From Belligerency to Recovery: A Postcolonial Account of Navigating Partition Trauma in Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India

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Introduction

Celebrated for her poignant and immersive storytelling, Bapsi Sidhwa encapsulates the harrowing ordeals of Partition in *Cracking India*. The novel explores the depths of profound loss, pervasive trauma, and the strenuous endeavour to reconstruct lives amid the ensuing chaos. Through the innocent yet astute perspective of young Lenny Sethi, Sidhwa vividly depicts the brutal realities of Partition, unveiling the complex and multifaceted dimensions of human suffering. This paper extensively analyses the loss of personal identities experienced by Sidhwa's characters, particularly focusing on two victimized women, Lenny Sethi and Shanta Ayah, and their re-

sulting identity crises under postcolonial scrutiny. It dissects how Partition breaks their self-perception, pushing them into a state of existential crisis. Furthermore, the sense of communal identity crisis is not limited to just individual characters; with Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus embroiled in violent riots against each other, reflecting the pervasive societal fragmentation. By examining these stories through the infiltration of trauma theory, the paper explores the profound psychological scars borne by specific characters, shedding light on their traumatic encounters and the ensuing psychological disintegration. Nevertheless, it also tells the story of the healing journey, focusing on how Sidhwa's characters find their way to recovery. The paper illustrates how, despite the pervasive trauma, characters find resilience and recovery, embodying the human spirit's tenacity and capacity for regeneration as described by the author.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This paper takes literature as its primary aspect with a female character to support this aspect, and two literary theories to serve both research questions. This paper examines the themes of loss and its effects through Edward Soja's postcolonial theory of Spatial Justice. Furthermore, Cathy Caruth's trauma theory of the unclaimed experience is employed to explore the process of trauma and recovery among the characters.

1.2 Research Methodology

By adopting a qualitative approach, this paper aims to analyse the themes of loss, identity, and trauma in Sidhwa's *Cracking India*. The research focuses on Soja's Spatial Justice to explore how space and place impact personal and communal identity. Caruth's Trauma Theory of Unclaimed Experience is applied to examine the characters' experiences of trauma and recovery. The study does not attempt to interconnect Soja's and Caruth's theories directly but uses them to frame specific questions about spatial manipulation and unclaimed experiences of trauma. This methodological framework serves as the modus operandi for analysing the novel's depiction of Partition and its aftermath.

1.3 Research Questions

This paper will investigate the following questions:

1. How does Cracking India portray the theme of loss and its impact on personal and communal identity through Edward Soja's theory of Spatial Justice?

2. How does Cracking India depict the process of trauma and recovery among its characters through Cathy Caruth's theory of unclaimed experience?

Identity Disintegration and the Spatial Justice in Cracking India

2.1 Personal Identities and the Disintegration

The burning of the liver, the eyes' eagerness, the hearts' grief, Remain unaffected by this cure for disunion's pain; From where did the beloved, the morning breeze come? Where did it go? ("Subh-E-Azadi" 2017)

Depicting the profound sorrow and disillusionment of the India-Pakistan Partition, Faiz Ahmad Faiz's Subhe-Azadi resonates deeply with the thematic essence of Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India. The poem's

lamentation over never-ending pain and unmet dreams reflects the struggles of Sidhwa's characters trapped in personal and communal breakdowns. Faiz's verses mirror Lenny's loss of innocence and Ayah's tragic destiny with their burning sorrow and hopeful gaze. Just as Faiz's lines question the transient solace offered by the dawn breeze, Sidhwa's narrative interrogates the hard-to-reach healing process and the lasting wounds left on the individuals affected by Partition.

The compulsory relocation during the Partition of 1947 had a catastrophic effect on individual identity. In Cracking India, Lenny and Shanta Ayah undergo significant loss and displacement caused by the turmoil, illustrating how space is used to amplify social injustices. Edward Soja's Spatial Justice is essential for comprehending how forced migration during Partition resulted in a substantial loss of individual identity. Soja argues that space plays a crucial role in influencing social relationships and justice, rather than just serving as a background for social interactions. In Cracking India, this is evident as the characters navigate the upheaval caused by Partition. For instance, Lenny's innocence is shattered as she witnesses the violence and disorder that follow. Likewise, the kidnapping and following ordeal of Shanta Ayah emphasize

the destructive effects of altering one's personal identity through spatial control. Sidhwa writes, "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." (Sidhwa 1991, 149). This violent violation of Ayah's personal boundaries represents the wider societal injustices at hand and how compulsory relocation disrupts one's identity. According to Soja's Spatial Justice, it is evident that the manipulation of space during Partition was not just a physical displacement but also a profound dislocation of personal identity. This theoretical model examines the intricate relationship between space, identity, and justice in the story, showing how the characters' identities are permanently changed by the enforced relocation and resulting social injustices.

Lenny Sethi's innocent perception of the world around her, starkly juxtaposed with the brutality of the Partition, highlights the deep scars left by the spatial and social upheaval. Lenny Sethi, a four-year-old Parsee girl marked by her painful honesty and incapacity to lie, is also burdened with the affliction of polio. Her physical restrictions and candid demeanour are intertwined, shaping how she interacts and how others view her. Facing the harsh truths of religious violence during the Partition, Lenny experiences significant changes in her identity due to shifting spatial boundaries. The abrupt assignment of religious labels and resulting violence dehumanize individuals, simplifying their identities into

symbolic categories, "One day everybody is themselves - and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols." (Sidhwa 1991, 80). This forced simplification and the violent redrawing of spatial lines profoundly disrupt Lenny's understanding of herself and her world, precipitating a deep identity crisis.

Lenny's personal space, once a sanctuary, becomes a site of violence and betrayal. This alteration of space greatly affects her sense of self, as she struggles with losing her childhood innocence and facing the brutal truths of her environment. Her reflective thoughts express her poignant confusion and fear regarding the fragmentation of both geographical and societal aspects, "Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother's then?" (Sidhwa 1991, 80). These reflections underscore her struggle to comprehend the tangible and intangible changes around her. The story vividly shows how Partition's external chaos not only divides the physical surroundings but also the psychological and social identities of individuals through Lenny's perspective. The intricate interplay between innocence and experience in Lenny's journey during this tumultuous period underscores the profound impact of external events on personal identity, illustrating how deeply spatial reconfigurations can affect an individual's sense of self.

Lenny's 18-year-old nanny, Shanta Ayah's sense of self, previously based on her position and connections in Lenny's home are abruptly shifted as she becomes a target of collective animosity When a mob discovers Shanta Ayah, at home, her life changes drastically. The mob drags her away, and she is forced into prostitution by Ice-candy-man, who later marries her, and she becomes Mumtaz. This violent abduction marks the beginning of a profound identity crisis for Ayah. Ayah, who was once a source of maternal comfort and stability for Lenny, now exemplifies the harsh effects of spatial manipulation and communal violence on individual identities as she is forced into a life of exploitation and abuse. The narrative captures this harrowing transformation, "Though she looks more ragged - and thin - her face and hands splotched with pale dry patches and her lips cracked," (Sidhwa 1991, 81). This powerful portrayal highlights Ayah's inner conflict and the deep sense of displacement she feels. The once vibrant and nurturing Ayah is now a symbol of the 'devastating effects of spatial manipulation and violence' on personal identity, stripped of her autonomy and subjected to the whims of those who wield power through violence. Her situation underscores how the distribution of space and power during Partition reshaped people's lives, causing lasting wounds and pushing them into unfamiliar roles and identities. Ayah's shift from a cherished caregiver to a prey of kidnapping and misuse showcases the individual misfortunes intertwined with the broader historical turmoil of Partition.

Bapsi Sidhwa's storytelling in *Cracking India* powerfully echoes Edward Soja's theory of Spatial Justice, demonstrating her insightful grasp of how spatial control impacts individual identities. Sidhwa's depiction of the Partition goes beyond just narrating historical events, delving deeply into the spatial aspects of individual suffering and identity displacement. Her keen understanding of literature aligns with Soja's claim that space plays a crucial role in creating social inequalities, solidifying her work as an essential text in discussions of Spatial Justice. Sidhwa highlights the close relationship between space, power, and personal identity by incorporating personal traumas into the geographical upheaval of Partition.

2.2 Communal Identities and the Disintegration

The narrative in *Cracking India* captures the bitter conflict among Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus during Partition, reflecting the pernicious effects of spatial manipulation that ultimately results in a few repugnant. Edward Soja's Spatial Justice explains that the conflicts between communities were not just random acts of violence, but instead stemmed from purposeful changes in space that increased competition for land and resources. The novel details the brutal communal confrontations, where "the red bricks of Lahore are stained with blood" emphasizing the harsh truth of the competition for control over space. The spatial redistribution fuelled resentment and resulted in harmful patterns of retaliation and payback.

This clash over space highlights the importance of spatial justice, since the random creation of boundaries and the displacements of people disrupted traditional ways of living, fuelling sectarian tensions. *Cracking India* reveals the devastating outcomes of spatial injustices, where the desire for spatial control led to widespread suffering and systemic violence, leaving lasting scars on the socio-cultural environment.

In Cracking India, Sidhwa's depiction of the communal violence during Partition serves as a harrowing testament to the catastrophic consequences of spatial reconfiguration. The violent upheaval in Pir Pindo village, now a part of India, is triggered by the Sikhs, in a frenzied bid to assert control, massacre nearly everyone, triggering a Ghadar. Edward Soja's Spatial Justice reveals that this violent incident highlights how the random changing of boundaries and enforced relocations heightened preexisting conflicts and sparked unprecedented aggression. The novel meticulously details the descent into chaos, where the manipulation of space exacerbates sectarian rivalries, leading to bloodshed and ruin. The systematic slaughter in Pir Pindo epitomizes the devastating impact of spatial injustice on communal harmony, where the relentless quest for spatial dominance obliterates centuries-old bonds and creates feelings of mistrust and hostility. Sidhwa's narrative, through its vivid and unflinching portrayal of such atrocities, reveals the profound and enduring scars left by the spatial upheavals of Partition, showcasing how the disruption of spatial equilibrium not only displaces individuals but also dismantles the very fabric of inter-community relations, leading to irrevocable loss and suffering.

The loss of communal identity during Partition becomes a potent weapon for characters like Ice-candyman in Cracking India. Dilnawaz, the Ice-candy-man, showcases how the breakdown of social connections can be used to advance personal grudges, aligning with Soja's concept of Spatial Justice. As a pretentious Sufi, Ice-candy-man hides his malicious motives behind spiritualism, but his real character shows a deep sense of Schadenfreude. He orchestrates communal violence to seek revenge on Shanta by manipulating the volatile environment to achieve his goals. By abetting her Muslim brothers into capturing her, he exploits the breakdown of community bonds, demonstrating how spatial upheaval and social fragmentation can be weaponized. His behaviour highlights the dark possibilities of manipulating space, as breaking down shared identities can allow personal grudges to thrive. The chaos of Partition provides Ice-candy-man with the perfect backdrop to enact his revenge, as the traditional structures of trust and kinship are eroded. The spatial reconfiguration not only disturbs physical spaces but also breaks down the moral and social structure of society, allowing individuals like Ice-candy-man to take advantage of these cracks. Sidhwa uses this character to showcase how spatial justice can have a negative aspect, as the manipulation of space and identity is not only a result of political choices but also a means for personal harm. The actions of the Ice-candyman bring attention to the dangerous overlap of individual grievances and communal violence, demonstrating how the breakdown of communal identity can be used to commit more atrocities. This use of societal breakdown showcases the significant and harmful effects of spatial injustice, as the reshaping of physical and social structures leads to an environment full of chances for revenge and aggression, ultimately increasing the pain and disorder of Partition.

The British leaders, playing a devious role in the Partition riots, illustrate how controlling space and power can result in harmful societal unrest. Their strategic gerrymandering and the infamous "divide and rule" policy did not just sew long-standing animosity and distrust among the groups but also encouraged a climate conducive to conflict and disharmony. Deliberately worsening already existing tensions by frequently showing favouritism towards one community over another to maintain control ultimately led to irreparable damage to the social structure. This deliberate bias and manipulation of geographic boundaries exacerbated social rifts, complicating the process of reconciliation. The sudden and haphazard exit of the British sparked violence, revealing a significant disregard for the socio-political intricacies they had historically taken advantage of. The sudden departure created a void in power and led to a disorderly reshuffling of borders, resulting in the outbreak of communal violence. The actions of the British rulers show how spatial injustice can have a destructive effect when space is manipulated as a means of control and domination, leading to severe consequences for the residents in these areas. The boundaries that were imposed artificially and the chaotic withdrawal that followed sparked intense communal hostility, revealing the dangerous combination of manipulating space and imperial ambitions. By serving as bystanders to the ensuing violence, the British rulers underscored their moral bankruptcy, as their policies and actions laid the groundwork for the mass atrocities that followed. Their participation in the Partition riots serves as a clear example of how control over territory and authority can result in significant societal breakdown. This underscores the central tenet of Soja's Spatial Justice, where the control and configuration of space are inextricably linked to the production of social injustices.

Unclaimed Trauma and Gradual Recovery in Cracking India

3.1 Trauma and the Unclaimed Experience

Sidhwa's storytelling in *Cracking India* closely reflects Cathy Caruth's trauma theory of unclaimed experience, showing the fragmented and non-linear quality of traumatic memory. Using Caruth's theory as a framework, Sidhwa delves into the traumatic effects of the Parti-

tion, revealing how it interrupts the flow of memory and sense of self. The narrative oscillates between past and present, mirroring the characters' shattered recollections, thereby emphasizing the enduring impact of traumatic experiences. The fragmented narrative mirrors the characters' difficulty in understanding and expressing their pain, emphasizing the indescribable essence of trauma discussed by Caruth. Sidhwa's characters struggle with their fragmented memories, as their identities are constantly being reshaped by traumatic events that keep coming back. This nonlinear narrative structure symbolizes Caruth's claim that trauma, as an unclaimed event, cannot fully integrate into one's consciousness, continuing to linger in the mind. The narrative's cracks and breaks mirror the characters' inner chaos, underscoring how trauma changes how one views time and self at a core level. Sidhwa's skilful utilization of this fragmented form not only captures the disorienting impact of trauma but also urges the reader to connect with the deep sense of dislocation felt by her characters, fitting perfectly with Caruth's theoretical framework.

The horror faced by Ice-candy-man in Sidhwa's Cracking India is vividly depicted when he sees a horrific scene of a train from Gurdaspur carrying the bodies of deceased Muslims. Sidhwa narrates,

Ice-candy-man comes to an abrupt and jolted halt. He is breathless, reeking of sweat and dust, and his frantic eyes rake the group. They rest for an instant on the Sikh, and flutter back to us. "A train from Gurdaspur has just come in," he announces, panting. "Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts!" Icecandy-man's grip on the handlebars is so tight that his knuckles bulge whitely in the pale light. (Sidhwa 1991, 123)

This traumatic event triggers his spiral into aggression and retribution. The Ice-candy-man's change, triggered by the untold trauma of witnessing brutality, corresponds to Caruth's idea of unclaimed experience, where trauma interrupts identity and memory, resulting in harmful actions. This horrifying moment creates a lasting impact on his mind, leading him into a cycle of seeking revenge and being cruel. The additional pain of this situation is intensified by the widespread communal conflicts present in the story, showing how personal distress is both a result and a catalyst of group turmoil. The unaddressed trauma of Ice-candy-man not only leads to his involvement in communal violence but also showcases the harmful effects of unresolved trauma, resulting in more rounds of violence and revenge. His behaviour, influenced by the trauma from the partition, highlights the significant effect of unacknowledged experiences on personal and group actions, as vividly portrayed in Sidhwa's story.

The religious trauma portrayed in *Cracking India* is closely connected with Caruth's idea of unclaimed experi-

ence, where traumatic incidents linger and torment the sufferers without being resolved. Imam Din, the Muslim chef of the Sethi family, demonstrates this trauma by being pressured to falsely swear to protect Ayah from the Muslim mobs. The deep religious and moral turmoil he experiences during the Partition is reflected in his internal struggle and the sacrilegious act he is compelled to perform. Likewise, when Master Tara Singh visits Lahore and gives a speech against Muslims, it leads to a violent outbreak of killing and burning, showing the destructive effects of religious provocation on community relations. This speech sparks violent conflicts, worsening existing religious tensions and causing a lasting impact on the community's collective mindset. These events underscore how religious trauma during the Partition manifests through forced sacrilegious acts and incitement to violence, creating a cycle of hatred and retribution that perpetuates the communal divide.

The conflicts between religions and their mud-slinging in *Cracking India* are powerful causes of trauma, echoing Caruth's theory of unclaimed experience. Her theory posits that traumatic events often remain unresolved, continually haunting the affected individuals. The book vividly depicts how these conflicts are shown through words and actions between religious groups, causing lasting emotional wounds. For instance, the venomous confrontations and allegations among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs are not just temporary bursts of anger but derive from longstanding grievances and uncertainties.

This inter-religious mud-slinging worsens the already tense atmosphere, resulting in increased violence and suspicion. The communal violence, fuelled by inflammatory language and long-standing hostilities, demonstrates how the lasting effects of Partition are continued through recurring cycles of revenge and animosity. This relentless conflict underscores Caruth's concept that trauma if not acknowledged and dealt with, can cause damage to individuals and communities for a prolonged time. The emotional impact of these clashes between different religions is deep, as individuals are always reminded of their pain and grievances, hindering any real possibility of reconciliation or healing. Through the lens of unclaimed experience, the novel encapsulates the enduring legacy of Partition's religious trauma, highlighting the destructive power of unresolved historical wounds.

3.2 Lenny's Perspective and Trauma through the Unclaimed Experience

Lenny's naive view of the violent events of Partition provides a distinctive and heartfelt way to observe trauma, mirroring Caruth's idea of unclaimed experience. As a young kid, Lenny's firsthand encounters are unedited and uncensored, depicting the deep and sometimes confusing influence of the violence she witnesses. Her disability gives her a unique clarity and directness in her observations that many adults do not have. This perspective from a child highlights the harsh truths of trau-

ma, untouched by adult explanations or protections, uncovering the profound emotional damage caused by the disorder and violence of Partition. Sidhwa communicates the enduring and widespread impact of trauma by portraying it through the perspective of someone who observes it in its purest state, as illustrated by Lenny.

Lenny's lack of experience and innocence peak when she trustingly divulges Ayah's location to Ice-candy-man, resulting in Ayah being raped. Lenny is deeply affected by this act, which is a result of a child's candid honesty. The traumatic event of Shanta being forcibly taken away has a profound impact on Lenny, changing her views on safety and trust permanently. This example demonstrates Caruth's unclaimed experience, where trauma is not completely understood or incorporated into the victim's story. The sudden invasion of the Sethi house and the resulting arrest of Ayah devastates Lenny, leaving her feeling overwhelmed with guilt and confusion. The betrayal suffered by Ayah and observed by Lenny turns her innocence into a constant source of torment as she struggles with the outcomes of her unintentional deeds. This traumatic event, laden with emotional upheaval, disrupts the continuity of Lenny's experiences, resulting in fragmented memories that trouble her.

The non-linear and fragmented nature of Lenny's recollections further illustrates the gaps in memory characteristic of trauma. The brutality of the Partition disrupts her perception of time and reality, leading her to vividly recall traumatic moments in a fragmented way. These memory gaps highlight how traumatic events can disrupt a person's sense of self and coherence. Lenny's story, characterized by these interruptions, emphasizes the lasting impact of trauma, as her fragmented memories show how the past continues to affect her current state. This representation echoes Caruth's theory, illustrating how the effects of trauma go beyond the initial incident, persistently shaping the victim's understanding and sense of self.

Lenny's enduring trauma, rooted in the harrowing events of Partition, leaves indelible scars on her identity. These traumatic experiences greatly impact her development, highlighting the persistent and widespread effects of trauma. This is in line with the unclaimed experience, where trauma still influences a person's identity and viewpoint well beyond the original occurrences. Lenny's lingering psychological effects from trauma, including fragmented memories, memory gaps, and unresolved guilt, emphasize how deeply it can impact identity and perspective, weaving a thread of pain and resilience in her story.

3.3 Communal Recovery and Resilience and the Unclaimed Experience

In Cracking India, the harrowing aftermath of Partition underscores an astonishing phenomenon; the ability of

society to bounce back in the face of destruction. Although the devastating trauma caused by shattered lives and histories, the communities portraved in the novel show a strong ability to rebuild and strengthen their social bonds. Caruth's unclaimed experience illuminates this phenomenon by emphasizing how trauma, though deeply disruptive, can catalyse a process of collective resilience and recovery. Lenny's storytelling reveals a delicate balance between loss and resilience for readers to observe. The societies, after experiencing breakdown and disorder, work to recreate social connections, displaying an impressive skill in rebuilding support systems and communal unity. This comeback is not just about surviving, but about showing human strength and determination in dealing with both systemic and personal traumas. Caruth's insights suggest that trauma can lead to a reassessment of social ties and a revitalized dedication to community unity. Thus, Cracking India portrays not just the harsh truth of sorrow but also the strong determination that arises from such deep disturbance, showing a complex comprehension of how societies overcome and rise above their traumatic events. The novel vividly depicts how social resilience thrives amid the devastation of Partition, showing the inherent human ability to rebuild and recover from collective trauma.

In the denouement of Cracking India, Bapsi Sidhwa skilfully employs narrative techniques that enable a deep healing process from trauma. The narrative transcends beyond just retelling events by using Lenny's character, becoming a therapeutic tool for coming to terms with past horrors. Caruth's insights into her unclaimed experience explain this phenomenon, showing how the gradual expression of traumatic memories leads to psychological cohesion. While Lenny delves into her fragmented memories, she starts to integrate her painful past into her current sense of self, turning scattered memories into a cohesive story. This process of narrative healing goes beyond just coping; it is also a significant step in taking back control of one's fragmented mind. By crafting her story with intention, Lenny, and by extension, find a sense of completion, demonstrating how storytelling can heal deep wounds. The novel's conclusion thus becomes a testament to the human capacity for healing through the articulation and integration of unclaimed experiences.

Conclusion

Cracking India stands as an enduring testament to the importance of recognizing history. Sidhwa urges readers to face and recognize past wrongdoings by exploring the trauma and recovery of its characters. The story serves as a strong message to strive for a fairer and more compassionate community. This exploration of pain and strength in literature stresses the importance of remembering history, and promoting a shared dedi-

cation to fairness and empathy. By delving into the visceral aftermath of Partition, the novel advocates for an empathetic reckoning with history, fostering a deeper understanding of the imperative to eschew repeated injustices. The paper employs Edward Soja's Spatial Justice and Cathy Caruth's unclaimed experience to dissect Cracking India through a postcolonial lens as well as a trauma theory, defending its exploration of loss, identity, and recovery. These theoretical frameworks bolster the analysis and effectively shed light on the novel's intricate connection between spatial dynamics, justice, and the impact of trauma.

The resilience exhibited by the characters in Cracking India underscores the indomitable human spirit's capacity to endure and transcend adversity. Their unwavering pursuit of self-discovery and fairness in the face of disorder and suffering stands as a powerful testament to human fortitude. This narrative emphasizes the crucial significance of this journey, showing how people continue to seek their identity and fight for fairness even when facing incredibly difficult challenges. The adventures of the characters illustrate the deep inner power within all humans, reinforcing the novel's message that resilience and the pursuit of justice are fundamental to overcoming the darkest of times.

The Partition of 1947 significantly altered the Weltanschauung of the Indian subcontinent, reshaping the identities, beliefs, and perceptions of the affected populations. The Partition in Cracking India starkly underscores the paramount importance of empathy, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. The devastating occurrences of 1947 highlight the disastrous results of separation, underscoring the deep necessity for harmony and shared comprehension. By vividly portraying suffering and displacement, the novel implores readers to acknowledge the ongoing importance of compassion and solidarity. It shows how the lack of communal harmony leads to immense destruction, promoting a strong dedication to empathetic involvement and united societal connections. The narrative serves the importance of tolerance and understanding in preventing a catastrophic rupture in humanity.

NOTE:

1. Cracking India was originally published as Ice Candy Man in U.K. in 1988. Although it was first published as Cracking India in both India and U.S.A., it is now available in India as Ice Candy Man.

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