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Two Tales of a City: Lahore in the Literary Narratives of Bapsi Sidhwa and Mumtaz Shahnawaz

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Abstract: This paper analyzes two novels of Pakistani female authors i.e. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988) and Mumtaz Shahnawaz's *The Heart Divided* (1957). Both the authors present Lahore as a metropolitan that was the center of all the political happenings; a city space that provided women the opportunity to participate in the public sphere. The central theme of the selected novels is the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent. Sidhwa and Shahnawaz reconstruct the experience of Partition in their works. Both novels are set in the city of Lahore in which authors are engaged with the recent political and social history of the Subcontinent. Both authors chronicle Partition through their female narratives. Their fictional characters document the role of women in the Partition movement. Sidhwa's novel provides the inclusive view of the diverse feminine role of women during Partition.

Key Words: Lahore, Partition, Mumtaz Shahnawaz, Bapsi Sidhwa, Partition Literature

Introduction

Lahore is an ancient city of the Subcontinent that served as home to many literary authors who have used it as their fictional setting. Both the selected texts *Ice-Candy Man* and *The Heart Divided* are set in Lahore and present the changing sociopolitical dynamics of the city during the time of the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent. Lahore is textualized as a metropolitan that provided the opportunity to women belonging to different religions to participate in public sphere. In Shahnawaz's and Sidhwa's novels Lahore is not only significant socially and historically but it is a place where new societal, and cultural modes are taking new

shapes. In both the selected literary texts Lahore serves as "synecdoche for Pakistan" (Chakraborty and Al-wazedi, 2017). This city of Punjab was amongst the cities that were "most affected by the violence and population exchange" (Chambers, 2016). Both Sidhwa and Shahnawaz chronicle the lived realities of the troubled times of Partition in their fictional works. During this distressed time, "Politically, the country was divided; socially, communal relationships were disturbed; domestically, families underwent traumas; psychologically, individuals were torn apart, and lost their identity" (Gundur, 2008). The changing socio-political reality of the country also impacted the social roles of different genders;

especially women who got a chance to participate in politics. Shahnawaz and Sidhwa demonstrate this changing reality in their texts and show how Partition was “making available hitherto-unknown modes of being-in-the-world” (Khanna, 2013) for women of Indian Subcontinent. The social space for women belonging to different religious groups changed during this time as they claimed more and more part in the political activities. Both the selected fictional works present gynocentric view of the history of Partition, in which the women play the central roles politically as well as socially. In the struggle for a free country women participated actively alongside men.

Mumtaz Shahnawaz was born in a politically significant family in Lahore in 1912. Her mother Lady Jahanara Shahnawaz was a prominent Muslim League activist so Mumtaz famously called ‘Tazi’ was acquainted with the politics of the time right from the beginning and this knowledge is depicted in her fictional work. Her novel provides “an authentic account of events which forged the Pakistan Movement” (Shamsie, 2017). Mumtaz Shahnawaz’s novel “provides tantalizing glimpses into the role played by elite Muslim women in the popularization of the Pakistan demand in the key Punjab region” (Winks, 2007). The novel does not portray women as victims of patriarchal structure. Shahnawaz portrays strong women who have agency and detest the societal norms. Shahnawaz creates characters belonging to different religions who confront the patriarchal societal norms and achieve autonomy. Her Hindu as well as Muslim female characters participate in the Independence movement. These women challenge the societal as well as the familial norms of the conservative Subcontinent society. Shahnawaz’s politically active and educated female characters stand side by side with the men.

The Heart Divided was published in 1959. The text is set in the Colonial India during

1930s and 1940s, when the people of Subcontinent were struggling against the British colonial rule. The struggle started as a joint effort of Hindus and Muslims, however, with passage of time the Muslim leaders realized the only possible solution of the problem and true independence for the Muslims of the Indian Subcontinent was to get a free country where they could live their lives according to their religion. Mumtaz Shahnawaz fictionalizes the same disillusionment in her novel and legitimizes the need of Pakistan.

The novel is based on the personal experiences of the author and the protagonist Zohra can be closely paralleled to the life of her creator. Zohra, her central character, “is the socialist daughter of an eminent Lahore lawyer” (Shamsie, 1998), Shahnawaz belonged to a liberal Muslim family of the Subcontinent. Mumtaz Shahnawaz’s grandfather, Sir Mohammad Shafi, and her mother, Lady Jahanara Shahnawaz, were prominent leaders of Muslim League (Shamsie, 1998). Other than being member of a politically active family like Zohra, Mumtaz Shahnawaz has several other similarities with her protagonist. Like Zohra, “she also became a socialist, looked to the Congress for leadership, and corresponded with Nehru for many years” (Shamsie, 1998). Shahnawaz was a staunch proponent of socialism like her protagonist Zohra. Describing her interest in socialism Dr. Ahmed Shah Nawaz notes:

In the 1930’s, the main wave of political interest among young intellectuals was a belief in Socialism, for its ideological idealism and sense of equality, but also because in India it was militantly anti-imperialist and the struggle for independence was then at its height. Mumtaz, who had been influenced by socialist ideals prevalent at that time in British universities, took a whole hearted interest in this cause. In fact it consumed her so much both in her analysis and in her action, that she came to be known to almost everybody as a

firebrand “red”. (Preface to the New Edition, *The Heart Divided* ii)

Mumtaz Shahnawaz’s fictional narrative presents Lahore as a metropolitan that gives space to the women belonging to different religions to practice their agency. Partition of the Indian Subcontinent was a significant event not only historically and politically but also culturally and socially. Partition became a reason of the Indian women’s awakening and participation in the mainstream politics. Shahnawaz presents this changing socio-cultural environment through her text in which the Muslim girls Zohra and Sughra abandon purdah and take part in the mainstream politics. She creates the character of Surrayya, a modern Muslim woman who has already abandoned purdah. Surrayya, is idealized by Zohra, she “admired the way in which she walked, erect and self-possessed” (Shahnawaz, 1957). She was amongst those few young Muslim women who were out of purdah during early 1930s. The author explains right in the beginning that “Zohra longed to be like her, but dared not go against more conservative ideas of her own family” (Shahnawaz, 1957). Like her fictional protagonist, Shahnawaz also believed that the only way forward for the people of the Indian Subcontinent was to struggle alongside Hindus and get freedom from the British colonial rule, however, with passage of time, like Zohra, she got disillusioned with the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity.

Bapsi Sidhwa was born in Karachi in 1939 in a prominent Parsi family. Though she was born in Karachi but her family shifted to Lahore soon after her birth so at the time of Partition Sidhwa experienced the city’s catastrophic environment, which she has depicted in her novel *Ice-Candy Man*. In an interview with Feroza Jussawalla, Bapsi Sidhwa explains:

If I were brought up in Karachi which is again very much a part of Pakistan, my experience as a child would have been totally

different. I would have been brought up among the Parsis. I was brought up apart from my cousins and other relatives. My family was not a big joint family. In my home, my paternal grandmother was with us for a few years, but there was not much influence of the joint family caliber. I was largely brought up by the servants. (1995)

Sidhwa’s fictional narrative is also inspired by the actual events of her life. Her protagonist Lenny is a mouthpiece of the author. Lenny is a polio-stricken ten years old girl who narrates the whole story. Like her creator she also spends most of her time with her servants, especially the Hindu Aya, Shanta. Lenny does not go to school on advice of the doctor, as Sidhwa was never sent to school by her parents. Sidhwa’s text is “set in and around Lahore during Partition” (Gundur, 2008). The novel narrates the story of the harmonious society of Lahore in which people belonging to different religions live harmoniously, but this harmony is disturbed soon. The peace and unity of the society is disrupted with “the whirlwind of the Partition. The news of Hindus killing Muslims ignites the fire of revenge among the Lahore Muslims... In the communal riots the Muslims of Lahore start attacking the Sikhs and Hindus” (Gundur, 2008). While Shahnawaz’s novel displays the interest of women in the political activities, Sidhwa portrays the societal groups that are uninvolved in all the political happenings but are affected by it. The story of Ayah’s circle narrates the dilemmas and traumas of the common people, whose lives were altered with this political change.

Analysis

It is interesting to note that both Mumtaz Shahnawaz and Bapsi Sidhwa chronicle the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent in their novels and both the texts are set in the city of Lahore, but the perspective that Shahnawaz propagates is entirely different from Sidhwa’s. Shahnawaz’s novel propagates the

need for a separate country for Muslims and the author explains in detail how the Indian Muslims got disillusioned with the idea of a united India and parted their ways from the Hindus. Shahnawaz belonged to a political family and personally participated in the political activism that led to the formation of Pakistan so her novel is concerned with the political necessity of a free country for Muslims. Shahnawaz's novel "helps us to understand the ferment of political ideas which created Pakistan" (Rahman, 2005). On the other hand, Sidhwa's novel does not comment on the political side of the partition. Her novel makes the reader revisit the city of Lahore where people belonging to different religions lived harmoniously. Shahnawaz's text can be read as an actual political history of the Muslims of Indian Subcontinent, while Sidhwa displays social history in her novel in which people themselves are neither interested nor involved in the whole change. Rather she portrays the trigger down effects of the political change on the lives of common people. Shahnawaz narrates the political side that stops short of Partition, while Sidhwa narrates the social side of the same event; her texts start before independence and ends post-independence. She clearly demonstrates how this unplanned Partition impacted lives of common people.

In 1947, Freedom came to the Indian subcontinent but in a fractured form. India was divided into two countries—India and Pakistan, and the border between the two was drawn with blood as nearly half a million were slain in communal clashes. Twelve million people fled their homes and over a hundred thousand women were abducted, raped and mutilated. Tens of thousands of houses, shops and other establishments were set on fire. (Singh, 2005)

Shahnawaz's narrative does not elucidate the social impact of the political unsettlements, she only focuses on the propagation of the narrative that justifies the

need of a separate country for the Muslims of the Subcontinent, i.e. Pakistan. Tariq Rahman in his book *A History of Pakistani Literature in English 1947-1988* describes the novel as "the only major response to the events which created the two states of India and Pakistan in 1947" (2015). Rahman describes it as a political novel that emphasizes "the renunciation of the idea of Hindu-Muslim Unity and the acceptance of the idea of creating a separate state for the Muslims called Pakistan" (2015). Shahnawaz portrays the changing socio-political realities of Subcontinent through two families, i.e. Sheikhs and Kauls. The friendship between the two families symbolically represents the Hindu-Muslim unity. Both the families reside in the Pre-Partition Lahore.

In the days when Raja Ranjit Singh ruled the Punjab, there were two young nobles at this court, who were close friends. One was Sheikh Jamaluddin, a Muslim, whose family had migrated to Lahore from Multan, in the days of the Moghal Emperors: and the other was Diwan Kailash Nath Kaul, a Hindu Kashmiri Pandit. An ancestor of the Kauls had come down from Kashmir during the reign of the Emperor ShahJahan, and had taken up an appointment at the Moghul Court at Delhi. Later, he had been given an appointment at Lahore with a small jagir or estate near that town and the title of Diwan. (Shahnawaz, 1957)

The friendship between the two families continued for many generations till the time of Partition. The actual rift between the two families was caused because of the love affair of Mohini and Habib. Both are in love but realize that they would not be able to unite, this realization also symbolically indicates the realization of the Indian Muslims that they could not live in a united India and required a separate state where they could lead their lives according to their religion and culture. The novel "remains an honest representation of how people responded to the politics of India in the crucial years

between the formation of the Congress ministries in 1936 and the partition of India” (Rahman 2005).

Another significant strand of the novel concerns the acceptance of roles of women in the public sphere. Mumtaz Shahnawaz explains in detail how the independence movement gave the opportunity to the women of the Subcontinent to participate in the politics. This “intensely political book” (Shamsie, 2017) classically portrays the history from the perspective of women. Shahnawaz theorizes Pakistani nationhood and the role of women in the struggle. Shahnawaz’s own life and family seem to be the prime inspiration behind the text. The protagonist Zohra is modeled after the author’s own personality, so are Zohra’s family resembles Shahnawaz’s family. According to Muneeza Shamsie, Mumtaz Shahnawaz’s grandfather, Mian Sir Muhammad Shafi, a Cambridge graduate “decided amid great criticism that the women of his family should discard purdah because ‘he did not like attending and arranging mixed functions without his wife and daughters’” (1957). Shahnawaz narrates a family discussion in the text where Zohra’s brother Habib tries to convince his father that Zohra should be allowed to abandon purdah and participate in her college’ debate competition. He explains to his father that Muslim women now need to participate in the public sphere.

Times are changing... some Muslim ladies in other parts of India actually took part in the Civil Disobedience movement last year, and even from our own Province, a Muslim lady has gone to the Round Table Conference. I remember all the English papers praising her speeches last year. Our women must come out of purdah now for we shall never make any progress until they do. (Shahnawaz, 1957)

Habib realized like Shahnawaz’s grandfather that Muslim women needed to “give up purdah and take their place in the building of the nation” (Shamsie, 2017).

Shahnawaz’s own family was politically active, especially her mother. She was a member of Muslim League and participated in the Round Table Conference in London. Shahnawaz documents the political developments between 1930 to 1942 in the Indian Subcontinent. Her novel permeates “a strong feminist consciousness” (Shamsie, 1998). Shahnawaz uses fiction as a means to propagate “ideas of social reform, identity, and nationhood” (Shamsie, 1998). The text gives the whole account of the political struggle behind the emergence of Pakistan but does not mention the Partition or Partition riots.

Shahnawaz presents the point of view of view of a “privileged, nationalistic, young Muslim woman” (Shamsie, 1998), who belongs to the political elite family. The text has at times been criticized for “ignoring the bureaucratic realities of division and geographical boundary lines, and the human cost of Partition” (Shamsie, 1998). The text “comments on the undetermined quality of the future, and the inability to accurately predict the consequences of India’s encounter with modernity—the rise of nationalism, and the concept of nation-state—has parallels in the lives of Mumtaz’s protagonists as they discard the old and embrace the new, often in ways unexpected by family elders” (1998). Shahnawaz narrates the story of Partition saga along with the love story of Mohini and Habib; the new generation of Hindus and Muslims of the Subcontinent who are liberal and westernized. The text also presents the liberal face of the Subcontinent men; in a predominantly patriarchal society there are men like Habib, who allows his sisters to abandon purdah. Mohini’s brother gives her permission to marry a Muslim. Najma’s brother supports his sister to come out of an abusive marriage. Shahnawaz creates female characters that are strong and show agency. The text “debates Independence, Partition, and women’s empowerment” (Shamsie,

1998). Sughra and Zohra are politically vocal and aware of the current political situation. Sughra's fascination with the Muslim history informs the reader of the historical past of the Indian Muslims. Mohini is politically active and participates in politics but her untimely death marks an end to a hope of Hindu-Muslim unity. Shahnawaz describes the elections of 1936-7 and the political environment of Lahore during a time when women are allowed to vote. The text also describes the Lahore Resolution and participation of Muslim women in the moment. Mumtaz Shahnawaz puts forward an idealized version of the political narrative of Pakistan and Muslim League, disregarding the human cost and traumas of common people. After almost three decades of this publication, Bapsi Sidhwa published her novel *Ice-Candy Man*, which is set in Lahore and is concerned with the same theme but elaborates "the carnage which left deep scars on the political landscape of India and Pakistan" (Shamsie, 2017).

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy Man* is a realist narrative of the Partition of Indian Subcontinent. It is considered "her most complex, sophisticated, and important work" (Shamsie, 2017). Most of Sidhwa's novels "possess the perception, moral courage and unsentimental approach to reality needed to write good realist fiction" (Rahman 155). *Ice-Candy Man* is a "response to the traumatic events of the partition of India in 1947" (Rahman, 2005). Sidhwa portrays the social history through her text. Rather than focusing on the political side of history, her narrator Lenny conveys the "truth about lifethrough mentioning trivial and ludicrous personal details" (Rahman, 2005). The author portrays the normal lives of the individuals especially women belonging to different religions and how it changes later on. Her entire "oeuvre is permeated with a strong feminist consciousness which portrays how the lives of women are circumscribed by social attitudes and ancient rules, regardless

of class, country, and religion" (Shamsie, 2017). Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy Man* recreates scenes from the author's own childhood and the character of the narrator is modeled after her ownself. Sidhwa spent her childhood in the city of Lahore and experienced the Partition as a child. She narrates the same experience through her narrator who starts the text saying: "MY WORLD is compressed. Waris Road, lined with rain gutters, lies between Queens Road and Jail Road: both wide, clean, orderly streets at the affluent fringes of Lahore" (Sidhwa, 1998). She narrates the social history of Partition with "a strong Pakistani minority identity" (Shamsie, 2017). This autobiographical novel incorporates many of Sidhwa's childhood memories, especially "memory of fires in Lahore and people chanting; seeing a gunny sack by the road from which the body of a young man spilt out; and the looters arriving at the door, assuming that Bhandara was a Hindu name" (Shamsie, 2017).

The text is significant from many points, firstly it is the first text that presents the point of view of the minority group, secondly a female is not only the narrator but also the author, thirdly the author has described the social changes in the society of Indian Subcontinent and how the political propagandas impacted the minds and lives of the common people. The text gives details of "the mass migration, the exchange of population, and the genocide that marked the birth of an independent India and Pakistan" (Shamsie, 1998). Sidhwa's narrative takes a neutral stance and does not take sides. She narrates the violence against people of every religion and displays that all the religious groups "Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs—were both perpetrators and victims, there is a collective guilt which South Asians find difficult to confront" (Shamsie, 1998). Sidhwa narrates the story of Lenny's Ayah, Shanta, a Hindu woman who is abducted and sold in the Heera Mandi by her Muslim lover,

at the same time she narrates the story of Hamida who is abducted and displaced by Sikhs. People belonging to each community faced atrocities and became a reason of atrocities for the opposite group as well.

Sidhwa starts her narrative with introducing her reader to Lenny's Ayah's social circle, a group of men belonging to different religions. The group symbolically represent the pre-Partition society of Subcontinent. The people live harmoniously and displays no disputes but with the political unrest increases the social unrest and Lenny comments:

It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves—and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols.. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah—she is also a token. A Hindu. Carried away by a renewed devotional fervor she expends a small fortune on joss-sticks, flowers, and sweets on the gods and goddesses in the temples. Imam Din and Yusuf, turning into religious zealots, warn Mother they will take Friday afternoon off for Jumha prayers. (1980)

The group that is not conscious of religion all of a sudden becomes careful about the religious identity. The city of Lahore where people belonging to different religions lived and thrived became a Muslim majority area where minorities were penalized. Lenny presents the view from both sides of the border as well as juxtaposes the situation of Muslim majority metropolitan city of Lahore to the Sikh neighboring village Pir Pindu. Trough these small stories Sidhwa “provides a graphic account of the atrocities committed at Partition on both sides of the new India-Pakistan border” (Shamsie, 1998). Amongst all this frenzy, Sidhwa presents women from both sides of the border as victims of war and violence.

Sidhwa's portrayal of “Ayah's agony and the tragic child-mrriage of Pappoo, the abused servant's daughter, make a chilling

statement on women's lives” (Shamsie, 1998). But Sidhwa does not only create powerless female characters. Lenny's Mother and Godmother are the character who show agency and participate in the process of rehabilitation of the displaced women. The text “provides a comparatively inclusive view of the diverse feminine roles during Partition, roles in which the female characters are not entirely empowered nor entirely victimized” (Kleist, 2001). These women show autonomy and resilience and participate in the changing socio-political environment.

The text is also significant because it challenges the dominant political narrative of Pakistan, in which it is accepted as a country for and by the muslims. The minority narrator of the text “challenges notions of Pakistan's national identity as homogenously Muslim” (Shamsie, 2017). The narrator presents the pluralistic view of Pakistani society in which people from various religions co-inhabit the country.

Conclusion

The selected novels textualize Lahore as a city that served as a central stage for the drama of Partition. These two novels present two tales of the same city; in one tale, the environment is politically charged and the societal roles of different gender (especially women) are changing. On the other hand, the second tale presents the same city, i.e. Lahore, as a space that is harmoniously inhabited by people belonging to different religions, but whose harmony is disrupted by the political unrest. Both Shahnawaz and Sidhwa have responded to the theme of Partition in idiosyncratic way. Shahnawaz's central concern is the political and historical aspect, while Sidhwa's focus is the human aspect of the event. Mumtaz Shahnawaz presents the story of Partition from Muslim point of view, whereas Bapsi Sidhwa's perspective can be taken as an outsider's view because she did not belong to any of the politically active or majority group, i.e.

Hindus or Muslims. In other words, social history of the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent. Shahnawaz's narrative presents the political history, whereas Sidhwa's fiction presents the

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