CHAPTER V

THE MUFFLED TRUTH OF EXILE

Bapsi Sidhwa’s The Crow Eaters is a true depiction of the desperate nature of the Parsi community to fit into, and appease a foreign and superior ruling force, the simple technique of survival. It is more than a journey away from themselves, a breaking apart and fragmentation to effectively mould into the popular standards. The protagonist of the novel, Faredoom Junglewalla is representative of Parsi ambition, industry, thrift and unscrupulousness. Willing to walk ahead the throng and keen to climb the rungs of the social ladder, Faredoom knows exactly the way to success.

The very beginning of the novel shows Faredoom’s highlighting ambition in his decision to abandon the less impressive village greens and seek better prospects in the business city of Lahore. Faredoom’s insistent growth upwards is well planned. He knows the strategies to adopt and the thresholds to cover to reach the desired heights.

Perhaps Faredoom’s only bone of contention is his bickering mother-in-law, Jerbanoo, who is ever-complaining and unsympathetic in
Faredoom’s tenuous struggle to success. Faredoom is invariably conscious of his minority status and calls upon the imperial forces to present him with prominence and gaiety. His adopting British standards of living, willingness to mollify British officials are all well thought of methods to prove himself worthy of the infinite favors, they might consider for him.

Wealth and status is the ultimate aim of the succulently rich character of Freddy, and he does achieve it. In the beginning of the novel Sidhwa describes him as a strikingly handsome, dulcet-voiced adventurer,

“...he not only succeeded in carving a comfortable niche in the world for himself, but also earned the respect and gratitude of his entire community. When he died at sixty-five, a majestic grey-haired patriarch, he attained the rare distinction of being locally listed in the ‘Zarathusti Calendar of Great Men and women.” (The Crow Eaters p.1)

Though this records a magnificent achievement, the unwinding of events in the novel shows links to the dubious means Freddy resorted to in the process. Freddy is representative of his community’s steadfast policy of survival and fitting in. The objective to maintain identity and
position in society is shown as bordering on obsequiousness and public relations, rather than an honest doctrine of gratitude and fidelity to the Raj. The fawning is neither lauded nor attacked in the novel. It is depicted as the minority community’s means of survival and balancing of personal inadequacies.

“And where, if I may ask, does the sun rise? No, not in the East. For us it rises-and sets- in the Englishman’s arses. 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.”(The Crow Eaters p.4)

The Parsis, as an alien ethnic minority were quick to realize the limited nature of their say in society and rule, and thereby they recognised the need to be strictly loyal to the ruling mass, even if it meant shifting allegiances from time to time. Thus Freddy’s superficially humorous remarks, his slimy behaviour towards Charles .P. Allen, and his frequent visits to the government house to pay deference to the British Raj is symbolic of his community’s attitude of personal
thrive and prosperity. Moreover it was essential to the Parsis to practice their religion unhindered. Hence the amplification in Freddy’s and the rest of the characters’ servility can be viewed as an essential act to ensure peace, security and economic status in view of their marginal position.

Within the few pages Freddy provides his recipe for survival during the Raj by ‘buttering and marmalading’(The Crow Eaters p.101) British officials, but his relationship with the British remains one of expediency and affection. The novel is filled with lively full-blooded characters and follows the gradual change in Freddy’s life as he prospers; his children marry and increasingly multiply, adapting the English ways.

Freddy’s unscrupulousness and deceit is also interleaved with an account of his charitable deeds, a principle close to his religion. But Sidhwa shows that, the methods of charity which Freddy advocates in life does not make him an archetype of goodness, but has shades of self-promotion. Freddy is extremely grateful to Charles P. Allen, the deputy commissioner, who helped him get a trading licence with Afghanistan, and so showers him with gifts and favours. On another occasion, Freddy proves to be a messiah to Bobby Katrak, when he inadvertently drives
over a beggar. He demands Rs.50,000 for the expenses to bribe Mr. Gibbons the Inspector General of police, whereas the actual bribe was only for 10,000; the rest being stowed in his special kitty to be used on other prospects of charity and for himself. Freddy thus develops an altruistic image to augment his public image and create a noble and magnanimous appearance in society.

Freddy’s quirky, inaccurate English and his tendency to misquote English proverbs are used very effectively to heighten the humour. In the following passage, Freddy is enraged that Jerbanoo always seizes the choicest food at the family table.

“Wagging a long retributive finger across the table, wildly misconstruing the English text, he thundered “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings!” (The Crow Eaters p.24)

Regardless of the depths he can stoop to stay on top, he knows how to manage himself as a godfather of his community, to dispense favour and command, obedience and gratitude.

Bapsi’s mock-saga stages the battle between the two redoubtable figures, the patriarchal Faredoon (Freddie) Junglewalla and his mother-in-law Jerbanoo, against a backdrop of colonialism and
opportunistic obeisance to the British empire. Freddy’s mother-in-law, Jerbanoo is perhaps the funniest character to inhabit the pages of the book. A typical middle-aged widow, whining, complaining and nagging, she is Freddy’s mortal foe. She accompanies her daughter on their route to a better life, but she is apparently unnerved by the uprooting-ranting, mourning and loudly resigning herself to martyrdom, throughout the journey-the corners of her set mouth drooping progressively.

Putli, Freddie’s wife tries to soothe her distressed husband
“…After all don’t forget we have uprooted her…” “…She is puffed up with sorrow.” (The Crow Eaters p.24)

Jerbanoo engages herself in a spree of merry making, overeating and boisterous exertions as if to compensate for her natural joy making and falls ill. Jerbanoo spent a good part of her day at the roost on the charpoy, brooding like a philosophical owl. She becomes extensively nostalgic of her long departed relatives, recalling their death anniversaries and ordering costly masses for each of them. She generously turns into a riotous, hedonistic hooligan. (The Crow Eaters p.24)

The family goes on a trip to London, and Jerbanoo takes with her every bit of herself. She indulges in a storm of fret and fancy and throws tantrums and boisterously pounces upon their English hosts. She
categorically states that she wouldn’t wish to die in a foreign land, “…I want to go back to my Lahore” (The Crow Eaters p.126)

The whole novel is so witty, entertaining and unpretentious, full of ghastly characters, riotously funny. The rich and spicy characters make the novel a literary tapestry.

Faredoon’s wife, Putli (Urdu for puppet) is the traditional and dutiful Indian woman who does not think twice before she embarks on the journey with her husband, to Lahore. She is an ideal of Indian wifely submission, love and responsibility. She is equally understanding towards her children, even when one of them turns out to be a poet, and later a shaven-head saint rebelling against the family tradition.

But Putli is at a loss when it comes to resonating to a change in culture, and adopting alien culture. Thus when it was deemed fashionable to be educated in an English missionary school, by virtue of the social mobility it provided, Putli resists change and shows displeasure at an interaction of two cultures.

“What revolted Putli most was the demand that she, a dutiful and God-fearing wife, must walk a step ahead of her
husband. She considered this hypocritical and pretentious, and most barbarous.” (The Crow Eaters p.185)

But Freddy is able to prod her to attend formal tea-parties on the gracious lawns of the Government house, keen to advance and consolidate relationships with the influential. But Sidhwa places aptly Putli’s dilemma in the face of her husband’s insistence,

“Deep-rooted in the tradition of a wife walking three paces behind her husband, their deportment was as painful to Putli as being marched naked in public.”(The Crow Eaters p. 185)

Putli is vehemently disregarded by her daughter Yasmin, who adopted the changing customs and moral code with much ease, and is seen preceding her husband down the steps to mount a carriage and her insistence of equality with her husband. “Oh Mother! Hasn’t Papa been able to modernize you yet?” (The Crow Eaters p.187)

Putli is at the edge of a loss of identity unable to adapt the manners and customs of the ruling colonial power and the inability to understand the generation gap which comes in between her and the children.
The couple’s younger son, Billy is more comfortable with the family traditions and goes on to take on the business. Yazdi, who in violation of the traditions wants to marry a girl of doubtful respectability.

The second son of Faredoon Junglewalla, Yazdi’s character is portrayed skilfully by Sidhwa as study in identity crisis. Denied his wish to marry a girl of his choice, an Anglo-Indian Rosy Watson, he illustrates an escapist behaviour. A sensitive boy, Yazdi is wounded by the striking commercialism and obsequiousness of his fellow Parsis. Yazdi takes to revolt against his existing family system, disillusioned by his fathers insulting appraisal of his love-interest, and indulges literally in the dictum of charity popular among Parsis and donates everything he has to the less privileged. He renounces all luxury and leads an ascetic life on the streets of Bombay. Initially he returns from school barefoot having given his shoes to an orphan in his class, and again gives away his dress and entire attire. Placed in a boarding school, he becomes a dropout, drifting about the city, “squandering his allowance and fees on beggars” and sleeping on park benches and pavements.

Yazdi totally breaks off from his family and takes to the streets feeding dying children and taking care of the homeless and dying. He
becomes a staunch follower of Mazdak, the first communist, whom Yazdi considers a Zarathusti ancestor who realised centuries ago “that all material goods, including women are to be shared” (The Crow Eaters p.212) He stops visiting home and he is last seen on the benches on Chowpatty beach, a withered tramp. Sidhwa has stressed through the character of Yazdi, that all Parsis are not similar in their attitude, nor do they have stereotype reactions.

The Bride is a damning indictment of the Kohistani community in particular and the Pakistani society in general in its brutal treatment of women. The major female characters like Zaitoon and Carol and even minor characters like Miriam and Afshan are confined within the narrow framework of rules imposed by the predominantly patriarchal society and also the male representatives in the household. They are not expected to play any pivotal role in the decisions, big or small, even though it includes their lives and selves.

The story of how Afshan, many years older than Qasim, becomes his bride, shows the unscrupulousness which comes to the fore, in giving away daughters in marriage, which exists in many societies. Ten year old Qasim gets Afshan as bride because her father was unable to pay a loan he owed his father. The fact that he offered his own daughter
to compensate a meagre sum of money is further given horrific light of a bargain when we are told that Qasim’s father had first considered marrying Afshan himself, but later gave her away to his son as a token of affection. She is forcibly partitioned from her family and dislocated to a completely alien society and nowhere are we told of her consent being called in for, or of her being told her impending fate. She does face the problems of uprooting and planting herself in a different soil, but as all female characters, she has the resilience to adapt quickly to a new environment and call that home.

Miriam the wife of Nikka Pehlwan, who takes up the responsibility of bringing up Zaitoon, complies totally with the unwritten rules of society and changes completely to suit her husband’s rising status and honour; she segregates herself from the general public to keep intact her husband’s ‘izzat’ with his new financial stability.

“Mariam, reflecting her husband’s rising status and respectability, took to observing strict purdah. She seldom ventured out without veil” (The Bride p. 51)

The women become spaces, in Sidhwa’s novels, on which their men’s status are marked, whether husbands or fathers, their notions of
honour and social positions are all imposed on a woman’s body; thus the incessant obsession with men to control over their women.

Sidhwa skilfully tackles a character’s conflict between identity and location through the character of Carol. Carol leaves her job as a shop assistant in a departmental store in San Jose and the drudgery of American life, and opts to stay in Pakistan, with its alien and sometimes claustrophobic culture. Yet all throughout her stay she feels segregated and unable to adapt the alien culture and surroundings. Though by choice she partitions herself from her home and culture in America, Carol is torn apart by the strange customs and traditions, which are definitely inferior to her civilized way of life. Yet she decides not to return to San Jose, where she would face a total lack of identity. Carol is presented as a liminal figure in both the societies, neither of the ‘identities’ fulfil her character.

Zaitoon, used by her foster father to renew his links with his tribe and left alone in a totally alien and hostile environment, without knowing what identity to resume, courts the worst fate of all. Her husband takes up the moral responsibility of taming her, by frequent and brutal beatings, whenever she dares to go against his wishes. A virtual prisoner of Sakhi, she decides to flee, before she is killed by her
husband’s animal treatment. The whole tribe sets on a wild search of the girl as she fights her existence in the cruel jungle. She loses identity as a human being as she is hunted by the tribe; no one is interested in why she tries to run away, their honour has been put on stake, and to vindicate their shame the girl has to be killed. Zaitoon escapes the tribe’s attempt to kill her and wash away the abstract notion of disgrace with which she has supposedly muddied their honour, with sheer will-power.

Qasim is the first character in the book to be exposed to the ravages of partition. The only survivor of small pox that hit his family, his wife, two sons and only daughter, fled the hills down to the plains of Jullunder, unable to face the prospect of a remarriage which he would be forced into, had he decided to continue in his own land. Managing to secure a job as watchman in a bank, he tries to restore the gaiety and nurtured pride of a hills man as he stood all day “…resplendent in a khaki uniform and crisp turban. The double-barrelled gun that stood beside him and the bullet-crammed bandolier swathing his chest gladdened his heart and gratified his pride, for a gun is part of a tribal’s attire. It shows his readiness to face his enemy and protect his family’s honour” (The Bride p.20). In this daily gesture he lives his own traditions far from home. He was comfortable though lost in a deep-
rooted urge to visit home. Perched on park benches he sought within his eyes the heights and valleys of the land he had left.

When serious political unrest and savage rioting hit the North Indian plains, Qasim fights a strong impulse to return to the Kohistani hills with his hill-country tribesmen who hurried back. He moves forward in anticipation of safety to Pakistan. But he carries with him every aspect of a hills man and remains throughout so, though he acquires polite ways and a seemly behaviour later.

Before leaving for Pakistan, Qasim settles an old score with Girdhalilal, a clerk in the bank, with the same wrath of a country tribesman as was the case in so many other places of North India with those who found a golden opportunity to vent their steaming hatred and jealousy in the garb of political and communal riots and because they knew they were leaving the plains for good. Qasim in the train is as impassive he could be in the face of slaughter and the desperate attempts of all and sundry to save their honour and lives. He remains unmoved because the people who were being victimised were not his people. He was a simple tribesman who acted on sheer impulse not reason or contemplation.
“Each emotion arose spontaneously and without complication, and was reinforced by racial tradition, tribal honour and superstition. Generations had carried it that way in his volatile kohistani blood” (The Bride p.21)

But Qasim was not so cold-hearted as he saves a little girl who grabs his leg mistaking him for her father, though led by the striking resemblance of the girl with his own daughter whom he had treasured so much and whom he lost to the cruel hands of small pox; he was at once at her side carrying all his way down to Pakistan, taking up his newfound responsibility with all fervour and passion and giving her his daughter’s name.

In the new land and position, he scarcely settles down for his mind wandered in the mountains where the winter cold tore through his flesh and pride stood higher and mightier than the peaks. Home was still there; the hills came alive in his dreams and pride and longing grew strong as he wove fantasies into Zaitoon’s mind, and taught her to believe that she belonged there, where she had to go one day and live forever. True to his roots, Qasim strengthens his bond to the hills marrying Zaitoon to one of his clansmen, satisfying an old fervent longing. Qasim’s return to the hills to give Zaitoon’s hand in marriage to
his tribe fills in him an indescribable pain, of anxiety and joy, as one
would meet a long lost child. ‘The vigorous air and the sight of the stark
mountains elated him’. He talks incessantly to Zaitoon, “Bibi, you will
like my village. Across the river, beyond those mountains, we are a free
and manly lot.” (The Bride p.148)

‘The spirit of his forbears stirred in Qasim. Already he had
forgotten the plains and the humiliations he had endured
there. These raw, wild ranges were his element.’ When
they finally reach the hills Qasim cries, tears of agony,
shed in the long separation he had suffered from his land.

“Munni, this is my land-do you wonder I love it so? “We
are here at last.” (The Bride p.148)

Zaitoon is sensitive and possessive when she insists to take her
calf along with her when her family flees for safety and honour from the
riotous mob that loots and creates havoc in her village. The little girl is
witness to the sordid victims and plunder in the train to Pakistan and
clings to Qasim mistaking him for her father. She still goes with him,
with the hope and innocence of a child. Her age, gifted with a short-
memory, helps her to find happiness in her new life; nevertheless she is
reminded of her own family and enquires about them, which stiffens
Qasim’s conscience. She grows up to be a well-bred conventional Muslim girl under Miriam’s guidance who believes that she needs to be at home and observe purdah, despite being introduced to school; learn to be a good wife, because that is what she would ultimately do. They visit together all the neighbouring families and Miriam prepares Zaitoon for her forthcoming life. Zaitoon readily accepts her lot, “…the benign squalor in the women’s quarters inexorably drew Zaitoon, as it did all its inmates, into the mindless, velvet vortex of the womb.”(The Bride p.56)

She loved to visit the Mullah’s house which invariably portrayed the lives inside the veiled orthodox Muslim quarters. Zaitoon fuses herself very well with the atmosphere with great intensity but Qasim’s far-away background and his dreams of a long lost land kept her apart, this dimension of her life tore her away from the present and an inner cloister of her heart thumped in anticipation of visiting ‘home’.

Zaitoon comes across a gorgeous American lady, Carol, who lives with her husband in the army camp on her way to the Kohistani hills. She is at once charmed by the foreigner, whose ways, Qasim explains, are so different from theirs. Zaitoon dawns on the fact that she too is alien to the ways of the mountains which was just material to her fancy and where she has come to be given away and spend the rest of her life. She is so different from them. This reminds her of her being orphaned,
of being thankfully adopted by this kind hills man, of being a stranger and an exile in those hills. “But Abba, I am not of the hills. I am not of your tribe. I am not even yours,” (The Bride p.40) She suddenly doesn’t want to marry from his tribe and cries, she would rather marry the Jawan who had accompanied them and was undoubtedly attracted by her.

Zaitoon’s fascination for the hills further dies down when she sees the people of the hills and after marriage her husband, who would have been how she had fancied but for his rough dealings that scared her. She pleads and frets before Qasim to take her along with him to the plains.

Qasim’s promise that Zaitoon would be back in Lahore for her first born remains the only hope in her life, as she lives constantly in exile and abandoned in the hills. Her mother-in-law, Hamida’s nearing death fills her yet again with the fear of abandon. In the course of time she, gets used to the roughness of the terrain and immune to her husband’s beastly behaviour towards her. In a couple of months, romance had weaned out of her mind and it was mere subjugation to the harshness and indifference of the milieu. The primitiveness of this ungoverned territory and smothering rules scared her, their life resembled the ‘cave era’ and Zaitoon longed to get pregnant and return
to the warmth of Miriam and Nikka and Qasim. She imagines going
back and pooling all sympathy and attention. She wishes that she
wouldn’t be sent back by Qasim who would definitely be angered by the
cruelty meted out to her.

Now and then, finding solace in the distance from the settlement,
Zaitoon loitered far into the forest to be on her own and enjoy the
loneliness that hung upon her. She feels closeness to the river and the
river that lay beyond it, which irrevocably changed her life and longed
to visit the river despite being warned not to. Zaitoon is brutally tortured
and finally she makes the fatal decision of running away from the land
Qasim had so wonderfully decorated her imagination with, abandoning
all her dreams and fantasies in utter frenzy to escape the tribals. When
her husband and his clan discover that she had run away they decide to
hunt her down, (in those parts a runaway wife was nothing less than a
Cadillac running off by itself) and reward her with death.

The Ice-candy-Man is the second novel written by a woman
writer on the theme of partition, the first attempt made by Attia Hossain
in ‘Sunlight on a Broken column’ But except for the similarities of both
the novels in which the girl-child narrators, Lenny and Laila, recount the
horrors of partition and the diminishing effect of it on all and sundry,
and the process of growth and self-discovery which both of them undergo, Hossain does not delve deep into the gory details of the massacres unlike Sidhwa, who depicts the events of partition complete in its naked cruelty and ruthlessness. This was indeed a bold theme for a woman writer who is assigned traditionally the relatively simpler and less arduous areas of sentimental and romantic area of writing.

Attia Hossain’s narrator Laila, reveals the trauma of partition from a much more personal level, than Lenny who is a detached observer who gives an objective account of the whole event. In recounting the tragedy, Laila goes through her memories and insights of the disintegration of her Taluqdar family during partition and their subsequent uprooting to Pakistan. Like Lenny, the grown up Laila is restless and nostalgic as she ruminates and wanders in her disbanded ancestral home, Ashiana after Partition. However she does not wish to return to all that she left behind. She does not lapse into a glorification of the past. Both Lenny and Laila react against the communal frenzy and horrors of violence. The mature Laila, rationalizes against communal tension whereas the young Lenny instinctively reacts against it. Both however realize that there is no solution to communal holocausts.
Sidhwa’s portrayal of bare facts present horrible visuals of the communal divide. It pictures the relentless transformation of sane people into helpless and ineffective cauldrons of religious tolerance. Friends turn into foes for some inexorable logic as people lose their power of reasoning and fall into the pits dug by exhorters of torching religious intolerance. What follows is an endless sequence of individual and mass migration, people leave taking bare essentials collecting nothing more than their kith and kin and join others in their destiny of exile from their country.

Pir Pindo, a village which was a brilliant co-existence of all communities is attacked at dawn and swamped by Sikhs, where men, women and children are killed, after Jagjeet singh with some furtive Sikhs had visited them and told them of an impending attack under the cover of darkness. Similarly a sikh village is also looted in Lahore. In Lenny’s neighbourhood, Mr. and Mrs. Singh leave with their two children and a few belongings. Sher Singh, the zoo attendant flees from Lahore, due to 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 Rasool singh and his pretty sisters are escorted to a convoy to Amritsar. In Lenny’s household the gardener, Hari is circumcised and becomes Himat Ali, and Moti
becomes David Masih, in order to survive the attacks of religious hooligans. Ayah’s lover’s, body is found mutilated in a gunny sack. The money lender Kirpa Ram flees leaving money behind. Even middle class families like the Shankar’s leave in haste.

Sidhwa subtly delineates further, the psychological impact of the horrors of partition on the lives of people. It distorts the lives of people and gives way to suspicion, distrust and susceptibility to rumours. Bapsi sidhwa symbolizes this in the children’s rise of suspicion and distrust in their mother’s clandestine activities during the bloodshed and ruthless activities of the Partition, just because they were denied the long rides. Lenny’s mother, Mrs. Sethi and Aunt Minnie, travel all over Lahore in their car carrying out secretive rescue operations, and Ayah adds fuel to the children’s suspicions that it is they who are setting fire to Lahore, when she tells them that the dicky of the car is full of cans of petrol. Sidhwa shows that in this highly charged atmosphere, distrust and suspicion are inevitable.

“We know who the arsonists are. Our mothers are setting fire to Lahore!-My heart pounds at the damnation that awaits their souls. My knees quake at the horror of their imminent arrest.” (The Ice- Candy Man p.173)
Sidhwa shows also how rumour plays havoc in a vitiated atmosphere of communal frenzy. On the radio when there is news of trouble in Gurdaspur, people instantly interpret it for ‘uncontrollable butchery’. Further when the Ice-Candy-Man returns panting, after he had gone to receive his relatives, with news of a train full of mutilated bodies and mentions that all of them were Muslims, the acquaintances of the Queen’s garden do not doubt for a moment, and quickly resort to revenge against the Sikhs, a long time friend Sher Singh is looked upon with hatred, compelling him to flee from Lahore. How ordinary men lost their rationality in the face of such horrendous atmosphere is best depicted in the Ice-Candy-man’s rage

“…that night I went mad, I tell you, I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I’d known all my life! I hated their guts.”( The Ice-Candy Man p.156)

Sidhwa presents a realistic pattern of violence in which rage and revenge becomes a major motivation for the Ice-candy-man. The friends, who had gathered in the beginning, at the Queen’s park and had argued about the impossibility of violence threatening their relationships and fleeing their homeland, are pitted against each other in the face of communal disintegration, something which, even the sensuality and
beauty of Ayah, cannot control. The saddest fact as Lenny depicts it is that even children do not mingle with each other. When she tries to interact with a Sikh child, she is pulled away by Masseur, and yet again some burkha-clad women ask her religion and hearing the word ‘Parsi’ express utter amazement at the discovery of a new religion.

As the novel begins, Lenny describes the perimeter of her ‘compressed’ world- extending from Queen’s Road to Jail Road and limited by a canal, cutting across the Jail Road and vanishing into the dense bazaars of Mozang Chung. Lenny is aware of the Salvation Army wall and the ‘gloom emanating from the wire –mesh screening the oblong ventilation slits. She calls the walls ‘hushed’ and imagines a dumb creature’ behind it, for never has she listened to anyone from across the wall.

Marked by precocity, Lenny discovers and accepts in due course the compressive and confined nature of existence, and the uncharted areas where she does not belong to as a result of her physical disability. But owing to her limited pace on the pram, she is a quick and an excellent observer of people, of pain and longings. “I learn fast…..I learn of human needs, frailties, cruelties and joys.” (The Ice- Candy Man p.20)
Lenny is not an inheritor to a long lost past, being a child distraught with polio and succumbed to a cloistered daily activity, there is not much she could witness and therefore claim her misfortune of being deprived of all that. But she thinks of Adi, her brother, whose life is different from hers and who goes to school. She is also aware of the barriers and the borders of her small world,—the Salvation Army Wall, and the periphery of her world duly cut by a distant canal across the road to Mozang Chungi.

But somewhere down the line her physical deformity is a cherished and welcome feature which allows her everything in her way without her asking for them. The thought that she would be cured after her operation puts her into a dilemma and suddenly she wishes to hold on to her deformity, her pram, the frothing attention and love of all and sundry, the care and sympathy she is so used to.

Bathing in discourteous sympathetic glances from everyone, Lenny finds solace only in her godmother’s one-and-a-half abode, her haven and refuge, and succeeds in getting away from the ‘gloom’ and ‘the perplexing unrealities of my home on Warris Road.’(The Ice-Candy Man p. 1) These perplexities include her own polo affliction, which she uses as an armour against a ‘pretentious world’; her mother’s
extravagance, her father’s dislike of it; her strain to fill up the infernal silence during her fathers mute meals by ‘offering laughter and lengthier chatter’. These perplexities also involve the household staff. It includes Ayah, Imam Din, the genial faced cook of the Sethi household; Hari, the high caste Hindu; Moti, the outcaste gardener; Mucho, his shrew of a wife; Papoo, his much abused child; and the Ice-candy-man, a raconteur and a born gossip; Masseur, a sensitive man who loves Ayah and the impressive Ranna, the boy whom Lenny befriends when she visits his village with Imam Din, and numerous others. The relationship between Lenny and her Godmother is so strong that Lenny finds it difficult to resist her urge for frequent visits to her house and her own submission to Godmother’s ethereal warmth and consolation.

‘… the bond that ties her strength to my weakness, my fierce demands to her nurturing, my trust to her capacity to contain that trust-and myloneliness to her compassion- is stronger than the bond of motherhood…(The Ice-Candy Man p.3.) ‘The intensity of her tenderness and the concentration of her attention are narcotic. I require no one else’ (The Ice-Candy Man p. 8.)
The dread of visiting the hospital and the stern disposition of Col. Barucha, the doctor, unnerves Lenny. But this imperative part of her life is however unregistered to her conscious mind, as she says, ‘somewhere in the uncharted wastes of space beyond is Mayo hospital.’ (The Ice-Candy Man p.4) Sidhwa records Lenny’s trauma as she is accosted by the doctor, ‘His eyes are a complex hazel…Col. Barucha is cloaked in thunder. The terrifying aura of his renown and competence are with him even when he is without his posse of house surgeons and head nurses.’ (The Ice-Candy Man p. 4.) But Lenny is aware of the value of her deformity – which excuses her out of school and gives her much access to the intricate world of adults- the interesting anecdotes and the blinding passions. She is troubled by the thought of normalcy if her foot cures itself of its disability,

‘…What if my foot emerges immaculate, fault-free? Will I have to behave like other children, slogging for my share of love and other handouts? Aren’t I too old to learn to throw tantrums –or hold my breath and have a fit?....What if I have to labour at spellings and reciting poems and strive with forty other driven children to stand first, second or third in class? So far I’ve been spared the idiocy-I am by nature uncompetitive- but the sudden emergence from its
cocoon of a beautifully balanced and shapely foot could put my sanguine personality and situation on the line.’ (The Ice-Candy Man p. 9.)

Lenny’s filtered memories of the Partition holocaust revolves round mainly a group of low class characters-, a Muslim cook, a Hindu sweeper, a Muslim living in the servant’s quarters of the sprawling parsi bungalow and their circle of friends who gather around Ayah’s mesmerising personality and ‘chocolate chemistry’, like a Sikh zoo attendant, a pathan knives-sharpener, a Muslim masseur and above all a Muslim ice-cream vendor, the Ice-candy-man frequently gathering in the nearby Queen’s Park where her ayah takes her for the evening outing, transcending their religious identity. Circled by grown-ups, who educate her on the ways of the world during her out-of-school days, Lenny often finds her lost in their difficult-to understand mannerisms and alien to the childishness of her age, thinking above her and stretching her mind way beyond. While the children of her age go to school and indulge in their own innocent discoveries of man and world, Lenny is already exposed to Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah and the various communal distinctions that spring up in the wake of Partition. Her interest suddenly diminishes and she no more wishes to be audience to their conversations, partly because her imagination is too brutal than what she comprehends out of their
talks and partly because she is too left out engrossed as they are in their own distress. The extremity of the situations scares the child groping in the innocence of childhood difficult as she finds it to cope with the complexities of the adult world. But protected as she is by her family’s wealth and position in society, she remains unaffected by the chaotic conditions during partition. She lives in a safe and predominantly woman’s world, spending her time with Ayah or Godmother. But she also witnesses a woman’s world later on during the communal riots, which is often victimised, exploited and raped and confined to rehabilitation quarters.

Lenny has a couple of other educators too—her cousin (who is not called by name throughout) and her brother Adi. Cousin is more considerate towards Lenny, and eager to teach and show things unfamiliar to her, whereas Adi, symbolic of all that Lenny lacks mentally and physically, avoids her and bullies her and makes her aware of her inappropriateness in his world.

‘My brother is aloof. Vital and alert, he inhabits another sphere of interests and private thoughts. No doubt he too is busy picking up knowledge, gaining insights. I am more curious of him than he is of me. His curiosity comes later. I
am skinny, wizened, sallow, wiggly-haired, ugly. He is beautiful. He is the most beautiful thing, animal, person, building, river or mountain I have seen. He is formed of gold mercury. He never stands still enough to see. He turns, ducks moves, looks away, vanishes.’ (The Ice-Candy Man p. 22.).

Lenny resorts to ways that anger him to claim his attention and persistently follow methods to attract him. Cousin’s precocious and shocking revelations of his understanding of things is also challenging to Lenny’s limitations and further engulfs her with her fate to live with and within her deformity.

For Lenny, in a few years’ time, a whole world, which also includes her world, undergoes a sea change marked by the blood-dimmed anarchy. Her focus shifts from her own sense of inadequacy and unworthy and the trivia and trappings of her learning to the world outside, which she finds is dark and dangerous. Lenny watches Ayah’s admirers dissolve and dwindle into hardliners of religious intolerance, she watches the city of Lahore burn from the roof of her house with her brother and listen to the smothered weeping of the women in rehabilitation camps, who have been raped and disowned by their
families and separated from their children. With greater perception, she notes the fast, unstoppable and violent changes that leave her and those around her, particularly Ayah, wounded in the soul as she is abducted by a gang that the Ice-Candy-Man leads.

Lenny records her first conscious memory of Ayah thus she passes pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships” (The Ice-Candy Man p.3). Though we are told towards the end that her name is Shanta, the child identifies her by her profession, as she does the masseur, the ice-candy-man, the pathan, the gardener, etcetera

In The Ice-Candy-Man the main events, besides the end of the first World War, India’s Independence, and the Partition, revolve around Ayah. She is not unlike India itself- a symbol of larger than life reality, truly perplexing. It becomes quite natural in Post-Colonial texts to picture one’s conception of land and place in terms of femininity. (It appears in different forms of gendered landmarks, means of sustenance and descriptions of fertility.) Ayah draws covetous glances by help of her round and plump body, her full blown cheeks and pouting mouth. Ayah is shown as being an object of lustful interest to beggars, holy men, hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists. India too has
been a much looted country, before she is finally forced to make a new beginning. At the outset, Ayah is just a maid at the Sethi household. All of a sudden, she is swept off her cosy dwelling into the vortex of political upheaval. She is forced to change from being an ordinary domestic help to a public entertainer in a matter of a few months. She is symbolic of the millions of displaced, looted and raped Hindus and Muslims during one of the harshest political phases in the history of the Subcontinent.

The Ayah is portrayed by Sidhwa as a flame of sensuousness, around whom her male acquaintances hover and try all means to catch attention, just like the queen bee and her admirers. To Lenny, Ayah is the epitome of female strength, independence and choice. As an individual she is confident of herself by virtue of her beauty and the impregnable power it provides. At the same time she comes across as extremely responsible, loyal and protective towards Lenny and the Sethi family, besides being emotionally attached to her. But her sensuousness and sexual warmth which drew together people of different communities is unable to hold them together at the outbreak of a religious sentiment and butchery. She is abducted by the Ice-candy-man -who takes revenge on his fellow Muslim out of jealousy of Ayah’s love for him- raped and ravished by the hoodlums and kept as his mistress for some months,
before he marries her. In the process Ayah undergoes a series of shifts from Shanta to Mumtaz; from a simple domesticated young lady to a dancer at the ‘kotha’ who in Godmother’s words, “…drunks, pedlars, sahibs, and cut-throats used like a sewer” (The Ice-Candy-Man p.250) Ayah symbolizes an entity mangled in the hands of torture and subjugation that came along as a penalty of Partition. But at the first chance to rescue herself from the incredulous hands of the ice-candy-man she expresses her wish to be away and go back, “I want to go to my family… I will not live with him” (The Ice-Candy Man p.261)

Often in history have women been treated as solutions to problems of the borders of the country. They are marked with the vulnerability of the borders. While of course women are guarded and defended as the borders are, they are also considered the easiest preys to take revenge

Ayah states her inability to forgive and forget what had happened to her, despite the ice-candy-man’s changed attitude and revived love and loyalty towards her and refuses to stay though he had now married her and restored her position. She wishes to go though she is not sure if her family would take her back. “…whether they want me or not, I’ll go” (The Ice-Candy Man p.262)
These short and strong statements bring out Ayah’s determination and will not to give in to the wishes of a man she does not love, and to get away from all that made her suffer, draws parallels to the struggle of Zaitoon trying to flee from the barbarian civilization that was out to kill her; and Carol’s decision to go back to her country, unable to find an identity of her own in the mountains of Karakoram; and Feroza’s decision not to return to Pakistan despite her disillusionment in her new country. These female characters represent a strong sense of independence and unwillingness to succumb to the pressures of society and meaninglessness of the hollow traditions followed throughout the centuries; they wish to uproot themselves from their immediate harsh surroundings no matter what lies ahead and is unsure of a secure and peaceful future.

All the characters in the novel are created brilliantly. At times they turn into a mask of horror and at others, into a peal of laughter. The Ice-candy-man is perhaps the most interesting character among all. He is a major news provider to Lenny as she says... ‘Ice-candy-man is a raconteur. He is also an absorbing gossip.’ (The Ice-Candy-Man p.19) The different roles he adopts for a living and the varied impersonations, lead many a suspicion to his already incongruent nature. During the cold, when ice sales plummet he changes his profession from a Popsicle
vendor to a bird seller and finds out incorrigible ways to sell his stock. He is well informed in everything. He reads Urdu Newspapers and the Urdu Digest. He can even read the headlines in ‘Civil and Military Gazette’, the English daily. He gives information on everything, from the German bombs to Subash Chandra Bose to Gandhi. He is a great talker; he handles both Urdu and English equally well and is bursting with gossip and news. He quotes Bose, Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah. But he is the only one who signifies resistance to change, and uses the chaos around him for his own malicious ends. In a move to revenge the killing of his relatives who come as severed bodies in a death train, he joins the marauding hooligans out to kill all of the Hindus and Sikhs in Lahore. He even kills his fellow Muslim, the masseur, out of jealousy. Here Bapsi tries to show that the defenders of Islam, who turned Lahore into a burning city, were not always true proponents of Islam. But though the Ice-candy-man’s role in the cataclysmic events of partition is painted in lurid colours, his growing passion for Ayah is shown to redeem him from the morass of senseless communal hatred. Blinded by his love to the so-sensual Ayah, he abducts her and secretly marries her and keeps her at the Hira Mandi. But he invites the wrath of Lenny’s family and Godmother who accuse him of giving her away to peddlers and drunkards in return of money and marrying her when he gets to know that Lenny’s mother had made arrangements to send her to her relatives.
From a rough and rustic man always ready to nudge Ayah, the ice-candy-man becomes a person of refined sensibility, he steeps himself into poetry. He weeps and pleads with Godmother to let Ayah stay with him as he had now married her.

“I’ve covered her with gold and silks. I’d do anything to undo the wrong done her. If it were to help to cut my head off, I’d cut my head and lay it at her feet…” (The Ice-Candy Man p.250)

But she is removed to the rehabilitation camp where women are kept till they are safely returned to their relatives, and the ice-candy-man turns into a mad faqir, delivering poetry and sitting defiantly in front of the gate of the camp to get a glimpse of her. When she is sent to Amritsar, he even follows her there. That he is willing to leave the land he so much cherishes, for the sake of his Hindu beloved, is not only an example of self-sacrifice, but also symbolic of a future compromising between the two warring communities. But love does not conquer all when communal and obscurantist passions are aroused. In the end he comes out unscathed and no wiser from the brutal pain of Indian independence.
Lenny’s godmother is shown as her refuge and haven, a pillar of strength and courage and seat of love, compassion and support, who has immense potential to comprehend human minds and offers unparalleled comfort with her immeasurable confidence and docility. She is Lenny’s confidante and friend and embodiment of motherly love, whom she visits, everyday after her private tuitions at Mrs. Pens and craves to return every now and then. When people float her in heartless and meaningless sympathy, after her series of operations, she wishes only to have Godmother next to her

“She sits by my bed stroking me, smiling, her pretty eyes twinkling concern, in her grey-going out sari, its pretty border of butterflies pinned to iron strands of scant-combed hair. The intensity of her tenderness and the concentration of her attention are narcotic. I require no one else.” (The Ice-Candy Man p.8.)

She towers over all the female characters in the novel with her vibrancy, wit, indefatigable strength and courage, her boundless love for Lenny, concern for fellow human beings and commitment to society. Her authoritativeness comes forth in her deft handling of Ayah’s situation, and her verbal bashing of the ice-candy-man, whom she finds
responsible for Ayah’s predicament. Ice-candy-man cowers in her presence and is at a loss to defend himself when she accuses him.

“You’ve trapped her in the poisonous atmosphere of the ‘kotha’…Why don’t you speak? Can’t you bring yourself to say you played the drums when she danced? ...” (The Ice-Candy Man p.250)

Godmother’s humiliating of her younger sister and treating her like a slave, (she is identified by Lenny as slave sister) who is dispensed with the chores of the household, nudged and suppressed, comes across as a surprising angle of her personality. Even her husband (referred to as Old husband by Lenny) is reduced to an impassive and unimportant character on his cane-bottomed chair. Godmother’s stature and overpowering nature over others in the novel, however does not lend any measure of cruelty towards her character; her intelligence, concern and untiring commitment towards society is ample material to pay for whatever minor imperfections.

Bapsi Sidhwa in her third novel has centralized the Parsi community and examined various themes of vital importance to the Parsis in the last decade of the twentieth century- the issue of marriage outside the community and an underlying identity crises, a quest for
security in the Parsi psyche and influence of a patriarchal society. A
minority culture, expelled from Persia by Arabs thousands of years ago
and spread to various parts of the world, they are very sentimental
towards their communal integrity and steadfast followers of the rituals
and traditions of their culture. The value of traditions and loyalty
towards community are instilled earlier in the minds of new generations,
revolts against which though rare, are seriously condemned.

An American Brat, functions on two different levels. Sidhwa
cleverly juxtaposes First and Third world perceptions which provide
much amazement and humour; she has also deftly portrayed through the
protagonist, a migrant’s culture shock in the west and difficulties in
adjustment in a sophisticated and fiercely independent culture.

Feroza is flown to USA, following an unparsi-like orthodoxy in
her attitude and outlook, making her a misfit in the community. But the
Ginwallah’s fail to realize that the attempted journey to USA in order to
broaden her outlook and free her of the fundamental nature influenced
by the political scenario in Pakistan would open before her further
avenues. It would inadvertently result in her challenging traditional
views, static orthodoxy, communality and patriarchy. True to their fears
it irrevocably makes her too modern in thought and supposition for her
patriarchal and seemingly liberal family. In this process of self-
realization, Feroza isolates herself from her Parsi heritage and is left
alone in the world of her choice to fend for herself in the mindless
culture of the west.

Her trip to USA, and her resultant initiation, both her naivety and
amazement, reflect the culture shock of migrants during their initial trip
from the Third world to the First world. Sidhwa chronicles the glamour
and sophistication of the technologically advanced and entrepreneurial
country, but she is also careful to give an honest statement of the
seething poverty and unemployment in that part of world, thereby
questioning the distribution of wealth and the vivid poverty in the midst
of such opulence.

“This was an alien filth, a compost reeking of vomit and
alcoholic belches, of neglected old age and sickness, of drugged
exhalations and the malodorous ferment of other substances she
could not decipher. The smells disturbed her psyche; it seemed
to her they personified the callous heart of the rich country that
allowed such savage neglect to occur.” (An American Brat
p.81.)
On these lines can be drawn parallels with Bharti Mukherjee’s ‘Jasmine’, the story of an Indian immigrants encounter with the new world and her transformation as she gradually imbibes the new culture. Feroza’s shock at the new culture and poverty of New York is similar to Jasmine’s dismal view of Florida swamps that she gets on her first entry into America.

Throughout her journey to America Feroza acts exactly as she is instructed and watches as the flight deposits and collects different people at different destinations, preparing herself to face the utter change in culture and land. As the plane lands at Kennedy Airport, Feroza is dazzled by the orderly traffic of rushing people, the bright lights and warmed air, the extraordinary cleanliness and sheen of floors and furnishings, and the impudent size of the glass-and-steel enclosed spaces. But her amazement and awe is momentarily shifted to an inhumane treatment at the passport counter, when her Pakistani passport opens from the wrong end, and she is quizzed, and suspiciously aired at her intentions of coming to the US.

Everything is new to her at the airport- the escalator, the caterpillar of stacked carts, and the inserting of a dollar bill to extract one. The young man, who helps Feroza with the cart, is flirtatious and
curious about her, and she responds in a different way than she would have done in Lahore, with a horde of uncles and aunts out to protect girls of her age from any malicious advances made towards them. It suddenly dawns upon her that no one bothers to glance her way or stare at them, and she revels at the new found freedom from the thousand constraints around her.

Her worst experience of setting foot on the soil of an alien western country awaits her, which sets her averse to the host of attractions that lifted her up, at the immigration counter, where she is held unaccountably guilty at a ruthless checking process of her possessions and a series of harsh questionings. Having been pushed to the end and confronted with a challenge to her fierce dignity and emblazoning anger, she shouts at the confused and astounded officer, “To hell with you and your damn country. I’ll go back” (An American Brat p.64)

Out of the airport and away from the insults, and dehumanising behaviours of the officers, Feroza forgets her first disturbing impressions of having left her country for the alluring attractions of an alien soil as she indulges in a tour of New York.
She shouts at the sight of the incredible lighting of the city in Punjabi… “Vekh!Vekh! Sher-di-batian!” (Look,Look, the lights of the city.) The sky-rise buildings with its shimmering glass and steel embankments reflecting the sunlight are all wondrous sights to her. She marvels at the quick service at the restaurants, the quantities of fries, ketchup and coke; the opulence in the city mesmerizes a wide gapping Feroza,

“It was like entering a surreal world of hushed opulence festooned by all manner of hats propped up on stands and scarves and belts draped here and there like fabulous confetti. The subtle lighting enhanced the plush shimmer of wool and leather and the glowing colours of the silk. Feroza felt she had never seen such luxuriant textures or known the vibrant gloss of true colours” (An Americam Brat p.73.)

But Sidhwa is also keen to show the other side of the picture, when Manek points out to Feroza, the small dark video parlours flashing lewd advertising, interspersed by grubby pawn shops, cheap hotels, and bars. She unbelievingly watches male prostitutes, elegant transvestites, the pimps and miniskirted prostitutes. He also tells her about the seedy world of lookouts, runners and drug dealers. She finds the bus terminal,
“...the infested hub of poverty from which the homeless and the discarded spiralled all over the shadier sidewalks of New York.” (An American Brat p.80)

*An American Brat* is also the story of the coming of age of Feroza, in the process of her migration and shock at the outset of an alien culture. Feroza rises above the restraints and confines of the patriarchal parsi society in Pakistan, and dares to question and revolt against the traditions that bound her to her community. She succumbs to the charms of America, and enrolls in a university, where she comes to terms with the American life-style, by the help of her roommate, Jo. The shy and conservative Feroza turns into a confident and self-assertive girl, acts, talks and dresses like an American girl, learns to drive, and sheds her inhibitions to drink and dance with her fellow students. She even commits a blasphemy against her religion when in a drunken state she gives in to her friends’ insistence to try her hand at smoking. Perhaps the most obvious impression of her coming of age is Feroza’s adaptation of a foreign slang. Her polite utterance puts her in trouble more than once, and Jo takes charge of educating her in the usage of American English. Thus a polite and refined Feroza who would say, “May I have this, please?” across the counter to an abrasive saleswoman and is replied,
“You may not. You’ll have to pay for it. This isn’t the Salvation Army y’know; it’s a drugstore.” (An Amercian Brat p.159) learns to replace her practiced and acquired language skills to usages such as ‘Gimme a coke’ and ‘lemme see’.

Later Feroza enters into a tempestuous love affair with an American Jew, David Press. When Manek informs Zareen of Feroza’s intentions to marry David, an alarmed Zareen arrives in America to dissuade her rebellious daughter from cutting across the lines of religion and community. Zareen believes that the marriage would be nothing less than a cultural suicide. Faced with an obstinate and unrelenting daughter, Zareen who is also sadly attracted to the young man tries different ways at calling off the marriage. She pretends to agree with the match and gives David distorting details of the ceremonies and rituals involved in a Parsi marriage, thereby scaring him and distancing him from a cultural bondage he would rather not befriend, even if it cost breaking off their relationship.

“He felt inadequate, wondering if he could cope with some of the rituals and behaviour that, despite his tolerant and accepting liberality, seemed bizarre- stuff his mouth with sweets, break a coconut on his head! And, were he by some
gross mischance accepted to the Zoroastrian faith, which fortunately was not permissible, he’d have the singular honour of having his remains devoured by vultures and crows in a ghastly Tower of Silence.”( An American Brat p.309.)

Though initially depressed and saddened at her change of fortune, Feroza refuses to return to Pakistan or marry any one of the three eligible boys chosen for her. While she still turns to her religion, culture and civilization, the music, ghazals and memories to connect herself to a well ordained identity, Feroza is a changed girl, different from the one that had left Pakistan.

“They’re preoccupation with children and servants and their concern with clothes and furnishings did not interest her. Neither did the endless round of parties that followed their parents’ mode of hospitality.”( An American Brat p.312)

She had experienced freedom from the restraining traditions, the disturbing ordinances, the sight of poverty, the insecure social ties, the oppression and discrimination against women, and refused to let it go. The sense of dislocation and of not belonging though would be part of her existence throughout; it seemed more tolerable than a fateful return to all that she had left behind for the better.
Shashi, her friend at the university, tries to comfort a dejected and dispirited Feroza, after her break up with David, by dramatically uttering a ghazal by Iqbal Banoo, “Ulfat Ke Naee Manzil Ko Chalay...(To reach new destinations of love),

Embarked on a new mission of love,

You who have broken my heart, look where you’re going

I, too, lie I your path” (An American Brat p.311.)

and the ghazal evokes in her a new longing for her homeland, the mushairas the poets her friends and all that she had come away from, but retrieves a self-confidence in herself and her decision to stay in the alien country.

“Her life that had bloomed in such unexpected ways had just as unexpectedly fallen apart. She must put it together again, heal her lacerated sensibility. But she could only do the healing right here, in America. For even in her bereft condition, she knew there was no going back for her, despite the poets and her friends.”( An American Brat p.311.)
Feroza resembles Lenny, in *The Ice-Candy-Man*, as she too inhabits a world of limited/constricted acquaintances, (Lenny, though has an extra physical disability) her kingdom and rule being that circumference of people. Zareen decides to pluck Feroza out of these maddening restraints and sets her on a trip to USA, where in the course of her entourage she soars too high, with her hitherto bound wings. Headstrong and inexperienced, what awaits Feroza in America is a totally new realm of discordant happenings. The influences of culture now take a back seat and Feroza grooms herself in a totally different world, and whirls in a world she had been till now cut-off from. America is no bit like Pakistan People stare at her without any obscene proclivity, neither is she supposed to cower herself at the sight of ‘nasty men’. Feroza is exposed to alien sounds and unfamiliar smells, in a strange country amidst strangers.

Feroza, being brought up in the midst of conventional Parsee and Muslim environments, stands confused to accommodate the most of both and runs herself to the extremities called forth by either communities. She was quick to adapt to the traditions of a Muslim nation by natural effect of her peers and the school she attended in Pakistan, giving birth to her mother’s growing concern towards her retreat into her shell and considerable backwardness.
“She won’t even answer the phone anymore!’ What if it’s someone I don’t know.” “She even 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, everyone knows we dress differently.”

(An American Brat p.10.)

The reminder that she belongs to yet another community is again confusing and disturbing once Feroza has settled into an alien society. She locks herself in her room when their house throngs with guests amidst heated political discussions. After an interval of dealing with Feroza’s timidness and tiring aloofness, Zareen decides to send her to America, to another alien society where she would shed all her inhibitions and become a lady by all standards. Excited as she is, Feroza doesn’t fly into the land unarmed and ready to welcome the new country hands outstretched. She is to the core filled with the inhibitions and prejudices of a conventionally brought up orthodox minded girl would be, as she heads to her destination. At the slightest pretext she opts to go back to Pakistan and for the moment hates all that America is. Battling at the tight immigration counter, the first of hundred hardships to come, she puts her foot down. Little did Feroza realise that she was among the only few to receive such moderate treatment as they set foot on the land, the rest of
the migrating lot from different parts of the world, facing more bitter experiences day in and day out to fight destiny, far from home.

Wide-eyed and basking in the newly surrounded freedom in the foreign land, Feroza cannot help drawing comparisons with her people back home and the people who were the least self-conscious, the lesser interrupting, the more free and happier.

Feroza is shocked to see her uncle who has immensely groomed himself in the ways of America, and criticizes offhand anything that originates from Pakistan, blames her third world status responsible for her outlandish behaviour and sets to improve her attitude towards life. At times he went too far that Feroza had to remind him that he himself was a Third world native. Lost in the exuberance of the city and malls, the breeze stops by Feroza reminding her of the pathetic contrasts back home.

Feroza takes the reins of her life in her hand as she decides to lengthen her stay and to join college in America. This new status draws unto maximum her potential and she learns and adapts the new country’s technique of survival and sheds her garb of innocence and naivety to unleash herself into this magnificent world, independently. She even changes the way she dresses banishing her colourful salwars and dangling earrings and fitting herself into a pair of jeans and t-shirt and
eventually a skirt. But all this doesn’t come without effort to compromise with her upbringing in a totally opposite world, of which she is reminded at the juncture of every transformation to soak herself into this utterly free country and among the less noticed public.

“She sensed she was not accepted among them. Dismayed by her own brown skin, the emblem of her foreignness, she felt it was inferior to the gleaming white skin in the washrooms and the roseate faces in the classrooms.” (An Amercian Brat p.153.)

Going out, mingling and flirting with young men Feroza wonders what everyone would think about her back home. Once in a half-drunken state Feroza took a few puffs from a cigarette, but the same night, she hunts out her ‘kusti’ and ‘sudra’ and prays to Ahura Mazda to forgive her for desecrating the holy fire.

As Feroza fuses more and more into the new society and her lifestyle gets on par with that of her peers she finds herself completely broke in money and decides to take up a job as waitress on the insistence of her friends. Feroza is suddenly filled with apprehension that this would be utterly intolerable, do her people in Pakistan get to know it. In Pakistan the mere fact of being a woman attached a lot of reservations, let alone working outside home, in a bar as waitress. The unchangeable
situations to which she belonged, alienates Ferosa and prevents her complete transformation.

“This focus would always isolate her, keep her removed from the variety of human contact she felt was at the very heart of living” (An American Brat p. 216)

Moulded in American culture and style, Feroza again feels left out when she goes to Pakistan on a holiday and sees for herself the measure of things changed.

“Time had wrought alterations she could not have foreseen-while her memory had preserved the people and places she knew, and their relationships with her, as if in an airtight jar.”( An American Brat p.235)

Her friends had inhabited worlds so different from hers, those which she had very easily in filtered into sometime back and stood unfriendly and tightly guarded.

“They talked about babies, husbands, and sisters-in-law and took her unawares by their gossip about people Feroza didn’t know and their interest in issues she couldn’t follow.
Feroza felt she had grown in different ways. Her consciousness included many things they had no concept of and were not in the least bit interested in.” (An Amercian Brat p. 238.)

“Feroza was disconcerted to discover that she was a misfit in a country in which she had once fitted so well”…” (An Amercian Brat p.239)

Feroza’s real tryst with her identity, her consciousness of culture and customs dawns on her when she meets David and the two decide to marry. A reformed Jew, David takes Feroza home to the feast on Sabbath where she is quick to notice the similarities of his religion to her Parsee traditions. “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” (p.257) This discovery fills in her a undercurrent of hope and rejoicing and an urge to know more about his religion and customs, together with a subconscious anticipation of amity between them and her family.

Adamant as Feroza turns out to be to marry David, Zareen flies down to Denver, to persuade her against it. Zareen exhorts time and again, their culture and traditions trying to pull her back in “You can’t toss your
heritage away like that. It’s in your bones!” (An American Brat p. 279)
Zareen tries her best to explain the consequences of marrying outside the community and the fate of those who tried to step out.

“Take Perin Powri. Like most of you girls, she never wore her ‘sudra’ or ‘kusti’. After her marriage to a non, she wore her sari parsee-style, and her ‘sudra’ covered her hips! Her ‘kusti’ ends dangled at the back! Till the day of her death, she missed her connection with community. She would have given anything to be allowed into the ‘agyari’” (An American Brat p. 278)

Finally Zareen had to accost David, her guard down inviting him into their fold, wherein David stood vis-à-vis his own culture and identity and decided to pull back. Suddenly as if woken from a stupor and reasserting his own roots, he says, “I belong to an old tradition, too!” (An American Brat p. 279)

In confrontation with age-old practices and unquestionable rituals, love and passion stand bleak and an imminent option between the two. “The very thing that had attracted him to Feroza, her exoticism, now frightened David. Zareen had made him feel that he and Feroza had been too cavalier and callow in dismissing the dissimilarities in their
backgrounds. He felt inadequate, wondering if he could cope with some of the rituals and behaviour that, despite his tolerant and accepting liberality, seemed bizarre.” (An American Brat p. 309)

Feroza, once again alone in her world, after her experiment with company and her choice to drift away into a region of bliss and liberation, settles down to heartbreak and pining.

“Feroza wept, yearning for the land of poets and ghazals she had left behind, for her friends from the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and for her own broken heart-when it occurred to her that she had thought of everything in past tense.” (An American Brat p.311)

Her heart leaping up for what she had very consciously left behind, Feroza is aware of that world which had changed beyond recognition and her alienation there. “For even in her bereft condition, she knew there was no going back for her, despite the poets and her friends.”(An American Brat p.311)

The novel deals with the issues of Diaspora and questions of cultural identity and racial differences. In its seemingly innocuous
portrayal of the (mis)adventures of its young protagonist Feroza, in USA, it actually describes the painful process of losing and replacing homes, presenting in the process, an indirect metaphor for the ambivalent position of so many diasporic writers today. Though Feroza is a Parsee, she could be any young girl choosing between a period of rampant sectarianism at home and the experience of more covert prejudice abroad.