Chapter Three

The Parsee Self and the Crisis of Identity: The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa
Bapsi Sidhwa is a Pakistani Parsee writer settled now in the USA. She was born in Karachi in 1939 and was brought up and educated in Lahore. During her childhood days she was almost isolated and lonely as she suffered from polio and she had to undergo extensive medical treatment. The doctors advised her parents not to send her to school. So an Anglo-Indian lady teacher was employed to teach her at home. As a lonely and ailing child, she had not much to do except reading. Her reading of the novels of Charles Dickens, Tolstoy and V.S. Naipaul among others has influenced her fiction considerably.

Her family, the Bhandaras, a leading business family of Lahore for generations had migrated there in the last century. She was reared on fictional and real tales of the entrepreneurial skills of the elders of her community. She graduated from Lahore’s Kinnaird College for women. At the age of nineteen, she fell in love and married a Bombay based businessman. However, this marriage did not last long. She was allowed the custody of her daughter but was forced to part with her son who came to her at the age of sixteen after his father’s death. At the age of twenty five, she married Noshirwan Sidhwa, the son of late Mr. R. K. Sidhwa, the former Mayor of Karachi.
and a well known freedom fighter. Her husband, twelve years her senior, was the man behind her creative genius.

She started writing at the age of twenty eight after the birth of her three children – two girls and a boy. She has written four novels to date. These are *The Crow Eaters* (1980), *The Pakistani Bride* (1982), *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) – published as Cracking India in the USA – and *An American Brat* (1993). Sidhwa has won international acclaim for her works. Her works have been translated into French and German and are taught as part of the academic curriculum in some American universities. Both Pakistan and America have honoured her for her writings.

In 1991, she received the *Sitara – e – Imtiaz* award, Pakistan’s highest honour for unique contribution in the field of Arts. Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* was named the Notable Book of 1991 by *The New York Times* and won the Literature Prize of the *1991 Frankfurt Book Fair*. In 1993, she received the prestigious *Lila Wallace Readers’ Digest Award* of US $ 105,000/-. 

Besides her being a distinguished writer, she is an eminent social activist working for women’s emancipation and upliftment. She participated actively in women’s delegations to Iran and Turkey in 1970. In 1975, she represented Pakistan in the Asian Women’s Conference at Alma-Ata, in the Republic of Kazakhstan in erstwhile USSR. The women of Pakistan appreciate her active involvement in setting up the Destitute Women’s Home as well as Children’s Home in Lahore. Hers is a country where freedom is not at all easy for women who have to follow basic norms of Muslim fundamentalism.

In the early eighties, she and her family emigrated to the U.S.A. and settled in Houston. She taught creative writing at Rice University in Texas and the University of Houston. She was a Bunting Fellow in 1986-87 at Radcliffe College, Harvard where she wrote her masterpiece *Ice-Candy-Man/ Cracking India*. 


THE CROW EATERS

Bapsi Sidhwa’s fiction deals with both the colonial period of the Indian subcontinent and the post-colonial period of the newly born nation Pakistan. Her best known and highly acclaimed third novel Ice-Candy-Man, called Cracking India in USA holds a prism of Parsee sensitivity through which the cataclysmic event of Partition is depicted. Her four novels are remarkably different from each other in both subject and treatment. Her first novel The Crow Eaters was published in 1978, though her The Pakistani Bride was written first and published later in 1983. Ice-Candy-Man was published in 1988 and The American Brat in 1993. She, a successful and versatile novelist of the Indian subcontinent and later of the newly born Pakistan, has aroused a variety of reactions. She cannot be categorized easily as just a Parsee novelist nor a comic writer but she is, no doubt, Pakistan’s finest English language novelist till date. In her four novels, the themes vary – various patterns of migration, the expatriate experiences, the Parsee milieu and their ethos and idiosyncrasies of this miniscule community, the Partition pangs and violence, issue of cross-cultural interaction, interfaith marriages and the suppressed and marginalized conditions of women apart from the sharp, minute and vivid observations of human behaviour dealt with earthy humour and genial wit.

The Crow Eaters, a hilarious saga of the Junglewallas, a Parsee family, was a controversial novel at the time of its publication. She was criticized by her community in Pakistan for portraying the Parsee community in bad light and damaging the goodwill earned by the Parsees through centuries. The legendary honesty and integrity of the Parsee people is defamed and blotted by the ambivalence of the character of its protagonist Faredoon nicknamed Freddy Junglewalla who is either a jewel of the Parsee community or a murdering scoundrel! According to the Karachi Herald of May 1987, this novel made Bapsi Sidhwa the ‘Parsee whom other Parsees love to hate’. Its launching was marked by a mock bomb threat. She herself has said:

The book launch took place at an international hotel in Lahore and there was a bomb threat….It took me some time to realize the turmoil the book had created within the community….they felt I was damaging the image…they felt
threatened by it, although it was written out of great affection (Montenegro, 1989: 33).

Disclaiming the criticism of the unfair portrayal of her community, she writes in the “Author’s Note” to the third edition of Penguin India, 1990:

Because of a deep-rooted admiration for my diminishing community and an enormous affection for it – this work of fiction has been a labour of love. The nature of comedy being to exaggerate, the incidents in this book do not reflect at all upon the integrity of a community whose honesty and sense of honour not to mention its tradition of humour as typified by the Parsi ‘natak’ – are legend. The characters drawn in this piece of pure fantasy have no relation whatever to any existing people.

As the story of the novel unfolds, the myriad aspects of the Parsee identity are revealed through its Parsee protagonist and his family; also through the Parsee customs and rituals including the Navjote ceremony, a wedding, death rites and the norms of the Zoroastrian religion. Makarand Paranjpe rightly points out that the above discussed controversy arises out of the assumption that the chief concern of the book is to portray the life of the Parsees in the Indian subcontinent. The Parsee ethnicity is minutely described in this book, but “The Crow Eaters is not a novel particularly about Parsis; instead it is a novel whose characters happen to be Parsis” (Paranjpe, 1996: 90). Paranjpe wants to convey that the Parsee slice of reality is just a small part of the wider reality of life that this novel reflects in the context of the colonial history of the then multicultural India,

The novel celebrates the achievement of a tiny community which has survived migration from Persia to India, re-settled peacefully and prospered without losing their cultural identity. The story begins with the migration of twenty-three year old Freddy. “Strong and pioneering, he saw no future for himself in his ancestral village, tucked away in the forest of central India, and resolved to seek his fortune in the hallowed pastures of the Punjab” (12-13). It was the Sindh region of the Indian subcontinent. He embarked on his travels towards the end of the nineteenth century and most of the action of the novel takes place in the first decades of the twentieth century till the novel ends with Freddy’s death in 1940. His is a success-story from rags to riches, an immigrant’s dream come true. He settles down in Lahore with his wife Putli, mother-in-law Jerbanoo and a daughter. He fathers seven children in all.
and his small business in a shop, which he bought by selling his wife’s gold ornaments, prospers into the expansion of his commercial empire in other cities too. He also climbs the social ladder of name and fame, “not only succeeded in carving a comfortable niche in the world for himself but he also earned the respect and gratitude of his entire community” (9). Sidhwa’s comic ironical tone undercuts throughout the novel, right from the very beginning,

Faredoon Junglewalla’s name is involved in all major ceremonies performed in the Punjab and Sindh – an ever-present testimony to the success of his charming rascality (9).

Actually, the narrative begins with an extended flash-back. The middle-aged Freddy tells his own story to a captive audience consisting of his children and some from the neighbourhood. This flash-back continues through the first seventeen chapters, till around the third part of the novel. Freddy narrates how he struggled for many years to get along with his shrewish mother-in-law unsuccessfully. Later, his clandestine conspiracy to hit the two birds with one stone is also half successful. Without revealing his intentions to anybody, he hatches a plan to do away with his meddlesome, fussy and outspoken mother-in-law and also benefit from his insurance scheme by fraudulent arson in his shop. Fortunately, he received a sizeable cheque from the insurance company. He could just hit one bird but Jerbandoo, rescued from the fire, was quite changed and ceased to be a problem. Thereafter, Freddy did not look back and the sky was the limit for his business enterprises.

In the middle portion of the novel, till the thirtieth chapter, the focus shifts from Freddy to his children. Two daughters, Hutoxi and Ruby are married off, and the third, Yasmin, too gets married later. Freddie dotes upon his eldest son Soli, groomed into a handsome and well-behaved youth. The sons receive more emphasis and attention. Yazdi, the second one turns out to be a very sensitive boy and Billy, the youngest, very naughty. Yazdi, perhaps mistaking his father’s many intercultural alliances for tolerance, falls in love with his class-mate, an Anglo-Indian girl, Rosy Watson from a troubled family background. Freddy tries his best to dissuade him from his involvement reminding him of the oath that Parsees took to be an endogamous race when they landed at the Western coast of India centuries ago. Rosy
is pushed into prostitution at Hira Mandi, may be by her step-mother and when Yazdi comes to know about it from her father he is shattered. Freddy’s favourite son, Soli, suddenly grows sick. His sickness is detected as typhoid, incurable at that time. Soli dies, fulfilling the astrological predictions of a Hindu foreteller Gopal Krishnan. Soli’s death comes as a brutal shock to everybody, especially Freddy and Yazdi who is quite changed. He renounces the world, using his monthly allowance for charity and wandering from place to place.

Thenceforth comes the third phase of the novel that continues till the end. This part revolves round Behram Junglewalla or Billy who carries on Freddy’s business and becomes one of the richest men in India. Most of this section deals with the family’s attempt to find a wife for Billy; courtship and marriage to Tanya, the daughter of the fabulously wealthy Easymoneys of Bombay; their honeymoon and nuptial bliss and most importantly their marital conflicts due to Billy’s stingy and thrifty temperament and Tanya’s extravagance resulting in Tanya’s surrendering to Billy’s eccentricities. Billy could rule over her and dominate her because she cares for him. We see Billy’s crazy and strange behaviour in buying inferior quality of pomegranates to fulfil his expectant wife’s desire after a long demand by her for the big red pomegranates of good quality. Billy bargains for this second grade fruit after wandering a lot on his bicycle in hot sun when Tanya throws tantrums one afternoon. And in front of Billy, she throws the yellow fruits too, out of her bedroom window. The money given by Billy to Tanya for household expenditure is hardly enough for her. Money is Billy’s first love not to spend but to save. Poor Tanya gives up later before the powerful patriarchy. An interesting interlude is Freddy’s trip to England with his wife and mother-in-law, full of comic episodes. The novel ends with Freddy’s peaceful death at the age of sixty five. The entire novel has the episodic structure, Makrand Paranjpe comments about this loosely constructed narrative:

Much of its comic energy and exuberance derive from a string of gags or comic episode.……… Each has an element of the ridiculous or incongruous. There is a good deal of physical comedy involved. There is some reference to sex. And verbal humour accompanies physical humour (Paranjpe, 1996: 91).

There are a number of such comic episodes in the first and the last parts of the novel; for example, the incident of the troublesome rooster and the consummation of Billy’s
marriage with Tanya. “An accent on the ridiculous, the frank and funny use of sex, the reliance on physical clumsiness, etc” are the key features of the above episodes (Paranjpe, 1996: 92). The most successful comedy that inspires boisterous laughter is when the Junglewallas visit England. Jerbanoo is an absolute misfit, first in the home of their hosts, the Allens, and then in the hotel. A number of comic scenes are created by Jerbanoo’s interference at the Allen’s household. She revenges herself on the exasperated Mrs. Allen by defecating on a newspaper in the centre of the landing. After being out of the Allens’ house, they stay in a hotel. There too Jerbanoo makes a scene by using the balcony for her daily baths, a luxury there and totally unconcerned about the drainage. Paranjpe comments that “… in addition to physical humours, the element of the ridiculous, scatology and the climax makes this perhaps the funniest of the scenes in the book” (93). The candour and the colloquial use of language save these episodes from being coarse or vulgar. The entire novel is full of such farcical episodes and humour except the middle one where occur the disappointment of Yazdi in love, his frustration and rejection of the world and Soli’s untimely death. These events make this part of the narrative very serious and sombre. Freddy is transformed into a much more mature person with deeper understanding about the complexity and suffering of life. The author, as it were, suggests that there is no gaiety without sorrow. Life is like a cycle where comedy and tragedy occur alternately. It is a way of life.

The novel is written in ironically comic mode and at the same time it does try to convey the deeper vision of life in its variety as well as vitality. The idiosyncrasies and foibles of its main characters like Freddy, Jerbanoo, Putli, Yazdi, Billy and Tanya are satirically caricatured. The story of Freddie’s settlement in Lahore tells us not only about himself as an individual but also about his small community. Freddy systematically finds his way to the homes of the four Parsee families already settled in Lahore: the Toddywallas, the Bankwallas, the Bottliwalls and the Chaiwallas. None of them practise the trades suggested by their names. Faredoon’s manly bearing and soft-spoken manners quickly found their way into Punjabi hearts. His noble face with mystic eyes combined with the fact that he was a Parsee – whose reputation for honesty and propriety is a byword – made him a man of consequence in the locality. Hindu, Muslim or Christian, all had profound respect for the man and his family. So, not only within his community, but also in his cross-cultural interactions with the
‘other’ people he earned the goodwill. An endearing feature of this microscopic merchant community is its compelling sense of duty and obligation towards other Parsees. Like one close-knit family, they assist each other, sharing success and rallying to support failure. There are no Parsee beggars in a country abounding in beggars. The moment a Parsee strikes it rich he devotes a big portion of his energies and resources to charity. He builds schools, hospitals and orphanages; provides housing, scholarships and finance for good cause.

Sidhwa’s mode of perception as well as narration is ironic. Faredoon Junglewalla’s aim was to earn wealth and status but he achieved that at the cost of his scruples and moral values. Freddy’s riches and fame are shown to have dubious roots. His acts of charity are not virtuous but tinged with self-promotion. He has developed an apparently philanthropic image to increase his business contacts. He prospered in Lahore because of sycophancy towards the British officials in the guise of public relations. In all such incidents, Sidhwa’s tone is not moralistic but ironic. The first thing he does in the initial stage of his establishment in Lahore is to get dressed up in his starched white coat-wrap and crisp white pyjamas and turban and drives his cart to the Government House and signs his name in the visitor’s Register. Sidhwa’s protective irony runs through these lines: “Having thus paid homage to the British Empire, established his credentials and demonstrated his loyalty to ‘Queen and Crown’, Freddy was free to face the future” (22).

Honesty has become part and parcel of Parsee identity as most of the people of this community are transparent and upright. Sidhwa in her quintessential ironical undertone ridicules this myth when Freddy’s help is sought by Mr. Sodawalla for his brother who is imprisoned by the London police for carrying illegal opium. Himself a scoundrel, Freddy pursed his lips. “‘Something will have to be done’, he agreed. ‘Not for that indolent bastard’s sake, but for the good name of our community. We can’t let it get around that a Parsee is in jail for smuggling opium!’ And if Faredoon did not take a penny from the Sodawallas, he had no scruples about relieving Mr. Katrak, a diamond merchant from Karachi, of fifty thousand rupees” (152). The amount is only Rs. 10,000 to bribe Mr. Gibbons and the remaining 40,000 goes to Freddy’s special kitty. Sidhwa in her characteristic ironic tone says, “This was the kitty he dipped into to help others – and occasionally himself” (154). Freddy handles all these incidents
and like this many more with extraordinary shrewdness and dexterity, maintaining his ‘image’ of a helper to his community.

The readers do not fail to grasp the ironical, often to the extent of farcical, undertone of Sidhwa’s narrative right from the very beginning of the novel. When he commences to tell his own life-story to the collected audience of a group of children including his own, the rhetoric of the language he uses is such that easily convinces his young listeners to the justification of his selfishness. He has the knack to prove flattery as the right means to achieve one’s ends, however low one has to stoop without pampering one’s self-esteem. He addresses his vulnerable young ones; scribbling on the blank slates of their minds, as it were:

The sweetest thing in the world is your ‘need’. Yes, think on it, your own need – The mainspring of your wants, well-being and contentment…. Need makes a flatterer of a bully and persuades a cruel man to kindness. Call it circumstances – call it self-interest – call it what you will, it still remains your need. All the good in this world comes from serving our own ends. What makes you tolerate someone you’d rather spit in the eye? What subdues that great big “I”, that monstrous ego in a person? Need, I tell you – will force you to love your enemy as a brother (10).

It is this quality of Freddy and his community that make them side with the rulers and the powerful; not only bow to the conditions of Jadav Rana when they arrived on the western coast of India but also to the Britishers with whose support the Parsees thrived and earned their privileged position. The famous story of the persecuted Zoroastrian Parsees arriving from ‘Pars’ or Persia to the western coast of Gujarat at Sanjan and saying to Jadav Rana, the then king, with a bowl of milk and some sugar added to it as their means of communication, that they would mix with the people just as sugar blends with milk and sweetens it. They did and in the process of assimilation, they have turned themselves into cultural hybrids. They have adopted the Gujarati language as their spoken language and the Parsee women have accepted saree as their costume, though a bit modified, reflecting their individuality. Parsees have maintained their group-identity by their typically unique dress code. Faredoon and his family take pride in their traditional mode of dress. But the modern generation like Billy, Tanya and Yasmin slowly discard the traditional outfits like mathabana, and saree also have been replaced by skirts and frocks under the British influence. But to this day they do
not allow conversion to their faith— or mixed marriages, despite adopting some of the Gujarati customs and several religious rites. They have been living in harmony for centuries together until the British arrived. Soon they have become hybrids with the British too quickly mixing, merging and adopting their language and culture and becoming highly westernized. Billy and Tanya are shown to be communicating in English with each other and also with the neighbours of their age. Till date the Parsees have shown the readiness for hybridity, which is the most important factor for their gaining acceptance in India.

Freddy also talks about how he used to buttress the English officials to earn favour and patronage in his business. His “vernacular was interspersed with laboured snatches of English spoken in a droll intent accent” (11). Sidhwa in her usual style with weighty irony and raunchy humour makes him say:

Yes, I have been all things to all people in my time. There was that bumptious son-of-a-bitch in Peshawar called Colonel Williams. I cooed to him—salamed so low I got a crick in my balls—buttered and marmaladed him until he was eating out of my hand. Within a year I was handling all traffic of goods between Peshawar and Afghanistan! (10)

Similarly he had made friends with Charles Allen, the Deputy Commissioner and Mr. Gibbons, the Inspector General in Police. Exaggeration does not mar; in fact, it enhances the charm of Sidhwa’s narration supporting her humour; and neither does the exaggeration of humility mar the sweetness of her community:

Ah, my sweet little innocents, he went on, ‘I have never permitted pride and arrogances to stand in my way. Where would I be had I made a delicate flower of my pride and sat my delicate bum on it? I followed the dictates of my needs, my wants— they make one flexible, elastic, humble. “The meek shall inherit the earth,” says Christ’ (11).

The maintenance of their identity of goodwill, in spite of being a microscopic minority, is actually maintaining nothing but public relations; at times to the extent of sycophancy, a sweet need to exist, neither acclaimed nor disparaged by the author. Her comic and ironical mode itself hints at a way of acceptance of the fact and suggests that it can be just a type of ‘philosophical’ attitude to life and existence to
avoid conflicts and disturbances. The Parsees of India have always seen themselves as attainders of hybridity. Homi Bhaba’s discourse on hybridity in *The Location of Culture* rationalizes it in today’s shrinking world in which cultures and languages come closer and interact. The inclination of the Parsees towards hybridity is so much that they declare themselves as Parsees and not Indians to gain acceptance and favour from the Britishers. Faredoon asks his audience of children, “And where, if I may ask, does the sun rise?” He explains himself:

No, not in the East. For us it rises – and sets – in the Englishman’s arse. They are our sovereigns! Where do you think we’d be if we did not curry favour? Next to the nawabs, rajas and princelings, we are the greatest toadies of the British Empire! These are not ugly words, mind you. They are the sweet dictates of our delicious need to exist, to live and prosper in peace. Otherwise, where would we Parsis be? Cleaning the gutters with the untouchables – a dispersed pinch of snuff sneezed from the heterogeneous nostrils of India! (12)

These “heterogeneous nostrils of India” stand for the multicultural nature of her being. The Parsees are ready to relinquish their age-old promised loyalty to the local dominant culture for the sake of their newly acquired loyalty to the Britishers. Freddy took extra care of his dear friend Mr. Allen. His obsequious behaviour to him and his insistence on Putli to attend the Englishmen’s parties were to please the British. His standing instruction to Putli is to walk a step ahead of her husband and not traditionally walking three paces behind him. Also she is supposed to speak English and not the Gujarati vernacular in the presence of the English; they send their children to the English medium school – all this is the impact of Anglicization and modernization. Yasmin, her youngest daughter protests her mother’s reluctance to accept the new ways and says, “Anyway, it’s stupid to walk behind your husband like an animal on a leash – Oh Mother! Hasn’t Papa been able to modernise you yet?” (191). Even the traditional Putli cannot rid herself from the fascination of white colour of the skin when the pregnant Tanya is advised to look at the pictures of the white English babies. The baby girl born to Tanya is of brown tan. Billy cannot digest the logicality of such craziness. The actual disillusionment happens when the Junglewallas visit England. The England of their imaginings was no where seen and the English people were no different from the common human beings in their own country. “The expression on the faces of Londoners was no different from that stamped on the faces of cross-sections of India. They realised in a flash that the
superiority the British displayed in India was assumed, acquired from the exotic setting, like their tan” (253).

Despite this realization, Freddy when on his death-bed is perturbed by the talk of the rebellion in India to gain self-rule and independence from the British; and most of all by the role of a few Parsees like Dadabhai Naoroji in this ‘mess’. The Parsee’s ambivalent attitude towards the Nationalist Movement is dealt with the same typically raucous humour by Sidhwa. Freddy calls the ‘Patriotic’ Parsees like Naoroji and Rustam Sidhwa as misguided ones and abuses them as fools and lunatics. Imagining the plight of the Parsees Freddy expresses his concern and anxiety for his community’s fate in future of free India. His diatribe against the Parsees who joined the freedom struggle:

Where will it get him? No where! If there are any rewards in all this, who will reap them? Not Sidhwa! Not Dadabhai! Making monkeys of themselves and of us! Biting the hand that feeds! I tell you we were betrayed by our own kind, by our own blood! The fools will break up the country. The Hindus will have one part, Muslims the other. Sikhs, Bengalis, Tamils and God knows who else will have their share; and they won’t want you! (282-83)

Torn between the two loyalties, the question which is in the heart of the entire community is asked by Yasmin’s husband Bobby Katrak “But where will we go? What will happen to us?” The easy answer to this anxious question is one and only:

Nowhere, my children … We will stay where we are… let Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or whoever rule. What does it matter? The sun will continue to rise and the sun will continue to set – in their arses…! (283)

The dubious loyalty of the Parsees has been attacked, exposed and satirised and of course, which is why she faced the initial rejection of her work by the Parsees of India. Their leaning towards hybridity and changing loyalties are very important to understand the paradoxical facets of their identity.

Novy Kapadia rightly pinpoints at the identity-politics of this minority community. Since the Parsees settled in India, they realized they could only survive as a minority by being strictly loyal to every ruling authority and avoiding tensions and conflicts
between various groups and powers in the state. At no point of time in the subcontinent was the community itself a power-factor that would have been able to enforce its own interests or churn out favours or dominate against the will of the rulers. Hence Parsees learned to realize that only loyalty to the ruler generates that political climate in which they could remain undisturbed and unscathed as a refugee minority creating their own comfort zone. The only condition for their loyalty was that they were not hindered in the practice of their religion. Hence the exaggerated servility of Freddy and his family and other Parsees towards the British is revealed by Sidhwa as an act to ensure legal security, peace and economic prosperity. “With her ironic perspective the flattery of the Parsees is humorously revealed in the novel but it also expresses an underlying identity-crisis and quest for security amongst the community as a whole” (Kapadia, 1996: 127).

Freddy’s apprehensions of the positions of the Parsees in the postcolonial India and Pakistan have the sound reasons as the formations of the twin nations had taken place on the basis of the religious divide between two major religious communities of the Indian subcontinent, the Hindus and the Muslims. Parsees, like the other minority communities, worry about the nature of their existence in the decolonized subcontinent; and the Parsee case is different from others in respect of – one, their dual loyalties and two, their being in diaspora. Freddie and other Parsees like him appeared more worrisome at the point of this critical juncture of the imminent Partition as they could not pre-conceive anything certain as to how the political events would take shape or in which direction the things would move. As two nations, Hindus and Muslims were not to live in a single state. Sidhwa deals with this issue of the division of the subcontinent on the religious grounds in her next novel Man, also called Cracking India. Both the communities on the either side of the border were at loss and the Parsees too were losing their ground, the sound base of their privileged position they had created so far. Though they were not targeted by violence, they experienced the sweeping socio-political unsettlement which Freddy had foreseen. Since these two nations were arbitrarily territorialized, the forced transfer of populations, of Hindus from Pakistan and Muslims from India, was considered a “legitimate political necessity” for the creation of two nation-states in the subcontinent. This division on the religious ground imparted the assumed religious identities to the newly formed postcolonial nation-states; Pakistan, a Muslim nation
and India, a Hindu one. However India chose not to have a religion-based or a constitutionally majoritarian ethnic state of the Hindus or a ‘Hindu Rashtra’. The leadership of India to whom power was transferred rejected religion as the basis of state-formation and nation-building. Instead, it chose to have a liberal, secular state governed by a democratic constitution. It was not the case with Pakistan which has been still identified as the Islamic nation, not built on the democratic principles like India. The Constituent Assembly of India, representing different identities and interests prevailing in the society, framed the Constitution in which India has been conceived as a sovereign nation-state. The Constitution established such rights as maintenance of cultural identities and pursuit of religious freedoms by cultural and religious minorities as fundamental rights and civil liberties of all individual citizens. The positions of the Parsees as minorities in both these newly created postcolonial nations are quite different. The threat of assimilation and marginalization for them is much more acute in the Pakistan of Islamic fundamentalism than it is in the democratically constituted Indian nation-state. In Brat, Sidhwa has depicted this anxiety of a Pakistani Parsee in the postcolonial Pakistan. In the postcolonial India, the egalitarian Constitution has listed the Parsees among the other religious minorities like Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, though the listing was disputed even at that time as the Jain community was not given the minority status. The discourse on minorities in every democratic nation-state operates with a list of designated minority communities which is periodically revised and updated in accordance with the changing perceptions of ethnic boundaries. In India too, the identified and officially recognised communities were asked to participate in the discussions and their representatives have been the part of the sub-committees of the Constituent Assembly.

The noble and enterprising dream of India to build a politically liberal and culturally plural modern nation-state on egalitarian ideals has not yet fructified except the transitory hope of this dream coming true had been noticed in the post-independent Nehruvian era. The concept of nation-building has been challenged and is required to be redefined in more specific and exclusivist terms in the latter half of the twentieth century by the movement of ‘Hindutva’ launched in agreement by various cultural and political organizations of Hindu nationalists like RSS,VPP,Shiv Sena, Bajrang Dal etc. Freddy’s apprehensions of India becoming a Hindu homogenized state have partially come true. Mistry has explicitly dealt with such praxiological aberrations
from the Indian Constitution in his novels that focus on the acute sense of alienation and marginalization of the minorities in India. Sidhwa treats this minority issue of the Parsees in Pakistan with her characteristic genial humour and acumen. These Parsee writers have clearly identified the problematiques of the minority discourse and tried to highlight the loopholes and lapses through the close-knit plots of their novels. Throwing light on the situation of the minorities in the Indian context, D. L. Sheth writes:

These Hindu nationalists, by articulating *Hindutva* explicitly as an ideology of ‘cultural nationalism’, seek to divest the established concept of national integration of its secular (culturally inclusive) and egalitarian content. Infused with a strong missionary zeal of unitary nationalism, *Hindutva* seeks to legitimize majority communalism in the name of nationalism, i.e. majority-ethnicism, cannot serve as the basis for the functioning of a modern state in India – a multiethnic society. If it succeeds, which in my view is unlikely, it would culturally marginalize the minorities and politically alienate them in such a manner that the whole issue of minorities is depoliticized, leading to their derecognition as distinct cultural entities entitled to specific rights (Sheth, 1999: 35).

The Indian nation-state is moving towards the direction of becoming the majority-ethnic state and would treat its minorities like other such states in the subcontinent. The Indian nation-state that initiated the process of democratization has faltered on its path proving that the discourse on minority rights have failed to address the issue of marginalization within the nation-state. The Parsee psyche, hence, has been constantly negotiating the threat of assimilation and finding it difficult to draw a limit as they have been doing so from their pre-colonial settling period to the post-colonial present.

The Parsees do not consider their adoption of English or western customs and manners as the shunning of their own group-identity. They do not deny their inability to resist the fascination for this apparently ‘liberal’ western culture. Billy and Tanya entertained themselves at small intimate “mixed” parties where married couples laughed and danced decorously with other married couples. “‘Mixed’ parties were as revolutionary a departure from Freddy’s all male get-togethers at the Hira Mandi, and Putli’s rigid female sessions, … The parties were fashionably cosmopolitan, including the various religious sects of India: Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians, the Europeans and the Anglo-Indians” (245). Apart from their limited status as a minority
community, the reason for their great regard for the British was the social code of their religion that preaches the Zoroaster to develop an attitude of loyalty to the ruler akin to the Iranian, pre-Islamic Sassanian traditions. This concept of loyalty to the ruler, gave Zoroastrianism the rank of a state religion, which meant a close relationship between state and community, based on mutual support. In return, all that the Parsees in India wanted from the ruling British authorities was religious autonomy and protection. They have got both. They consider the British as good government because they fit in the conception of a ruler in the Zoroastrian philosophy as just and religiously tolerant. Explaining another sound sociological factor about Parsees’ loyalty to the British, D.F. Karaka, an eminent historian compares the Parsees in India with their co-religionists in Persia, facing the miserable state of persecution until recently, and states that the blessings of social security and economic prosperity the Indian Parsees enjoyed under the British rule should be fully and rightly appreciated (as quoted in Kulke, 1978: 134). Such feelings and experience of being fortunate were prevalent among the Parsee milieu and Sidhwa conveys it very aptly in The Crow Eaters.

Freddy took every opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to the British Empire. His sweet-tongued conversation to his ‘friend’ Charles Allen and referring his children as ‘my prince’ and ‘my princess’ and entertaining the British officials at Hira Mandi etc. are just low-key demonstrations of loyalty compared to the collective loyalty actually displayed by the Parsees by holding public meetings and Jashans (mass prayers in public) on the occasions like royal birthdays, coronation ceremonies, arrival of a new Viceroy or death in the royal family. So, Freddy’s vitriolic tirade against his few brethrens who joined the National Congress to fight for India’s struggle for freedom from the British colonial rule is understandable and cannot be disregarded as sheer exaggeration or crazy eccentricity. Freddy echoes the most of his community who are panicky or uncertain about their future in free India, in case the Britishers leave. Freddy’s outburst provides us the deeply perceptive insight into the complex working of the Parsee psyche. Paranoid about their existence as an infinitesimal minority, the behavioural patterns of the Parsees very often lead us to label them as eccentric or schizophrenic. Like Freddy, most of the Parsees were not sure of their status in the post-independence time. Naturally, unknown at that time about the future of the democratic and secular independent India where the minorities would get secure and
equal status in the Constitution about their rights, their paranoia seems justified. Of course, the status would undergo a change undoubtedly as they might not enjoy the same privileged status that they had enjoyed during the colonial rule. For purposes of trade and business the British had granted the Parsees a special status of brokers and reliable trading partners. Despite their diligence, honesty and a conscious group-desire to identify too closely with the English people, their endeavours for the privileged status were not fully successful. The English also had limits to their willingness to grant them a special status. The English refused to consider Parsees as their own kind even if they were equally educated and extensively anglicised. Similarly, the Parsees, inspired by the behaviour and statements of community leaders like Sir Jamshetjee Jeejeebhoy (as quoted in Kulke, 1978: 139) and the prevailing social milieu, developed an aversion to identifying themselves with other Indian communities. However, this led to a mental estrangement from India for many Parsees without finding an identity of their own that is free of both the English and the other Indians (Kapadia, 1996: 131). Such details of the social history reveal the reasons for the insecurity and alienation of this “schizophrenic community” (Kapadia, 1996: 131). Bapsi Sidhwa reflects this quest for identity in several situations and aspects of not only *Eaters* but also of her other two novels *Man* and *Brat*.

It was the most critical phase of the Parsee identity when the British were about to leave the country. It is represented at length in *Man* when the Parsees of Lahore meet at Dr. Mody’s and in *Eaters* when Faredoon is on his death-bed. As per the promise of the first settlers in the subcontinent, they were supposed to mingle with the natives and be loyal to the majority of the land. May be because of the heterogeneity of the country they could not identify with the variety of the people of this land, but they even lacked the patriotism for the land that provided them with food and refuge. The rulers of this land kept on changing. The Parsees’ concept of loyalty to the rulers and especially, to the foreign rulers was more integrated than their supposed loyalty to the land and people that gave them shelter and support. Obviously, their inclination and attraction to the foreigners, as they themselves were actually foreign to this country, is but natural; but it creates an acute identity-crisis when there is a nationwide call for patriotism. This crisis becomes much more complicated when the British limit to recognize them as their own type because after all, they are “Colonized Indians”! Their own rejection to be recognized as ‘Indians’ and the British recognizing them as
Indians creates a vacuum of the solidity and concreteness, of any identity and hence alienation and estrangement. “A striking manifestation of this identity-crisis is the dying Faredoon Junglewalla’s vehement protests against the nationalist movement and exhortations to his offspring to remain loyal to the British Empire….However shocking Faredoon Junglewalla’s views may be, they were representative of a majority of Parsees, especially the business class, bankers and civil servants. The apprehensions of Faredoon Junglewalla are not the figment of a dying man’s fevered imagination but based on social reality….However, displaying remarkable adaptability, the Parsees on realizing the inevitability of Independence altered their allegiances. With a dying man’s perceptiveness Faredoon Junglewalla hints at the necessity of changing allegiances (Kapadia, 1996: 131-32).

Another aspect of identity-crisis among the Parsees, despite following the value-system of Zoroastrianism is charity. Stemming from the firm ethical dictum of the religion is the concept of good and to be on the side of the good. Hence, the moral values of good thoughts, good words and good deeds (humata, hukhta and havashta). Charity is the manifestation of these ethical values. Here, in the novel, the philanthropic image of the Parsees is tainted by the hint at the ambivalent intentions behind the Charity. Freddy’s charitable deeds accounted by Sidhwa’s ironic mode mostly have the selfish motives of promotion in trade and business or a way of showing gratitude to the British for the favours received from them. Freddy’s generosity is often mixed with self-interest. It might be viewed as a defence mechanism against their alienation from the other cultures and communities in the Indian subcontinent’s multicultural society, and thereby building the virtuous philanthropic image. The intentions, apparently self-less, may be to counter the impression of being a toddy to the British. Generosity for Freddy is not totally for the purpose of charity. Sidhwa creates a genial comedy out of it with the mild corrective mode of irony “to create humour and to present the ambivalent attitude towards charity of Freddy. Irony, here, is a mode of acceptance, a type of philosophy, highlighting the Parsi paradox” (Kapadia, 1996: 134). Sidhwa does not pass any value judgements but just presents the human foibles and follies with tolerance without being moralistic or didactic. Yet the Parsee sensibility was piqued at the time of release of this book as the Parsee face, was tinged with dark hue, especially in the multicultural context of the Indian sub-continent. Their alienation, as it were, becomes
more acute and painful due to the ‘betrayal’ of one of their own ‘privileged native informant’ in Spivak’s words. Apart from Sidhwa’s own perception of her community and people, herself being part of it, she also narrates the ‘other’ community’s and people’s perception of her community too and vice versa. From the writer’s vantage stance of objectivity she views and presents these perceptions not only as a realist but as a humanist. Her tolerant humour is the saving grace which saves the novel from falling into a serious criticism of her community. Sidhwa’s works reflect the cultural multiplicity in which she lived; first that of the Indian subcontinent and later Canada and USA. For many writers, their, ‘multi-cultural situation’ has become the ‘mode of perception’ which Meenakshi Mukherjee (1977) anticipated, and is an asset rather than a loss.

The following excerpt from the novel tells us how Sidhwa views other communities viewing the Parsees, based on their set impressions and also gathering some fresh ones, especially about the newly settled Freddy and his family. Freddy’s handsome appearance and soft-spoken manners quickly found their way into Punjabi hearts:

All this, combined with the fact that he was a Parsi -- made him a man of consequences in the locality. His sales picked up almost at once and he began to live in reasonable comfort. He was even able to save a bit.

Faredoon made a point of giving small alms every Friday and his wife and mother-in-law never appeared in public without ‘mathabanas’ – white kerchiefs wound around the hair to fit like skull caps. The holy thread circling their waist was austereely displayed and sacred undergarments, worn beneath short blouses, modestly aproned their sari-wrapped hips. Stern-visaged, straight-backed, the two women faced the world with such moral temerity that Hindu, Muslim or Christian, all had profound respect for the man and his family (23).

The family mingled so well with their multicultural social milieu that Putli and Jerbanoo invited a drove of middle-aged ladies to their long sessions of morning gossip and emotional unburdening and gained the sympathy and support of these Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsee ladies. As discussed earlier Sidhwa shows that the Parsees of the previous generation maintained their group-identity by their dress-code and she also shows that the younger generation has become quite westernised in this matter; though in matters of language and life-style the process had already set
with the advent of the colonial rule. As the daughter of an urbane Parsee family, the Bhandaras, Sidhwa simultaneously benefited from a secure cultural identity and from that tolerance of other communities permitted by the absence of dietary and social taboos in Zoroastrianism and though protected, young Parsee girls were not as discriminated as their Hindu and Muslim counterparts. As Parsees had already been notoriously westernised and pro-British, Sidhwa enjoyed many of the benefits of hybridization before leaving home.

The Parsees, despite earning the privileged and elite status in the multicultural Indian society due to the patronage they received from the colonial power, have always tried to keep their relations congenial to other communities. To avoid the ire or jealousy of their special status of being in good books of the British, the Parsees always strived to earn the good-will of the other communities by showing regards and reverence for their cultures and faiths and received the same in return. Nevertheless, the imminent departure of the British made them anxious whether the same cordial relations would be maintained in future or not. Their sentiment of respect for all religions is expressed by Freddy as he has arranged the holy books of the other religions on his prayer table. His book of famous English Proverbs “stood on a shelf right above the prayer table, snug between The Bible and The Bhagwad-Gita. Other books on the shelf were a translation of The Holy Quran and Avesta, the complete works of Shakespeare, Aesop’s Fables, Das Kapital, and books representing the Sikh, Jain and Buddhist faiths” (52). Beneath the shelf on the prayer table burnt the holy lamp before the picture of the Prophet Zarathustra who held his finger aloft to remind his followers of the one and only God. The reverence for all faiths has been an ancient tradition dating back 2,500 years to the Persian Kings Darius and Cyrus the Great, who not only encouraged religious tolerance, but having freed the Jews held captive by the Babylonians, rebuilt their Temple; the Torah, written at that time, testifies to the influence of Zoroastrianism on Judaism, and the influence of the ancient religion of the Parsees on other Semitic religions can be dated back to this period. Freddy is no exception to be proud and feels superior about his religion. A Hindu scholar says that ‘the gospel of Zarathustra, the Gathas, covered all the ground from the Rig-veda to the Bhagwad-Gita. Thus, Zoroastrianism lies, at the centre of all the great religions of the world, Aryan and Semitic. Freddy’s yearning heart discovers an affinity with all religious thought. His table echoes his sentiments. There are pictures of Virgin Mary,
Goddess Laxmi, Sita, Lord Buddha and the crucified Christ. Photographs of the Indian Saints crowded the table. At least, once a day Freddy used to approach the table for a brief benediction and found himself attracted oftener as his woes increased.

Like Yezad, Freddy too turned more religious-minded as he passed through his middle age but not tended towards bigotry. Neither is he even as tolerant and liberal as Gustad who got the wall converted into a multicultural one like Freddy’s prayer table or visited Mt. Mary for prayers. It is a very important point of paradox about the Parsee identity. Despite displaying such secularist approach to all other religions, the Parsees are strictly endogamous and never encourage the inter-faith marriages. In spite of their Anglicisation, Freddy is dead against his second son Yazdi’s affair with his school sweetheart Rosy Watson, an Anglo Indian. His religious tolerance is an absolute sham here. The so-called secularist ideology of the Parsees is punctured when it comes to inter-community marriage. Yazdi is so shocked by this hypocrisy and paradox of his family and people that he is disillusioned and resorts to an escapist behaviour and philanthropy. The paradoxical response of his father and his community leaves his life in a lurch and both the lives are lost in frustration. Similarly, Jehangir is embarrassed by his father Yezad immersing the other religion’s pictures, the ancestral collection, into the sea despite his ‘respect’ for them. Yazdi’s case is very much like Nariman in Matters; and the girl Lucy too is Christian. Just as Nariman’s father does not give in and makes his son’s life miserable; ditto happens here too in the case of Freddy and Yazdi. Proselytization inside or outside and the inter-faith marriages are strict taboos in Parsees despite their being prone to hybridization in other matters. Herein, the firm line is drawn to restrict the assimilation despite their respect for other religions and cultures. Their anxiety for the purity of their race is one of the numerous factors causing the recession in their population. Nowadays, there is a voice raised from the liberal Parsees to weaken their resistance about their purity in order to survive, though the orthodox group is not yet ready to reconcile.

At the time of Freddy’s lifespan, the scenario was different, and not as grim and worrisome as it is today. Freddy had seven children and all of them except Yazdi got married, and Soli died a pre-mature death. While in Mistry’s novels about the post-colonial time, many Parsee characters are shown single like the brother-sister duo Jal
and Coomy in *Matters* or the couples shown to have not more than two children; for example, Yezad-Roxana in *Matters*, Nusswan-Ruby in *Balance* and Gustad-Dilnawaz in *Journey*. Sidhwa nowhere expresses her concern about the demography of her community, may be because she writes about the time when these issues were not the causes of great concern. But she does take note of the Parsees being the minorities in the bottom line:

When Faredoon Junglewalla, pioneer and adventure, trotted into Lahore in his bullock-cart at the turn of the century, there were only thirty Parsis in the city of over a million Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Twenty years later the number of Parsis in Lahore had swelled to almost three hundred (150).

Some poor Parsee families had shifted from Bombay to settle down in the rich North Indian region. And of the older generation of the settlers of which Freddy was justifiably a member had prospered like anything. Freddy was the undisputed head of this community. He was also the spokesman and leader of the Parsees scattered over the rest of the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province right up to the Khyber Pass. And it was no mean accomplishment for the Parsees to ally with the aloof, disparaging and arrogant British as they rarely became pally with the ‘natives’. As an anti-dote to the envy it would invoke in other ‘native’ communities, and also out of his sweet-tempered cordiality, Freddy interacted with the people of other communities. He had a Hindu Clerk named Harilal. When Freddy’s shop ‘caught’ fire, he and his family were comforted and consoled by their acquaintances of the neighbourhood from the other communities. Freddy, himself, had consulted a fakir, a Muslim fortune-teller and trusted him. So did he do to a Brahmin called Gopalkrishnan, a Hindu fortune-teller too. “Freddy found himself readily believing the man’s story. For Freddy was of India and though his religion preached but one God, he had faith in scores of Hindu deities and in Muslim and Christian saints. His faith taught heaven and hell, but he believed implicitly in reincarnation. How else could one reconcile the misery, injustice, and inequity of life in the scheme of things?” (161-162). When Gopalkrishnan predicted about his dear-most son Soli’s death at the age of twenty-one, it came as a rude shock to him, unbelievable and unbearable. For a moment, he distrusted the Brahmin and doubted his knowledge and the soundness of his prediction. To give his own self a much-needed solace, Freddy resorted to the beliefs of the other faiths:
But it is not easy to shed a lifetime of instinctive faith in irrational beliefs. Had not Christ risen from the dead? Weren’t there miracles? Something would miraculously change the course of the stars and thwart destiny. There could be a mistake in the ‘janampatri’. He tried to recall the particulars of a story in which a Moghul emperor had taken his son’s death upon himself by praying. He would pray. There was black magic…the dark moments of Soli’s stars could be transferred to some other member of the family….And all at once Freddy put a stop to this trend of thought. It harboured the insidious ingredients of faith – his deadliest enemy since that stricken moment when he had believed the Brahmin (167).

Freddy is very much like Gustad who visits Mt. Mary’s Church with his Christian friend Malcolm to pray for the recovery and life of his beloved daughter, Roshan and his bosom friend Dinshawji. The existence of multiculturalism on the humanitarian ground has been prevailing in the subcontinent since the pre-colonial time save a few incidents of intolerance and extremism recorded by History. People of all the communities have been living together with concern, respectful consideration and a feeling of fraternity to each other. Just as, Freddy got the sympathetic response of the non-Parsees at the time of arson; he also got their overwhelming support at the time of the untimely demise of his young son Soli. Freddy reciprocates their concern by showing due respect to them:

The compound between the priest’s quarters and the stone building of the Fire Temple filled up with non-Parsis. Indian-Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and a few British officials waited patiently to see the body when it emerged from its mysterious rites. Freddy came into the compound from time to time, bowing his ravaged face. From a small distance they offered their sympathy. They sensed they were not to touch him (177-178).

Soli’s funeral was a congregation of the multicultural population, as Freddy had gained good reputation in the multi-cultural society of Lahore. When the bier was carried out of the gate and Freddy saw that the street was filled with people to the end and all of them were familiar faces; particularly dear at this moment:

On an impulse Freddy stopped the bier and with shaking hands removed the sheet from Soli’s face. He kissed his son’s cold, pallid cheek. Scandalised, the men of his community crowded round the bier. Once the sacred rites are performed over the body people of other faiths are not permitted to look upon
it. Someone said, ‘Faredoon, this is sacrilegious! Pull yourself together!’ And Freddy, fighting desperately to keep his voice steady, said, ‘They stood all this while to see my son: let them. What does it matter if they are no Parsis? They are my brothers; and if I can look upon my son’s face, so can they!’ The bier moved slowly through the hushed, bowed heads lining the street. (179).

Such tendency of bending down their rules and beliefs to the sentiments of the ‘other’ people had led them to a certain level of hybridity and assimilation. Bending before the rulers as well as before majority and minority communities of their host country has made their existence peaceful and trouble-free for more than a millennium. They have, indeed, kept their word to blend like sugar in the milk and sweeten it save the mixing of genes with the ‘other’ races.

Also the Parsee mind works on another psychological principle that fear and anxiety make one stretch to the need of the time. Sometimes acute fear of death makes one change one’s faith in the eyes of the ‘other’, for the time-being to suit the requirement of the situations like riots or communal attacks and to save one’s life. Similar is the situation that Sir Noshirwan Jeevanjee Easymoney narrates to his audience including Freddy who has come to Bombay for his youngest son Billy’s wedding with Tanya, the daughter of Sir Easymoney, an ex-army man. He tells the story about the loss of his eye when he was with the army in Sudan. He and his thirsty army had landed in an Oasis, suspiciously deserted. Instead of taking any precautions the army rushed to drink water and Sir Easymoney had the apprehensions of the Arab natives concealed behind the mud walls and mounds. There were only a handful of Musulmans amongst them. The rest were the non-believers, the ‘kafirs’ for them and were scared to be done for. Pausing for a while and killing his audience with suspense he described what he did. He spread his blanket on the sand and knelt down in the Mohammedan attitude of prayer, the ‘namaz’. Though he did not know it full, he maintained the perfect posture raising his arms to heaven and touching his nose to the blanket. Following him, his soldiers, too, did the same. But there was an attack after the prayer; they were plundered of their belongings and some of them wounded. Sir Easymoney’s eye was gouged out in honour of his rank, but their lives were spared. Freddy appreciated his courage and congratulated him on his cunning. Later, they had a discourse on the bigoted attitude adopted by some natives. Considering Freddy of his own kind, Sir Easymoney said, “… Now take you and me: One leg in India and one leg in England. We are citizens of the world!” (222).
Sidhwa, in her genial and pleasantly ironical style says that the cultures of the East and West met in these two worthies. Despite the cultural flexibility of the Parsees and their leaning towards the westernisation, Sidhwa, time and again, reminds us that, after all, the settler foreigner Parsees are like any other natives, the Indians with their distinct identity as Parsees. This distinctive complexity and their hybridization itself is the essence of their identity. Portraying the highly anglicised Sir Easymoney she says, “Despite his British affectations he looked graciously and splendidly Indian” (212). Also when Sir Easymoney narrates the war-story, he gestures to establish an informal camaraderie and to demonstrate that though he might be a ‘Sir’, and accustomed to the ways of British aristocracy, he was first and foremost a loyal and down-to-earth Parsee! (221). Again while describing Behram Junglewalla, ‘Billy’ for short, Sidhwa tells us about a Parsee characteristic: “His frugality he might have inherited from an undiluted line of Parsee forebears” (192).

With fabulous candour and transparency Sidhwa writes about her community and people in this Parsee novel. As a member of the Parsee minority in Pakistan she knows her people’s secrets, real strengths and foibles. The title of the novel itself suggests the characteristic feature about the Parsees. It refers to the Parsees’ notoriously endearing “ability to talk ceaselessly at the top of their voices like an assembly of crows” (56). The typically joyous and mirthful bearing with which these people carry themselves has earned them this ditty “Crow-Eaters”, i.e. “Kagra-Khaow” in Gujarati. But it is not a crow-eating (talkative) community. In fact, as Nariman says to Portia in Perin Bharucha’s The Fire Worshippers, “It isn’t the Parsees who eat crows but the other way round. And anyway, they are not crows but vultures to whom the dead are fed” (Bharucha P., 1986: 37). Commenting on the Parseeness or Parsee ethnicity that pervades the entire novel Alamgir Hashmi states:

Her novel, beyond particular situation and character, aims at a sweep that encompasses a people and may well be better considered in that light (Hashmi, 1996: 139).
ICE – CANDY -- MAN

*Ice-Candy-Man* published in America with the title *Cracking India* is Sidhwa’s third novel, a harrowing tale of the holocaust of Partition of the Indian subcontinent resulting into the painful birth of Pakistan. Published in 1988, the action of the novel takes place in the pre-Partition period of the 1940s and also the year of the long-cherished independence, 1947 when “the lofty ideal of nationalism was suddenly bartered for communal thinking, resulting in unprecedented devastation, political absurdities and deranged social sensibilities” (Gaur, 2004a: 45). The barbaric details of the nightmarish cruelty, human loss and dislocation are presented with the subtle irony, witty banter and parody, typical of Sidhwa’s fine sense of humour which makes the novel different from the other novels in the genre of the Partition novels. The novel not only narrates the dehumanizing atrocities perpetuated by one community over the other but also delineates the inscrutability and unpredictability of the human behaviour expressing the degeneration of moral values and complexities of human psyche. “*Ice-Candy-Man* narrates a society which has deflated chivalrous attitudes, encourages petty self-serving tendencies and indifferent tolerance of pogroms so long the self stays alive with a whole skin; a society which was given what it deserved – a sanguine and blood curdling mind set, which made Partition of India a grim reality” (Gaur, 2004a: 45).

It was a man-made political and social tragedy, the worst disaster of the 20th century people who, living like a family, were suddenly divided into communities; uprooted and shattered. The massacre of around five million people, the savage torture of around a million of women and the forced migration and displacement of around a billion of people on either side of the newly formed border that cracked the Indian subcontinent was the heaviest price paid for the long-coveted and long-strived independence through a “non-violent struggle”. Ironically, such a precious moment of independence turned out to be bloody violent. It was a huge transfer of population with heaps of corpses and heartfuls of hatred unprecedented in the history of the subcontinent. Partition had a lasting impact not only on the Indian polity and the multicultural fabric of the subcontinent but also on the collective consciousness of
both the new nation-states. It affected the psyche of the Indian as well as the Pakistani people and their lives so much, that the scars of these wounds are not yet completely healed. It is still an aching memory, politically, historically and socially. Sidhwa deftly handles this sensitive issue in Man but with a difference. She deals with this theme of Partition from a Parsee perspective and from neither of the involved communities which perpetrated the mayhem on each other. Most of the Partition novels are written either from the Sikh/ Hindu or the Muslim point of view. Sidhwa is the second woman novelist after Atia Hossain to write on the theme of Partition in the arena of Indian English fiction and the first in the Pakistani English fiction. She is the first and the only Parsee woman author to tackle with this theme from the viewpoint of a handicapped Parsee girl-child named Lenny rendering neutrality and objectivity to the narrative. In Attia Hossain’s Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961) also there is a female narrator Laila but Sidhwa’s female narrator is a Parsee, a miniscule minority in the Indian sub-continent, further triply marginalised being a girl and that too a handicapped child. Sidhwa chooses to place her from the utmost margin to the centre position of the protagonist to impart a balanced perspective to the narrative, that of a chronicler, a distanced watcher. Sidhwa has proved that her minority experience as a member of a small Parsee community in Pakistan offers her a vantage point to celebrate her talent. Protected by her privileged status and free of any trouble-spot on her creative psyche unlike most of the writers of marginal status she feels that it has given her a unique sense of ‘detached attachment’ for her country and her people. It is believed that there is an autobiographical touch in choosing Lenny as a narrator as Sidhwa herself, a polio-ridden child of a Parsee family, witnessed the horrors of Partition. Like Lenny, she too, born in Indian sub-continent before Partition, suddenly became a Pakistani as millions of people did. There are three ‘P’s which are prominent in her identity, i.e. Parsee, Punjabi and Pakistani. Lenny looks at characters belonging to different communities through the prism of her own Parsee feminine sensitivity. Lenny’s childish naiveté, devoid of any bias or prejudice, and belonging to the community unaffected in the riots, lends an authentic credibility to the narration. At first consideration, this young girl’s first person narration might seem to be a strange voice, for she admits in the very opening of the novel, “My world is compressed” (1). “Taking full advantage of this limited view, however, Bapsi Sidhwa relates through the eyes of her child narrator the Partition story from a domestic standpoint and more significantly, from a feminine view. Lenny’s naiveté, her privileged
position and her religious background lend her version of Partition a quality that other novels about this tempestuous period in Indo-Pakistani history lack” (Ross, 1996: 183).

Lenny narrates the incidents and characters of the novel to the readers, commenting and ruminating on various issues with her childish innocence and candour, also deftly camouflaging the adult and mature writer’s omnipresence. The suggestive ambivalence generated by the several simultaneous marginalised identities represented by the figure of a child-narrator is enhanced by many perceptible commonalities Lenny shares with Sidhwa. The use of a precocious Parsee polo-stricken girl-child as a narrator of a story to comprehend and capture the traumatic upheavals of a turbulent history is unique in itself. Commending Sidhwa on her selection of the narrative point of view in Man Kapadia writes:

The device of the child narrator enables Sidhwa treat the holocausts of Partition without morbidity, pedanticism or censure. It also helps maintain a masterful balance between laughter and despair (Dhawan and Kapadia, 1996a: 20).

When the narration commences, Lenny, the narrative persona, is in her fifth year and it ends after her eighth birthday. Sidhwa was of the same age when the nation was divided into two and had the first-hand experience of the trauma of Partition carnage and communal riots. The events of Partition had left an indelible mark on the psyche of the child Bapsi and kept compelling her to unburden herself from the heartrending experiences of those days. Lenny, in fact, is the personae, voicing the inner urge of the author. Because of the autobiographical parallelisms the narrator and the author, at times merge; their identities intersect at various points of the narrative and that may not be just a coincidence. Pashupati Jha and Nagendra Kumar discuss the narrative technique and say:

As the narrative progresses, everything is filtered through the consciousness of Lenny…. The narrative design that Bapsi Sidhwa follows in the novel apparently looks very simple and straightforward, but on a closer look one realizes that its simplicity is merely deceptive. Although the main narrator is Lenny, the voice that emerges from the novel is far from being a monologue. There are moments when it is hard for the readers to believe that a little girl
like Lenny can utter the words that have been put into her mouth (Jha and Kumar, 2004: 216).

There are the passages where the readers could take note of the presence of the author and also certain childhood situations to which Lenny gives the adult reactions. Sidhwa does it with a serious purpose without sounding political and controversial. That purpose is to present the other side of the truth regarding the Partition riots. She just presents this truth from the popular Pakistani point of view, different from the historians’ or the popular Indian point of view rather from a neutral Parsee stance. In fact, the point of view Sidhwa adopts is one of the novel’s most successful ploys. Jha and Kumar very significantly comment:

We believe we are witnessing the event of Partition through the eyes of an innocent child but strategically placed flash-forward signal in a subtle manner that the adult Lenny is actually reliving the past in order to make sense of the events that baffled her when she was too small to comprehend; simultaneously, she restricts herself to the experiences and sensory perceptions of the child she was. Thus we are given a double - even dialogic - perspective that layers innocence on experience, introspection on hindsight (Jha and Kumar, 2004: 218).

*Man* is often termed as a ‘bildungsroman’. The term means a novel which follows the development of the protagonist from childhood or adolescence into adulthood through a troubled quest for identity. Sidhwa herself explains why she chose Lenny as the narrator of the novel: “I am establishing a sort of truthful witness, whom the reader can believe. At the same time, Lenny is growing up – learning, experiencing and coming to her own conclusions” (Montenegro, 1991: 32). Lenny’s quest is autobiographical as Sidhwa’s life in Pakistan was very much like that of Lenny in *Man*. Like Lenny she also had polio and spent a lot of time with servants. She also had a number of operations and was not sent to school. She read voraciously to engage herself. When she was growing up in Lahore it was a city of five million with only 200 Parsees. The Parsees easily adopted the mores of the dominant society which made Sidhwa – like Lenny – to grow with the backdrop of a multicultural and multi-religious society, earlier comfortably in the pre-Partition period and later uncomfortably during the post-Partition time. It is the persona of a child that enables Sidhwa to narrate her impressions freely and also to exercise a close watch over the narration itself. The lame girl Lenny, entering her puberty gradually loses her
innocence and awakens to the terrors that come along with independence. She uneasily notices the change in the pre and post-Partitioned society brought with the advent of independence. She does not simply ‘inform’ the reader of the happenings but she learns painfully through her experiences. She questions those happenings, people, their motives and intentions and emotions in order to grasp their fullest interpretations. The naiveté of the child permits her to look at the things from unconventional angles and gives her the strength to raise doubts and interrogate. The questions which cannot be comfortably answered by any grown up have the answers, implied by the author and to be grasped by the readers. When Lenny learns that India is going to be broken, she has many unanswered queries, “Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother’s then?” (92). Lenny’s cousin cannot answer but Ayah ventures that perhaps a canal will be dug to crack India (93).

It is noticeable, nevertheless, that the language and the vocabulary in which Lenny thinks and reports to us is that of an adult. Troubled by the surrounding communal frenzy she sometimes lapses into rhetoric postures also asking in a grown-up voice, “What is God?” (94). Such postures convince us that the narrator’s voice is controlled and guided by the author and such questions are raised deliberately by the writer through Lenny because they are the thematic key questions posed by Sidhwa herself before the society. The indirect interrogation is asked on the event of Partition itself. Why is there any need for Partition? And if it is there, why are there so much of the communal strife and unrest? Lenny undergoes a self-educating process as Sidhwa does and learns to accept the reality with a hurt that her queries are not answered satisfactorily. Sidhwa, successfully using the device of a girl-child narrator and remaining on the protected periphery as a Parsee, presents a critique of several issues from multiple angles and comments on them in a reporter’s tone of detachment. Lenny’s narrative voice is not unidirectional; the very ambivalence of her narration enriches the readers’ comprehension of the presence of multi-layered meanings in the text. Lenny’s experiences compel her to define her own position in the multicultural society, forcing her to recognize and adapt to her own marginality. She becomes aware of her religious and gender related identities -- her consciousness of these multiple layers of existence becomes her initiation into maturity -- a bildungsroman.
Lenny gradually awakens to her sexual identity through a variety of experiences, personal and social. Through Lenny’s narrative Sidhwa has raised some gender-related issues too. Her impressionable young mind receives several images of man-woman relationships which lead her to question the status of women and also express her individuality at the same time. She notices how in Col. Bharucha’s clinic a poor Muslim woman in burqua has to discuss her child’s illness through her husband, as any direct conversation between genders was looked down upon by the society (12). The Parsee household in which Lenny is being groomed under the care of a host of servants is quite liberal and open-minded in their attitude towards the females. She is also free from the effect of social conditioning most of the Indian girls had to undergo at that time. She is a very inquisitive and vivacious child, eager to know what happens around her and participates in it with live interest and spirit. Even prior to the socio-religious divide creates in her an awareness of her identity. She becomes conscious of her own gender, the socially constructed and accepted role of women and girls and also of her burgeoning sexuality. She realises that “her world” is indeed “compressed” and full of constraints not only being a girl but a polio-inflicted girl. This awareness is intensified when Col. Bharucha prophesies her future, “She’s doing fine without school, isn’t she? ….Don’t pressure her … her nerves could be affected. She doesn’t need to become a professor….. She’ll marry - have children - lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams” (15). Lenny remarks that the advice made by the doctor sealed her fate. This last remark is, of course, the addition of the grown-up Lenny who reminiscences and as we know, it is none but Sidhwa herself making such oblique remarks in between and making us aware of her omnipresence. Such remarks reveal the restrictions and limitations associated with a girl’s life. Development of feminine virtues with female nature and carrying out the responsibilities associated with the domestic affairs are considered as the only aim for women. Not exclusively in the case of lame Lenny but also otherwise, the patriarchal society considers women as physically weak to venture into the world outside the four walls of their houses and too deficient to make important decisions. Hence women are relegated to the domestic sphere where they have to accept the hegemony of their male counterparts. Since ages it is considered that it is women’s duty to tend house, raise children and give comfort to her family.
Lenny as a girl learns that marriage of girls is of utmost importance to their parents. Independence and self-identity are meant for men. The intense concern for her marriage even in her childhood puts Lenny in dismay. She states, “Drinking tea, I am told, makes one darker. I am dark enough. Everyone says, “It’s a pity Adi’s fair and Lenny so dark. He’s a boy. Anyone will marry him” (81). Fairness, for a girl, is the most important part of her eligibility for marriage. Sidhwa, here, underlines the popular mania for the white complexion without which a girl is not considered good-looking or attractive. The authoress very often highlights that Ayah is very sensuously beautiful with her chocolate brown skin and wants to suggest that beauty is not the prerogative of white skin only. As a child, Lenny had no inclination to have female possessions though from time to time she was advised to have one by the women of her family. She recalls: “I can’t remember a time when I ever played with dolls though relatives and acquaintances have persisted in giving them to me” (138). This reflects the sexual identity thrust upon her by the society time and again. What is noteworthy is that it is the women in the family, in the roles of mother, aunt, sister, friend or any elderly person that thrust such social constricts in the mind of a growing girl who in time turns out to be a like-minded person, a stereotype. It means that women have willingly accepted or have to accept the social constraints created by male hegemony. But Lenny is quite independent-minded and is not going to be moulded in the socially set and expected roles easily. During her visits to Pir Pindo she meets young girls of roughly her age who have already unquestioningly accepted their socially designated gender roles. Ranna’s adolescent sisters Khatija and Parveen wear the responsible expression of much older women and affect the mannerisms of their mother and aunts (54). They are perplexed by Lenny’s cropped hair and short dresses. Such early impressions on Lenny, presented with irony and witty humour, make her perceive many gender differences. However, Lenny is neither influenced nor conditioned by her perceptions of gender based social stereotypes. Lenny assertively maintains her individual spirit and it is evident in her attitude towards her Ayah Shanta, Hamida and her cousin. Also her neutral reporting sensitizes the reader to the extent to which these stereotypes have seeped into the collective social thinking.

Lenny recognizes the biological exploitation of women as she grows. The time she spent with her teenaged voluptuous Ayah Shanta who loves and cares for Lenny has a
lasting impact on the tender psyche of the child Lenny. As a child she cherishes her parents’ love but the whole episode of Ice-Candy-man and Ayah harms her conception of love. Ayah’s raw sexuality attracting a number of admirers, her manipulation of it for small gains and ultimately its destruction by force awakens profound responses in Lenny and she lays bare the gender-based structure of contemporary India. She had never seen this kind of jealous and sadistic side of love. She was shocked to find out that her dear Ayah had been pushed into prostitution by her own one time admirer and now husband, the Ice-Candy-man. When Godmother arranges a meeting with Ayah, Lenny insists on accompanying her. She feels that Ayah has been wronged and ashamed by the people, who were once her ‘friends’ and she shares her humiliation. She wants “to comfort and kiss her ugly experiences away” (254). Lenny thinks that sexual exploitation should not remain a stigma for any woman. She says, “I don’t want her to think she’s bad just because she’s been kidnapped” (254) or in that case any woman who has been molested, ravished or raped can be called bad. Lenny witnesses the barbaric cruelties of the Partition days, including the inhuman commoditization of women. “Yet what emerges as the dominant thematic motif in the novel is not the victimization of women, but their will and sustained effort to fight against it and overcome it” (Gaur, 2004b: 54). Most of the other Partition novels in English as well as in other languages, even by the more contemporary authors have focused largely on the women as sufferers pitched against the oppressive male forces “Sidhwa, on the other hand, treats the theme of Partition with a clever juxtaposition of images and an underlying ironical humour without compromising with the innate independence of women” (Gaur, 2004b: 54).

In fact, the resilience of women characters saves the novel from being a heart-rending, depressing rendition of a journalistic reporting. Throughout the novel, Lenny appears as a courageous and demanding girl. Lenny is being brought up in a patriarchal Parsee household but quite liberal compared to any Muslim household of the time. Such upbringing makes her receptive of her sexual stirrings during her puberty. Her relationship with her cousin, allowing clandestine forages into physical intimacies and at the same time resisting cousin’s shameless advances, shows her mental independence. Lenny is given ample personal space by her mother just as Feroza is imparted by her mother Zareen. The daughters outdo their mothers in exercising independence. Like Zareen, Mrs. Sethi, despite her modern life-style, is very much a
traditional wife, almost servile in her desires to please her husband coquettishly though she handles her children liberally; she decisively controls and channelizes their lives. She allows them to have fun around and look at life from their own viewpoints. Lenny is permitted to accompany Imam Din twice to his village and her visits to parks and restaurants with Ayah are also unchecked. Belonging to a quite well-off social stratum Mrs. Sethi runs her household smoothly with an entourage of servants, entertaining guests and partying. For such women, social elegance is not simply pleasure; it is also bondage, because herein they are forced to accept their role as females. Her driving sprees along with the Electric aunt to smuggle petrol in order to help their stranded Hindu and Sikh friends and the rehabilitation of Hamida, Lenny's new Ayah, shows her humanitarian understanding of the situation and also a desire to do something meaningful despite submitting to the conventional male hegemony in the family and the society. Ignorant of this side of her mother's personality, Lenny keeps Hamida's past a secret under the impression that if revealed, her mother would sack her. She has taken after her mother in having such all-encompassing spirit of compassion. The temperament of the mother-daughter duo has also the implication of the Zoroastrian doctrine of charity, as one of the intrinsic characteristic of a Parsee household.

In no way does Lenny's lameness become a source of self-pity or a constricting force on her psyche. Not allowing her cousin to manipulate her sexually, she remains assertive and at times aggressive. Her Ayah Shanta is the formative influence on Lenny. She is a flame of sensuousness and female vitality around which the male moths hover constantly and hanker for the sexual warmth she radiates. She acts like the queen bee that controls the actions and emotions of her male admirers enjoying their covetous glances. Wielding her feminine strength, she infuses in Lenny the ideas of independence and choice. Ayah uses her charm to obtain easy gains like cheap doilies, cashew nuts, extra serving of food etc. Though Flirtatious and flippant, she is fully aware and confident of herself as an individual, who cannot be taken advantage of. At the same time, she is loyal to the family she serves and very much protective of Lenny. Though this eighteen year old Hindu girl is employed with considerate masters her social condition is that of an unprotected girl whom everybody treats only as a sex object. Like thousands of women, she too suffers during the Partition riots. She is abducted by the cronies of Ice-candy-man, one of her ardent admirers. He gets
this heinous deed done just to settle the old scores under the pretext of troubled times. As Ayah responded the advances of his rival, the Masseur, the Ice-Candy-man got envious of their affair. He got Ayah, the object of his desire, ravished and raped by the hoodlums; kept her as his mistress for a few months and then forced her to become his wife. Her name is changed from ‘Shanta’ to ‘Mumtaz’ and she is kept at the ‘Kotha’ of ‘Hira Mandi’ even after her marriage. Marriage is just ‘used’ by the scoundrel Ice-Candy-man as an instrument to continue with his profession of a pimp unhindered. During the interregnum between her abduction and marriage, she, in the words of Godmother, is “used like a sewer” by drunks, peddlers, sahibs, and cut throats” and even by her so-called old friends with the connivance of the shameless Ice-Candy-man. But as soon as the Ayah gets the opportunity she wants to get away from the man she does not love. Though lost the spirit of life and robbed of the sheen of her liveliness, she is firm and decisive. She wants to go back to her family and face life anew. Learning a very important lesson as part of her education, Lenny comments:

The innocence that my parents’ vigilance, the servants’ care and godmother’s love sheltered in me, that neither cousin’s carnal cravings, not the stories of the violence of the riots, could quite destroy, was laid waste that evening by the emotional storm that raged around me. The confrontation between Ice-Candy Man and Godmother opened my eyes to the wisdom of righteous indignation over compassion. To the demands of gratification and the unscrupulous nature of desire. To the pitiless face of love (252).

Towering high among the women characters is the vibrant figure of Lenny’s Godmother, Rodabai. The childless Godmother’s personality sparkles with a good sense of humour combined with sharp wit and her deer-like agility despite her old age. Her attachment for Lenny, her social commitment and her power to influence and order the individual and even the system, if she desires, earn her respect and admiration. She tries to help the people whenever she can. She donates blood, seeks admission to a boarding school for Ranna, and traces the Ayah in ‘Hira Mandi’ and manages to send her back to her people. She is a domineering and formidable person who scolds the Ice-Candy-man for disgracing the Ayah. She is endowed with the profound understanding of human existence and the fine sensitivity to human psychology. Her sensibility and sagacity are revealed when she consoles the Ayah.
She incarnates in herself the ideal of the female strength. Gifted with a glib tongue, Ice-Candy-man is not an easy person to deal with. Her dealing with the Ice-Candy-man shows her self-confidence, authoritativeness and capacity to handle the critical situations tactfully. Her courageous visit to the disreputable “Kotha” in Hira Mandi with little Lenny and the rescue of the Ayah, once she is convinced that the Ayah is forcefully kept by the Ice-Candy-man, are indeed laudable. “Godmother concentrates in her character what the feminists feel is very important for a woman to realize her individuality: the feeling of “self-worth”” (Chandra, 2004: 119).

Apart from the very prominently emerging feminist perspective in the novel projecting the victimization of the women, what seems to be Sidhwa’s major concern is to show the grit and guts of the Parsee women like Lenny’s mother and Godmother whose humane contributions in the rescue work at such catatonic time of Partition without any biased attitude to either of the involved community is commendable. They help both, the Hindus and the Muslims, thereby trying to mend the fatally damaged multicultural texture of the society on the ground of humanism. But then Godmother’s bullying attitude towards her younger sister Mini, aptly called the Slave-sister by Sidhwa, draws the reader’s attention for its incongruous eccentricity. Unlike her dealing with the people outside her immediate family, her dealings with her husband and sister are devoid of compassion and understanding. She is insensitive and blunt to her sister and bosses over her household in which these members are just peripheral. She scolds, criticizes and humiliates her sister nastily in spite of the sister’s slaving obedience in doing the chores. Maybe, Sidhwa indicates at the double faces of the ‘charitable’ Parsees as she does in Eaters. The exposure of this undesirable trait may have made this novel unpopular among the Parsees. Godmother’s unseemly oppression and exploitation does not cohere with the main plot and can be dispensed with. Subhash Chandra says:

But I think, Sidhwa wants to convey an important message or warning that the exploitation, manipulation and suppression of one individual by another are not confined to the male-female relationship. These can exist between a female-female relationship as well and become as vicious and debilitating for the victim as when a male dominates a woman (Chandra, 2004: 121).
Another example of such female exploitation by a female is that of Muchho, the sweeper and her real daughter Papoo. Muchho takes Papoo as her rival and her irrational hatred for her daughter, even worse than the stepmother, makes her enrage cruelly at her daughter. Blinded to Papoo’s virtues and her strong and high spirit she maltreats and abuses her. She saddles her with all the household chores and beats her at the slightest pretext. Not only Lenny but everybody in the household cannot understand the reason for her unreasonable wrath. Their sympathy is with Papoo and Ayah and other servants constantly try to save the poor girl but in vain. Despite this senseless maltreatment, Papoo cannot be browbeaten into submission. Sidhwa suggests very early in the story, “There are subtler ways of breaking people” (47). Muchho arranges her marriage with a middle-aged dwarf whose face is lascivious, shrewd and cruel. Papoo is drugged with opium at the time of ceremony to suppress her revolt. Muchho cheats and pushes her own premature daughter into an ill-fated marriage. The sadistic smile on her face suggests that women themselves are unconsciously bound by the gender-conditioning and perpetuate victimization of their own daughters, saddling them with a repetitive fate and treating marriage as a panacea of all ills. In fact, marriage proves a fatal bane for such Papoos who might continue to breed and nurture such gender-bias in their progeny. Susie Tharu argues that there is a need for a ‘real’ consciousness. Women have not only internalized a bourgeois consciousness but also refuse to see themselves as victims. They are locked into a ‘culture of silence’ which they themselves contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchy that objectifies and destroys her (Tharu, 1982: 36-37). Lenny, the child protagonist recognizes these social patterns and the pre-fixed gender-roles; but what is noticeable is that as a girl she exhibits the grit and vivacity to transcend them. Along with the gender differences she also grooms into the awareness of the religious differences. Through her feminine eye, she sees the world surrounding her. Her world is her family and the servants. Ayah is her dear-most person and they care for each other. The oppression and victimization of Ayah, as a woman and as a Hindu woman admired by a Muslim, present women as a category twice oppressed; first suffered as human beings and suffocated by violence bred by religious differences and secondly, as women burdened by the bonds and impositions of the patriarchal society. 

As the story progresses, the spectre of Partition disrupts the cosy life of the people and Lenny’s education gets underway. She gains the knowledge about the larger world
which is full of deception, injustice, hypocrisy, religious enmity and cruelty. The patterns of communal amity which have always been present in the Indian social fabric were torn asunder in the holocaust of Partition. First, Lenny watches Ayah’s circle of admirers dissolve. Once a number of Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Sikh men were drawn together by the Hindu Ayah Shanta’s eighteen-year-old sensuous beauty, a binding force to keep them united and friendly despite their multi-religiosity but not even her feminine allure can overcome their religious intolerance. Lenny feels that the verbal skirmishes among the Ayah’s admirers gradually take up communal overtones. As the British prepare to leave, they change their habitual meeting place the Queen’s Park significantly and assemble at the Wrestler’s restaurant instead. Being a Hindu, the Government house gardener insists that Lahore will stay in India as it has too much Hindu money; while the Masseur and the Butcher coarsely insist that owing to a Muslim majority it shall go to Pakistan. The Sikh zoo-attendant Sher Singh also argues the case of the Sikh peasants. Troubled at this change, Lenny remarks, “I close my eyes, I can’t bear to open them; they will open on a suddenly changed world. I try to shut out the voices” (129). The Wrestler’s predictions of a bloody aftermath massacre of people startle not only Lenny but all others too in an uneasy silence. The masseur tries to smooth out the differences by making them realise the underlying unity of all the religions:

It’s all buckwas! The holy Koran lies next to the GranthSahib in the Golden Temple. The shift Guru Nanak wore carried inscriptions from the Koran…. In fact, the Sikh faith came about to create Hindu-Muslim harmony! ... In any case, these are no differences among friends…. We will stand by each other (130-131).

But the Masseur’s sagacious remarks fail to bring about peace and the acrimony continues. He is the good Muslim who stands in sharp contrast to the Muslims like the Ice-Candy-man, engaged in shameless deeds. The common masses are unable to foresee the extent of devastating havoc to be unleashed by the Partition of the Indian sub-continent.

Shanta, the Ayah is a common passion among men belonging to different communities. It is through her that young Lenny gets a feel of the life of the cross-sections of the Pakistani society. She does not discriminate among her multi-religious
admirers. They feed and cater to her idyllic world of romances. They are what they are to her – human beings, full of human strengths and weaknesses. She is fond of them, their company, their disputes, jokes, funny stories and jealous rivalry to command her attention. It is a kind of self-pampering inflating her vanity. She never cares for their religious faith, their distinct loyalties and political talks till she hears the disturbing talk of Partition of the nation. As Partition is imminent, the admirers of Ayah become conscious of their communal identities. Things do not remain the same as this news spreads like a bush-fire in the town. Lenny’s idyllic world of childhood innocence gives way to the tormenting adult world of Partition riots. The individual identities merge with the identities of the community and soon the society is sharply divided on the communal lines. Lenny tries to understand as she observes:

It is sudden, one day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christians. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all encompassing Ayah – She is also a token. A Hindu. carried away by a renewed devotional fervour she expends a small fortune in joss-sticks, flowers and sweets on the gods and goddesses in the temples (93).

Iman Din, the cook and Yousaf, the servant also turn into religious zealots, taking Friday afternoons off for the ‘Jumha’ prayers. Crammed into a narrow religious slot they too are diminished: as are Jinnah and Iqbal, Ice-Candy-man and Masseur.

Hari, the gardener; Moti, the sweeper and his wife Muchho, and their untouchable daughter Papoo, become ever more untouchable as they are entrenched deeper in their low Hindu caste, while the Sharmas and the Daulatrams, the Brahmins like Nehru, are dehumanised by their lofty caste and caste marks. The Rogers of Birdwood Barracks, Queen Victoria and King George are English Christians: they look down their noses upon the Pens who are Anglo-Indians, who look down theirs on the Philbuses who are Indian Christians, who look down upon all non-Christians. Godmother, Slavesister, Electric aunt and Lenny’s nuclear family are reduced to the “irrelevant nomenclatures” because they are Parsees. As communal tensions increase, the Parsees become more conscious not only of their identity, but also of their neutrality. In this time of religious identities, the next question Lenny asks herself is “What is God?” It is the most scathing and the sharpest irony of the novel suggesting that there is no religion of God. All the religious identities are created by the mankind which God has
created only as the human kind, only as the human beings. Lenny still sees “through
the hearts and minds of the people, but their exteriors superimpose a new set of
distracting impressions (94). Her perception of people has changed. She feels that the
names of Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Iqbal, Tara Singh and Mountbatten do not simply
remain names but they become representative symbols of various sects. People are
defined by the narrow religious slots they have been driven into. Lenny notices that
people do not mix up freely anymore in public, they hold subdued hushed up
discussions in groups. The aloofness of the Parsees is indicated by the bantering tone
of Lenny and her light-hearted responses to the increasing communal rift represent her
understanding of the marginalized status of the Parsees. She narrates how her cousin
erupts with a horde of Sikh Jokes and wonders whether there are “Hindu, Muslim,
Parsee and Christian jokes” (95). Sidhwa, being a Parsee, did not suffer much during
Partition. The fight was chiefly between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, people who
were to gain by it and who were to be empowered by it. It was their battle and as a
Parsee, her emotions were not aligned one way or the other. In fact, the sympathy of
the Parsees was with both the communities, especially the victims and the sufferers on
either side. They were not just the passive and detached observers, watching the
turmoil from the angle of the ‘other’ but Sidhwa, from her Parsee perspective, wants
to convey that there were Parsee women like Lenny’s mother and Godmother who
acted like saviours doing heroic deeds of rehabilitation and tried to bring some order
to the chaos already beyond control.

Sidhwa handles the delicate theme of Partition with rare dexterity and reveals the
horror and brutality of the communal frenzy through subtle insinuations, images and
gestures. “The stark horror of loss, bloodshed and separation is portrayed without
verbosity, sensationalism, lurid details and maudlin sentimentality” (Kapadia, 1996b:
40). With a morbid sense of humour, Sidhwa reveals how the violence of Partition has
serrated the roots of the people of different communities, irrespective of ideology,
friendship and rational ideas. Lenny’s intimate relationship with her ayah and her
visits to the Sikh/Muslim villages, i.e. Dera Tek Singh and Pir Pindo respectively,
take her outside the bourgeois circle of the Parsee community and make her aware of
the heterogeneous cultural context of her society at large. The divide between the
majority communities can be clearly discerned in Lenny’s visits to Pir Pindo, a
Muslim village thirty miles east of Lahore. During her first visit, the Sikhs and the
Muslims pledge their lives for each other and convey their pride over their unity. Muslims of Pir Pindo and Sikhs from Dera Tek Singh, a neighbouring village, sit together to discuss the violence pervading in the cities but feel that it shall not affect their villages. They believe, “To us villagers, what does it matter if a peasant is a Hindu or a Muslim or a Sikh?” (56). The Sikh priest, Jagjeet Singh, who is highly respected by all the villagers, says, “Brother, our villages come from the same racial stock. Muslim or Sikh, we are basically Jats. We are brothers. How can we fight each other?”… If needs be, we’ll protect our Muslim brothers with our lives!” (56). As against this the Muslim’s sentiments of fraternity are also exemplary; “I am prepared to take an oath on the Holy Koran that every man in this village will guard his Sikh brothers with no regard for his own life” (56-57). The ties of brotherhood are so strong that they have no need for such oaths as an elderly mullah says, “Brothers don’t require oaths to fulfil their duty” (57). However, during her second visit to Pir Pindo Lenny feels that the communal tensions have destroyed the normal composite culture of the land. Lenny accompanies the members of Iman Din’s family to the Baisakhi fair held at Dera Tek Singh. Amidst the gaiety of the festival, even Ranna, a child of around eight, feels the presence of the Akalis as signals of the impending disaster and becomes conscious of an oppressive suspicion and fear. When the adults of the village approach the Sikh priest Jagjit Singh, he admits his helplessness and warns them to be on their guard as the Akalis might attack any time. Mutual friendship and harmony between communities have been replaced by fear, distrust and suspicion.

The news of atrocities on Muslims near Amritsar and Jullundhar are heard in Lahore. The brutal and bizarre details are hard to believe. After a fortnight or so an army truck dumps a family outside the gate of Lenny and she recognizes them to be the distant kins of Iman Din from the neighbouring village of Pir Pindo. The process of uprooting has started. “Embedded in the heart of the Punjab, they had felt secure, inviolate. And to uproot themselves from the soil of their ancestors had seemed to them akin to tearing themselves like ancient trees from the earth” (198). The ill-planned Partition, resulting in migration, displacement, deaths and incidents of rape and torture, all on a massive scale, itself was a big hole in the multicultural fabric of the country. The communal violence was tearing it apart brutally and the loss was irreparable and unhealable. The story of Pir Pinto gives us the idea of how hundreds
of such villages suffered with the dehumanizing effects of the bloody Partition. The familiar faces have started dwindling or have changed beyond recognition. The people who were simply friends have now turned Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs or Christians, fighting for their land and faith even at the cost of their established social relationship. Lenny’s bitter realization is of profound significance: “One man’s religion is another man’s poison” (117). Suddenly, the whole atmosphere is charged with religious slogans (134-35). Communal frenzy has rocked the two sides and the geographical division has led to a division in souls of the people. People are being butchered – men, women, children, old, young, handicapped, diseased, indiscriminately on either side. There are loots and arsons all around. Women have been the worst sufferers as they have been raped brutally and their limbs amputated. One by one most of the Hindus and Sikhs in Lahore have either left, killed or forced to convert in this heinous senseless battle. In Lenny’s household, Hari, the gardener has been forced to adopt Muslim faith, circumcise and rename himself as Himmat Ali and Moti, the sweeper becomes David Masiah, a Christian illustrating the politics of survival and compromise. Lenny realizes this uneasy change as she visits her usual favourite spot, Victoria Park with her new ayah Hamida and notices that Lahore is no more cosmopolitan. She narrates:

Beadon Road, bereft of the colourful turbans, hairy bodies, yellow shorts, tight pyjamas and glittering religious arsenal of the Sikhs, looks like any other populous street. Lahore is suddenly emptied of yet another hoary dimension: there are no Brahmins with caste-marks – or Hindus in dhotis with ‘bodhis’. Only hordes of Muslim refugees (175).

The new born nation and its people are not comfortable with its new Muslim identity. The Sikh families are attacked in Lahore. The neighbour of the Sethis, the Singhs flee with just a few belongings, leaving the rest with Lenny’s parents. Sher Singh, the zoo-attendant runs away due to the insecurity, after his brother-in-law is killed. Similarly, the student fraternity of King Edward’s medical college is disrupted. Prakash and his family migrate to Delhi and Rahool Singh and his pretty sisters are escorted to a convoy to Amritsar. The money lender Kirpa Ram flees leaving guineas and money behind. Even the middle class families like the Shankers flee in haste. Partition is shown as a series of images and events depicting human loss and agony. Even the Ayah is not spared and is kidnapped by a mob with the help of Ice-Candy-man, her
admirer to suffer humiliation, defilement and mental torture. At that instant, she is not the woman whom Ice-Candy-man always desired, but she is a Hindu woman who deserves to be treated the way the Muslim women have been treated by Sikhs and Hindus. Ice-Candy-man is no more her wooer but has become a militant Muslim fighting the cause of his faith and land. Her forced marriage and rechristening as ‘Mumtaz’ is a rude assault on her already fractured identity (259-60). The corpse of Masseur, Ayah’s beau, who tried to unite his bickering friends of different communities and sought a compromise, is found brutally murdered in a gunny sack by the roadside. It is the death of the spirit of humanism. This remains a mystery forever as sometimes old scores are settled under the guise of communal agitation. When Sidhwa makes such suggestive statement, the suspicion is hinted at the Ice-candy-man. Lahore is being poured with aliens or newly acquired alien identities by conversion into Islam. Having lost their settled home, property, prestige and near and dear ones in the riots they struggle hard to recover from this sudden jolt. They occupy the abandoned houses of Hindus and Sikhs who have been compelled to leave the legacy of lifetime in that one moment to meet the same fate at the other end. The saddest part of this horrible tale of Partition is that the national spirit of fraternity was killed by the crimes of the people like Ice-Candy-man who was transformed from a friend into a foe, a fiend, a fraud leaving a deep scar on the psyche of the ‘other’ people and a deeper and unamendable one on the multicultural, collective psyche of the societies of both the newly formed countries.

The novel also shows how there can be the co-existence of good and evil in the same person. Sidhwa resembles the horror portrayed by William Golding in The Lord of the Flies (1954). Golding indicates that there is a thin line between good and evil in human beings and it is only the structures of civilization which prevent the lurking evil from being rampant. At the end of this novel, the boys of Jack’s team act like barbarians and get a devilish sadistic delight in hunting Ralph, the leader boy of the opposite group. He is saved by a naval officer who reaches the island at that very point of time and his presence curbs the pointless brutality of the crazy boys. Golding had written this novel after the second world-war and its allegorical meaning is evident. Kapadia writes that, in the world of fiction, a mature adult stepped in to curb the atrocities and cruelty of the boys, but when the grownups of two countries commit such horrific brutalities there is no restraining power. Like the children in Golding’s
novel even Lenny is not spared of the frightening impact of the surrounding violent frenzy. The scenes of violence, arson and the venomous hatred of friends breed violence in Lenny too. The symbolic scene of a man being dragged by two jeeps in the opposite directions and torn into two has a disturbingly painful and lasting impression on her tender psyche. Actually, it stands for the heart-rending process of the Partition of the country and the pain of the man barbarically torn into two pieces stands for the torn country and the pain of her people. The destructive urge overpowers Lenny and she wrenches out the legs of her doll and examines the spilled insides (138). The wrenching of the doll symbolises the ruptured female psyche as the aftermath of Partition. Jill Didur opines: “Lenny’s decentred view of the British rule within her local community helps to defamiliarize the dominant interpretation of history and nationalism at the time of Partition and discloses its patriarchal and majoritarian underpinnings” (Didur, 1998: 47). Apart from the allegorical significance of the destruction of the doll, “it shows how even a young girl is powerless to stem the tide of surging violence within, thereby implying that grown up fanatics enmeshed in communal frenzy are similarly trapped into brutal violence. Lenny breaks down and cries at her pointless brutality, a sombre message by the novelist that unless there is re-thinking, brutality and insensitivity become a way of life, such is the conditioning of communalism (Kapadia, 1996b: 41). Lenny’s narrative tracks the increasingly constricted and gendered definition of nationalist discourse. There is an absolute need to re-think as the multicultural ambience that existed in the pre-Partitioned Indian subcontinent could never be restored. The disintegrating impact that this secessionist policy had on the collective psyche of the populace has resulted in many separatist movements in the post-independent India and thereby affecting the politics of the country till date. Even the secular Constitution of free India has not been able to erase those scars from the collective psyche and mend the multicultural fabric of the country as ever before. In this novel, Sidhwa shows how different cultures and communities become antagonistic to a point of no return. It is a story which has been repeated in various attempts at genocide and ‘ethnic cleansing’ the world over and which in the case of Indian subcontinent uprooted millions of people as they fled from the massacre to cross the newly created borders. The legacy of this tumult as the continual chafing of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs with periodic eruptions of violence stirred up now and then by political interests and local gangsters. There is a deadly need for a syncretised civilization to avoid such a communal holocaust. The message -
- those who forget history are condemned to repeat it -- is applicable to many Partition novels and is applicable to this novel too. Sidhwa puts the prophecy in the mouth of the restaurant owner wrestler who says phlegmatically during one of the hot discussions across the table: “History will repeat itself, once the line of division is drawn in the Punjab, all Muslims to the east of it will have their balls cut off!” (130). Man, written at a period of history when communal and ethnic violence threatened disintegration of the subcontinent is an apt warning of the dangers of communal frenzy.

Sidhwa, very importantly shows that during the communal strife; sanity, human feelings and past friendships are forgotten and things are never the same again. Partition was a big loss for India, not only in terms of land but in terms of the secular spirit that existed before Partition in the subcontinent’s composite culture, in its multicultural social milieu. At the Queen’s Park in Lahore, friends and colleagues argue endlessly about the impossibility of violence against each other and of fleeing from their homeland. Yet ironically, while they -- Masseur, Butcher, Ice-Candy-man, Sher Singh -- gossip about the national politics, Lenny senses the subtle change in the Queen’s garden, a metaphor for the Indian subcontinent ruled by the British Queen Victoria. The admirers of Ayah, in the pursuit of wooing her, a symbol of Mother India, have the communal feeling dormant in them and “Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsi are as always, unified around her” (97). The others without such motivations are deliberately sitting with members of their own community, huddled together preserving cultural and religious identities. The Brahmins form their own circle of exclusivity (98). Burkha-clad Muslim women and children have their own group. The saddest fact as observed by Lenny is that even the children do not mix while playing. Lenny attempts social interaction with a group of Sikh children but Masseur tries to pull her away. The Sikh women ask her name and the name of her religion. When Lenny states that she is a Parsee, the Sikh women express amazement at the discovery of a new religion. It is then that Lenny instinctively realizes the marginalization of her community and the social divide between communities. Rationalizing her feelings she says, “That’s when I realize what has changed. The Sikhs, only their rowdy little boys running about hair piled in topknots, are keeping mostly to themselves” (96). The author implies that the events at Queen’s Garden are a reflection of a crystallization of feelings at a larger scale in Lahore and other cities of India. Due to their relatively
small population and policy of aloofness, Parsees remained mostly unknown and enigmatic for non- Parsees. Such unfamiliarity could provoke suspicion and prejudice. Cultural and religious exclusivity leads initially to indifference and later to contempt which becomes the breeding ground for communal violence and bigotry. With a subtle parody, Sidhwa conveys the dangers of social exclusivity and ghettoization. When Lenny hears a group of Hindu children with caste marks on their foreheads yelling at her, “Parsee Parsee, Crow eaters! Crow eaters! Crow eaters!” she screams vehemently denying the charge, “We don’t! We don’t! We don’t!” (100). Without knowing the connotations of the name-calling and explaining the meaning Ayah says that the Parsees are a talkative lot like a rowdy flock of crows. Pacifying the disturbed Lenny and defending her on behalf of the whole of their secular group the Ice-Candy-Man sings a couplet meaning a glimpse of four Sikhs, Muslims or Parsees is supposed to send a mob of Banyas scurrying (101). The mutual misinterpretation of the communities aggravates the confusion of the time. The so-called secular group of Ayah’s admirers maintains a façade of unity by cracking ribald jokes on the community characteristics. However, they also become vicious and fall prey to communal frenzy very soon.

On hearing the name of Lenny’s religion those Sikh women in Victoria Park exclaim: “O kee what’s that?” (96). They discover the religion they had never heard of. The question also indicates that the reason of their ignorance may be the very small number of this community. They are a thin minority in the subcontinent and even so few in Lahore that majority of the people are unaware of them. With the approaching climate of disquiet the fundamentalism is provoked. The mini Parsee upper middle class community maintains caution. The readers are allowed to participate not only in their cultural traits and allegiances, but also their insecurities and political and human ideals portrayed with the versatile strokes of humour, caricature and parody. The Parsees situated in a metropolitan city of the then united India, sandwiched between two hostile communities, the Hindu/Sikh and the Muslim, were more vulnerable at that delicate juncture in the contemporary political context because Lahore had to play a major part in the Partition of India. Without siding with any warring community, Sidhwa, through Lenny, expresses the paradoxical Parsee situation during the pre-Partition days. A piquant humorous touch is imparted to the delineation of this Parsee dilemma of whether to support “Swaraj” or to maintain their loyalty to the British Raj.
With the impending news of independence, the paranoid feelings of the Parsees, a miniscule minority, get accentuated. The first glimpses of the Parsee insecurity can be found in the Jashan prayer which is held at the fire-temple in Lahore to celebrate the British victory in the Second World War. The Parsees used to organize such public meetings and gatherings to display their pronounced support to the British. The meeting is interesting as there is an acrimonious debate over the then political situation. It expresses the insecurity of the Parsees not because of communal antagonism but the apprehension of their status at the departure of the British. The Parsees are celebrated for their unflinching loyalty to the British. As per the Zoroastrian dictum a Parsee should be loyal to the ruler. The Parsees were never a power factor in the subcontinent and realized that they can practise their religion and prosper only when they remain loyal to the ruling people. This basic attitude has been carefully explored by Sidhwa in almost all her novels. The sense of insecurity and anxiety in the Parsee community was due to alienation brought about by the rejection of the colonizer and distrust of the nationalists. Due to their loyalty to the British Government all along, they, however, fear the Partition of India and consequently, are in a fix as to which community they should support. They are confused as to which side shall ultimately emerge as the ruler. In the meeting, Col. Bharucha, the domineering Parsee and the President of the ‘Parsi Anjuman’ announce the note of caution:

No one knows which way the wind will blow….. There may not be one but two - or even three new nations. And the Parsis might find themselves championing the wrong side -- if they don’t look before they leap! (37).

The ambivalent attitude of the Parsees towards Partition and Independence emerged at this main-hall meeting where they try to redefine their strategy which Col. Bharucha and Mr. Bankwalla claim as “We must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare” (16, 37). Col. Bharucha whose word is almost a law for the Parsee community advocates status quo. He warns the fellow Parsees to shun the anti-colonial movement and the nationalist agitation spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi. His reasoning is based on expediency. In her first novel Eaters Sidhwa portrays the dying businessman Faredoon Junglewalla vehemently protesting against the nationalist movement and exhorting his offspring to remain loyal to the British Empire. There, sycophancy is shown as a need to exist. Col. Bharucha has somewhat similar attitude. Always they
are very much concerned and influenced by the socio-political conditions of the country. In *Brat* too, the dissatisfaction against the constricting social changes in the post-colonial rule in Pakistan relegating the Parsees in the extreme margins is discussed in hushed-up tones within the family only. If there is “Home Rule”; political glory, fame and fortune will be acquired by the two major communities, Hindus and Muslims. Col. Bharucha considers “Home Rule” as a power-struggle, saying

Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power and if you jokers jump into the middle you’ll be mangled into chutney! (36).

He advocates the above stated note of caution due to the long-standing attitude of loyalty to the British stemming from the religious belief of loyalty to a ruler and a close relationship between the state and the community. In India, their relationship with the other communities is neutral, though they are sceptic and do not trust them. A person impatiently and impartially asks:

Does it matter where they look or where they leap? … If we’re stuck with the Hindus they’ll swipe our businesses from under our noses and sell our grandfathers in the bargain: if we’re stuck with the Muslims they’ll convert us by the sword! And God help us if we’re stuck with Sikhs! .... I’ve something against everybody (37).

Col. Bharucha advises the perpetuation of old attitudes. He does not want any Parsee of Lahore to offend the British sensibilities by espousing the nationalistic causes. In a tone of admonition he says, “I hope no Lahore Parsi will be stupid enough to court trouble - I strongly advise all of you to stay at home - and out of trouble” (36-37). However, Dr. Mody points out that it is not so simple. The Parsees cannot remain uninvolved and will have to take a stance with Independence imminent and Partition inevitable. Otherwise, “our neighbours will think that we are betraying them and siding with the English” (37). This, however, leads to a further complication, as voiced by fellow Parsee, when he asks: “Which of your neighbours are you going to betray? Hindu? Muslim? Sikh?” (37). This remark brings to the foreground the bitter fact that even after the peaceful existence of nearly thirteen hundred years the Parsees feel alienated in the multicultural Indian subcontinent. Col. Bharucha reminds them that their community has never fought back.
In order to highlight the Parsee dilemma at the time of Partition Sidhwa goes thirteen hundred years back to the significant moment in Parsee history when they “were kicked out of Persia by the Arabs” and “sailed to India” (37). The short account highlights the dilemma of assimilating themselves into an alien culture and risking the loss of their identity. The impending Partition of the country, as depicted in the novel, might prove all the efforts the Parsees have made over the centuries to assimilate themselves into the Indian culture as futile since the community suddenly faces the threat of extinction / annihilation in their critical dilemma of supporting any majority community. Centuries ago, the Parsees had tried to accept the Indian culture with all its diversities, but now, in the wake of Partition, they might be forced to take sides with one of the dominant communities in India -- Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs. Thus, Sidhwa undercuts the received historical view that the Parsees were totally indifferent to the Partition of the country. Instead, they had a complex attitude towards it as has been brought out in the main hall meeting in the fire-temple. Referring to the original migration of the Parsees from Persia to India Bharucha advises his people to remain neutral in the tug of war among the three major communities of India. The neutral narrative voice of Lenny represents the collective sub-consciousness of the Parsee people and is rooted in the racial psychology of her people (Singh, J., 2004: 149).

Col. Bharucha allays the fears of his community by resolving to cast their lot with whoever rules Lahore (39). Finally, wafting in self-esteem, the assembled Parsees agree to Col. Bharucha’s suggestion: “Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rulers of their land!” (39). Thus, Sidhwa by giving voice to the marginalized Parsees demonstrates that their choice of remaining neutral in the context of the Partition was not out of indifference but forced upon them by a complex historical reality. Hence, their spirit of ‘patriotism’ for the country they ‘belong’ to never ran very high. Despite their smooth and amicable terms with the co-existent multicultural communities, they remained aliens to them and never felt that true sense of belongingness for the country that rendered the centuries-long refuge to them. They have always stayed uneasily in their adopted home. Ruling out any fear and insecurity and setting the policy of peace Col. Bharucha proclaims:
As long as we do not interfere we have nothing to fear! As long as we respect the customs of our rulers - as we always have - we’ll be all right! Ahura Mazda has looked after us for thirteen hundred years: he will look after us for another thirteen hundred! (39).

Some Parsees in the congregation express their apprehension about remaining in Lahore if the Muslims rule after independence. They wish to move either to London or Bombay where the majority of their co-religionists live in India. The thirteen hundred years old memory of their persecution by the Arabs is the reason for this apprehension but such fear is over-ruled by the Colonel who reminded those timorous souls of their prosperity and peace even during the Muslim Mogul rule in India and how even the emperor Akbar was impressed by the Zoroastrian scholars. He wanted to get converted to the Zoroastrianism but the Parsees would not proselytize and the Parsees do not break faith! (40). They are well-known for their honesty and integrity. The herd-mentality and the desire to ghettoize during the critical time of insecurity suggesting the solution to migrate to Bombay is also rejected. There are some who get fascinated by the option of London, “If we must pack off, let’s go to London at least. We are English king’s subjects, aren’t we? So, we are English!” (40). Herein lies the irony. The Parsees might have the misconception that they could encash their goodwill among the colonizers but the bitter reality is that in any country they go, they would be treated with the secondary status. The irony becomes sharp when Dr. Mody asks in a remarkably tongue-in-cheek tone: “And what do we do when the English king’s Vazir stands before us with a glass full of milk? Tell him we are brown Englishmen; come to sweeten their lives with a dash of colour?” (40). Here Sidhwa means that the Parsees would have to face racism in London, despite their light skin colour because after all, they are known as the Indians and recognized by their past status of the colonized. The final resolution is one of adoptability and compromise. The Colonel continues to say, “As long as we conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present no threat to anybody, we will prosper right here” (40). The meeting closes on a very important remark by the banker, “But don’t try to prosper immoderately. And remember: don’t ever try to exercise real power” (40). This is the key to their survival and peaceful existence in future.

Through this animated conversation, Sidhwa reveals the implicit, lurking fear of the Parsees, a vulnerable minority losing their identity and getting swamped by the
majority communities - either Hindus in India or Muslims in Pakistan or the English in London. So, even amongst the Parsees, the smallest minority in the undivided India, the Partition sparked off an impulse for migration from their ‘homelands’. Sidhwa in her Brat and Mistry in his Journey and Balance show the tyranny of the post-colonial rule. In Brat, the dissatisfaction against the restricting social changes in the Pakistani milieu pushing the Parsees and their freedom into the extreme margins has been very often discussed by Zareen and Cyrus. They, especially Zareen, worry about their daughter Feroza’s healthy and individualistic upbringing. To avoid the suffocating Islamic constraints they decide to send Feroza to America. Mistry, in his novels, criticizes the rule of Mrs. Gandhi and the imposition of Emergency as even worse than the British rule. The Parsees’ hold on the banking had been loosened by the nationalization of banks during the rule of Mrs. Gandhi. Their golden image of integrity had been tainted by the infamous Nagarwala case which has a ‘factional’ reference in the novel Journey. Mistry hints at the insecurity and anxiety of Parsees in the postcolonial rule and suggests the option of immigration to Canada as it is in Matters. Exiled thirteen hundred years ago, the Parsees adopted India as their homeland. Another mass migration would be truly unthinkable. They are attached to and have identified themselves with the Indian soil. Bombay was opted for, primarily due to safety in numbers rather than the safeguards of democratic India. Historically, however, the movement to Bombay, as indicated in the novel, was minimal. The Parsees remained in urban areas of India and Pakistan trying to preserve their identity by not meddling in political matters and not trying to prosper immoderately and exercise real power following the advice of the Banker in the congregation.

Col. Bharucha, too, agrees with this typical Parsee compromise, a resolution of self-interest and an attitude of keeping the low profile during the post-independence period. As the president of the community in Lahore, just two hundred in all, he now and then keeps on discussing about this critical period which causes anxiety among the Parsees to maintain their security as well as identity. At the last community dinner, held on the roof of the YMCA building on the Mall, Col. Bharucha had declaimed in an impassioned speech:

We must tread carefully…. We have served the English faithfully, and earned their trust … So, we have prospered! But we are the smallest minority in
India…. Only one hundred and twenty thousand in the whole world. We have to be extra wary, or we’ll be neither here nor there… we must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare! (16).

This British proverb very precisely explains the approach and attitude the Parsees have determined to take up in the post-independence era. With this policy they have been the gainers of success, prosperity, security and goodwill. By this policy if they would not be the gainers, they would not be the losers either. And they have been proved successful in various walks of society by maintaining their stand and individual identity as the settler minority in the post-modern India and Pakistan. Here, Sidhwa, especially talks of the Pakistani Parsees, she herself being the one. Both local and national politics play a prominent part in Man. Sidhwa admits in a conversation with David Montenegro that Man is a politically motivated novel:

The main motivation grew out of my reading of a good deal of literature on the Partition of India and Pakistan… What has been written has been written by the British and the Indians. Naturally, they reflect their bias. And they have, I felt after I’d researched the book, been unfair to the Pakistanis. As a writer, as a human being, one just does not tolerate injustice. I felt whatever little I could do to correct an injustice I would like to do. I don’t think I have just let facts speak for themselves, and through my research I found out what the facts were (Montenegro, 1991: 36).

Sidhwa’s treatment of history is typical of a postcolonial novelist. Her fictional rendering of historical figures and incidents is singular. The political figures of the time, Gandhi, Nehru, the Mountbattens, Subhashchandra Bose, and Mohammed Ali Jinnah are all named in the book and Sidhwa presents them in an unusual light. Despite her admiration for Gandhi; she holds him, though partially, responsible for Partition. Gandhi was deified whereas Jinnah was caricatured in Indian films and the biased accounts of the British and Indian historians. He is often extolled in many books on Partition, but he is not spared in Man. Her proposition is that most of these accounts, however moving, show a strong pro-Hindu bias. She sets out to pull down the ‘Imperial purpose’ in Man. In other words, she, to borrow Rushdie’s expression, “writes back to the centre”.

Lenny’s response to Gandhi is naïve. She makes funny observations on Gandhi about his weaving and his views on digestive problems. Her humorous description of
Gandhi is a mixture of awe and irreverence. Her child-like observation of him is that Gandhi is “an improbable mixture of a demon and a clown” who is an opportunistic politician, accruing power and glory through his repeated imprisonments and marches in the name of the people. Sidhwa satirically portrays him as a shrewd and manipulative political player with “ice lurking deep beneath the hypnotic and dynamic femininity of (his) non-violent exterior” (88). Sidhwa here is deliberately being an iconoclast. She reacts to a lot of literature and the film “Gandhi” which sanctified him. Sidhwa feels, “He’s not human in that film. And I tried to humanize him”. She disapproves the unfair depiction of Jinnah in that film. She feels he was caricatured “as a very stiff villain of the piece”. She tells Montenegro:

And I felt, in Ice-Candy-Man, I was just redressing, in a small way, a very grievous wrong that has been done to Jinnah and Pakistanis by many Indian and British writers. They’ve dehumanized him, made him a symbol of the sort of person who brought about the Partition of India….Whereas in reality he was the only constitutional man who didn’t sway crowds just by rhetoric (Montenegro, 1991: 50).

In Man, her eulogy on Jinnah is typical of a Pakistani, making it a moral obligation for her to defend him. When Lenny’s mother tells her that Jinnah’s wife, a Parsee, died heartbroken, the ‘grown-up’ Lenny recalls:

But didn’t Jinnah, too, die of a broken heart? And today, forty five years later, in the films of Gandhi’s and Mountbattens’ lives, in books by British and Indian scholars, Jinnah, who for a decade was known as ‘Ambassador’ of Hindu-Muslim unity’, is caricatured, and portrayed as a monster (160).

These lines give clear expression to Sidhwa’s anguish at the biased views spread in India and all over the world. Taking a passage from Sarojini Naidu’s tribute to Jinnah, Sidhwa reinforces her views:

… Calm hauteur of his accustomed reserve masks, for those who know him, a naïve and eager humanity, an intuition quick and tender as a woman’s, a humour gay and winning as a child’s -- a pre-eminently rational and practical, discreet and dispassionate in his estimate and acceptance of life, the obvious sanity and serenity of his worldly wisdom effectually disguise a shy and splendid idealism which is of the very essence of the man (161).
Sidhwa, just does not fulfil the moral obligation as a ‘Pakistani’ in lauding Jinnah but also as a ‘Parsee’ to launch a just defence of this versatile statesman of the ruling community in Pakistan. Or maybe to prove her loyalty to the ruling community as resolved by the community leaders, very characteristic of a Parsee. Though she does not focus on the issue of the inter-faith marriage of her community, she takes a subtle pride in the matter that a bold and beautiful Parsee girl had won the heart of an elegantly handsome Muslim man and a brilliant lawyer Jinnah braving the disapproval and hence the ex-communication from the rigid Parsee community. Sidhwa pays a glowing tribute to Jinnah, who in her view, was assessed derogatorily.

Sidhwa represents the minority point of view in the Indian context of nationalist discourse as the novel deals with the pre-partitioned India when Pakistan was not yet a reality. The history of the twentieth century nationalist India cannot be studied without reference to the history of Pakistan. The very concept of nationhood was bequeathed by the British colonizers to both India and Pakistan simultaneously but Sidhwa, here, foregrounds the Pakistani Parsee perspective and writes into history a female script around the girl-child narrator Lenny, her mother, grandmother, aunt and most significantly her Hindu Ayah Shanta. The novel is a sole account of the Parsee female involvement/uninvolvement in the tumultuous period of the sub-continental history. Lenny refracts the historiography of Indian nationalism through a child’s point of view. Placed at a contentious margin of the discourse of the subcontinent, Sidhwa displaces the dominant Indian nationalist narrative by portraying the Hindu leaders of the freedom movement iconoclastically. Theorizing the counter-narratives of the nation’s margins/minorities, Bhabha locates the ideological ambivalence of the national narrative, its “double-writing” or “dissemiNation”, in the very “people” who are constructed historically and politically as a unified national identity. For Bhabha, the people are not always merely the historical objects of a nationalist discourse but they can be dissenting, resistant subjects of a post-originary narrative. To him, they “represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the social and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population” (Bhabha, 1990: 297-99).

The vivid description of Sikhs’ attack on Muslim villages in Punjab is also part of Sidhwa’s political game-plan. She believes, “the Sikhs perpetrated the much greater
brutality -- they wanted Punjab to be divided. A peasant is rooted to his soil. The only way to uproot him was to kill him or to scare him out of his wits” (Montenegro, 1991: 36). She is of the view that the Muslims in east Punjab suffered more because of organized violence by the Sikhs who were manipulated by politicians like Nehru and Gandhi. She gives very scant credit to these politicians in this novel. She uses her minor characters, the ordinary people as her mouthpieces who reduce and denigrate these high-profiled extraordinary leaders to nobody, below the level of even ordinary. Here minor characters such as the Masseur, the Government gardener, and the zoo-attendant Sher Singh, perform like Hardy’s rustic characters, the role of commentators and interpreters. Sidhwa too, resorts to the conversations among the groups of these ordinary people in the novel to offer the multiple voices and perspectives of the marginalized. Here, she comes close to Mistry too, who employs the narrative device of the popular gossip and newspaper account to question the ‘official’ version of the infamous Nagarwala case. In Man, the commoners analyze and draw their own inferences which sometimes reflect the stand taken by the respective communal groups to which they belong and thus, the heat of the communal frenzy develops. For instance, the discussions of politics in Queen’s Park and later at the Wrestler’s restaurant again like Hardy’s Buck’s Head and Mistry’s ordinary middle class hotels give ample scope for them to voice their feelings and opinions. They curse the politicians in whose hands their destiny lies. The butcher’s comments on Gandhi are typical of a Muslim in the pre-Partition context:

That non-violent violence monger -- your precious Gandhijee -- first declares the Sikhs fanatics! Now suddenly he says: “Oh, dear, the poor Sikhs cannot live with the Muslims if there is a Pakistan!” What does he think we are - some kind of beast? Aren’t they living with us now? (91).

The Masseur’s reply is equally sarcastic: “He’s a politician, yaar. It’s his business to suit his tongue to the moment (91). Similarly, Nehru is a shrewd politician who in spite of all the efforts of Jinnah “will walk off with the lion’s share” (131). Nehru, according to the Ice-Candy-man is “a sly one … He’s got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English’s wife out of his other what not…. He’s the one to watch!” (131). He also states about the unreliability of the British. Sidhwa seeks to re-examine the role of the British in ‘cracking’ the country. It was a political gimmick
played by the British using the leaders of the freedom struggle as pawns. Before departing the country, they imparted the independence bloodied with communal riots halving the nation into two. The long standing peace and centuries-long multicultural harmony of the diverse communities staying together were irrevocably disturbed. The British had done the irreparable harm to the country. The birth of Pakistan leads to an identity-crisis in Lenny and in all the inhabitants of the new nation. Suddenly overnight, they were all conferred upon a new identity. A quite alien new identity was born to them. Lenny thinks bitterly: “I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that” (140). *Man* is Pakistani in its setting and sensibility and Sidhwa’s perspective too, is quite evidently Pakistani. According to her, Partition was a ‘mistake’, a tragedy which could have been averted.” However, in the novel, she argues how Partition favoured India over Pakistan:

> The Hindus are being favoured over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favour Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri, they grant him Kashmir. Spurning logic, defying rationale, ignoring the consequences of bequeathing a Muslim state to the Hindus... They grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot without which Kashmir cannot be secured.... The fading Empire sacrifices his cause to their shifting allegiances (159-160).

Thus, Sidhwa rejects the British and pro-Hindu Indian versions of history. *Man* is a typical post-colonial text that achieves the purpose of displacing the notions nursed by the people on either side of the border in the subcontinent. The thesis which Sidhwa elucidates in the narrative may be ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ which so far has been considered as popular ‘myth’ and ‘marginal’. “To complement her contestation of the Indian “master narrative” of the sub-continental history, Sidhwa intervenes as well in the male-gendered and classist hegemonic text of Indian nationalism” (Mann, 1994: 74) by her strategic deployment of Shanta, the ayah and conveys that women suffer the most in times of political turmoil as “victory is celebrated on a woman’s body and vengeance is taken on woman’s body” (Graeber, 1991: 11). Marked by her gender, religion and class, Ayah represents a token vent for the violence inherent in the nationalist discourse. At the time of Partition, the patriarchal construction of women’s identities, and particularly their sexual purity as symbolic of community honour and integrity, made them subject to gendered and humiliating acts of aggression as India and Pakistan sought to become the sovereign nations.
The Parsees, though the ‘irrelevant nomenclatures’ and not the direct victims of the Partition, felt no less agony. Despite being the detached observers of the bloody event which broke the country into two, they were the people with sensible heads and sensitive hearts. The claim of neutrality and objectivity through the narrative point of view of a Parsee girl-child can be questioned at times in the novel. Sidhwa’s leaning towards the Muslims cannot be always explained in terms of the declared loyalty to the rulers. There may be genuine reasons to side with the Muslims and thereby interrogate the history and the historians. Even though Sidhwa tries to depict the atrocities committed by the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs without partiality, being a Pakistani writer she makes it obvious that her sympathies are with the Muslim victims. Not only is the Sikh’s attack on Muslim villages in Punjab described vividly, but also it is seen through the eyes of the Muslim child Ranna that makes the readers sympathize with the Muslims. Thus, Sidhwa not only shifts the blame of Partition onto the Indian leaders but also shifts the readers’ sympathy with the Muslim victims by accentuating the violence inflicted upon the Muslims by the Sikhs during Partition. However, in Brat, Sidhwa is not so sympathetic towards all the Pakistani leaders. Both Mistry and Sidhwa falsify the myth of Parsee loyalty to the rulers when they pull down the autocratic leaders like Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan in Brat and Indira Gandhi in Journey and Balance. They show their loyalty to democratic values of truth and justice and side with its three doctrines: liberty, equality and fraternity. Both the authors side with the ordinary people who are the sufferers; who are on the margins like the Ayah and the Masseur and the millions like them who were the victims of the riots as depicted in Man or the common people like the tailors and Dina, the victims of Emergency who struggle for their living in Balance. The moral vision of the writers is that it is the ordinary persons who ‘battle wrongs’ and they are to be glorified to the ‘extraordinariness’ as Wordsworth did in his poems and not the people in the corridors of power.

It is very significant to note that the resolution of the Parsees to have a neutral stance, during the Partition and after, does not mean to be blind to the injustice or that they are just the passive onlookers of the suffering. The worsening situation and rising communal discord force them to work actively, though surreptiously, to help their friends and acquaintances. The compromises with their neutral stand are solely guided
by humane consideration for both the communities alike without any bias or prejudice. If Lenny’s mother and the Electric-Aunt smuggle the rationed patrol to help their Hindu and Sikh friends to run away and also for the convoys to send the kidnapped women of both the communities to their families across the border; Lenny’s mother also employs Hamida, a Muslim woman who had been kidnapped, rescued and later on spurned by her family, as Lenny’s new Ayah to rehabilitate her. When Lenny’s Godmother Rodabai finds out that the Hindu Ayah does not want to stay with the Ice-Candy-man as his converted Muslim wife, ‘Mumtaz’, she rescues her, sends her to the Recovered Women’s Camp and then helps her to return to her relatives in Amritsar. At the same time, she takes care of the Muslim boy Ranna’s free education. Hence, the then Parsees extended the humanitarian relief to the riot-affected people and got involved without any discrimination of the communities and thereby actually proving their ‘neutral stance’. Not only during the troubled times, but even in their daily routine life such indiscrimination and neutrality are practised.

Lenny’s Parsee household is like a cosmopolitan hub where their Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Anglo-Indian and Parsee friends visit and get together. Also their whole lot of servants from diverse castes and communities stay in harmony without any partial treatment from their masters. The Ayah and Hari, the gardener are Hindus, Imam Din, the cook and Yousuf, the servant are Muslims and Moti, the sweeper from a Hindu low-caste. They enjoy a very amicable and harmonious relationship with each other. The household is like a microcosm of the pre-Partitioned peaceful multicultural society of the Indian subcontinent. This ambience was shattered beyond restoration as the aftermath of Partition. Ice-Candy-man’s relations lie dead in the heap of carcasses in that unfortunate train and Imam Din’s entire family is wiped out in the Sikh attack on his village Pir Pindo. Ranna alone has survived to tell the gruesome tale. While the pent-up rancour in the Ice-Candy-man makes him join the marauding hooligans out to kill the Sikhs and Hindus, Imam Din remains calm in the face of all calamities. The distinction between the two becomes marked when a gang of Muslim hooligans comes to abduct Ayah. To save her, Imam Din goes to the extent of telling a lie about Ayah that she has gone. In contrast, Ice-Candy-man, due to Lenny’s “truth-infected tongue”, not only gets her abducted and throws her to the wolves of passion in a ‘Kotha’ but also kills his co-religionist Masseur out of jealousy. The readers feel proud of Imam Din for his humanism till his name is heard in the list of the people who visit Ayah at Hira Mandi (241). So, his vengeance also
got the outlet. Thus the patterns of communal harmony and amity are replaced by the flames of communal conflagration that devours each and everybody. The Parsees are spared at a safe distance but inspired by a feeling of humanism they shake off their passive spectatorship and become the active agents of the healing process.

The Pakistani conservative nationalist discourse constructs its citizenship as Muslim and patriarchal and pushes the minorities, women and the subalterns to the margins of national imaginary. The tension between the real and the imaginary events in Sidhwa suggests how the discourses of gender, minorities and nation overlap and converge. Underlying the basic unity among the various religions of India is Hinduism represented in the novel by the Hindu Ayah and her multi-religious throng of admirers. The Ayah catches the attention of the Mali Hari, the Ice-Candy-man, the Masseur, Sharbat Khan, Imam Din and Sher Singh, the zoo-attendant -- all converge on this one focal point. The Ayah is indiscriminating towards all and it is in this that she becomes the symbol of the composite culture that India has. Interestingly, as the events roll ahead and the fear and suspicion rise, this group of Ayah’s admirers dwindles and the friends become foes. Whereas before Partition, Ayah is able to express her sexuality within her circle of companions in various ways; but after Partition, her sexuality is exploited and made emblematic of the national imaginary. As a symbol of India, earlier the Indian subcontinent of the multicultural hues, all the men co-exist peacefully in her presence. The subversive effects of her bodily expression of desire articulate a more permeable and heterogeneous definition of the national imaginary than the narrow, restrictive one that eventually prevails in Pakistan. A similar symbol of the multi-religious and multicultural unity is provided by the visitors to the Queen’s Park where people of all religions and creeds rub their shoulders with one another. With the Partition imminent, the park presents a picture of diverse religious groups keeping away from one another’s company. The passions run high even when people from different communities just talk or chat. Lenny, the frequent visitor of the park observes significantly:

The Queen has gone! …. The garden scene has depressingly altered. Muslim families who added colour when scattered among the Hindus and Sikhs, now monopolise the garden, depriving it of colour (236).
The multi-cultural colour of the park which stands for the diversity of India has faded. The healthy atmosphere of unity and fraternity in the park has lost. The various communities of India have become conscious of their individual identity at the cost of the composite culture they had evolved after centuries. The Partition had an adverse influence on the country’s “unity in diversity.” The novelist draws a line between the national politics and the relationship among different communities. The common people think that the politics of the country do not affect them directly. Just as Dina thinks about Emergency in Mistry’s Balance, Ayah too shakes off the caution of big trouble with a casual remark: “What’s it to us if Jinnah, Nehru and Patel fight? They are not fighting our fight.” (75). However, Sharbat Khan does not agree with her light-hearted assessment and is of the opinion that it “may be true but they are stirring up trouble for us all.” Sidhwa shows Partition as the result of irreconcilability of the adamant and rash leadership of India. Here, Sharbat Khan becomes a persona of the novelist and comments on “intransigent sectarianism of the national leaders which wrought havoc on the pattern of communal amity existing in rural India” (Singh, J., 2004: 155). That is the reason for Sidhwa’s scathing attack on the leaders, especially the Indian leaders, who were responsible for the unmitigated suffering of ordinary people on either side of the border crumbling the familiar social order. The analysis of the political leadership during the Partition days by Sidhwa is subjective and at times seems even prejudiced. Despite it, the final message of the novel is clear and unambiguous. It rejects the two-nation theory and suggests that religious, social and cultural differences are artificially created and exploited by the unscrupulous people. She also suggests that power should be used for the good of the people and to suppress the evil. Partition has been, indeed, the sorest point in the history of the Indian subcontinent and also played a vital role in shaping the identity of the country. There was a painful birth of a new nation amidst so much of unbridled violence and turmoil that both the countries regret it till date, and may do so for the rest of their existence.

The change from the pattern of communal discord to that of reconciliation can be, however, traced in the changed personality of the Ice-Candy-man who, at the end, regrets his deeds and becomes a person of refined sensibility, a poet following his beloved Ayah ‘Mumtaz’ across the border to Amritsar willing to leave his own land for the sake of his Hindu beloved “is not only an example of self-sacrifice but also
symbolic of a future rapprochement between the two warring communities -- the Muslims and the Hindus. Though Bapsi Sidhwa shows the possibility of the emergence of a harmonious pattern of communal relations between the Hindus and Muslims sometimes in the future, she leaves much unsaid about how the change in the Ice-Candy-man’s personality comes about” (Singh, J., 2004: 158). In this story, Sidhwa also suggests that though the past cannot be forgotten, it can be forgiven. Urvashi Butalia raises a pertinent question about the predicament of women during Partition:

Why was it that we heard so little about them? …. My assumptions were simple: firstly, that these questions had remained unasked because of the patriarchal underpinnings of history as a discipline. I also believed that in times of communal strife and violence, women remain essentially non-violent, and are at the receiving end of violence as victims and that they are left with the task of rebuilding the community (Butalia, 2000: 33-34).

The task of building the community and that of rehabilitation as pointed out by Urvashi Butalia is precisely what the strong women in the narrative -- Rodabai and Lenny’s mother -- accomplish. When Godmother confronts Ayah, she tries to comfort the hapless victim with her words of wisdom and profound understanding of human existence:

It can’t be undone. But it can be forgiven …… worse things are forgiven. Life goes on and the business of living buries the debris of our pasts. Hurt, happiness… all fade impartially… to make way for fresh joy and new sorrow. That’s the way of life (262).

But the traumatic experience leaves Ayah spiritually dead. She replies: “I am past that. I am not alive” (262). Her damaged self seeks relief in India where her roots exist. As men lose their senses, raping, killing and looting; women reveal their strengths, building links across the divided communities, sheltering survivors and insisting on continuity.

Lenny’s emerging consciousness about her sexuality is juxtaposed with and is jolted by the appalling treatment the women receive during the riots. Her pleasure of discovering her own ‘self’/gender is marred by the horrendous subjugation of women
culturally and socially. She is outraged at the scapegoating of the women and the way the patriarchal conservative nationalist interests produce their identities as victims. Her gradual discovery of the story of Hamida, her new ayah, makes her understand the predicament of the “fallen” women in the time of such troubles and trials. Her off-centred view makes it clear how the women’s suffering is both a product of their abduction from and rejection by their original families and communities and also the state’s efforts to erase their history. Public outrage over the presence of abducted women living in the communities of the ‘other’ in India and Pakistan in 1947 and after, placed social pressure on the state to intervene and ‘recover’ them on behalf of their masculine subjects. Regardless of their own wishes, Hindu women were ‘recovered’ to India and Muslim women were ‘recovered’ to Pakistan. Jill Didur analyses Ayah’s position and states that only in the isolated cases like her, they have had some say in the determination of their “fate”. She is one of those very few, who could contest their objectification in and through these patriarchal legal interventions.

Sidhwa’s text opens up a narrative space that resists this objectification, where Ayah and Lenny are portrayed as neither “heroines” who rise above the patriarchal conservative nationalist struggles that engulf their communities nor are they complete “victims” of its physical and discursive violence. Instead they are figured as negotiating their subjectivities within the interstices of experience and interpretation and shaping the outcome of material events as they do so.... Where women like Ayah or Lenny question the interpretation of their identities by patriarchal community and state interests, they perform an act of resistance that destabilizes the dominant order. Cracking India figures Lenny as conscious of Ayah’s strategic use of her multiple subject-positions as a means to subvert the discourses that inscribe her body in multiple and contingent ways (Didur, 1998: 49-50).

So, Lenny’s narrative is centred round increasing awareness of the connections between the power-relations she experiences as a girl – her inferior status in a patriarchal society, the different and unequal expectations her parents have for her and her brother, her mother’s subordinate position in the marriage – growing up in a minority community and the pressures Ayah negotiates as a female Hindu servant living in colonial India and postcolonial Pakistan.

Related very closely to the changing patterns of communal relations is the sea-change in the attitude of the Parsee community from the passive neutrality to active neutrality towards the pattern of communal discord swirling around them during Partition. The
novel, apart from being a classic of Partition novel, is a celebration of writer’s own community and its humanity and loyalty to the nation it inhabits and the people it shares things with. The narrator feels most at home with the delineation of the Parsee household. Its cultural codes, patterns of communication, jokes render characters like Godmother, Old husband, Dr. Manek Mody, Slavesister, Electric Aunt, Cousin and Dr. Bharucha and of course the Sethis their distinct individuality. Their idiosyncrasies, failings and convictions are vividly dramatized. The hilarious moments also neutralize the tense ambience of the outside world. It would be apt to conclude with the equiponderant remarks of Niaz Zaman:

Sidhwa is too good an artist to show only one side of the picture. Her overarching sense of compassion allows her an understanding of the pain of the ‘enemy’. Her clear vision allows her to see that violence affects everyone… Her sense of absurd permits her to realize the meaninglessness of artificial divisions. “I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that” (140). Nevertheless, in all her writings Sidhwa reveals that, with all her love for truth, all her compassion, she sees Partition from the western side of the Indo-Pak border (Zaman, 2004: 103-04).

Or maybe she might have a clearer and more balanced perspective from the western country she inhabits now, her new adopted home at Houston, Texas where the differences between the religious communities have been blurred. Hindus, Muslims Sikhs seem to form one large “Indian” community, i.e. the Indian sub-continent where their roots lie or even a broader identity of the South Asians.
AN AMERICAN BRAT

The theme of immigration is quite prominent in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *An American Brat*. In an interview to Naila Hussain, Sidhwa says that

… the book deals with the subject of the ‘culture shock’ young people from the subcontinent have to contend with when they choose to study abroad. It also delineates the clashes the divergent cultures generate between the families ‘back home’ and their transformed and transgressing progeny bravely groping their way in the New World (Hussain, 1993: 19).

*Brat* is set partly in Pakistan and partly in the USA. The time is the late 70s. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is in jail and Islamic fundamentalism is growing in Pakistan. There might be a death sentence for Bhutto in future, under the autocratic military regime of Zia-Ul-Haq. There is the pent-up wrath, fear and anxiety among the people. The female protagonist of the novel, Feroza Ginwalla, a sixteen year old Parsee girl, has been carefully brought up in the microscopic but prosperous Parsee community in Lahore. Her parents think that she should be saved from being further influenced by the Muslim conservatism. Her mother Zareen is perturbed because Feroza is becoming more and more backward every day. The un-Parseelike orthodoxy in Feroza’s attitude and outlook alarms Zareen who tells Cyrus, her husband, that Feroza hesitates in answering the phone in case it is a stranger’s call. Also she objects to her mother coming to her school dressed in a sleeveless sari-blouse. Though they dress differently as Parsees, Zareen is worried about the grooming of her daughter in the narrow-minded Islamic social milieu where there are rigid restrictions on women. They should not wear frocks and show their skin. Girls must not play hockey or sing or dance. Feroza’s parents feel that she should go to the USA, a country of freedom and modernity, as “Travel will broaden her outlook; get this puritanical rubbish out of her head” (14). Manek, Zareen’s younger brother who studies at MIT, takes the responsibility to look after her. The Parsees feel uncomfortable with the hegemonic monoculture of the Islamic extremism in the postcolonial Pakistan. Zareen recalls her childhood days when the society of Pakistan, then the Indian subcontinent, was multicultural and tolerant enough to grant them individuality and choice. Also under the liberal British patronage the Parsees enjoyed the privileged status and respect. In
contrast to that they were facing quite the pitiable situation now. With their thin minority they were just relegated to the margins. The big jolt their identity received during the troubled time of Partition when the healthy and secular collective mindset of the populace of the subcontinent was shattered and the multicultural social texture tattered. The insecurity and discomfort the Parsees feel during the post-independence period in Pakistan is very overtly expressed in Zareen’s anxiety for her daughter and thereby the elders’ concern for their progeny’s future in this country.

Feroza’s migration from Pakistan, once a part of the Indian subcontinent, to the USA at the age of sixteen is very significant in many respects. Sidhwa finds the autobiographical reflection in Feroza’s character as she herself had undergone the émigré’s experiences, though not as a teenager but in her late twenties. More importantly, Sidhwa feels that the ‘culture shock’ is much deeper on a female psyche and conduct than the male counterpart; which is why she chooses to have the female protagonist in this novel. The act of female immigration brings in many sensitive issues apart from the culture shock. It problematizes the issues of gender parity, identity-crisis, double marginalization as a ‘Parsee’ and further as a ‘woman’ and also of course, the issue of the inter-community marriage faced by this about-to-be extinct community. Feroza’s migration is a journey through three cultures -- her country Pakistan’s Islamic culture, her own Parsee culture and the western culture of the USA. If the Muslims are rigid and conservative with regard to the women’s dress-code then the Parsees are no less stubborn and fundamentalist with regard to inter-faith marriages, despite their so-called liberal attitude and westernization. The western civilization of the First World liberalises and celebrates one’s individuality. Its influence on Feroza is the strongest and she is not ready to compromise with the freedom she has got; and that too without relinquishing the essence of her religious faith which lies within one’s being inextricably.

Not only Feroza but her mother Zareen also acts as the writer’s mouthpiece. Like Sidhwa, she is also very active in women’s committees and is aware about women’s rights. Though Feroza outgrows her mother later in asserting her individually, Zareen has that open mind, sensitive enough to understand women’s minds and their problems. In fact, Sidhwa’s own two selves are reflected in the characters of the mother and the daughter. Zareen understands the shortfalls of her community and
would very much like to be with the younger generation but she does not have the
courage to tear apart. She represents the middle generation of the Parsees as Sidhwa
does and expresses herself through the conflicts and dilemmas that Zareen undergoes
while dissuading Feroza from marrying a non-Parsee, an American Jew. Though
Zareen finds no fault with her daughter’s choice, David Press, she feels that her dear
daughter would be lost to her as her marriage to a non- Parsee would be nothing less
than the cultural suicide. Conversion is not permitted among Parsees and a Parsee girl
marring outside the faith is expelled from the Zoroastrian religious community. She
can no longer practise her religion and is no longer considered a Parsee. The same law
does not apply to Parsee men, however. It makes a strong case of gender-
discrimination and injustice to the women in the community. It is also one of the
causes of the dwindling population of this community as not only the woman, who
marries outside, is ostracized but also her children are considered outcaste and
deburred from all religious rites and rituals – even from the fire temple – ‘Agyari’or
‘Atash Behram’. The bias for the men, who marry outside and accepted in the Parsee
fold, is indeed unjust and unreasonable. Surprisingly, the Parsee community that
prides itself as highly westernized and liberalized one claiming to treat women as
men’s equal is in fact, not so liberal. The religious attitude of the orthodox elders and
the high priests paradoxically consider women as inferior to men.

Sidhwa portrays Parsee community’s traditional dictum of double standards – one for
the men and another for the women, especially when it is the question of inter-faith
marriage. This means that the Parsees are fundamentalists to the core and the priests
are not prepared to move with the times even when the community is dwindling.
Charmed by David whom Zareen finds very admirable and appealing, she regrets that
some of the ‘custodians’ of her faith are as narrow as those of others:

These educated custodians of the Zoroastrian doctrine were no less rigid and
ignorant than the ‘fundos’ in Pakistan. The mindless current of
fundamentalism sweeping the world like a plague had spared no religion, not
even their microscopic community of 120 thousand (305-306).

The novel examines this very contentious and controversial issue of the mixed
marriages, a taboo as per the Parsee religious tenets. By making this a central theme
of the novel, Sidhwa unmask the other paradoxical face of the identity of her
community, which is believed to be quite adoptive and assimilating and hence hybridized. It may be flexible with regard to dress-code, language or food-habits and cuisine or various rites and rituals they might have accepted from the hegemonic community over a period of time but there is no compromise about mixing the genes and endanger the purity of their race. Through this novel Sidhwa reflects on this issue which has very serious ramifications and implications for the Parsee community. The precepts of the prohibitions on proslytization and mixed marriages were, in fact, laid down as among the conditions imposed by the King of Sanjan, Jadi Rana, to allow asylum to the persecuted Parsees over a millennium ago (Kulke, 1978: 28). However, their repercussions cause grave concern today, as the issues are linked with the survival of the community. Though there is no clear mention of the prohibition of the mixed marriages, it is very clear that they are not allowed only with the purpose of keeping in line with the purpose behind these conditions, i.e. to prevent proselytization. The Indian society has been patriarchal for centuries and hence, the Parsee man’s wife from the other faith and their children can be initiated into the Zoroastrian faith but not the woman and her outcaste husband and their children. The family and the community lose their daughters in such inter-faith marriages. It is going to happen in the case of Feroza in Brat. The above stated preconditions and their innuendos are nothing but a ploy by the ruler to ask for more bending and compromise on the part of the Parsees if they wanted the much-desired shelter. And the Parsees had to give in and bend down to more assimilation into the hegemonic community. The hybridization had been demanded only to certain extent, as mentioned earlier, and not regarding the mixing of the genes resulting into conversion. In that case, Zareen’s question, as a mother of a daughter, has a valid point of gender discrimination and injustice to the Parsee girls marrying outside the community. It is high time for the Parsee high priests to think and decide on this issue once and for all, in favour of the survival of the community. The seemingly endless dichotomy between the Reformists and the Orthodox should resolve at some point. After proving their faithfulness to the laid down conditions and getting absorbed in the Indian society with exemplary humility, the Parsees, at this juncture, can afford to be more flexible in this country which is as good as their home by now. After the division of the Indian subcontinent, there are now India and Pakistan having the Hindu and Muslim majorities respectively.
After receiving the letter from Feroza declaring her intentions to marry an American Jew, Zareen and Cyrus are in distress and the whole lot of their relatives and close friends come down to them to impart their useful and well-meant advice. The Ginwallas are thankful for the community’s support in helping them to sort out the problem that has arisen so suddenly and unexpectedly. Sidhwa writes:

For the subject was much larger than just Feroza’s marriage to an American. Mixed marriages concerned the entire Parsee community and affected its very survival. God knew, they were few enough. Only a hundred and twenty thousand in the whole world. And considering the low birth rate and the rate at which the youngsters were marrying outside the community – and given their rigid non-conversion laws and the zealous guardians of those laws – Parsees were gravely endangered species (268).

There had been acrimonious arguments between the elders and the youngsters, who had grown considerably in the four years Feroza had been away, at the first hastily summoned family conference in Zareen’s seating room. The youngsters, obviously, could not understand the gravity of the issue and also the reason for such prolonged discussions.

Bunny, Feroza’s cousin, says very casually and innocently, “For God’s sake! You are carrying on as if Feroza’s dead! She’s only getting married, for God’s sake!” (268) She is sternly scolded by her mother Jeroo and the teenagers are explained the cause of the worry of the elders by citing various examples from the community. They are told that Parsee girls are excommunicated once they marry out. Perin Powri was the latest casualty. Having defied her family to marry a Muslim, she had died of hepatitis four years later. Honouring her last wishes, Perin’s family had flown her body to Karachi to be disposed of in the dokhma or as the British had dubbed it, the ‘Tower of Silence’. Her body was denied accommodation in the Karachi dokhma and the priests refused to perform the last rites. It is believed that without the utamana ceremony, the soul cannot ascend the crucial ‘Chinwad Bridge’ and the poor soul remains horribly trapped in a limbo. Perin Powri’s body was eventually buried in a Muslim graveyard; and the poor woman’s appalling fate was dangled as an example of the evil consequence of such an alliance. Another example of a misguided woman Roda Kapadia who had married a Christian was not allowed into the room with her grandmother’s body and was made to sit outside on a bench like a leper. These
instances were narrated by the elders to ‘demotivate’ the younger generation from such mixed marriages. Sidhwa wants to highlight the gender parity and the injustice done to the females by their patriarchal community. She is on the side of the young progeny of her community as she clearly conveys her views through Zareen when she is impressed by David’s eligibility for her daughter. Caught in a dilemma, Zareen looks forward to with a vague confidence that the controversy would be resolved in an enlightened manner as after all, her community was educated and progressive. These are Sidhwa’s views expressed ironically because it is a known fact that the Bombay Parsee Panchayat, the centre of authority on community matters had inclined to be conservative. Zareen felt suddenly aligned with the thinking of the liberals and reformists. So is Sidhwa. She opines through Zareen:

Perhaps the teenagers in Lahore were right. The Zoroastrian Anjuman in Karachi and Bombay should move with the times that were sending them to the New World (288).

Sidhwa, too, seems to consent that the authorities of her community should rethink to loosen this dogmatic grip and conform to the need of the time.

The paradox here is indeed, obvious. It adds to the irony that runs throughout the novel. Novy Kapadia rightly points out:

The Ginwallas fail to realize that the journey to the USA (the New World) will broaden Feroza’s thinking and open up further avenues for her. She will become ‘modern’ in the truest sense of the world. By thinking for herself she will challenge traditional views, static orthodoxy and grow beyond the confines of communality and the norms of a patriarchal society (Kapadia, 1996c: 188).

Sidhwa suggests that Feroza’s short trip to the USA was supposedly a learning process, a crash-course in modernization but instead of returning she stays back as a student and turns ‘too modern’ for her patriarchal and seemingly liberal family. Feroza’s lifestyle changes completely as she turns more introspective and journeys inwards seeking her individuality. Her growing awareness about her own self, her self-quest is initiated with the training lessons from her uncle and mentor Manek, her friend, philosopher and guide. Then onwards Feroza learns each and every moment
through her college experiences, her relationships with her room-mates Jo, and later with Gwen and Rhonda and the lesbians Shirley and Laura and also from her friend Shashi and beau David. Like Lenny, Feroza too is the protagonist of this *bildungsroman*, a novel of self-education. The author shows that Feroza is a typical girl of the subcontinent, initially shy, conservative and helpless but willing to strive. She and Manek, represent their Parsee community and milieu with an inherent fondness for western style and ready to change for better, freer life-style. Because of this inclination to hybridise and assimilate both of them absorb the culture-shock very soon without much of the pangs of homesickness, especially Feroza alters her lifestyle by learning to drive, drink, dance and use a more direct and less polite language mixed with slang. The meek and docile Feroza who at Lahore was hesitant to talk to young boys, now flirts with Shashi, an Indian student at the University of Denver where she studies Hotel Management. Later, her tempestuous love-affair with David, an American Jew, disintegrates due to her mother’s interference. So, in this story of self-discovery, a *bildungsroman* in the true sense, the awareness that Feroza acquires, ironically isolates her from her Parsee heritage. But Feroza is undisturbed by the frigidity and insularity of her religion. She and David had decided to be Unitarians. It is a different matter that Zareen later succeeds in demoralising David, by talking constantly about the ‘exotic’ rites and rituals of the Parsee wedding which frighten David. He, being a very private and reserved person, feels alienated and backs out. Feroza, though depressed for a while, after the break-up gains her equipoise very soon. She has matured enough to realize that no one could take her religion away from her, as she carried its essential spirit in her heart, prayed intensely when in distress, and hence did not need to go a temple to worship. Latha Rengachari rightly comments:

> While her reaffirmation in the Parsee faith is not post-modern, her means of coming to terms with it are decidedly post-modern, concurrent to her condition of exile. She decides that since she carries the Holy Fire of her religion in her heart always, it is unnecessary to confine the practice of her faith within the stuffy Parsee religious establishment in Lahore. Feroza learns to carry her religion around within her as part of the religio-cultural baggage that every migrant carries around on her/ his travels (Rengachari, 2001: 70).
After the break-up, Feroza realizes that her healing can take place only in America and that there was no going back to Pakistan for her. She does not wish any backward change as she feels that she is on the point of no return. Her life has taken a different direction from that of her friends in Lahore. She enrolls for a course in Anthropology at the University of Arizona. Like her friends in Lahore the domesticity involving children, servants and other household preoccupations does not interest her at present. All this can wait for a while. She can think this way because she is in America. In Lahore, the pressure to marry would have made such attitude impossible. Immigration has brought such an irrevocable transformation in Feroza that from a naïve and innocent girl in the beginning of the novel she has become a self-assertive and confident young woman eager to exercise the infinite options that America offers her. In a review, Edit Villarreal suggests that the coming-of-age theme is closely linked with the theme of immigration in Sidhwa’s novel:

Coming of age is never easy. Coming of age as a woman is even harder. But coming of age as a female immigrant in a foreign country may be the most difficult of all. For any woman born into societies with restrictive social and political codes, however, immigration may be the only real way to come of age (Villarreal, 1993: 7).

Immigration imparts wings of freedom to an individual who after crossing the boundaries of region, culture and milieu tastes the fruits of independence. After attaining her self-hood and maturity Feroza, too, does not wish to be restricted by the conventional ways of her community. She has become an ‘American Brat’ in her mother’s words (279) but Zareen too knows that Feroza is now capable to be on her own. Feroza realizes what her mother has done to David to lead to their break-up but she is prepared to struggle her way into the new free world, to exercise her independence in choosing what she wants to do and whom she wishes to marry. She thinks:

There would never be another David, but there would be other men, and who knew, perhaps someday she might like someone enough to marry him. It wouldn’t matter if he was a Parsee or of another faith. She would be more sure of herself and she wouldn’t let anyone interfere. It really wouldn’t matter; weren’t they all children of the same Adam and Eve? As for her religion, no one could take it away from her; she carried its fire in her heart (317).
She is surer of herself and her choices. She does not renounce her religion and is at peace with herself saying her prayers. In the words of Indira Bhatt,

She has decided to chart her own cultural heritage, journeying through the Pakistani Islamic culture and western culture of America. Hers will be a new way of life, her personal religion intact coupled with the western freedom to choose her life-style (Bhatt, 2001: 98).

Feroza’s journey to America serves the novel in two ways: it is her journey towards self-discovery and also serves to give the author as well as the protagonist that valuable objectivity which enables a fair and neutral evaluation and analysis of both the societies that they are affiliated to, “although the sense of dislocation of not belonging, was more acute in America, she felt it would be more tolerable because it was shared by thousands of new comers like herself” (312). Like other Third World women who are expatriates in the West, Feroza as well as Sidhwa are intensely conscious of their privileged status and value greatly the privileges granted to them in the West. Also like Manek, Feroza had become used to the seductive entitlements of the First World, its privacy and plenty. Even Zareen enjoyed the opulence and freedom the New World provided, though for the time being. “There was also the relief from observing the grinding poverty and injustices she could do so little to alleviate, the disturbing Hadood ordinances that allowed the victims of rape to be punished and the increasing pressure from the fundamentalists to introduce more Islamic laws of Shariat. These and the other constraints would crush her freedom, a freedom that had become central to her happiness. The abandon with which she could conduct her life without interference was possible only because of the distance from her family and the anonymity America provided (312).

Sidhwa’s female protagonist ‘celebrates’ the marginal status which expatriation affords her. She becomes reconciled to her marginality and sees it as a great freedom, a means of feeling at home anywhere. It is this acceptance of her marginality and the freedom attached to it that resolves the crisis of religious faith that she undergoes in America. She strikes a compromise, achieves a synthesis between tradition and modernity at the end. The novel concludes with her vowing to fight against injustices wherever she finds them, equipped as she is with a deeply ingrained and early awareness of political and state evils and to live by the ideals of generosity and
constancy she had grown up with. The stance which Feroza has adopted with her rebellious spirit ought to be supported from the multicultural perspective. As multiculturalism recognises the difference with respect and dignity, the dictum should be practised within the community too. Her difference and dissent from her community ought to be imparted recognition and she should be respected as an individual. Feroza, the rebel, is the ‘non-conformist member’ of her patriarchal Parsee community. If multiculturalism is to be promoted then the voices of resistance like Feroza’s should not be silenced, but amplified. And there were enough causes: “in the narrow vision of the world seen through the cold prisms of self-interest and self-pity” (313). “America is not all saks and skyscrapers” (81). It has its filth and poverty too. It is “the strangely paradoxical nation that dealt in “death”, and sold the world’s most lethal weapons to impoverished countries” (313). And “yet this paradox was shaping a New World, the future in microcosm, the melting pot in which every race and creed was being increasingly represented, compelled to live with and tolerate and integrate with the “other” and she would play her part however miniscule it was, in shaping the future” (313). She would manage her life to suit her heart; after all, the pursuit of happiness was enshrined in the constitution of the country she had grown to love, despite its growing knowledge of its faults and she would pursue her happiness her way” (314).

It is the multicultural policy of this First World country that attracts her. From the vantage point she is privileged as an expatriate, she can perceive the pros and cons of both the countries, i.e. that of exile and home. What Sidhwa tells about herself and about her handling of history in an interview to Chelva Kanagnayakam is true of her protagonist too – “yes, being a Parsee marginalises and it also gives a better perspective” (Kanagnayakam, 1995: 87). She, like her protagonist, is the ‘other’ in Pakistan, in more senses than one. She is considered ‘othered’ since she is of the minority Zoroastrian community living in Islamic Pakistan, and doubly marginalised because of her colonial education which puts her among the elite of the once colonized nation. Her marginality becomes more accentuated as she is a woman in a traditionally patriarchal Asian society, forced like all other women under patriarchy to take the backseat in the socio-historical context of the nation. The voices of the protagonist Feroza and her mother Zareen are the voices of marginalised Asian women who protest the narrowness of religion and social attitudes towards women,
and are pleas for more liberal and understanding socio-religious communities. The novelist has handled the contentious issue of the inter-faith marriage of her community and through that a larger issue of gender inequality with great maturity. The ambivalent ending conveys a lot. Evidently, the ending of the novel seems to uphold the orthodox view as Feroza does not marry David Press and Zareen, representing the orthodox elders and her community, wins. But Feroza has not changed her attitude. The mellowed Feroza, despite an estranged love-affair and general feeling of depression, prefers the struggle for freedom and self-fulfilment at the USA to the settled life, family and easy contentment like her friends in Lahore by marrying one of the Parsee suitors her mother talked about. Hence the novel ends with some repudiation of an empty and rigid tradition. Sidhwa hints at such repudiation, implicitly, through her mouthpieces Feroza and Zareen in their dilemmas.

*Brat* talks in detail of the increasing feeling of unease that the marginalized Parsee community feels in Pakistan. Sidhwa talks of how the religio-political pressures work authoritatively combined with the homogenous extremism exercised within the various communities and make the social life of the people more oppressive. In Pakistan, even the non-Islamic communities like the Parsees were affected by the increasing Islamic fundamentalism. Women, it is seen, are most affected by the dictates of narrow religious sanctions which propagate gender segregation. Zhulfikar Ali Bhutto propagated democratic dictums but after seizing power from him Zia-ul-Haq narrowed down the extremist hold by his martial laws. Fareedoon’s advice to be loyal to the rulers in answer to the pre-Partition anxiety about the Parsees (*Eaters*) and also Dr. Bharucha’s solution of not to move anywhere but to stay where they are after Partition (*Man*) have been implemented by the Parsees but they have not been at ease, especially the Pakistani Parsees unlike their Indian counterparts. Zareen complains about her daughter’s attitudes being affected by the laws. She says:

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’re Parsee, everybody knows we dress differently. When I was her age, I wore frocks and cycled to Kinnaird College. And that was in ‘59 and ‘60 – fifteen years after Partition! Can she wear frock? No. women mustn’t show their legs, women shouldn’t dress like this and women shouldn’t act like that, girls mustn’t play hockey or sing or dance! If everything corrupts their pious little minds so
easily, then the mullahs should wear burqas and stay within the four walls of their houses! (10).

Zareen fears her daughter would sound backward in comparison to her fraternity in Bombay. Here too, it is, as it were, Sidhwa speaks through Zareen. This then is a comment on the regression in social mores that has taken place in Pakistan since independence, in the name of religion. The narrator goes on to add that it was not surprising that the Ginwallas’ most trivial conversation took a political turn. In Pakistan, politics with its special brew of martial law and religion influenced every aspect of day-to-day living (11). In Pakistan, Politics concerned everyone – from the street sweeper to the business tycoon – because it personally affected everyone, particularly women, determining how they should dress, whether they could play hockey in school or not, how they should conduct themselves even within the four walls of their homes (271). The novel narrates how the country’s aspirations and dreams, bottled up for thirteen years of martial law, had soared very high with Bhutto’s electoral victory. The return of democracy under Bhutto’s liberal leadership had made Pakistanis feel proud again to be a part of the modern world community. This elation did not last long as Bhutto could not live up to his promises and, under the political pressure, had to invite the army to supervise the law and order, only to find himself in the prison awaiting death-sentence. Zareen talks of the freedom that Bhutto momentarily brought to their lives:

I was really hopeful when Bhutto was elected. For the first time I felt it didn’t matter that I was not a Muslim, or that I was a woman. You remember when he told the women to sit with the men? That took guts! (11).

The novel thus shows how political changes affect every aspect of life in Pakistan. In 1979, the Hadood Ordinances had been introduced by General Zia without anyone knowing what they were and the Federal Shariat Court had also been established. People were suddenly caught unawares one day when they were surprised by reading the news of the case of Famida and Allah Baksh. The couple, who had eloped to get married, had been accused of committing adultery or Zina, by the girl’s father. They were sentenced to death by stoning. On an appeal to a higher court the charges were dismissed. Fortunately and ironically, stoning to death was declared un-Islamic because there was no mention of it in the Koran. But the shock that provoked the
massive wave of public indignation came with Safia Bibi’s case. The blind sixteen year old servant girl, pregnant out of wedlock as a result of rape, was charged with adultery. She was sentenced to three years’ rigorous imprisonment, the punishment of fifteen lashes and a fine of a thousand rupees. Safia Bibi’s father, in bringing charges against her assailant had been unwittingly trapped by the Zina ordinance. People were aghast by its unreasonability. It required the testimony of four “honourable” male eye-witnesses or eight female eye-witnesses to establish rape. The startled women, who had enjoyed the equal witness status under the previous law, realized that their worth had been discounted by fifty percent. Sidhwa’s genial humour underlying this distressing narrative makes it tolerable to the anguished readers. Since, it was scarcely possible to produce four male eye-witnesses given the private nature of the crime; the blind girl’s testimony against the assailant was not admissible. Being sightless, she was not considered a reliable witness. Since rape could not be proved, she was charged under a subcategory of rape: “fornication outside the sanctity of marriage.” Safia Bibi was not punished due to the pressures of the legal community and the women’s and human rights groups. The verdict was cancelled. But the way such cases were handled was really disturbing. Jehan Mian, a pregnant eleven years old orphan, was similarly charged. In view of her “tender age”, the judges reduced her punishment to ten lashes and one year rigorous imprisonment, to go into effect once her child was two years old. Feroza found the judge’s compassion revolting and a society that permitted such sentencing criminal. Undoubtedly, it is the novelist that opines through Feroza. The addition of Zina altered the entire legal picture of sexual crimes in Pakistan.

The victim of rape ran the risk of being punished for adultery, while the rapist was often set free. The gender bias was appalling. As against this, the dating practice, live-in relationship and other social mores in America called for a more accommodating view of the relationship between men and women. Though the society there too is patriarchal, the crevice between the genders is not so deep and hence the injustice not very conspicuous and painful. A country like India, even in the twenty first century, faces the problem of the skewed ratio of the girl-child birth-rate because of the unhealthy and gender biased attitude of the people. Shashi, Feroza’s Indian friend at Denver, takes her to meet his brother Deepak and his wife Mala from India. Mala was due to have her baby in a month or so. Deepak had specially arranged in this way
because it would get their child the coveted United States citizenship. Though it would be their first born, they expect a son. Shashi explains to Feroza that it is all right if it is a girl but the hint is that they would be happier to welcome a son. The couple’s expectations are in line with the social expectations of the country which they belong. A girl-child is born to them prematurely and Deepak faces to pay an exorbitant hospital bill unexpectedly. It is almost impossible for Deepak to pay and he decides to give the baby away. Feroza was incredulous when wailing Mala tells her: “He gave her away because she’s a girl! I bet he’d have gotten the money if she was a boy”. Deepak could have managed the money for a son but he became a heartless father for a daughter. He, then, struck a deal with the hospital authorities at the request of a social connection and solved the matter. It was difficult to afford even the meagre amount at the end but what this incident reveals is the gender parity set in the minds of the Third World people. They are mostly conditioned by the quaint socio-religious beliefs. The status of women in the Islamic society is much lower to their male counterparts whereas in India it is not as low as it is in Pakistan or any other Islamic country. The Occidental societies are even much more open compared to the Oriental ones like those of the Indian subcontinent. For girls, it is difficult not only to get birth in these societies but also to get the desired education, if fortunate enough to come to this world. In Feroza’s case, it is because of her parents and especially mother Zareen, quite progressive in her ideas, that Feroza gets the encouragement to at least finish her graduation. The Ginwallas’ decision to send Feroza abroad just for a better change and later to allow her to join a course there and stay back has met with a lot of opposition from Khutlibai, Zareen’s mother. She represents the older generation with conservative beliefs about the girls. The gender parity is very vocal and glaring when Khutlibai and Zareen argue with each other about Feroza’s education at America. Khutlibai vehemently registers her protest and rebukes Zareen for sending her daughter abroad as she herself has no trust in Manek, her own son, for looking after Feroza well. She is very much worried as to what would become of her poor child Feroza, raw and unmarried. Zareen reassures that a lot of people, some of the best Parsee families in Karachi are sending their daughters for education to America. Zareen is sure that they would be proud of her. And when the most vital question shoots from Khutlibai as to when she would marry, Zareen consoles, “when the right time comes, it is in God’s hands.” Khutlibai mourns at Zareen’s foolishness:
But even He can’t do anything if you chop off your own foot with an axe. Good Parsee boys are scarce and you know how quickly they are snapped up. The right time will come and go, and mark my words; the child will be lost to us! God knows what kind of people she’ll mix with. Drunks, seducers, drug addicts… (121).

When Zareen says that Manek would guard her like a lion and that she has full trust in Feroza and her own upbringing, she is sure that Feroza would never do anything to disgrace her family. Zareen’s over-confidence in her daughter and brother is not digestible to Khutlibai:

We don’t know what kind of friends Manek has. All I can do is pray he won’t marry some white tart. But he’s a man; he can get away with a lot. But who’ll marry a girl who’s been up to God knows- What? Our elders used to say, keep the girls buried at home (121).

Not being burdened with the familial and social expectations, the girls were not required to study abroad. If they persisted, and if the family could afford it, they might be affectionately indulged. It was also expedient sometimes to send them to finishing schools in Europe, either to prepare them for or divert them from marriage. Hence, it was only a privilege of the ‘spoilt brats’ of the rich families. Hence Sidhwa has deliberately gone for a female as the protagonist in her novel about the expatriate experiences. Her dislocation from the doubly marginalised social position to her relocation at the position that transcends those limits and barriers “to reclaim an autonomous and free identity” is the major thematic concern of the novelist (Jain, 1996: 161). History is a very important constituent of the postcolonial novel of expatriation. The writing of history as a part of this effort is important as the historical narrative is in itself a statement of the self and an expression of the conceptualization of the historical process. It goes over the past to understand the present and seeks to explain and when it fails to explain, it raises certain questions. When women turn to writing history, a third element appears on the scene – the traditionally ahistoric, the conventionally marginal is placed centre-stage. The women writer’s work does not only reflect the difference between colonial and postcolonial contexts but also reflects a feminization of history. “To feminize cultural information means to detach it from its active role within a historical field and to ground its meaning in a private sphere of gendered consciousness. Feminization here refers to the attempt to free history from
purely masculine pursuits, from hegemonic structures, from an ideological thrust and
to bring it closer to the actual happenings which work in several diverse directions
and cannot easily be accounted for by a cause and effect explanation” (Jain, 1996: 162). It is less ideologically directed and more an attempt to show the increased
blurring of the demarcations between male and female. The women writers see
history not only as structured by wars and conquests and the actions of men, but as
identified in the interaction of women and in the cultural traditions of society. Sidhwa
in her novels, *Bride, Brat* and *Man* deals with history – pre and post colonial - past
and present – and seeks to feminize it in the above fashion, with an active
interrogation of the woman’s position in that historical/socio-political situation.

*Brat*, like Mistry’s *Journey* and *Balance*, is preoccupied with the drawbacks of
democracy and the anarchy that has overtaken the newly formed nation-states of the
subcontinent. Like other immigrant novels, it is concerned with the socio-political
situation in the writer’s home-country, in this case Pakistan, and draws upon the
subcontinent’s religious and political history which forms the backdrop of the
narrative. It is a socio-political critique of a bleak and grim society that suffers under
political instability, military suppression and increased Islamic fundamentalism. All
the three novels of Sidhwa, *Crow, Man* and *Brat*, deal with the small Parsee
community and portray the lives of the Parsee characters as members of a
marginalized minority community in Islamic Pakistan. The Parsees of the 40’s at the
time of Independence were more confident of their own place and status in society,
their identity and religion, cultural mores in the Indian subcontinent and also in the
newly formed nation-states of Pakistan and India than the insecure and anxious
Pakistani Parsees under General Zia-Ul-Haq, in the 80’s, forty years later. Even in
Mistry’s novels *Journey* and *Matters*, it is the similar kind of anxiety, fear and
insecurity that the post-colonial Indian Parsees feel under the chaotic rule of
Emergency as well as the “Aamchi Mumbai” regionalism of the Shiv-Sena in Bombay.

Though Feroza’s female expatriation blurs the gender marginality in the postmodern
western society emphasizing one’s individuality, her identity as an Asian immigrant
still makes her feel the ‘other’, as many like her feel so, i.e. Manek, Jamil, Shashi et
al. The Parsee identity of the ‘diasporic community’ continues to exist in their western
diaspora too. The identity-crisis still persists even though they are prone to westernization or ready to assimilate and adopt in either society, Oriental or Occidental. Hence, the anxiety for a secure and peaceful life persists. Manek and Feroza do their best to be accepted in the American society. Manek does not mind selling Bibles during his initial struggling period or later change his name to ‘Mike’ for his American survival and to be accepted as one of them. He is desperate in teaching Feroza the American ways of life. He gets irritated by Feroza’s habit of interrupting during the conversation:

As I was saying, if there is one thing Americans won’t stand, it’s being interrupted. It’s impolite. It’s obnoxious. You’ve got to learn to listen. You can’t cut into a conversation just as you like. You’ll be humiliated. Learn from someone who knows what he’s talking about (101).

Manek’s tone of voice and choice of words finally declared to Feroza all the pent-up hurt within him and the pressures he had been subjected to, not only that afternoon, not only since she had arrived from Pakistan, but since Manek had arrived in America. The impatient and boisterous Feroza suddenly felt sympathetic and understanding. She could only guess as to how he had been taught American ways and manners. He must have endured countless humiliations. And his experiences – the positive and the negative – had affected him, changed him not on the surface but fundamentally. From the day one Feroza had started feeling the pressures of the American domination when she was subjected to the stern interrogation from an immigration officer at the New York airport. Change has started taking place in her even without her knowledge. The pressures of the locale and the milieu on an individual are so high that change is inescapable. If one does not succumb to these pressures than the feeling of being the ‘other’ begetting alienation and estrangement is also unbearable. It is true for any diasporic community anywhere in the world any time. Feroza’s backward change as a Parsee girl in Pakistan worries her parents. Cyrus, her father thinks:

I think Feroza is confused by these sudden switches in attitude. She probably feels she has to conform, be like her Muslim friends. There are hardly any Parsee girls her age. She wants you to be like her friends’ mothers, that’s all (12).
An individual’s urge to be accepted has a winning edge over one’s being. Feroza is very keen and attentive when Manek instructs her and her Americanization is worked up faster. By the time Feroza reaches America, Manek has been well-versed in American ways and means and feels superior to his callow niece. Even before going to America when excited Feroza talks to Manek, the talk is permeated with the flavour of American hegemony exercised through racism. Manek addresses Feroza as a ‘Third World Paki’. Clever Feroza retorts that he was also the same and not ‘some snow-white Englishman’. Feroza is light-skinned and not only do the Parsees but, for that matter, any of the Oriental people, have the fascination for fair complexion. Manek tells Feroza not to come with that ‘gora’ complex to America. He says, “If that’s what you think, you’re in for a big shock” The unaffected Feroza replies, “Black, brown, white are all the same to me. We are all God’s creatures.” But Manek cuts her off abruptly and tells her to drop that ‘white’ complex that the Parsee have because Feroza would be considered among the brown Asians, however fair she is. She asks that touchy question to herself and her parents, “Why am I a Paki Third Worlde?” (26-27). This is a key question asked by Sidhwa herself.

During the process of assimilation Feroza, time and again, feels this ‘otherness’ not only about her skin-colour but also about her Oriental birth and grooming as an over protected Asian woman. The humiliation she faced at the Kennedy Airport makes Manek teach her the very first lesson as she steps in the New World, “And you better forget this honor-shonar business. Nobody bothers about that here” (66). One needs to be practical, thick-skinned and humble. Humility is the need of the time, the first lesson Feroza learnt. One is reminded of the ironical statement by Faredoon Junglewalla in Eaters that need is the sweetest thing in the world. Manek, who has already undergone a change, wants his stubborn, clear-headed and proud niece to change too. To accelerate this change, he hurts her self-respect by very often calling her ‘desi’. Manek, the tutor’s nose is very sensitive when he once announced, “I can smell a ‘desi’. I bet there’s an Indian or a Paki in the room. One can smell a native from a mile” (73). Finding that Feroza is that smelly ‘desi’, he preaches her to use a deodorant. Though himself a native and one among the ‘desis’, Manek flaunts his superior air, “That’s the trouble with you ‘desis’. You don’t even know what a deodorant is, and you want to make an atom bomb!” He continues his harangue about the backwardness of the Third World:
Are we struck in the middle ages because we were colonized? Because we are illiterate? Because we don’t have enough technology to make atom bombs? ... It’s because we squander time! It is the single most precious commodity besides money, and we act as if we are millionaires in eternity… He becomes very loud and dramatic in this speech, forgetful of the people around. When Feroza reminds him that people are looking at them, he says, They are Americans, they will not waste their time on usss. Only illiterate natives like you, from Third World countries, waste time. The eloquent, assertive and obstinate Feroza got irritated and flushed with anger retorts, You Third World native yourself! It’s my time and my life, and I’m answerable to no one but my parents and my God! (77).

And Feroza learns many more things from her uncle Manek who is in his sophisticated American persona. In the process, sometimes she is confused when she is so thrilled by the exhilaratingly free and new culture and forgets her own present now becoming a past identity and the strictures imposed on her conduct as a Pakistani girl. For quite some time, she oscillates between two conflicting feelings before she sets her feet firm in America: the sense of acute loss and the pleasure of being in a new free world. She became nostalgically conscious of the gravitational pull of the country she had left behind. “Her sense of self, enlarged by the osmosis of identity with her community and with her group of school friends, stayed with her like permanence” (52). Along with this feeling, she felt a strange awareness within her. “It was a heady feeling to be suddenly so free -- for the moment, at least of the thousand constraints that governed her life”.

But unknowingly, Feroza is readily stepping into different kinds of constraints laid and expected from an expatriate by the American hegemony. Through Manek she learns that in America one does not get something for nothing (110), and that “you’ve got to skim what you can off the system, otherwise the system will skim you (144). Also he insists upon her to shun the ‘desi’ manner of licking the fingers while eating and accept the American etiquette, “you’ve got to stop eating with your fingers. It makes them sick” (145). This is how it is. The expatriates have to act and behave in a way that is approved by the hegemonic people. They have to mould and change so as to make the dominant people happy. Their habits, likes and dislikes are expected to be dropped so as to please the Americans! Despite Feroza’s protests Manek persists, “It’s all very nice and cosy to be ‘ethnic’ when we’re together but those people won’t find
it ‘ethnic’, they’ll just puke” (145). Manek takes care to conduct a thorough crash-course in American survival for Feroza and is very happy that Jo, Feroza’s room-mate at Twin Falls is an American. Once she lived with the Americans, she would learn a lot.

Feroza’s talking and dressing underwent a drastic change in Jo’s company. But while metamorphosizing Feroza still had that deep down bewilderment. “At about this time, she also became aware of her different colour and the reaction it appeared to have on strangers and on some of her classmates. Not that her classmates were discourteous. A few tended to avoid her, and these she disregarded. But some in their anxiety to be civil were exaggeratedly effusive and awkward in her presence. She sensed she was not accepted as one of them. Dismayed by her own brown skin, the emblem of her foreignness, she felt it was inferior to the gleaming white skin” (152-53).

The ‘otherness’ which Feroza feels as a foreigner becomes more pronounced when it comes to socializing with boys. There is no such thing as dating in Pakistan and it is highly embarrassing for Feroza as she does not know how to behave or respond. She cannot be as casual and confident as Jo. She feels like a fish out of water. But then with Jo and her company’s efforts and encouragement she comes out of that painful shell. One fine evening, she discovered that they were talking to her; she felt their genuine interest and it occurred to her that they liked and accepted her. But Feroza feels that she can never be as spontaneous as Jo. Though her behaviour was modest, she never got over her feeling of guilt. With such feeling of uneasiness Feroza succumbs to the rare but strong bout of homesickness which she hardly feels. She unbearably missed her home and people (162-64). With the pressure of constraints deeply embedded in her she feels she has taken a phenomenal leap and is growing the wings of freedom which her family and society there in Lahore would never approve of. Her father had ordered that young man to get out of his house as he was trying to persuade Feroza to act in a play on the Annual Day. He would not have his daughter fool around with Muslim boys or any boys. It was only due to Zareen’s over-enthusiasm for ‘forwardness’ that they had decided to send Feroza to America. After staying on for her studies and away from Manek’s observation Feroza finds herself completely independent and one among the unsupervised lives of the young people in America.
Feroza feels that living with Jo has helped her to understand the Americans and their ‘exotic’ culture and also how much an abstract word like ‘freedom’ could encompass. The more Feroza understands America and its people, the more disturbed she is because she can view everything very clearly from her expatriate perspective. With a politically acute and restless mind she can decipher the duality and double standards of America at the core of its relations to its own citizens and to those of poor countries like hers. Even after absorbing so much of Americanism, she is, after all, a Third Worlder! She eventually came to the conclusion that it troubled her because America was so consummately rich and powerful and the inconsistencies of its dual standards, the injustices it perpetuated, were so dynamic and so brazen. Not that Pakistan or other countries were paragons, but then no one expected any better of Pakistan -- it laid no claim as the leader of nations, the grand arbitrator of justice and human rights (172). Zareen, too, feels the same fear and loathing during an unexpected encounter with an American in Pakistan. Zareen acutely felt the American conceit and its political hegemony during the conversation. When asked by him about Bhutto, Zareen enthusiastically says, “He’s my hero -- the Champion of the poor, of women, of the minorities and the underprivileged people – of democracy” (175). Zareen felt that the talk about her social work for the disadvantaged people like destitute women and orphaned children was of no use because she was not talking to somebody her equal. She was being looked down upon as a bloody Third Worlder. She became strongly aware of his insolent demeanour and hated to answer his next question whether there would be troubles or riots if Bhutto was hanged the next day. Zareen knew that he already had the answer. For him, democracy and social justice, as it were the despicable things, something to be ashamed of and done away with. He represented America’s oriental and neo-colonialist attitude that manoeuvres the politics as well as the economy of the Third World countries. Ironically, the Americans do not believe in interference but America interferes in the politics of many weaker countries to maintain its own powerful status in the world. Later Zareen expresses her disgust about that unchivalric corpulent American to Cyrus:

You know what I hated most? The man did not think of me as a person, as somebody. I was not Zareen, just some third-rate Third-Worlder, too contemptible to be of the same species. He was so cynical; He asked the most
simplistic questions, as if the complexity that makes up our world does not exist. I’ve never felt the way he made me feel…valueless…genderless” (177).

Exactly a month after this conversation, Bhutto was hanged but there were no processions or riots as expected by the people like Zareen. She had thought correctly that even if there were some troubles, it would be controllable as all the leaders of the Peoples’ Party were either in prison or under dire threat of some kind or the other. In this novel, Sidhwa chronicles Pakistani history and a turning point in the nation’s existence. She notes that the larger tragedy was that General Zia had the support of all the major political forces in the country and all the country’s major institutions – the military, the bureaucracy and the judiciary. She proves to be a very accurate political commentator when she has Zareen writing bitterly to Feroza, “I realized then that there is no such thing as a ‘spontaneous uprising’ unless it is sanctioned” (178). Such bitterness about America’s domineering interceptions is also expressed by Mistry in his Journey (76) through the ironically humorous comments put in the mouth of Dinshawji. Sidhwa does not give a one-way picture. After Bhutto’s hanging, there is still hope among the lay people that another saviour, the champion of democracy would arrive soon. Even at the far end of the multicultural America, Feroza’s cosmopolitan classmates and friends understood the plight of the common people at Pakistan and expressed their sympathetic condolences to Feroza, the sole representative of the country. It is the valuable concern shown by Feroza’s counsellor, Emily Simms that comforts Feroza the most. She knew how emotionally involved Feroza was with Pakistani politics, particularly Bhutto. She plied Feroza with coffee, tissues and cookies and told her, “I know just how you must feel, honey, being so far away from your family and home. But please think of us as your family. We’re very fond of you. We love you” (183). The Teachers in Feroza’s classes stopped to have a word with her and the students she had never seen smiled at her and consoled her. Sidhwa does not miss to take note of the American commonalty’s multicultural humanism that co-exists with the American despise for the Third World.

In fact, Manek and the people like him in diaspora are all praises for the First World country they settled into in spite of the disrespectful and discriminating attitude of the people there. Though they compromise with their identity, they just make a happy face and talk very tall about America’s riches and opulence like Manek only because
their dollar dream is realized. The loss of cultural and social milieu can never be compensated. For Parsees, their identity which has been pushed to the margins in the subcontinent in the postcolonial times is nowhere noticeable in the western diaspora. Of course, they would like to be better identified or recognized as ‘Parsees’ and not as Indians or Pakistanis or brown Asians. The identity-crisis which Sidhwa herself has felt as an expatriate has been felt by Feroza too, though covertly. It is also evident in Mistry’s tales *Squatter* and *Lend Me Your Light*. Feroza has never analysed her thoughts and casual reactions that way but Zareen does. After Bhutto’s hanging, the implementation of the martial laws during Zia’s rule brought autocracy, anarchy and terrific gender injustice. Feroza hears about various such legal suits and regrets that she had not been informed about them in detail through newspaper clippings. She said to her mother, “I want to know what’s going on here. After all, it’s my country!” (237). “At that time Zareen did not mention the innuendo, the odd barb that had suddenly begun to fester at the back of her consciousness. The insinuation that her patriotism was questionable or that she was not a proper Pakistani because she was not a Muslim hurt her and disturbed her. What was she then? And where did she belong, if not to the city where her ancestors were buried? She was in the land of the seven rivers, the land that Prophet Zarathustra had declared as favoured most by Ahura Mazda. What if, on the strength of this, the 120 thousand Parsees in the world were to lay claim to the Punjab and Sindh?” (237-38). Zareen smiled at her own absurd idea but such comments were a passing thing. The over-zealous Islamization fostered by General Zia encouraged the religious chauvinism and made the marginalized people like her – the minorities vulnerable to petty ill-will. When the Americans consoled Feroza on Bhutto’s death, they thought Pakistan was Feroza’s home country and valued her attachment to it. Even Feroza herself had believed it to be her native country and never questioned about her belongingness to it nor felt that acute sense of alienation at any point of time so far. Her ‘otherness’ in Pakistan, the country of her ancestral settlement/diaspora, has started to be felt with the recent political development.

In America, Feroza has been scathingly critical of America, of its bullying foreign policy and ruthless meddling in the affairs of vulnerable countries, in her discussions with her room-mates and friends. Like Manek, Feroza too, flaunting her foreign-returned status back in Pakistan, defends America in unexpected ways. After talking
about the pros and cons of America as well as Pakistan, Feroza was disconcerted to discover that she was misfit in a country in which she had fitted so well. Although Zareen had not mentioned those slighting remarks, “Feroza’s subconscious had registered subtle changes in her mother’s behaviour. She could not have put her finger on them, but they were there in the wariness that sometimes flickered across Zareen’s face and in a barely noticeable hesitation in her choice of words. Feroza, absorbing the undercurrent at some hidden level of her consciousness, found her sense of dislocation deepen” (239).

But this feeling of dislocation and non-belongingness evaporates, not gradually but suddenly and almost immediately the moment Feroza meets David. The irresistible and tumultuous attraction they feel for each other make them comfortable with each other as if they have been familiar to each other since long. As usual, Sidhwa narrates from Feroza’s angle:

She was amazed at how comfortable she felt with this incandescent being. His sentiments, his aspiration were so like hers, and those of her family. And yet it was as if she had taken a leap across some cultural barrier and found herself on the other side of it to discover that everything was comfortingly the same and yet the grass was greener. She never thought she could have felt this complete trust in a stranger to take her across the unchartered terrain of her emotions (251).

Though Feroza believes that underneath the religious and cultural differences, she and David are alike, the elders of her community do not think so. It is difficult for Feroza to make them or even her mother understand what she feels. Their religions, cultures and various rites and rituals are different but the sentiments behind them are more or less the same. Feroza is unable to explain that unifying link between their diversities. She discovers this oneness when she attended a Sabbath meal with Adina and Abe Press, David’s parents. Different though the Jewish rituals are, Sidhwa suggests that basically all religions are the same:

Adina had covered her head with a lace scarf, lit the candles, lightly covered her face with the palms of her hand and silently prayed. Her gestures and the ritual were very like those performed by her mother and grandmother when they prayed before the atash....
Then Abe held up the Kiddush cup filled with wine and said a short prayer. He passed the cup around so that each of them could take a sip of the sweet wine,
uncovered a loaf of golden, braided bread, broke it and passed it around too. The bread was delectable. Breaking bread, sharing salt - these concepts curled in her thoughts with comforting familiarity – they belonged also to the Parsee, Christian and Muslim traditions in Pakistan (256-57).

For the first time, then, Feroza had become conscious of their religious differences. They had sorted out the matter by deciding to be the members of the Unitarian Church. But that is their personal resolution and does not solve the problem of society. Feroza had to put up with the intolerance and interference from her elders and result is the break-up. But the affair had deepened Feroza’s understanding. She would not take a back turn. She might face with another possibility of happiness any time in life provided she stays in America, potential of the endless opportunities for the development of the individual spirit in the midst of its multicultural reality. It is the hub of the multicultural, multinational and multi-religious peoples celebrating the free spirit in an individual. The American experience does allow Sidhwa to expand her canvas. In each of her earlier books, *Eaters* and *Man*, Sidhwa has included people from different ethnic and religious groups, often to question religious and ethnic prejudices. In *Bride*, she includes Muslims and Sikhs, people from the plain and hilly region. Though in *Eaters* her focus is on the Parsee community, she refers to the other communities with which the Parsees living in Lahore come in contact and interact. In *Man*, however, Sidhwa makes her most incisive comments on religious prejudices. At the beginning of the novel all communities -- Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, and Parsees -- coexist peacefully. Then comes the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. Religious differences surface to tatter the social multicultural fabric. Hindus turn against Muslims, Muslim against Hindus. Terrified that they will be killed, Hindus convert to Muslims or Christians. In *Brat* too, Sidhwa shows the minority communities like the Parsees living congenially with majority Muslim community. Zareen frequently worships at the shrine of the Muslim saint Data Gunj Baksh despite being a faithful Zoroastrian. Similarly, one cannot question the loyalty of Gustad in *Journey* when he goes to the church of Mt. Mary with his Christian friend Malcolm for prayers. Here, too, Zareen has full faith in the saintly powers of the shrine and visits it whenever in distress or feeling depressed. Sidhwa writes:

> Given the medley of religions that exist check-by-jowl in the subcontinent and the spiritual impulse that sustains them, people of all faiths flock to each
other’s shrines and cathedrals. They came to the fifteenth-century sufis’s shrine from all over Pakistan and before Partition they came from all over the Northern India (19).

In fact, all the non-Muslim families like that of Zareen’s were accustomed to live with the predominance of the Muslim population and their culture in the region. In America, at times Feroza feels unbearably homesick about her relatives and friends and even she misses “the raucous chorus of the Main Market mullahs.” Cyrus could take his post lunch nap, undisturbed by the “mosques’ rowdy stereo system” (281). “Zareen was always amazed and mildly resentful, at how peacefully her husband slept through the blasts while she shot up in bed, her heart thumping. Sometimes when someone of the family was sick, she sent messages requesting the mullah to tone down the volume. Being a frequenter of the mosque, the bearded cook wielded influence with his pals, and Zareen enjoyed the illusion that she exercised some control over her environment. She also misses those mosque stereos in America (282).

But to live accepting the co-existence of the multi-religious and multi-cultural milieu is one thing and to accept the matrimonial bond between two different religio-cultural entities is a different matter. Marriage is not just an emotional, moral and legal bondage between two individuals but it is a social institution too. And for a strictly endogamous community of Parsees, it is an outright ‘no-no’, despite the respect they show for other communities, religions and cultures. Sidhwa hints at the problem of inter-community marriage in her first novel Eaters too. Yazdi, the second son of the successful businessman Faredoon Junglewalla, is a very sensitive boy and is aggrieved as his father refuses him permission to marry his childhood sweetheart, the Anglo-Indian Rosy Watson. Even Nariman’s father, in Mistry’s Matters, strongly refuses Lucy, a Christian match for his son. And Yezad too, in the same novel, is not ready to accept his son Murad’s affair with a Maharashtrian girl, Anjali. In all these cases, the Parsee men are not outcaste even after the inter-faith marriage as their family is accepted in the Parsee fold. Yet the orthodox parents are dead against them surprisingly. Through Faredoon’s speech Sidhwa shows the rationale behind the traditional Parsee opposition to any inter-community marriage. Faredoon says:

I believe in some kind of a tiny spark that is carried from parent to child, on through generations … a kind of inherited memory of wisdom and righteousness, reaching back to the times of Zarathustra, the Magi, the Mazdiasnians.
But what happens if you marry outside our kind? The spark so delicately nurtured, so subtly balanced, meets something totally alien and unmatched. Its precise balance is scrambled. It reverts to the primitive (Brat, 128-29).

In the novel, Sidhwa merely narrates and documents the Parsee theory as propounded by some Orthodox priests and dasturs about a ‘bonuk’ or a Parsee seed. She does not offer any critique nor does she conform to it. It is through Zareen she comments when Zareen is happy in finding a suitable nice match in David. Zareen had grown up following the religious precepts and had blindly accepted them. She had never doubted that she would marry a Parsee. Till now these issues had not affected her. But with Feroza’s happiness at stake and her strengthening affection for David, Zareen wondered about it. She found herself seriously questioning the ban on interfaith marriages for the first time. At such moments, she wished David was a Parsee -- or that the Zoroastrians would permit selective conversion to their faith. She had often opined how unfair it was that while a Parsee man who married a ‘non’ could keep his faith and bring up his children as Zoroastrians, whereas a Parsee woman could not. And it did not make sense that the ‘non’ man was not permitted to become a Zoroastrian; one could hardly expect their children to practise a faith denied to their mother. How could a religion whose Prophet urged his followers to spread the Truth of his message in the holy Gathas – the songs of Zarathustra – prohibit conversion and throw her daughter out of the faith? This is, indeed, a grave interrogation by Sidhwa too. Zareen was not sure anymore and felt herself suddenly aligned with the thinking of the liberals and reformists. It eased her heart to think that a debate on these issues was taking place. The reason behind selecting the core theme of the interfaith marriage of an expatriate female Parsee is Sidhwa’s own first-hand expatriate experiences and also the controversy raging round these issues in Bombay, as well as in Britain, Canada and America, where the Parsees have migrated in droves in the past few years. Sidhwa, through Zareen, expresses, without being overtly rebellious and confirming her stand that the various Anjumans would have to introduce minor reforms if they wished their tiny community to survive.

The Parsees’ anxiety for the purity of their race is paradoxical to their anxiety to assimilate and hybridize in order to survive. Manek and Feroza display the characteristic Parsee traits to adapt and endure in order to succeed and survive in
America. Their assimilation to the American way of life reflects a certain continuity of themes in Sidhwa’s novels. In her first novel *Eaters*, the Junglewallas, who have shifted to Lahore, prosper due to their adjustments and sycophancy to the ruling Britishers. Similarly, Manek, the Parsee Pakistani pioneer in expatriation at the USA displays the same traits of adaptability. Initiating under her ‘guardian angel’ Manek, Feroza begins to assimilate the independence of mind and spirit and the sturdy self-confidence offered by the New World, alien to her Third World experience and sheltered upbringing, so much so that she outgrows not only her mother Zareen but also uncle Manek and her American friend Jo.

Manek has drawn a limit of assimilation. For him the private and public lives are different. He has changed his name to ‘Mike’ for the Americans at the workplace, for his family it is still the old one. He would bend down to the need of time and can sell Bibles to earn his living. He enjoys the company of the liberated women but when it comes to marriage, he returns to Lahore and agrees to an arranged marriage within his community. There is a limit to the hybridization and it cannot be extended to that of genes. He chooses a docile Parsee girl Aban to whom ‘divorce’ is an ‘ill-omened word’. Aban is completely dependent in her position as the immigrant wife of a scientist educated in the US. Manek has prepared Feroza for the American life, but not his wife as Aban needs to be docile and not independent and assertive like Feroza to exercise his patriarchy in their matrimony. Such a choice reflects the Parsee psyche and a curious paradoxical attitude towards women. Westernised education for Parsee women is welcomed, as in the case of Feroza; yet female behaviour is codified and attempts are made to curtail any form of self-assertion. Sidhwa has deliberately chosen to narrate the case of Feroza marrying outside the community and not Manek whose interfaith marriage would not have been as problematic as Feroza’s. Sidhwa strikes at the point where her community is uncompromising. Manek and Feroza are foils to each other, though both of them are initiated into the process of acculturation in the western world. Both of them have assimilated the American social norms and codes of conduct but Feroza goes a step further in challenging her community’s rigid codes of matrimony. She believes in grasping the very essence of her religion and in not following the formal dogmas of it. The Parsee cultural mores which have already been hybridized during their millennium-long contact with the subcontinent could be further moulded, mixed and integrated with any other cultures they might come in
contact with. What Feroza believes more important is to conserve the essential Zoroastrian religion and its core values. Unlike Manek, she believes that their ‘Parseeness’ can be compromised but not their Zoroasrianism. Maybe these are the crevices and interstices of cultures which the new lot of Parsees in their latest western diaspora would like to dwell on and negotiate their identity unfolding a novel and more complicated phase. Their already hybridized Indian identity might unravel another more complex facet to cope with the new realities. Manek’s approach to deal with this new multicultural reality is quite conventional leading to insularity, whereas Feroza’s is much more open and unconventional reminding us about the other such pair of foils, i.e. Rusi and Homi in Desai’s *Elephants*.

With her American room-mate Jo Feroza understands the values of freedom and self-confidence and finds her days,” filled with excitement, joyous activity and ascending wonder” (215). She even outgrows Jo and acquires new friendship, knowledge and confidence that make her a happier person. She was “already flying” in the words of Father Fibbs who said once when invited in Manek’s attic,

> When you leave your Universities, you will test your wings. You’ll fly and fall, fly and fall.” It will hurt. You’ll be frightened. Don’t be. Your wings will become stronger (116).

Feroza thought that to be that far from home, to have to cope with strangers and mysterious rites, was itself a test. Father Fibs added,

> Then you’ll want to fly, taste of what Adam tasted, what Eve tasted, the bitter and the sweet, and discover the places you can fly to and fall from. And once you’re no longer afraid to fall, away you’ll soar – up, up, to where you need never fall (117).

At the end, after her excruciatingly painful estrangement from David and after tasting freedom, that bitter-sweet fruit of Adam and Eve, Feroza had fallen from that high place which she had discovered on her own.

The image of Father Fibs suddenly filled her mind’s eye. The emotional impact of his soliloquy had not lost its initial grip on her imagination. Had she flown and fallen and strengthened the wings he had talked about? He had told them not to be afraid. But she was. Her break with David still hurt so much,
especially the circumstances surrounding the break. If she flew and fell again could she pick herself again? May be one day she’d soar to that self-contained place from which there was no falling, if there was such a place (317).

Feroza’s flight of freedom with her strengthened wings of self-confidence continues to soar higher and higher, of course keeping her religious and cultural baggage intact with a broader and much more humane view, but refuses to be bound by the narrow confines of religion and culture. Lori Gravley-Novello calls these borders as “dangerous crossings” (Gravley-Novello, 1994: 90) or spaces as the more stable social limits of America offer little opportunity for the marginal to gain power within the interstices. According to Victor Turner (1974), the immigrant is usually marginal, someone who walks within more than one culture but who will never fully enter into a status position within the dominant social structure. Gravley-Novello thinks that the characters in Brat are searching to traverse margins into a position of greater autonomy, though not necessarily security. These characters do seem liminal/in-between instead of marginal. It seems possible that from her marginal/liminal position Feroza might attempt to find some balance between the interstices of cultures and become a hybrid/mestizo. By doing so she might be able to make a ‘home’ in the dominant social structure. She might find entry into the American mainstream as the metropolitan intellectual as her graduation in Anthropology indicates. Anyway, it would be questionable to gain influence within the system. What is certain is that unlike the women in Man who found places of influence in the margins of their society, Feroza would have a difficult time gaining the same power at that in-between/liminal position within the interstices of the multiple structures / systems.

Her journey of self-quest, a bildungsroman, is carried on with renewed vigour and hope into the mosaic multicultural environs of America. With more and more Parsees like Feroza undergoing their expatriate experiences, the future of the community with its rigid stand is grim, dark and miserable, unless the obstinate norms of the community are made liberal. The increased number of such inter-faith marriages would ultimately bring misery to either parents or children. The hangover of this gloom would undoubtedly affect the life of this already geriatric community. The future of the community can be brighter only by adopting malleable attitude.
WORKS CITED:


“When they (Parsees) compare their condition in India with that of their co-religionists in Persia (Iran) who were reduced until recently to a miserable state of persecution, they fully and rightly appreciate blessings, which they enjoy under the British Government.” (134)

“The closer union of the Europeans and Parsis is the finest thing that can happen to our race. It will mean the lifting up of a people who are lying low, though possessing all of the qualities of a European race.” (138)

“They, my children’s children, shall be taught that fidelity to the British Crown is their first duty – loyalty the first virtue.” (139)


The five conditions imposed by the king of Sanjan, Jadi Rana are as follows:

1. The Parsees’ high priest would have to explain their religion to the king.
2. The Parsees would have to give up their native Persian language and take on the language of the region.
3. The women should exchange their traditional Persian garb with the customary dress of the country.
4. The men should lay down their weapons.
5. The Parsees should hold their wedding processions only in the dark (Kulke, 28).

In the list of these five preconditions as stated by Novy Kapadia, the first one is not there. Instead, at the fourth place the condition which is laid is: venerate the cow. (Kapadia, 2001: 14-15) Due to this condition, the traditional Parsees still do not eat beef, though there are no religious taboos against eating the beef. It may just be to
respect the religious sentiments of the Hindu majority of the region of their new settlement. Similarly, the last stipulation was imposed so that the local population is not attracted by such a ceremony and hence the danger of conversion is minimized. The Parsees in the subcontinent still follow this tradition and do not allow outsiders in their Fire Temples, which is a further guarantee that they will not attempt any conversions to their religion.


Mukherjee, Meenakshi. “Inside the Outsider”, paper read at the fourth triennial conference in New Delhi, 2-8 January, 1977. (quoted in Sampat)


