

CROSS CULTURALISM IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S *AN AMERICAN BRAT*

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ABSTRACT: - In this age of globalization, every country or community has a distinct culture and often within it there are divergent cultural mores. Cultural diversity adds color and variety to the human world but at the same time it divides people into numerous groups and sub-groups having little in common with one another, and thus proves a great cultural issue to human relationships. In point of fact, it is usually very difficult to categorize some writers and Bapsi Sidhwa is one of them. She has taken up the issue of the cultural difference and the problems arising out of it. This research paper explores how Bapsi Sidhwa beautifully portrayed cross culturalism in *An American Brat*.

KEYWORDS: Bapsi Sidhwa, Cross culturalism.

INTRODUCTION

Bapsi Sidhwa is a Pakistani novelist who writes in English and is resident in America. Sidhwa is widely recognized as one of the most prominent Pakistani-Anglophone novelists writing today. She was raised in the Parsi community, a religious and ethnic minority in Pakistan. Sidhwa skillfully links gender to community, nationality, religion, and class, demonstrating the ways in which these various aspects of cultural identity and social structure do not merely affect or reflect one another, but instead are inextricably intertwined. In 1991 she was awarded the Sitara-i-Imtiaz, Pakistan's highest national honor in the arts. She has also received a variety of grants and awards for her fiction, including a National Endowment for the Arts grant in 1987, a New York Times Book Review Notable Book of the Year award for *Cracking India* in 1991, and a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest award in 1993.

As a matter of fact, cross culturalism is concerned with exchange beyond the boundaries of the nation or a cultural group. Globalization has, to a great extent, accelerated and given impetus to cultural exchange. Culture may be defined as the shared set of assumptions, values and beliefs of a group of people by which they organize their common life. As a matter of fact, culture is the lens that we see the world through, the way we communicate, negotiate, take a decision, behave socially, even the way we feel. When we move outside our own cultural boundaries, issues like conflicts,

domination, elimination and assimilation affect our views, our perception, attitude and behavior.

The novel begins in Lahore, Pakistan. The protagonist of the novel *An American Brat* is Feroza Ginwalla, who is a pampered, protected sixteen-year-old Parsee. The Parsees, a small sect in Pakistan, take great pride in their liberal values, business acumen, and most importantly the education of their children. In the beginning of the novel, she is a shy girl, she won't answer the phone, she tells her mother to dress more conservatively, she sulks, she slams doors, she prefers the company of her old-fashioned grandmother; she seems to sympathize with fundamentalist religious thinking. Feroza's mother Zareen says to her husband Cyrus that Feroza must get away and for this, she is packed off to visit her Uncle Manek, a student at MIT. In this way, she moves from Gulberg, Lahore to Denver, Colorado, U.S.A. The novelist delineates the character of Feroza adapting to an alien culture and the stress that accrues when colliding cultures clash. On many occasions, Feroza finds herself in an awkward situation that she fails to understand the nuances of a foreign language. Feroza's roommate Jo helps her to grow and make herself fit in a new system. Feroza has shed her old persona of Lahore and she finds herself new with an independent attitude.

Here it is worth-mentioning that Manek goes to Pakistan and marries a Parsee girl but Feroza is determined to marry David- a Jew. When Zareen hears this, she immediately rushes to Feroza to convince her to marry a Parsee as she feels that Feroza's marriage to a non- Parsee would be a cultural suicide. Conversion is not permitted among Parsees and a Parsee girl marrying outside the faith is expelled from the Zoroastrian religious community. However, the same law does not apply to Parsee men.

When Feroza refuses Zareen's argument to marry a Parsee only, Zareen says angrily: "I should never have let you go so far away. Look what it's done to you- you've become an American brat!" (279) There is a sweep change in the attitude of Feroza who has been an orthodox and conservative earlier in Pakistan, instructing her mother not to be so modern. Now she considers her own faith as narrow minded. Zareen plays a new trick and frightens David away from Feroza by emphasizing

the cultural difference between the Zoroastrian and the Jewish. Zareen succeeds in her mission and David leaves Denver and Feroza for a job elsewhere.

Zareen thinks that the defiance of an immigrant i.e. her daughter's oppose will convert into consent to marry a Parsee boy. But Feroza has experienced freedom in America and she thinks it would not be possible for her to go back to Pakistan now. She decides to live in America and adjust herself well to a different culture and if not David, anyone else may be there for her in America whosoever he is, Parsee or non-Parsee.

As a matter of course, It is quite natural for a writer to give room to his/her own culture and social background in one's writings. Bapsi Sidhwa; the much acclaimed novelist, is not an exception in presenting the essential ethos of her society. Being a Parsi by birth, she is profoundly rooted in her own Parsi culture and beliefs and completely engrossed in it. She shows Parsis extremely preoccupied with abiding Westernization and following British ways.

The cultural identity is tied to uniqueness in food and eating habits, dress, personal relationships, rituals and ceremonies and Feroza's act of dressing 'daringly' is one such mild subversion and living the adversarial space. When Zareen smells the Pakistani bigotry making inroads into her cultural edifice; through her daughter Feroza getting radicalized, she presses the panic buttons. The cross-cultural effects on Feroza were that she became independent, obsessed, powerful, experienced, confident and secular. There are many effects on Feroza's mindset after experiencing the two contrasting sets of civilizations. Her relation with David and her liberties with him are ample proof of her mental advancement.

In the character of Jo, Sidhwa has shown the independence of American girls. While Feroza was dependent on her parents and for some time on her uncle Manek. But Manek taught her to be independent. All American characters are free and independent to take their own decisions as opposed to those of Pakistani

culture where women are still dependent and unable to take their decisions.

CONCLUSION:

Sidhwa has drawn extensively on her communal heritage and benefitted as a future writer from the privileged environment and cosmopolitan background typical of a wealthy Parsi home. Now a citizen of the United States, she has once again enlarged her community, and this expansion serves her well in *An American Brat*. In *An American Brat*, she addresses another aspect of community - the woman dangling between two cultures. As people move from one part of the world to another, seeming to dissolve national boundaries, the formation and maintenance of the community take on new dimensions, as community becomes even more fluid.

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