



Resistance against Stereotypical Imaging of Women- A Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*

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Abstract

Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* foregrounds multiplicity of meaning, which delineates cross-culturalism, ethnic purity and image of woman in general and traditional view about man-woman relationship inter-community marriage religious antagonism struggle for individual freedom and self – fulfilment in particular. It is set against the backdrop of political turmoil in Pakistan where Bhutto government has been removed for power and martial has been imposed. The first part of the novel tells the story of Feroza Ginwalla, a traditional-bound Pakistan-Parsee girl and her reluctance to change. The second part highlights her assimilation in American culture. Feroza's parents think that migration to American will broaden the outlook of Feroza. Though she goes there involuntarily, she is enthusiastic about visiting a developed country. Her journey creates awareness in her and she starts liking the new environment, new culture and modern life of America. She nurtures new hopes and fresh thoughts and changes her way of life. She challenges the fundamental doctrines of religions and cultures. She discards the gender stereotypical signs from her mind when she falls in love with a Jewish American. Her parents do not want her to marry a non-Parsee man. Both the Islamic fundamentalism and the Parsee ethnicity cannot have their control over Feroza's new ideas about her future in America. Feroza strongly resists not only the Islamic conservative ideologies about woman but also her own ethnic milieu's paradigm on woman. Feroza creates her own space in an alien society. And she is the representative of the liberated woman of postcolonial era.

Key words: culturalism, struggle, freedom, religion, stereotypical

Introduction

Bapsi Sidhwa is a south Asian Pakistani woman novelist, who entered into the orbit of diaspora fiction in 1990s. she has written five novels such as *The Pakistani Bride*, *Crow Eaters*, *Cracking India*, *An American Brat*, and *Water*. Her novels deal with certain postcolonial themes like partition, women's issues, multiculturalism and cultural clash. On the themes of women's issues, Sidhwa provides her women protagonists with the postcolonial concept of resistance in order to change their images from stereotypes.

Overview of *An American Brat*

An American Brat published in 1993 speaks about the positive and the negative sides of the multireligious and multicultural aspects through the woman character, Feroza Ginwalla, who is a Pakistani Parsee girl traditional bound. She starts her journey from Lahore to Denver to explore the modern ways of life. Her journey from innocence to experience creates awareness in her. She thinks a different and modern life beyond religions and cultures.

Feroza Ginwalla : A Pakistani Girl

Feroza rises up with new hopes and fresh thoughts which changes her way of life. She challenges the fundamental doctrines of religions and cultures. She discards the gender stereotypical signs from her mind when she falls in love with a Jewish American man. This change in Feroza alarms her parents that they do not want her to marry a non- Parsee. Both the Islamic fundamentalism and the Parsee ethnicity cannot have their control over Feroza's new-fangled ideas about her future in America. Feroza strongly resists not only the Islamic conservative ideologies for woman but also her own ethnic milieu's paradigm on woman. Feroza is a character depicted by the novelist has the postcolonial traits that as a woman of postcolonial era.

Journey from Lahore to Denver

Since time immemorial, woman has been assigned with female stereotypic values such as to marry and have children. Woman is conditioned not only to be docile and modest but also to be exposed as loving, caring, nurturing, and sympathetic in the familial set up. She has not been permitted to be an independent both in social and economic stature. She is forced to obtain specific image because of his women's biological as a weakness. According to this a forced to must possess delicate manners and behaviours throughout her life time. This approach has been in practice among the women, thinking that then only they can be in safe net. They were taught to believe if they possess the 'woman image' they will be regarded as "Goddesses". This ideology was reflected in the writings of the male writers of any literature in the global. It also happened in the south Asian literature both male and female writers of per independent era portrayed their women characters as dependent beings. They showed the women protagonists compulsorily dependents men.

Feroza's Transformation

The women characters were glorified for they restrict themselves within the domestic sphere and play their roles as mothers, daughters and wives. They were portrayed as uneducated and mute. The heroines in the novels were denied resistance against their oppressions. There were hardly any woman empowerment actions

occurred in the stories. Most of the woman characters were exploited. They were retained as stereotypical in the novels. In this situation there were few female writers in the postcolonial era, they started viewing women subjugation in feminist perspectives and they came forward with solutions for the women's issues. One among the female writers is Bapsi Sidhwa, who is a postcolonial feminist woman writer and she raises her voice of opposition against women's oppression. She wishes for women's emancipation. According to Bapsi Sidhwa the primordial practices like denial of women's education, child marriage, and widowhood are the berries against women empowerment.

Resistance against Cultural and Religious rules

In *An American Brat*, the female protagonist is Feroza Ginwalla who is portrayed as a new woman of colonial Pakistan, challenging the old obsolete mind-set towards women and reshaping her individuality through and economic independence. In the beginning, Feroza is shown as an innocent school girl that she internalizes the rigid codes of the Islamic rulers. Ever since her childhood, Feroza has been under stress to follow the rigid Islamic fundamental norms of Pakistan. Though she belongs to a rich Parsee family in Lahore, and has all fineries to enjoy, her mind is packed with puritanical ethics and moral values. She is very exactly fit in the stereotypical image of woman. She is hesitant to attend telephone calls and she does not want to perform a role in school drama. She openly shouts at her mother not to wear sleeveless blouse when she comes out especially to her school to pick her up. Feroza wears purdah like Muslim girls to her school. In this regard Zareen says, "she objected to my sleeveless sari-blouse really, this narrow-minded attitude by General Zia is infecting her" (10). Feroza's understanding about her own female identity is based on the Islamic fundamentalism that restricts her free mobility. She internalizes certain conventional ideologies that include even riding on bicycle that is outlawed to a woman.

Impact of Post Colonial Feminism

The social and cultural set up of Pakistan warns its women folks to be dependents on their men for everything. It is obvious that Feroza in the beginning refuses to step out of that tradition-bound and conservative stand point. She possesses all required features of a stereotypical woman. Feroza is frequently complained by her mother Zareen for her custom-ridden attitudes. Zareen wants her daughter to be modern and independent. Feroza is urged to leave for America by her parent for three months' vacation. They believe that life in America will change her orthodox mind set and so she will learn the modern ways of life.

Feroza's path from dependence to Independence

Bapsi Sidhwa encourages the women to emancipate themselves from the age-old customs and creeds that have silenced them for centuries and to empower them. She points out how the fossilized social habits and customs obstacle the progress of the women in the society. She exposes how women in the postcolonial era sense their thraldoms condition and how they create awareness of independency on their younger generation. In *An American Brat*, Zareen views the fundamentalism of Pakistani society as a handicap that would do nothing good to her daughter Feroza's future. Feroza represents the new generation that wants

changes in its life style. The postcolonial thinking is to bring changes in the fossilized social systems through rehabilitation and replacement.

Feroza's struggle to break stereotypes

Feroza goes to America in order to get refined. She easily gets along with that outlandish cultures and behavioural patterns. Her ignorance gradually vanishes from her mind when she mixes with the people of the modern society of America. There is a sea change in her attitude and she starts valuing life with utmost enthusiasm and passion. She becomes focused on her catering professional studies and turns all her ears to enrich her knowledge in that. She earns sufficiently from her part time jobs. Feroza becomes generous to share her residence with her friends of different culture and nationalities. She even doesn't bother to stay with lesbians. About all, in spite of her of her rigid, a Jewish American's love proposal. Feroza's decision about her marriage with David reveals her mental ripeness to face any cultural conflicts in future. Her intention to marry David press, over takes the classical rules of her Parsee ethnic system. According to the rules of Zoroastrians, a Parsee woman cannot marry a non-Parsee and in such case the girl will be excommunicated from the ethnic milieu permanently.

Women Empowerment through Feroza

Feroza has been regular to azure-master temple in Lahore, who is a stauncher of her religion, and also has beliefs in Parsee ritual. Feroza is willing to marry a non-Parsee which shows her height of broad-mindedness. Feroza knows well that she will become paradigm in Parsee society, if she breaks traditions to marry a non-Parsee man. Feroza reads in normal way when Zareen makes fuss to accept her daughter's choice of her life partner. Zareen's intention to mould Feroza modern is fulfilled. Her Parsee background pulls her back to primitive system. Feroza stands the pressure to marry a Parsee boy by declaring that she will neither marry David press or any Parsee gentleman in Lahore. She determines to go back to America to pursue her higher studies. Feroza, a humble and conservative girl becomes conscious of her self-respect and identity and she create a new space for her to live in.

Conclusion

One of the themes of postcolonial literature is resistance against any oppression imposed upon the people who have weak and fragile metabolism. Particularly women are being underestimated regarding their physical and intellectual potentiality. Still, literatures in the world produce a good number of woman protagonists reflect the real heroines in the social set up. Feroza in *An American Brat* shed away the traditional beliefs and she reimages herself as a non-stereotypical woman. She proves that she is an individual and independent woman.

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