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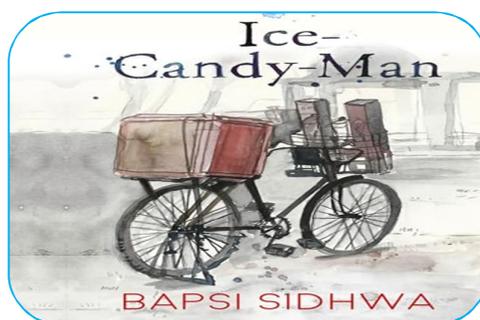
ECHOES OF EARTH AND ENDURANCE: POSTCOLONIAL ECOFEMINIST RESISTANCE IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S *ICE CANDY-MAN* AND *THE PAKISTANI BRIDE*

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INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial South Asia's predominantly male-dominated customs and India's 1947 partition have long served as a foundation for literary observation of the oppression of gender, traumatic situations and relocation from families from one place to another. Through her books, *The Ice-Candy Man* and *The Pakistani Bride*, renowned Pakistani novelist Bapsi Sidhwa highlights and presents these challenging facts. These pieces portray striking images of women entangled in a web of social control, cultural standards, communal brutality, and separation and isolation. Although the physical violence committed on female characters like Ayah, such as rape, kidnapping, and forced marriage, has received a great deal of serious attention, there is a clear knowledge on the psychological forms of oppression that follow these traumatic experiences and horrifying memories.



This paper also analyses how violence and trauma continue to affect women's survival even after physical injury and mental anguish have occurred, and explores beyond superficial narratives of victimisation. Lenny's in her ignorance, gets involved in her betrayal, Ayah's silent distress and pain following her abduction in the *Ice-Candy Man*, reveal a society that ignores the psychological wound that violence transits from a contemporary city to an oppressive tribal environment. The novel *Pakistani Bride* highlights the psychological repercussions of the cruelty of patriarchal traditions seen in the novel.

This study presents savagery and female oppression and atrocity as continuous processes that have their roots in both the influence of colonialism and postcolonial power connection and dynamics, rather than as separate or fragmented phenomena. This study aims to explore the nuanced, enduring, and subtle ways in which women, bodies, lives, and nature are reflected in Sidhwa's novels within the postcolonial context. It will emphasize the psychological repercussions of trauma, the suppression of women and arranged and spatial experiences, and the assimilation of the systems of dominance.

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KEY WORDS: *oppression, marginalization, gendered violence, patriarchy, nature, territory.*

Ecofeminism in Post-Colonial Contexts: Theoretical Framework

Ecofeminism, originating from Vandana Shiva's work on Chipko activists and Maria Mies's critiques of global capitalism, asserts that the domination of women and nature stems from the same ideological roots: patriarchal dualisms that privilege mind over body, culture over nature, and colonizer over colonized (Shiva 45; Mies and Shiva 18). In post-colonial South Asia, this framework gains particular potency, as British environmental policies—deforestation for railways, monoculture

plantations—disrupted indigenous land-women relationships, legacies that Partition violence and tribal honor codes brutally extended (Gadgil and Guha 112). Sidhwa's novels frame these disruptions as "ecocide," a term Hussain applies to *Ice-Candy-Man's* depiction of landscapes ravaged by communal riots (48). Women's silenced voices echo colonized landscapes stripped of agency, yet Sidhwa subverts this silence through resilient narrators who bear witness to dual exploitations (Qureshi 7). As Warren argues, ecofeminism demands "transformative praxis" linking gendered and ecological liberation—a praxis Sidhwa models through her characters' journeys from victimhood to agency (35). This study thus positions Sidhwa as expanding ecofeminist discourse from Western environmentalism to Partition's specific socio-ecological ruptures (Parmar 2915; Rudra 2). To fully understand how culture, history, and gender interact, this study is grounded in postcolonial feminist theory. It draws on the works of scholars such as Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Homi Bhabha. By closely studying both novels, the study challenges the visible and invisible systems that support and normalise this kind of turmoil and trauma, in addition to bringing attention to the cruelty and distress the women endure. Bapsi Sidhwa is widely recognised for her contributions to South Asian postcolonial literature, particularly for highlighting how historical upheavals, catastrophe, and cultural bindings affect women's lives. Her novels, *Ice-Candy Man* and *Pakistani Bride*, have been studied from various critical angles, including the pain and trauma of Partition, the sufferings of women and norms of patriarchy.

Bapsi Sidhwa's fiction consistently examines the intersections of history, culture, power and gender. Her work explores the women characters in the novel, their complex terrain, and their lives within postcolonial and patriarchal structures. Among her famous novels, *Ice-Candy Man* (1988) and *Pakistani Bride* (1983) stand out for their detailed description of how violence, both systemic and personal, shapes the traumatic experiences of women. Although the two novels differ in timeline, setting, and narrative technique, they are united and tied by a common concern: the persistence of female oppression and suppression across changing socio-political scenarios and landscapes. Through thematically and distinctly connected narratives, Sidhwa reveals and reflects how entrenched traditions and historical trauma collaborate in shaping women's subjugation and enslavement in postcolonial South Asia.

Ecofeminist and Post-colonial Intersections in *Ice Candy* and *The Pakistani Bride*

In '*Ice-Candy Man*' set against the distressing and devastating setting of the 1947 partition of India, *Ice-Candy Man* (also published as 'Cracking India') offers a child's perspective and discourses on one of the subcontinent's bloodiest political ruptures and shattered scenarios. It is described through the voice of Lenny, an eight-year-old Parsi girl afflicted by polio; the novel begins in a peaceful, multicultural Lahore. The early chapters paint a vibrant picture of peaceful coexistence among Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Parsis until the political rhetoric and discourse of independence begin to escalate and magnify into communal hatred and eventually, genocide.

The novel's central female character is Ayah, Lenny's Hindu nanny, who is admired by a group of men with lustful eyes from different religious communities. Her beauty, youth, and presence serve as a connecting point among the various male characters in the novel; foreshadow her objectification. As political tensions and differences among people mount, these men, once friendly rivals in love, become divided by their communal identities. In a devastating and destructive turn, Lenny reveals the Ayah's hiding place to a group of Muslim men led by the Ice-Candy Man, who then abduct her. She is eventually coerced and dragged into prostitution in a Lahore brothel. This horrifying and dreadful incident, viewed through Lenny's innocent but observant eyes, reveals the gendered nature of Partition violence. Women become the embodiment of territories of conquest and revenge. The *Ice-Candy Man*, once a poetic and charming character, transforms into a figure of horror, menace, and control. He justifies the reason for abducting Ayah is rooted in personal trauma—as his sisters were among the victims of a train massacre—but Sidhwa subtly critiques how male grief is turned into female suffering. The novel does not end with a traditional resolution. Even after Ayah is rescued and liberated with the help of Godmother, her silence and withdrawn demeanour reflect deep psychological trauma. Her survival and endurance are not celebrated but problematized, drawing attention to the internal scars that remain long after physical captivity ends.

Sidhwa's decision to use a child narrator as protagonist adds another layer of complexity. Lenny has limited understanding contrasts with the reader's awareness, producing ironic and emotional intensity. The Parsi perspective also provides a neutral approach in a divided world, allowing the novel to analyze both Hindu and Muslim atrocities without political bias. Through characters like Godmother, Electric Aunt, and Lenny's mother, Sidhwa also presents alternative models of womanhood – some complicit in the status quo, others quietly rebellious. Ultimately, *The Ice-Candy Man* is not just a Partition novel; it is a meditation on how religion, nationalism, and patriarchal masculinity combine to sacrifice women for the sake of identity politics. The trauma and distress of Ayah reflect a broader failure of postcolonial nation building, where women are rendered voiceless and disposable.

The Pakistani Bride

In contrast, *The Pakistani Bride* takes us away from the political upheaval and turmoil of Partition, drops us into the rugged, unforgiving tribal terrain of northern Pakistan. The novel describes Zaitoon, an orphaned girl adopted by Qasim, a tribal man who has migrated to Lahore but remains emotionally and culturally tied to his ancestral village in the mountains. Though Qasim raises Zaitoon with love and care, he later arranges her marriage to a man from his native tribe, believing he is honouring his traditions. This decision marks the beginning of Zaitoon's descent into a brutal and harsh patriarchal order. The shift in setting from a relatively modern urban centre to an isolated, law-bound tribal society symbolizes the broader theme of women's disempowerment and subjugation across varying postcolonial spaces. While Lahore allows Zaitoon some sense of individuality and interaction with characters like Carol (an American woman also feeling trapped in a patriarchal marriage), the mountain society strips her of even the most basic freedoms and liberation. Her husband, Sakhi, treats her like a bound property. The village enforces strict codes of female conduct and behaviour, and disobedience is met with ostracization, violence, or even death. Zaitoon's decision to flee and liberate becomes the turning point of the novel. Her escape across the treacherous and hazardous mountains is described in visceral detail. She faces wild animals, starvation, injuries, and emotional despair, yet she persists. This journey and odyssey, not merely a physical escape, is symbolic of a woman's fight for autonomy in an environment that devalues her existence. Though she is eventually rescued and freed, the novel ends on a subdued note. The trauma and anguish she endured, like Ayah's, remains imprinted on her identity. While *The Pakistani Bride* may not deal directly with colonialism or Partition, it reveals another aspect of postcolonial critique: how tribal and patriarchal traditions, untouched by colonial modernity, continue to enslave and dominate women.

Sidhwa's portrayal of tribal life does not glamorize it; instead, she interrogates the internal colonization and bondage that exist within the very fabric of Pakistani society. The novel suggests that the oppression and suppression of women is not only a colonial hangover but also a product of native systems of control.

Zaitoon's story resonates and reflects that many women in post-independence Pakistan find themselves caught between modernity and tradition, law and custom, love and obligation. Her resistance and yearning for freedom, though limited, are a statement against a system that expects women to be silent, submissive, and sacrificial.

Gendered Violence as Political and Cultural Weapon

In *The Ice-Candy Man* Sidhwa explores how women's bodies become battlegrounds during national conflict. Ayah, a Hindu nanny working in a Muslim household, becomes a victim of abduction and sexual violence during the Partition riots. Her violation is not simply personal—it is deeply political. As communal tensions intensify, women are individuals and representatives of their respective religious communities. Ayah, once adored by men of all faiths, becomes a casualty of their reasserted masculine identities fuelled by religious hatred. This dynamism is evident when the *Ice-Candy Man*, previously flirtatious and poetic, transforms into a vengeful and malicious predator after witnessing a train full of mutilated Muslim women arriving from Amritsar. His grief is redirected onto Ayah, who is abducted and trafficked as an act of symbolic revenge. Her body becomes a site for

expressing anger, control, and national frustration. Thus, gendered violence and brutality in the *Ice-Candy Man* are inseparable from political trauma.

In the *Pakistani Bride*, violence and viciousness are not caused by war or national crises but by the suffocating grip of patriarchal tradition. Zaitoon, an orphaned girl adopted by Qasim, is forced and compelled into a marriage with a man from his native tribe in the mountains. Her husband, Sakhi, views her not as a partner but as bonded property. The violence she faces – beatings, confinement, and marital rape – is sanctioned by tribal norms and justified as maintaining family and community honour and prestige. Her pleas and begging to Qasim to avoid this marriage are dismissed with rigid beliefs in cultural duty, revealing how the father figure, too, becomes an agent of violence by upholding social customs over personal empathy and sympathy.

Patriarchy, Silence, and Female Trauma

In both novels, Sidhwa focuses on and explores not just physical violence but also psychological trauma and emotional silencing. Ayah's story does not conclude with her rescue and liberation. After she is retrieved from the brothel, she is emotionally numb and silent – a living reminder and cue of the long-term impact of sexual violence and betrayal. Her silence and stillness speak louder than any description of her suffering. Her trauma is painfully internalized, and society offers no space for her to talk about it. In this way, Sidhwa highlights how female trauma and pain is routinely buried under the need for societal order and patriarchal comfort. Zaitoon's trauma and pain are of a different kind but equally powerful. Even before her marriage, she experienced anxiety, fear, and isolation. Her emotional appeals to Qasim to stop the marriage reflect a young woman's awareness of her fate, yet she is not heard or overheard. After her marriage, her trauma intensifies and deepens into a physical and spiritual prison. Her escape through the forest is not just a survival act – it is a symbol of rejection of her objectification that denies her humanity.

The Landscape of Violence: Cities and Mountains as Gendered Spaces

Sidhwa carefully uses space and thoughts to represent systems of power. Lahore in *The Ice-Candy Man* is a city that begins as cosmopolitan and open but gradually collapses into suspicion, fear, and brutality. The public park where Lenny and Ayah used to spend leisure time has become unsafe and threatening. The domestic space, once comforting, becomes penetrable by communal hatred and antipathy. The home is no longer a refuge; it becomes a stage where betrayal and violence unfold. Ayah is taken not from a battlefield but from the street outside Lenny's home, highlighting that women's spaces and rooms are never truly private or safe.

In *The Pakistani Bride*, the mountainous tribal region is portrayed as wild, distant, and beautiful – but also deeply patriarchal and vicious to outsiders, especially women. Zaitoon's journey into the mountains marks a shift from modernity to feudal control. The mountainous terrain becomes a metaphor for entrapment and isolation. The landscape is not just geographical – it is ideological. It reinforces and supports male dominance and punishes female disobedience. Yet the same mountains also offer the possibility of escape. Zaitoon's perilous and treacherous journey through forests and ravines is a path toward freedom, even though it is short-lived.

Resistance and Survival: Redefining Female Agency

Though both Ayah and Zaitoon face immense suffering and agony, Sidhwa does not portray them solely as helpless victims. Both characters display resistance – emotional, silent, or physical – that disrupts the narrative of total submission. Ayah, despite her silence, remains present, holding on to a shadow of dignity and respect. Her continued survival and perseverance is an act of defiance in a society that expects her to disappear. Godmother's effort to rescue her represents moral courage and female solidarity amidst male indifference. Zaitoon's decision to escape is more visible. She chooses to liberate and flee even when survival is unlikely.

Her journey is filled with pain, but her refusal to accept abuse is a moment of immense power. She defies both tribal authority and the cultural norm that demands obedience. Carol, too, though a secondary character in the *Pakistani Bride* represents another kind of resistance. As a foreigner married

to a Pakistani man, she experiences cultural oppression and suppression differently. Her discomfort and gradual withdrawal from societal expectations show how patriarchal structures cut across class and nationality.

Emotional Violence and Erasure of Female Identity

Sidhwa's novels reveal post-colonial patriarchy's insidious continuity: women silenced like exploited land, Partition riots entangling gender and ecological crises in a single cataclysm (Spivak 310). Lenny challenges imperial-local hierarchies by narrating Ayah's plight to her English mother, bridging subaltern-dominate divides: "Mummy, they took Ayah like they took the fields—by fire and mob" (Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man* 210). Similarly, Zaitoon rejects Kohistan's honour economy, her urban rebirth echoing decolonization's incomplete promises (Ahmed 130).

In both novels, Sidhwa goes beyond physical violence to explore symbolic and emotional violence. Ayah's identity and individuality are erased through forced prostitution and betrayal. She is no longer an individual but a symbol of communal hatred and revenge. Her values and thoughts are tied not to her personhood but to what she represents for others. Even when rescued, there is no healing space for her pain. Similarly, Zaitoon is reduced to an object of tribal honour. Her wishes, dreams and personality are irrelevant. Even Qasim, who loves her like a daughter, ultimately conforms to the idea that a girl must be married into her "own people". When Zaitoon tries to assert herself, she is met with violence and harsh judgment. Her identity is not hers to shape – it is imposed by cultural logic.

In both the novels 'The Ice-Candy Man and The Pakistani Bride', gender and violence are not separate themes – they are inextricably connected. Whether in the context of traditional rigidity or national chaos, women are subjected to both direct and structural violence. Their voices silenced, their bodies are symbols and their choices denied. However, Bapsi Sidhwa does not allow her female characters to be passive symbols of suffering and distress. Through their resistance – whether in the form of survival, escape, or silence – they assert a form of agency in spaces designed to erase them. These intersecting themes reflect the broader postcolonial condition, although newly independent societies replicate systems of control once imposed by colonial rulers. Sidhwa's novels challenge us to see violence and trauma not just because of war or tradition but also as a continuous thread in the lives of women, woven into the everyday and the intimate. Her fiction demands not only recognition of this violence but also a reimagining of female voices and strength in the postcolonial world.

CONCLUSION

Bapsi Sidhwa's novels, 'The Ice-Candy Man and The Pakistani Bride stand as powerful literary testimonies to the harsh realities faced by women in postcolonial South Asia. Through these two novels, Sidhwa constructs narratives that not only reflect the violence and trauma of a transitional society but also challenge the systems, both inherited and internal, that continue to devalue and oppress women. This paper, through a postcolonial lens, has explored how violence against women is not merely incidental in these novels but deeply woven into the very fabric of society, shaped by systematic silencing, historical wounds, and patriarchal traditions.

A close analysis of *The Ice-Candy Man* reveals how the Partition of India, a direct consequence of colonial withdrawal, became a site of mass violence and gendered brutality. The novel does not merely document historical facts but paints an emotionally devastating picture of how women, like Ayah, were transformed into battlegrounds over which masculine pride, religious, and national interests were asserted. Ayah's abduction and eventual silence reflect how violence against women during the period of partition was both a personal violation and a political act. Her suffering is not only physical but also symbolic – she becomes the "other", voiceless and objectified, her identity consumed by the communal madness around her.

Similarly, *The Pakistani Bride* delves into a different form of postcolonial violence – one rooted in tribalism, tradition, and internal patriarchy. Zaitoon's journey from urban Lahore to the rigid, mountainous tribal lands is a movement away from the remnants of modernity into a space untouched by colonial reform but heavily influenced by age-old customs. The violence she endures is normalised through cultural expectations, and prevailing notions of shame and honour impose her silence. While

the novel is not set during a national crisis like Partition, it still reveals how postcolonial societies fail and exploit their women, not because of external colonisers, but because of deep-rooted internal systems that remain unchallenged. Both novels, though distinct in setting and narrative structure, reflect and ponder a shared concern: that independence from colonial rule did not equate to liberation for women. In many ways, the end of colonialism allowed for the revival or continuation of patriarchal systems that had once been subdued or questioned. These systems reasserted control over women's bodies, voices and choices, whether in the name of religion, tribal code, or national purity. Sidhwa's critique, therefore, is not only of colonialism but also of postcolonial societies that replicate similar hierarchies and injustices, often against their most vulnerable citizens.

An important insight drawn from this study is that violence in postcolonial contexts is diverse. It is not always visible or loud. Sometimes, it reflects in the form of fear, silence, emotional suppression, or forced obedience. Ayah's muteness and Zaitoon's hesitation to speak are forms of trauma and agony that linger long after the violent acts themselves. These forms of suffering, though quieter than turmoil, riots, or physical abuse, are equally devastating. They reflect a deeper truth that postcolonial violence often continues in intimate, private spaces, masked as tradition, family duty and morality.

Another key point explored in this study is the role of space and geography in shaping women's experiences. In *Ice-Candy Man*, the urban setting of Lahore becomes a region of chaos and betrayal during Partition, where neighbours turn into enemies, and no place remains truly safe for women. In *The Pakistani Bride*, the remote mountains initially appear untouched by colonial forces but soon reveal themselves as sites of rigid discipline and harsh masculinity. In both cases, women are displaced, both emotionally and physically, stripped of control over their environment and movements. Space, then, becomes a tool of entrapment – a silent collaborator in their oppression.

This comparative reading has allowed for a deeper understanding of how structural violence operates across different postcolonial settings. While Ayah suffers due to large-scale historical trauma and communal violence, Zaitoon is crushed under the weight of cultural expectations and an isolated patriarchy. Their stories, although they differ in circumstance, align in consequence: both are denied autonomy, both are betrayed by systems meant to protect them, and both are rendered silent by forces beyond their control.

Bapsi Sidhwa's novels do not offer simple resolutions or heroic recoveries. Instead, they present the harsh and painful truth that many women in postcolonial societies continue to suffer invisibly, their pain folded into the larger narrative of national identity and cultural pride. Sidhwa's work is not only literary but also political – it demands that readers confront the uncomfortable reality that freedom for a nation does not guarantee freedom for all.

This paper has attempted to fill a comparative gap in existing scholarship by examining these two novels side by side, using a postcolonial lens that centres violence and female suppression as core concerns. While much has been written about Partition violence or patriarchal control in alienation, fewer studies have addressed how both *The Ice-Candy Man* and *The Pakistani Bride* reveal the continuity of gendered suffering across different stages and regions of postcolonial development. In conclusion, Sidhwa's narratives are not just stories of individuals but also reflections of broader historical, social, and political failures. They remind us that the lingering pain of colonialism does not vanish with independence; instead, it often transforms and finds new victims. Her fiction urges us that through Ayah and Zaitoon, Sidhwa offers a haunting portrayal of how women continue to bear the burden of national trauma and cultural rigidity, their pain too often excused, ignored, or silenced.

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