

Varied Perspectives of Women: A Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's Select Novels

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Summation

This research study has scrutinized how Bapsi Sidhwa's female characters reconstruct, recreate, and reform their identities in a male-dominated world. The problems and difficulties they face during their evolution process by various factors such as patriarchy, culture, and religion is highlighted. The emancipation of new women from a submissive to a matured, bold, and brave female characters -- Zaitoon, Carol, Chuyia, Ayah, Feroza, Putli, and so on is created by Sidhwa to prove how women break the restraints of patriarchy, culture and religion.

Subaltern theory helps us to discover the unheard, muted and silenced tones of women caught in the web of their own miseries. The interdependent nature between Literature and women society is clearly investigated with Feminist theories. As it is used to dismantle the notions of patriarchy, not from a feministic perspective alone, but also from a humanistic perspective. Feminism is not against the dictates of male dominating society, it is not an exact opposite to the existing male centric society. The basics of feminism are constructed to explain how women are treated as second citizen human beings. The foremost role of feminism is to make people understand the need for equality. It also struggles to figure out how men are also caught as victims in the male dominated society.

The present study has identified how the perspectives of women have changed by struggling and resisting in the world, where they were prisoned by familial bonds, cultural stereotypes and religious beliefs. The hypothesis of the

thesis lies in it. The selected writer for the research study fights to empower and strengthen her women characters by exposing the problems they faced to the present society. Hence, their courage to battle against the customs of patriarchal world paved way for reformation and renovation of recreating new identities.

Sidhwa's female characters are mainly from different background and yet she makes it a point to bring solutions to all the problems women society as a whole face in this contemporary world. She uses her women characters as images to project to the outside world. Bapsi Sidhwa's novels create a strong, impregnable and a powerful impact in the minds of readers. It helps the readers to identify themselves in her female characters and to bring upon remedies to the sufferings they face in everyday lives.

Sidhwa spills much ink in stressing that the man-made society creates certain norms according to their own benefits. Hence there is no place for a woman in the process of creating these norms. Thus, the restrictions and the family set up are used to make women live under the clutches of patriarchy.

An American Brat is simply one more one of her works of art. A reviewer in *The New Statesman* says, "A conceived story teller, a loving canny onlooker ... she composes with power and pizzazz" (8). Beginning in Lahore, a standout amongst the most notable and excellent urban communities of South Asia the book moves to the United States. The story spins around a Parsi young lady and her life.

The main arrangement is to send her girl to the United States for a couple of months, where she will remain with her uncle Manek, a doctoral competitor at

the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. According to Elaine Feinstein:

The book is simply staggering to peruse ... to see, how a basic young girl moves to “gimme coke! From may I have a Coca Cola?” *American Brat* is a story about growing up, a touchy representation of how present day America appears to another entry . . . and an investigation of the effect it has on a Parsi young lady. (16)

In spite of his own initial troubles changing in accordance with life in America, Manek persuades Feroza to remain on as an understudy studying hotel management, an appropriately down to earth field, at a lesser school in Idaho. In Idaho she experiences the genuine America which impacts her life and changes her socially. In the organization of Jo, Rhonda, Gwen, Shashi and Bill, Feroza considers life to be multifaceted Mike works for the NASA in Houston. Manek is sufficiently traditional to come back to Pakistan to discover a reasonably accommodating, spouse. Feroza goes a lot further when she chooses to wed David Press, an American Jew, along these lines encouraging her mom’s wild eyed trip to The United States to stop the marriage.

Zareen is more than only a storage room preservationist, a comic personification of an Indian mother. She is a Parsi, and she realizes that Feroza’s wedding outside the little Parsi people group will mean, both for her girl and for the Parsi an otherworldly outcast. This perspective comprises the topical substance of the novel. At the end of the day, the novel is about a spoiled youthful Pakistani girl developing into a free Pakistani-American in the United

States, being settled to pick the best of the two universes. This is a novel about the different clashes or tensions, among married couples, among East and West, India and Pakistan, Parsi and Muslims, the holy and the profane, haves and the have-nots.

An American Brat is a story which reveals the immigratory experiences of a young girl in an American world. The adventurous, fun filled experiences and the terrific moments of her stay in America, the cultural collision that destroyed her Pakistani innocence and the influence of western culture into her is sketchfully painted by Sidhwa. In spite of, facing trouble in the immigration office and struggling to cope with the American way of English accent Sidhwa has created Feroza as a bold and brave girl who emerged into a new woman in America. During her short trip to Pakistan from America, Feroza realized her transformation from conservative shy and innocent girl to fearless, confident and adventurous young woman. It reveals Sidhwa's audacity to record the positives and negatives of living in the United States of America.

As a Third World craftsman, Bapsi Sidhwa like Mulk Raj Anand feels that an author has a converting task to carry out. She discusses the shameful acts which she exhibits through occurrences in her books. A portion of the treacheries recorded by Bapsi Sidhwa are the conduct of superpowers as clear in *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice- Candy Man* or the mistreatment of women as in *The Pakistani Bride* or a shamefulness done to a nation as observers in the misrepresentation of Pakistan's perspective of partition in *Ice-Candy Man* or the treachery done to a political pioneer displayed through Mohammed Ali Jinnah in

the battle for independence which she later endeavours to correct in *Ice-Candy Man*.

There is not an obvious departure from Euro-American generic conventions of fiction writing in the works of Bapsi Sidhwa. She, more or less, follows the traditional structural organization and conventions of novel writing. Her choice of generic style does not correspond to other prominent non-native writer's style that abrogates imperial novelistic conventions. Sidhwa includes numerous culture-specific sub-text types and orders of discourse in the flow of her main narrative.

Local allusions like local literature, folktales, local music etc. carry cultural discourse of any land. All of Bapsi Sidhwa's novels contain many such local allusions. Numerous examples are taken to illustrate her selection from the repertoire of Pakistani discourse and the strategy of using it. First of all, in *An American Brat* a reference to an extract from a popular song of Iqbal Bano, a famous Pakistani singer, is given not only in its original version in Urdu but also in English translation. To avoid repetitive dullness which may likely to be felt by local audience on reading the same thing first in Urdu and then in translated form, Sidhwa chooses to give the first line as it is in Urdu and then along with its English translation keeps on translating some more lines of the song. The song goes on as one of the characters, Shashi craftily croons the peculiar rhythm and tone of the singer, "Ulfat ki nayee manzil ko chaley (embarked on a new mission of love). You who have broken my heart, look where you're going/ I, too, lie in your path" (325).

At the beginning of *Ice-Candy Man*, the writer has translated a stanza from Iqbal's 'Shika' (complaint to God) to set up a backdrop theme for the story of the subcontinent partition. The considerable section of Iqbal's poetry is written in connection with the struggle of Muslims in the wake of the independence movement. As a child narrator, in a neutral way, Lenny sheds light on the situation of Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and Parsis during partition riots, and reveals the bestiality and hypocrisy of humans who have made use of religious guise to play havoc. The extract from the poem establishes an apt connection with the larger narrative content of the novel.

It is noted in all the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa that whenever she includes a local allusion, she takes conscious care to make its function and meaning evident in contexts. Here it is important to mention Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (155), a brief reference to which is provided in *The Crow Eaters* without an effort by the writer to explain or embellish it.

The Pakistani Bride, expresses the plight and pangs of women bearing tortures in the institution of marriage. In the beginning of the novel, all the female characters are shown as submissive, subservient and weak characters. The characters accepted their fate in the prison of marriage and they suffered in silence. The change in their perception is highlighted by Sidhwa through Saki's mother Hamida. She is a tribal woman who endured the beatings of her son as if it is her birth right, later when she found the same thing happening to her daughter in-law Zaitoon, Hamida suggests her to move away from their village. This thought of liberation in Hamida's character is shown as a symbol of

liberation towards emancipation. The next character is Miriam, she tried to stop Zaitoon from schooling saying that a girl is going to get married and deliver babies. So it is not essential to send her to school. The same woman raised her voice, when she understood how Qasim, Zaitoon's father arranged her daughter's wedding without her permission. The image of Miriam is identified in such a way, that she stands to the point that marriage should be made with the consent of a girl. This way of speaking for the need of change in the tribal society is worked and reworked by Sidhwa in her novel *The Pakistani Bride*.

In *The Pakistani Bride* there is a reference to a popular Pakistani film song. Every Pakistani is well aware of its verses and tune. The writer has translated the whole song into English. The song supports the context in which it is placed. Shahnaz of Hira Mandi, who is a prostitute, recites a song and dances over its tune which is complimented with the beats of tabla. Few lines of the translated song are worth quoting, "Oh, let me stay in purdah...don't lift my veil. If my veil/ if my purdah is removed...my mystery is betrayed...Allah...forbid! Allah...forbid!" (TPB 64).

Zaitoon's strong determination is described through Iqbal's oft-quoted poem, the difficulties Zaitoon endured in her marriage life is best exemplified through the poem. This first line of the poem is "Khudi ko ker buland itna". The surviving power of Zaitoon from her in-law's place and the newly accommodated tribal village disturbs Carol. After realizing the strong will-power of Zaitoon, Carol herself decided to make an end to all the problems that

she faced in her life.

Starting at the season of partition in 1947, the narrative of *The Bride* is set in the clamouring city of Lahore. The tale takes a turn towards the rocky stretch of Kohistan. The Hindu-Muslim clash and the resulting gore takes the peruser on an endeavor into the wild of the dim melancholic days amid those ridiculous uproars. Qasim, a tribesman from the upper area of Pakistan, going on a displaced person train conveying many travelers, battles through a sheltered exit, while a large portion of the travelers are butchered cruelly. He runs over a young girl, whose parents have likewise been casualties of the crazy killings. He names the young girl Zaitoon, after his very own expired little girl, and raises her with all protective friendship and love. Nikka, Qasim's companion masterminds Zaitoon to be left under the consideration of his significant other, Miriam. Under Miriam's maternal supervision, Zaitoon at last achieves the time of youthfulness. She is sustained by a sound religious training.

As Zaitoon turns fifteen, Miriam proposes Qasim to locate an appropriate husband for her. Qasim, energized with a sudden profound sentiment of fondness becomes nostalgic for his own special individuals, the ancestral. He looks for neighborly ties with a tribesman Misrikhan so as to give Zaitoon's turn in marriage to his child, Sakhikhan. The hurried choice maddens Nikka and Miriam, who are monstrosly disillusioned with Qasim. A rush of disarray and discontent goes through Zaitoon, yet her naivety abandons her dumbfounded. She has dependably trusted that Qasim would have picked the most ideal route for his dear little Zaitoon as another lady of the hour is frantically miserable in

her marriage. She can't change herself in that savage and uncouth society and all the more thus, with her cold- blooded and incomprehensible spouse. Finally, she chooses to flee however she realizes that by the inborn code, the discipline for such a demonstration is just demise. She is sufficiently lucky to be spared by the military Major Mushtaq and his associates. Siva Nandhini says:

Major Mustaq acts as the spokesman of the novelist and voices her views about the problems of cultural discrepancy. When he realize that the Punjabi Zaitoon is about to marry a Kohistani, he conveys his anguish about the fate of Zaitoon. The wide variation in the culture would eventually cause rift between the pair. It would have been better for Zaitoon to have accepted the proposal of the Punjabi jawan, but bound by her sense of duty to her adopted father she marries Sakhi. Major Mustaq after rescuing Zaitoon wishes that she had a peaceful life with the people who would understand her behavioural pattern and cultural traits. (290)

Lahore as an important landscape occupies a predominant role in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa. She observes and records remarkable locations, its characteristic features, and the historical background of the city, the beautifully constructed buildings, its specialty, and memorable incidents of that particular place. Innovatively, the ambience of the city with its traditional saga and customs moves through Feroza's wandering mind when she is on the way to airport in Lahore. Sidhwa charmingly portrays the scenery of setting sun feeling

the warmth of waters of Ravi, the magical setting of the daylight rays and the tower of Badshahi mosque. She also picturizes the pre-historic buildings and its style, the city streets of Lahore shaped with evergreen trees between sides shadowing over the modern bungalows. Sidhwa captures:

The brand-new, tree-lined boulevards and palatial bungalows, the ancient Moghul fort and the ancient mausoleums, the new gardens with new fountains, floated radiant in Feroza's multi-dimensional vision. It was her city. A beautiful, lushy green and luminous city, and she would miss it. Feroza felt the warmth of the sun nestle on the back of her head. She would miss Lahore, and her family. (AAB 47)

Likewise, in *Ice-Candy Man*, the glances of the ancient roads of Lahore are vividly portrayed by Sidhwa. In *The Pakistani Bride*, Zaitoon and Qasim who survived in the war of partition stayed in Lahore and they admired by the charming beauty of the city. Qasim feels that Lahore looks like an 'ageing concubine' who has had the history of rambling with Hindus, Muslim Mughals, Sikh, and the Britishers. (TPB 39)

The climatic conditions of Lahore are also given importance in Sidhwa's novels. The glimpse of summer is captured realistically in *The Crow Eaters*. She says:

It was a fierce day in June. The heat already had killed all the flies and mosquitoes in Lahore, and it took a daily toll in scores of human lives. Temperatures ranged between 118 and 119

degrees Fahrenheit in the shade. It required an effort to stir and people moved their limbs as little as possible, sitting up or reaching for a glass of water carefully and calculatively, like misers who have to pay for their indulgence in hard cash. Mostly they slouched in darkened rooms, painting like fish expiring in shallow waters. (*TCE* 279)

Bapsi Sidhwa, first composed two or three short stories and articles about the excellence of the 'Karakoram' mountains. Notwithstanding, when the inclination constrained her to recount the young lady's story, she chose to compose a short story which in the end, turned into her first novel, *The Bride*, additionally called *The Pakistani Bride*. It is a work of fiction, in view of the occasions from the inborn young lady's life. As Rida Igtadar affirms, "An important national asset, Karakoram Highway is highlighted in *The Bride*" (116).

Through her first novel, Sidhwa found adoration for composing. As indicated by Gitanjali Singh, "*The Bride* is quick moving and sufficiently intriguing. Sidhwa's virtuoso be that as it may, slanders in her style. She has an uncommon feeling of fun that is compelling. The instinctive nature of her depictions of the physical is the look; the body or the sexual demonstration is an extraordinary component among the subcontinent woman journalists" (79).

Sidhwa's *Water* provides an incisive look into the treatment of widows by the ancient Indian society. It talks about the injustices done to the Hindu widows. The novel relates how Chuyia, a child widow is trapped into the system

called marriage and it painfully describes how she is neglected and ignored by her father as soon as she becomes a widow. It explains about the problem of how widows are forced into prostitution by the upper class men of the society through Kalyani's character. It also brings to light about how the culture and tradition which oppress women favour men in all possible manners. As Shazrah Salam remarks:

Sidhwa clearly shows the Brahmin Hindu society of *Water* is of patriarchal society, because it always protects the interest of men and treats women as dispensable objects. The same society that punishes women if their husbands die before them allows Brahmin men to remarry if their wives die or fail to produce sons. This society allows men, like the fathers of Narayan and Rabindra, to keep mistresses and use prostitutes but in the name of sanctity of religion stops a widow from respectably marrying. (74)

The Crow Eaters traces the problems of inter-faith marriages, superstitious beliefs, the norms of Zoroastrian community. It captures the social mobility of a Parsi family; the representation of Faredoon's character upholds a strong autobiographical element. Sidhwa, belonging to a Parsi family, uses her family's migratory experiences in the novel. It shows how the potential destroyer of community that is partition caused fear in the minds of Parsi people about their settling. At the end of the novel, a character in *The Crow Eaters* asks, "But where will we go? What will happen to us? Faredoon replies, "We will stay where we are...let Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or whoever rule. What does it

matter? The sun will continue to rise and the sun continues to set in their asses...
(TCE 282).

This research work examined how Sidhwa's women characters are emancipated and empowered in their lives by shattering the oppressive forces thrown in their path towards empowerment and self-realization. Sidhwa shows how Zaitoon in *The Pakistani Bride* decides to leave her torturing husband and by breaking the norms of a patriarchal society. Feroza in *An American Brat* is shown as a symbol of liberty and independence, as a girl from a Third World country who seemed as a shy and conservative girl in nature is being transformed into a modern girl. She chooses to marry the one who she actually loves by changing the old aged customs of her Parsi family. Carol in *The Pakistani Bride* seeks sexual satisfaction in Mustaq's unconditional care. Thus, being an emotionally satisfied woman she finds solutions to her problems that kept on pricking her mind.

The researcher explains about the different repressive forces which destruct the lives of women in different situations, by representing the different perspectives of women through the feminist lens. Further the researcher also makes it to a point that how patriarchy, culture and religion which are framed by the society to protect and safeguard women have become as weapons to destroy women.

Thus the researcher has studied the selected works of Bapsi Sidhwa such as the *Crow Eaters*, *Ice-Candy Man*, *The Pakistani Bride*, *An American Brat* and *Water* and thrown light upon perspectives from various angles. The research

study has traced the problems and obstacles' faced by women during her time, by focusing mainly on the female characters, to find how they gave new identity by putting up with all the hardships and pains, to attain empowerment in their journey of life.

The researcher has analyzed the ways to deal with the various perspectives of the women character from selected novels. The researcher hopes and find that little research was carried in this angle, so the researcher has made a study on the themes relating to women, their plights and pangs of sufferings undergone by women in the patriarchal society the constraints imposed by the culture on them and the religious intolerance to which they were subjected to. The researcher felt the need of cultural discourses to educate and empower by being carrying the research about Pakistani social set up. Thus the researcher shows how Bapsi Sidhwa with her rebellious nature projects wrestling with her fertile imagination, relating to the cultural, religious and patriarchal issues in her novels.

As Sidhwa has been compared to so many writers, Sidhwa can be compared to African writers too. The researcher's insight also makes a gap for future scope of scrutinizing Sidhwa's male characters from a psychological point of view. Sidhwa can also be compared with Indian tribe writers for future scopes of research.