



## “THE NOVELS OF BAPSI SIDHWA: A STUDY IN FEMALE CHARACTERS AND THEIR EXISTANCE IN THE SOCIETY”

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### Introduction

Bapsi Sidhwa undoubtedly established herself as Pakistan's leading English-language novelist and has become an important voice in world's commonwealth fiction. In her three published novels, *Ice-Candy-Man* (re-titled *Cracking India* in the united state), *The Crow Eaters*, *The Bride* (re-titled the *Pakistani Bride* in the U.S.), She has shown considerable accomplishment as well as prominence. With the publication of her most recent novel, *An American Brat*, which also heralds a new direction in her fiction, she confirmed the position as is said by the New York Times, "Pakistan's finest English language novelist." Bapsi Sidhwa is not the only Pakistani to write fiction in English but she has also main-tained the most consistent publication record and gained the widest reputation abroad. Her all works has been accorded an impressive international reception. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* (1991) won " The Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest writer's Award" for (1993) worth 105,000 U.S. dollars, the LiBeraturepre is from Germany for her services to Pakistan's fiction she has been honored with the prestigious Sitara-i-Intiaz, National Honour in the Arts.

She was born in Karachi in 1939 during the final gasps of the Raj. Bapsi sidhwa spent her first few years in India, then brought up and educated in Lahore. One day she found her larger community called Pakistan, a nation created amid the maelstrom of Partition. Her native city of Lahore was transformed overnight when millions were uprooted, their lives often destroyed, some-times rebuilt, at other times lived out in anguish. As a child Bapsi Sidhwa witnessed great historical moments: the combined apprehension and elation over independence, followed by the bloodshed of Partition, then the chaotic time of resettling refugees, establishing an infra-structure, and recreating community. A resilient young

woman, she took to writing out of boredom and loneliness. Bapsi Sidhwa admitted herself that as a typical social wife in Lahore, her life was one of unrelieved tedium. She said, "how I abhorred those coffee parties" I tell you, I would have gone mad had it not been for my writing." Even as a child, Bapsi Sidhwa was isolated and lonely due to polio. So, she had no alternative but to read copiously. So a grim childhood, loneliness and isolation inspired Bapsi Sidhwa to be a writer and once the creative muse was aroused in Bapsi Sidhwa, there were no looking back. Though initially she was a housewife but now she is an assistant professor of creative writing at the University of Houston, and her vocation is writing. She is an active social worker too. Her main field of interest is Women's Rights and Social Investigation. She was part of a women's delegation to Iran and Turkey in 1970. In 1975 she represented Punjab at the Asian women's conference at Alma-Ata, in the republic of Kazakhstan, in erstwhile USSR. She was a voluntary worker on several social work committees and was actively involved in setting up the Destitute Women's and Children's Home in Lahore.

Bapsi Sidhwa had to migrate from India to Pakistan due to Partition but she left Pakistan too long before and settled in America. As the exiled writers benefit for his or her uproot, with the result what is left behind is seen for clearly from a distance and the new abode is also seen in a sharp or focus. As for many writers, their ' multi-cultural situation' has become the 'mode of perception' which is anticipated by Meenakshi Mukherjee as an asset rather than a loss. The cultural multiplicity in which she lived is also reflected in the works of Bapsi Sidhwa. Her first three novels, however, are all set in Pakistan, and in each there is a strong sense of place and community which she uses to examine particular aspects of Pakistan's postcolonial identity. In her most recent novel, *An American Brat*, she shifts the predominant local of her work from Lahore and Pakistan to various cities across America as she explores the Parsi/Pakistani Diaspora. Thus Sidhwa fulfills M.G. Vassanji's concept of the essential role of " the writer as a preserver of the collective tradition, a folk historian and myth maker. " Bapsi Sidhwa's early novels are also different from one another and all are described as ' a passion for history and for truth telling. In her published novels, the themes vary -the partition crises, expatriate experience, the Parsi milieu and social idiosyncracies of this small minority community, the theme of marriage, women's problems, patterns of

migration, the complexities of language and the art of story telling. So, she cannot be easily categorized as just a comic writer or a Parsi novelist.

As a novelist, she belongs to that group of women creative writers who have started to depict "determined women for whom the traditional role is inadequate, women who wish to affirm their independence and autonomy and are perfectly capable of assuming new roles and responsibilities." Feministic movement gradually emerged to be world wide cultural movement to secure a complete equality of women with men in the enjoyment of all human rights-moral, religious, social, political, educational, legal, economic etc. But the picture of the movement for the women's rights makes one think as 'Paradise Regained.' The crux of the problem is that man-woman relationship has, on the whole, evolved through centuries on a set pattern i.e. man to rule and woman to obey; man, the master, and woman, the slave, man, the god, and woman, the devout; man for the field and woman for the hearth and so on. Their preference is for cow-women. This centuries-old mutely followed relationship is now challenged. Feminism voices the objection to be treated as a door-mat or a piece of furniture meant for the convenience of man. The existential struggle is to establish one's identity, to assert one's individuality and the desperate fight to exist as a separate entity appears in all its intensity in the novels of women writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande etc. thus feminism as an extension to existentialism gets echoed in world literature. Like other Indian writers, Bapsi Sidhwa is able to give voice to the marginalized figures of Pakistani society, mainly women. Sidhwa's female characters, in all her other novels are as strong if not stronger than the men who run their lives; in the way that they resist the limitations of the definition of "woman" which circumscribes their identity. Her protagonist, while on the one hand, come alive on the account of their realistic presentation, on the other, they serve as the means of consciousness-raising among the female segment of society. Literature is a powerful tool in the hands of creative writers to modulate and change the societal framework, and Sidhwa through her extremely absorbing and interesting work seeks to contribute to the process of change that has already started all over the world, involving a reconsideration of women's rights and status, and a radical restructuring of social thought.

*The Crow Eater*, set in pre-independence India, excels the condition of woman at that time. Jerbanoo, mother-in-law of freeddy, located in the private space of the home and body. Yet, she helped freeddy to settled his business and become worthy. But for Jerbanoo whose protestations are ignored and trivialized by male instituted terminology like 'Nagging,' Coupled with her forced confinement to a room in the house of the Allens in London. Being the oppressed subject, with no legitimate space for resistance, Jerbanoo makes her own body the site for generating protest. "We will stay where we are..... Let Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or whoever, rule : what does it matter? The sun will continue to rise and to set-in their arses. " it is a remark which clarifies the conditions of women. Putli, wife of freeddy conforms to the traditional image of a fidel, faithful and serving wife who seems to be capable only of humouring things out of her husband. She submits to the moods of the man she is wedded to, tolerating in the process, the conventional hegemony given to the male of the species among human being. Rather than the changes of society, Putli tries to preserve certain customs, like walking behind her husband.

*The Bride* is the story of a woman's fight to survive in a world that offers no easy way out. Zaitoon, a young girl is victimized by the debilitating patriarchal situation of an insular tribal society. The woman is held as repository of moral values in a patriarchal society. Zaitoon signifies the 'woman-as-victim' paradigm in much feminist writing. Her escape form her husband and his family is the only act of zaitoon propelled by her own free will, after being a victim of ineluctable fate almost throughout the narrative. Carol, the American girl married to a Pakistani army officer is equally oppressed in her relationship. But the means of resistance being more easily available to her, due to her privileged class and race identity, she decides to break free. In the end of the novel Carol takes the charge of Zaitoon and perhaps returns to America. This is the best example of female solidarity of sisterhood.

*Ice Candy Man* is a clear reflection of 'women-as-victim' paradigm but here the victimization is a result of a collective action viz. The communal riots that followed the Partition. Shanta (her address inscription in novel is Ayah.), the maid in the parsi family at Lahore is the one who suffers the impact of partition the most. The story of the partition is synecdoche in the story of 'Ayah'. Even after her marriage with Ice-candy-man, she was kept at a Kotha and become Mumtaz. She " used like a sewer "by" drunks,

pedlars, sahibs and cut-throats, " with the connivance of the Ice-candy-man. But as soon as the opportunity presents itself, she seizes her freedom and gets away from the man she does not love. Godmother liberates her with the help of the recovered women's camp. Then she prefers to go back to her family in Amritsar.

*An American Brat* dramatises and interrogates the conflict in the mind of Feroza, a modern, educated Parsi girl. Feroza Ginwalla the rebellious daughter of Cyrus and Zareen Ginwalla makes the transition from Gulberg, Lahore to Denver, Colorado with a mixture of frustrations, anger and humour. Feroza finds that she has outgrown the confines and limitations of her secluded, sheltered life in Lahore. She has developed an independent mind and is willing to chalk out her own career, instead of being guided by solicitous advice from parents and elders. But she can not marry with her own choice whom she loves. When Feroza wants to marry David Press, an American jew, the perennial parsi problem of inter-faith marriage arises. The family assemble at Lahore and treat the situation like a dire emergency. Zareen's plan to break off the relationship of Feroza and David gets success. David leaves Denver for a job elsewhere. Initially Feroza feels depressed but gradually recovers, strengthened in her resolve to continue her life with different culture of USA and "there would be no going back for her."

## **Conclusion**

Bapsi Sidhwa portrays in her novels, the vulnerability of women, the power of women, the deviousness of women, the helplessness of women, the courage of women etc. Inevitably, Bapsi Sidhwa's novels clearly emerge as feminine texts concentrating on women's struggle to find and preserve their identity as mother, wife, daughter and above all as human beings, set against the patriarchal modes of the contemporary Pakistani society. Women in the novels of Bapsi sidhwa question the validity of the accepted set of values and rebel against the existing moral codes and social norms which deny women the oxygen of freedom that nourishes individual self. To view them as mere champions of feminism is doing them injustice. Bapsi Sidhwa's women refuse to be an acquiescent, suffering and sacrificing lot. They are women who are conscious of their emotional needs and hence cry for a change of order that starves them of individual fulfillment. They are women who long for an atmosphere congenial for self-

expression and conducive to self-fulfilment. The hardship and suffering involved in fighting against an established order, the shattering experience of divorce and the resultant alienation between parents and children form the thematic concern of Bapsi Sidhwa. Her women strive to establish a new order with changed standards where women can be their true selves and where there is no need for hypocrisy. They believe that character is to be judged not by chastity of body but by purity of heart. These women wish to herald a new morality which demands accommodation of individual longings for self-fulfillment and seeks consideration not for just the deed but the heart and feelings too. Their concept of freedom and identity is not confined to the realms of social and economic freedom. It is the freedom of mental make up and emotional attitude.

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