



## POWER DYNAMICS SHAPE THE IDENTITY OF A MINORITY (A STUDY OF PARSI MINORITY IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S ICE CANDY MAN)

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### Abstract

It has been the dilemma of the minority that it has never been allowed to form its own identity. Its identity has always been defined by the dominant class. Parsi community is the endangered minority in the world. It is dispersed throughout the world without a homeland of its own. Parsis have always adopted the rules and customs of the majority of that country in which they settle. Bapsi Sidwaha has written Ice candy man in the context of partition of united India in 1947. Being as Parsi herself she has also discussed through characters how Parsi community decides to follow rules and customs of that majority who will rule Pakistan. To support my argument from theoretical perspective I will be referring to P.D.Nimsarkar's essay "Dimensionality of History and Politics in Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man". Nimsarkar's has comprehensively elaborated the plight and miseries of Parsi community at the time of independence of Pakistan and India. He highlights the fears and confusion which a minority encounters when its' fate lies in the hands of dominant ones. This research paper aims to elaborate that the identity of the Parsi minority is shaped by the majority with reference to Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice candy man.

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### Keywords

Minority, Parsi community, Partition of united India, Pakistan, Fears, Miseries.

### 1. Introduction

Parsi minority has always adjusted itself according to the ruling class. This adjustment has never been an easy thing for the Parsi community. They had to compromise on their culture, values and tradition every time when they followed the majority or the ruling class. It is indeed a tragic fact that they had to go through this whenever they settled in a new country or stopped following the previous rulers and became loyal subjects to the new rulers. Parsis left their homeland Iran because they wanted to avoid confrontation with Muslims. They migrated

to India and assimilated themselves into Hindu majority by adopting its rules and culture. When the British came to power the Parsi minority discreetly came close to new ruling class. It can be observed that in this whole time period they kept redefining their identity according to the new dominant group which was agonizing for them.

In *Ice Candy Man* Bapsi Sidhwa has revealed the agony of her community in a very refined manner. She has boldly expressed the torment of identity crisis which has been haunting Parsi community for centuries. Parsis have always tried to maintain good relation with the ruling majority since they do not

have their own homeland. They have been loyal to their rulers but in *Ice Candy Man*, their bewilderment is at its peak because they are not clear who is going to be their new masters. P.D. Nimsarkar believes that the practice of shifting the loyalties and compromised identity made situation

### 1.2 Research Questions

Considering the topic of this research work following are the research questions which this study will address

1- What shapes the decisions which Parsi minority makes?

2- What has been the status of Parsi minority during the partition of 1947?

History and Politics in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*". Qualitative methodology is relevant to this research paper since it aims to study the dilemmas of a minority which does not even have its own motherland. The resources which have been used to extract the relevant material are library and internet.

### 3. Discussion

Minorities are neglected in the important events of the countries they reside in. The plight of a minority partition of India? How will they survive? Colonel Bharucha at that moment talks about the historical aspect of Parsi minority that it has always adhered to the majority. He says to his people present at that meeting "As long as we do not interfere we have nothing to fear! As long as we respect the customs of our rulers as we always have we'll be alright!" (Sidhwah, 2012). Colonel Bharucha is describing the reason of survival of Parsis in India which is that Parsi minority has always adjusted itself according to the wish of the rulers. Despite the fact they have been shifting their allegiance according to the rulers they have not been able to earn trust and a status of their own.

This adjustment has never proved beneficial on the permanent basis. Nimsarkar in his essay "Dimensionality of History and Politics in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*" writes "At the time of division of the country their indifferences became a reason for apprehension and insecurity which resulted from "alienation brought about by the rejection of the colonizer and distrust of the nationalist" (Nimsarkar, 2008). Nimsarkar is elaborating the agony of the Parsi minority that it

more complicated. Parsis are helpless to form their own identity and they draw their identity by remaining faithful to the ruler whoever may it be but at the end of the day, their identity and future remains imprecise.

3- What are the fears and reservations of Parsi minority?

### 2. Research Method

It is a qualitative research work and the primary text for this research paper is Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*. For the theoretical perspective I will utilize P.D. Nimsarkar's ideas in "Dimensionality of

becomes more eminent when it has no say in the matters relating to it. Nations go through many diverse phases but only majority plays an active role. Minority remains dependent on majority since it determines the course of events.

The same situation has been depicted in *Ice Candy Man* when in the meeting at temple Parsi community appears very confused about its future. Parsis are bewildered that what will become of them after the always has to compromise for its survival but this practice never brings any stability in their status. They have been on good terms with British because they were in power but it has made Parsis deplorable in the eyes of native Indian population. Parsis have no option but to keep adjusting their identity according to the ones who rule.

In the novel Parsis depict their fears about the new identity. As the time of partition draws near Parsis become more and more uncertain that what will become of them? .In the meeting one of the Parsis presents the collective fear about how they will be treated by the new rulers, "If we are struck with the Hindus they'll swipe our business, Muslims will convert us to Islam by sword, and GOD help us if we struck with the Sikhs" (Sidhwah, 2012). Parsis have made progress under British because British preferred loyalty to the government, religion was secondary to them. Now British are leaving and the majority status will be enjoyed by Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. They are in majority and they have the supremacy to tell a minority like Parsis that what is going to be their status. At this juncture of the history for Parsis the obstacle is greater than ever.

They have to choose among three majorities Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. The new identity of Parsis will be shaped on the basis of religion while three majorities have a very strong religious perception and it may put the existence of a minority like Parsis in jeopardy.

They are not in the position to fight for themselves and for their identity but to accept submissively whatever status will be given to them by the majority. Tragedy with the Parsis minority is that they have always been told about their position and identity by the majority. Besides being a very submissive minority, Parsis have always been unclear about their present and future. Nimsarkar writes "Sidhwah has not only rewritten the history Parsi community has always taken sides with the rulers because it knows that ruling class decides the identity of minority. Although this practice had caused the damage to their identity. By damage I mean no permanent identity of their own, a compromised identity, so they can stay out of trouble. In the novel Parsis face a very critical choice with whom they should stand on this great verge of change?. In the novel they make their decision in the context of their past practice, "Which of your neighbors are you not going to betray?" asks a practical soul. That depends upon who's winning, doesn't it? Says Mr Bankwalla" (Sidhwah, 2012). Bapsi Sidwah is estimating the identity of her community through the characters.

Through Colonel Bharucha, Lenny and Mr. Bankwalla she is describing how a minority does not have the opportunity to make its choices as it prefers. Parsis do not enjoy open freedom to choose. Choice is being given to them which means they have got a limited freedom because they don't belong to the dominant class.

Majority has the power and this power provides the authority by which dominant class shapes the identity of the minority. Though Parsi minority has always supported the powerful ruling class but it has never asked for its share. The episode of sugar in the milk clearly indicates that Parsis will merge themselves with the majority. It does not indicate that they will become a part of the majority and demand their share of power one day. In the meeting it is being discussed that important political figures of Congress are enjoying high facilities in jail and if a Parsi gets booked for any charge, he will never be facilitated in jail. So Parsi community must protest against this discrimination. At this

of the marginalized community expressed the dilemma and predicament of the people and society who have settled down in the country, adopted the social cultural practices but still are uncertain in their attitude and commitment" (Nimsarkar, 2008). In this novel Bapsi Sidhwa is illustrating the plight of her community that it has always tried to cope up with the demands of the rulers but even then it has never enjoyed a certain identity of its own. Her community has always been the victim of confusion and insecurity because it is solely dependent on the good will of the majority. When the majority undergoes a change then the minority has to experience it as well. It does not matter whether minority wants it or not.

point Colonel Bharucha again speaks out the bitter reality which Parsi minority must accept. He says "Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power: and if you jokers jump into the middle you'll be mangled into chutney" (Sidhwah, 2012). In the history Parsis have enjoyed the important posts, e.g. Jamshed Nusserwanjee Mehta has been the Mayor of Karachi. It can be assumed that the power which Parsis enjoyed, it was given by the majority. It does not matter if it was given by Hindu Rajas, Muslim Emperors or British rulers. If a Parsi had an identity of the mayor of a city, it was because majority elected him.

On this great verge of change Colonel Bharucha is trying to bring his community to senses that Parsi minority has never claimed for power in past and it should still avoid it, especially at that moment of history. Bapsi Sidhwa is portraying the neutral stance of Parsi minority throughout the history. She has not romanticized the depiction of her community. In fact she has provided us the deep insight into the thinking pattern of Parsi minority. Colonel Bharcha's notions are not wrong regarding no share of Parsi minority in power because after partition the discriminatory legislation was done in Pakistan. It is compulsory that a Pakistani President and Prime Minister have to be Muslims. Minorities have been marginalized by the constitution of Pakistan. Objective resolution in 1949 was the first step towards this marginalization and president Zia-Ul-Haq did the most damage. Religious minorities in Pakistan had to suffer from his vigorous imposition of religion.

The identity of those Parsis who decide to stay in Lahore undergoes change after the partition. Previously they have been the British Subject but now they have become Pakistani citizens. This is an

evident example that how identity of a minority gets changed and takes a new shape according to the majority. In the novel this sudden change in the identity has been expressed by Lenny, “I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that” (Sidhwa, 2012). This is a very realistic and sarcastic depiction that how much a minority is dependent on the majority for its identity. It is going to be decided by the new majority that how much space they have to practice their religious, social and cultural rituals. Lenny has represented the misery of her community that they are not asked but told that from now on you are going to have a new identity.

In the British government they survived according to the will and wish of the British supremacy but now they have to adjust with this paradigm shift. Nimsarkar discusses this angle from a very objective and realistic perspective; he says “They have always forced their allegiances with the country and the people with whom they stay. It is the tragedy of the community which has sickened their mind and consciousness which has been lucidly expressed through the girl narrator, Lenny” (Nimsarkar, 2008). He has elaborated the historical fact and tragedy of Parsi minority that although Parsis have always acquired their identity which is never contrary to the expectation of the minority but this whole process is not pleasant.

It obviously damages their pride and status. Bapsi Sidhwa has been very objective in presenting her community. She is the only Parsi writer who has written on the partition of 1947. She has indirectly presented this agony of her community that activity. The silence of Lenny about her community is actually the silence of her community. It is the new identity of Parsi community in the new state under the new rulers. They have to keep themselves as much low profile as they can to survive. Their new masters don't want them to be as prominent in general walk of life as they used to be under the previous rulers.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion it might be proposed that Parsi community actively constructs its identity according to the majority. As the novel draws to an end we observe that Parsi community disappears from the general scene because this is the demand of their new identity. They can live in Pakistani as its citizens but they have to keep their matters to themselves strictly. Other minorities like the Hindu,

although acquiring of new identity is the key to survive but yet it hurts.

In the novel after the partition the general commentary on the Parsi community gets vanished. Child narrator Lenny, who narrates happenings around her very vividly, gets silent about the activities of Parsi community after becoming a Pakistani citizen. It should not have been the case because the founder of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah had a vision of Pakistan as a state where minorities would have complete freedom to exercise their custom and rituals. In the inaugural speech of the first constitutional assembly he said “You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the state” (Khan, 2001).

Contrary to Jinnah's speech and vision the state of Pakistan turned out to be oppressive in case of minorities. One of main reason for it was the state religion of Pakistan. Muslims have a very active religious profile and it affected the minorities in Pakistan. The people belonging to religion other than Islam have to face bitter discrimination and segregation. So in the novel the sudden disappearance of minority community is noteworthy because before partition she mentions the Parsi dinner at YMCA, the meeting at the temple and social life of Parsi community. After partition she does not mention any such

the Sikh and the Christian celebrate their cultural and religious rituals in Pakistan. We never come to have any glimpse of Parsi community celebrating its Jashan e Noroaz or other cultural and religious rituals. They are living in a state where religious extremism has gained a very critical form. Parsi community is surviving with the identity which was given to it after the partition and the later part of Ice candy man depicts it very accurately.

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