

# Translational Journey and Acculturation in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*

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## Abstract

This paper throws light on Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* that chronicles the adventure of a young Pakistani Parsee girl Feroza Ginwalla. Sidhwa delineates the character of Feroza, who adapts an alien culture and experience the stress that occurs when colliding cultural clash. Initially Feroza's conservative attitude and objection towards her mother's wearing makes her family to feel for her. Feroza's conservatism paved a way for the journey to United States of America for a vacation. The journey to United States of America is supposedly a learning process instead it makes her modern. The cross-cultural effects of Feroza makes her Independent, obsessed, powerful, confident and secular. After experiencing the two contrasting sets of civilization. Thus, this paper comments how she acquires self-realization, self-awareness which ironically isolates her from her Parsee culture.

**Keywords:** Bapsi Sidhwa, Linguistic changes, Religion and Morality, Family structure, Zero Interference, Cross-cultural effects.

Bapsi Sidhwa was born on August 11, 1938 in Karachi in Pakistan, to Zoroastrian parents Peshotan and Tehmina Bhandara and later moved with her family to Lahore. She was educated in Lahore and now a resident of the USA. She felt lonely because she was the only child of the family. Her sense of isolation was accentuated by polio that struck her when she was just two years old and so she was advised to study at home only. Polio had completely affected throughout her life. She married a businessman, Gustad Kermani in Bombay. After five years she divorced and went back to Pakistan. Her personal experience of partition and stay in Mumbai are reflected in her works.

Bapsi Sidhwa is a leading Pakistani Diasporic writer. Most of her novels reflects her personal experience of the Indian subcontinent's partition, abuse against women, immigration to the US and membership in the Parsee community. Sidhwa was the best novelist and won international acclaim for her work and also won several awards for her writings.

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This paper delineates the sufferings of the protagonist and a struggle for a accommodation to the alien culture is the major view seen throughout this paper. The protagonist of this novel is Feroza Ginwala, she is a young Pakistani Parsee girl who is stubborn and very conservative girl in Pakistan. This novel partly in the USA and partly in Pakistan. In late seventies, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is in Jail and Islamic Fundamentalism is growing and spreading like a fire in Pakistan. Feroza, a sixteen year old girl brought up in a Parsee family in Lahore. She was highly influenced by the Muslim government and becomes more and more backward every day. Feroza has stopped answering the phone because "What if it's someone I don't know" (10). She objects her mother to wear a modern sleeveless blouse. This made her parents Cyrus and Zareen feel for her attitude. So they decided to send her to USA for three month vacation under the custody of Manek, a graduate student at M.I.T. They believed that "Travel will broaden her outlook, get this puritanical rubbish out of her head"(14). The family accepts the decision and Feroza feels extremely happy that she is going to America. Until now she heard about America as ".....the land of glossy magazines, of 'Bewitched' and 'Star Trek', of rock stars and jeans...."(27). Feroza's grandmother is very cautious of her Parsee community and their values so she instructs her not to get spoiled in America. Throughout the journey Feroza acts according to the instructions given by the elders but as soon as she reached the Kennedy Airport there starts the troubles and it was the turning point of Feroza's life.

First experience of Feroza in United States is her encounter with the immigration official who badgers her and tries to get her to admit that she has come to get married and the uncle is not and an uncle. she ends up in tears shouting that she will go back to her own country. Manek manages and guarantees that she will return to Pakistan when her visa expires. And also she had a terrible experience in elevator for taking a wrong floor. She was rescued by a Japanese man. Feroza's innocence is shown in getting lost in a museum at Boston. She had experienced both sides of America, the rich and the poor.

The Religion and Morality is reflected in Manek attitude in this novel. In the initial stage Manek also feels the same struggle what all the expatriate experience to the alien culture. Manek did odd jobs like selling Bibles which are against the principles of Parsee community. Though he enjoys the company of liberated women but when it comes to marriage he returns to Lahore after four years to marry a Parsee girl, Aban. This reflects the attitude of Parsee religion and morality.

The next problem faced by Feroza is Linguistic change. Feroza decided to stay as a student in America because of its charms. Her parents also permit her to study in Junior College in Twin Falls, Idaho. The character Jo, she was the room-mate and later she became a very good guide and friend of Feroza. She feels the independent life and slowly changes her behaviour in the University of Denver. She completely adapts an American lifestyle. Feroza's complete

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outlook had changed and everything shows her as a perfect American girl. At a drug store Feroza uses polite expression to a shop-keeper who mistakes politeness an appeal for charity and only Jo rescue her and teaches her to replace the polite expressions of 'Please' and 'May' into an order. Then she learns to drive, drink, dance and use the American slang. Feroza's transformation reaches its climax when she meets David Dress, a Jewish American boy to buy his secondhand car. She falls in love with him and feels that David is everything for her and their love cannot be changed forever. She writes about her love for David to her parents.

The Eastern family structure is completely different form the western. The news from Feroza shook the whole family so Zareen embarks a journey to America to convince her daughter not to marry a non-Parsee. With the blessing of Cyrus she started her journey towards America. Zareen gets to Houston, She gets shocked when she finds that Feroza live with her fiancé David and a girl named Jo. On the beginning she barely spoke to David then she gets used to American freedoms and she forget her mission to break off her daughter's engagement. Americans doesn't have any restrictions to take decisions. Everyone is free to take decision. There is no interference of any one into the decisions taken be American people. They do not even leave the religion or moral values to interfere in their personal matters. David don't want to ask permission to their parents but Feroza needs to take permission on every level. Zareen finds impossible to convince Feroza as she is stubborn, so she plays a trick on David by asking him to change the community to Parsee and get married in Parsee style. Finally they break up their affair. Feroza at the end decided not to return to Lahore and settles in America. The cross-cultural effects on Feroza made her to realise herself and she wants to enjoy the free life. The cross-cultural experience of Feroza to America changes her into *An American Brat*.

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