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# 'Heavy Waters' of Punjab: A Hydro-critical Analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*

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## ABSTRACT

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This research argues that the seminal Partition novel *Ice-Candy Man*, written by Bapsi Sidhwa, presents a vision of fluvial Punjab in a manner that fits the idea of "Heavy Waters" presented by Elizabeth DeLoughrey. The latter's idea of water carrying both physical and metaphysical waste seems to materialize in Sidhwa's novel, who places her story in the context of the partitioned Punjab of 1947, when a desire for 'territorialism' over water resulted in countless human beings turning into 'national refuse', or people killed in the name of nationality, whose dead bodies floating in the rivers of the Punjab turned the rivers into both a haunting site and a site foreboding an environmental crisis sooner or later. Hydro-criticism emerges as an apt theory to carry out this research, considering the tools it provides to look at literary texts from a watery perspective, while the research methodology involves a close textual analysis, with specific focus on events pertaining to water in the novel. The study concludes that a) If Elizabeth DeLoughrey's hydro-critical lens can aid in understanding the pain of Middle Passage victims and the defiling of the Atlantic Ocean, the same theory may help read indigenous texts to pay tribute to Pakistan's water bodies, and b) If Atlantic modernity is metallic due to the residue it carries of British naval weaponry, then overt sexual activity taking place in Pakistan and India can be linked to the ample flesh that lies in the waters of the Subcontinent.

**Keywords:** *Partition, Heavy Waters, Territorialism, National Refuse, Indian Modernity*

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Elizabeth DeLoughrey astutely notes that the "practice of border making in fluid space has been historically and narratively reproduced in maritime novels," (2010, p.708). Although not a maritime novel, its setting in the province of Punjab (the land of five rivers) makes Bapsi Sidhwa's penultimate novel on 1947's Partition, *Ice-Candy Man,* a literary work in which water is of greater significance than it appears to be the case at a cursory glance, so much so that its deep textual analysis renders it a text that can be strictly placed under the theory of Hydro-criticism. It is the idea of Elizabeth DeLoughrey that best fits the happenings in Sidhwa's novel. DeLoughrey, a professor and researcher in Environmental and Oceanic Humanities, posits the idea of "Heavy Waters". This idea takes its roots from the event of Middle Passage, the journey which several Africans forcibly undertook on the Atlantic Ocean, and while undertaking it, they lost their lives as well, at times by jumping into the water themselves and, at times, by being thrown into the water by their masters.

*Ice-Candy Man*, at a closer glance, brings the waters of Punjab to a level of equal importance, for the author adeptly seems to have woven within her fictional work, the real activities rooted in water during 1947, from a desire to capture water bodies and uproot people from their homes to be sent across the water borders, to the eventual defiling of waters with the dead bodies of people who were not willing to leave their homeland. Apparently, *Ice-Candy Man* is a story of divided land, altered demography and changed human behaviour. Told through the perspective of Lenny, a young Parsee girl who lives through the traumatic year of 1947, it covers both the urban and rural areas of Punjab as sites of Partition riots, with Lahore and Pir Pindo providing the microcosmic settings. Water inconspicuously emerges many times in the novel, making us realize that the city of Lahore or the village of Pir Pindo alone do not serve as the story's two backgrounds, but the entire province of Punjab[2], a torn vision of which the narrator is not ready to accept because she carries an understanding of its geographical location.

This paper provides an analysis of these water-related events present in the novel, a discourse which begins with a question when the readers are thirteen chapters into the novel, and expands itself with answers. The question reflects an incredulity towards the partition of a fluid space and the answers try to depict what happens when such spaces are finally partitioned.

Theoretically, the argument regarding water in the novel and the ensuing discussion are subsumed under the concept of "Heavy Waters" expounded by Elizabeth Deloughrey. I have done an elaborate textual analysis of *Ice-Candy Man* in the forthcoming pages of this study.

[2] Punjab, one of the provinces of Pakistan, is named so after its five rivers: Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej.

## Territorialism over water

*Ice-Candy Man*, published in 1998, is a story of altered demography and changed human behaviour as major fallouts of the 1947 Partition, the division that created Pakistan and India from within a single subcontinent. It has been told from the perspective of Lenny, a Parsi girl who spends most of her time with her Ayah, and who, in front of her eyes, sees a friend, the Ice-Candy Man, turning into an enemy out of religious fanaticism, trying to forcibly convert her Ayah amidst Partition riots and eventually sending her to a brothel. Apparently, the novel is about these oft-quoted changes that are known for having characterized the subcontinent's division. However, *Ice-Candy Man* is here and there also pockmarked with references to what, along-with its inhabitants, was happening to the land of Punjab, a geographical area everyone wanted to have more because of its fluvial significance.

One of the subtleties of Bapsi Sidhwa's writing in *Ice-Candy Man* is her portrayal of the events that occur prior to Partition which convey the sense of dread and foreboding and the imminent and inevitable chaos that is bound to follow this historical event. Much before Ice-Candy Man abducts Lenny's Ayah and forces her into prostitution, he menacingly blackmails her into accompanying him to the movies by threatening to endanger the life of her ward, Lenny's four-year old brother Adi, by turning him upside down. This act foreshadows his tendency to commit evil long before he maltreats Ayah. Similarly, before Hari, Lenny's Hindu gardener, converts to Islam to ensure survival in a Muslim-dominated Pakistan, the game of stripping his dhoti is played multiple times by the household members to show how Hindus like Hari will eventually be stripped of their religious identity amidst the frenzy of intercommunal violence unleashed in the wake of Partition. The dhoti stripping playful activity insinuates that a game will be played later as well, but on a political level, forcing people to remove the endangered religion's clothing and don the safe religion's attire.

If this technique employed by the writer is placed in the context of the events that unfold in the novel's thirteenth chapter, it is realized that before the novel moves towards the waters of Punjab's rivers, the readers are introduced to a minor event that foreshadows other acts of water-related violence. This chapter opens with the announcement of the death of Mr. Rogers, the district's Inspector General of Police. The news is disclosed before Lenny by Slavesister who says that the inspector's body has been found mutilated in one of the gutters of the vicinity. This incident of the dumping of Mr. Rogers's body in a gutter signifies two possibilities: one that can be linked to the attitudes of people hailing from water regions, and the other to the author's creative strategies.

The purpose of taking into account the attitudes of people belonging to fluvial lands is to assert how things that are amply available and usually do not yield

immediate results are taken for granted, something which Charne Lavery also argues when she says that water, which constitutes a major part of the world we live in, is considered a dumping site because its vastness "has seemed a guarantee of disappearance" (Lavery, 2017, para.1). It is probably one of the reasons why the banks of the largest river of India, the Ganges, are used for cremating the dead and the ashes of those dead are then "spread in the river" (Briney, 2019, para.12). Considering this selfish anthropocentric attitude, it becomes easy for us to comprehend why unlike someone from a desert region who may bury the dead, Mr. Rogers's murderer considers gutter as an ideal place for hiding the mutilated body; the act probably backed by the idea that one of the several water receptacles of Punjab might not be found out as carrying a corpse, and even if found out, might not be considered as endangering the entire water-filled province.

The second idea reflected from this incident, one which gets associated with Sidhwa's story-telling technique is that Mr. Rogers's body in the gutter predicts water-related violence at a larger scale. As Adi's predicament paves way for Ice-Candy Man's more gruesome activities and Hari's dhoti's game serves as a prelude to extreme brutalities in the name of religion, a small water reservoir carrying an individual's body prepares the readers for more dead bodies dumped in bigger water reservoirs, causing an impediment in the flow of water. In this regard, it becomes important to note how Lenny recalls the killing, imagining Mr. Rogers's "English toes and kidneys float(ing) before" her "disembodied eyeballs" (Sidhwa, 2015, p. 117).

That Mr. Rogers's body parts "float" before Lenny's eyes is also a way of foreseeing a violence incorporating water. Moreover, when Lenny imagines watching the assaulted body with "disembodied eyeballs", the readers are inclined to envision multiple dismembered humans, looking at each other's floating bodies in a state of disbelief.

As expected, in the very next passage, Lenny raises three questions, reflecting a concern not for the gutters but for the rivers of Punjab, or the way water in its natural form will be subjected to human whims around the time of Partition. Bewildered by the talk of Partition and the land equally divided between two separate nations, Lenny conjures the "vision of a torn Punjab" and asks: "Will the earth bleed? And what about the sundered rivers? Won't their water drain into the jagged cracks?" (Sidhwa, 2015, p. 117).

The way these questions have been formulated demands special attention, since it is only one question that focuses on land and two that focus on water, suggesting that water geography cannot be eschewed when it comes to Punjab and automatically switching the concern more towards the "blue" of the province instead of its "green", rendering *Ice-Candy Man* a literary work that is not indifferent to the geographical facts of its settings inspired from real life. About the pre-Partition Punjab, it is said, "The British Punjab, the central core of which comprised the land of five rivers- the Satluj, the Beas, the Ravi, the Chanab and the Jhelum

covered an area of 346,389 sq. kms which is nearly seven times the area of the present East Punjab after its reorganization" (Gosal, 2004, p. 21-22).

Sidhwa's fear voiced through her protagonist seems justified when non-fictional, real accounts on Punjab's partition are consulted. Under the heading of "Divided lands, divided rivers" from his book titled *Indus Divided: India, Pakistan and the River Basin Dispute*, Daniel Haines, a notable historian and professor of History, informs that "Oscar Spate, a British academic geographer who worked as a technical advisor for the Ahmadi community of Qadian in Gurdaspur district during the run-up to Partition, wryly remarked in 1947 that the Ahmadis alone (of all the parties interested in Partition) showed any appreciation to the fact that a geographer might have something of value to say'" (qtd. in Haines, 2017). In the same section, he goes on to tell how only "factors such as communication and infrastructure" were considered by Radcliffe while partitioning Punjab (2017, p. 27-28). Spate himself, while talking about the division of both Punjab and Bengal says:

> It will, I think, be fairly generally agreed that the only type of river really satisfactory as a boundary is one flowing through a deep rock-walled canyon, or possibly through extensive marshes, with a fairly constant volume of water, without shifts of course, with few crossing-places, and useless for navigation or rafting, irrigation or hydro-electric power. Few rivers have all these negative virtues, and those of the Punjab are decidedly not among them. (Spate, 1947, p. 203)

The realization of Punjab's geography emerges as even profounder in Lenny's last question which reflects the idea that the rivers of Punjab have but a "a meandering nature" (Hanies, 2017, p. 96) as Daniel Haines puts it in his book, and therefore their partition will result in the water taking unusual routes unless an extremely careful mapping is executed. Philip Ball, in his article, *India: a turbulent tale of rivers, floods and monsoons*, also presents a similar stance when he says, "Rivers and waterways do not abide by political borders." (Ball, 2018, para. 5)

The passage under consideration from *Ice-Candy Man*, a work of historical fiction, thus emerges as more aware of and concerned about the disasters which can be caused if matters of water are not treated carefully, especially when it comes to Punjab.

Sidhwa not only raises these questions but in the forthcoming chapters, also answers them through the fictionalization of some of the real events pertaining to water that took place near and during Punjab's division.

Ishtiaq Ahmed, in his book titled *The Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed* tells that the "idea of a Sikh Plan to drive all Muslims out of East Punjab has been mentioned by many individuals who were directly involved in the events of the period" (Ahmed, 2017, p. xIiii). Then quoting Harkishen Singh Surjeet, a member of India's Communist Party back then, he tells how the "communal attacks

on the minorities were definitely planned", the purpose being to drive out the Muslims so that "the Sikhs could form their own state in Eastern Punjab" (qtd. In Ahmed, 2017, p. xIiii).

In the novel's sixteenth chapter, the character of the wrestler voices the same plan when Lenny, Adi, Ayah, Masseur, Ice-Candy Man, Government House Gardener, Sher Singh and the butcher gather at his restaurant to discuss the on-going political scenario over food. One of the statements of the wrestler goes like this: "My cousin's a constable in Amritsar District. . . says [that] the Sikhs are preparing to drive the Muslims out of East Punjab-to the other side of the Ravi" (Sidhwa, 2015, p. 133).

At this point, Lenny's question about the "sundered rivers" gets answered; when rivers are partitioned, they become bordered areas and people claim ownership over them. That the Sikhs have planned to send a minority to the other side of the River Ravi contains the idea that the eastern side of the river is being considered by the Sikhs as their own and the other side of it as someone else's.

To this practice, one can apply Elizabeth DeLoughrey's various terms such as "State privatization of the seas", "militarization of the oceans" and "territorialism" (DeLoughrey, 2010, p. 705). In the context of Punjab's partition, the activity being planned by the Eastern Punjab's Sikhs can be labelled as "territorialism", although it won't be wrong to say that the "State privatization" of waters also took place because "the decision to partition the Punjab was taken not by the Punjabi masses or even their elites, but at the central level by the colonial government at Delhi, the high commands of the Indian National Congress, and the Muslim League; only the Sikhs from the Punjab were consulted by the viceroy" owing to their claim that "their religion and cultural identity was rooted in the Punjab more than Hindus and Muslims" (Ahmed, 2017, p. xI).

Daniel Haines puts it more directly under the heading of "Punjab's Riverine Borderlands" when he says, "Water and Sovereignty converged in Punjab's borderlands, producing an especially intimate relationship between border spaces and rivers' fluvial action." He also uses the word "Controlling" while informing the reader that this ownership over waters was "significant not only for the operation of canals, but also for how locals viewed national sovereignty" (Haines, 2017, p. 86).

Taking territorialism over water as the focal point, it also becomes important here to revisit the incident of Mr. Rogers's death. Before being killed and found in a gutter, Mr. Rogers has a row with Mr. Singh at Lenny's place, during which the latter expresses his hatred for the British and as if already an accomplice to a governmental plan, says. "I am upto ruling you and your empire." (Sidhwa, 2015, p. 63). In response, when Mr. Rogers insults Gandhi and says that he will celebrate the leader's death, Mr. Singh makes the following statement: "You will not celebrate! You know why? Because rivers of your blood will flow in our gutters!" (Sidhwa, 2017, p. 63).

Here, the idea mentioned before, that of Mr. Rogers's murder being a prediction of water reservoirs' usage in an aggressive manner, holds true because by using the phrase "our gutters", Mr. Singh makes it clear that from the smallest of water reservoirs to the largest ones, the Sikhs have planned dominance. In the next section, what follows is a discussion on what happens when humans plan to dominate waterbodies like this.

## National waste—the physical heaviness

Dominance over water has far-reaching impacts for the immediate as well as future generations. However, like Sidhwa's protagonist who believes that water, when bordered, cannot promise to take natural courses, and like Haines who seconds the idea and considers it a reason for the water dispute between Pakistan and India because of the "changeability of Punjab's rivers" (2017, p. 96), Elizabeth DeLoughrey too is of the view that water "cannot be possessed" (DeLoughrey, 2010, p. 707). However, she does accept that at certain points in history, human beings have been making such attempts, and such attempts eventually lead towards water's heaviness. When water is turned into territories by humans, it is used the way humans want, the usage mostly being in the form of water-pollution. DeLoughrey provides two examples of this kind of pollution related to the Atlantic Ocean, which was used waywardly once during 1500 and 1866 to send the Africans across, and once during the twenty first century "at the end of World War II" when "the number of military vessels at sea" (DeLOughrey, 2010, p. 707) was doubled. While the former activity produced waste in the form of humans who committed suicide by jumping into the ocean's water because they were taken away from their homes and put into suffocating, "tightly packed holds" (2020, Wolfe), the latter produced chemical waste because of the dumping of "hundreds of thousands of barrels of radioactive materials" (DeLoughrey, 2010, p. 707) into the water.

When one juxtaposes the treatment of the waters of the Atlantic with the riverine waters of the Subcontinent, striking similarities emerge. Waters of the Subcontinent, during Partition riots, emerge as receptacles for people who were uprooted from their homelands, were forced into migration, were made to cross rivers, and were then killed on the way, resulting in the filling of the rivers with human bodies and their blood. Thus, when placed in the context of Partition, water's heaviness comes from the "lost bodies" (DeLoughrey, 2010, p. 708) of people crossing the rivers, and to slightly depart from DeLoughrey's example, from their blood instead of metallic waste.

To depict this in her novel based on Partition, Sidhwa presents the example of River Beas while narrating the Partition riots taking place in the village of Pir Pindo in the twenty-fifth chapter.

"Three important Muslim tahsils west of the Beas-Sutlej were allotted to East Punjab (Spate, 1947, p. 211)," says Spate while talking about the Partition of

Punjab, and articles penned down after the Partition refer to "the Sutlej, Beas, and the Ravi" as "eastern rivers" which "cross directly from India into West Pakistan" (F.H., 1957, p. 536).

When Sidhwa moves towards the partition of rural Punjab from its urban side, what serves as the setting is Pir Pindo, the village of Imam Din who happens to be Lenny's cook. The river that comes into play during the riots in this village is Beas, another river the partition of which finds its place in the novel. Although it is hard to find Pir Pindo as a real village in the books on Punjab's geography, inclining us to believe that it must be a fictionalized name for any of the several villages that existed in Amritsar, Jullundur and Ambala in the undivided Punjab, the nearest geographical division around Beas seems to be Jullundur, lying "on a level plain about 20 miles (32 km) east of the Beas River" (*Britannica*, 2015, para. 1).

An interview of one of the Partition victims from Jullundur also acts as a proof of this. Rana Muhammad Afzal Khan, while relating his journey from Hariana, Hoshiarpur to Lahore, says: "Then we reached Jullundur. After Jullundur, we crossed Beas. Dead bodies were no longer floating in it although we heard that some weeks earlier it was full of them" (qtd in Ahmed, 2017).

Keeping these facts under consideration, the description of corpses in Beas in *Ice-Candy Man* makes us realize that it is Jullundur's chaos, and accordingly, its nearest river's condition which Bapsi Sidhwa narrates when Dost Mohammad, one of Imam Din's villagers, says, "Their (Sikhs) numbers have swollen enormously. They are like swarms of locusts, moving in marauding bands of thirty and forty thousand. They are killing all Muslims. Setting fires, looting, parading the Muslim women naked through the streets – raping and mutilating them in the center of villages and mosques. The Bias, flooded by melting snow and the monsoon, is carrying hundreds of corpses" (Sidhwa, 2015, p. 202).

While the mentioning of Ravi only hints at what will happen and focuses more on the plan instead of the action, the discussion on Beas in the novel tells what happens when waters come into possession, as it happened during Partition. The last line of the same passage goes like this: "There is an intolerable stench where the bodies, caught in the bends, have piled up" (Sidhwa, 2015, p. 202).

This incident expands DeLoughrey's idea of territorialism because it reflects an attitude of sovereignty that is self-centered to such an extent that along-with the infestation of controlled waters with the bodies of enemies in order to derive personal satisfaction and reinforce sovereignty over their own side of the river, an attempt is also being made to completely wipe off the other nation which is simultaneously coming into being i.e. Pakistan. Here, the notion of nationality becomes so much important for the Sikhs that in their action of killing the Muslims and throwing them into Beas is latent a desire to not let a nation take birth, which is also on its way to be formed, the population of it being a religious group that is migrating to the other side of a riverine border. In fear of a new nation in competition, the migrating population is being stopped from inhabiting the area

existing on the other side of Beas by being killed first and then being dumped in water. The enemies thus make the natural element heavy by "placing refugee and fugitive bodies at sea" and demonstrating "how waste is a constitutive by-product of modernity and national border-making. . . [and therefore], human beings, as a result, turn into but "national waste" (DeLoughrey, 2010, p. 708).

About *Ice-Candy Man*, it can be said that if the novel is placed in the contemporary theoretical frameworks that give as much importance to the environment as to the human characters, then *Ice-Candy Man* serves as an example that suffices to show a concern for natural elements, be it land or water. In the case of the novel under consideration, the interesting thing is that the land itself is that of rivers, thus not giving rise to a confusion regarding which environmental issue to probe into, that of land or that of water.

Punjab's waters, in *Ice-Candy Man*, are not treated in any way better than Ayah. If Ayah, amidst religious extremism and in a desire to compete for governance, is taken under possession, converted forcefully into a Muslim, and misused physically in a red-light area, thus being rendered deprived of her basic human rights, the same happens with water. The Eastern side of the Punjab, along with its waters, is taken hold of by a religious group to establish governance, and in that attempt, water bodies, be they gutters or rivers, are violated because they are stopped from taking the courses they naturally do. *Ice-Candy Man* acquaints us with all the activities that lead to water's heaviness, the first step activity being territorialism. It is after a territory is established, and nature is brought into subservience that its elements are taken for granted.

## Metaphysical burden of memory, Indian modernity, and environmental degradation

Having discussed in the analysis how the Subcontinent's waters have come to carry large amounts of physical waste, as shown in *Ice-Candy Man* and proven through non-fictional texts as well, I will now go on to discuss how this burden has shaped the Subcontinental or Indian modernity and will continue to impact the environmental future of the region. Before that, I will also discuss how the metaphysical waste, in the form of memory, continues to exist, thereby rendering Partition an event that has marked its influence on the past, present and future of the Subcontinent and will recur as an unavoidable incident at every turn in the history of this region.

I will start by explaining how the metaphysical burden, the painful stories of the refugees turned into haunting memories, is what constitutes the intangible yet heavy burden of the Subcontinent's waters. That people have still not gotten over the Partition of 1947 is not only proven through the fact that it was in 2010 that Razia Butt's Partition novel, *Bano* was again brought to the front in its dramatized form, *Dastaan*, which went on air on HUM TV, or it was in 2018 that the same

channel decided to adapt Khadija Mastoor's Partition novel, *Aangan*, fifty six years after its publication. Partition as a haunting memory is a fact proven time and again, so much so that it has connected itself with interdisciplinary studies. Partition, as a subject, now falls under the category of Trauma Studies as well as Post-memory Literature, a few examples being *States of Affect: Trauma in Partition/Post-Partition South Asia*, a PhD dissertation submitted to Michigan State University by Rituparna Mitra, and *Partition and Post-memory in the Work of Kriti Arora and Sharlene Bamboat* submitted as an MA Dissertation at Concordia University, Canada.

Amrita M. Uttamchandani, in her dissertation titled *Crossing Borders and Generations: Sharing of Partition Stories among Survivors and Families of the Partition of British India,* allots a chapter to the traumatic experience of the Partition victims. She also explains how the trauma trickled down to the later generations of Partition victims as well, who are not allowed to discuss the year and its brutalities at all. "Participants expressed that their parents and other family members did not talk to the children about their Partition experience. Additionally, many added that Partition survivors often did not talk about the Partition among themselves either" (Uttamchandanim, 2011, p. 139). The silence, however, never hints at a forgetful attitude towards the event, but at the painful memories associated with it which keep the victims from talking about it. Otherwise, the Partition is very much alive to date. It was in 2020 that Khurshid Ahmed interviewed multiple Partition survivors and compiled the interviews in an article titled "Eyewitnesses still haunted by the violence 73 years after creation of Pakistan" published in *Arab News PK*. Another interviewer, Anam Zakaria, says that the "personal and collective memories of 1947 continue to haunt the survivors, and in many ways, also the post-Partition generations because these memories were never fully heard or shared, let alone processed" (Zakaria, 2017).

When it comes to the waterbodies as carriers of these memories, which is the ultimate focus of this research, then Moni Mohsin's 2017 article "The wounds have never healed: living through the terror of partition" has a lot to offer. One of the Partition victims interviewed in the article is Mazhar Malik, who was a school-going boy back in 1947. While narrating the brutalities exercised against the Muslims of Jammu in the year of 1947, Malik states that "They (Hindus) cut down everyone and threw the bodies into a nearby canal" (qtd. in Mohsin, 2017, para.19). In the same article, another survivor, Anjolie Ela Menon, while informing how her father made it to India from Pakistan out of sheer difficulty, says, "My exhausted father arrived and told us about thousands of refugees and the River Jhelum, which had run red with blood" (qtd. in Mohsin, 2017, para. 41). In another article written just a few months ago in 2021, titled "From Pakistan to India: Tracing my grandmother's refugee journey", it is interesting to note that the women's dead bodies as found in the waterbodies of the 1947's Subcontinent are still etched in people's mind. Whenever the atrocities of those times are mentioned, those women are not forgotten who "drowned themselves", "their bloated bodies floating through contaminated, blood-stained rivers" (Tarrant, 2021, para.5).

These accounts of Mazhar Malik, Anjolie Ela Menon and Tavleen Tarrant are evidence enough that memories not only of bloodshed continue to haunt the people of the Subcontinent, but also of wells and rivers, with which people also associate the 1947 brutalities, even if in a line or two, so many years after the event. It is to prove that the waterbodies of the Subcontinent still carry painful memories that real-life accounts of Partition victims from just recent years (2017 to 2021) have been chosen.

It also becomes important to see how these water-related events of the Partition, those of people jumping or being thrown into wells and rivers, have shaped the Subcontinent's people's modernity and how will they contribute to the environmental future of the Subcontinent. For focusing on the first probable result of humans filling up the region's waters, it is important that the following stance of Elizabeth DeLoughrey be read and analyzed:

> To understand the extent to which the ocean signifies modernity, we might turn to the close relations between surveillance, militarization, and waste. The militarization of sea has turned it into a basin for waste. Hundreds of thousands of barrels of radioactive materials have been dumped in the ocean, particularly in the northeastern Atlantic……..While the sea is understood as external to human experience, we carry its waste in our bodies: radioactive and other munition and industrial waste dumping has contributed to the increasing presence of heavy metals in marine mammals and human beings, configuring our bodies as participants in metallic modernity. (DeLoughrey, 2010, p. 707)

If the presence of metallic munition has the tendency to give rise to a metallic modernity because "human beings are formed by the ocean" exactly the way the "ocean might be formed by human history" (DeLoughrey, 2010, p. 707), then it becomes essential to study the kind of modernity that we, as people of the Subcontinent, have come to acquire as a result of the excessive dumping of human bodies into our waters.

Nehal Johri, in an article titled "What is behind India's rape problem", relates that "According to the latest government figures, Indian police registered 33,658 cases of rape in 2017. Experts say that a woman in India is raped every 16 minutes" (Johri, 2019, para.6). Another article, "Rape cases on the rise", focusing on Pakistan, informs how 10,000 rape cases were reported in Punjab between 2014 and 2017 (2020, Shah).

If one were to probe into the reasons for this increasing number of rapes in Pakistan and India, collectively referred to as the Subcontinent, and were to do it from a Hydro-critical perspective, then metals in water resulting in metallic modernity helps us see the overt sexual activity in this region in light of the ample flesh that rests in the waters of India and Pakistan. If the "refashioning of metal into

politics, art, and history" is "constitutive of transatlantic modernity" (DeLoughrey, 2010, p. 710), then the ever-increasing obsession with the human body, and that too mostly sexual, is constitutive of an Indian modernity, or the collective modernity of the Subcontinent. This is evident from the fact that the television shows and films of the Subcontinent take sexual consummation as a necessary concluding action of their narratives, and sex also finds a convenient space in the lives of the Subcontinent's political leaders. An article written by Jug Suraiya in 2013 for *The Times of India* by the name of "Indian males can't help being sex-obsessed; it's in their genes" reflects an incredulity at Indian men's unstoppable sexual advances and the need to trace the reasons behind it. While researchers from different fields may trace different reasons, from medical to psychological to cultural, a Hydro-critic may take water as the source and see what is present in it which may be influencing certain behaviours.

Since one of the major concerns of Hydro-criticism is to bring an environmental change, it will now be discussed how the water-related violence of 1947 has environmentally affected the Subcontinent and might continue to negatively affect it in the coming years.

Amna Mufti, an Urdu language writer of Pakistani origin recently wrote a novel by the name *of Paani Mar Raha Hai*, translated as *Water is Dying*. When I asked her in a telephonic interview what had inspired her to write this environmentally concerned novel about Pakistan's gradually shrinking waterbodies, she replied:

> My entire life has been the inspiration behind this novel. I live near the dried-up Beas, the dryness resulting from our desires to take hold of waterways. I have also witnessed the shrinking Sutlej, at the bank of which stood my ancestral village. The same is the case with Ravi, all because of our negligent attitude towards water. The way we are dirtying up our pure water, regardless of whether you take into account the religious, cultural or social connotations of "pure", is just horrible. Not only have we seen the rivers shrinking but also the waterfowl disappearing along with them; birds which were specific to water habitats. Migrations have also played a crucial role in destroying our rivers. Migrations, until and unless backed by climatic reasons, is very wrong. Nature is destroyed when politics enters it. I wonder what the mass migration of 1947 will lead to regarding our environmental future. We have unforeseen natural disasters in store for us. The other disconcerting factor is water division. Sundering the rivers is something that horrifies me and leaves me wondering how people can guide natural elements. Rivers and seas are not ours. We cannot control them. Can you keep a bird from flying across Wahga border? How can you allot a passport to water that has been flowing for centuries in a manner designated to it by nature? (Mufti, 2021)

It is interesting how Mufti, in one single answer, encapsulates multiple water-related concerns. Mufti too, like Bapsi Sidhwa, raises question regarding what will happen as a result of the maltreatment of nature that took place in 1947, when she forebodes a grim environmental future for the Subcontinent.

Before moving on to what may happen in the future, it is important to see the prevalent environmental degradation that has ensued because of the rivers partitioned in 1947. It is important to note that "[e]nvironmentalists have been talking about Pakistan's shrinking rivers for many years now" (Khalid, 2019, para.6), and these shrinking rivers of Pakistan, without any doubt, are the results of the careless partitioning of the entire region, as it is mentioned time and again by scholars. The blame is mostly put on Radcliffe, who did not bring into account the water flowing through the Subcontinent at all, and drew the dividing line within a matter of "just three weeks", considering "factors such as communications and infrastructure" without realizing "that a geographer might have something of value to say" (Haines, 2017, p. 27-28). This resulted in an imbalanced division of water, with India gaining the upstream power of water and Pakistan attaining a "downstream and vulnerable" position in this regard (Haines, 2017, p. 35). Since an extreme sense of nationalism had been inculcated in both the communities, the interest in sovereignty extended itself to include a control over water as well. It would be better to say that Indian and Pakistani governments now wanted to rule over the natural elements as well which came inside their territory, for "Rivers challenge state sovereignty by flowing across borders" while humans, refusing to consider this natural element as superior or even equal, "challenge each other's claims to sovereignty, by interfering with rivers or by contesting the right to do so" (Haines, 2017, p. 36). The water dispute continued, eventually resulting in the Indus Water Treaty of 1960. However, the fluidity, or the "meandering nature" of the region's rivers, as Daniel Haines puts it, did not yield a definite, negotiable policy. India continued to practice its absolute sovereignty, based on the idea that an "upstream power wholly owns the water that flows within its borders" and Pakistan continued striving to demand water, arguing that "a downstream state has the right to continue receiving water to which it is accustomed" (Haines, 2017, p. 35).

It is easy to comprehend that the entire dispute, which eventually brought in water as also an element to be territorialized, arose from the idea of partitioning the Subcontinent. Had it not been divided, or not so carelessly divided, no imbalance in power would have emerged. An equal share of lands would have resulted in an equal share of waters as well. Unfortunately, the power imbalance raised water issues and continues to do so, as India still practices its absolute sovereignty over water because of being an upstream power. This has led it to use the rivers' waters the way it wants, one of the desires in this regard being to stop the rivers from flowing into the other side of the border, for a "state's ability to control the flow of water out of, or into, its territory" is considered a "vital marker of its fitness to govern" (Haines, 2017, p. 36). This is one of the reasons why Daniel

Haines, in his book *The Indus Divided*, refers to the Indus Water Treaty as nothing but a "Phantom of Cooperation". A 2019 article "Water crisis brews between Pakistan and India as rivers run dry" informs that the "rivers and taps" have "run dry" and "mass water scarcity" looms ahead in Pakistan (Bloomberg, 2019). It also mentions how the water crisis is a result of growing hatred between the two countries, inclining India to violate the treaty by building hydroelectric projects "along the Chenab River". It is understandable that considering its prospects, India cannot be criticized for planning hydroelectric projects, but at the same time, the fact cannot be eschewed that India is doing so by violating the water rights of a country which was its part once, before communal hatred started. Instead of declaring that the water-conflict is a major source of row between the two countries, it would be better to say that it is the result of political rows between Pakistan and India that their rivers are also suffering, particularly their tributaries that lie in Pakistan and are almost non-existent.

*Figure 1: A recent picture of River Ravi, showing the huge patches of dry land, clearly visible above water.*

Now it would be instructive to discuss other probable results of what happened to the waters of the Subcontinent in 1947 by taking into consideration the filth that got accumulated in the wells and rivers in the form of the dead bodies of Partition victims. What kind of future does this act of dumping dead bodies hold out for the environmental condition of the Subcontinent? Do we, as inhabitants of the Subcontinent, need to fear more natural disasters because of what happened to our waterbodies at the most crucial point in our history?

Charne Lavery, while tracing the reason why humans so casually dump waste into water, notes:

> The ocean has long been considered the ideal location for the disposal of waste, including, among many other things, treated and untreated sewage poured easily into the sea, the vast quantities of sand and earth displaced into continental margins by harbour dredging, and the irredeemable byproducts of nuclear reactions secretly sunk. The ocean's vastness, viscerally encountered and culturally reproduced, has seemed a guarantee of disappearance. (Lavery, 2017, para.1).

This passage tells that it is the quality of water that absorbs things in such a way and makes them invisible by carrying them in their depths. That is what inclines humans to throw waste into it. The instant drowning of them is what makes the humans believe that the item dumped has disappeared forever. However, what happens after this is explained by Lavery in the following lines:

> But that sublime image—wild, limitless, outside—is pockmarked by reminders of both past and distant disposals. Most famously, the now familiar plastic island in the Pacific, made up of vast quantities of slowly broken-down plastic collected in an ocean gyre, so large as to be visible from space. And, a recent scan of the floor of the Pacific Ocean which revealed that even the deepest parts of the ocean, up to four miles down, are littered with humanity's detritus. It is often very difficult to adequately represent environmental destruction, because it happens so slowly and anonymously. . . . Chemical pollution is displaced not only spatially but temporally, "such that accountabilities exceed the scope of individual lives, bioaccumulating or persisting over time, across regulatory regimes, beyond research grants and into the conjectural future." (Lavery, 2019, para.1)

It is the slowness with which water gets polluted over time that creates a frightful picture of the Subcontinent's waters, worse than what we are already witnessing in the form of water-scarcity. If the deepest parts of the Pacific Ocean, as told in the passage above, are littered with detritus which must have been thrown into it years and years ago, then the deepest layers of our waters, or of the Indian ocean into which all our rivers flow must still be carrying the detritus formed by several dead bodies that were consigned to wells, canals, rivers and seas during 1947. A "plastic island in the Pacific, made up of vast quantities of slowly broken-down plastic" forebodes the occurrence of strange patches of land in our region as well. But what would that patch look like is a question the answer of which might be as much nauseating as it is frightening.


*Figure 2: Garbage Island on the Pacific Ocean*

What happens to human bodies in water, and whether such a result as shown above should be feared or not in case of human flesh forming the detritus is a question that becomes essential at this point. Edward Willhoft, former principal of Scientific Consultancy, ETGS, explains that the "solids making up the human body are dissimilar to water, the latter having polar properties, so much so that water will form a weak bond with other molecules through electrostatic bonding. . . . Principally, because of the great dissimilarity between water and the cellular components of the body, dissolution of the latter by the former does not occur" (Willhoft, *2019*). This statement based on scientific facts gives us all the reasons to realize the carelessness with which we have been treating our waterbodies in 1947, as shown in *Ice-Candy Man*, and fear the imminent worsened environmental degradation that awaits us in future.

The analysis of *Ice-Candy Man* shows how Bapsi Sidhwa turns out to be a creative writer way ahead of her times. Long before literature had taken a political turn, Bapsi Sidhwa used fiction to make us contemplate questions pertaining to our environment. By placing them in the mind and observation of the character of a child, she also seems to have infused the idea that some questions need to be mulled over right from childhood. One may usefully employ DeLoughrey's position to critically appreciate such literary texts that keep us from moving ahead without first thinking what we have been doing in our past. *Ice-Candy Man* takes the form of a text that does not appeal in terms of aesthetics only, but also in terms of the environmental conscience it imparts. The analysis reinforces DeLoughrey's idea that the defiling of water damages

generations both mentally and physically and, simultaneously, opens research avenues to think about significant role literature can play in the shaping of human societies, and work for better environmental conditions.

**Note.** The author publishes this paper as a tribute to Bapsi Sidhwa. She died on December 25, 2024, in Houston, Texas, United States.

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