

**THE DIALECTICS OF CULTURAL CONFLICT AS REFLECTED IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S  
THE PAKISTANI BRIDE AND AN AMERICAN BRAT**

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Culture conflict becomes an inevitable and a challenging task in the life of an individual. Every woman lives under the strict social and religious custom in a multicultural society. The social, cultural and religious system of a patriarchal society imposes restriction on woman. The whole of nation's culture is pluralistic and hegemonic. In recent times, the advancement of science and technology has shrunk the world as a global village and the monolithic society becomes the salad bowl of multicultural society. This event triggers the cultural related emotional and intellectual problems.

Bapsi Sidhwa presents women as the protagonists of her novels "The Pakistani Bride" and "An American Brat". Pakistan consists of the majority of the population as Muslims but there exists an internal sub division among them. There are varieties of tribal groups found in the mountains of Pakistan. The difference in their custom prevents the person to mingle with one another. The cultural differences the gender and racial differences have led to perpetual culture conflict.

The Pakistani Bride is mainly a story of two brides Zaitoon and Carol. Zaitoon a young Punjabi girl, who loses her parents during the partition of India and Pakistan, is adopted by a hill tribal called Qasim. Qasim devotedly raises her but to keep his honour he marries her to a man from kohistani hills. The poor girl struggles a lot to live with her husband Sakhi as he is very Jealous. Finally she escapes from the torture of her husband and runs away from her husband which is regarded as a punishable act according to the tribal custom.

In 'Pakistani Bride', there is another young American girl Carol, who marries a rich young Pakistani Farukh. Her husband is always jealous, yet gives her financial and social security. To take revenge on her husband, she permits herself to fall in love with her husband friend Major Mustaq. To the pity of Carol, he too is not faithful to her, but only takes advantage of their marriage as a husband's friend.

Zaitoon and Carol find themselves in the same predicament as they are suffering a lot in their groom's place. The adjusting between two different cultures brings bitter experience to the two brides. These women are subjugated by men irrespective of their location. In hills there is strict condition imposed on woman and the rigid code of conduct is created by man in order to control the life of women. The men Qasim and Nikha who restrict their woman by their tribal laws are ready to strip off the dress of other woman as an act of chauvinism.

Law should be equal to all, in order to be true but, the so called custom, culture and tradition victimize women or work against the liberation of women. It is a patriarchal society in which male acts as chauvinist. In phallogocentric society it is men who fix standards and norms for the women to follow. Usually they expect women to do only the traditional role assigned to them (i.e. Homemaker) but men follow a different yardstick. Men never hesitate to violate the moral code of conduct when it comes for pleasure seeking activities.

Zaitoon is marooned by the closed world of mountain. She pleads to Qasim to take her to the plains. She begs him to arrange a man from the plain for her marriage but the tribal custom does not permit.

Zaitoon has been brought up in Lahore plains and the ghetto mentality of the tribes terrifies her.

**"Abba she begged in a fierce whisper, take me  
back 'I'll look after you always . . . . If I must  
marry; marry me to someone from the plains.  
that jawan at camp, Abba, I think, he likes  
me." (PB 157)**

But Qasim leaves her and goes back to plains. Sakhi, the jealous husband beats his mother and his wife as if they are animals, beaten because he is the master. Both the

animal and the women are treated the same in manner. At last Zaitoon is rescued by Major Mustaq. Regarding her future, major has two options, one Carol will take care of her in Lahore or in America and the other is, Ashiq, the jawan will marry her, after she recovers. Zaitoon has shown her will when she was five and again she proves it. Zaitoon's 'Khudi' (PB 230) 'will power' brings a kind of hope to Carol's disturbed life.

In "An American Brat" too the conflict arising out the difference between two cultures can be noticed. Feroza, a sixteen year old Parsi girl, is the protagonist of the novel. The narrow minded Feroza objects her mother's sleeveless blouse and tells her not to visit her school dressed in this manner. The parents of Feroza - Zareen and Cyrus are afraid that the dogmatic and fundamental nature of Pakistan does not allow the fashionable way of living. They plan to send Feroza to America for four months holiday to her brother Manek, who is a MITT student. They believe that travel will broaden her outlook and change her attitude as an educated modern girl.

Feroza's new American life begins. Manek undertakes the task of preparing Feroza for life in foreign land. He also wants Feroza to pursue her studies in America. He writes a long letter addressed jointly to Khutlibai - Feroza's grandmother and to her parents Zareen and Cyrus. The parents permit her to study in America. Manek gives instruction and advice to her. The timid Feroza changes herself and absorbs the culture shock. She alters her lifestyle, learns to drive, drink, dance and start using a more direct and less polite form of language. She compares her family behavior to that of her friend Jo's family. She finds the American way of upbringing entirely different.

Feroza spends her winter vacation in Lahore. She observes many changes in her family as well as in her country. Secularism has given way to Islamic fundamentalism. Non-Muslims are eyed with suspicion. The gender bias is horrifying and poverty has spread like disease. Feroza feels sorry to discover that she is a misfit in the country in which once she has fitted well. Feroza's Mother and grandmother are astonished to see the change in her.

On her flight to America she opens the envelopes that her uncle and relatives have given. It has more than seven hundred dollars. She plans to buy a second hand car with that money. This is again the American influence on Feroza. She asks her friends to suggest and finally fixes an appointment with David Press. She goes to inspect his two year old car but she falls in love with him. It is love at first sight; Feroza is not able to resist the love for

David. After all the years that she spent in America, she at last falls in love with David a non-parsi.

The Parsi community which takes pride itself for being westernized and liberated is in fact not liberal at all. The novel portrays the dubious nature of Parsi community. It is liberal towards men but imposes too much restriction on women. In the question of marriage man's inter-faith marriage is acceptable but if a woman marries a man from non-parsi community, she is ostracized by the Parsi community. She is disowned and disinherited.

Feroza from the childhood is aware of all these strictures of her community but still she challenges her community by falling in love with David. One Sunday evening David takes her to his home in Boulder for Sabbath meal with his parents. When David's mother politely queries her about her religion, Feroza for the first time realizes that David's religion is different from hers.

Feroza spends her vacation with her uncle Manek and enjoys her stay there. Later, she tells about David, Manek clearly replies.

**“It all seem wonderful now, but marriage is something else; our cultures are very different of course, I'm not saying it can't work, but you have to give it time” (AB 263)**

Manek, Uncle of Feroza, who is educated at MIT and working in America, is not able to accept the love of Feroza. Feroza returns to Denver and moves to live with David in the same house, being shared by two lesbian girls. Living in the same house increases the chances of their intimacy. Feroza decides to get permission from her parents to marry David. She sends a letter along with David's photograph to her mother. The letter creates uproar in the family and the elders are agitated and make hue and cry over this issue. The youngster in the family understands Feroza's feelings and one of the cousins, Bunny reflects,

**“For God's sake you're crying as if Feroza's dead! She's only getting married, for god's sake” (AB 268).**

As the representative of younger generation he urges the elders to broaden their views and permit interfaith marriage as it has become inevitable now.

Zareen is deeply disturbed by Feroza's decision. She flies to Denver and explains to her daughter the risks of marrying outside her community. Feroza requests her mother to look at things in a different way. The Americans have different culture and are living happily. Zareen becomes furious and regrets for having sent Feroza to America and says that she has become "An American Brat."

Ironically Zareen discovers the freedom Feroza enjoys in America. It almost seems unfair to her that a Parsi man can marry a non-Parsi and remain a Parsi and bring up his children as Zoroastrians where as a Parsi woman cannot. Zareen has been compelled to take steps against her wish. She is afraid of being expelled from the community and so shatters the hope of her loving daughter. Zareen describes the details of the Parsi wedding rituals and customs to David. If he is to marry Feroza it should be the Parsi marriage. David gets offended and explains in anger says that a Jewish wedding too is an elaborate one. Zareen succeeds in her mission of creating a wedge between David and Feroza in the name of their respective religion. David refuses to compromise and so he thinks of going out of her life. Zareen goes back to Lahore and Feroza decides to stay and live in America.

Khutlibai, Feroza's grandmother expects that a woman's goal in life is to get married and beget children. Her world centre's on her husband and her children. Women's desire or ambition has no place in her society. It is not expected that the women should the out stretch her boundaries and if they dare to do they are supposed to be treated like the pigeons of Khutlibai's childhood. [Kapadia Novy 51]. She proudly recalls,

**"If one of the bird's from our loft spent the night on another's roof, we'd have pigeon soup the next day. He'd (Khuthibai's grandfather) have its throat slit"** (AB 121).

Both Khutibai and Zareen stand against Feroza's decision to choose a non-Parsi life partner. Feroza's is not allowed to choose a life of her own in Parsi society. The traditional values are deep rooted in their psyche and anyone who goes against is mercilessly punished.

Feroza has tasted the fruits of freedom and now, she doesn't want to give it up. So, she decides to lead her life the way her heart desires and pursues happiness the way in

which her conscience dictates. She likes to marry a man whom she comes to like and love without bothering herself whether he is a Parsi or of different faith. She has learnt a lesson and in future she will not allow anyone peep ones nose in her personal affairs. As far as religion is concerned, she is a Parsi and she will continue to be Parsi but a liberated Parsi.

The characters Zaitoon and Feroza are made to suffer on account of cultural practices and traditional norms. The voices of the protagonist Feroza, and female characters like Zareen, Zaitoon and Carol are the voices of marginalized Asian women who protest the narrowness of religious and social attitude towards women and they plead for more liberal and understanding socio-religious communities (Kapadia Novy 68).

These women refuse to accept the conventions in the name of culture, traditions and religion. Though they are victimized in various ways by men and the man-made social, religious and cultural norms, they are not ready to surrender or to accept their suffering without the semblance of fight. They are bold enough to break the shackles of the worthless conventional system to assert their own individuality. The culture may differ from one place to another and there may be similarities and dissimilarities, but one has to mature enough to understand and appreciate the cultural nuances. Moreover, whatever may be the cultural differences, one must learn to treat another individual as human beings. In order to nullify the conflicts arising out of cultural differences, the novels suggest that hope is still possible even though the situation seems to be hopeless.

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