



Kaleidoscopic World of Diaspora in Fictions of Bapsi Sidhwa

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Abstract:

Being from a small Zoroastrian community, Bapsi Sidhwa is always aware of her surroundings and depicts them in her paintings. In her last three works, she discusses Parsi rites and culture. Sidhwa's favourite topics are migration and immigration. She was nine years old when India was partitioned in 1947, and in the novel *Ice Candy Man*, she discusses the issue of partition in an autobiographical tone. Her most recent novel, *An American Brat*, is primarily set in USA and depicts the challenges that immigrants encounter, therefore examining the Parsi and Pakistani diaspora. Sidhwa's woman characters are attractive, intellectual, and upbeat.

Key words: *Diaspora, Migration, Immigration, Partition*

Lead In:

Bapsi Sidhwa is a south Asian Parsi writer who prefers to be referred to as a "Punjabi-Pakistani-Parsi woman." One focuses on women and their religious practices and traditions. She was born in the Pakistani city of Karachi in 1938. (then province of undivided India). Following her birth, her family relocated to Lahore. Because she was her parents' only child, she spent her childhood in solitude, which was exacerbated by polio on her right leg when she was merely couple of years old. As a result, she was unable to be present regularly at



school. Her family hired an Anglo-Indian governess to assist her at home with her education. She was the one who heartened her to develop an insatiable reading habit. The books were the only thing that kept her from becoming bored. She took her Matriculation exam privately and graduated from Kinnard College for Women with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1956. In 1957, she married Gustad Kermani, a wealthy Parsi businessman, but their marriage ended in separation, and she returned to Lahore with her two kids. Mumbai, then known as Bombay, the city she frequently recalls, has wounded her soul deeply. It did, however, broaden her prospects.

Bapsi remarried into Noshirwan Sidhwa, a well-known businessman in Lahore. She visited Northern parts of Pakistan for her honeymoon. She listened about a Punjabi lassie who was married to a Kohistani man who was cruelly killed by her spouse for fleeing. Sidhwa felt impelled to write down this moving anecdote. Her debut novel *Bride* is based on this story, which is reassembled into a bigger narrative. It was later released in India under the title *The Pakistani Bride*. She and her spouse moved to the United States in 1983. She has been appointed as an Assistant Professor in the University of Houston's Creative Writing Program. Her third novel, *The Ice Candy Man*, was released in Karachi in 1991 and earned worldwide acclaim. In 1991, Milkweed Editions published *Cracking India* in the United States. The name was also modified this time by the publishers in order to appeal to American readers. The new title caused a stir around the world because it reflected the history of the Indian subcontinent's separation. In 1991, the fiction was named in New York Times Notable Book, awarded the Li-Beraturepreis Prize in Germany, and was nominated as a Notable Book by the American Library Association. In 1991, the Pakistan Academy of Letters presented her with the Sitara-i-Imtiaz and the National Award for English Literature, both funded via Pakistani government. *An American Brat*, her fourth novel, was released in 1993 and won the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Writers Award. Deepa Mehta renamed *Cracking India* as *Earth* and screened it.



Depiction of Parsi Community:

The Zoroastrian ethical system is built on the principles of '*humata*,' which means good thoughts, '*hukta*,' which means good words, and '*hvarshata*,' which means good deeds. Charity and loyalty are the fruits of their good efforts. Freddy, his lad Billy, along with his mother-in-law Jerbanoo make the tale enjoyable with their comedic characters. In expressing the Parsi culture, Sidhwa exposes all of her community's vices and follies in a humorous tone. Her mocking tone adds to the life of her character. Marriages and last rituals for Parsis are explored in depth. Ceremonies such as *Madarasa* and Navjot find such a delightful presentation that even other readers may visualise the traits of the small community i.e. Parsi.

Sidhwa is attractive, humble, resolute, brave, and spent her youthful days in seclusion in real life, and her female characters in the imaginary universe are the same. Sidhwa's novel, according to Feroza Jussawalla, consists with

Initiation and awakening into oneself as Indian or Pakistani as connected to the sub-continental peoples and their land and religion is the essential theme of Bapsi Sidhwa's novels and this is what makes them so real and engaging to the reading public. (Jussawala 31)

Themes of Migration and Immigration:

Another of Sidhwa's favourite themes is migration and immigration, which appears throughout her work. In *The Ice-Candy Man*, the idea of mass migration due to Partition is similar to her community's dread of being Islamicized, which drove them to India. The protagonist, Faredoon Junglewalla, migrates to Punjab from his ancestral village in Central India in the novel *The Crow Eaters*. This gives her character more life. Jerbanoo arrived in Lahore after journeying for two months in a bullock waggon with his wife, Putli, and others. In the maize field, Jerbanoo came close to being attacked by a wild buffalo. To save her life, she yelled and bolted. Freddy expresses his gratitude to God right away and intends to have a *Jashan* of thanksgiving performed in his new home. To a hundred beggars, he will offer fruits and bread. His commitment to his God is demonstrated by the notion of generosity in his



head when he is still settling. *The Bride* recounts Qasim's departure from Kohistan's highlands to Punjab's plains, and lastly his longing to return to his home through her adopted daughter Zaitoon. Before Partition, Qasim lived in Punjab, India and after Partition, he moved to Lahore which was now in Pakistan. Sidhwa explores the expatriate experience of her protagonist, Feroza, in her most recent work, *An American Brat*. The expatriate's life is depicted in great detail, from assimilation to eventual settlement.

Qasim's departure from *The Bride* is a difficult transition. As his situation got more precarious, Qasim was obliged to migrate to the plains. In the Himalayan mountains of Afghanistan, he made a living by raising a small herd of cattle. He was survived by three children. However, smallpox, a dreadful disease, soon infected their town, wiping off his entire family. Because he had been infected with smallpox as a child, Qasim was the lone survivor. He had no choice but to leave his lovely home and go to the plains. Jullunder, a small Punjabi town, became his home. For three years, he worked as a bank watchman in England. After Partition, he moved to Lahore and was the lone survivor of the Amritsar-to-Lahore train carnage. In front of Qasim, Munni, Sikandar and Zohra's six-year-old daughter, became an orphan. Munni reminded him of her deceased daughter, Zaitoon, so he adopted her. Munni took a few days to transform into Zaitoon because she was alone except for her adopted father. Her first marriage was to a Kohistani when she was sixteen years old. Her father was eager to rekindle old relationships by marrying her adoptive daughter in the hills. Through Zaitoon, he will be reunited with his long-lost roots, but he has no idea how she would adjust to Karakoram's harsh climate. Despite the fact that Mariam and Nikka (who had no child of their own hence they looked after Zaitoon) were adamantly against him. Mariam also proposed that Nikka accept her and Zaitoon stay with her as daughter, or that she marries anyone from the community. Qasim used to tell her tales of his homeland in free hours, Zaitoon was enthralled.

Her budding imaginings were crushed when she went to the hills for the first time at the age of sixteen.



Her fantasy, started off by his astonishing handsomeness, fierce animalism, and her infatuation with tribal history and passionate savagery- took wing,' (Sidhwa *The Bride* 221)

Sidhwa sensitively describes her disillusionment with life. The life of folks in the highlands astounded her. They stayed in mud huts or caverns, eating corn bread and water only, which made Zaitoon's stomach hurt. When she slumbered with her father at night, screams came out from her mouth when she heard the jackal's voice and clung to her father, who was opposed to the marriage. She recognised the differences between the two cultures and persuaded her father to join him; she no longer wishes to live among or marry tribals. 'Rather than living here, I'm going to die.' (137) Qasim's ear was deafened by her remarks. A week later, Zaitoon was forced to marry Sakhi. She cried just thinking about being uprooted from her roots. Sidhwa has touched the vulnerable state of women of third world with finesse. Sakhi ripped her silk dress in half on the first night of her wedding because he was consumed by proprietorial passion and corrosive envy.

Zaitoon and Ashique, a guy who accompanied the father and daughter to the hills, were together, he noticed this condition of Zaitoon and this resulted into Sakhi's jealousy growing and he alleged Zaitoon of infidelity, and he mistreated both the animals and the housewife. Even her mother was unrespected by him. The episode with the animal pounding is heartbreaking. Sakhi took out his resentment and jealousy on her. He kicked her in the stomach till she passed out. Zaitoon chose to flee after this horrible occurrence. In the novel, she has only one option. Her journey out of the grips of a savage tribal society was fraught with perplexing circumstances. She walked the less-traveled cliff for nine days. She set off on a daring adventure with only a few corn breads and a blanket, which nearly cost her her life. She ate the stale bread for two days to calm her tummy. She chose the most difficult Karakoram mountain path since she knew the tribal would search the easier passages first. But she had no idea how difficult the road would be or where she would wind up? Those mountains, which had previously driven her insane with desire to see them, had now turned against her. She became disoriented and fell down a slick, steep slope, yearning to see Sakhi.



Major Mushtaq Khan finally discovered her in a half-dead condition on the seventh day after continuous wandering. Because recovering from the rape by two Kohistani men proved to be quite difficult. She was left in miserable condition, alone on the knolls, surrounded by ice-capped hills.

In *An American Brat*, Feroza's character in the story, is heavily influenced by the issue of immigration. Feroza's peculiar and narrow-minded attitude makes her mother Zareen scared. The tale is set in the 1970s, and Feroza's innocence is being influenced by Gen. Zia's islamization. Her mother's sari-blouse was sleeveless, which she objected to. She detested wearing dresses and talking on the phone with strangers. Zareen believed her odd demeanour was taking her back a century. So, in order to increase her horizons, she sends her to the United States for the summer vacation with her brother, Maneck. Her father, Cyrus, understands his significant other's choice as he recalls her behaving timidly in their drawing room a week before when she spotted a little boy. Feroza's grandma, on the other hand, was opposed to her daughter's scheme. At the airport, her aunt and grandma offer her a last-minute warning not to talk to strangers or accept anything from them since it could be tainted with drugs. Her goal of visiting "the country of glossy publications like "Bewitched" and "Star Trek," as well as "Rock Stars," was realised. Feroza panics when she is not acclimated to western mode and style and begins rushing up and down the stairs, trip after trip in aero plane, until her lungs begin to burst.

'You must have your head examined,' advises a Japanese man who assisted her in finding her way. You aren't a toddler. If you have no sensibility, you have no place in New York. (Sidhwa *An* 94)

Feroza was chastised for being out of touch with a culture she despises. Feroza, who was born and raised in typical Pakistani, especially Islamic culture, struggled to adapt to the hostile western environment. It is believed that third world immigrants constantly take their physical exile wherever they go, but they are never alienated from the emotional ties that bind them to their cultural roots. As an ethical metaphor, they have a specific commitment to their motherland culture. And this awareness of one's own culture serves as a value indicator and



controls their moral sensibility. For instance, Feroza's boyfriend, David, pushed her to mingle with boys, she was reluctant. Feroza objected since she came from a place where it was illegal to mix men and women of different sexes. She began to flirt modestly with unknown young men after David's insistence, but she still worried about what her family would think if they knew. This demonstrates that the moral ideals she was taught as a child have not eroded. She gradually drifted away from the ethical epicenter, as if she were undergoing a cultural metabolic process.

She is an immigrant in the United States, and she frequently recalls her grandmother, parents, friends, and ayah during her nostalgic journey. On Friday afternoons in Lahore, she missed the mullahs of the Main Market. When Kim's domesticated kitten was kicked out of her home by Jo, her roomie, she felt sorry for the cat and missed her hometown terribly. She was traumatized again after her heartbreak with Jo, and her India-based friend, Sashi, tried to help her relieved from the trauma. By singing Iqbal Banoo's ghazals, he mesmerizes her. Feroza instantly realised she was thousands of miles from the poets' and ghazals' homeland. She sobbed and wished she could hear the exquisite ghazals and songs again. She had a strong desire to meet up with her classmates. Her emotional memories of mushairas triggered an uncontrollable wave of nostalgia. Feroza found it difficult to re-locate her country in the unfamiliar environment, yet she never gave up despite the obstacles. "It is the unhealable chasm forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its genuine home: its core misery can never be overcome" (176) Edward Said accurately articulates.

While it is true that heroic, romantic, wonderful, even triumphant events in the life of an exile can be found in literature and history, these are nothing more than attempts to overcome the paralyzing pain of separation. Exile's accomplishments are forever tainted by the loss of something that can never be replaced. (134)

As a result, all of Sidhwa's female heroines are overbearing. They are ladies like Sidhwa, who are intelligent, courageous, and modest. They also strive to deal with familial, societal, and cultural constraints in their lives to the extent that they can, and when they reach



their breaking point, they aggressively reject and struggle for the personal identity. Ayah, the ostracized character in *The Ice Candy Man*, Zaitoon in *The Pakistani Bride*, and Feroza in *An American Brat*; they have experienced a variety of challenges but have never given up hope or sacrificed their own identity. Sidhwa has redesigned women's feeling of olden times and their being in the right place by giving a voice to the marginalized figures in Pakistani society, particularly women.

Conclusion:

Partition, which Sidhwa has successfully addressed in three of her works, is another area of interest for her. The unavoidable 'dislocation' and migration are described in great detail. She has also highlighted her Parsi culture in addition to presenting political instability. All of her novels, except *The Pakistani Bride*, go into great depth into Parsi rites and rituals. Her works have not only preserved the little community but also given non-Parsi readers an improved knowledge of Parsi identity in general. M.G. Vassanji's view of the crucial duty of "the writer as a preserver of the collective tradition, a folk-historian, and myth-maker" (67) has thus been fulfilled by her.



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