

## Literariness Journal

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly  
Journal of Literature and Cultural  
Studies

P-ISSN: 3108-1614  
E-ISSN: 3108-172X

LiterarinessJournal.org

Vol. 1, Issue. 2  
March 2026

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**Citation:** Kulkarni, Meenakshi. "Adapting *Ice-Candy-Man* into *1947: Earth: Partition, Gender, and Cinematic Transformation*." *Literariness Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2, Mar. 2026, pp. 1562–72.



A Literariness.org Project

## Adapting *Ice-Candy-Man* into *1947: Earth: Partition, Gender, and Cinematic Transformation*

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**Abstract:** Bapsi Sidhwa is Pakistan's leading diasporic writer and is best known for her collaborative association with Indo-Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta. Sidhwa's 1991 novel *Ice-Candy-Man* served as the basis for Mehta's 1998 film *1947: Earth*. The film is a powerful and disturbing reminder of how a civilization can suddenly fracture under social and political pressures. The aftershocks of Partition continue to resonate even today. The film presents significant aspects of the novel, representing nationalism, religious fervour, friendship, and betrayal during the transitional period of the division of the Indian subcontinent.

The adaptation of a novel into a film, and the transformation of a print medium into a visual medium, becomes an emotionally charged narrative shaped by the filmmaker's interpretative vision. This paper applies psychoanalytic film theory to analyse Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* as a personal version of Partition seen through the perspective of a young girl, thereby exploring the female viewpoint and women's responses to the violence of the Indian Holocaust.

**Keywords:** trauma, feminist perspective, male gaze, psychoanalytic film theory

## Introduction

**B**apsi Sidhwa is Pakistan's leading diasporic writer. Her works include *Their Language of Love* (2013), *Jungle Wala Sahib* (translation from Urdu, 2012), *City of Sin and Splendour: Writings on Lahore* (2006), *Water: A Novel* (2006), *Bapsi Sidhwa Omnibus* (2001), *An American Brat* (1993), *Cracking India* (1991; originally published as *Ice-Candy-Man*, 1988), *The Bride* (1982; later published as *The Pakistani Bride*, 1990), and *The Crow Eaters* (1978). Her novels reflect her traumatic experience of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, the oppression of women in patriarchal society, and her migration to the United States, along with her identity as a member of the Parsee (Zoroastrian) community.

She witnessed the violence of Partition at a young age in 1947 and is well known for her collaboration with Indo-Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta. Sidhwa's 1991 novel *Ice-Candy-Man* served as the basis for Mehta's 1998 film *1947: Earth*. *Cracking India* was originally published as *Ice-Candy-Man*. The novel deals with the Partition of India and the immense human cost paid by innocent people of different religious communities—both Muslims and Hindus.

The novel presents the horrors of Partition through the perspective of Lenny, a young girl growing up in a Parsee family, and portrays her disturbed psyche as she witnesses the sudden violence between communities. The Parsee community, being a minority group, maintained a largely neutral position during the time of Partition. The narrative presents Partition as a series of vivid images and events depicting human loss, agony, and displacement.

Lenny observes that Lahore is no longer cosmopolitan. The Sikhs and Hindus have fled: "Lahore is suddenly emptied of yet another hoary dimension: there are no Brahmins with caste marks—or Hindus in dhotis with bodhis. Only hordes of Muslim refugees" (Sidhwa 175). Through the child narrator's perspective, the novel reveals the emotional and social consequences of the massive exchange of population based on religious identity.

The novelist further focuses on the fires produced by Partition, which are also depicted in the film. There is fire both outside and inside each individual. The narrative raises important questions: why are people forced to migrate on the basis of religion, and why are borders created? Sidhwa uses fire as both a literal and symbolic motif. Hindus and Muslims alike contribute to the fires of Partition. These fires spare nothing; they consume buildings, human lives, history, heritage, relationships, humanity, and human values. Years of love, togetherness, and shared celebrations of festivals turn into hatred overnight. Sidhwa portrays Partition as a massive human tragedy on an unprecedented scale. She remains fully aware of the losses suffered by both Hindus and Muslims in the form of lives, homes, dreams, and hopes for the future, thereby emphasizing the tragic pointlessness of Partition.

### **Adaptation of the Novel into Film: 1947: Earth**

The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* was adapted into the film *1947: Earth*, a 1998 production directed by Indo-Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta. It is the second film in Mehta's *Elements Trilogy*, preceded by *Fire* (1996) and followed by *Water* (2005).

Mehta recalls that she made the film to explore the disintegration of a multicultural society and to understand how neighbours and friends could suddenly turn against one another. The film is an Indian period drama set in Lahore in 1947, when the city was still part of undivided India before the creation of India and Pakistan as independent nations. The narrative begins with a voice-over by Shabana Azmi, representing the adult Lenny. The first-person narration enhances the storytelling process and encourages viewers to recognize the gaps and biases present in memory and representation. As a result, the audience becomes actively engaged in the unfolding narrative and gains a broader understanding of the characters and events.

The film begins with material corresponding to Chapter Eight of the novel. Lahore is portrayed as a cosmopolitan city where people of different religious communities live together harmoniously. A group of working-class friends—a Hindu, a Sikh, and Muslims—are shown enjoying one another's company, reflecting the social cohesion that existed prior to Partition.

In the opening scene, Lenny, an eight-year-old girl affected by polio, is shown breaking a plate into pieces. Her stream of thoughts reveals her anxiety about the impending Partition and her uncertainty about what India will become afterward. As a young child, she is unable to fully understand the events unfolding around her, although she repeatedly hears conversations about Partition. This opening scene establishes the aptness of the title *Cracking India*. Immediately afterward, the narrative shifts to a dinner party at the Sethis' house. The setting is depicted in an extravagant manner, with crystal crockery and a gramophone, symbolizing affluence and social status.

The scene then shifts to the dinner arrangement at the Sethna household. Among the guests are Mr. and Mrs. Rogers from Birdwood Barracks, where Mr. Rogers serves as Inspector General of Police. Also present are Mr. and Mrs. Singh, the parents of Rosy and Peter; Mrs. Singh is American, and Mr. Singh's role is portrayed by Gulshan Grover. During the dinner conversation, what begins as a light exchange of jokes soon develops into a heated argument between Rogers and Mr. Singh over the issue of Partition, reflecting the growing political tension of the time.

### **Helplessness and Commodification of Women during the Cracking Times**

The women characters in *1947: Earth* draw attention to the victimization of women and their compulsions to define their lives according to predetermined gender roles. They are portrayed as helpless and as objects of sexual gratification. The child protagonist, Lenny, recognizes the social

patterns of patriarchal bias and becomes aware of the archetypal perceptions imposed upon women. At the same time, she demonstrates an emerging awareness of the multi-layered trauma experienced by women during the chaotic and devastating days of Partition.

The narration of the story through the perspective of a girl-child ensures that Lenny's world is presented through a feminine lens. The film portrays women as doubly oppressed: first as women constrained by the structures of patriarchy, and second as human beings subjected to violence, humiliation, and displacement during Partition.

As Bapsi Sidhwa observes, "As a woman, one is always marginalized. I have worked among women to create an awareness of their rights and protested against repressive measures aimed at Pakistani women and minority communities." Through such representations, Sidhwa exposes cultural attitudes that render women insignificant and reduce them to objects of desire. Patriarchal bias in the film is evident in the expectation that women must be physically attractive in order to be desirable, whereas men remain exempt from such expectations. This is illustrated in the episode in which the young girl Pappo is mistreated, beaten by her mother, and forcibly married to an older man.

No female character in *Ice-Candy-Man* is shown as actively participating in large-scale violence. Although Pappo's mother behaves harshly toward her at a personal level, she does not contribute to violence at a broader social level. In contrast, men from different religious communities engage in acts of brutality and savagery during the Partition riots.

Lenny, the child narrator of the film, witnesses the brutal hatred of the Partition period, including the inhuman commodification of women. However, the dominant theme of the novel is not merely the victimization of women but also their determination to resist and survive oppression. In the film, Ayah is dragged away by a violent mob, and her ultimate fate remains uncertain, symbolizing the tragic vulnerability of women during Partition.

A significant portion of the narrative centers on Lenny's Ayah, Shanta, a young Hindu woman of eighteen. Despite working in a relatively supportive household, she remains socially unprotected and is frequently treated as an object of desire. She is aware of her sexuality and uses her charm confidently to negotiate her social environment. She attracts several admirers who regularly gather around her in Victoria Garden—the Ice-Candy Man, the Masseur, the Government House gardener, the restaurant owner, the zoo attendant, and a knife-sharpening Pathan.

While the sexuality of Lenny's mother remains concealed beneath layers of sophistication and restraint, Ayah's desires are expressed more openly. She uses her charm as a strategy for survival, gaining small advantages such as gifts, food, and attention. However, the violence of Partition

ultimately destroys the relatively secure world she inhabits. When riots break out, she becomes a victim of mob violence and sexual exploitation.

Sidhwa emphasizes the symbolic loss of Ayah's voice during her abduction. This loss is not merely literal but represents the silencing of marginalized and subaltern women during Partition. Although Ayah can also be interpreted as symbolizing the disintegration of a once-integrated nation, she simultaneously represents the silenced voices of women who were displaced and erased during this historical trauma. As a Hindu woman living in Lahore, she is forced to abandon her home and migrate to an unfamiliar land, thereby losing both identity and belonging.

Before Partition, Ayah confidently expresses her sexuality in fluid and socially complex ways. However, after Partition, her sexuality is fractured, exploited, objectified, and commodified, reflecting the broader violence inflicted upon women during this historical crisis.

### **Feminist Perspective**

In every society, women have historically been subjected to suppression and domination. However, many women writers have challenged these structures by foregrounding women's experiences and raising awareness about social inequalities. They highlight the difficulties women face in workplaces, within families, and while managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously. Women often conceal their inner conflicts while striving to fulfil these expectations, which may lead to emotional strain, depression, and disillusionment.

Although many literary works are traditionally male-centered, *Ice-Candy-Man* focuses primarily on female characters and their dilemmas. Lenny, an eight-year-old child, serves as the protagonist of the novel. As Sidhwa suggests in interviews, a child's perspective is direct, innocent, and relatively free from prejudice. Similarly, Lenny remains unaware of the deep religious divisions that shape the violence around her. As the narrative progresses, she gradually becomes conscious of the harsh realities of Partition and witnesses Lahore burning before her eyes. She observes how men are brutally killed and women are subjected to rape and violence. Over time, Lenny also becomes aware of issues related to bodily dignity and personal boundaries, particularly when she resists inappropriate advances from her cousin.

Ayah is another significant female character in the novel. As Lenny's caregiver, she is portrayed as a young woman of beauty and charm who attracts the attention of several male characters. Despite this attention, she maintains agency within her social interactions. For instance, during daily gatherings in the park, when political tensions begin to dominate conversations, she firmly warns the group that she will stop attending if such discussions continue. The Ice-Candy Man immediately reassures her that the topic will be avoided, demonstrating her influence within the group dynamic.

Sidhwa effectively portrays women's agency through Ayah's eventual decision to leave the Ice-Candy Man and migrate to Amritsar with the assistance of the Godmother. Similarly, Lenny's mother actively participates in rescue efforts during Partition. With the support of other Parsee women, she helps Hindu and Sikh families cross the border safely by secretly arranging transportation and supplies. She also contributes to establishing shelter for women who have been abducted, assaulted, or displaced during the violence.

The Godmother is portrayed as an independent and confident woman who handles situations with calm authority. She confronts the Ice-Candy Man directly for humiliating Ayah and forcing her into exploitation in Heera Mandi. Through her intervention, Ayah—renamed Mumtaz during her captivity—is rescued and safely sent to Amritsar. In this way, Sidhwa assigns heroic qualities to several female characters who resist patriarchal oppression and support one another during crisis.

The patriarchal structure of society is represented through the character of the Ice-Candy Man. After witnessing the Gurdaspur train massacre, his personality undergoes a dramatic transformation from a sympathetic individual into a violent and vindictive figure. Through this episode, Sidhwa highlights the destructive consequences of communal hatred and male aggression. Women become the primary victims of such violence, as they are repeatedly subjected to humiliation, assault, and physical mutilation. The shocking image of gunny bags filled with women's severed breasts serves as a powerful reminder of the gendered brutality of Partition violence.

Two additional female characters in the novel are Muchoo, the sweeper's wife, and her daughter Pappo. Muchoo is frequently shown beating and abusing her daughter and eventually marries her off to an elderly dwarf, reflecting the harsh realities faced by women within patriarchal social structures. Through such episodes, Sidhwa exposes the widespread belief that marriage is considered a solution to women's suffering regardless of their personal desires.

Despite these hardships, the novel concludes on a hopeful note with Ayah's rescue from the control of Dil Nawaz (the Ice-Candy Man) and her migration to Amritsar. This resolution provides a sense of closure for readers while reinforcing the resilience and strength of female characters. Through these portrayals, Sidhwa demonstrates that women are not merely passive victims of patriarchy but active agents who assert their identities and resist oppression.

### **The Male Gaze**

The male gaze refers to the representation of women in visual culture and literature from a masculine and heterosexual perspective that positions women as objects of male pleasure. The term "male gaze" was introduced by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in her influential 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

Mulvey argues that gendered power asymmetry functions as a controlling force in cinema and that visual narratives are often constructed for the pleasure of the male viewer. This framework is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and cultural discourses that shape both representation and spectatorship.

The male gaze operates through three primary perspectives:

1. the perspective of the person behind the camera,
2. the perspective of characters within the narrative, and
3. the perspective of the spectator.

It occurs when cinematic techniques position the audience to adopt the viewpoint of a heterosexual male observer. In such instances, the camera may linger on specific parts of a woman's body—such as her breasts or hips—thereby reinforcing her role as an object of visual desire rather than as an independent subject.

In the novel *Ice-Candy-Man*, the male gaze is evident in the description of Shanta's physical appearance, particularly in references to her rounded figure and bodily attractiveness. Similarly, in the film *1947: Earth*, the male gaze becomes visually explicit in scenes where Shanta accompanies Lenny to the park and male characters gather around her, drawn by her beauty and physical presence.

The male gaze denies women full human identity by associating them primarily with visual pleasure. In many films, female characters are structured around appearance and erotic appeal rather than narrative agency. As Mulvey observes, women are frequently presented as figures whose presence supports male-centered storytelling rather than directly shaping the plot.

However, in *1947: Earth*, Shanta (Ayah) plays a crucial role in influencing the development of the narrative. Her presence significantly affects the transformation of Dil Nawaz (the Ice-Candy Man), whose character undergoes a dramatic shift over the course of the film. This focalization of Dil Nawaz's emotional trajectory demonstrates that Shanta is not merely an object of desire but an active narrative force whose relationships shape the progression of events.

Thus, while elements of the male gaze are present in both the novel and the film, Shanta's character also challenges passive representations by exercising agency within the narrative structure.

### **The Terrace Scene: Celebration of Life in Contrast with Violence and Death**

At Dil Nawaz's terrace, people from different religious communities gather in an atmosphere of gaiety and celebration during the kite-flying festival. The festival symbolizes the togetherness of Hindus and Muslims, reflecting a long-standing tradition of shared cultural participation and harmony. Imam Din

and Shanta visit the terrace along with Lenny, and Dil Nawaz playfully flirts with Ayah while teaching kite flying. A song accompanies the scene, enhancing its celebratory tone and emotional warmth.

However, this same terrace later becomes a site of mourning and horror in the second half of the film, when the characters witness brutal killings of both Muslims and Hindus. Lenny observes the gruesome killing of a man tied to vehicles and torn apart. It appears questionable that Lenny is brought outside during such violent disturbances. Witnessing this savagery leaves a deep psychological scar on the child and has a lasting impact on her mental state.

During this tense moment, Dil Nawaz proposes marriage to Shanta, confessing that “there is an animal inside me straining to break free,” and suggesting that marriage might restrain his violent impulses. His emotional intensity reflects his internal conflict and anger following the Gurdaspur train massacre. This moment marks the beginning of a transformation in his character from a sympathetic individual into a more aggressive and unstable figure.

After witnessing the violence, Lenny returns home and tears her doll apart while sobbing uncontrollably. The scene symbolically reflects her psychological trauma. When Ayah later attempts to comfort her and stitches the doll back together, the act becomes a metaphor for emotional healing amid social fragmentation. Through this scene, Deepa Mehta effectively conveys the symbolic meaning of *Cracking India*. Sidhwa similarly represents the psychological impact of Partition through Lenny’s perspective, portraying the societal tensions and unconscious anxieties of the time.

The events of the narrative are structurally interconnected and collectively reinforce the central theme of Partition. The plot, characters, and setting function organically to produce a powerful representation of national fragmentation based on religious divisions. This thematic unity intensifies the reader’s engagement with Lenny’s perspective and deepens the emotional impact of Partition as experienced by the author herself.

### **Narrative Omissions in the Film Adaptation**

Certain episodes from the novel are omitted in the film adaptation. For instance, scenes depicting the playful interaction between Lenny and her cousin following his hernia operation are not included in the film. Similarly, the lighter moments involving Godmother Rodabai and the Electric Aunt are absent.

The character of Ranna, Imam Din’s great-grandson—who witnesses the large-scale violence and travels through devastated areas filled with corpses—is also omitted from the film. In the novel, Godmother later treats his severe head injury, highlighting her humanitarian role. Another omitted episode involves Imam Din taking Lenny and Ayah to his village on his bicycle.

Such omissions may be attributed to the time constraints of cinematic adaptation, since it is not possible to incorporate the entire narrative of a novel into a film of limited duration. Likewise, Chapter Fourteen of the novel reveals that the Ice-Candy Man is already married and that his wife lives in a village with her mother; however, this detail is not included in the film. Instead, he is consistently portrayed as courting Ayah.

Following the terrace episode, when Ayah refuses his marriage proposal, a dramatic shift occurs in Dil Nawaz's personality. He transforms from a devoted admirer into a violent and vindictive individual. He later betrays Lenny's trust by asking about Ayah's hiding place and abducting her as an act of revenge against Hindus.

The film concludes with the voice of the adult Lenny, narrated by Shabana Azmi, reflecting on the passage of fifty years since Ayah's disappearance. The uncertainty surrounding Ayah's fate reinforces the emotional depth of the narrative and symbolizes the enduring trauma of Partition.

### **Psychoanalytic Film Theory**

Psychoanalytic film theory draws upon the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan and is closely associated with critical theory. The theory developed through several phases, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s and continuing into later decades. It interprets cinema as a medium that engages with the unconscious mind and functions in ways comparable to dream structures.

Psychoanalytic approaches to cinema often focus on uncovering latent meanings behind visual images before moving toward an understanding of film as a representation of fantasy and desire. In this context, the present study examines the psychological dimensions of the director, the novelist, the screenplay writer, and the characters represented in the narrative.

In *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sidhwa presents her personal experiences of Partition through the perspective of an eight-year-old child, Lenny, which itself represents a powerful narrative strategy. The psychological effects of Partition on the author are reflected in her characters and their experiences.

Freud's discussion in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* addresses childhood curiosity regarding bodily differences and forbidden knowledge. In the novel, Lenny's observations of Shanta's body and her interactions with her cousin reflect this psychological curiosity. However, such scenes are omitted from the film adaptation, possibly due to cultural sensitivities within the Indian cinematic context.

Lenny also observes the emotional relationship between Shanta and Dil Nawaz, while Shanta herself is emotionally inclined toward Hasan. The tension between these relationships creates a triangular emotional structure that contributes to Dil Nawaz's psychological transformation. His inability to accept rejection ultimately leads to frustration, resentment, and violent behaviour. His later actions

reflect not genuine love but a disturbed psychological response shaped by trauma, jealousy, and communal violence following the Gurdaspur train massacre.

### Conclusion

The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* provides a powerful representation of the communal tensions that shaped the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. Through the consciousness of Lenny, an unusually perceptive eight-year-old Parsee girl, the narrative explores the shifting relationships between Hindus and Muslims during this turbulent historical moment. It also reflects the dilemma faced by the Parsee community in maintaining neutrality during a period of intense political conflict.

A feminist reading of the novel demonstrates that female characters are portrayed both as victims of patriarchal oppression and as agents capable of resisting social constraints. They challenge traditional gender roles and assert their identities in difficult circumstances. Characters such as Ayah, Lenny's mother, and the Godmother embody resilience and moral strength, demonstrating women's capacity to confront injustice and support one another.

Sidhwa portrays the trauma of Partition based on her own childhood experiences, while Deepa Mehta's adaptation recreates the narrative with strong visual realism and emotional depth. Although certain scenes from the novel are omitted in the film, the adaptation remains effective in conveying the central themes of the narrative.

Despite not achieving major commercial success, *1947: Earth* leaves a lasting impact on audiences through its sensitive treatment of Partition. The performances of Aamir Khan and Nandita Das significantly enhance the emotional power of the film. Their performances contribute to the film's realism and help convey the pathos of Partition with remarkable intensity.

Deepa Mehta's adaptation successfully translates Sidhwa's literary vision into cinematic form, demonstrating how film can effectively reinterpret historical trauma through visual storytelling.

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