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LOOKING THROUGH THE PARSIS GLASSES: PERSONAL AND NATIONAL QUANDARY IN  
ROHINTON MISTRY'S *SUCH A LONG JOURNEY* AND BAPSI SIDHWA'S  
*ICE CANDY MAN*

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the premise that Parsis notwithstanding a microscopic ethnic community in the Indian subcontinent, contribute considerably to the writings in English, offering a fresh perspective on their identity amidst a multitude of social and political surge. Their works act as a reference point explaining how they observe the society around them and their own position with respect to the variegated cultural environment of the Indian subcontinent. This paper focuses on *Such a Long Journey* by Rohinton Mistry and *Ice Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa as they are fine examples of Parsi literature. The idea is to perform a comparison between these works with respect to the Parsis' personal and national quandary as delineated in these texts.

**Keywords:** Social and Political, Parsi Literature, Personal and National Quandary.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, Parsi, often spelled Parsee, is a member of a group of Iranian prophet Zoroaster's followers in India (or Zarathustra). The Parsis, whose name means "Persians," are descendants of Persian Zoroastrians who fled to India to escape religious persecution. They predominantly live in Mumbai and a few towns and villages to the north of the city, but they also live in Karachi (Pakistan) and Bengaluru (Karnataka, India). Although they are not technically a caste as they are not Hindus, they do form a distinct group.

The arrival of Parsis in the Indian Peninsular Region brought about the most important question of the time-how a foreign community, significantly small in number would assimilate itself into the dominant social milieu without losing the essence of its identity. It must have been imperative for this microscopic community to persevere in order to preserve and formalize a 'common community identity in India in the midst of historical change' (Palsetia, 2017: 227).

With the advent of European colonization on the Indian subcontinent, their ability to adapt through language made them one of the first communities in India to learn European languages. They were far more advanced in adopting the Westernization and English schooling processes than other sections of Indian society. They were exposed to a wide range of intellectual trends in India and other countries; their ability to adapt to

frequent cultural shifts and their perceptive response to the current environment resulted in a compelling body of work in literature by Parsi writers.

Most of Parsi fiction locates itself in the socio-cultural plane of the Parsi community. It is focused mostly on the structure of Parsi identity, eulogising its essence, illuminating the rituals associated with it, bringing forth the peculiarities, and baring its constant struggle for establishment. As seen in various Parsi fictions, the focus is on the day-to-day dealings of diverse Parsi life in the face of constant social and political transmutations.

This paper is based on the premise that, although being a small ethnic minority on the Indian subcontinent, Parsis make major contributions to English-language literature, presenting a fresh perspective on their identity in the midst of many social and political upheavals. Their works reflect a viewpoint, how they observe society, and their own position with respect to the many cultural planes that make up the Indian subcontinent. This paper considers the novels *Such a Long Journey* by Rohinton Mistry and *Ice Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa, both of which are notable examples of Parsi literature. The objective is to compare them in terms of the Parsi condition and the national quandary as portrayed in these novels.

Mistry's novel *Such a Long Journey* is about the Parsi community in India. During the turbulent days of 1971 in India, when India and Pakistan went to war over the independence of East Pakistan or Bangladesh, Mistry tackles the protagonist, Gustad Noble's loss of innocence as he tries to define himself in relation to his family and country. The novel provides a thorough account of Gustad and his family's lives in their Bombay flat, which acts as a contrast to the outside world. It was nominated for the Booker Prize in 1991 and won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1992.

Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man* (republished in 1992 as *Cracking India*) is told in the words of Lenny, a precocious eight-year-old Parsi girl who reports the events as she observes. Taking advantage of her polio-afflicted leg, she spends the majority of her time with her young ayah Shanta, a Hindu girl from Amritsar. The child explores her relationship with her ayah and tries to understand the adult world by gauging the events happening around her. The story is set during the time when India was transforming from a British colony into two independent countries. Conflict of identity, loss of innocence, and communal frenzy are the major issues that this book brings forth. The book is full of distinctive and fascinating occurrences regarding the Partition and its effect on the Parsis.

Covering the personal and the national quandary, these texts continue to stir the perceptions about this compact community by outsiders as it offers a minority perspective of postcolonialism, democracy, secularism, multiculturalism, and national and international politics.

## 2. PREDICAMENT OF THE PERSON

Rohinton Mistry and Bapsi Sidhwa both have lived in India and experienced the day-to-day encounters of being a minority in a large multicultural society. Even though they both moved to different lands they both continued to write about their culture, their community- its constant struggles, transposition, and its historic and present-day plight.

### 2.1 Angst, Anxiety, and Apprehensions In *Such A Long Journey*

*Such a Long Journey* gives a peek into the Parsi way of life in India. It is Mistry's attempt to make readers aware of the Parsi religion and its intricacies through his characters and their stories. Gustad Noble, the protagonist is shown to be a man of religion, performing *kusti* prayers and reciting *Sarosh Baaj* at the crack of dawn every day, exuding a subtle pride in his religion. "When he had unwound all nine feet of its slim, sacred, hand-woven length, he cracked it, whip-like: once, twice, thrice. And this was Ahirman, the evil one, driven away-with that expert flip of the wrist, possessed only by those who performed their *kusti* regularly" (Mistry 4).

Mistry projects his characters as conservatives or liberals- a mix of people struggling to keep their place unaffected by the dominant groups. He brings forth an interesting angle to the difficult situation that Parsis face in India in the context of their choice of food. Stuck between the mercurial religious tolerance of each other by the two religious majorities in a nation that strives to keep the peace, Mistry craftily portrays the predicament

of a middle-class Parsi to avoid stigmatization about food preferences. "...worn basket lined with newspaper to soak up meat juices that could not start dripping in the bus, causing embarrassment or, worse still, angry protests from vegetarian passengers. Throughout the trip he felt anxious and guilty- felt that in his basket was something deadlier than a bomb. For was he not carrying the potential source of Hindu-Muslim riots? Riots which often started due to offences of the flesh, usually of porcine or bovine origins" (Mistry 21).

Another challenge that a microscopic religious community faces amidst religious diversity is to keep conversions at bay. According to Palsetia, the Parsis in India refuse to see themselves as a dying or affected community. The Parsis of India continue to celebrate their rich religious and social culture in India. The same is confirmed by the teachings of Gustad's parents in the novel. "The first time, Gustad was quite intrigued by the church and its rituals, so different from what went on in the fire-temple. But he was on his guard, conditioned as he had been from childhood to resist the call of other faiths... His parents had been painstaking on this point, conversion and apostasy being as rife as it was, and rooted in the very history of the land" (Mistry 24).

*Such a Long Journey* mostly comprises of Parsi characters, but by employing non-Parsi characters Mistry displays the commonplace that Parsis share with the others and covers their apprehensions about them. Gustad's wife Dilnavaz is shown particularly to be wary of people of other religions she has little knowledge about. "In the meantime she had to patronize the *bhaiya*, whose thin, short tails of hair growing from the centre of his otherwise perfectly shaven head never ceased to amuse her. She knew it was Hindu custom in some particular caste," (Mistry 3).

Mistry not only gives delicate details to the Parsi ways of life and death, their religious practices, their celebration of festivals, their cuisines, but also, as rampant in the Indian subcontinent, their gullibility to superstition. Characters like Mrs Kutpitia and Dilnavaz are craftily used by Mistry to show the despair of middle-class Parsi women resorting to superstition to make their troubles vanish. Neglecting the real cause of the problem, Dilnavaz is portrayed as a mother and a wife who wants peace and happiness in her home following the instructions of Mrs Kutpitia, even if that is to be achieved at the cost of sensibility. "She detailed the procedure, then returned the chillies and lime. 'From now on, learn to be more cautious. And teach your children also. Teach them to feat the night of the full moon; and with Kalichovdas approaching, keep them indoors after sunset. Tell them not to step on, or over, strange objects placed in the road. Beware of anything that looks like a little packet of flowers, or broken eggs or shattered coconuts. Those things come from black-magic *kaarestaan*, believe me" (Mistry 206).

Watching their children succeed, and leading a better life than they have is what the common man dreams of. In the novel, Mistry explores chaos inside a middle-class Parsi man, as well as outside his world. Gustad Noble is portrayed as someone who constantly strives to give his children a better future. "'Sohrab will make a name for himself, you see if he doesn't,' Gustad had said with a father's just pride. 'At last our sacrifices will prove worthwhile'" (Mistry 3). But when his son Sohrab refuses to join IIT, what Gustad fears the most is his son not achieving success because he belongs to a minority community and Mistry conveys it well. "What kind of life was Sohrab going to look forward to? No future for minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America-twice as good as the white man to get half as much" (Mistry 55).

Another apprehension that a minority community faces is in the wake of undesired changes brought about by the ruling political party. Mistry deftly shows the difficult situation faced by Parsis in Dinshawji expressing his anger and subtle protest about the changing of names of places. Here, the question of belongingness emerges and Mistry successfully puts it across. "I grew up on Lamington Road. But it has disappeared, in its place is Dadasaheb Bhadkhamkar Marg. My school was on Carnac Road. Now suddenly it's on Lokmanya Tilak Marg. I live at Sleater Road. Soon that will also disappear. My whole life I have come to work at Flora Fountain. And one fine day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names?... Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out, just like that?" (Mistry 74).

Wary of all the political parties, the Parsis in the novel are shown as skeptical and criticizing of them. They see every move by these parties as just a means to add to their vote bank and believe that they conspire to make them “second-class citizens” (Mistry 39). According to Business maps of India, the nationalization of banks was a significant move undertaken by the government for the development of the country. It not only established public confidence in the banking system encouraging the masses to save and invest but also eased the removal of regional bias and promoted the opening up of branches in the remote areas of the country as well, thus strengthening the banking network. By riding on monopoly or credit competition, nationalization streamlined banking practices in the country. Mistry brings forth another angle to the nationalization of banks from Parsi’s perspective. In *Such a Long Journey*, Gustad’s friend Dinshawji laments over this move of the government. “Parsis were the kings of banking in those days. Such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalised the banks” (Mistry 39).

Mistry’s fictional world is set in the lower middle-class Parsi community of metropolitan Bombay. It is a novel with epic ambitions: what begins as a story about the life of a good Bombay clerk, Gustad Noble, evolves into a story about a minority community’s fears, anxieties, and sense of powerlessness (Mani, 2004: 45). Mistry captures the predicament of a Parsi plebeian by projecting his protagonist, Gustad Noble as the one who feels cheated almost by everyone around. Cheated by luck for losing wealth when his father’s business went to bankruptcy; cheated by the government for not getting clean tap water, which made his daughter utterly sick; cheated by his son for opting Arts over IIT and cheated by his best friend Billy Moria to bring to him an unfortunate situation. Mistry succeeds in bringing out the difficult situations faced by Parsis at multiple levels.

## 2.2 Fear, Frustration, and Forlorn In *Ice Candy Man*

*Ice Candy Man* is rendered in the words of a child, an eight-year-old girl, Lenny. Without any adornment, it exposes the adult Parsi world outright. The observations Lenny makes and the perceptions she develops, Sidhwa utilizes them to present the complex of feelings that the Parsi community conjures out of the presentiment of being pushed to the margins of a multicultural society. In the novel, ahead of the partition, the Parsis put forth their fear for the future, to which Colonel Bharucha suggests the key to their survival notwithstanding the inevitable political turmoil in the Indian subcontinent. “...the Parsees have been careful to adopt a discreet and politically naïve profile. At the last community dinner, held on the roof of the YMCA building on the Mall, Col. Bharucha had cautioned... ‘We must tread carefully . . . We have served the English faithfully, and earned their trust . . . So, we have prospered! But we are the smallest minority in India . . . Only one hundred and twenty thousand in the whole world. We have to be extra wary, or we’ll be neither here nor there . . . We must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare!’” (Sidhwa 16).

Since their arrival in India, the Parsis have shown their desire to settle amicably among the natives. They are not bothered by discrimination such as religion or caste which run rampant in Indian society for ages. Sidhwa shows that the Parsis in the novel are proud of the submissive nature of their ancestors. “The refugees would get absorbed into his country like the sugar in the milk . . . And with their decency and industry sweeten the lives of his subjects. The Indian Prince thought: what a smart and civilised people! And he gave our ancestors permission to live in his kingdom!’ ‘Shabash! Well done!’ say the Parsees, regarding each other with admiration and congratulatory self-regard” (Sidhwa 39). This piece of history is brought about in the novel to indicate Parsis’ attitude to merge with the majority. Never have they shown the desire to be a part of the majority and claim their share of power (Mansoor, 2018). “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 all right!” (Sidhwa 39).

The sugar in the milk incident plainly suggests that Parsis will blend in with the majority. It does not imply that they will one day join the majority and demand their share of authority. However, in the novel, they are also shown as not having much confidence in the political leaders. They consider the intentions of these leaders to be just a gateway for power acquisition. It clearly shows that the Parsi motto is to stay clear of state politics and “out of trouble” (Sidhwa 37). “No doubt the men in jail are acquiring political glory . . . But this short cut to fame and fortune is not for us. It is no longer just a struggle for Home Rule. It is a struggle for power. Who’s

going to rule once we get Swaraj? Not you,' says the colonel... '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!' (Sidhwa 36).

The political figures, of Gandhi and Nehru, are caricatured. It achieves a dual purpose in the novel, on the surface it justifies the comical perceptions of a child but at a deeper level, it is done to reflect the Parsi psychology of being indifferent to the otherwise politically powerful people, and showing solidarity only with the one who rules. "He is small, dark, shrivelled, old. He looks just like Hari, our gardener, except he has a disgruntled, disgusted and irritable look, and no one'd dare pull off his dhoti! He wears only the loin-cloth and his black and thin torso is naked" (Sidhwa 86).

The end of British authority in India in 1947 brought significant upheavals to the Parsi community, jeopardizing its unity and kinship links. Throughout the nationalist fight, most Parsis maintained a mostly detached attitude, not only because they had a special relationship with the British administration but also because they were alienated from the philosophy of Indian nationalism, which included a resurgence of India's cultural legacy in general and Hinduism in particular. Because they lacked access to and affiliation with Indian history, Parsis were unable to identify with the process of forming a new Indian historical consciousness. As a result, Parsis had a sense of uneasiness, an identity crisis, and a strong need for self-definition as a result of India's independence (Vijayasree, 1996). "I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that" (Sidhwa 140).

Sidhwa illuminates this predicament of Parsis amidst the political turmoil. Colonel Bharucha's speech at the Fire temple shows the fear that this minority community has to face. "Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land!" (Sidhwa 39). Parsis in the novel are shown in a precarious situation. According to Mansoor, they are unable to fight for their own identity and are ready to give in to the status given to them by the majority. And this is their tragedy, uncertain about the present and unclear about the future.

Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* gives voice to marginalized groups in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality (Singh, 2016). She incorporates characters from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds to emphasize the multicultural composition of the pre-partition social fabric of the Indian subcontinent. During her visit to Imam Din's village, Lenny narrates how in pre-independence times, civility and a sense of camaraderie were intact between different religious communities (Sidhwa 56). But within months, the nature of society changes to a majorly homogeneous Muslim majority. The conservative Islamist groups pose fear in the minority communities to either migrate or convert. Parsis do not fall under the target of these radicals as they are already an insignificant number and have made their stance clear about their submission to the dominant power authority. "Godmother, Slavesister, Electric-aunt and my nuclear family are reduced to irrelevant nomenclatures – we are Parsee" (Sidhwa 94).

*Ice Candy Man* is a reconstruction of the history of partition. It bares the conversion of innocence into brutality in the name of identity conflict. Many people give in to the fear of identity annihilation and turn to violence to salvage their integrity. Sometimes it is just hatred seeded deep by the colonial policies of divide and rule that leads to the rampage in the otherwise peaceful streets of the pre-partition Indian subcontinent. The predicament of Parsi community is to be the bystander to this entire bloody transition. Although they are not affected directly like Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs of the time but their stance of not being loyal to one yet connected to all, is their quandary. Lenny's mother and her sister try to help their non-Muslim friends flee the unfortunate situation by providing them the petrol, the Godmother pulls her political connections to free Ayah from the clutches of Ice Candy Man who marries her forcibly, they, as a community, are shown tolerant of all the religions and castes.

Portrayed as a frail community that bears witness to all of the crimes committed in the name of nationalism, during times of transition, the Parsi community exhibits its own perspectives, attitude, and crisis, in addition to the witnessing process. The novel depicts the minority community's feelings about the partition. The Parsis are torn between their past and their future (Tripathy, 2018). Their main concern is to survive and strive in tumultuous times and succeed in their endeavours to secure their community.

### 3. PLIGHT OF THE NOVICE NATIONS

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* and Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* cover the political turmoil that affected the newly formed nations. When *Ice Candy Man* details the horrors of the partition of India and Pakistan, *Such a Long Journey* portrays the effect of political instability in the newly developed East and West Pakistan, in India. Both novels illustrate the bloody and violent process of the birth of new nations. Both these books attempt to bring focus to a number of political and national issues affecting the masses. Outright corruption prevailing in the government, economic disparity, the single-minded vote-focussed attitude of the political parties, and authorities' indifference towards the common man's sufferings are some of the issues rampant in the nations of these novels. What makes these renderings unique is that they are shown from the perspective of a Parsi.

#### 3.1 Corruption, Conspiracy, and Conflicts in *Such A Long Journey*

*Such a Long Journey* rearranges many of the true events that occurred during Indira Gandhi's time as India's Prime Minister. The tale is set in 1971, the time during the India-Pakistan war. The protagonist, Gustad Noble is a Parsi bank clerk and a family man, a sensitive individual whose world has been polluted by the 1962 Indo-China conflict. Mistry contrasts the values of family and tradition- the micro-level, with the corruption of the political powers- the macro level.

The city, Bombay of the novel is shown as a progressive city with its multi-storey buildings, bank offices, rustling markets, and intra-city buses. But at the same time, Mistry makes no attempt to hide the economic disparity of its people. It accounts for another national quandary that this economic disparity is ever-progressive. Gustad cringes at the thought of being thrown out of his own home by "people in slum shacks and *jhopadpattis* in and around Bombay" who, he thinks in need of better housing, want to replace the ones living in better buildings with their own families (Mistry 4).

Adding the element of humour to this uneven distribution of wealth, Mistry utilizes the elderly character of Cavasji, Gustad's neighbour in the Khodabad building. Although Cavasji comically blames the universe for this disparity, the satire in presenting the stark reality of two extremes in terms of wealth acquisition in a developing nation stands out. "To the Tatas You give so much! And nothing for me? To the Wadias You give, You keep on giving! You cannot hear my prayers? The pockets of the Camas only you fill! We others don't need it, You think?" (Mistry 87).

The citizens elect the government, putting their trust and hope in the hands of their leaders for a better future instead they feel deceived when their leaders turn out to be corrupt. It becomes an unfortunate situation for the citizens when the government itself is doubted. The novel *Such a Long Journey* covers such a case of helplessness of a middle-class Parsi whose struggles make it hard for him to cover his quotidian expenses. "Like the others, the Nobles were endlessly awaiting a milk ration card from the government office" (Mistry 3).

The events surrounding Gustad's friend, Jimmy Billimoria's life and death are unmistakably Mistry's fictionalized version of the infamous Nagarwala case. Billimoria, a RAW agent, is shown to have fallen prey to the scheming of Indira Gandhi of money embezzlement. Mistry utilizes this episode to connect the personal and the political, with the political elite's abuse of power and corruption intruding menacingly into the daily lives of regular residents (Mani, 2004: 52).

Emerging from the shadows of colonial rule, the nations sometimes have to take strict measures in the name of development. Widening of the road for instance has been described by Gustad not as a way to make transport comfortable but as a probable cause of misery for the ground floor residents of the Khodabad building. "What was the need to widen the road? ...The compound would shrink to less than half its present width, and the black stone wall would loom like a mountain before the ground-floor tenants. More like a prison camp than a building, all cooped up like sheep or chicken. With the road noise and nuisance so much closer. The flies, the mosquitoes, the horrible stink, with bloody shameless people pissing, squatting alongside the wall. Late at night it became like a wholesale public latrine" (Mistry 16).

Amid the concussions of war and political unrest, the life of a common man struggles to go on. Mistry hints at the difficulty for the common citizen to collect his life and its banalities in the wake of violence and bloodshed. Gustad eagerly awaits the news of his son's selection in IIT. It becomes his morning ritual to shuffle the pages and look for a confirmation of a better life that he would live precariously through his son if he made it to India's premier institute. Here, Mistry makes no attempt to hide the display of an amalgamation of personal aspirations and painful awareness about the brutal realities. "He ignored the grim headlines about Pakistan, barely glanced at the half-naked mother weeping with a dead child in her arms. The photo caption, which he did not stop to read because the picture looked the same as the others that had appeared regularly in the past few weeks" (Mistry 7).

Satirizing the gullibility of people with the hope of having a strong nation, the novel describes the plight of people torn by the traumas of war. Mistry, in the reminiscence of Gustad Noble, shows the time during the Indo-China war when the citizens beguiled by the "fund-raising politicians" gave away their riches, their personal belongings, even the clothes on their backs, in the name of their love for their country and brave soldiers. But because of the corruption rooted so deep in the system, they felt cheated by the so-called politicians when their donations allegedly showed up in Chor Bazaar and Nul Bazaar (Mistry 10).

The general awareness about the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is craftily fictionalised by Mistry while telling about the war and its effects. The Parsi protagonist remembers how "the war with China froze Jawaharlal Nehru's heart, then broke it." Giving away the internal turmoil of the ruling political party, Gustad recalled how PM Nehru's son-in-law Feroze Gandhi antagonised him after exposing scandals in the government which led him to his "overwhelming obsession" to have his daughter Indira Gandhi become the next prime minister (Mistry 10).

The doubt on the political strength of the nation by the common citizen is reflected by Gustad's keeping of the blackout paper even after the war was over. He somewhere feared that the need may arise again. "The room was dark like the others in the flat, with blackout paper taped over the glass panes of the windows and ventilators. Gustad had put it up nine years ago, the year of the war with China... And riots in the city – curfews and lathi charges and burning buses everywhere. What a dreadful years 1962 had been" (Mistry 9).

And as it turns out in the wake of Pakistan's attack after three years, the blackout was declared again. "Then Gustad triumphantly pointed out" the wisdom of his decision (Mistry 12). War of 1971 proved that the apprehension of a common citizen about the uncertain political future of his country is real and haunting. "(Gustad) read silently, about Bengali refugees streaming over the border with tales of terror and bestiality, of torture and killings and mutilations; of women in ditches with their breasts sliced off, babies impaled on bayonets, charred bodies everywhere, whole villages razed" (Mistry 12).

The freshly formed nation Bangladesh too had its share of misfortunes involving its conception. Mistry employs newspaper headlines like "Reign of terror in East Pakistan" and news articles as a vessel to carry out the task of reinstating the horrors that people had to undergo in the forming of a new nation (Mistry 12).

Indira Gandhi's decision to intervene in the internal politics of East Pakistan with the aim to expand India's political influence has a direct effect on India's middle class. With the strain on their pockets in the name of refugee-tax, Mistry reiterates the complaints of mid-income groups in the novel. "Then the price of Odomos went up, along with the price of every necessity and luxury, from matchsticks to sanitary napkins. 'This refugee relief tax,' he (Gustad) said, 'is going to make all of refugees'" (Mistry 83).

Another national quandary that Mistry points out is the inefficient judiciary system in India. The President of India, the Chief Justice of India, and many cabinet members have all made public statements in recent days concerning the judicial crisis and how it is affecting the rule of law. As a result, the concern isn't the problem. Capacity, power, and time are (Narasappa, 2016). With much lesser courts and judges than the legal complaints, Mistry satirizes the way the judiciary system works in India. By highlighting the relief of Gustad Noble about the procrastination of widening the road as all the tenants along with the landlord have signed the petition against

it, he skilfully brings forth the follies in the working of the complete system. "Way the courts work, we will all be old and dead. By the time there is a verdict. Thank God" (Mistry 216).

Mistry employs the voice of a third-person omniscient narrator to show that the 'chaos' within the government of a country has a different effect on different people. Dr Paymaster had to forgo his subscription of foreign medical journals which, as skilfully shown by Mistry, are related to unsuitable foreign exchange regulations. This in turn, has an effect on his prescribing to same old medicines for his patients which ultimately leads to abandoning his doctorly advice by his patients and initiating self-prescription. "once again the government was in chaos. Streamlining foreign exchange regulations ranked very low on the country's list of priorities, and Dr. Paymaster's subscriptions remained unrenewed. Thus, when it came to diarrhoea, the same two names, Entero-Vioform and Sulpha-Guanidine, kept appearing on his prescriptions" (Mistry 114).

Mistry uses the psyche, the perspective of various middle-class people to convey the turmoil in a country and its effect on people. Dinshawji working in a bank sees the banking sector losing its "Honour system", lamenting that "Age of honour and trust is gone forever now" (Mistry 145). Dr Paymaster, the physician, analogizes the refugee problem during the war of 1971 and the problem of East Pakistan with a patient needing treatment. Mistry blends history with fiction using this technique of character analogy. "East Pakistan is suffering from a diarrhoea of death... East Pakistan has been attacked by a strong virus from West Pakistan, too powerful for the Eastern immune system...intravenous injection of Indian Army will defeat the virus" (Mistry 165).

Mistry makes no attempt to hide the embarrassment of both the nation and its citizens because of the political failure of the government. In the novel, India faces multiple wars; the citizens learn to live in anticipation of any political unrest, yet the government and other political parties stay blissfully ignorant of the affliction caused by their actions on the common public. "He reminded her how she had kept nagging about it nine years ago, after the China war, nagging on and on. But in '65, when there was war with Pakistan, was it not convenient to have the paper already in place? 'Same thing again. history repeats itself'" (Mistry 292).

Sensitivity towards religious tolerance in Indian citizens is another issue that has been highlighted in the novel at various occasions. Parsis of Khodabad building praying thankfully behind the tall black stone wall away from the prying eyes of non-Parsis (Mistry 82); Catholic Malcolm criticising the eating habits of vegetarian groups (Mistry 23); Gustad avoiding his visits to Crawford market to stay clear of any possible rioting over food habits of majority religious groups (Mistry 220); and his brilliant idea of turning the compound wall of his building from open urinating spot to a beautiful art piece by encouraging an artist to paint religious figures on the wall (Mistry 286).

Mistry tries to bring together the fact that despite the beauty in India's religious diversity there lies an underlying reality of people being anxious and overwhelmed in the name of protecting their religion and its practices in the multitude of other religions around. The metaphor of the colourful wall in the novel, with all the religions of India displayed together in one place, revered by everyone, is the hint given by Mistry for a plausible and happy future for a country like India.

### 3.2 Nations under Creation in *Ice Candy Man*

The novel *Ice Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa, explores the turbulent times during the Partition of India. The internal strife, revisited in the novel by Sidhwa that preceded the birthing of new nations involves fanatic behaviour by religious extremists, led to the mass killings on both sides. Violence, destruction, mutilations, and displacements of millions of people over the decisions made by the political leaders mark the national quandary that is highlighted in this novel.

Presented in the words of a precocious eight-year-old girl, *Ice candy Man* describes the national issues concerning the common man adorned with curiosity, sometimes innocence, and sometimes indifference of a Parsi child. "There is much disturbing talk. India is going to be broken. Can one break a country?" (Sidhwa 92).



Lenny roams around the streets and parks of Lahore along with her Ayah. Taking advantage of her polio-afflicted leg and the sympathies she grabs out of it, she snoops into the lives of adults around her. Things she hears, behaviours she observes from her own experiences of the adult world, and as precocious she is, she renders the details, however ugly or brute, plain and frank. Being a Parsi herself, Lenny takes cognizance of other various religions around her. Sher Singh, the zookeeper is a Sikh; Muccho and her daughter Papoo are Hindus of low caste; Imam Din, the cook, and Yosaf are Muslims and Ice candy man is a multifaceted Muslim who lusts after her Hindu Ayah. "Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Iqbal, Tara Singh, Mountbatten are names I hear. And I become aware of religious differences. It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols" (Sidhwa 93).

The story depicts a significantly dissimilar social grouping, comprised of persons representing several religions who, at the start of the narrative, lacked any stern religious identification and were friendly with one another. Sidhwa presents the irony here that if this diverse mix of people is crucial in the formation of Lenny's personality; it is this diverse group of people that is responsible for the partition and formation of two separate nations (Tripathy, 2018).

Before the air of partition, Sidhwa presents the society to be just a heterogeneous group of people living together, presumably peacefully. Sidhwa postulates how the imprudent actions of ruling authorities transmute such a society into a disheveled group of assailants and victims. The confession of Ice Candy Man makes it explicit the way how revenge consumes people and they are ready to turn against the very people they have spent their entire life with. "I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur . . . that night I went mad, I tell you! I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I'd known all my life! I hated their guts . . . I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women . . . The penises!" (Sidhwa156).

The unwilling uprooting of people based on their religious identities, the complete upheaval of their lives, and migration to unknown lands just because the safety of harmony and friendship turns into hatred and bloodthirst points to the haphazard functioning of ruling authorities as an utmost failure. "When our friends confess they want to kill us, we have to go" (Sidhwa 157), says the Government House gardener, showing the unwillingness but necessity to migrate in order to save his life.

Sidhwa recreates the changed scenario in Lahore after the partition. Once a place bustling with a multitude of people of different attire and identities, it starts becoming a place that is left desolate because the people in power decided its fate, keeping the public out of their minds. "Beadon Road, bereft of the colourful turbans, hairy bodies, yellow shorts, tight pyjamas, and glittering religious arsenal of the Sikhs, looks like any other populous street. Lahore is suddenly emptied of yet another hoary dimension: there are no Brahmins with caste-marks – or Hindus in dhoties with bodhis. Only hordes of Muslim refugees" (Sidhwa 175).

The indifference on the part of authorities is reiterated when Sidhwa brings up the tragedy of people leaving the land they know as their home and venturing out into the unknown future and known danger of the present day. "Within three months seven million Muslims and five million Hindus and Sikhs are uprooted in the largest and most terrible exchange of population known to history. The Punjab has been divided by the icy card-sharks dealing out the land village by village, city by city, wheeling and dealing and doling out favours" (Sidhwa 159).

Although Sidhwa uses the words of Lenny, she makes no attempt to make her personal stance unclear. Her Pakistani affiliation is explicit when she asserts that the partition favours India and majorly Hindus. But her dissent of the British and their irrational decisions is undoubted. "For now the tide is turned – and the Hindus are being favoured over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favour Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri; they grant him Kashmir. Spurning logic, defying rationale, ignoring the consequence of bequeathing a Muslim state to the Hindus: while Jinnah futilely protests: 'Statesmen cannot eat their words!' Statesmen do. They grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot, without which Muslim Kashmir cannot be secured" (Sidhwa 159).

The novel delineates the aftermath of violence accompanying the partition. Rampaged villages, trains carrying mutilated corpses, and burning cities, Sidhwa brings out these images to expose the effect of unwary decisions of the so-called torchbearers of independence on the common public who acts beastly in the name of safeguarding their religious identity. "Mozang Chawk burns for months . . . and months . . . Despite its brick and mortar construction: despite its steel girders ... the buildings could not have burned for months. Despite the residue of passion and regret, and loss of those who have in panic fled – the fire could not have burned for . . . Despite all the ruptured dreams, broken lives, buried gold, bricked-in rupees, secreted jewellery, lingering hopes . . . the fire could not have burned for months and months..." Sidhwa 139).

The obsession to have a state of the majority to avoid future conflicts is what makes people ignorant of the harmony and peace they have been living in till the partition is declared. Sidhwa fictionalises Jinnah's speech on the birth of Pakistan implicating his benign objective behind the partition. "Jinnah's voice, inaugurating the Constituent Assembly sessions on 11 August, says: 'You are free. You are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or any other place of worship in the State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed, that has nothing to do with the business of State . . . etc., etc., etc. Pakistan Zindabad!" (Sidhwa 144).

But the reality was far from this dream of his. It was a disappointment to the country that religious freedom was not given to the non-Muslims in the country. Ayah, a Hindu lady employed in a Parsi family was coercively changed over into Islam and taken to Hira Mandi where Ice-candy man weds her without her wanting to do so. Coercive changes become the arrangement of the day. Moti and Papoo, who have a place in the Hindu lower position, convert themselves to Christianity to shield themselves from the fury of Muslims. Hari, an orthodox Brahmin boy converted to Islam. Hari becomes Himat Ali. At the point when the enraged horde goes to Lenny's home to kidnap Ayah, it additionally enquires Hari. There ought to be reasonable, clear-cut, and fixed importance for terms like country, patriotism, and country-building measure. The Partition savagery was the outcome of the deficient comprehension of individuals. They were oblivious to their position and circumstances (Tripathi, 2018). "One man's religion is another man's poison" (Sidhwa 117).

According to Singh, the Partition had a wide-ranging impact on the subcontinent's life; it signaled the dissolution of love relationships and peaceful coexistence, as well as the inability of inter-community networks to withstand the slaughter. It had a significant impact on the relationships between various classes; to view Partition solely as a religious or communal issue is to ignore the power dynamics at work. And Sidhwa proves this too. "Playing British gods under the ceiling fans of the Falettis Hotel – behind Queen Victoria's garden skirt – the Radcliff Commission deals out Indian cities like a pack of cards. Lahore is dealt to Pakistan, Amritsar to India. Sialkot to Pakistan. Pathankot to India. I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that. A new nation is born. India has been divided after all" (Sidhwa 140).

*Ice Candy Man* is a novel that portrays the buoyant diversity before partition and grim uniformity in terms of social, cultural, and religious standings. It covers a number of issues conveying the plight of the Indian subcontinent and the newly formed Pakistan. With the partition, people becoming aware of their religious differences, the forcible uprooting of people, their fearful migration, the coercive conversions into the majority groups, the violence and killings in the name of revenge, the indifferent and adamant attitude of the authorities, the oppression of minorities especially women and the failure to restore normalcy and peace are some of the prominent issues that account to the national quandary in the novel.

The personal and national quandary as faced and observed by the Parsees as a micro-ethnic community has been detailed in *Such a Long Journey* and *Ice-candy Man*. Both these works attempt to present the history involving political transmutations that bring forth the national issues and the effect of such upheavals in the lives of a minority community. The issues pertaining to their small community are dealt with skillfully in both works.

An exploration of these texts reveals the personal and national issues raised in these works along with their historical and political context. Both of these books deal with the political turmoil that afflicted the newly established countries. When *Ice Candy Man* depicts the horrors of Partition, *Such a Long Journey* depicts the impact of political instability in the newly created East and West Pakistan. The formation of new nations is shown

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in both works as a brutal and terrible process. Both texts try to raise attention to the personal and national quandary in the context of the Parsi community.

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