

# Immigrant Experience in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*

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### Abstract

*Bapsi Sidhwa's An American Brat presents a captivating story that explores themes of immigrant experience, identity crisis, cultural clashes, and individual growth. This paper explores Feroza Ginwalla's experiences as an immigrant, emphasizing the emotional and social challenges she faces while transitioning from her traditional Pakistani upbringing to the more liberal, individualistic culture of the United States. It highlights her journey to America, shedding light on the hurdles she encounters while trying to adapt to a new environment and simultaneously maintain a connection to her cultural roots. In particular, it examines the immigration challenges she experiences, including homesickness, cultural adaptation, and the feeling of being caught between two identities, all of which ultimately influence her self-identity and perspective on life.*

**Keywords:** Immigration, Cultural Identity, Assimilation, Identity Crisis, Self-Discovery and Displacement.

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *An American Brat* explores a distinct facet of community: The Immigrant Experience. As individuals transition from one region of the globe to another, often blurring national borders, the creation and sustenance of community acquire new complexities, resulting in an increasingly fluid understanding of communal ties.

An individual's identified in this world through their heritage, culture, and language. When an individual seems to lose touch with these aspects, they can become a pitiable and isolated figure. This is where the struggle begins in their quest to preserve their own identity. Migrants encounter numerous challenges, such as feelings of guilt for having departed from their homeland, cultural conflicts at various levels, a sense of isolation, and experiences of alienation. The sense of dislocation, the worries of a migrant, and the estrangement of individuals trapped in a landscape of clashing values are effectively examined by Bapsi Sidhwa in *An American Brat*, particularly through the experiences of Feroza, the main female protagonist.

Feroza, a 16-year-old girl, comes from an affluent Parsi family in Lahore. At a time when Zulifikar Ali Bhutto was incarcerated and Islamic fundamentalism was gaining ground in Pakistan, her parents were deeply involved in politics. However, they hope to protect their

daughter from the influences of the Muslim government. Zareen, her mother, worries that Feroza is becoming more conservative; she feels that Feroza has adopted a mindset that is uncharacteristic of their Parsi heritage and seems to overlook the core principles of their faith.

Zareen believes that Feroza's objection stems from the influence of Muslims. She thinks her daughter is losing sight of the fact that Parsis have a distinct way of dressing. Zareen feels that Feroza is quite unlike other Parsi kids in Karachi or Bombay. Feroza's parents wish to shield her from the further impact of the conservative Muslim government. Thus, they decide to send her to the USA, hoping that her time there will expand her perspective. They fail to recognize that Feroza's experience as an immigrant may lead to changes in her character that they might later regret.

At this moment, Feroza is not aware of the obstacles she may face in America. Her family members give her a warm goodbye. From the moment she discovers her journey to America, she feels a rush of excitement. However, as her departure draws near, she starts to long for all that her hometown provides, realizing she will miss them while in America. She understands that everything she loved the sights, sounds, smells, and people will be left behind. As she is about to leave, her eyes fill with tears. Throughout her journey, Feroza follows the advice of her elders, but the difficulties of migration become apparent as soon as she arrives at Kennedy Airport. At the airport, Feroza notices a significant difference between Americans and Pakistanis. In America, people are absorbed in their own lives. Unlike in Pakistan, no one seems to notice or gaze at her.

She had to face the harsh behavior of the customs officers. Regarding her passport, there are some questions. They pose various questions - such as the duration of her stay, her uncle's age, his work, and if he is a U.S. citizen, resident, or visitor. Feroza finds it difficult to give adequate responses. A secondary inspection is then conducted on Feroza. She is inundated with inquiries once more. Overwhelmed by nervousness, she unintentionally discloses that her uncle works two jobs to supplement his money while attending school. She was unaware that foreign students are not allowed to work. The officers start to think that Manek is actually her fiancé rather than her uncle and that she has come to America to get married. This charge greatly affects Feroza, making her wish to return to her place of origin at once. In the end, Manek's promise to depart Pakistan after three months is accepted by the authorities.

As Feroza takes in the beauty of America, she feels an overwhelming sense of joy. She becomes captivated by both America and its people. Everything around her, from the shopping malls to fast-food chains and modern kitchens, brings her immense delight. Spending three months on vacation with Manek is a joy for her. The charm and allure of America are so compelling that she decides to remain for further education. This decision marks the beginning of a clash between Eastern and Western value systems.

Feroza's journey as an immigrant encompasses both the positive and negative aspects of America. Migrants often find themselves drawing comparisons between their past and present lives. On one side lies the world they have abandoned, which offers little hope and opportunity, while on the other side is the new world where they aim to realize their aspirations. In America, Feroza witnesses shopping malls, fast-food chains, and advanced technologies, but she also encounters inexpensive hotels, bars, male sex workers, and their pimps. When Manek takes Feroza on a tour of New York, he initially presents the city's shiny and spectacular image. He guides her to iconic landmarks like the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, the World Trade Towers, Wall Street, Lexington Avenue, and the major museums.

Feroza quickly adapts to the contrasting aspects of American life. The once shy and reserved Feroza, who in Pakistan would hesitate to answer the phone to avoid speaking with strangers, begins to smoke and drink freely. Manek takes on the responsibility of preparing Feroza for life

in a foreign country. He demonstrates how to apply deodorant to her underarms to eliminate odor. He instructs her to be more cautious and aware of her surroundings. He helps her shed her Eastern habits and adopt Western manners and etiquette.

Feroza initially traveled to America with the intention of staying for just three months; however, her visit extended to three years. Upon her return to her home country, she spent a brief period before deciding to return to America to complete her education. She assured her parents that she would come back after her studies and marry in accordance with their wishes. Nevertheless, she found herself unable to fulfill this promise, as her second journey to America solidified her desire to remain there permanently. Even after her breakup with David, she experienced emotional pain and depression, yet the thought of returning to Pakistan never crossed her mind. She understood that her path to healing lay solely within the confines of America.

Feroza, encounters a dilemma characterized by conflicting emotions. The liberties afforded by life in America present a significant challenge to relinquish. At various moments, she grapples with the opposing urges of returning to Pakistan and continuing to indulge in the joys and experiences she has discovered in America. The intricate love-hate dynamic that migrants often experience towards both their homeland and their adopted country is effectively illustrated by the novelist in *An American Brat!*.

Feroza has undergone a profound transformation. Her perspectives and areas of interest have shifted significantly. She now finds herself distinct from her friends, her parents, and the broader community in Pakistan. Acknowledging this irreversible change, she recognizes that her life trajectory diverges from that of her peers in Lahore. This realization evokes a sense of dislocation within her. Her feelings of dislocation are further intensified as she observes nuanced alterations in her mother's demeanor.

Displacement in this narrative revitalizes to Feroza, providing her with the chance to pursue a more fulfilling existence according to her own desires. She opts for the immigrant experience in America rather than returning to the confines of Pakistan. Ultimately, Feroza's psychological struggles reflect the challenges faced by contemporary multicultural societies. She embodies the aspirations of the younger generation, particularly migrants who endeavor to reconcile tradition with modernity, as well as dependence with autonomy. Furthermore, she symbolizes the identity crisis and the ongoing struggle of Parsis to maintain their existence in post-partition Pakistan and other nations, including America. Through her determination to carve out a niche for herself in a foreign land, she conveys a message to all migrants: despite the inevitable ups and downs, they can ultimately attain a state of self-sufficiency from which there is no regression. This dislocation is perceived as a constructive endeavor.

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