

CULTURAL CONFLICT IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S "AN AMERICAN BRAT"**Ainuiddin Muradi**^{*1}**Razia Sadri**^{*2}

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ABSTRACT

Bapsi Sidhwa is a postcolonial writer from South Asia, Pakistan. She is best known for her novel "An American Brat." In the novel she depicts the story of a sixteen years old Parsee girl. Parsee people are the followers of Zoroastrian religion, they do worship sun. Her novel is presented the socio-cultural background of Parsee community and cultural antagonism among different nations. 'An American Brat' throws light on the cultural antagonism; it is represented through the character of Feroza the protagonist. The novel talks on the transformation of Feroza; she has tackled the cultures of Pakistani, Parsee and American. She actually becomes an American brat by adopting the American culture. The antagonism enters into Parsee life when Feroza adopts the American culture. In the novel, it is seen that new generation believes that inevitable to do the marriages outside of faith. This study is an attempt to reveal the cultural conflict through the character of Feroza.

Keywords: Cultural Conflict, Parsee community, American Brat, Bapsi Sidhwa.

Introduction

The significance of culture in the development of societies and their people cannot be denied during the history of humankind. It becomes the driving force for major issues as conflict or war and peace (Akhter, 2020). Culture can be defined as the beliefs, customs and learned ways of living which is socially inherited possessed by persons in virtue of their membership in social groups. Society is the place where the people are living with different cultures, religions, and races. The statistics of cultural conflict might be high rather than the society. Generally, conflict occurs across cultural boundaries and problems of intercultural miscommunication and misunderstanding.

Conflict is a characteristic of all human communities; theoretically it is an aspect of all social relationships. Avruch (1991) states that "Conflict is competition by individuals or groups over incompatible goals, rare properties, or the sources of power needed to acquire them" (p.1).

This clash is determined by individuals' comprehension of aims, resources, and power and such comprehension might differ greatly among individuals. Further, conflict is related to language, religion, race, nationality, geographical area, social position, business, organizations, and parties. One of the perceptions is culture; it is very important and invaluable part of human beings living in any society. Also culture can be the identity of the particular group and the cause of some conflict among the groups.

People have their own culture, different people perceive culture differently and that is why it may be illuminated in many ways. Sarup, M. (1994), states that mutual programming of the mind is called culture which has the power to separate the people of one society from another. Culture is a set of specific worldwide values and has a state of human excellence.

The Goal of the Study

The main goal of this study is to reveal the cultural conflict in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel "An American Brat" between East and West nations and its effect on young generation where all nations, countries and communities come closer to each other and all are affected by others' culture, language, and civilization.

The Significance of the Study

Sidhwa (1994) investigated the issue of the cultural clashes in her fourth novel in detail. She said that the subject of "An American Brat" obviously deals with cultural conflict. Imtiaz (2011) explains that cultural shock is handled in "An American Brat, when people migrate from sub-continent to western countries for studying, they meet with cultural shock. When people of Asia migrate to western countries for education and employment, they have to face cultural conflict.

This novel "An American Brat" explains the western culture and its traditions are opposite to the traditions and culture of the East. The novel represents the story of (Feroza) a young girl who experiences three cultures, first Parsi culture which is the culture of her community, second the Muslim culture of Pakistan that is her native country and third is the culture of America where she has sent to study.

The significant of the conducted research is to reveal the cultural conflict between East and West. In the world where all nations, countries and communities come closer to each other and all are affected by others' culture, language, and civilization. The researcher investigates cultural conflict which it creates.

Methodology

The researcher applied the library research methodology to collect data and important materials from academic articles, journal and books about "Cultural Conflict in Bapsi Sidhwa's 'An American Brat'."

Literature Review

Avruch (1991) asserts that culture always is shown in two ways (generic and local). Generic culture is a feature of human beings, an adaptive characteristic of our species on this planet for at least thousands years. Local culture is a complex system of human life encodes symbols, schemas, and other sorts of cognitive representations created, shared, and transmitted (socially reproduced and inherited) by individual as well as social groups (p.4). We cannot find a group of people who are living without culture in a reign, even single person. Everyone whether in group or in individual; live(s) with a specific culture. Culture is playing very significant role in human being life. Only culture can shape up the personal and group life in a community. In the modern world diaspora is a displaced community from homeland, they emigrated ethnical group who leave their homeland for prosperity. They are always in minority in the host country and often struggle to keep their ethnical identity (Velvizhi and Thavaseelan 2019).

According to T.S. Eliot (1948), there are three types of cultures, including individual culture, group or class culture and culture of whole society. He states:

The culture of the individual depends upon the culture of a group or class, and the culture of a group or class depends upon the culture of the whole society to which that group or class belongs. Therefore, it is the culture of the society that is fundamental. (21)

So, what is the cultural conflict from the perspective of Bapsi Sidhwa in “An American Brat”?

Sidhwa has depicted the story of Feroza sixteen years girl from Parsee community of Lahore in Pakistan through “An American Brat.” The story is surrounded by the adventurous journey of a young Parsee girl, Feroza from Lahore (the third world) to America (the first world). Parsee is one of the two Zoroastrian societies originally from Iran; they had migrated from their homeland (Iran) to Gujrat (India) between 8th and 10th centuries. Feroza is influenced by Islamic culture which is dominant culture in Pakistan and become more orthodox rather than her parents (Cyrus and Zareen). She tries to observe the cultural rules completely, and attempts to purify their family based on the Islamic culture. Sometimes Feroza criticizes her parents if they do not observe the cultural rules. Sidhwa writes that Feroza, “Won’t even answer the phone anymore.” (p.10) Zareen mocks her daughter and says, “I told you, don’t be silly. No one is going to jump out of the phone to bite you.” (p.10) Feroza’s parents think that she must be saved from being more Islamic orthodoxy. Her mother becomes apprehensive that Feroza is getting more and more involved with Islamic culture. Zareen states:

I went to bring Feroza from school today. I was chatting with mother Superior... in the car, she said: ‘Mummy, please don’t come to school dressed like that.’ She objected to my sleeveless sari

blouse! Really, this narrow-minded attitude touted by General Zia is infecting her, too. I told her: ‘look, we are Parsees, everybody knows we dress differently. (p.11)

After this moment Zareen and Cyrus apprehend about another type of loss of identity. They scare that Feroza is strictly involved with Islamic culture and she is losing her originality that is Zoroastrian and will marry with a non-Parsee boy. To find solution or to change Feroza’s mind, they take the decision to send her on a holiday to America. Cyrus says, “Travel will broaden her outlook, get this puritanical rubbish out of her head.” (p.14) When Khutlibai Zareen’s mother comes to know, why Zareen and Cyrus are sending Feroza to America. She gets angry and thinks may be her granddaughter completely lose the Zoroastrian religion and become more non-Parsee girl rather than now she is. Zareen says, she is going just for 3 months and she adds:

You have no idea how difficult Feroza’s been... all this talk about Islam, and how women should dress, and how women should behave, is turning her quite strange. (p.30)

Sidhwa points out that clash between two different cultures start from this event. It can be called cultural conflict between two different cultures (Islamic and Zoroastrian). That is the central theme in “An American Brat.” Culture has two sides (negative and positive), it can be the cause of unity and also hostility in a society. There is no problem for natives in their homeland, but there are a lot of challenges for immigrants or refugees. We can find the cultural antagonism in Feroza’s experiences.

Life is getting more and more complicated in Feroza’s journey. She is sent to America to hope of saving Parsee culture. Unfortunately, when she reaches to the first world (America) become anti-Parsee girl. She comes across with a new culture, which is completely different from her culture that she has never faced before. She humiliates by police and pushes her down, prejudice and demoralization in Kennedy Airport. She shouts: “To hell with you and your damn country. I will go back.” (p.58) Manek her uncle who is experienced expatriate in Boston comes and guides her. In the new land, he tells her “You would not be allowed to wear shorts or bikinis, and if you were a boy, you would be allowed to wear a beard or keep your hair long.” (p.13) He is emphasizing to keep pure their culture and rules. America the place where men and women are in same position, there is equality, freedom of choices, freedom of individual life, and liberty in everything. No one can interfere to the affairs of someone. It is depended upon to the person whether who lives as Muslim, Hindu, Jews, Christian or Parsee. Feroza gains freedom of everything, and she is shaping up a new life for herself; changes and forgets that who was she and what was her culture. Her three months vocation updates to years. She gets admission from Denver University. After that Feroza begins to assimilate the American

culture. Feroza absorbs the cultural shock, changes her lifeways, learns driving, dancing, drinking, does a part-time job in a bar and wears short and tight clothes. While she was a student at Denver University, she falls in love with David Press an American Jewish boy.

When Feroza expresses her decision about the marriage with David to Manek, then he says:

It all seems wonderful now, but marriage is something else, our cultures are very different. Of course, I am not saying it can't work, but you have to give it time. We will keep touching on the phone, and see how it goes? (p. 263)

After consultation with her uncle, she wants to inform her family in Lahore by sending a letter to take permission of marriage; this news has shocked all the family members. She calls to her mother and says:

We are having a civil marriage in any case; a judge will marry us... of course, you know David and I are Unitarians! Zareen replied Unitarians! You sound almost as if you have converted. (p. 278)

This news like bomb-explosion disintegrates all family members, especially Zareen. Because, based on the Zoroastrian culture they will lose social privilege as well as religious, and they will not have called Parsee anymore. According the strict rules of Parsee community, they have to reject her decision. Zareen warns her that Parsee people never forget their pure Zoroastrian culture and it is not allowed to marry a non-Parsee boy. Zareen says, "I should have listened. I should never have let you go so far away. Look what is done to you... you have become an American brat." (p.279)

Immediately, her mother goes to America to forbid her daughter from marrying. Zareen talks of all the possible threats of marrying with the non-Parsee boy. She warns her that she might be thrown out from the society, and nobody likes you. She would not be permitted to enter Parsee temples and may not be allowed to attend religious ceremonies or even the parent's funeral. Clash goes on between them and Feroza tries to change her mother mind and Zareen wants to change hers. Mother is getting more and more restless and anguished with daughter's behavior and she says:

Parsee would deprive her daughter, her heritage, her family, and her community. She would be branded an adulteress and her children pronounced illegitimate. She would be accused of the community the most heinous sacrileges. Cut off from her culture and her surroundings like a fish in shallow waters, her child would eventually shrivel up. (p.289)

Zareen secretly meets David and explains Parsee rituals and culture to him patronizingly. She adds, how their cultures are

difference to each other, there are many barriers. She says that it is impossible to marry Parsee girl. David tells Zareen:

My parents are not happy about the marriage, either. It is lucky they are reformed Jews, otherwise, they would go into mourning and pretend I was dead... I belong to an old tradition too. (p.298)

He also points out to some obstacles in Jewish culture, but he preferred his love to his culture. Finally, Zareen makes him conscious about Parsee and Jewish cultural disparities and convince him to desist from marriage. Pandya points out that David's love for Feroza is getting melt away and also his feeling is losing. He is getting hopeless to go out of her life. On the other side Feroza, the protagonist of the novel disintegrates and fades away because of the conflict between two cultures. She loses all her wishes and feels getting alienated and isolated. Ultimately, because of the cultural antagonism, David desists and decides to leave Feroza.

Singh (1993), states that Feroza has tested the freedom of life and now she is not able to give it up. She takes the decision to manage her personal life and will not permit anyone to interfere in her individual affairs. She will wed with the person whom she loves without disturbing herself whether he is Parsee or non-Parsee. Feroza is a Parsee girl and she will be Parsee. Sidhwa intends to point out the cultural antagonism among the individuals, groups, and society through the character of Feroza.

Hussain (2005) argues that the novel "An American Brat" deals with the issue of the 'Cultural conflict' young generations from the Indian subcontinent have to be content with when they go to study abroad. It also sketches the conflicts the divergent cultures generate between the families 'back home' and their transformed and transgressing progeny bravely groping their way in the first world.

Conclusion

Feroza's story depicts the three cultures, Parsee (Zoroastrian) culture, Islamic culture, and the western culture of America. The story represents clash of western and eastern cultures. Sidhwa tries to show discriminatory issues of Parsee's laws toward women. Men are allowed to marry with non-Parsee girls in Zoroastrianism, but women can't. If a Parsee girl marries with a non-Parsee, she commits a cultural suicide; therefore they prevent her to entry into Zoroastrian temple and will deny all religious ceremonies. Her life experiences are represented the mental state of a multicultural community, particularly of ethnic and refugees groups. She illustrates all expatriates who find it very difficult to inhabit a new land and to balance between custom or ritual and modernism, past and present, dependence and independence, native and migrants. Critics call this is a conflict between traditionalists and modernists.

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