

**Bakhtin's Concept of Heteroglossia: An Interpretation of Bapsy Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man**

**Gurpreet Kaur\***

**Abstract-**

In this paper, the attempt is to employ the concept of 'Heteroglossia', for a deep analysis of Bapsy Sidhwa's classic Novel *Ice-candy Man*. Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian Literary theorist, a linguist rhetor and an eminent scholar was the one who came up with the concept of Heteroglossia. Bakhtin introduces the term heteroglossia which substitutes "Polyphony" and denotes heterogeneity of styles, dialogism and ambivalence in the dialogic discourse of the novel as opposed to the monologic discourse to which traditional linguists subscribe.

**Key Words: Heteroglossia, heterogeneity, Polyphony, language.**

**\* Assistant Professor of English, Sri Guru Teg Bahadur Khalsa College, Sri Anandpur Sahib (Punjab)**

**Bakhtin's Concept of Heteroglossia**

Heteroglossia denotes the inclusion of different social strata in the artistic discourse, such as the language of the court, journalistic language, everyday speech etc. Bakhtin defines Heteroglossia as:

"Another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way".

Bakhtin opposes monologic language to Heteroglossia, which is the idea of multiplicity of languages all in the operation of culture. It may also be defined as all the forms of social speech, or rhetorical modes, that people use in the course of their daily lives. Bakhtin also calls these as "socio-ideological languages". Bakhtin says that there are actually two forces in operation whenever language is used: centripetal force and centrifugal force.

Centripetal force tends to push things toward a central point, centrifugal force tends to push things away from a central point and out in all directions. Bakhtin says that monologic language (monologia) operates according to centripetal force: the speaker of the monologic language is trying to push all the elements of language, all of its various rhetorical modes (the religious, the

political, the economic) into one single form or utterance, coming from one central point. The centripetal force of monologia is trying to get rid of differences among languages in order to present one unified language.

Heteroglossia, on the other hand, tends to move language toward multiplicity - not, as with other poststructuralist theorists, in terms of multiplicity of meaning for individual words or phrases, by disconnecting the signifier and the signified, but by including a wide variety of different ways of speaking different rhetorical strategies and vocabularies. Both heteroglossia and monologia, both the centrifugal and centripetal forces of language, Bakhtin says are always at work in any utterance.

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear.

Language, in this sense is always both anonymous and social, something formed beyond any individual, but also concrete, filled with specific content which is shaped by the speaking subject. Novelistic language is dialogic and heteroglossic and as such it exists as a site of struggle to overcome the univocal, monologic utterances that characterize official centralized language. This diversity of voice is the defining characteristic of the novel as a genre. Traditional stylists, like epic poetry, do not share the trait of heteroglossia. As he writes "Poetry depersonalizes "days" in language, while prose, as we shall see, often deliberately intensifies differences between them...."

Indeed, in his writings from *Dialogic Imagination* onwards, heteroglossia like polyphony becomes a prerequisite of the genre, which Bakhtin saw as commitment to the representation of the widest possible range of social classes.

This concept of heteroglossia can be appropriately be applied to many writings, but we shall consider here a fascinating yet sensitive text, *Ice-Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa. Bapsi Sidhwa, a leading diasporic writer from Pakistan is truly acclaimed to be a very significant voice in the commonwealth fiction. An embodiment of intense creative craving, she is candid, forthright, balanced woman novelist. A product of her enormous talent *Ice-Candy Man* is a 'multi-faceted jewel of a novel'.

Set against the partition of India, this fast paced, serio-comic saga tracks the daily peregrinations and capricious thoughts of Lenny who unwittingly learns that people and events are not as "transparent" as she had thought.

It is a superb novel, brilliantly and realistically written. It is a masterful work of history as it relates political events in the most simple but also most humanly way mingling comedy and anguish through the eyes of a child. A heteroglossic study of this work involves the multivocality of the myriad characters, this text embody. While dealing with the theme of partition, the text involves in its folds the characters from various strata and also from different cultures. Lenny, Ayaha, Ice-Candy Man, Imamdin, Col. Bharucha, the Shankara's, Papoo, Godmother-Rodabai, Slave sister - mini aunty are the many voices who with their centrifugal forces tend to inform a lot about many issues. These voices grow with a particular background of the novel, which involves Sidhwa's presentation of Kaleidoscopic changing socio-political realities of the Indian sub continent just before the partition. This story takes up the themes of communal tensions, using religion as a way to define individual identity, territorial cravings, political opportunism, power and love and binds them together in a very readable narrative. These themes and background indulge in proper nurturing of multiple informants.

To start with Lenny, the eight-year old narrator of the novel is a polio-stricken girl belonging to a miniscule Parsi community. Lenny narrates the incidents and the characters of the novel to the readers, commenting and ruminating on various issues, also deftly camouflaging the writer's omnipresence. Sidhwa is able to present the holocaust of partition without criticism, morbidity or pedantic preaching with the help of Lenny. Her childish innocence enhances the sharpness of the irony and lays bare the devastating cruelty in true colours. She questions happenings, peoples, motives and emotions in order to grasp their fullest interpretation. The naivete of the child permits her to look at things from unconventional angles.

She lacks prejudices - the hatred and biases one learns as one grows up. Her innocence gives her the strength to raise doubts and ask questions which cannot be comfortably answered by any grown-up and also to reach at conclusions intuitively. "What's a fallen woman?", she asks her

godmother. Troubled by the surrounding communal frenzy she sometimes lapses into rhetoric postures also, asking in a grown up voice "What is God?" Such postures convince that narrator's voice is controlled and guided by the author.

Lenny's narrative raises some gender related issues too. Her impressionable young mind receives several images of man woman relationships which lead her to question status quo. She notices how in Col. Bharucha's clinic a woman has to discuss her Childs' illness through her husband, as any direct conversation between genders was looked down upon by the society. During visits to PirPindo she meets young girls, of roughly her age who have already unquestioningly accepted their socially designated gender roles. Being a young child she herself is not influenced by such stereotypes, but her neutral reporting sensitizes the readers to the extent to which they have seeped into the collective social thinking.

The child's voice also generates a tone of authentic documentation of the partition horrors. The innocence of her childhood days is suddenly snatched from her when she witnesses the fissiparous tendencies on the rise, the growing communal hatred and opens gestures of arson and violence. Her familiar compressed surroundings suddenly distort into topsy-turvy. She listens to the warnings of Sharbat Khan, watches an emaniated person being torn into two pieces, looks on as the Shalmi markets burn and notes Hari's conversion. These experiences compel her to define her own marginality. Protected by her religious background and her family status, Lenny is not directly affected by the growing cruelty of these times. She remains on the periphery, watching the events unfold and commenting on them in a reporters tone. Coupled with the innocence of a child's view point, her detached tone enhances the poignancy of the emotions which are linguistically underplayed.

On the one hand we have Lenny whose higher family status and liberal upbringing makes her receptive to free judgments and on the other hand we visualize the character of Papoo, the sweeper's daughter's marriage to a middle aged dwarf. Her mother Muccho maltreats her to the extent of serious injuries. So a dominant and free dialogue is contrasted with snubbed, downgraded and lower strata's voice which is meak and unhearable. Even in higher strata we come across a voice which in servile and that is of Lennys' mother. Despite her liberated handling of children and

a modern life style, she is almost servile in her attitude towards her husband, coquettishly appeasing him always.

Another major voice of significance is Shanta, the Ayaha, who represents a voice of an eighteen year old Hindu girl, of whom everything is eighteen. Though she is employed with considerate masters, her condition is that of an uprooted girl, whom everybody treats only as a sex object. She is fully aware of her sexual charm and uses it without inhibition to fulfill her desires. She has accumulated a good number of admirers who regularly assemble to meet her, which include the Ice-Candyman, the Messieur, the gardener etc. She successfully uses her charm as a strategy of survival and manipulation till the violence of partition destroys her familiar world. Her portrayal also represents the male exploitation of female sexuality. But in the end her refusal to admit defeat despite physical and emotional mutilation and her determination to probe into future alternatives imparts a strong moral courage. Her voice issues a protest to stand up though one is snubbed down to minimal.

A heteroglossic investigation of Godmother highlights her as a voice of sharp wit, accurate repartee and a profound understanding of human psyche. She is presented as an old lady, plainly dressed from head to toe. She makes it her business to know everything about every body and tries to help whenever she can. She donates blood, seeks admission to a boarding school for Ranna, traces the Ayaha, in HiraMandi and manages to send her back to her people. She is a sensitive person and realizes that Ayaha, despite her marriage with Ice-Candy Man does not want to live with him and decisively sets about to rescue her.

The plot of the novel comes to a head long because of the God mother, her visit to Ayaha has the trappings of a trial; she sits and acts as a judge.

So a heteroglossic surveillance of the female characters of the novel projects myriad voices. Domination, inquisitiveness, neutrality, exploitation, strong will, charm, sensuality, innocence, protest are some of the features underlined. So the claim seems apt that:

Ice-candy man is a novel in which heartbreak co exists with slapstick ... and jokes give way to lines of growing beauty. The author's capacity for bringing an assortment of characters vividly to life is enviable.

A heteroglossic surveillance of the male members of the writing also is quite interesting. Ice-Candy man, Col Bharucha, Iman Din, Ranna and many of the suitors, of Ayaha projects a complex set of narration signifying some facet of the reality during partition. As suggested:

In the book many character's comes to exuberant life, exhibiting the odd tastes and unpredictable behaviour of real individuals.

Ice-candy man, one of the many suitors of Ayaha is a voice of low class, partly employed strata, who are the most effected ones by the power politics at the center stage of the nation. He tries for survival various involvements -a birdman at one time, a Sufi telephonic at other. Thus with his chameleon like attributes he tries to be many in one just for the sake of necessity. He knows quite a bit about the politics going on in the nation, and he concluded Nehru being the sly one, having the lions share. Being a fanatic, he hated other religions to the extent of evading them completely. Negative vibes or intense love forced him to secretly chase Ayaha and Messieur to many places, but all this never went to complete villainy until partition.

The brutality of partition brings a complete metamorphis in his character. Changing from a lively amiable man, he turns to abject fanaticism. He now doesn't mind killing people whom he knew all life, or trusted all his life. The speech of Ice-Candy Man isthus of one who cannot do anything but bear the burdens of the power struggle going on. He is the one, who could never prove himself to be innocent or his deeds guided by suffering. His action of forcibly kidnapping Ayaha is an act of complete villainy or desperate love seems unanswerable. Thus he ends up being a strange, mysterious voice that always is short of evidence and proves for one's actions.

Col. Bharucha, is a voice of completely contrasting with the Ice-Candy Man. His is the voice of leadership, dominance and politics. He is shown as the president of the parsi community. He instead of getting effected by the power politics believe in diplomacy and asks his community members to "hunt with the hound and run with the hare" to safeguard ones interest. Thus he is

shown as one who looks for one's own interest in others share of misery. His voice is of a leader who asks for safe play and thus he aptly highlights the voice of all the members of higher strata power — politics. Col. Bharucha, very well depicts his male chauvinism when he predicts in a traditional perception a happy, carefree, domestic life for Lenny even though she is handicapped. His conventional perception of considering females only for domestic chores is completely highlighted in the writing through his stereotyped dialogues.

There are many other very important and distinct able voices which present different facets of plight during partition. Ranna, presents a testimony of the ultimate brutalities unleashed then. He became a witness to his family's killing, and survives only with a stroke of luck but only to pass days in misery and remembrance of the past pain.

Imam din comes across as a lecherous cook, whose attitude towards young children is that of sexuality. He grabbed the young children, as well as Ayaha, when they entered kitchen and rocked them gently on his lap. He called it a little - `masti' a bit of naughtiness. On the other side of the picture he was respected for his wisdom by other servants and also by the villagers. So, the inherent evil in a man is surfaced by pure wisdom of untrue nature.

### **Conclusion:**

A heteroglossic study of the parsi perspective in the Ice-Candy man is also of great significance. Sidhwa narrates the story through Lenny, an eight year old polio struck parsi child. Without siding, with any warring community she expresses the paradoxical parsi situation during the pre-partition days. The first glimpses of the Parsi insecurity can be found in the "Jashan prayer" which is held at Lahore to celebrate the British victory in Second World War Sidhwa turns Parsi history into art by her clever use of irony. The Parsis were never a power factor in the sub-continent and realized that they can practice their religion and prosper only when they remain loyal to the ruling power. This basic attitude has been carefully explored by Sidhwa through the character of Col Bharucha, who advises his people to remain neutral, "Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land".

After this long held neutrality the factors which later on compelled this community to provide humanitarian relief to the suffering people are also sensitively delineated. The novel thus

beautifully chronicles the changing attitude of the Parsi community during partition, thus enabling the readers to make a heteroglossic survey of one more perspective.

The brilliantly created Indian characters in this novel are made with a real face, that turns at times into a mask of horror and at others into a peal of laughter... of all the marvelous people brought to life in this novel there is one who signifies resistance to change and uses the chaos around him for his own malicious ends. And so in the end there is one person who comes out unscathed and no wiser from the brutal pain of Indian independence: Ice-Candy Man.<sup>8</sup>

### References

1. Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and M. Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press. 1981 p. 21.
2. Abrahms, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cornell University, 1978.
3. Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World* (1965). Helen Iswolsky Bloomington Ind: Indian University pres. 1984.
4. Dhawan, R.K., *Introduction to the Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa* New Delhi: Prestige, 1996.
5. 3 Dec 2006 [http://Members.aol.com/\\_ht\\_a/bsidhwa/cracking\\_india\\_indian.html](http://Members.aol.com/_ht_a/bsidhwa/cracking_india_indian.html)
6. Piciucco, Pier Paolo, *The Hidden Strength of Women: A Key to the Reading of Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-candyman*. *Atlantic literary Review* Vol. 1, No. 1
7. Makarand, R. Paranjape, *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa Common Wealth Fiction*, ed., R.K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Classical, 1988.