

## **A brief summary of Ice Candy Man**

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy Man* deals with the partition of India and its aftermaths. This is the first novel by a woman novelist from Pakistan in which she describes about the fate of people in Lahore. The novel opens with the verse of Iqbal from his poem 'Complaint to God', with this, the child-narrator Lenny is introduced. She is lame and helpless. She finds that her movement between Warris Road and Jail Road is limited. She sees the Salvation Army wall with ventilation slits which makes her feel sad and lonely. The narration is in the first person. Lenny lives on Warris Road. The novelist describes about the localities in Lahore through the Child-narrator. Lenny observes: "I feel such sadness for the dumb creature I imagine lurking behind the wall." Lenny is introvert and she is engrossed in her private world.

One day, Lenny is in her pram, immersed in dreams as usual. Her Ayah attends to her. Suddenly an Englishman interrupts them and he asks Ayah to put Lenny down from her pram. But Ayah explains to him about Lenny's infirmity. Lenny is a keen observer. She has seen how people are fascinated with the Hindu Ayah's gorgeous body. She notices how even beggars, holymen, old people and the youngmen adore her for her feminine grace.

Colonel Bharucha is Lenny's doctor. He is a surgeon. Lenny is brought to the hospital for her limp in one leg. In the first, attempt, plaster on Lenny's leg is removed but still she limps. Soon a new plaster is cast over her leg. Lenny cries out of pain but her mother takes care of her.

Dr. Bharucha's surgery pains Lenny as she has become bed-ridden. The news of Lenny's operation spreads in small Parsi community of Lahore and she has visitors but she cries for Godmother. Lenny lying on the bed observes keenly the reaction of visitors and her parents. After one month, Lenny is allowed to be taken in a stroller outside her house. Her eighteen year old Ayah Shanta takes her to a zoo.

Lenny's Ayah Shanta has a number of admirers. Ice-Candy-Man is among her admirers. Another companion of Lenny is her electric-aunt, a widow. She also picks up a brother. His name is Adi and Lenny calls him Sissy. He goes to school and Lenny studies at home. When winter comes, Ice-Candy-Man turns into a birdman and in the streets of Lahore, he is seen with birds. Rich ladies give him money for these poor birds to be freed. Ice-Candy-Man is a chatter-box and he can talk on any topic.

One day, the Parsi community assembles in the community hall in the Parsi temple. Two priests prepare for the worship of fire. Lenny observes everything with curiosity. Then the meeting of the Parsi community begins on their stand on Swaraj. Col. Bharucha holds the mike and apprises all -about the latest political developments. After discussions and questions, all agree to observe the middle path—to observe and see. They will not be with the Indian nationalists to oppose the Raj. They fail to come out of their dilemma.

The Ayah takes care of the helpless child Lenny like a sister. Lenny's mother too loves her.

A portion of Lenny's house is lent to the Shankars who are newly married. Shankar's wife Gita is seen welcoming him in the evening. The children observe this couple with curiosity. Gita is a good cook and a good story-teller. She is popular with children. The reader is now introduced to Hari, the gardner, Imam Din, the cook of Lenny's house. Here one finds focus on the character of Imam din. He is sixty five years old. He is "tall, big-bellied, barrel-chested and robust." Imam Din likes to play with children in his spare time. One day Imam Din takes Lenny to his village on his bicycle. Lenny observes every thing keen on her way to the village. There she meets children Ranna and his sisters Khatija and Parveen. This is the village Pir Pindo where Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims live peacefully. Villagers have assembled beneath a huge sheesham tree to discuss about the situation in other cities like Bihar and Bengal. They feel disturbed over the news of Hindu-Muslim riots. The villagers blame the British government for 'inaction in the wake of communal riots. The Chaudhry of Pir Pindo assures them about the safety of everyone in the village if riots break out. Later Lenny and Imam Din return to Lahore.

Ayah has now two more admirers—a chinaman and the Pathan. They are fascinated by her feminine grace. They visit Lenny's house daily to talk to her. Lenny doesn't go to school. She goes to Mrs. Pen for her studies. Her house is next to Lenny's Godmother's house on Jail Road—opposite to Electric-aunt's house. Ayah accompanies Lenny to Mrs. Pen's house. After tuition, Lenny goes to her Godmother's house for sometime. One day Mahatma Gandhi visits Lahore. Lenny goes to see Gandhijee with her mother. She is surprised to see him because she has always taken him to be a mythic figure only. Gandhi jee blesses them all and advises them to follow the enema-therapy. Lenny fails to understand as to why people call him a saint. To her, he appears to be 'half clown and half-demon'.

Now it is April and Lahore is getting warmer day by day. Ice-Candy-Man finds his business prospering. By now it has become clear that India is going to be broken. Muslim league wants Pakistan to Muslims. Imam Din, the cook at Lenny's house is worried over the news of communal riots and plans a visit to his village Pir Pindo. Lenny insists to join him on his trip to the village. She still cherishes the memory of her earlier visit to Pir Pindo. On Baisakhi, they visit the Dera Tek Singh near the village. Dost Mohammad joins them. They enjoy the mela and the feast. Now people apprehend trouble. One day the relatives of Imam Din arrive in Lahore to stay with him. They are accommodated in Servant's quarters. Military trucks arrive in Pir Pindo to evacuate Muslims to safer places but the Muslim peasants are confused. They can't leave their home, property and harvest all of a sudden. Mr. Roger's mutilated body is found in the gutters. He was the Inspector General of Police. This news sends shivers among the people of Lahore. Children including Lenny find it a strange incident. Ayah loves Masseur's songs and Ice-Candy-Man loves Ayah for her blooming youth. Ice-Candy-Man is disturbed over the developments in the nearby areas. People start moving to safer places. Riots begin and this leads to confusion among people.

Communal riots spread from towns to small villages like Pir Pindo. Muslims and Sikhs become enemies thirsting for each other's blood. In Lahore, people begin to move to safer places. Hindus

and Sikhs leave their houses behind and reach Amritsar. People hear announcements on All India Radio about the division of districts into India and Pakistan. The Parsee community in Pakistan is safe but still worried about its future. Muslim mobs attack Hindu houses. A mob stops outside Lenny's house and enquire about its Hindu servants. They ask about the Hindu Ayah Shanta but the cook Imam Din tells them about her fake departure. Ice-Candy-Man comes forward and asks Lenny about Ayah. Out of innocence, Lenny discloses about her hiding. The angry Muslims drag her out of Lenny's house. This shocks Lenny and she repents for her truthfulness. A truth can also ruin one's life, Lenny discovers. Ice-Candy-Man takes her to Hira Mandi, the bazars of prostitutes. Ice-Candy-Man's mother was also a prostitute and Ice-Candy-Man becomes a pimp. He is fond of reciting Urdu poetry.

In Pir Pindo village, Sikh crowds attack the Muslim community. Imam Din's family is in trouble but nothing can be done. There is confusion. Muslims in Pir Pindo village get killed and their women gang-raped. Children are butchered mercilessly. Ranna, the playmate of Lenny in Pir Pindo is also wounded and buried under the heap of dead bodies. After some time, he safely moves to other place. His journey of hide and seek has been dealt with in detail by Bapsi Sidhwa. Sidhwa narrates Ranna's ordeal of escape in full fifteen pages. A little boy wounded and shocked, running for life finds suddenly himself alone in the world. Earlier, it had been decided that the women and girls of Pir Pindo would gather at Chaudhry's house and pour the kerosene oil around the house to burn themselves. It was also decided to hide some boys and men in a safer place but nothing worked. Muslims are killed, women molested and children butchered. Only Ranna escapes and finds shelter in a camp in Lahore. When he reached Lahore, he observed, "It is funny. As long as I had to look out for myself, I was all right. As soon as I felt safe, I fainted." Before reaching the camp, Ranna had a tough time: "There were too many ugly and abandoned children like him scavenging in the looted houses and the rubble of burnt-out buildings. His rags clinging to his wounds, straw sticking in his scalped skull, Ranna wandered through the lanes stealing chapatties and grain from houses strewn with dead bodies, rifling the corpses for anything he could use ... No one minded the semi-naked spectre as he looked in doors with his knowing, wide-set peasant eyes." Later, Ranna was herded into a refugee camp at Badami Baug. Then "chance united him with his Noni chachi and Iqbal chacha."

After the abduction of Ayah by the Muslim mob, Lenny remains sad and dejected. She is shocked over the betrayal by Ice-Candy-Man. She finds him to be a changed man. The day he saw the mutilated bodies of his Muslim brethren, he became a different person. His beloved Ayah becomes a Hindu for him. "They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet that want to move backwards—are forced forward instead." This sight proves to be traumatic for poor Lenny and she repents for telling the truth to Ice-Candy-Man. She is guilt-driven: "For three days I stand in front of the bathroom mirror staring at my tongue. I hold the vile, truth—infected thing between my fingers and try to wrench it out: but slippery and slick as a fish it slips from my fingers and mocks me with its sharp rapier tip darting as poisonous as a snake. I

punish it with rigorous scourings from my prickling toothbrush until it is sore and bleeding." This act of Lenny shows her sense of guilt. There has been Papoo's marriage but Lenny feels lonely without Ayah. By now Lenny has become mature both in body and mind.

Lenny's Godmother is an influential lady. She loves Lenny, she has established a network of espionage in Lahore. She has information from each corner of Lahore. One day, Lenny's cousin comes with a news that he has seen the Ayah in a taxi dressed like a film actress. After a few days, Lenny too sees Ayah in a car. Now she tells everyone about it and the search for Ayah begins. One Monday, Lenny visits her Godmother's house to tell her about the Ayah. She is told about the Ayah's husband's visit to Godmother's house in the evening. Lenny finds it difficult to wait for the evening. At six o'clock, the bridegroom of Ayah arrives. He is none but Ice-Candy-Man, now dressed in flowing white muslin. He recites a verse from Urdu poetry and greets everyone. He informs that she is married to him and has been accepted in the family of dancers. Godmother scolds him for illtreating Ayah and let her be raped. But he confesses: I am a man! Only dogs are faithful! If you want faith, let her marry a dog." But Godmother reacts wildly by saying: "You have permitted your wife to be disgraced! Destroyed her modesty! Lived off her womanhood! And you talk of princes and poets! You're the son of pigs and pimps!" Ice-Candy-Man weeps and cries but asserts that now he will make her happy by all means. Lenny has been listening to all this. She is angry with Ice-Candy-Man to such an extent that: 'There is a suffocating explosion within my eyes and head. A blinding blast of pity and disillusion and a savage rage. My sight is disoriented. I see Ice-Candy-Man float away in a bubble and dwindle to a grey speck in the aftermath of the blast.'

Ice-Candy-Man stands there with Jinnah—cap in his hand and "his ravaged face, caked with mud, has turned into a tragedian's mask. Repentance, grief and shock are compressed into the mould of his features." Then, Godmother plans a visit to see Ayah, now Mumtaz after her marriage. Lenny insists of going with her to Hira Mandi. They reach Hira Mandi in a tonga. They are led in a well-decorated room with the fragrance of sprinkled flowers. Ice-Candy-Man brings his Mumtaz, the Ayah dressed as a bride before them. Lenny is shocked to see sadness in Ayah's eyes. Lenny observes: "Where have the radiance and the animation gone? Can the soul be extracted from its living body? Her vacant eyes are bigger than ever: wide-opened with what they have seen and felt... She, buries her head in me and buries me in all her finery; and in the dark and musky attar of her perfume."

Leaving Ayah with Godmother and Lenny, Ice-Candy-Man goes to fetch tea. Now Ayah pleads that she will not live, here anymore and she must go. Godmother asks her to think over it again but Ayah (Mumtaz) insists of going back to her relatives in Amritsar. The visitors return after assuring Ayah that she will be rescued.

Lenny's cousin asks her about a Kotha and her impression of it. Lenny understands by Kotha to be a place of dancing girls. By now Lenny also understands that "the potent creative force generated within the Kotha that has metamorphosed Ice-Candy-Man not only into a Mogul

Courtier, but into a Mandi poet. No wonder he founds poetry as if he popped out of his mother's womb spouting rhyming sentences."

After her visit to Hira Mandi, Godmother contacts the government machinery. One day a police party comes to Hira Mandi and takes Ayah away from Ice-Candy-Man. She is put at the Recovered Women's Camp on Warris Road which is well-guarded. Ice-Candy-Man visits the camp to see his beloved but is beaten up badly by the Sikh sentry. Now Ice-Candy-Man has become a dejected, wandering lover searching for his lost love. He has acquired a new aspect: "that of a moonstruck fakir who has renounced the world for his beloved." Ice-Candy-Man places flowers for Ayah over the wall of the camp every morning and his "voice rises in sweet and clear song to shower Ayah with poems." This routine of offering of flowers and singing of love songs continues for many days.

One day, Lenny learns that Ayah has been shifted to Amritsar with her family there. Ice-Candy-Man has also followed her across the Wagah border into India to pursue his love. The novel ends on this sad and tragic note. The novel contains a number of poignant scenes along with scenes of murder and violence. "The novel is a masterful work of history as it relates political events through the eyes of a child." *Ice-Candy-Man* has also been called as a multifaceted jewel of a novel. The novel deals with "the bloody partition of India through the eyes of a girl Lenny growing up in a Parsee family, surviving through female bonding and rebellion."

