

Voices of the Diaspora: A Critical Study



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Abstract:

The voices of the diaspora in literature are the voices of women who are suffered, marginalized, oppressed and suppressed. The research paper focuses on the indifference of gender issues and the quest for identity. The Post Colonial thought and fiction concern for voicing the position of the women in the society. It is an endeavor of interpretation of women's identity and experiences. All the women writers of Post Colonial, Postmodern, Contemporary or the other age have always been marginalized and excluded from the literary canon and occupations. Since long women are treated as others in a male dominated world.

Like many eminent feminists emerged, Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the distinguished feminist writers who has made much unique contribution to the feminist literature. Bapsi Sidhwa is known as the Pakistan's dominant feminist writer who worked for the upliftment and emancipation of women. The writing of Sidhwa is a unique blend of gender, society and culture which explores stark truth and reality of the society. In her novels, the approach to feminism is indirect, suggestive and therefore it seems more compelling.

Keywords: Voices, diaspora, exploitation, domination, oppressed, gender, Parsi, interfaith marriages etc.



RESEARCH PAPER

The research paper titled *Voices of the Diaspora* focuses on the identity and status of women. According to them, women are supposed to be the subject matter, the spoken and the silences. Women's literature aims at developing new identities and definitions of value, power and status centering on the women. The women writers have chosen to talk back - 'moving from silence to speech', for the suppressed, oppressed, colonized and exploited. It is a struggle that heals, that makes new life and new growth. It is an act of speech, the expression of a movement from object to subject - the liberated voice. It is also a discussion of migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation and gender. It is an experience of writing and speaking which exposes one's identity in detailed.

Sidhwa performed various roles in U.S., she was appointed as an Assistant Professor for the Creative Writing Programme at University of Houston, 1985. In 1989, Sidhwa was an Assistant Professor of MFA Graduate Programme at Columbia University, New York. In the year 2000-2001, Sidhwa held a Post Colonial Teaching Fellowship at Southampton, University, England. Bapsi Sidhwa became an American like Feroza in *An American Brat*. As a writer of Indian subcontinent and of U.S.A., Sidhwa's journey as a writer is very interesting.

An American Brat is the fourth novel written by Bapsi Sidhwa. *An American Brat* is about immigrant perspective which highlights voices of the diaspora. Parsis are known as diasporic; basically the community is based on migration of Parsis since 850 A.D. Parsi is a most migrant community moved from Iran to India, India to Pakistan and finally Pakistan to America. According to Bapsi Sidhwa migration is the basic and natural instinct of human being to gain knowledge and broaden outlook. *An American Brat* focuses on one's voluntary decision which makes one to move towards green pastures. The craze for materialism is also a part of migration which makes many people to move.

An American Brat 1994 is also a novel of experience and knowledge. It is a novel partly set in Lahore and partly in U.S.A. It begins with the culture and politics of Pakistan and ends in U.S.A. Feroza; the woman protagonist is the central of both nation's culture and history. It is



also known as a Parsi perspective written by a Parsi novelist and Parsi protagonist. Feroza, a sixteen-year-old young protagonist very well represents Parsi community and its traits. The novel begins with the concern of parents about Feroza's conservative nature. *An American Brat* is about the journey of Feroza from the dark, conservative to the advanced and liberal is the journey of Sidhwa. Along with the cultural differences the text centers on Parsi Zoroastrianism. The immigration to U.S. from Indian subcontinents is a learning process of accumulating knowledge. The Parsi representative and the parents of Feroza (Zareen and Cyrus) badly affected by the Muslim fundamentalism. The journey is an attempt to come out from one culture to look into the other.

Diasporic in nature, *An American Brat* expresses Sidhwa's self through Feroza, the Parsi protagonist. The novel makes compare and contrast analysis, by juxtaposing the two cultures and two generations. Compared to Pakistani culture, American culture is more appealing and liberal which gives one more scope to develop or to make progress in their respective field. On the other, the Pakistani culture is much conservative and religious centered. Immigrant experience and related enquiry is also a challenge for south Asians. Feroza's encounter with Emigrant officers shows the nature of South Asian people. Feroza is the center character observes the two cultures and finally decides to live in America. Interfaith marriage is the important issue that every Parsi meets / faces. According to the Parsi tradition and their word given to Yadav Rana, every Parsi follows it very honestly.

The novel *An American Brat* also highlights issues like interfaith marriages, women oppression. As a writer, Bapsi Sidhwa plays a very neutral role, doesn't go against the prevailing Parsi ideology instead suggests for little relaxation. Parsi Zoroastrianism allows men to marry 'nons' and by doing so they remaining Parsi while if the Parsi woman marries 'non', she remains 'non Parsi', away from faith, Fire Temples, Navjote and Funeral. Like other religions, Parsi religion seems much favorable to Parsi men and not to women. Parsi community is like the other community which treats woman as a secondary one. Thus, the novel through the characters and cultures highlights migration which is the most important phenomenon today to save the tiny Parsi community and its faith.



As a diasporic writer or Parsi diaspora, Sidhwa has highlighted serious issues in the Parsi Community. The Zoroastrianian faith gives the individual adequate space to grow and progress. Thus, the novel represents Bapsi Sidhwa's Childhood in Pakistan, adulthood in India and education in America is skillfully highlighted through Feroza. Bapsi Sidhwa very well narrates the diasporic experience of Feroza when she came to USA for the first time. Feroza was much surprised when she heard that her parents decide to send her to USA for further education and broaden her outlook.

The Parsi community has been in Diaspora from the time of their fleeing from Iran in 850A. D. in order to escape from the forceful conversion to Islam. During the time of British colonialism they enjoyed an exclusive status with the ruling English. The upheaval of partition and India's independence, they stood neutral to any of the parties be it Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. Since the 1960s, they, like many educated Asians, have decided to migrate to the West to keep their faith and identity. Since the Eighties, several Asian Americans have made great contribution to the post colonial immigrants and cultural consciousness from the subcontinent. Being Zoroastrian Feroza recollects Parsi tradition and finally Feroza decides to remain Zoroastrian by preserving her ethnic identity while living in USA. Thus, Bapsi Sidhwa elaborates the USA culture and the culture of Indian subcontinent (Pakistan).

Bapsi Sidhwa, through Feroza depicts the expatriate experiences of her own and of the many 'Third World' people migrated from under developed Indian subcontinent to the 'First World'. Apart from Feroza; Manek and Zareen are able to decipher the wide differences between the two cultures by their stay in America. The conservatism and marvel for their country goes over by crossing the boundry and then there is no coming back for them. Sidhwa through ethnicity desires the justice and equality. It is simply an attempt to give voice to the voiceless, poor, and marginal. It also called as a Parsi perspective written by a Parsi novelist and a Parsi protagonist, in an alien nation, America.

Feroza's decision to get married to David Press is anti- religious according to the Parsi community. It's a cultural exploration of one's own in the USA. The cultural difference is one of the strong issues of the Asian American writers. The immigrant experience is another important issue that makes one known about unknown. It leads one from one part of the world to the other.



In spite of experiencing some bitter encounters, Feroza felt much convenient and she longs to stay there forever. Living in an alien land like the USA, does not mean going away from her religious faith, but it is a kind of reinforcement of her religious beliefs.

Feroza accepts American ways of life by heart and its broader outlook. She has suffered many limitations at her home land compared to USA. Bapsi Sidhwa, the winner of many awards and prizes explores the Parsis voices. The voices of the Parsis urge for equality at cultural and gender level. According to Feroza's father, Asian American mainstream culture, compared to Pakistan, is much flexible. USA is a land of free thought, religion and equality at cultural and religious level. Sidhwa would like to correct the notions about her homeland.

Feroza's arrival in USA, the so called land of freedom where she is sent to broaden her outlook in the company of her uncle, Manek is merged with promises. Feroza's excitement for the freedom in the USA gets crashed at the threshold of that country when the Customs Officer misbehaves with her by bombarding her with his questions bordering on suspicion. She was asked a lot of questions like - What is her name. How long she would stay? And with whom she would stay? How old was her uncle? What did he do? Was he a citizen, resident? Such type of inquiry was new to Feroza. The Custom Officer has also called in Manek for interrogation to find out the facts.

Besides, all this, the novel also focuses on the USA its striking merits and demerits. The ruthless interrogation by the custom officer twice is the first and worst experience Feroza has faced in her life. The episode of custom officer is not new to Manek. Such type of immigrants' experience seems very horrible and humiliating. Feroza, all alone undergoes such a hard time, the new immigrants like Feroza faces lot of trouble in adjusting with the new land and its ways. In spite of the trials and tribulations, shocks and alienations, they prefer to stay there.

The USA, for them is a land of pleasure, museums, shopping except some rigid immigrant entrance rules which every newcomer experiences. Such experiences broaden ones outlook. Feroza decides to manage her own expenses by working in bars, selling tickets or jobs within her capacities. As a Pakistani by birth, Feroza though living in America is actively reminded of the essential difference between the two cultures: There were no waitresses in Pakistan, only waiters. Since there were no bars, there were no bartenders. Even had the jobs



been available and the stigma attached to them had not existed, Feroza would have found working at these professions in Pakistan intolerable. Her slightest move would attract disproportionate attention and comment, for no other reason except that she was a young woman in a country where few young women were visible working.

The novelist tries to make it clear that Feroza's journey is a journey of her own experience, of learning the new ways of life and becoming aware of one's own self and therefore acquiring self-knowledge. Feroza got separated from her motherland, she is not unhappy, rather feels contented for enjoying more freedom. It's the same atmosphere of free breath which every immigrant enjoys. Feroza, the protagonist in the novel is a representative of the young generation while Cyrus and Zareen Ginwalla belong to the old. Manek is neither fully modern, nor fully traditional like the novelist's position. Manek, in spite of being a Parsi enjoys the company of women, drinks, smokes and cheats others. The same time decides to return to the home and accept the family decision. The novel *An American Brat* also centers on Parsis views on marriage. Parsi Zoroastrianism doesn't allow a marriage of a Parsi woman to a 'non'. The context again a shift from USA to the Indian subcontinent. The ethnic mode plays a dominant role in such matter.

The novel brilliantly juxtaposes the first and the third world cultures in a broad and detailed manner. In short, Being Parsi, Feroza has accepted the American style and acts, talks, behaves and dresses like an American girl. Feroza has accepted such advancement and became bold, confident and assertive. She has left behind her innocent, shy and conservative nature. Feroza learned to drink, drive, dance and smoke. Smoking is strictly prohibited in Parsi religion and it is regarded a cardinal Sin. Feroza, may be for some time, deviates from the path of the Zoroastrianism who held 'fire' sacred. Fire, for Parsis, Fire in smoking or in home cooking is a symbol of Ahura Mazda. 'Fire' has special significance in Parsi religion the practitioners worship fire in a Fire Temple.



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