



## ANALYSIS OF CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND THEIR EFFECTS ON FEROZA IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S NOVEL "AN AMERICAN BRAT"

\*Muhammad Ilyas Mahmood, \*\*Abida Shamim, \*\*\*Mobashra Mobeen

### ABSTRACT

*The key motive of this paper is to explore the cross-cultural differences which are prevalent in Asian and American civilization, and are demonstrated by Bapsi Sidhwa in her eminent novel 'An American Brat'. It reflects the different socio-cultural elements of both countries, Pakistan and America through the journey of Feroza's character after the exposure of American life style. An assemblage of various themes like cultural imperialism, immigration, self-exploration, and socio-cultural conflicts is presented over here. It also demonstrates cross-cultural effects on sixteen years Feroza who is involuntarily sent to America by her parents with this view that exposure of advanced society will make her broadminded. It is the story of a docile, orthodox and reserved girl, Feroza who turns into a self-assertive, regnant and audacious woman after the exposure of majestic and impressive American life style.*

*Keywords: Cultural imperialism, First & Third World, Hybridity, Cultural Difference, Cross-cultural effects*

### Introduction

Pakistan came into being as an independent Islamic state on 14 August in 1947 after a myriad of sacrifices of the Muslims of India. Before the partition, it was also one of those sub-continental states which were strictly governed by the British government. This period is acknowledged in history as colonialism. It was the age of social injustices and oppression in which colonizers demolished the cultural values, traditions and social identities of colonized people. Even after independence, the immigrants of dominated countries still suffer from a sense of inferiority in colonizers' countries, and they find no other way for their acceptance over there except the adoption of alien culture.

---

\*Department of English, University of Okara, Punjab, Pakistan

\*\*Visiting Lecturer, Department of English, University of Okara, Punjab, Pakistan

\*\*\*Visiting Lecturer, Department of English, University of Okara, Punjab, Pakistan

The present study focuses to find answers to the following questions:

1. Which cultural differences of Pakistan and America are reflected in the novel 'An American Brat'?
2. How does American culture affect Feroza's character?

### Literature Review

Culture comprising social codes, morals and traditions is a paramount power which determines life style of its inhabitants and diverges them from their native cultures. Edward Burnett Tylor (1871) defined *culture* as an amalgam of norms and values. Indigenous of a region has to internalize these societal structures voluntarily or involuntarily to be acceptable in that particular culture. Chen et al. (2006) state that the personalities of individuals are developed by past and present as well. Gilroy (1997) argued that people construct their own personalities, but not in conditions of their own. According to Lustig (2006), identity is a dynamic concept which varies from culture to culture. Hybridity as historical and cultural phenomenon was originated and developed by Darwin (1837) and Bhabha (1994) respectively. Bhabha defined it as something which lies between two cultures (1994, p.129). Emergence of hybridity introduced the concepts of identities as changing and emphasized the inclusion of cultural values. Another significant force revolutionizing cultural values is colonialism. Post-Colonial writers represented the colonizers' exploitation of weak nations after domination. They snatched their liberty and demolished their socio-cultural values. Colonizers established strict rules and their obeisance was made mandatory for colonized, and transgression of which resulted in the form of severe punishments. While discussing the relationship between colonizers and colonized, Forster (1981) argued that affection was impossible among them. Dominated nations were treated as servants. Leaving their own native customs and follow the life style of ruling class was considered criterion of existence for colonized nations. It is called cultural imperialism. Ralph Sing (1967) argued that we tried to pretend ourselves as real man by following the man of New World. The Westerns dominance is detained through cultural materialism, its financial background and wellbeing. Edward Said (1981) emphasized the superiority of the West over the East. Macaulay (1958) described European colonial power as a powerful class having more learning and governing a majority of persons who are Indians in colour but English in their opinions and intellect. European learning and colonial power as "a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect"

At the end of the British rule, post-colonial literature emerged as a distinct aspect of English literature, signifying colonizers' reign and pathetic condition of colonized. The post-colonial

authors showed repulsion for colonizers and highlighted the themes of freedom, cultural identities and national values in their works. Matthew Kirschenbaum (2014) presented the stereotypical picture of Americans before the world.

Bapsi Sidhwa is a post-colonial writer who presents cultural issues especially cultural imperialism in her writings. She shows the conventional cultural images of both America and Pakistan in her famous novel *An American Brat*. To explore these cultural conflicts and their influence on Feroza is key concern of present study. This research is descriptive in nature. First, the conversation of main characters is selected then it is analyzed and interpreted qualitatively.

### **Analysis**

European countries subjugated sub-continental nations for a longest span of time and disturbed their every sphere of life. This period of colonization is characterized by oppression, psychological tortures, exploitation and mental suffocation. Colonizers assumed themselves more refined and enlightened nations and controlled the cultural, social and linguistic behaviors of occupied nation with the name of civilization. Mumtaz Shahnwaz, Sadat Hassan Manto and Bapsi Sidhwa as representatives of their age examined and exhibited the prevalent socio-political trends of colonial age through their writings. Bapsi Sidhwa is a celebrated Pakistani-American novelist who highlighted the issues of cultural shock in her most of writings especially in *An American Brat* (1993). *An American brat* is a story of transformation and self actualization of a bashful and reserved sixteen years old Feroza into more confident, audacious and Self-governing woman 'American Brat'. Feroza's mother Zareen is obsessed with the prevailing political fundamentalism in Pakistan which makes her daughter reluctant. Therefore, she sends Feroza to her brother Manek in America. Zareen says:

*"travel will broaden her outlook, get this puritanical rubbish out of her"* (Sidhwa,1993, p. 6).

### **Comparison of Pakistani and American Civilizations**

Cultural conflicts as an essence of this paper are discussed as follows:

#### **Political Differences**

Besides the socio-cultural enlightenment, Bapsi Sidhwa also juxtaposes the political orders of both civilizations and illustrates its impacts on protagonist, Feroza's behaviors. In Pakistan politics is concern of all and sundry. It influences every field of life even women's dressing and way of conduct. Please refer to Appendix A for Bapsi Sidhwa's (Sidhwa, 1993, p.163) comments about Pakistani Political Circumstances.

### **Analysis and discussion**

In Pakistan political system governs the opinions and conversational behavior of public. Zareen condemns the political fundamentalism widespread at the time of Zia which suffocates humans' lives by imposing a lot of restrictions on them and snatching their absolute autonomy. She is annoyed with her daughter's traditional life style for which she blames politics of Pakistan. She says: "*She is been so desperate lately; You are right, it's these politics*" (Sidhwa, 1993,p.6)

Feroza's emotional indulgence in politics is so intense that while living in America she is much worried about political crisis prevalent in her homeland. After knowing about Bhutto's assassination she is desperately disappointed and says:

*"I want to know what's going on here. After all, it's my country!"*(Sidhwa, 1993, p.124).

In contrast, the Americans are less involved in political gossips. Joe is representative of Americans. Little effect of political upheaval is observed on her life. She carries on with her usual activities without any interruption under all governments.

### **Differences in Portrayal of Woman**

Bapsi Sidhwa has juxtaposed the Pakistani and American civilizations with the reference of predicament and ideas of womanhood. In Pakistan women are marginalized as inferior creatures and their roles are reserved as domestic servants by imposing strict Islamic conventions. Firm codes of conduct are determined for them to follow under patriarchal social system making the liberal identity of women impracticable. Having subordinate position to men in society, they are reliant on men socially, psychologically and economically. They are not autonomous enough to make choice of their marriage and occupation. Thus the idea of breathtaking job looks awkward to Feroza. She says: "*There were no waitresses in Pakistan, only waiters*" (Sidhwa, 1993, p.208). Conversation of Zareen and her Mother shown in Appendix C (Sidhwa, 1993, p.13) presents a vivid example in this regard comments about Pakistani Political Circumstances.

Zareen stands for women's equality and protests against conventional codes of conduct for women. She believes in the equality of gender and condemns the double standards of the Muslim society which allows men's drinking but prohibits women's sleeveless dressing. She challenges the authority of her husband. Ironically, such a resolute and daring woman is not free

from societal limitations. She is not free enough to take any decision herself about her daughter. She is supposed to consult with her mother and brother in her family affairs. Zareen's mother Kuttibai asks from her very authoritatively about her decision to send Feroza to America.

In contrast to Pakistan, American culture is much liberal with the reference of women. It assigns gender equality, unrestricted liberalism and lot of amenities to women in life. American women have better career opportunities for the enhancement of their future as compared to Asian women. Another astonishing and appalling element of American culture is unlimited sexual liberty. Pakistani women are governed by husbands as their property but American women have no such limitations. Notions of homosexuality and lesbianism which are regarded as menace in Pakistani culture are very common in America. Exposure to such advanced culture turns Feroza like conventional girl into an assertive woman in American Brat. Please refer to Appendix C for Bapsi Sidhwa's (Sidhwa, 1993, p.13) comments about Pakistani Political Circumstances.

### **Comparison of Pakistani Feroza with American Brat**

Bapsi Sidhwa further elaborates the cultural differences and compares the Pakistani Feroza with American Brat, Feroza's consciousness is developed by the exposure of both social systems. Pakistani sixteen years old Feroza is immensely credulous, modest and well-mannered girl who follows the social etiquettes very strictly. She wears shalwar-Kameez and criticizes her mother, Zareen's modern dressing. To be an introvert and reluctant in nature, she detests social gatherings and prefers the accompany of her grand-mother. She is reluctant to attend even the phone calls of boys. Before going to America her conventional nature is observable through her religious activities such praying for blessings, reading and attending Fire Temple on regular basis.

During her stay in America, she contemplates about the distinctiveness of both social orders. She is enchanted with the luxuries and comforts available for public on American airport. After experiencing a lot of confinements in Pakistan, such prodigious liberty in America confounds her initially. She feels extremely happy after the exposure of American free life. Please refer to the conversation between Feroza and her uncle Manek in Appendix C (Sidhwa, 1993, p.1).

### **Analysis and Discussion**

In America, she suffers from moral exploitation, psychological tortures and sense of inferiority as a colonized immigrant. Insulting attitude of police officers makes her infuriated. Manek satirizes Feroza's homeland with his derogatory remarks. She is accustomed to the odor of sweat, rotten fruit and vegetables in Pakistan. But in America she experiences more disgusting aromas like filth, drinking, vomiting and drugs. Her habit of interruption is terminated by Manek's

critical remarks as “*It is impolite*” (Sidhwa, 1993, p.94). Manek’s authoritative and sarcastic attitude is best embodiment of colonizers’ imperialistic ideology. As spokesperson of colonizers, Manek repetitively satirizes Asian life style with his sneering comments.

From Manek’s and Jo’s attitude, Feroza realizes that American are more assiduous and punctual as compared to Asians. Besides Manek, Jo is an another prodigious force molding the Feroza’s character. Jo’s laissez-faire, diligent and autonomous nature is true reflection of American women with no such social principles which dominate and suffocate Asian women’s lives. Jo enhances Feroza’s ways of pronunciation. She wears shalwar- kameez and scarf in Pakistan, but in America Feroza’s shalwar-kameez is replaced by trousers, tea-shirts, blouses and jeans. Jo introduces her with boys. Feroza like girl who is hesitant in attending boys’ calls gets fascinated and involved in illegitimate relations without any sense of embarrassment. In Jo’s accompany she adopts the habits of drinking and smoking which are prohibited especially for women in Pakistan. With her indulgence in such activities her expenses are increased. As a result, she starts odd jobs to fulfill her increasing expenditures and enjoy an autonomous life. Fascinated by the glamorous and fabulous American life style, a diffident girl is converted into a confident and self-assured woman who decides herself about her university, career even her life partner.

After the exposure of American life, she rejects her mother’s marriage proposal very arrogantly. Her decision to marry a non-parssee boy astonishes her parents. Zareen tries to frighten her by various means to discard this view but in vain. Feroza’s way of conversation provides a glimpse of her determined personality and changed spirit. Zareen regrets on her own decision and calls Feroza “*an American brat!*” (Sidhwa, 1993, p.273)

## Conclusion

Bapsi Sidhwa has illuminated contrasting picture of European and Asian civilizations through the character of Feroza. In Pakistan she is credulous, demure and submissive type of girl who becomes more conservative under the impression of rigid Asian conventions. In abroad, she is bewildered with the luxuries of American life and accustomed to it to such an extent that she discards the view of existence under confinements of Pakistan. To get social recognition in America she adopts the American culture socially, psychologically and linguistically as well. Consequently, this journey of self-exploration and actualization initiating with a diffident and confused personality, Pakistani Feroza ends on an audacious, regnant and self-governing woman ‘American Brat’.

## REFERENCES

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture* London: Routledge.



Chen, K. H., & Morley, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*. Routledge.

Gilroy, P. (1997). 'Diaspora and the Detours of Identity,' in Kathryn Woodward (ed.), *Identity and Difference*, London: Sage Publications.

Forster, E.M. (1981). *A Passage to India*. London: Penguin

Kuo, K. C. H. (2003). A euphoria of transcultural hybridity: is multiculturalism possible?. *Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics, Economy*, 6(2), 223-235.

Lustig, M. W., Koester, J., & Halualani, R. (2006). *Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures*. Pearson/A and B.

Macaulay T. B. (1958). Minute on Education, in *Sources of Indian Tradition*. vol. II, (ed.) William Theodore de Bary. New York: Columbia University Press.

Naipaul V. S. (1967). *The Mimic Men*. London: Penguin

Said E. (1981). *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

Sidhwa, B. (1993). *An American Brat*. New York: Academic Press.

Taylor, C. C. (1992). *MILK HONEY MONEY*. Smithsonian.