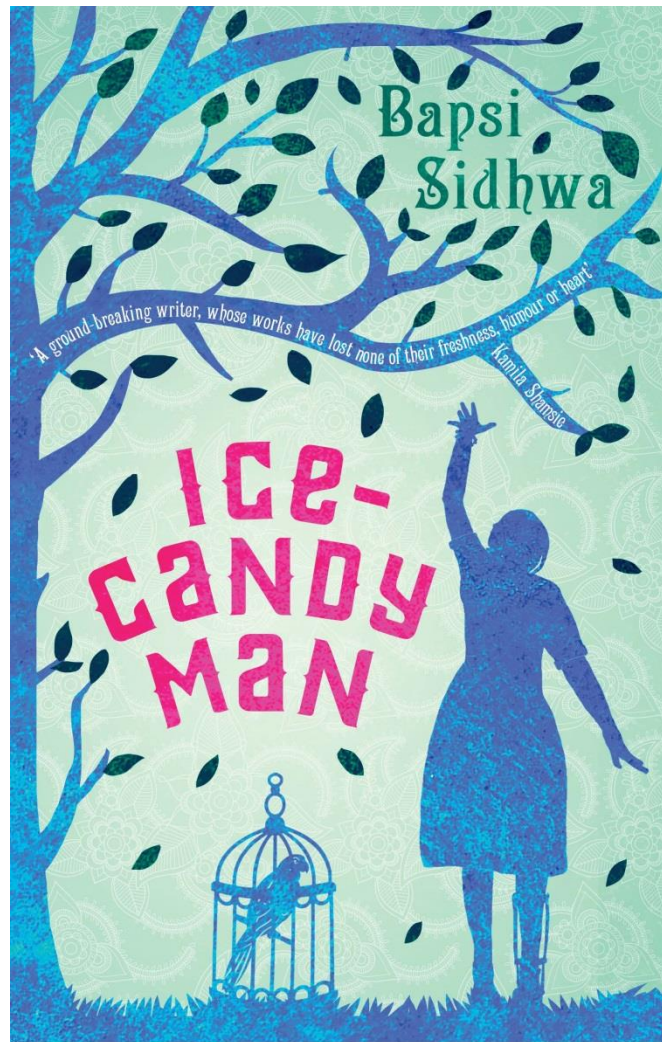


**Hegemonic Femininity**  
**Role of Rodabai (godmother) in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man***

**Muhammad Imran Joyia, M.Phil. and Ammara Gull, M.Phil. Scholar**

---



**Abstract**

This paper is about hegemonic feministic role in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man*. Feminism is generally taken by Sidhwa regardless of its actual role in society. Women's behavior with other women is quite surprising, and mostly marginalization and victimization of various women is due to the other women. Women are more than victims and love to victimize

both males and females. According to postcolonial feminist literary criticism, women are empowered by most of the postcolonial authors. They have been given special roles in society which challenge both genders. The study of the novel *Ice Candy Man* highlights the fact that Bapsi Sidhwa consciously or unconsciously is a great supporter of hegemonic femininity. So it will be unjust to say that only male members are blamed to be rude and cruel with women, however the women themselves are ever more involved in this hideous act of female suppression.

**Key words:** Feminism, marginalization, victimization, hegemony, suppression.

## Introduction

Feminists thought that women are the most oppressed creature on this planet. They are considered marginalized, abused, physically and mentally weak and victimized by the dominant role of men of the society. In this context many writers wrote about the victimization and oppression of the women and raised voice for their due and undue rights such as Bapsi Sidhwa in her novel “Ice Candy Man”, Virginia Woolf in “A Room for One’s Own”, Henrik Ibsen in “A Doll’s House”, Florence Claxton’s “The Adventures of a Woman in Search of her Rights”, Lillie Blake’s “Are Women A Class?” and Margaret Atwood’s “Surfacing”. But in these feminist writings we can observe another very important issue which is ignored by many feminist authors and critics, that is the empowerment of women and their hegemonic role in society. This present paper will elaborate the role of feminist writers in expressing, awakening and rehabilitation of the female bodies through their fiction landmarks. It’s the reality that many feminist writers advocated the rights of the women but never talk about their duties, described their victimization but never their cruelty, explained their weakness but never acknowledge their empowerment, exaggerated their miserable condition but very often their powerful impact and influence over male bodies such as social marginalization, no proper nouns, abusive language which is even not used by male and moral discouragement and at last but not least very rarely discussed the oppression and victimization of women by other women.

The same issue is seen in Bapsi Sidhwa’s “Ice Candy Man” where most of the criticism is made about the cruelty of male members of the society like Ayah’s abduction by Ice Candy Man

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 16:10 October 2016

Muhammad Imran Joyia, M.Phil. and Ammara Gull, M.Phil. Scholar

Hegemonic Femininity: Role of Rodabai (godmother) in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man*

and Mrs. Seth's scared life under the influence of her husband. One prominent aspect of this novel remained unchecked by most of the feminist critics that is Sidhwa's all-time favor for her female characters, award of proper nouns for only female protagonists, moral and social help, narrative power, social and familial strong connections, snubbing and humiliation of male characters, help to escape and survive at every moment of difficulty only for female characters. Sidhwa also showed a fight among male characters due to feminine beauty and made them restricted to revolve around attracted female body like a moth smoke and provided every chance to women to enjoy their seductive and attractive body gestures to attain different favors from men such as ice candies, dry fruit and 'paan' etc. for free every time. In this context the present paper will address the role of a central female character in "Ice Candy Man" Rodabai nick named godmother as courageous, influential, dominant, powerful, cruel and victimizer woman in this novel.

### **Character of Rodabai (godmother)**

Bapsi Sidhwa's basic focus, in her novels, is to highlight the issues of the women in a male dominant society. Her unique way of portrayal of female characters makes her prominent in the literary world. She is admired due to her extraordinary technique of projection of women in a very real and convincing way that it will become easy for every reader to comprehend the described issues. Her all female characters possess a specific moral center and demand for their own earned and distinguished identity and recognition. One of these identity and status conscious ladies is Rodabai (godmother). She is the woman whom Sidhwa has used to challenge and revolt against the traditional patriarchal rules of society. After seeing the personality and social connections of Rodabai no one can claim that women are marginalized or oppressed in "Ice Candy Man". But the reality is that in this novel, almost all the characters either male or female are somehow affected, both are humiliated, abused, oppressed, murdered and marginalized.

Many feminist critics in this context like Madhupurana Mitra (2008), in her article in which she discussed Ayah's scene of the abduction, did not make commentary in a neutral way. She only addressed to the female issues regardless of men. She even didn't describe the incidents in which women oppressed and victimized the other women as well as men very cruelly. But after seeing the dealings and life style of Rodabai one must say that these female characters in

“Ice Candy Man” are more than victims by all means. They have complete control over the society around them. A famous critic Kelist (2011) very interestingly elaborates that:

Women are not only victims in this novel but they have their own strong references and agencies of power to mend their own ways according to their choice. All the female protagonists of this novel enjoy their femininity, charming body and influence over men.  
(p.69)

So in this way Rodabai has strong character and influential personality. Sidhwa empowers her to handle any situation without the help of any male member of the locality. She not only protects her own family women but also rescues other injured, oppressed and abducted women. She rebukes and snubs Ice Candy Man when he admits his mistake and promises to make every effort to provide happiness to his wife Ayah but Rodabai doesn't care for his emotions and feelings. She in extreme anger scolds Ice Candy Man in an abusive language while such rough language is not used by any man for any woman in the whole novel. Here Sidhwa portrays Ice Candy Man, a very submissive creature and Rodabai a dominant voice which represents the real mindset of Bapsi Sidhwa to show female strong enough to make men submissive.

Rodabai acts like any hero of the movie and plays vital role in successful escape of Ayah from Ice Candy Man's house who is legally her husband. Sidhwa's choice of nick name for Rodabai also shows the importance of this character in novel as godmother (extreme motherhood) and she enjoys her role as mother. Stampfl (2010) describes the role Rodabai as mother in such a way that:

Sidhwa makes her female characters empowered by providing them multi-layered and all-rounder roles. Her concept of mothering makes novel prominent and provides strength and empowerment to her female characters. Her mothering concept is universal not limited to any biological bound. This mothering concept is communal, societal and familial. This mothering concept makes the female united and strong in this novel. ( p. 304)

Sidhwa rewards Rodabai with exceptional qualities that make her a strong and influential woman in society. She is equipped and empowered with such exceptional characteristics that such qualities have not been seen in any male character in Sidhwa's any piece of writing. Rodabai's personality is well explained by Marwah (2008) in following words:

“Rodabai (godmother) is a figure of stability, tradition and morality. She is someone who gives advice and who has connections all over Lahore. Godmother uses the power of her social standing to enforce traditions and the social hierarchy”.  
(p. 63)

Rodabai not only enjoys the free and influential life style but also challenges the traditional norms of the society and doesn't confine herself to traditional feminist submission and to remain surrounded by four walls of the house. She is a source of inspiration and encouragement for the other female characters of the novel. Kleist (2011) throws light on this aspect in this way that Sidhwa empowers her female characters who have been challenging the traditional patriarchy and they prefer to rely upon their own familial connections and social values. Lenny's mother and aunt godmother enjoyed particular social status and influential impact on society. (p. 70)

### **Hegemonic and Cruel Nature of Women in *Ice Candy Man***

Sidhwa's female protagonists enjoy every favor in society and are being considered the most miserable creature of the society. There are two prominent women, Rodabai and Mucco (papo's mother), who are more than victims by all means and even made others victim in this novel. This is the other side of the picture presented by Sidhwa which is not unveiled by most of the critics. Rodabai uses her social influence and power not only to snub and humiliate the male members of the society but her sister also suffers a lot of living with her elder sister godmother. Her rough and snobbish attitude with her own sister shows the cruel and mean nature of so-called godmother. Same is the case with Mucco who very cruelly beats, abuses and tortures her innocent and very young daughter Papo. These incidents are the examples of marginalization, oppression, victimization and humiliation of the women not by men but only by women who

consider themselves the torch bearer of women rights. Rodabai just makes publicity stunts when she talks about the survival and reconciliation of the oppressed women. She nicknamed her sister as slave-sister is in itself a shameful matter. As the name shows that the existence of her sister in her house is no more than a slave in a prison. Rodabai's relation and treatment with her sister is completely traditional one. She never uplifts her sister and always suppresses her personality and made her like a thing which has no life and emotions. Slave-sister at many times is humiliated and considered like a stranger in house and she spends her complete life alone in traditional family suppression not by any male member of family but by a female and elder sister. And her elder sister never considered her a family member. She is always treated as unwanted guest in her own sister's home. Rodabai scolds and abuses Ice Candy Man for his misconduct and misbehave with Ayah and also he is blamed to spoil the life of a woman. But when we see Rodabai's treatment with her own sister, who remains unmarried in the novel and serves her elder sister (godmother) as servant is very unjust and cruel. Slave-sister does not enjoy any freedom or liberty in her sister's home. She always remains under the strong influence of her own sister who takes from her all types of house hold tasks. She does not even allow thinking independently. Once, Rodabai arranges for a blood collection campaign camp for the victims of migration in Lahore. She asks students and other people to donate blood open heartedly. But when her own sister comes and wishes to donate blood for victims at that time Rodabai does not allow her to give even a single drop of blood for public welfare. She rather snubbed by her sister for her wish.

She says to her sister that it is better for her to be away from such virtues which make her weak enough to handle her own affairs. She forbids her to donate blood for the injured while she encourages and motivates others to participate in this holy task. She further says that she can't afford her weak body at her home.  
(*Ice Candy Man*, p. 204)

This incident shows that slave-sister completely lives at the mercy of godmother. She remains slave in her own house in both ways physically as well as mentally. Her character exposes the true face of cruel society where oppression and violence is enjoyed by every



powerful person either male or female. Rodabai's behavior with her younger sister is well described by Sen (1998) in such words that:

Lenny's clever observant eyes could not be able to see the problems and issues in godmother's behavior and relationship with her sister, slavesister, which reinforces the hierarchies of master-slave dialectic. Her ill-treatment with her younger sister shows the worst example of women's oppression than men in Pakistani patriarchy. (p.203)

## **Conclusion**

Bapsi Sidhwa has very craftily created her female characters which possess every sort of social face. The complete story of the novel "Ice Candy Man" revolves around the role and participation of women in society. She has intentionally infused in her female characters a rebellious and radical attitude and thought. In this novel, she very aptly highlights the problems of women and through the exaggeration and propagation of feminist issues she strengthens her female characters. Her attitude empowers her characters to challenge every just and unjust situation only at the name of female suppression and victimization. Dar (2013) in his article presents the analyses of the situation in this way that Sidhwa provides central focus and attention to her female characters and presents them role model for the other people of the society. While her male characters are projected as passive, submissive, scared and involved in violent acts and not in any positive activity. Sidhwa empowers her women to live and enjoy their lives according to their own will and choice (p. 02). After reviewing all the incidents of the novel related to empowerment of women and their hegemonic attitude especially related to the character of Rodabai it can be said that Sidhwa has intentionally promoted and highlighted the characters of Rodabai and Mucco along with the characters of Slavesister and Papo so that she can expose the oppression and suppression of female by another female. The said act makes this fact very clear that in this world, especially in a society described in "Ice Candy Man", the traditional concept, that only men are considered and labeled as suppressors and victimizers of women, is wrong because most of the times suppression and victimization of the women is done by other women. The issues become more complex with only female characters and their relationships which lead

towards violence. Sometimes the violence against female by female is worst in comparison with all other types of violence.

---

### References

1. Ahmad, Z. (2009). 'Pakistani Feminist Fiction and the Empowerment of Women' *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, 1 (2), pp. 90-100.
2. Dar, S, H. (2013). 'Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man: A Feminist Perspective', *Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*. Vol. II.
3. Gida, S, R. (2006). 'Women in the Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa and Namit A Gokhale: A Critical Study', [Doctoral Dissertation] Saurashtra University.
4. Jadika, M. (2004). 'Hyphenated Perspectives on the Cracking India: Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man', *South Asian Review*, 25 (02).
5. Kleist, J. (2011) 'More Than Victims: Versions of Feminine Power in Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India', *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, 3(02).
6. Marwah, A, F, S. (2008) 'When I Rasied My Head Again: Feminism and the Female Body in BapsiSidhwa's Novels; The Pakistani Bride and Cracking India', [Masters Dissertation] The University of Oslo.
7. Mitra, M. (2008) 'Contextualizing Ayah's Abduction: Patterns of violence Against Women in Sidhwa's Cracking India', *ARIEL: A Review of international English Literature*, 39 (03).
8. Sidhwa, B (2012). 'Ice Candy Man', Pakistan: ILQA Publications Lahore.
9. Stampfl, T. (2010). 'Cracking (Mother) India' In: Podnieks, E. and O' Reilly, A. (eds.) *Textual Mothers, and Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures*, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press.
10. Sen, A. (1998). 'Child Narrators in The Shadow Lines, Cracking India and Meatless Days', in *World Literature Written in English*, 37(1&2).

---

### Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Imran Joyia

M.Phil. English

Bahuddin Zakaryia University Multan, Pakistan

[imranjoyia76@gmail.com](mailto:imranjoyia76@gmail.com)

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 16:10 October 2016

Muhammad Imran Joyia, M.Phil. and Ammara Gull, M.Phil. Scholar

Hegemonic Femininity: Role of Rodabai (godmother) in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*



**Co-author:**

Ammara Gull  
M.Phil. Scholar in English  
University of Sargoodha, Pakistan  
[gullhameed129@gmail.com](mailto:gullhameed129@gmail.com)