Feminism in Postcolonial Perspective with Special Reference to

Ice Candy Man

Ankita Soni
Department of English,
A.P.S. University, Rewa.
(M.P.) India.

Abstract:

The topic of the present paper is Feminism in Postcolonial Perspective with Special Reference to Ice Candy Man. Various aspects pertaining to the topic has been dealt with in the paper viz. what is feminism, its origin and development, its basic and fundamental concepts. Since feminism is the burning topic of the day; it is felt need to discuss about feminism in short to facilitate the readers’ and the scholars’ further studies. Feministic criticism being developed in 1960s, attempted to describe and interpret (and re-interpret) women's experience as depicted in various kinds of literature. Now its present status continues to question long standing, dominant, male phallogocentric ideologies, patriarchal attitudes and male interpretations in literature. It also challenges traditional and accepted male ideas about the nature of women and about how women feel. The term “post-modernism” was tentatively used in the late 1960s and a sense of a general cultural phenomenon began to crystallize in the 1970s. It was also linked to post-colonialism. Feminism as a movement gained potential in the twentieth century, marking the culmination of two centuries' struggle for cultural roles and socio-political rights.

In a “patriarchal social set up, ‘masculinity’ is associated with superiority whereas ‘femininity’ is linked with inferiority, and while masculinity implies strength, action, self-assertion and domination, femininity implies weakness, passivity, docility, obedience and self-negation.” Ice-Candy-Man by Bapsi Sidhwa, though ostensibly a hero-oriented novel subtly but effectively subverts the ingrained elements of patriarchy, privileging female will, choice, strength along with the feminine qualities of compassion and motherhood. The central consciousness of the fictional world of Ice-Candy-Man is represented by a young girl, Lenny, who is lame. The lameness of the narrator-protagonist becomes suggestive of the handicap a
woman creative writer faces, when she decides to wield the pen, because writing, being an intellectual exercise, is considered a male bastion, outside the routine of a woman's submissive domesticity. Sidhwa’s recuperation symbolizes the overcoming of the constraint on the intellectual activity of writing. By making Lenny the narrator of the novel, the novelist lends weight and validity to the feminine perspective on the nature of surrounding reality.

**Keywords: Feminism, phallogocentric, ideologies, submissive, avant grade, Postmodernism, gynocriticism.**

Today, feminism occupies an important place in modern literature, the concerns of this movement, implicitly as well as explicitly questions the positioning of women as "inferior" or "defective", "passive" and "subordinate" in comparison to men. Feminists challenged these assumptions of woman's secondary status to primary status of man and the presumptuousness of compartmentalizing her essence as a home maker, a mother, a stationary presence in stark contrast to the stereotypes of masculinity, male strength, wanderlust and aggression. The feminists identify the origins of this "sexist" bias in patriarchy.

Simone De Beauvoir uses the term marginalization for women, because she believes that women are always oppressed and marginalized in the society: “woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature …whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it.” (Beauvoir 23)

The male members of the clan easily crushed the voice of women and all these close relations remain weak and fearful and fail to play a strong role in resisting and challenging the male authority. Deborah Cameron describes how social taboos prevent women from speaking: “Even where it seems that women could speak if they chose, the conditions imposed on their lives by society may make this a difficult or dangerous choice. Silence can also mean censoring yourself for fear of being ridiculed, attacked or ignored.” (Menon and K. Bhasin 10)

Feminism is an impulse to defend women against the exploitation and oppression of women in the male dominated society. The insertion of women's experiences in post colonialism may be a feminist act, but only to an extent. For feminism is really a particular Western inflected political discourse committed to changing patterns of patriarchal domination and sexism in all areas of life and relationship. Linked to the Women's Liberation Movement, its political agenda
is premised on a belief in the political, social, legal and sexual equality of women and in their ability to achieve their full potential. In its very beginning, feminism sought to create a homogenous women's standpoint that had its basis in commonly held epistemologies about women. There was the assumption that women shared a common history of patriarchal oppression through the political economy of the material conditions of sexuality and reproduction' (Collins 190) that even where these conditions varied, the knowledge's through which women responded to their common oppressions remained uniform.

Such notions of commonality were themselves based on ideas about similar patterns of socialization among women, on their childbearing and nurturing qualities, and on how these might inspire common ways of perceiving, knowing and conceptualizing experience. Feminism's political ideology derived its unity and organizational strength from this understanding of women's experience. It theorized its notion of sexual politics from the premise that the differentiation of status and power between male and female was the root cause of a patriarchal domination of the world, and feminist discourse should therefore focus primarily on confronting and changing this fundamental inequality in gender relations. Race, class, and sexual orientation would be automatically addressed, it was felt, in the all embracing politics of gender.

In the 1960s and 1970s feminist discourse focused on social and personal power relations between the sexes, making these the central political agenda for women globally. Sexual politics became a specific branch of knowledge with a particular set of assumptions and interpretive Strategies. Making gender a category of analysis in all areas of knowledge helped feminists to uncover power structures, biases, and exclusions in the construction of knowledge and to rethink almost all the disciplinary paradigms. It was feminism's revisions of existing knowledge and its theorizing of gender that moved the notion of gender itself beyond biological difference into the arena of culture, history, politics and religion. The idea that it was societies and cultures that constituted meanings around sexual difference seemed a logical way of understanding and probing hierarchical power relations in politics and culture. It helped feminists in all the disciplines to probe the historical roots of assumptions about women and interrogate their meanings. Feminist discourse located constructs like masculinity and femininity in day-to-day cultural, social, and political interaction and sought new ways of understanding and rethinking them.
In other words, today's feminism is anti-patriarchy but not anti-man just as it is pro-woman without seeking to replace patriarchy with matriarchy.

As a critical approach its purpose is to scratch the surface of the so-caused 'neutral' and 'objective' texts and reveal that these are in fact, appropriated by patriarchy to preserve its voice against any possible resistance.

The prominent characters in *Ice-Candy-Man* are mostly women, and at the centre of them is Lenny - girl child who is also the narrator. Though the paradigm of 'women-as-victim' features in almost all writings on the theme of Partition.

The extensive featuring of women's shared experiences of victimization in the communal riots is here complimented by a presentation of their oppression and the strategies to overcome the oppression even at personal level inside their homes, and in their-relationships with husbands and lovers. In this novel the fundamental schism between man and woman cannot be hidden even from the eyes of the eight years old Lenny. Lenny's narrative is the most important clue to the political commitment of the novel itself, it follows that the use of her consciousness as the dialectical site of contest between different ideologies specifically gender related makes the text polyvalent. The feminist inscriptions are markedly visible.

Its protagonist's world-review is largely determined by her limited range of movement around her house.

My world is compressed. Warris Road, lined with rain gutters, lies between Queens Road and Jail Road . . .

Rounding the right-hand corner of Warris Road and continuing on Jail Road is the hushed Salvation Army wall . . .

Jail Road also harbours my energetic electric-aunt and her adenoidal son ..... (Sidhwa 1)

Unlike mainstream writing, which is hero-oriented and represents women and home in its sentimental paraphernalia, Ice-Candy-Man foregrounds the women's consciousness as they are affected by the political battles. The novel highlights their domestic roles, their individual characteristics, their shared experiences of sexual exploitation, their survival and their sexuality against the backdrop of Partition. And this experienced realm deeply affects Lenny's psyche. Sidhwa has recreated a universe where women appear as biological beings; 'female' as compared
to the stereotype 'feminine'. This is not to say that by depicting so many women, the text or Lenny's narrative perse become 'feminist' or even that all or some of its characters are feminist.

Though she is located on the margins of her milieu-as a physically 'handicapped girl child' belonging to a 'religious minority', very curious to 'know' things; and one who is dynamically involved in the construction of her identity. Not only the subject of her narration but each inflection in her voice, as she gives the accelerant of her growth from childhood to adolescence during the country's division, is significant.

Both men and women inhabit Lenny's universe when she is young, but as she grows up, she develops an anxiety regarding men in spite of her interaction with cousin, Ayah's wooers and her own father:

"Lenny . . . is not male-identified. She has strong female models with whom she has a woman-to-woman bonding." This boding is not born instinctively, it occurs gradually just as nor alienation from the men is a gradual process. As a child sensing a void in her life she gravites towards her. Godmother who has nurtured her instead of her biological mother. Extolling this relationship Lenny say that it is 'stronger than the bond of motherland. More satisfying than the ties between men and women'. Her bonding with mother and Ayah are separate realms of experience.

Through them she is initiated into the norms of heterosexuality and romantic love. While Ayah's sexual life in particulars is vicariously gratifying for Lenny, she finds herself recognising the appeal as well as exploitation of women's biological existence. Mother's marital sex life and Ayah's 'Free Love' are carefully counter balanced in Lenny's psyche.

These woman-to-woman bondings at the level of ordinary routines described in the novel mature into a stronger 'female bonding', which feminists extol, in the face of the women's victimisation in the communal violence of 1947.

She wonders why her father acts indifferent or superior to her mother and the mother pampers him still. What a fallen woman? What are the things men do to women in Hiramandi Lenny's narrative poses these fundamental questions hence it operator as a 'feminist allegory' Bharucha observer that through the character of Lenny' Sidhwa explores a female universe hemmed in by the restricting and reducing forces of patriarchy and colonialism.
Through her character Sidhwa presents some of commoner forms of woman's exploitation within her domestic sphere, and her ability to retain her sense of individuality in the midst of exploitation.

Female sexuality with the ramification of its celebration as well as its exploitation by men is highlighted in Ayah's portrait. A substantial part of the narrative revolves around her character. It is through Ayah that Lenny is introduced to most of the people outside her family circle. When she moves around under her nanny's charge, her child's world expands to include awareness of community, nation, sexuality and barbarity.

It is interesting that while a nanny's role amounts to a paid extension of motherly functions—bathing, massaging, clothing the child and taking her to the park for fresh air—Lenny's Ayah has other correspondence with her mother, as well. In her pedestrian way she replicates mother is sex appeal. Like mothers she knows that she cannot afford to offend men but might get her way in the man's world through subterfuge. In the Victoria Garden where she walks with Lenny, Ayah accumulates a fleet of admirers including the Ice-Candy-Man a masseur, a gardener, a restaurant owner a zoo attendant, a knife-sharpening pathan and several more.

The men vie with each other, by turns to win her favour; while she dispenses it according to the degree to which they gratify her psycho-sexual needs. The Ayah is an assertive woman who, as shall be seen later in her story, holds her own even in the face of ineluctable misery.

The Ayah, conscious that she is a sex-object for the male gaze learns to manipulate her sexuality to achieve her meagre goal from obtaining cheap bosky clothes or cashews from peddlers to the gratification of her 'female' ego. Hers is a strategy of survival that rather enjoys through it, reaffirms her exploitation by playing her wooers one against the other for favour, she manages to remain in fact in their midst for a good time.

Between the characterisation of Ayah and Lenny's mother, Sidhwa is able to prompt a dialogue on female sexuality versus the male power structure within or outside their homes. Understandably, there are no happy marriage in this novel though there are several memorable sexual encounters.

The violent molesting of women and children under the excuse of communal revenge actually highlights the gender divide, which is more absolute and hostile than communal or racial fundamentalism. Women, once they fall prey to men's violence like Lenny's to two Ayah's, can not hope for their restitution to their own families.
In *Ice Candy Man* Sidhwa views as Lenny grows, she recognizes the biological exploitation of women. When Lenny grows she feels changes in her body then confidence also rise in her. She starts to look the world with ‘female eyes’. All these quotations show how women are biologically oppressed and marginalized by men. She notices that after taking away Ayah from her house a new Ayah named Hamida comes to work at her home. Lenny discovers that even Hamida has four children but she is refused by her husband. Hamida herself tells Lenny that now she is a ‘fallen woman’ because other men have touched her. So, this incident shows how the patriarchal men oppressed and marginalized their women. (QaiserShahraj, www.alhamara.com., 11)

The dialogue between Lenny and her Godmother clarifies it:
"What is a fallen woman?" I asked Godmother . . .
"Hamida was kidnapped by the Sikhs", says Godmother seriously . . . . when that happens, sometimes, the husband or his family-wan't take her back.
"Why? it isn't her faults she was kidnapped".
"Some folk feel that they can't stand their women being touched by other men."

Using a child narrator Sidhwa has pointed the harsh reality of women’s secondary existence in married life under the pretentious Indian society:

And closer, and as upsetting, the caged voices of our parents fighting in their bedroom. Mother crying, wheedling. Father's terse, brash, indecipherable sentences. Terrifying thumps. I know they quarrel mostly about money. But there are other things they fight about that are not clear to me. Sometimes I hear Mother say, 'No, Jana: I won't let you go! I won't let you go to her!' Sounds of a scuffle. Father goes anyway. Where does he go in the middle of the night? to whom? Why . . . when Mother loves him so much? Although Father has never raised his hands to us, one day I surprise Mother at her bath and see the bruises on her body...................(Sidhwa 212).

Another encounter with feminist theme in the novel is noticed when Lenny shares her experience of one of her meetings with cousin.
'I have become a honey-comb', he says. 'Lick me, here, and see what happens.'
I lick the tip gingerly. Nothing. No honey.

'You've got to suck out the honey.' Cousin arches his back and maneuvers his penis to my mouth.
'Suck it yourself!' I say, standing up.
'I can't', says Cousin.
I see the absurdity of my suggestion. I shrug away.

I like Cousin. I've even thought of marrying him when we grow up: but this is a side of him I'm becoming aware of for the first time, and I don't like it.

'All right, I'll show you anyway' says Cousin in a conciliatory voice. 'Just look: I'll show you something.'

Cousin pumps and pumps his penis and it becomes all red and I think he will tear himself and I say, 'Stops it'. You'll bleed', but he pumps and pumps and I begin to cry.

Cousin too is close to crying. He mopes around for the rest of the afternoon with his fly looking stuffed. I haven't been able to keep my eyes off flies since: intrigued by the fleshy machinery (161-162).

At present Feminism is a subject not related to any particular place. Its not confined to any specific country, it is a universal problem. Thus its awareness is not only necessary but its is essential too. It needs universal appeal. In this paper a humble attempt has been made to explain what feminism is and how Bapsi Sidhwa has contributed in her work as as Postcolonial writer.

Finally we state that Feminism in Ice Candy Man is an outstanding tools for understanding and analysing the relationship between men, women and society. The perception of masculinity and femininity during that era is also shown in the novel. The racial factors, the description of class distinction, male dominance, difference between the sexes and the issues under the patriarchal society have keenly been observed in this paper.

Works Cited:

