Chapter I

Introduction

Literature is a powerful tool in the hands of creative writers to modulate and change the societal framework. It can not be created in vacuum. It is a reflection of life; it is related to a social context. Literature might be seen as an individual’s perspective on the social, historical, political, economic and cultural patterns of the times. Literature has always been used by writers as a medium to fight against the established social norms and traditions, hypocritical reactions, outmoded customs and the political system. A writer’s sensibility reacts sharply to the contradictions in the social life and it expresses itself most eloquently and effectively in the literature he creates. It is said that literature, even religious literature, has never been devoid of social sense. Literature is rooted in the reality of its time and is committed to changing the reality. A certain sense of social responsibility may even be found in the most ancient literature of the world. Social realism has always been a significant streak in literature. Such realism in fiction gained prominence in the eighteenth century novelists like Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding. Social realism implies the acute consciousness of the various social, political, economic and religious forces that surround the individual, their power to influence the lives of men and women for better or for worse and the overall interaction of the individual.

Of all the literary forms, fiction is the most vital form of literature which reflects and signifies the social conditions and values. Novel, with its broad canvass, has responded vitally to accommodate the social and historical consciousness of the writer. And a writer, especially a novelist, is by definition a socio-political being. Her or his significance lies in formulating and fostering certain principles which make the earth a better place to live in. The writers, therefore, cannot use words merely for entertainment; they need to address more serious issues and problems. So, they not only reflect the various discourses of the society they live in, but also make an intervention to reform the society as well. Bapsi Sidhwa is among those writers who perceive a dialectal relationship between a culture and its art. She is well aware of the dynamics between her role as a writer and the society she lives in.
Sidhwa through her extremely absorbing and interesting works seeks to contribute to the process of change that has already started all over the world involving a reconsideration of women’s rights and status, and a radical restructuring of social thought. Sidhwa belongs to that group of creative women writers who have started to depict “determined women for whom the traditional role is inadequate, women who wish to affirm their independence and autonomy and are perfectly capable of assuming new roles and responsibilities” (Kaur xvii). These writers wish to build a world which is free of dominance and hierarchy, a world that rests on the principles of justice and equality and is truly human.

In this age of globalization, it is usually very difficult to categorize some writers and Bapsi Sidhwa is one of them. She belongs to India, Pakistan and the United States simultaneously but she likes herself to be described as a Punjabi-Pakistani-Parsi woman. All her four novels – *The Crow Eaters*, *The Pakistani Bride*, *Ice-Candy-Man* and *An American Brat*—are about her perceptions of life as a Parsi, Punjabi, Pakistani and American woman respectively. Sidhwa believes that all of her works have some degree of autobiographical elements. She picks up some significant incidents from her own life or from the lives of other people and flashes them out to create a larger reality of fiction. To her each book is a cathartic release.

Bapsi Sidhwa, who is a new and important voice in the world of commonwealth fiction, is best known in India for her book *Ice-Candy-Man*, which was later made into a film, *1947: Earth* by Deepa Mehta. Bapsi Sidhwa was born in an eminent Parsi business family of Karachi in 1939. Soon after her birth, her parents, Peshotan and Tahmina Bhandra, moved to Lahore where Parsis were in a minuscule number, one hundred and fifty in all. The family was, thus, cut off from the mainstream of the Parsi life. Sidhwa was the only child of her parents. Naturally she felt very lonely. Talking about her upbringing in Lahore, Bapsi Sidhwa says:

If I were brought up in Karachi which is again very much a part of Pakistan, my experience as a child would have been totally different. I would have been brought up among the Parsis. I was brought up apart from my cousins and other relatives. My family was not a big joint family. In my home, my parental grandmother was with us for a few years, but there was not much
influence of the joint family calibre. I was largely brought up by the servants (Interview by Jussawalla 207).

Bapsi Sidhwa admitted that she lived a typical social life in Lahore and that her life was one of unrelieved tedium. She said, “How I abhorred those coffee parties! I tell you, I would’ve gone mad had it not been for my writing…. I had polio as a child. I had to have extensive treatment, my parents were advised not to send me to school. I was tutored at home by an Anglo-Indian lady who taught me to read and write” (Dhawan 11). In a more detailed interview with Feroza Jussawalla, Bapsi Sidhwa says:

From the age of about eleven to eighteen, I read non-stop because I did not go to school. I had nothing else to do, no other form of entertainment to fill my life with, and a big slack was taken up by reading. This did turn me, I now realize, into a writer. I must have read *The Pick Wick Papers* at least four times during that period. I would laugh out loud. I recently reread *The Crow Eaters* and reread *The Pickwick Papers* and realized there were so many parallels. I subconsciously absorbed a lot of that book and years after when I wrote *The Crow Eaters*, it influenced that book without my being aware of it. I think all that I read then was an influence – a lot of Tolstoy has influenced my work, many British writers. And Naipaul was very good to begin with (Jussawalla 217).

For Bapsi Sidhwa writing has become a natural condition of existence and very often an act of joy. So a grim childhood, loneliness and isolation, circumstances somewhat similar to that of Emily and Charlotte Bronte at Haworth, a small bleak town in Yorkshire, inspired Bapsi Sidhwa to be a writer. In the interview to Jugnu Mohsin she confesses, “I recognize the fact that my loneliness has had everything to do with my creativity. When you’re on your own, you have to fall back on your own resources to entertain yourself” (Dhawan 11).

Bapsi Sidhwa took her matric examination privately. She graduated from the Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, in 1956. The very next year she fell in love with Gustad Kermani, a sophisticated businessman of Bombay and married him. The
marriage, though, did not last long. After living in Bombay for five years she got divorced and went back to Pakistan. 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. She remarried Noshir Sidhwa, a Parsi businessman in Lahore and twelve years her senior. She spent her time as a housewife and had two daughters and a son. She herself has termed this span as a constricted sort of life. The responsibilities of a family led her to conceal her literary prowess.

Sidhwa is the author of four internationally acclaimed novels and her novels have been translated into German, French, Italian and Russian. Her first novel *The Crow Eaters* was published in 1978 and was soon translated in many languages. Although she wrote *The Bride* (1983) as her first novel, it was published after *The Crow Eaters*. Her third novel *Ice-Candy-Man* was published in 1988 and was declared New York Times Notable Book for 1991. The novel received laurels in the form of Literaturpreis Award in Germany. It was also nominated by the American Library Association as a Notable Book of 1991. Bapsi’s fourth novel, *An American Brat*, was published in 1994. Together with these novels, she has also published *Water: A Novel* (2006), a work of fiction based on the movie of the same name by her close associate and film director Deepa Mehta, and *City of Sin and Splendour: Writing on Lahore* (2006). In addition, her stories, reviews and articles have appeared in *New York Time Book Review, Houston Chronicle, Harper’s & Queen, The Economic Times* and *The London Telegraph*.

Bapsi Sidhwa received numerous awards such as Sitara-i-Imtiaz, Pakistan’s highest national honour in Arts, in 1991 and Wallace Reader’s Digest Writer’s Award in 1994 for her literary contributions. She held a Bunting Fellowship at Radcliff and was visiting scholar at the Rockefeller Foundation Centre, Italy. She has also taught at Columbia University, University of Houston, and Mount Holyoke College. She was the Fanny Hurst writer-in-residence at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. Bapsi Sidhwa has shown keen interest in the social works related to women and destitute children. She has served as a voluntary secretary in the destitute women’s and children’s home in Lahore. She has also been on the
Advisory Committee to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Women’s Development. She takes special interest in movements for women’s rights.

Bapsi Sidhwa belongs to Parsi Zoroastrian, a distinctive minority which left Iran for South Asia to avoid religious persecution; thus her relation to her country varies considerably. Writers from distinct minority communities within a country are likely to have different relation to it than writers from the majority community or culture. There are many good Parsi writers in India, Pakistan, England, Canada and the United States of America as well. Like Bapsi Sidhwa, they encompass a double migration, they are Diaspora writers in South Asia and America. Zoroastrians, also known as Parsis, are an ethno-religious minority in India living mostly on the west coast of the subcontinent, especially in Bombay. In Pakistan, most Parsis reside in Karachi and Lahore. As their names imply, the Parsis are of Persian descent. The word Parsi means a native of *Pars* or *Fars* an ancient Persian province, now in southern Iran. The Parsis left their homeland over twelve hundred years ago to save their religion, the teachings of Zoroaster, from being Islamised by the invading Islamic Arabians in the seventh century A.D. The story, usually connected with their arrival at Sanjan in Gujarat and a repeated metaphor in all the Parsi writers, is how on their arrival, the Prince, Yadav Rana, presented them a glass full of milk signalizing how his country was already full, leaving no place for the refugees. The *Dastur* (High Priest) of the Parsis stirred a spoonful of sugar in the milk representing their capacity to assimilate in the rich culture of his country. Though the Prince allowing them to settle peacefully in his country yet he imposed certain conditions on them such as non-proselytizing, adoption of Gujarati language etc. It is one of the reasons why Parsis do not allow conversion to their faith even today. It is obvious that the concern for the perseverance of their ethnic identity is reinforced in Parsis due to their peculiar experience of migration from Iran after Muslim invasion and forced conversions.

The Parsis are the followers of Prophet Zarathustra. Their religion known as Zoroastrianism was founded around 2000 B.C. The Parsi Zoroastrians are famed for being a very adaptable minority community. Although they form a minuscule community representing less than 0.016 percent of India’s population, their
contribution to the country’s society, economics, commerce, politics and literature has been remarkable. They adopted Gujarati as their main language after their settlement in Gujarat. With the spread of the British Empire, the Parsis were the first Indian community to learn English. Nowadays Parsis learn how to speak, read and write in both Gujarati and English. Parsi families residing in different regions of India, also learn the regional language or Hindi. So most Parsi families in the Indian subcontinent speak at least three languages. The scriptures of religious texts of the Parsis are written in the ancient Avestan language or the Pahlani script. Moreover, these languages are now extinct and are used only by priests for prayers.

Parsi novel in English, that is, the novel portraying Parsi life is a potent index of the Zoroastrian ethos. It voices the ambivalence, the nostalgia and the dilemma of the endangered Parsi community. In Parsi novel in English, the operative sensibility is Zoroastrian. The Parsi novelists have forged a dialect which has a distinct ethnic character. The triumph of the Parsi novelist in the use of English language is largely due to their westernization and exposure to English culture. Their prose is interspersed with Persian words and Gujarati expressions. Besides being innovative, the Parsi novelists describe in detail the esoteric rituals and the Zoroastrian customs such as Novjote. Thus Parsi novel in English gives us a peep into the turbulent Parsi mind of today.

The emergence of promising writers like Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga, Boman Desai, Farrukh Dhondy, Ardashir Vakil and Bapsi Sidhwa have given a new direction to Parsi novel in English. Steeped in the Parsi myths and legends, these writers use English as an instrument of the self-assertion. In asserting themselves, they re-define the identity of the Zoroastrian community. At the same time, they are not blind to the challenges confronting the minuscule community such as mixed marriage and demographic decline. Novelists like Karanji and Sidhwa prefer re-thinking in the Parsi community whereas expatriate writers like Dhondy, Kanga and Boman Desai take a sceptical stance.

Rohinton Mistry’s *Tales from Ferozesha Bagg* is an important contribution to Parsi writing in English. Historically speaking, Parsi fiction begins with Cornelia Sorabji. Her two works *India Calling* and *India Recalled*, which are
autobiographical in nature, serve as valuable pieces of social criticism. D.F. Karaka’s novels written during the colonial era are either sentimental or didactic. His first novel, *Just Flesh*, is a novel of English life which undoubtedly displays his intimate knowledge of English milieu and life and Karaka’s second novel *There Lay the City* vividly recreates a bygone era.

Nergis Dalal is another woman novelist in Parsi Fiction in English who, like Shobha De, turned to fiction after attaining success in journalism. Her novels *Minari, The Sisters, The Inner Door* and *The Girls From Overseas* have helped her in creating a name for herself as a Parsi novelist. Saros Cowasjee, like D.F. Karaka, is a Parsi whose sensibilities were conditioned by the East-West confrontation. He is an expatriate writer who gives expression to the predicament of an Anglo-Indian exile in his first novel *Goodbye to Else*. Gustasp Irani’s *Once Upon a Raj* is written in a lighter vein and the narrative spoofs the British manners and mechanization of a royal family in India. Irani’s narrative mode is overtly ironic.

Bapsi Sidhwa has a distinctive Pakistani yet Parsi ethos in her writings. Hers is above all a unique individual voice. It is this individualism and sense of humour which makes her one of the finest writers of sub-continental English fiction. Bapsi has shown considerable accomplishment as well as promise through her fiction. Like all good novelists, Bapsi Sidhwa’s works have aroused a variety of reactions. Her interests are vast and she cannot be easily categorized as just a comic writer or a Parsi novelist. The present study aims at examining the various thematic patterns in her works. Her novels are remarkably different from one another in both subject and treatment. One can find variety of themes in her fiction such as the Partition crisis, expatriate experience, the Parsi milieu, social idiosyncrasies of the small minority community, the theme of marriage, women’s problems and patterns of migration. Her treatment of such wide ranging themes is a testimony to her growth as a powerful and dramatic novelist who is both an affectionate and shrewd observer of human society and a keen teller of stories. She is perhaps Pakistan’s finest English language novelist. There is a complex sprinkling of themes in her novels which defy any simplistic interpretation. Most of the literary criticism on her, however, veers round the theme of migration, ethnicity, feminism and use of comic mode in her
Rashmi Gaur in her edited book, Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man: A Reader’s Companion*, has presented a collection of essays on themes varying from gender and imagination to postcolonial appraisal of Sidhwa’s fiction. Niaz Zaman’s article “Bapsi Sidhwa: I am Pakistani” traces the Pakistani identity of the writer as revealed in her novels particularly in *Ice-Candy-Man*. Pallavi in her article entitled “*Ice-Candy-Man*: A Saga of Female Suppression and Marginalization” studies the novel in the context of feminism. Pashupati Jha and Nagendra Kumar in their essay “The Narrative Technique in *Ice-Candy-Man*” reflect upon the use of the first person present-tense narration. Ralph J. Crane while evaluating the early novels of Bapsi Sidhwa in her essay, “A Passion for History and for Truth Telling: The Early Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa” in *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa* stresses that through her marginalized narrators and characters she gives voice to the hitherto silenced groups. In the same book Cicely Havely in “Patterns of Migration in the Work of Bapsi Sidhwa” finds the recurrent motif of migration in her novels. The migration of Parsis from Persia to India and then to Europe, Canada and America in search for greener pastures gives them a unique experience of double migration. Feroza Jussawallla examines her fiction as bildungsroman novels and Parsis as the attainers of true hyberdity. Makrand Paranjape studies in his essay “The Early Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa” the more profound dimensions of the comic mode of *The Crow Eaters*. Novy Kapadia in “Expatriate Experience and Theme of Marriage in *An American Brat*” connects the theme of expatriate experience with inter-community marriage in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa which, according to her, leads to the movements towards self-actualization.

Bapsi Sidhwa is, undoubtedly, Pakistan’s leading diasporic writer. Besides her, Ahmed Ali and Zulfikar Ghose are the only other Pakistani novelists in English of some renown and stature and who have also been published abroad. Sidhwa’s conscious identification with Pakistan, as revealed in the treatment of themes and characters, becomes a strategy to assert her parochial identity for the deliberate purpose of popularizing the novel in the country of her origin. Sidhwa’s Pakistani perspective is evident in her writing. As a Pakistani writer, Sidhwa feels it incumbent upon her to explain her Pakistani background to those unfamiliar with her
milieu. Because she is also a Parsi, she attempts to explain this culture as well. Sidhwa shares with other third world writers, particularly those writing in a non-native language, the compulsion to explain her culture to an audience unfamiliar with that culture. The great Urdu poet of the subcontinent, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, has praised Bapsi Sidhwa for her comedy and shrewd observations of human behaviour. Faiz Ahmed Faiz says that “Ruthlessly truthful, deeply perceptive, she tells her story with rare courage, frankness, and good humour” (Paranjape 89). He compared her to V.S.Naipaul and R.K. Narayan.

My research intends to highlight how Bapsi Sidhwa has approached the Parsi society. There is a substantial need to critically evaluate and recognise the contribution of the Indo-Pakistani writers both on the national and international level. Writers from South Asia have been the subject of many critical studies. Many Indian writers of unusual calibre have helped to justify the independent position of Indian English writing and the bulk of criticism on Indian English literature is a positive proof of this fact. Pakistani writers, unfortunately have never been in the critical limelight. The situation regarding critical studies about Pakistani fiction is quite bleak, that is, their frustrating lack or total absence of such studies. Except for some newspaper reviews and brief commentaries scattered in some journals there is no systematic study available as yet. Criticism on Bapsi Sidhwa’s work is a case in point.

Sidhwa has published four novels so far and through her every work she has tried to show experimentations in imagination with an aim to achieve artistic synthesis. In Sidhwa’s work themes diverge from the traditional to contemporary. Thematically Sidhwa’s novels are rooted in the subcontinent where she was born and brought up yet they simultaneously possess a cosmopolitan appeal which readers can feel as a palpable presence beneath the characters.

Bapsi Sidhwa’s first novel *The Crow Eaters* could be read as a satire on the ways of the Parsi life. The criticism by a section of the Parsi community is the result of an assumption that the major thematic concern of the novel is the life of the Parsis. What Bapsi Sidhwa attempts to establish is that the Parsi community is like any other community with its own strengths and limitations. *The Crow Eaters,*
unlike several eulogies of Parsis by Parsis, does not exalt the community but only places Parsi life in perspective. Sidhwa’s vision is ironic which reveals her moral preoccupations.

*The Crow Eaters*, set in pre-independence India, excels in its representation of a combination of Indian and British characters. This novel is written in a comic mode. It is a very humorous novel with a distinctive authorial voice celebrating the achievements of a tiny community which has survived migration, resettled peacefully and prospered without losing its cultural identity. Sidhwa establishes her Parsi identity in the very opening pages of the novel. This novel breaks new grounds as it portrays the Parsi community in ironical mode for the first time in literature. It was attacked by a section of the Parsi community which considered it to be an unfair portrayal. According to the *Karachi Herald* of May 1987, this novel made Bapsi Sidhwa the “Parsi whom other Parsis love to hate” (Upadhyay 28). However, this criticism arises from the assumption that the chief concern of the novel is to portray the life of Parsis in India. She was disliked because she revealed the community’s secrets to the whole world. The author herself attempts a disclaimer by acknowledging, in a way, the basis for the controversy:

> 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 the 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” (Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, Author’s Note 7).

It is true that the protagonist, Faredoon Junglewalla, and all the major characters of the book are Parsis, and that Parsi life and rituals of wedding, death rites, and various aspects of Zoroastrian religion are minutely and comically described in the book, yet these factors do not make the book an indictment of or even an attack on the community. She satirises those Parsi characters and their idiosyncratic tendencies which provide enough scope of satiric criticism.
The Crow Eaters is not a novel particularly about Parsis; instead, it is a novel whose characters happen to be Parsis. The characters could well have been Hindu, or Muslim, and a good deal of satire would still have carried; each ethnic group, after all has its peculiarities and absurdities. (Upadhyay 31).

The Crow Eaters is a loosely constructed narrative which begins with an extended flash-back. Faredoon Junglewalla tells the story of his early years to a captive audience consisting of his seven children and some neighbouring kids. He tells how at the end of the nineteenth century, at the age of twenty-four, he embarked on a journey to Punjab with his wife and mother-in-law; how he struggled many years with his mother-in-law for control over his household; how, through a fraudulent insurance scheme in which he set fire to his own shop and frightened his mother-in-law, he becomes both the master of his house and rich; and how he rose to power and eminence in the community with hard work and craft.

Faredoon Junglewalla uses public space in his business and social interactions, while his spirited and indefatigable mother-in-law, Jerbanoo may be located in the private space of the home and body. Faredoon Junglewalla is a pioneering Parsi at the turn of the century. He transports his family in an ox-cart from Gujarat to Lahore. He, like many other Parsis, were the blind supporters of the British Empire for their vested interests. His identification with the British Raj is strong and here he represents the majority of pre-Independence Parsis. In a multi-religious Lahore, Faredoon Junglewalla and his family enjoy superior status by virtue of being Parsis. So the novel is rich in Parsi idiom; the highly evocative Parsi Gujarati is translated into English by Sidhwa.

Bapsi Sidhwa portrayed the dying businessman Faredoon Junglewalla’s offspring to remain loyal to the British Empire. The Parsis’ longstanding attitudes of loyalty to the British stemmed from the Zoroastrian religious belief of loyalty to a ruler and a close relationship between state and community. All that the Parsis wanted from the ruling British authorities was religious autonomy and protection. They got both. Such feelings were prevalent in the Parsi milieu and Bapsi Sidhwa aptly conveys it in The Crow Eaters. Freddy took every opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to the British. Self-preservation is of primary concern to the Parsis. We
see this operating principle at work when Faredoon, soon after his arrival in Lahore, goes to Government House and signs his name in the visitor’s register. “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” (The Crow Eaters 22). Freddy’s visit emblematizes the traditional submissiveness and pragmatism of the community. As Faredoon says:

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 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? (The Crow Eaters 12)

Hence, the exaggerated servility of Freddy, his son Billy and other Parsis towards British is revealed as an act to ensure legal security, peace and economic prosperity. The maintenance of identity by the Parsi community sometimes even verges on resorting to sycophancy. With her ironic perspective, the flattery of the Parsis is humorously revealed in the novel but it also expresses an underlying identity crisis and quest for security amongst the community as a whole. The identity crisis in changing social milieu which Bapsi Sidhwa accurately depicts in the novel was distinctively a social problem for the Parsis of the British India. Parsi alienation from mainstream Indian culture and fascination with western things is satirized in Faredoon Junglewalla’s hilarious attempts at quoting English proverbs. This alienation is also underlined in the Junglewalla family’s horror when their Yazdi wants to marry an Aglo-Indian girl and mingle his pure Persian blood with her mongrel blood. The Parsi fascination with England is satirized in Faredoon’s visit to Britain with his wife and mother-in-law. The visit ends in an embarrassing fiasco and the Junglewalla’s return to India.

The novel ends on a rather ambiguous note. The Junglewalla family is definitely at home in India and not in the West. However, this India is on the verge
of being torn apart by the Hindus and the Muslims alike. Faredoon Junglewalla, like most Parsis, remains aloof from the freedom movement. Secure in his religious exclusivity, and the immunity it offers against violence and death, he sits back and is ready to let Hindus and Muslims battle over India. To Junglewalla, like to the majority of Parsis, it mattered little who was to rule over independent India or over the new state to be carved out. The Crow Eaters explores the more profound dimensions of the comic mode. Not only is it an entertaining satire and farce on the foibles of its main characters, it also embodies a larger vision of the world, a vision which is best described as broad, tolerant and sympathetic.

Bapsi Sidhwa’s second novel The Pakistani Bride deals with one of the pivotal concerns in feminist discourse, viz. the oppression of women in the patriarchal set-up. The narrative depicts the struggle for the survival of Zaitoon, a tribal girl. Through Carol, an alien, Sidhwa speaks against the oppression of women. In the ultimate analysis, Zaitoon emerges as a shining symbol, an emblem against oppression. The narrative celebrates the will, resolve to resist evil and the struggle against oppression of women.

Sidhwa’s The Pakistani Bride, is completely different from her first novel. This novel, on the other hand is serious, almost tragic, though it has its lighter moments as well. It is based on a true story which was narrated to her when she and the family camped in the remotest regions of the Karakoram mountains. Let alone the assertion of Parsi identity, it does not have even a single Parsi character. The novel is about a young Pakistani girl who is a Muslim refugee from India and is adopted by a Pathan during the Partition upheavals. The novel’s language and its keen insight into the Pakistani ethos and the understanding of the Pathan psyche is a superb testimony to Sidhwa’s assimilation into Pakistan.

The Pakistani Bride provides an incisive look into the treatment of women. It is the most contentious of Sidhwa’s novels, the most critical towards unjust traditions that undermine the structure of community. Zaitoon, a young girl is victimized by the debilitating patriarchal prescriptions of an insular tribal society. A child of Partition, her parents are dead when she is four or five. Brought up by Qasim as his own daughter, she grows up secluded in Qila Gujjar Singh, Lahore. At
sixteen, her marriage is fixed by Qasim with Sakhi, the son of Misir Khan, Qasim’s cousin. The marriage seems to be doomed to fail. First Miriam warns Qasim about the differences between hill life and urban life. Finally, Zaitoon herself has misgivings and begs to be taken back with Qasim. But Qasim is adamant, even threatening to kill the girl if she crosses him. The marriage and the interlude of joy that follows are both short-lived. Zaitoon’s torture begins on the very next day after marriage. Soon after that she is broken in by her “tyrannical, animal-trainer” of a husband, who “beat her on the slightest pretext” (Sidhwa, The Pakistani Bride 174).

Two months after her marriage, Zaitoon is severely battered for going up to the river against the commands of her husband. The river is the boundary between the tribal territory and the army. Beyond the river is the world Zaitoon is familiar with. She longs to go back to it. Seeing her move at the Jawans across the river, Sakhi nearly kills her. She decides to flee from the nightmarish world. Zaitoon frames her resistance in the gesture of defiance. Her escape from her husband and his family is the only act of Zaitoon propelled by her own free will, after being a victim of ineluctable fate almost throughout the narrative. Zaitoon’s escape from the rigid, traditional tribal community is considered by Fawzia Afzal Khan as a spirit of defiance which “endorses a challenge to the strictures of patriarchy” (Ross 74). Carol, the American girl in the story, married to a Pakistani army officer is equally oppressed in her relationship. But since the means of resistance on more easily available to her due to her privileged class and race identity, she decides to break free. The open-ended novel makes available to the reader various options to construct its likely end. But there are strong pointers in the text towards Carol taking charge of Zaitoon and perhaps returning to America. The end of the novel achieves the feminist utopian ideal of female solidarity of sisterhood. If Zaitoon is the heroine of the novel, Carol is the best supporting actress. Though it may not appear so at the first reading, she is the most important character in the book besides Zaitoon. In her, Sidhwa reveals the pangs of a western, upper-class woman in the male-dominated society of the novel. Carol’s story nicely complements Zaitoon’s and viewed together they help convey the author’s view of the status of women in the novel. The novel is a very moving and powerful work of art. It portrays an idealistic and
philosophical outlook which shows the primacy of the human spirit over physical and material obstacles. It is a story of courage and heroism, superbly narrated.

*Ice-Candy-Man*, also known as *Cracking India* by Sidhwa’s American publisher, is her third novel which possesses several layers of connotative and enigmatic interpretations. It is her most serious political novel till date and is written on the theme of Partition. Effectively using the persona of a child narrator, it critically presents the kaleidoscopically changing socio-political realities of the Indian subcontinent just before the Partition. Sidhwa’s humorous tone, subtle characterization, irreverence to established traditions and the absence of histrionics impart a very specific charm to this novel. Indeed, Bapsi Sidhwa became a household name in India when this novel was recently made into a successful Mumbai film *1947: Earth*.

*The Ice-Candy Man* is a re-inscription of male texts on the Partition which valorises objective reality in the narrative and ignores the experiential realm of the woman. In this novel Sidhwa again draws our attention to the facts of victimization of women but here the victimization is a result of collective action viz. the communal riots that followed the Partition. Riots are largely orchestrated by males and become a signifier of a collective male victimizer. The maid in the Parsi family at Lahore, the Ayah, is the one who suffers the impact of Partition the most. Partition is an upheaval which changes the status of millions of hapless people on either side of the border in the subcontinent into refugees. If Partition is the cataclysm which Freddy predicts towards the end of the narrative in *The Crow Eaters*, in *Ice-Candy-Man*, Partition becomes the moulding principle, a shaping force in the evolution of consciousness of Lenny, the Parsi child-protagonist. If Partition is a traumatic experience for Bhisham Sahni and Amrita Pritam, it is an integral part of Bapsi Sidhwa’s consciousness. This narrative, complex as it is, marks a point of departure in Sidhwa’s writing. Here, for the first time, she uses a child-narrator like Firdaus Kanga in *Trying to Grow* and Adam Zameenzad in *Gorgeous White Female*.

*The Ice-Candy-Man* is the prism of Parsi sensitivity through which the cataclysmic event is depicted. It is the only novel written by a Parsi on the theme of
Partition. While the novel shows in the beginning the non-committal attitude of the Parsi community towards the flux in which the various communities of India found themselves at the beginning of the twentieth century, it does reveal the love-hate relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims through the consciousness and point of view of Lenny, an unusually precocious eight-year-old Parsi girl.

The author in this work showcases the Parsi attitude to the imminent Partition and to the concept of Swaraj. Set in pre-Partition Lahore during the period of “the satanic rites of fragmentation in the Indian subcontinent,” (qtd. in Mitra 180) the novel clearly highlights the vulnerability of human relationships that can be torn asunder at the slightest pretext. Also, here again, as in Dina Mehta’s novel and in Bapsi Sidhwa’s earlier novel, The Crow Eaters, we see the ambivalent attitude of the Parsis towards the British. They find it difficult to choose their loyalties between Swaraj or the British Raj. At a special meeting organized at the Temple Hall on Warris Road an irresolvable battle of words on the political situation ensues between various Parsis representing different attitudes. Col. Bharcuha’s advice to the Parsis is to keep their distance form the slush of the nationalist agitation. Dr. Mody, on the other hand, pleads for the commitment to the cause of the freedom struggle for the transparent reason that “Our neighbours will think we are betraying them and siding with the English” (Sidhwa, Ice-Candy-Man 37). And finally, at the instance of Toddywalla, the banker, the Parsis decide to opt for a path of compromise. Here, it may be relevant to point out that Sidhwa’s novels voice the views of the particularly affluent, urban, middle-class Parsis.

When the Partition riots erupt, the Ice-Candy-Man seizes his chance to debase the Ayah and leads a Muslim mob to Lenny’s house. The Parsi family and its Muslim servants hide the Ayah, but Lenny unwittingly betrays her. At this level, it is the wider and constant betrayal by all Parsis of the one hand which has given them refuge. Ayah is dragged away by the mob and raped. After her degradation, the Ice-Candy-Man, sets her up in a house in the prostitute’s quarters in Lahore. Having proved his mastery over her, he now professes to be crazily in love with her and wants to marry her. She, having been betrayed by him and physically abused by the mob, refuses to accept him. The women from Lenny’s family eventually rescue her
and she becomes a candidate for rehabilitation. However, the ever-present betrayer, the Ice-Candy-Man, goes along with the rehabilitated Ayah to perhaps ravish her afresh.

Interwoven into this dark and sordid talk of political betrayal and rape is Lenny’s childhood and her Parsi identity. The ethos is not stressed but subtly interwoven into the narrative. Lenny, the maimed child, is at once autobiographical as well as metaphorical. In this novel Sidhwa also confronts the issue of how the Parsi identity was going to cope with the changes on the political front. Lenny is thus a witness to the varied adult worlds which are in the process of tearing the community which bore witness to the carnage of the Partition of India. Though Sidhwa’s novel does focus on the changing attitude of the Parsi community, it leaves out the exploration of the dilemma that the Parsi community had to resolve regarding its unnatural schismatic division between Indian and Pakistani Parsis.

Bapsi Sidhwa’s earlier novels portray life in her home territory, in familiar surroundings of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, the tumultuous history of Partition, independence, theme of marriage and the survival of her tiny Parsi community. Her fourth novel *An American Brat* moves its locale, for the most part, to the New World, the United States of America. Her novel reflects the recent trend of globalization, the concept of the world as a global village and increasing movement of professionals from the third world to first word nations like the United States of America, England, Australia and Canada. As people move from one part of the world to another, national boundaries dissolve, the formation and maintenance of community takes on new dimensions. The Hong Kong born novelist Timothy Mo treats this theme effectively in *Sour Sweet* (1982) as does the African novelist Buchi Emecheta in several of her books. In the genre of Indian-English fiction, Bharati Mukherjee explores this contemporary theme in several of her short stories and in her novel *Jasmine* (1989). Earlier Anita Desai examined the migration and re-adjustment theme in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971) and Kamala Markandaya in *The Nowhere Man* (1972). In *An American Brat*, Bapsi Sidhwa handles the change in theme and locale expertly, with a lot of humour and from a contemporary perspective. This novel marks her entry into the orbit of diasporic fiction, in which
other South Asian novelists like Salman Rushdie and Bharati Mukherjee have already made a mark.

In Bapsi Sidhwa’s fiction, there are multiple levels of displacement or diaspora, but these within the subcontinent—from central India to Lahore in *The Crow Eaters*, from Lahore to Amritsar in *Ice-Candy-Man* and from Lahore to New York in *An American Brat*. Displacement or diaspora thus becomes the creative thrust of her fiction in which history is the compelling factor. *Ice-Candy-Man* ends on a note of assimilation. Ultimately, even with Partition, what matters for the Parsis is a stable and unified country—India or Pakistan. *Ice-Candy-Man*’s departure for India is certainly a symbolic gesture, particularly at the end of the novel.

This novel reveals Bapsi Sidhwa’s all major qualities as a writer—her rich comic powers, keen observation, heightened sense of storytelling and character portrayal and her moral vision of her community. The storyline is simple. Feroza Ginwalla, the rebellious daughter of Cyrus and Zareen Ginwalla, makes the transition from Gulberg, Lahore to Denver, Colorado with a mixture of frustrations, anger and humour. The novel deals with the change that Feroza undergoes, in the West and how her perspective on life changes. Sidhwa is at her best as she humorously delineates Feroza adapting to an alien culture and the stress she suffers when she comes face to face with the collision of cultures.

*An American Brat* deals with the intercultural theme which has assumed vital significance for many postcolonial novelists. In this narrative, the West is depicted as a set of values in conflict with the value system of the East. Here, quite significantly, the conflict between the two cultures is discernible not only on the social plane but also on the personal level leading to a quest for identity. Bapsi Sidhwa evinces keen interest in the interaction of two cultures that exist side by side. The Zoroastrian mode of life of Feroza, the Parsi protagonist, clashes with the modern American way of life with its emphasis on material prosperity. The resultant friction compels her to make a moral choice in life. This fate is shared by many expatriate today.

Feroza is caught between conservatism, which is the result of the rising wave of fundamentalism in Pakistan, and progressive liberalism for which her mother
Zareen stands. Her lack of interest in religion, at least initially, is typical of the Parsi community today. Speaking of Feroza’s relationship with Zoroastrianism, Sidhwa observes: “Like most Parsees, who know very little about their religion, Feroza had a comfortable relationship with the faith she was born into; she accepted it as she did the color of her eyes or the length of her limbs” (Sidhwa, *An American Brat* 40). Sidhwa, like Kanga, is unsentimental and detached in her stance on issue pertaining to religion. Feroza resolves to have *humata* (good thoughts), *hukhta* (good words) and *hvarshta* (good deeds) that would advance His divine plan. She feels the spiritual power of the fire reach out from its divine depths to encompass her with its pure energy. She feels herself being suffused with the presence of Ahura Mazda. She prays, “Come to my help, O Ahura-Mazda! Give me victory, power and the joy of life” (*An American Brat* 42). Discussing the major trends in postcolonial literatures, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write, “A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being, the concern with the development of recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (Ashcroft 8-9). In Feroza’s case also, a valid and active sense of self is eroded by displacement. The sudden swing from the stifling conservative milieu of Lahore to the exhilarating surreal world of New York disorients her. Gradually, however, a perceptible change comes over Feroza. Her gain of knowledge in the new world is a privilege which the conventional morality denies her in Pakistan.

Novy Kapadia points out that, “through Feroza’s experiences, Sidhwa also shows the expatriate’s assimilation to the way of life of the New World” (191). The attitudes of Feroza and Manek, her uncle are diametrically contrary to each other. In other words, he adapts himself, in external behaviour for a smoother acceptance in the chosen land. With Feroza, on the other hand, it is assimilation which is a far slower process. Her ability to react instinctively and emotionally to the culture of the New World shortens her period of adjustment. Her association with Jo, an American student, benefits her understanding of America.

The message of Fr. Fibs is an enunciation to the migrants in general, and Feroza in particular. Comparing young men and women to birds, he observes that
they would fly and fall and fly again. It would hurt but their wings would become stronger. He concludes, “And once you’re no longer afraid to fall, away you’ll soar—up, up, to where you need never fall!” (An American Brat 117) His message fires her imagination and produces a catalytic effect on the process of her assimilation. The constraints so deeply embedded in her Pakistani psyche slowly loosen their grip under Jo’s influence.

Discussing the dilemma of the expatriates, Viney Kirpal points out that “the compelling need in a migrant, which almost becomes a survival-strategy, is to cling to his own traditions and to mix with people of his own country” (65). He keeps his ethnicity alive. Feroza, like most expatriates, revives her ethnicity, the cause of which is nostalgia.

One evening, Feroza commits the sin of smoking. That night, she performs the Kusti ritual, bows her head to beg divine forgiveness for desecrating the holy Fire—the symbol of Ahura Mazda—by permitting it such an intimate contact with her unclean mouth. The interior landscape of Feroza remains Zoroastrian and her triumph lies in preserving her ethnic identity despite her long stay in American. Her quest is not only for social space, which would ensure her an identity of her own but also for self-development. Zoroastrianism offers her the much-needed emotional space. Like a true Parsi, she aims at ethical perfection and realises the significance of freedom, a privilege to which she is not entitled in the conservative Pakistan.

In An American Brat, Sidhwa shows the complex love-hate relationship that exists between the land and the migrants. Feroza is caught between the two worlds—the one she had forsaken because it offered no hope and prosperity and the other which had failed her despite initial promises. Thus Feroza stays on as a marginal being, unable to discard and forget her old world and equally unable to find solace in the chosen land. Although the sense of dislocation in Feroza is more acute in the New World, it is more tolerable because it is shared by thousands of expatriates like her. The introduction of Islamic law at home would crush her freedom. She admits, “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” (An American Brat 312). In other words, the New
World promises Feroza freedom and abundant happiness. In contrast, life at home is bleak and gloomy. In the beginning of the novel we hardly find any integration between Feroza self and the society. However, she achieves the fruitful fusion of heart and mind and thus resolves the moral crisis in her life.

In *An American Brat*, Sidhwa deals with the motif of expatriation which was dealt with extensively by Bharati Mukherjee and other postcolonial novelists like Yasmine Gooneratne. Bharati Mukherjee and Yasmine Gooneratne are coloured expatriates who faced a multi-cultural situation in America and Australia respectively. For them, as for Sidhwa, the multi-cultural situation is not only a theme but also a mode of perception. The clash of cultures and the need for adaptation are part of the diasporic experience. Like Feroza, Jane, Bharati Mukherjee’s protagonist in *Jasmine*, leaves her own culture and enters another which results in a cultural uprooting. With keen precision, Bharati Mukherjee leads Jane through a series of adventures and misadventures to a final self-actualization and reconciliation. In her case, the achievement of an identity is not by a mere geographical shift to America but by a personality honing through acculturation to the different identities she takes on. Bapsi Sidhwa and Bharati Mukherjee differ radically from each other, although both are expatriate novelists. While Bharati Mukherjee rejected her Indian identity to become an integral part of the American ethos, Sidhwa’s roots continue to exist in Pakistan. This is precisely what sustains her as a creative artist and complements her expatriate experience.

Though expatriate experience constitutes the core of the narrative in *An American Brat*, Sidhwa brings in a variety of relevant issues such as mixed marriage and oppression of women. Thus her canvas is much broader than Bharati Mukherjee’s. Mixed marriages are not permitted in the Zoroastrian community. Parsis who marry outside the community forgo all the privileges enjoyed by the other Parsis. Feroza’s emotional involvement with David Press, an American Jew, comes as a potent threat to the orthodox Parsi community of Lahore. Zareen, mother of Feroza, comes to dissuade her daughter but ironically enough, modifies her stand on mixed marriage and conversion to Zoroastrian faith. She begins to question the rigid code which prevails in Zoroastrianism, “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?” (An American Brat 287) Her predilection for mixed marriage is, as for the Parsi community itself, an existential necessity. She muses:

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. . . . The various *Anjumans* would have to introduce minor reforms if they wished their tiny community to survive (An American Brat 288).

Sidhwa thus employs a situation in the narrative to focus on the issue of dissent among the younger generation of the Parsi community. She seems to suggest that the demand of some rethinking as regards the rigid code is justified. However, she neither takes a rebellious stance against the prevailing ideology in the Parsi community nor does she advocate blind conformity. Through the gestures of Feroza and Zareen, she hints at the need for a change in values, and attitudes of both old and new Parsis. Without taking sides, she emphasizes the need for a compromise on crucial issues like mixed marriages as the survival of the microscopic community is at stake. If she resents the mindless current of fundamentalism in Pakistan, she is equally critical of the rigid custodians of the Zoroastrian faith. Thus with An American Brat, Bapsi Sidhwa has made a significant contribution to the literature of the diaspora. If the new world offers Feroza adequate social space to grow, Zoroastrianism provides the ultimate emotional and religious space to her.

Along with the four novels, Bapsi Sidhwa has also worked on the screenplay of the much-acclaimed award-winning film *Water* by Deepa Mehta. The renowned author Bapsi Sidhwa and the equally renowned film maker Deepa Mehta share a unique artistic relationship. Though Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Water: A Novel* is based on the script of Deepa Mehta’s controversial film ‘Water’ yet it is a powerful and moving book that complements the film and also holds up well as an independent work—with quite a few passages that are more compelling than their cinematic equivalents.
Throughout *Water* Bapsi exposes the cruelties of Hinduism against widows. This novel throws light on exploitation of widows by rich Brahmans. The book also tries to show the love between Narayan (who is educated) and Kalyani (who is widow) but the main aim of the book is to show the exploitation of widows by other people and how they are dragged to prostitution. It is not that Bapsi is rejecting Hinduism as a respectable religion. She is merely raising the right questions – she is striving to empower, with the means to help those widows who, till this day, suffer in the same conditions described in the novel. No religion is perfect. Each has its share of blemish. Hinduism is no different whether these injustices are innate to the religion or a by-product of chauvinistic interpretation, one thing is clear: unleashing and relinquishing one of the skeletons in Hinduism’s closet will only enhance the quality of the religion.

Bapsi Sidhwa’s intense and moving novel *Water* is set in 1938, when the traditions of colonial India were being threatened by the modern ideas of Mahatma Gandhi. Against the backdrop of Gandhi’s rise to power, *Water* follows the life of eight-year-old Chuyia, betrothed at age 6 and widowed at age 8. According to Hindu tradition of time, she is transported from a carefree life and a loving family to a widow’s ashram on the fringes of society, after the death of her forty-four-year-old husband. In the widow-ashram, her head is shorn and her life is given over to penitence. There, she must live in penitence until her death. Inside the widow-ashram Chuyia encounters the strong and the weak, the corrupt and the honest, the victims and the victors. Still years away from a proper understanding of the ways of the world, she is told that she no longer exists as a person – all because of the sudden death of a husband she had barely even met. According to Brahmin culture in those times, “Once widowed, a woman was deprived of her useful function in society – that of reproducing and fulfilling her duties to her husband. She ceased to exist as a person; she was no longer either daughter or daughter-in-law. There was no place for her in the community, and she was viewed as a threat to society. A woman’s sexuality and fertility, which was so valuable to her husband in his lifetime, was converted upon his death into a potential danger to the morality of the community” (Sidhwa, *Water* 24). Unwilling to accept her fate, she becomes a
catalyst for change in the lives of the Indian widows. Slowly, Chuyia overcomes her sense of dislocation, makes friends with other women in the ashram and stirs a few hackles with her directness in situations where others simply follow the letter of the ancient texts. “Where is the house for the men widows?” (Water 81) She innocently asks at the gathering, producing instant shouts of outrage: “God protect our men from such a fate!” (Water 81) However, the child’s words have an effect on the middle-aged Shakuntala, who tries to conquer her own inherent conservatism by questioning the scriptures. When her friend Kalyani, a beautiful widow-prostitute, falls in love with a young, upper-class Gandhian idealist, the forbidden affair boldly defies Hindu tradition and threatens to undermine the ashram’s delicate balance of power. This riveting look at the lives of widows in colonial India is ultimately a haunting and lyrical story of love, faith and redemption. Sidhwa’s humour and compassion grow in Water. The brightly dressed eunuch Gulabi declares, “This Gandhi is going to sink India” (Water 103). Yet Gulabi realizes that if Gandhi believes the untouchables (such as widows) might be children of God, “then eunuchs are His stepchildren!” (Water 104) Moreover, Sidhwa expects some intellectual muscle from her readers. Although her stories are simple, their subtexts are richly instructive. Her lively characters thrash out personal and political issues. As Gandhi’s train passes through the village the prospect of rescue from punishing Hindu traditions seems conceivable.

One of Sidhwa’s strengths is the ability to make a point without underlining it. She does over-stress the irony in a couple of places – for instance when Madhumati, the ashram head who has forced Kalyani into prostitution, says, “We must live in purity, to die in purity” (Water 144). But the overall restraint with which the story is told helps strengthen the impact of the more disturbing moments.

Despite the fact that the ashram has its own internal politics and that we are constantly rooting for some characters (Chuyia, Kalyani, Shakuntla) against others, we are never allowed to forget that all these women are victims of a cruel, unthinking tradition which exists for no better reason than that it has always been so. Even Madhumati, variously compared to a ‘beached whale’ and a ‘satiated sea-lion,’ and despicable in her treatment of Kalyani, has a human side. She too was once a
young girl with dreams, and in the parasitic monster she has become, we can see how one evil begets another. The growing influence of Gandhiji does in fact seem to indicate a better future for tradition’s victims, and Water ends on a tenuous note of hope. But the story is still just as relevant; the violent protests that nearly aborted Mehta’s film are a reminder of how unthinking adherence to tradition can lord it over reason and humanity.

All these thematic issues will be taken up for detailed analysis in the present study. The Parsi ethos is the subject of The Crow Eaters but it continues in Ice-Candy-Man as well as in An American Brat. Oppression of, and discrimination against women is a recurrent motif in Bapsi Sidhwa’s fiction. Plight of women which is central to the narrative in The Pakistani Bride is dealt with in Ice-Candy-Man, An American Brat and Water also. Partition is the main theme of the Ice-Candy-Man but it also figures in The Crow Eaters and in The Pakistani Bride. The diasporic experience and cultural difference is the pivot of An American Brat but it is an important issue in her other novels as well. Thus, racial, regional, national and cultural issues of historical as well as topical significance form the core of her novels.
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