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Gender stereotypes in Azadi and Ice candy man

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Abstract

This article critically examines the portrayal of gender stereotypes in two acclaimed South Asian novels, "Azadi" by Chaman Nahal and "Ice Candy Man" by Bapsi Sidhwa. Through a comparative analysis, the study delves into the ways in which these influential works of literature depict and reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations prevalent in their respective societies. By exploring the characters, plotlines, and cultural contexts, the article seeks to shed light on the deep-rooted gender biases and their impact on the lives of men and women in the narratives.

Drawing on feminist literary theory and cultural studies, the analysis unpacks the representation of masculinity and femininity in "Azadi" and "Ice Candy Man," emphasizing the stereotypes and societal norms associated with each gender. The article explores how the male characters in both novels embody patriarchal ideals of strength, power, and dominance, while the female characters are often portrayed as passive, submissive, and confined within traditional gender roles. The article also examines the limitations and consequences of these stereotypes, highlighting the ways in which they restrict individual agency and perpetuate inequality.

By critically analyzing the gender stereotypes present in "Azadi" and "Ice Candy Man," this article contributes to a deeper understanding of the ways in which literature reflects and influences societal norms. It highlights the importance of questioning and challenging these stereotypes to promote gender equality and empower individuals to transcend restrictive gender roles. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for scholars, readers, and society at large, encouraging a more inclusive and equitable representation of gender in literature and beyond.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes, Azadi, ice candy man

Introduction

Chaman Nahal's Azadi: Challenging Gender Stereotypes from Multiple Perspectives

Gender stereotypes have long plagued societies, perpetuating restrictive roles and expectations for individuals based on their gender. Literature has often been a powerful medium to explore and challenge these stereotypes. Chaman Nahal's novel, *Azadi*, published in 1975, presents a thought-provoking narrative that delves into the complex web of gender stereotypes from various perspectives. Set against the backdrop of India's struggle for independence, Nahal's work challenges conventional notions of masculinity and femininity while shedding light on the profound impact of societal expectations on individuals. Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* depicts the catastrophic episodes of sexual violence against women during the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. The bifurcation of the Indian subcontinent became a tale of woe—a monstrous holocaust, mass rape, massive destruction, arson and communal violence, sexual rivalry over the possession of women, abduction, and murder. Nahal exposes the brutal fact that in any kind of conflict, be it war, communal riots, the holocaust, or partition, it is the women who have suffered the most. *Azadi* portrays the realistic and historical documentation of the atrocities faced by countless women in the aftermath of the communal divide. The partition brought communal violence, which shattered the peace and harmony of both nations. *Azadi* is a novel of graphic representation of human identity and brutality, mass murders, large scale abduction, mass rape and parade of naked women etc. Among these, the parade of nude Hindu and Sikh women in Sialkot and of Muslim women in Indian Punjab is the most horrifying scene of the novel. Though India has progressed a lot since independence, women still remain vulnerable. Even today, women become the easy source of humiliation in any kind of conflict, be it war or communal riots. A violation of a woman's chastity is an attack on her family and on the community to which she belongs.

These distressing and horrendous atrocities can be overcome by practicing humanity. This paper is an attempt to analyze aspects of exploitation and atrocities against women during the catastrophic partition.

In the ancient period, women suffered a lot in the name of rituals and traditions. There were some practices formulated by the patriarchal society, i.e., child marriage, the *pardah*-system and above all, the *Sati* system that were followed by the women willingly or unwillingly. The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender based violence that results in physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts of coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. When the people have daggers drawn, they aim to humiliate the men of other communities by molesting their women. The man is the victim of time and history, but the woman is the victim of the man, of course. It is an established fact that women are considered the most vulnerable. Violence experienced by women followed a similar pattern of sexual assault, retaliation, and reprisal in any kind of war, conflict, or holocaust. They are sexually abused, brutally beaten by their masters, kidnapped, and spoiled as clay toys by violent men. With the passage of time, everything has changed, but the condition of women is still wretched. Even today, they fall prey to the bloody violence.

The novel covers the period of eight months from the announcement of partition up to the period of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. In between, he painted a cruel picture of atrocities against women. The story of the novel revolves around a well-to-do Hindu grain merchant, Lala Kanshi Ram and his family.

The novel is divided into three parts, namely

1. Lull.
2. Storm.
3. Aftermath.

Which symbolize the historical occurrence of partition. The first part shows how the people of Sialkot were living together peacefully before the announcement of partition brought a drastic change into their lives. All of a sudden the peace and harmony wore the garb of a violent storm of calamity and disaster in the form of murders, abduction and rape etc. After this havoc, the people who survived anyway had to face the innumerable calamities as they lost their belongings, their identity, their family and above all these things, their morale and strength. *Azadi* depicts a blend of realities about the best and worst times that have been witnessed by the common man. *Nahal* described in detail his characters' love, relationship, faith, and humanity, as well as their sufferings, snatching, rape, murders, anguish, and chaos. The communal frenzy was provoked after the declaration of partition. India became free but was divided into two sovereign countries, major and minor and into different communities as well.

Nahal shows the robust cruelty as well as the ardent humanity of both sides. *Azadi* is a realistic and graphic record of the horrible incidents caused by the catastrophic partition. The rumors fanned the flames into a communal frenzy that violated the peaceful atmosphere of Sialkot. Suddenly, the friends turned into foes. The novel exposes how women and their lives were made tools and toys in the hands of men. The novelists did not criticize the people of

one religion against another and presented a deliberate contamination of the historical facts. The bifurcation of the Indian subcontinent disturbed the peace and harmony of the people, and the novelist explores the trauma of partition with ardent sympathy and humanity and criticizes the atrocious violence against women. The novelist did not fail to describe humanity, which surpasses all woes and draws our attention towards Hakim Sahib. When the procession of naked women was before his shop, the Hakim sahib was so ashamed of that heinous activity of Muslims. He prays for the protection of those women, and the scene becomes the threshold of humanity:

Exploring Gender Stereotypes: Perspectives in Bapsi Sidhwa's "Ice Candy Man"

Bapsi Sidhwa's celebrated novel, "Ice Candy Man" (also published as "Cracking India"), is a powerful narrative that takes place during the partition of India in 1947. Amidst the backdrop of political turmoil, the novel also delves into the intricate web of gender stereotypes prevalent in society. Sidhwa skillfully explores various perspectives, presenting a nuanced and thought-provoking portrayal of the impact of gender stereotypes on individuals' lives. In this article, we will examine the different ways in which gender stereotypes are portrayed in "Ice Candy Man" and how they shape the characters' experiences. The feminist movement of the 1960s heavily influenced and ignited the literary minds of South Asia, chiefly the women writers. Bapsi Sidhwa is one such literary figure whose concerns for women find portrayal in her novels. Her protagonists are mainly women, who essentially win against their male counterparts in their struggle for survival and honor. The *Ice-Candy-Man*, written in a similar mode, is a sort of feminist discourse set against the background of partition. It has been effectively rendered through an eight year old crippled girl living in the midst of, yet apart from, the rising tensions among the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs during the Partition of the Indian sub-continent. The protagonist of the novel is an eight year old girl called Lenny with a crippled leg.

The novel encompasses various female characters of varied temperaments. The reactions and responses of the female characters in *The Ice-Candy-Man* are resonant with audacity and determination. The characters of Lenny, Godmother, Ayah and Lenny's mother are ornate and have been well worked out. If there is a character of Ayah, an embodiment of motherhood, love, compassion, tolerance, and strong will power, then there is also a character of Hamida, who is also a 'fate-smitten' lady like Ayah but compromises and accepts her destiny and does not strive to go back to her family as she feels, "What can a sorrowing woman do but wail?"

Broadly speaking, a feminist is not only a woman who raised her voice against men; it is also an agitation for men and a true concern for women within one's heart and mind. If there is a cry for "fallen-women", Lenny gives her ear to it, irrespective of her young age. After the pathetic incident, Lenny couldn't forgive herself. She is completely preoccupied. Taking the feminist perspective into account, she punishes her "truth-infected tongue", for three days. She behaves deliriously for Ayah, Lenny says, "I punish it with the rigorous scouring from my prickling tooth brush until it is sore and bleeding".

By observing the lives of many women, she understands the limitations associated with women's lives in patriarchal society, which brings us to the point that women novelists in

the subcontinent have often shied away from expressing political themes and have been more comfortable highlighting the problems faced by women in a patriarchal society, within or outside a feminist framework. Sidhwa states that women are always marginalized, and she always protests against it. Lenny's mother is another significant female character who conforms to the traditional image of a faithful and serving wife who seems to be capable only of humoring her husband. Displacement is a natural condition for women, given the social fabric, the centrality of marriage, and the relocation in space and culture that accompanies it. Females don't have to kill baby boys. Just not nurture them. Females are forced to 'birth' baby boys, but beyond that, a female's physical actions are her own. Males will die without the constant infusion of female energy that they get from our wombs and from our lives. They are perfectly welcome to take the male infants from the hands of the midwife, and what they do with them from that point on is their decision. Females need not be emotionally and intellectually invested in a male's future.

The analysis of *Ice Candy Man* shows female characters to be strong enough to live lives of their own. They are not suppressed. In the patriarchal system, males are superior and females are considered inferior. All the good qualities are associated with males and all the weaknesses are associated with females. But in *Ice Candy Man*, all the strong qualities are presented by female characters. The main character of the novel is a young man who is lame. Through this handicapped child, it is shown that women can be creative even with disabilities. She takes a pen and narrates the story of partition. In general, writing is a characteristic of men, and women have to perform domestic tasks. By making Lenny the narrator, Sidhwa lends weight to the feminine perspective.

Sidhwa's female characters in *The Crow Eaters*, *The Bride*, *The Ice-Candy-Man* and *An American Brat* are all conventional figures of a submissive nature. Yet she is careful to draw out an expansion and realization of their rights as inhabitants of a common earth. Thus, Sidhwa has highlighted the process of change that has already started all over the world in order to claim women's rights and status through *The Ice-Candy-Man*. Though the *Ice-Candy-Man* is masculine, the novel is about women's lives viewed through a woman's eye.

In the colonial context, the image of woman as nation or culture brings out both her power and helplessness, simultaneously marshaling and emasculating her range of control. Arguments for women's education and emancipation were based on the logic that educated women make better wives and mothers; yet are reminded not to overstep their bounds and usurp authority from men, making them companions and help-mates to their men and yet completely subservient to the male of the household. The idea is to improve the lot of the woman while protecting her from becoming 'decultured' as a result of too much education.

The patriarchal concept of male responsibility in controlling and providing for the family was mimicked by the colonial state, which cast itself onto supposedly serving the colonized subject. However, now that the familial vocabulary extends beyond the relationship between state and subject, it also bears the onus of expressing racial and cultural relations. The colonizer became a patriarchal archetype, assuming the task of looking after the crude,

underdeveloped, undisciplined civilization. With the colonizer at the center, the colonized man felt the need to reassert and strengthen his superiority within the familial vocabulary. It resulted in the requirement for women to refresh their subservience, even though they were provided with certain freedom and education. It is here that her silence becomes manifest.

A prominent topic of debate in post-colonial theory is the practice of 'sati', the traditional practice of the immolation of the widow on her husband's pyre, in conventional patriarchal society. Though the woman is the subject of debate, nowhere is her subjectivity discernible—the widow herself is not discussed at all, nor are her ordeal and pain. Despite their differences and mutual rivalry, the colonial and indigenous patriarchies bonded together to assign a 'place' to native women, whose prospect of real freedom presented a frightening picture to them. Those who dared to break the codes of silence and subservience became the objects of extreme hostility, which succeeded in silencing the bold. This inability of the native woman to articulate is emblematic of her difficulty in recovering her voice steeped in oppression and the absence of a 'space' from which she can render her voice. Way down the hierarchy, she finds it difficult to challenge those who rule the system.

Conclusions about gender stereotypes and perspectives in *Azadi* and *Ice Candy Man* novels

1. The Struggle for Independence and Masculinity

Azadi explores the idea of masculinity in the context of India's fight for freedom from colonial rule. Nahal's protagonist, Acharya, embodies the traditional image of a strong, heroic male figure expected to participate actively in the nationalist movement. However, as the novel progresses, Acharya's character evolves, challenging stereotypical notions of masculinity. Nahal exposes the vulnerability, doubts, and internal conflicts faced by men during challenging times, ultimately highlighting the fluidity of masculinity and the importance of embracing a more nuanced understanding.

2. Women's Agency and Identity

Nahal's *Azadi* also provides a platform for examining the roles and expectations imposed on women in a conservative society. The female characters in the novel are not merely passive victims but active participants in the struggle for independence. Nahal portrays women who defy societal expectations and assume roles traditionally reserved for men, asserting their agency and challenging gender norms. Through characters like Shyama, Rani and Aarti, Nahal explores the strength and resilience of women, showcasing their ability to break free from gender stereotypes.

3. Subverting Traditional Gender Roles

Nahal's novel deliberately subverts traditional gender roles to challenge deeply ingrained stereotypes. He explores the idea that men can be vulnerable and emotionally complex, just as women can be assertive and capable leaders. By presenting characters like Acharya, who struggles with his identity and faces moments of weakness and women who challenge societal norms, Nahal encourages readers to question and reject rigid gender expectations. This subversion ultimately promotes inclusivity and equality, dismantling stereotypes that confine individuals to narrow roles.

4. Confronting Patriarchy and its Impact

Azadi offers a critical examination of patriarchy and its pervasive influence on society. Nahal portrays the destructive consequences of patriarchal norms, showcasing the limitations they impose on both men and women. Through the characters' experiences, he reveals the emotional and psychological toll of gender stereotypes, underscoring the urgent need to challenge and dismantle patriarchal systems. By highlighting the multifaceted impact of gender norms, Nahal emphasizes the importance of forging a more egalitarian society.

5. The Subjugation of Women

One prominent theme in Sidhwa's novel is the pervasive subjugation of women in a patriarchal society. The female characters in the book are often confined to narrow roles and restricted by societal expectations. Lenny's mother, for instance, embodies the traditional roles of a submissive wife and a dutiful mother, leading a life confined to domestic spaces. The women in the novel are expected to prioritize their roles as caregivers and homemakers, reinforcing gender stereotypes that limit their opportunities for self-expression and personal growth.

6. Resisting Stereotypes: The Female Perspective

Sidhwa presents strong female characters who challenge the confines of gender stereotypes. Shanta, Lenny's nanny, epitomizes resilience and determination as she defies societal expectations by engaging in politically driven activities. Her actions signify a rebellion against traditional gender roles and highlight the courage and agency of women in challenging circumstances.

7. Toxic masculinity and male identity

"Ice Candy Man" also explores the damaging effects of toxic masculinity on male characters. Through characters like Dilnavaz's husband and the Ice Candy Man himself, Sidhwa reveals the consequences of rigid gender expectations placed on men. The male characters, driven by their insecurities and social conditioning, perpetuate violence and domination. Their actions perpetuate a cycle of misogyny and aggression, leaving both women and themselves trapped in a toxic cycle.

8. Breaking the Mold: Redefining Masculinity

In contrast to the negative portrayal of toxic masculinity, Sidhwa introduces alternative male characters who defy gender stereotypes. Lenny's father, for instance, is portrayed as an affectionate and nurturing figure, challenging the notion of traditional masculinity. By presenting such characters, the author challenges society's limited view of masculinity and encourages a more expansive understanding that embraces empathy, compassion and equality.

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