar, a character in Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959). Both the characters are physically disabled. But their outlook is more or less alike, one that is characterized by maturity. Lenny sees people from this perspective without any prejudice.

During the partition, many people are forced to leave their places. Some people, in order to survive leave their home town.

Thousands of people, irrespective of their religion lose their lives. British Government failed to contain violence and people lost their hope in the ruling party. Lenny is shocked to hear about the murder of Mr. Rogers. Lenny is seven years old, she is mature enough to think intellectually like adults. When she heard that his mutilated body was found in the gutter she said “For a moment I cannot breathe. I feel I might fall” (112). When she learns of the dying people she contemplates and utters these words:

I know of death: a grandfather died in Karachi and his remains were consigned to the Tower of Silence. Moti's relatives are forever dying ... But they weren't murdered. Or mutilated. And they weren't people I knew!'How mutilated?' I have seen goats slaughtered at the end of the Muslim fast on Eid. I've watched them being disemboweled and, with the other children, lined up to blow into their moist windpipes and inflate their lungs. (112)

Even though Lenny's family members tried to divert her mind she was not convinced. She gets more agitated hearing about the news of the dead. A child will never see any difference among people. They treat everyone as equals. Lenny now comes to understand that “One man's religion is another man's poison” (117). This incident makes Lenny say that, “I experience this feeling of utter degradation, of being an untouchable excrescence” (117). She reaches a stage where her psychological trauma intensifies. She rages in madness. She is not able to show her frustration and emotion. Later she shows her agony to her dolls. She states:

I hold it upside down and pull its pink legs apart. The knees and thighs bend unnaturally, but the stitching in the centre stays intact.

I hold one leg out to Adi. 'Here,' I say, 'pull it.'

‘Why?’ asks Adi looking confused.

'Pull, damn it!' I scream, so close to hysteria that Adi blanches and hastily grabs the proffered legs. (He is one of the few people I know who is fair enough to blanch- or blush noticeably.) Adi and I pull the doll's legs, stretching it in a fierce tug-of-war, until making a wrenching sound it suddenly splits. We stagger off balance. The cloth skin is ripped right up to its armpits spilling chunks of greyish cotton and coiled brown coir and the innards that make its eyes blink and make it squawk 'Ma-Ma'. (138)

Even though Lenny lives a comfortable life, she is caught in the trauma of partition. Ralph Crane describes Lenny thus:

It may be that the atrocities of 1947 are best seen through the innocent, naive eyes of a child, who has no Hindu, Muslim or Sikh axe to grind... Lenny is free both from the prejudices of religion, and from the prejudices against women, and the constraints she will be subject to as she grows older. The authorial voice is a powerful voice of hindsight. (2)

In the novel, one can see a transformation in Lenny's personality. When she starts to progress from childhood to adolescence she gets physically and intellectually mature, which can be seen on her eighth birthday:

I open my eyes: and discover Cousin's bewildered eyes gazing directly into mine. He doesn't know if he is doing it right. Or when to stop. The kissing scenes in the films go on much longer. But I can tell at that alarming proximity that the muscles in Cousin's jaws are trembling. My neck, too, is beginning to ache at that awkward angle. Kissing, I'm convinced, is overrated. Trust Cousin to enlighten me. When our mutual agony becomes unbearable, Ayah suddenly slaps Cousin hard on his back. (143)

A child in her peer group often tends to explore new things. They are not aware of differences in gender. Their emotion starts to change, as they grow and undergoes a transformation. Due to the changes in hormones, they begin to see the opposite sex differently and respond accordingly. These changes can be seen in Lenny's character too. As novel progresses she says, "I'm feeling despondent. When something upsets me this much I find it impossible to talk. It used not to be so. I wonder: am I growing up? At least I've stopped babbling all my thoughts" (217).

Lenny realizes that she has become taller, her limp had almost subsided. She grows physically mature; she feels gratified and becomes aware of the opposite sex. She states "I feel so sorry for myself- and for Cousin- and for all the senile, lame and hurt people and fallen women- and the condition of the world- in which countries can be broken, people slaughtered and cities burnt- that I burst into tears. I feel I will never stop crying" (217).

The slow awakening of the child to sexuality can be compared to Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) and Doris Lessing's *The Old Chief Mshlanga* (1983). Lenny's growing up is noted as a loss of political and racial egalitarianism as she develops a sexual interest towards her cousin. It is her Cousin who initiates her growing self awareness. As the relation between Lenny and her Cousin mature she looks at him with new eyes:

I don't find you that attractive, 'I say truthfully. I suppose you're too young,' says Cousin. 'You haven't known passion.

I open my eyes wide and look demurely at Cousin, and let it pass.

But Cousin can't: 'Do you find anyone more attractive than me?' 'Yes,' I say, 'I think I found Masseur more attractive...' I surprise myself. Mouthing the words articulates my feelings and reveals

myself to me. (218)

With this freshness of vision, Lenny says “I look about me with new eyes. The world is athrob with men” (219). She is also aware that she has physically grown up. She says, “Flesh of my flesh, exclusively mine. And I am hard to put to protect them; I guard them with possessive passion... I can't trust anyone” (219). It can be rightly said that, Lenny becomes aware of both her sexuality and the pains and pleasures of adulthood.

A bud blooms into a flower, likewise, Lenny grows from being an infant to a woman:

As the mounds beneath my nipples grow, my confidence grows. I tell Imam Din to hold Adi in the kitchen, push Hamida out of the bathroom and lock the door. I examine my chest in the small mirror hanging at an angle from the wall and play with them as with cuddly toys. What with my limp and my burgeoning breasts- and the projected girth and wiggle of my future bottom- I feel assured that I will be quite attractive when I'm grown up. (220)

The relationship between Lenny and her Cousin shows that Lenny is no way docile to men like her mother. She says “Maybe I don't need to attract you. You're already attracted” (220). This statement clearly brings out her intelligence and smartness. Though her Cousin takes advantage of her disability, she tackles it with her intelligence.

Her Cousin abuses her sexually. She is able to relate to Ayah's experience who has been raped and pushed in to prostitution. She thinks thus: “If those grown men pay to do what my comparatively small cousin tried to do, then Ayah is in trouble. I think of Ayah twisting Ice- Candy Man's intrusive toes and keeping the butcher and wrestler at arm's length. And of those strangers' hands hoisting her

chocolate body into the cart” (241). She remains assertive, at times even domineering because of her relationship with her ayah.

Over time, Lenny starts to live a very normal life. Her reveries fade away and she comes to terms with reality. She starts to think like adults. Her emotions kindle and she states, “I have never cried this way before. It is how grown-ups cry when their hearts are breaking” (254). Lenny optimistically looked at her womanhood. Her understanding of the disaster brought about by Partition and the resultant suffering makes her mature. She comes closer to the adult world, though not completely.

There is continuous development and growth in the character of Lenny. She understands the norms and conventions of the society. This is coupled with the realization of her sexuality and identity in the world. She experiences pain during partition. She loses her friends and her most beloved Ayah, from whom she had learnt the lessons of joy, sorrow and struggle. All these bring about a change in her. She emerges as a woman with a free will to plan her future.

Towards the end, Sidhwa portrays Lenny awakening to a new identity. She pulsates with a will and life of her own, Lenny presents a vivacity which helps her to transcend the patriarchal biases present in the social perceptions. Through Lenny, Sidhwa presents women who are oppressed by violence and the conventions of a patriarchal society. Sidhwa's society encompasses victimised yet empowered women. Her society supports the view that men and women have different roles. Femininity and masculinity are two separate and opposite identities. Sidhwa considers it a special right or advantage to make women like Lenny, the major character in her writings. She challenges male privilege which has an inherent existence in the society by privileging female will. She attempts to dismantle the myths around the misconception of female privilege. Lenny acts as a

source for the writer to present women who appear to be powerful yet completely lost in a patriarchal world.

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