Chapter V
Cultural Difference

Culture has played an enormous role in the development of people, nations and societies throughout history. It has provided the primary impetus for war and for peace, for good deeds and bad, from the unified efforts of Christian countries during the crusades to the wholesale slaughter of the Indians in North America. It provides a powerful bond for personal loyalties and loyalties between people. When someone in a given culture hears another man using, for example, his language, or even just his accent, it is an instant attraction and incentive to camaraderie. Furthermore, certain traits and characteristics are very effectively inculcated by a people’s culture. It is a powerful influence upon all people in all times and all places.

Furthermore, cultures have been able to form people into certain molds and certain ideals more effectively than any other material force. People have retained a fierce loyalty to given ideals and patterns of behaviour without any apparent motivation other than what in English is commonly referred to with the word culture. Furthermore, culture has been of more service than even formal education, because of both its effectiveness and its universal availability in imparting a given set of ideas effectively through the generations. Clearly, culture is a vital influence upon individuals and societies and ought to be properly understood in order to understand their actions.

Furthermore, human societies and cultures are inextricably connected because culture is created and transmitted to others in a society. Cultures are not the products of lone individuals. They are the continuously evolving products of people interacting with each other. Cultural patterns such as language and politics make no sense except in terms of the interaction of people.

The word culture is commonly used for a number of different things. For some it refers to an appreciation of good literature, music, art and food. For a biologist, it is likely to be a colony of bacteria or other microorganisms. However, for anthropologists and other behavioural scientists, culture is the full range of learned human behaviour patterns and perceptions. Most obviously is the body of cultural traditions that distinguish one’s specific
society. When people speak of Italian, Samoan or Japanese culture, they are referring to the shared language, traditions and beliefs that set each of these people apart from others.

Thus culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Certain traits of a culture are certainly shared with other cultures; those traits may still, however, be considered part of an individual culture provided they are distinctive to that culture.

Culture, therefore, is something which applies to a given, distinct group of people and involves those habits which are distinct from the habit of other people. They may share some habits with others. However, these habits can still be considered distinctively their own, even if at the same time they are distinctively someone else’s.

Thus every country or community has a distinct culture and often within it there are divergent cultural mores. Cultural diversity adds colour and variety to the human world but at the same time it divides people into numerous groups and subgroups having little in common with one another, and thus proves a great barrier to human relationships. Bapsi Sidhwa in all her novels has taken up the issue of the cultural difference and the problems arising out of it.

In *The Crow Eaters*, Faredoon gets angry when he comes to know that his son Yazdi wants to marry Rosy Watson, an anglo-Indian girl. He objects to his son’s inter-community marriage and says that Parsis are not allowed to marry outside their community. He emphasises the need for preserving the ethnic purity. Freddy argues that children born to people who marry outside the community will be misfits. Mixed-marriage was not conceived as a threat by the Parsi community during the colonial period. But Freddy opposes it since it involves a challenge to patriarchy. Thus, the relationship between Yazdi and Rosy is crushed by the racial and cultural differences.

Again, it is the cultural difference that makes Jerbanoo feel very awkward, first in the house of her son-in-law Freddy’s bosom friend, Charles P. Allen, and then at a hotel in England. Before leaving for England she and her daughter Putli have wonderful fantasies about the land of their rulers: “To them England was a land of crowns and thrones; of tall, splendidly attired, cool-eyed noblemen and imposing, fair-haired ladies gliding past in gleaming carriages; of elegant lords in tall hats and tails, strolling with languid ladies who swept spotless waterfront promenades with trailing gowns, their gestures gracious and
charming, marked by an exquisite reserve” (Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters* 252). They are a bit disconcerted on the ship when they find Englishmen scouring the decks and waiting upon them. Within two days of landing in England they are extremely disillusioned:

They saw grubby Englishmen, in ill-fitted woolen garments, scurry past with faces that betokened a concern with the ordinary aspects of life. They saw meek, unassuming men with mournful, retiring eyes; and men with the sly, sly, cheeky eyes of street urchins. They saw seedy looking Englishmen sweep roads, clean windows and cart garbage. They met sales girls, clerks and businessmen; all English, all white-skinned and light-eyed, on a footing of disconcerting equality. And the expression on the faces of Londoners was no different from that stamped on the faces of a cross-section of India. Where were the kings and queens, the lords and ladies and their gleaming carriages? Where were the men and women with haughty, compelling eyes and arrogant mien? They realised in a flash that the superiority the British displayed in India was assumed, acquired from the exotic setting, like their tan (*The Crow Eaters* 253).

The sight of their host, Mr. Charles P. Allen, scrubbing out his toilet bowl is the final blow. His wife is an overworked housewife and she has no servants except for an insolent and slovenly maid who comes for an hour each morning. Jerbanoo cannot reconcile herself to what she considers Mrs Allen’s treacherous degradation. She remembers her surrounded by lackeys trained to jump to her bidding in India. She recalls her parties on flower banked lawns and feels greatly betrayed. She feels it demeaning to address such an inconsequential person as ‘Mrs Allen’, and calls her ‘May-ree’. Her husband becomes ‘Charlie.’

When Mr. Allen, Faredoon and Putli go round the City from dawn to dusk, Jerbanoo prefers to stay in the house, ordering Mrs. Allen about. Mrs. Allen tries her best to indulge her every whim but Jerbanoo is not satisfied with merely making demands. She constantly meddles, “Why you not make curry today? Why you not cut onion proper? Why you not rinse O.K.? I not drink with soap! No chilli? I no digest!” (*The Crow Eaters* 255-256) Sometimes her remarks are much too personal and insulting:

Why you not wear nice long gown? Silly frock. It shows you got a terrible leg. Why you not have bath! Water bite you? You sit, you drink tea-cup every two, two
minutes. Mind, demon of laziness make your bottom fat. And once, why you got no breast? She asked, reproachfully thrusting her own abundance forward and patting Mary’s flat chest. Not good. Poor Charlie! Jerbanoo touched, tampered, and tinkered with everything, poking her inquisitive nose into cupboards, drawers and larder, drawing things out for inspection. Often she summoned Mary from her work to inquire. May-ree! May-ree! What is this?” (The Crow Eaters 256)

One evening while Mrs Allen is adjusting the fire, Jerbanoo jacks up her skirt with a fork to examine her underwear and exclaims, “Shame, shame, shame! You wearing such a small knicker!” (The Crow Eaters 256) Mary, having exhausted her patience, complains to her husband. Mr Allen talks to Freddy and Freddy strictly instructs Jerbanoo to stay in her room and come downstairs only when he and Putli are in the house. If Mary sees her on the stairs, she instantly shooes and sends her back to her room. This is more than Jerbanoo can bear and she thinks of staging a scene. One night, when everyone has gone to sleep, she comes out of her room, spreads a newspaper on the landing and defecates on it. Next morning, one of the students living in the house detects it and the whole house is in uproar. Mary screams, “This is the last straw! I will not have that — that demon in my house another minute! Get her out! Get her out!” (The Crow Eaters 262)

At midday Freddy with his wife and mother-in-law leaves Mr Allen’s house. Their departure is forlorn. No one waves goodbye. They check into a hotel in Oxford Street. Jerbanoo is delighted at the change of scene. She enjoys roaming around the place alone and her fat figure wrapped in a sari attracts a lot of attention. The rooms in their hotel do not have attached baths. There is one bathroom at the end of their corridor and three tiny lavatories. In the lavatories there are no taps and no water, only flush bowls and toilet paper. Every time Jerbanoo goes to wash herself, she carries water in the brass jar she has brought with her from India. Freddy feels embarrassed to see his mother-in-law with this old-fashioned water container and forbids her its use. Jerbanoo finds out a way. The moment Freddy and Putli leave the hotel, she rushes to the lavatory with her jar. The problem of bathing still remains unsolved. She is used to bathing twice daily but Freddy has told her to take bath once every three days. One sunny morning while she is leaning out of her balcony, an idea occurs to her that she can use it as her bathroom. On the fifth day while she is splashing about happily, she hears a furious voice bellow: “Blimey! God, we’re being flooded!” (The Crow Eaters 268)
She quickly drapes a towel round her shoulders and peers over the balcony into the red, wet and choleric face of an Englishman. Assessing the explosive situation, Jerbanoo points a prophetic hand at the cloudless sky and says, “Rain! Rain!” (The Crow Eaters 268) and goes back to her room. A few minutes later, the Englishman violently knocks on her door. He demands her to tell him what she was doing on the balcony or he will get her locked up. Jerbanoo says, “I tell you! I wash my bottom. I no dry-clean like you dirty Englishman. I wash my bottom!” (The Crow Eaters 269) The Englishman before leaving the hotel lodges a violent protest with the management. Freddy in exasperation decides to return to Lahore.

Whereas Jerbanoo feels isolated in an alien land, Qasim in The Pakistani Bride finds himself an odd man out in his own country. He is a Kohistani tribal. After the untimely death of his wife and children caused by a smallpox epidemic, he leaves his mountain village and goes to Jullundur where his cousin finds him a job as watchman in the National and Grindlays Bank. Every common object in Jullundur is a wonder to Qasim. Torches, safety-pins, electric-lights, cinemas and cars whirl magically before his senses. The sight of women walking with brisk buttocks and bare midriffs is a new experience to him. A meal of spicy curries and vegetables is a far cry from his daily mountain diet of flat maize bread soaked in water. He finds a striking contrast between his native place and Jullundur as regards their basic values: “The men of the plains appeared strangely effeminate. Women roamed the streets in brazen proximity. These people were soft, their lives easy. Where he came from, men—as in the Stone Age—walked thirty days over the lonely, almost trackless mountains to secure salt for their tribes” (Sidhwa, The Pakistani Bride 21).

Qasim, however, soon adjusts himself to the mode of life in Jullundur. Everything goes on well for a few months and then, he gets into an altercation with the bank-clerk, Girdharilal. Besides his clerical work, Girdharilal has charge of cleanliness in the bank building, right down to the toilets. Qasim uses the bank toilet very rarely but whenever he uses it, he leaves it clogged with stones and scraps of smooth-surfaced glass. It causes much inconvenience to the employees visiting the lavatory later. One day Girdharilal catches him out. When he asks him if he threw the stones there, Qasim merely smiles as he doesn’t follow his words. When someone explains the charge to him, he admits the facts but still smiles because he doesn’t realize that he has done anything wrong. He has done what all hill-men do. They never wash their bottoms. Girdharilal angrily calls him “filthy son of a Muslim
mountain hog” (The Pakistani Bride 22). Qasim tries to strangle him for insulting his tribe, blood and religion. They are wrenched apart. Qasim is ordered to apologize but he apologizes only when his cousin persuades him to do so. He later tells Qasim that killing is against the law of the plains and one found guilty is caught and hanged. Qasim resolves nevertheless to avenge himself on Girdharilal sooner or later.

Qasim gets the opportunity after three years in 1947 when violence erupts in almost every street in the north Indian plains in the wake of partition. One night, defying the curfew, he goes to Girdharilal’s quarters, shoots him down and the next day, boards a train to Pakistan. The train is ambushed near the border by a murderous mob of Sikh rioters. Qasim jumps off the train in the nick of time and takes refuge in the deep shade of a clump of trees. He watches the massacre of Muslims as in a cinema. Although he is horrified by the slaughter, he feels no compulsion to sacrifice his own life because these are people from the plains, not his people. When the carnage subsides, a little girl Munni, whose parents have been killed, clings to his legs calling him Abba. After some initial hesitation, he picks her up, names her Zaitoon after his own dead daughter and carries her to Lahore.

Though Qasim has been living in cities far away from his mountain village for a pretty long time, he still feels nostalgic for his native world of wilderness. In order to re-establish the lost link with his homeland, he marries Zaitoon to one of his kinsmen in the mountains. But Zaitoon, having lived first sixteen years of her life in cities like Ludhiana and Lahore, is little suited for the harsh life in the hills. Her husband beats her brutally on the slightest pretext. At the end of two months, she rebels and runs away from her husband.

While Zaitoon, a city-bred girl, runs away from her husband in the hills, Carol, an American girl, married to a western-educated Pakistani engineer Farukh, finds Pakistan uncongenial and returns to her own culture and land. Carol is another character in dislocation with her environment in Pakistan, and in a way separated from her home and culture in America. She is totally alien to the culture and her surroundings. She has left America yet is unwilling to adapt to way of life that people lead in Pakistan. What she had imagined to be exotic has failed to live up to the harsh image of reality as it is apparent in her personal relationship with her husband, Farukh. But in spite of her husband’s morbid jealousy, Carol decides to settle in Pakistan. But her resolve is shaken by the news of Zaitoon being hunted down by her husband and his clansmen. Through the telepathic peephole of Zaitoon’s plight,
Carol catches a glimpse of her condition and the fateful condition of girls like her. Her encounter with a chopped off head floating in the river is the last straw. Carol gets convinced that her independent attitude will get her killed sooner or later. To live in Pakistan one needs “an inherited memory of ancient rites, taboos and responses: inherited immunities: a different set of genes...” (The Pakistani Bride 227). As she doesn’t have any of these, she decides to get back. She tells Farukh, “I think I’m finally beginning to realise something... Your civilization is too ancient... too different...and it has ways that can hurt me... really hurt me... I’m going home” (The Pakistani Bride 229).

Zaitoon’s running away from the hills to the plains and Carol’s going back to America seem to suggest that it is very difficult, almost impossible, to surmount the cultural barriers. Thus Bapsi Sidhwa has located the theme of inter-community marriage in a non-Parsi context in her novel, The Pakistani Bride. The two inter-community marriages depicted are between the white American woman Carol and the Pakistani Muslim Farukh and between the girl from the plains Zaitoon and the tribal from the hills, Sakhi. Both marriages are a failure. Both Carol and Zaitoon are victimized and the marriages cause them intense agony and unhappiness. So in this novel, Bapsi Sidhwa shows that marriage outside the community can be self-damaging, thereby seemingly endorsing the traditional Parsi construct of prohibition of inter-community marriages.

In her third novel, Ice-Candy-Man, an attempted inter-community marriage between the Hindu Ayah and her Muslim admirer Ice-Candy-Man becomes a victim of the communal passions of partition. Initially the Ice-Candy-Man is a part of the frenzied mob which abdicates Ayah and keeps her in the brothels of Hira Mandi. Later he repents and attempts to make amends. He forcibly marries Ayah, changes her name to Muntaz, and recites love poetry to her. But love is shown as powerless. Ayah has a revulsion for her newly acquired Muslim identity. With the help of the girl-child narrator Lenny’s Godmother she is taken to a Recovered Women’s Camp and then sent to her family in Amritsar. The Ice-Candy-Man now a “deflated poet, a collapsed pedlar” (Sidhwa, Ice-Candy-Man 265) follows her to Amritsar in vain. Their relationship is serrated forever, another victim of communal frenzy and the chaos of partition. In this novel, Bapsi Sidhwa implies that love does not conquer all, when communal and obscurantist passions are aroused. Thus it is the cultural difference that makes Ayah break up with Ice-Candy-Man though he has married her and now loves her truly.
The issue of the cultural difference moves from periphery to centre in Sidhwa’s fourth novel, *An American Brat*. To a question put by Naila Hussain about the theme of *An American Brat*, Sidhwa replies:

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

*An American Brat* is the story of a young woman who journeys through three cultures – her own community’s Parsi culture, her country Pakistan’s Islamic culture and the Western culture of the United States of America. This novel talks specifically of Feroza’s understanding of her own and other cultures that distance offers. Feroza’s passage to America, her education in life and her transformation into a mature young woman form the kernel of the novel. The novel deals with the change that Feroza undergoes, in the west and how her perspective on life changes.

And moreover surprisingly the Parsi community that prides itself as westernized and liberated community is in fact not so liberal. Sidhwa portrays Parsi community’s traditional dictum of double standards—one for the man, another for the woman especially when it is the question of inter-faith marriage. Man’s inter-faith marriage is acceptable and the children born out of this wedlock are accepted into the Parsi fold. But if a woman marries a non-Parsi, she is an outcast and debarred from community and even from their temple—Agyari. The Parsis are fundamentalists to the core so far as inter-faith marriage of Parsi women is concerned and the priests are not prepared to move with the times even when the community is dwindling. To such a community belongs Feroza, the protagonist of *An American Brat*. Sidhwa portrays this paradoxical situation of social life of the community where women, though considered equal, are, in fact, not allowed any kind of freedom or choice in this matter.

The novel opens with Zareen’s anxiety that her daughter Feroza is un-Parsi like, in a sense that she is influenced by the Islamic fundamentalist views: “She’s becoming more and more backward everyday” (Sidhwa, *An American Brat* 9). Zareen is worried. Brooding over
her dark anxieties, she narrates the school-incident when she had gone to pick up Feroza: “In the car she said: ‘Mummy, please don’t come to school dressed like that.’ She objected to my sleeveless sari-blouse! Really, this narrow-minded attitude touted by General Zia is infecting her, too. I told her: Look, we’re Parsi, everybody knows we dress differently” (An American Brat 10). Further Zareen asserts that she wore frocks when she was Feroza’s age, but Feroza questions her dressing. Feroza must cover her legs: “Can she wear frocks? No. Women mustn’t show their legs, women shouldn’t dress like this, and women shouldn’t act like that. Girls mustn’t play hockey or sing or dance!” (An American Brat 10)

Feroza firmly believes in the special code for women to follow. She does not consider men and women equals. Her father Cyrus is worried about a Muslim boy who visits Feroza and feels she may be prevailed upon to marry a non-Parsi, a Muslim. Both Zareen and Cyrus are worried about Feroza that she might succumb to the Islamic conservatism in one way or the other and forget her own Parsi tradition. They find a way out of this by deciding to send her away to America for a holiday and expose her to a liberal westernised way of life which they think is very much like their own way of living. But when Khutlibai, Zareen’s mother, comes to know that Feroza is being sent to America, she becomes very angry. Zareen tells her that she is going only for three or four months and explains at greater length how upsettingly timid and narrow-minded Feroza has become: “You’ve no idea how difficult Feroza’s been of late. All this talk about Islam, and how women should dress, and how women should behave, is turning her quite strange. And you know how Bhutto’s trails is getting to her” (An American Brat 30).

Feroza is highly delighted at the news. She repeats to herself, “I’m going to America, I’m going to America!” (An American Brat 27) America means to her at the moment “the land of glossy magazines, of ‘Bewitched’ and ‘Star Trek’, of rock stars and jeans. . .” (An American Brat 27). Thus begins the geographical journey for Feroza, from the third world of conservative Pakistan to the first world of free and liberal America.

At the airport, Feroza is given last-minute instructions by her grandmother, mother and aunts. She is told that she should not talk to strangers, nor should she accept anything to eat or drink from them as it might be drugged. Throughout her journey, Feroza behaves as instructed by her elders. She politely refuses a young Pakistani’s offer of coke or tea at Heathrow in London. But as soon as she reaches America she is a changed person.
As the plane lands at Kennedy Airport, Feroza is triumphant and glowing. She is dazzled by the orderly traffic of rushing people, the bright lights and warmed air, the extraordinary cleanliness and sheen of floors and furnishings, the audacious immensity of the glass-and-steel enclosed spaces. But Feroza’s jubilance suffers a jolt when she is subjected to a rather inhumane treatment by the custom officials. There is a moment of confusion as her Pakistani passport opens from the wrong end. Unlike English, Urdu is written from right to left and not vice-versa. And then there is a barrage of questions—how long she would stay, where she would stay, who would support her, how old was her uncle, what did he do, was he a US citizen, resident or visitor? Feroza’s answers do not seem satisfactory to the hostile officer and she is directed to go in for secondary inspection after collecting her luggage.

Feroza tries to cope with the different life-style of the Americans and the modern technology used by them. Feroza is quite unfamiliar with the moving staircase, the escalator, which one finds in abundance in even the small stores in the United States of America. An elderly American couple helps her to cross this hurdle—the man takes the duty-free packages from her hand and the woman takes hold of Feroza’s arm to help her get on and off the escalator.

The next problem Feroza faces is of carrying her outsized suitcases. Approaching an immensely tall porter with a large cart evokes no response. Thrown to her own resources, Feroza finds people carrying the luggage on carts and asks a gray-haired woman where she had gotten her cart. Directed to a shining caterpillar of stacked carts, she struggles to extract one but fails. She finds youngmen coming and taking away carts one by one after inserting a dollar bill in a slot. As the next man hustles up with the same intention, Feroza steps right in front of the box, barring access and says: “It’s my turn!” (An American Brat 57) Jolted by her somewhat rude and strange behaviour, the youth comes to an astonished halt. Feroza explains in a manner which is half-apologetic and half-appealing for help: “I don’t know how to get this, . . . Can you show me?” (An American Brat 57) The man smiles flirtatiously and shows her how to insert the dollar bill. As she loads her suitcases and hand luggage on the cart, Feroza’s mind is filled with images of the slender young American and his candid admiring eyes: “How easily he had talked to her, his gestures open, confident. She wished she could have responded to his readiness to be friends, but she was too self-conscious” (An American Brat 58). The people around her were busy with their own concerns; none of them
had even bothered to glance her way or stare at her as they would have in Pakistan.

Feroza’s wide-open eyes soak in the new impressions as she pushes the cart. A strange awareness seeps into her: she knows no one and no one knows her. It is a heady feeling to be suddenly so free of the thousand constraints that governed her life. Feroza feels reassured to find Manek, her uncle waiting for her in the lounge. But the worst is still to come. A woman in blue uniform looks sternly at Feroza and reminds her that she must go in for secondary inspection. The immigration officer leads Feroza to the ominous place where weary passengers stand before their disarrayed possessions with subdued looks. The custom inspectors take their own time, checking each and every item in the suitcase which makes each passenger look unaccountably guilty.

Feroza’s interrogation starts with a simple query: “Are you a student?” (An American Brat 59) However, Feroza is so nervous by then that her answer does not reach the inspector who gets impatient and feels irritated at her response. In a cold, calculating manner he explains to Feroza that the sworn statements she was going to make in a few minutes’s time should be “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” (An American Brat 60). Otherwise she can be fined two thousand dollars or imprisoned for not more than five years or both. This is followed by routine questions about her name, address, date of birth etc. till the officer comes to the crucial question: “How long do you wish to stay in the United States?” (An American Brat 60) Feroza’s answer “Two or three months” (An American Brat 60) does not satisfy him and he wants her to be more specific. It is at this moment that Feroza blurts out that she will stay with her uncle who is “a student. But he also works at two other jobs to make extra money” (An American Brat 61). Evidently, she does not know that it is a crime for foreign students to work. She is told that her uncle would be hauled before an immigration judge and most likely deported. She too would have to go back on the next available flight. He accuses her of being a liar—she has no uncle in America and her so-called uncle is actually her fiancé. Feroza finds it difficult to believe her ears. To this is added the inspection of each and every item in her bags—the shoes, the toiletries, the underwear, a sanitary pad. Tears roll down Feroza’s burning cheeks at the humiliation.

Feroza is relieved to find Manek around, not knowing that he has been paged, his name announced over the loudspeakers in the reception lobby and interrogated. She realizes that she has unwittingly incriminated him with her naive answers to the questions fired at her.
and is petrified. In a composed, reliable and trustworthy manner, Manek assures the officer that he indeed is Feroza’s uncle, studying chemical engineering at M.I.T. and receives enough money from home for his education and living expenses. The odd jobs he does are for the university which are permitted.

The officer reverts to his aspect of demon prosecutor as he turns to Feroza and tells her: “You are not eligible to enter the United States. You and your ‘uncle’ have concealed the truth. You’re both lying. Isn’t this man your fiancé? Aren’t you here to marry him?” (An American Brat 64) The officer holds up between his fingers a lacy pink nylon nightie he has fished out of the bag and triumphantly announce: “Ah-ha! ... The wedding negligee!” (An American Brat 64) Both immigration officers leer at the nightgown as if it was an incriminating weapon discovered at the scene of a crime. The comment “It’s no use, your lying. Here’s the evidence!” (An American Brat 64) rouses Feroza who snatches the nightgown from the officer’s stubby, desecrating fingers and shouts: “To hell with you and your damn country. I’ll go back!” (An American Brat 64)

Feroza’s immigration officer realizes that he has exceeded his bounds and has surprise stamped all over his soft, shiny face. He accepts Manek’s guarantee that the girl will go back at the end of three months or whenever her visa expires and asks Manek to provide proof of his assertions as soon as possible. The officer who had treated Feroza so vilely just a few moments back is now conciliatory and he even helps Feroza in stashing her belongings into her suitcase.

Bapsi Sidhwa describes vividly the impressions a new arrival has of the modern America. Adam L. Penenberg rightly calls the novel “a sensitive portrait of how America appears to a new arrival” (qtd. in Bala 78). Bapsi Sidhwa chronicles not only the glitz and glamour but also the ugliness and squalor of the United States of America. Soon after uncle Manek and Feroza come out of the Kennedy airport, Manek tells Feroza: “You’ll love New York. I’ve planned it so we can spend a week here. Then we’ll get back to Cambridge. If I get the time, we’ll even go to Disneyland” (An American Brat 66). Immediately Feroza notices the garlands of lights outlining the iron rhythm of the bridge they are racing along, the sumptuous red tail-lights of the cars ahead. This is how Bapsi Sidhwa describes the scene:

And then they were climbing into a futuristic spaghetti of curving and incredibly suspended roads, mile upon looping mile of wide highway that weaved in and out of
the sky at all angles so that sometimes they descended to the level of the horizon of lights in the distance that Manek told her was Manhattan, and sometimes they appeared to be aiming at the sky. Feroza saw ships in an incredible river. How deep the river must be to hold the ships (An American Brat 67).

The incredible lights excite Feroza so much that she utters in Punjabi: “Vekh! Vekh! Sher-dibatian!” (An American Brat 67)

The next day Feroza’s tour of New York starts. Uncle Manek and Feroza ride the ferry to the Statue of Liberty and explore the iron innards of the stern figure presiding over the ocean. They gape giddily from atop the Empire State Building midtown and the twin World Trade towers at the tip of the island. They stroll with the nannies and babies through the zoo at Central Park, marvelling each time they lift their incredulous eyes from the wild animals in their native habitats to the shimmering glass and steel embankments of the Manhattan skyline reflecting the sunlight. This is followed by a quick look at the enticing window displays of dresses, shoes, sportswear and jewellery on Fifth Avenue and Madison. The opulence and shopping in New York simply mesmerize Feroza. Enchanted by the apparel on the skinny mannequins, the colourful patent-leather shoes, the gleaming handbags at Bloomingdale’s on Lexington Avenue, Feroza simply refuses to budge from the place:

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. And it was merely the entrance foyer that had affected her so (An American Brat 73).

She moves amidst the dazzling wares, bewitched by displays of merchandise which attract her with a suction-like force. Later she insists on window-shopping on Fifth Avenue and ogling the strands of pearls and diamonds displayed at Tiffany’s and elegant skirts and jackets displayed at Christian Dior’s. When they have lunch at McDonald’s, Feroza is struck with wonder at the quick service and the quantities of fries, ketchup, and the ice in the Coke. She is enchanted by the America and Americans she encounters. She takes great pleasure in shopping malls, fast-food restaurants and modern kitchen appliances. The sudden swing from
Lahore to New York seems to have pitched Feroza into the next century. She has a surrealistic impression of blurred images; a kaleidoscope of perceptions in which paintings, dinosaurs, American Indian artifacts and Egyptian mummies mingle with hamburgers, pretzels, sapphire earrings, deodorants, and glamorous window displays.

Feroza’s initiation to the United States of America cannot be complete till she sees the ugly side of New York too. On Eighth Avenue, she walks past small dark video parlours flashing lewd advertising, interspersed by grubby pawn shops, cheap hotels, and bars. Later, Manek directs Feroza’s attention to male prostitutes, elegant transvestites—the American-style heejras—the pimps and miniskirted prostitutes. He also tells her about “lookouts, runners, and drug dealers” (*An American Brat* 80). Feroza is shocked to see the Port Authority bus terminal “the infested hub of poverty from which the homeless and the discarded spiraled all over the shadier sidewalks of New York. Ragged and filthy men were spreading scores of flattened cardboard boxes to sleep on in the bus terminal” (*An American Brat* 80).

Feroza was used to the odour of filth, the reek of poverty: sweat, urine, open drains, rotting carrion, vegetables and the other debris. She was accustomed to these sights and smells in Pakistan and had developed a tolerance for them. However, she finds it hard to accept the poverty and stench of filth in the United States of America. The smells of New York repel her:

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. The fetid smell made her want to throw up. She ran out of the building, and, leaning against the wall of the terminal, began to retch (*An American Brat* 81).

She understands that “America is not all Saks and skyscrapers” (*An American Brat* 81). A little further down, she sees a couple of shifty-eyed young men selling stolen goods.

Feroza has another unpleasant experience when she confronts a sex maniac at the YMCA bathroom. While using the facilities in the women’s bathroom, Feroza feels uneasy, menaced, as if she were being observed by someone or something dangerous. As she raises
her head to look into the mirror, she stands transfixed. A man’s bloodshot eyes are staring at her, hideously examining her not as a woman but as a specimen of the female gender. As Feroza whirls around, the man’s face suddenly breaks into a cunning, lewd, brown-toothed grin and he says: “How ya doin’, baby? Ya wanna poke?” (An American Brat 70) As Feroza tries to save herself from this dark man, another one moves into block her path: “Howja like it if I rub it up against ya?” (An American Brat 70) As Feroza swerves and dodges past him, banging against one of the half-doors, the man’s hand brushes her back. She reaches her room completely out of breath after taking several wrong turns. As a precaution, the next few days Manek stands guard outside the bathroom whenever Feroza goes in.

Feroza has a horrifying experience when she is locked out in the YMCA fire-stairs. Returning from shopping around one o’clock, Feroza is surprised by the long lines of people waiting for the elevators. Wondering which line to stand in, Feroza sees one line being rapidly absorbed through open doors into an elevator and joins it. Only when the elevator sails past the fifteenth floor where she is staying, she realizes that the different elevators are meant for different floors of the building. The elevator stops on the twenty-second floor, the level reserved for women and she steps out, not knowing what to do. A sympathetic soul asks her to go down again, get into the correct line, and then take the elevator that goes to the fifteenth floor, the numbers being marked on the top. Feroza feels that this will take a long time and the amiable woman shows her the fire-stairs—she can run down to the fifteenth floor. Feroza steps inside the door hesitantly. As the woman shuts the door at her back, Feroza has a feeling that she has been shut out of New York. She feels disoriented—the air is rank with the smell of stale cigarette smoke and food. She gets a whiff of urine and of decaying refuse too. After a minute or so, she tries to open the door but fails to do so. Forcèd to take the stairs, Feroza looks at the accumulated debris in a corner—cigarette butts, food cartons, grimy plastic bags. The atmosphere is weird enough and the shallow steps dissolving in the darkness. At certain places, the banister is loose in its moorings and wobbles beneath her hand. What if some parts of the balustrade were missing as happened in nightmares or a section of it comes away where the concrete has crumbled, and she is plunged into the void? An unsettling weakness creeps into her legs. She tries the doors on different floors but all of these are locked. She shouts for help but no one listens. She prays to God but it does not help. It seems to her nothing exists outside the
stairwell. “America assumed a ruthless, hollow, cylindrical shape without beginning or end, without sunlight, an unfathomable concrete tube inhabited by her fear. She was sure something monstrous was crouched in the impervious shadows that patrolled this alien domain—ferocious sewer rats, a brutish Doberman—breathing softly, waiting patiently” (An American Brat 90). The fear of somebody coming up the stairs makes Feroza fly up the steps. Her heart pounding, she runs up flight after flight of stairs till she feels her lungs would explode and flings herself at a door. Banging on it with her fists, with the palms of her hands, rattling the rod and the handle, she screams: “Open the door... For God’s sake, open the door! Can’t anybody hear me? Please, somebody...” (An American Brat 92). Her scream finally attracts a Japanese man who opens the door with a sharp metallic click. Like an uncle or a family friend, he scolds Feroza for her irresponsible act and warns her: “Never do that... Never! You could be murdered... No one would know. All kinds of shitty people... drugs!” (An American Brat 94) It is only later that Feroza realizes that she had been marooned in that hell for only half an hour.

Thus we see that Sidhwa exposes Feroza to the cruel and harsh realities of life when she lands in America. So far, she was a protected spoilt child having her own way in everything and having no responsibilities even to look after her own self. But here at the airport she realizes that she has to look after herself and act as a grown up person answering for herself. She is so naïve and childish and does not seem to know even the address of her uncle Manek. Sidhwa makes her arrival at New York a little unrealistic only to shock Feroza and the readers that the New World is not as simple as stepping into the liberal ways of life but also to realize how a person has to be a responsible citizen, knowledgeable enough to face the outer world of equals. The novelists makes it clear that Feroza’s journey is a journey of her own experience, of learning the new ways of life and of becoming aware of one’s own self, one cannot depend upon other, one has to be on one’s own. Sidhwa provides for a gradual transformation in Feroza.

The first stage of journey is simple. Her uncle Manek takes her around the city and shows her the museum, libraries and shopping markets. Through this touring of New York city’s marvellous places on the one hand and on the other the horrible experience in the fire-stairs, Feroza realizes her folly. Her irresponsible and unthinking attitude lands her into labyrinth of filth, and dirt and debris. Sidhwa jolts Feroza into a responsible person who
should always remain alert and not trust strangers. In a foreign country, it is difficult for a girl of sixteen to grow into maturity very easily. It also shows how the eastern young persons are over-protected, whereas in America, such persons are on their own, at times earning their education. If America is a land of dreams, it also has its darker side and the protagonist is made aware of this through her fall into the filthy fire-stairs. The novelist exposes Feroza to both the aspects of America.

After this, Feroza takes stock of herself and decides to stay on and study in America. First she enrols in a small strictly supervised college in Twin Falls, Idaho. She is much impressed by the campus life and under the guidance of her room-mate Jo, she acquires the American ways of life. Jo first teaches her to speak English the way it is spoken in America. She improves Feroza’s pronunciation and teaches her to say ‘mayonnaise’ as ‘may-nayze’ and ‘mother-fucker’ as ‘motha-fuka’ with the accompanying curl of nose and emphasis. She makes Feroza practise saying, “Gimme a lemonade. Gimme Soda,” (An American Brat 154) and cures her of saying, “May I have this – may I have that?” (An American Brat 154) Feroza soon learns to use expletives like ‘shit’, ‘asshole’ and ‘douchebag’ with abandon. No longer is she shy and conservative girl of Pakistan who would be shocked by the mother’s dress. She finds that there’s nothing wrong and immoral in wearing skirts though she tells that “It’s not decent to show your legs in Pakistan” (An American Brat 151). She also learns to drink wine and like boys: “Something within Feroza must have changed imperceptibly, because suddenly one spring evening Feroza discovered that the boys were talking to her, making a concerted effort to kid, cajole, and encourage her out of her painful shell. She felt their genuine interest. It occurred to her that they liked and accepted her” (An American Brat 163). She sometimes has feelings of guilt. She wonders what her family will say of her conduct if they come to know about it, but she takes it as her assimilation into the American way of life. “At the same time, she felt she was being initiated into some esoteric rites that governed the astonishingly independent and unsupervised lives of young people in America. Often, as she sat among them, Feroza thought she had taken a phenomenal leap in perceiving the world from wider, bolder, and happier angle” (An American Brat 163-164).

One day Feroza goes to Boulder to spend her summer vacation with Jo and her family. Feroza finds Jo’s parents, the Millers, extremely understanding and unobtrusively hospitable, not meddling in their children’s affairs or imposing restrictions yet remaining
closely associated with them. She remembers her own family. Her parents, aunts and uncles, for all their assertions of being broadminded and modern, expect unquestioning obedience on certain matters, like the relationships between various family members, and between boys and girls, and view with consternation any straying from the established path. She finds the American way of upbringing entirely different.

And, surprisingly, even though Feroza found the Millers’ way of life admirable, tolerant and eminently desirable, she could not imagine it transposed to any community, weather it was Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, or Parsee, in her part of the world. What would life be like in her family and in Lahore without the extravagant guidance and dire warnings, the endless quoting of homilies, and the benign and sometimes not so benign advice, inquisitiveness and interference? (An American Brat 209)

Then one Sunday afternoon Jo takes Feroza to Denver to visit her brother, Tom. Feroza is surprised at the number of children in Tom’s family. On the way home Jo tells her that the children have been farmed out to her brother and his wife by the county for a fee. Feroza becomes aware of another cultural difference between her country and the United States of America:

It was so unlike anything in Pakistan. She had never heard of children being sent to foster homes. If a man could not for some reason provide for his family, usually because of sickness, death, or some other calamity, his wife and children would be provided for by relatives. Children were not given up for adoption or “farmed out,” so long as there were family members alive. Men didn’t go to seed the way Tom had because of drinking problems: few Muslim men drank. She had heard of very few cases of alcoholism, and these existed only among the fashionably wealthy, who could afford the black-market rates demanded by their affliction. She wondered, was this the price one paid for the non-interference and the privacy she was beginning to find increasingly attractive? (An American Brat 212)

Feroza and Jo decide to join the University of Denver. They rent a small basement apartment in a building near the campus. The cosmopolitan variety of students—Black,
Hispanic, Arabic, Irani, and some unmistakably Pakistani and Indian—fills Feroza with suppressed excitement. Here she becomes confident and assertive young woman and acquires boyfriends. She learns to dance and drink, drive and even flirt with boys. She becomes conscious of her body and is no longer shy of her body-language. One day she meets an Indian student, Shashi, who is one year ahead of her in the hotel management course. Within a few days they become good friends. She feels something locked within her opening up. She finds her days filled with excitement, joyous activity and ascending wonder. As her social life blossoms and expands, her expenses increase. She thinks of waitressing, working in a bar, becoming a salesperson or selling tickets at an amusement park. Feroza finds the very idea of these jobs impossible in Pakistan:

There were no waitresses in Pakistan, only waiters. Since there were no bars, there were no bartenders. Even had the jobs been available and the stigma attached to them had not existed, Feroza would have found working at these professions in Pakistan intolerable. Her slightest move would attract disproportionate attention and comment, for no other reason except that she was a young woman in a country where few young women were visible working” (An American Brat 216).

Within the heady climate of freedom in America Feroza feels she is able to do anything. She starts working in a bar close to the campus. Shashi, and the friends she has met through him, drop by for an occasional chat. She now realizes what life really means. It is like Bharti Mukherjee’s Jasmine in Jasmine who understands the joy of living and loving and discards the idea of dying. Both Mukherjee and Sidhwa make their protagonists suffer a little at first at the time of their arrival in the New World of freedom and shock them into learning the value of freedom and free choices even for women.

Feroza’s roommate Jo abandons her hotel management course and also leaves the apartment to live with her boyfriend, Bill, at the air force base. Feroza moves into an apartment with Rhonda and Gwen, one white, the other black, and both of them strikingly beautiful. One sweltering noon, Feroza finally musters up the courage to get into a spare pair of Rhonda’s shorts. Both of her roommates applaud and assure her that she is looking great. Gwen has a lover about whom Feroza and Rhonda have heard but they have never seen him. Rhonda enjoys flirting even with less attractive boys. Shashi sometimes visits them. His
relationship with Feroza is more romantic than sexual. They kiss when they are out alone and indulge in light and playful petting. But they never feel swept away by a grand passion. Their restraint is the result of the “taboos that governed the behaviour of decent unmarried girls and of desi men” (An American Brat 230). Their romance gradually fades into friendship.

Feroza decides to spend her winter vacation in Lahore. She is given a hearty welcome when she arrives home. The family surrounds Feroza affectionately, much as they did Manek. They ask her many questions and there is a vigorous exchange of views. After the initial euphoria, Feroza perceives many changes in her family as well as in her country. After having seen seventy-two-year-olds jog like athletic young things in America, it is painful to see her grandmothers look older than they really are. Her one grandmother, Khutlibai, has stopped dyeing her hair, and the other one, Soonamai, has got her vision considerably impaired on account of cataracts. People have forgotten Bhutto and his martyrdom. Secularism has given way to Islamic fundamentalism. Non-Muslims are being eyed with suspicion. The Islamic laws are governing the law courts. The rape-victims are being punished for adultery while the rapists are escaping scot-free. The gender bias is appalling and poverty has spread like a galloping disfiguring disease. Feroza is disconcerted to discover that she is a misfit in a country in which she once fitted so well.

Feroza’s grandmother and mother are astonished at the change in her. The timid Feroza has grown into a confident creature. When Zareen broaches the subject of her marriage, Feroza says that she cannot give up her studies. Zareen bursts out: “What’s this new graduate-shaduate nonsense? We send you to America for a few months, and you end up spending almost three years! Your father and I offered you our finger and you grabbed our whole arm! Enough is enough! You have to listen to us. It’s time you settled down” (An American Brat 240). Feroza says that she is not going to settle anywhere without a career as she doesn’t want to be at the mercy of her husband. And then to please her mother and grandmother she says, “I refuse to die an old maid! It’s only a matter of a few months; a year at most. When I’m back I’ll have a good look at all the boys, and I’ll marry the handsomest!” (An American Brat 240) Shortly before Feroza leaves for Denver, she realizes with a sense of shock that she has outgrown her family’s expectations for her.

On her flight to the United States, when Feroza opens the envelopes, she comes to know that she has received a gift of a little over seven hundred dollars from the members of
her family and her relatives. She is jubilant. She can buy now, a decent second hand car. She scans the classified ads, consults her friends, and on Rhonda and Gwen’s advice, makes an appointment with David Press to inspect his two-year-old Chevette stick shift. He is a tall, blue-eyed handsome hunk of twenty-two or twenty-three. Feroza buys his car but loses her heart to him. On the dance floor of the restaurant to which she has test-driven the car, she feels as if she cannot sustain herself without David’s support:

She felt David’s heartbeat against hers, sounding loudly in her ears, and she wanted that sturdy heart to beat and beat forever like that, close to her. Its throb and pulse were her natural element, just as the oceanic depths of his eyes were when she had found herself swimming in them like a fish. When David held Feroza a little away from him to look down at her, Feroza slowly raised her eyes to meet his, and her face was bathed in a shy, yielding amber radiance that reflected his own tumultuous feelings” (An American Brat 252).

David often drops in on Feroza and soon they get physically close:

Feroza was as “swept off her feet” as she could wish, as David wished her to be. And the instinct that had guarded her before, now let her go as David released her from the baffling sexual limbo in which Shashi’s cooler rhythm and the restraints of their common culture had set her adrift. Yet each appreciated the reserve in the other; a certain sexual reticence. David, who might have wandered naked in his room before an American girl, didn’t. Feroza dressed and undressed behind doors and beneath bed sheets. David never saw her, except for brief moments, naked, and then her voluptuous warm nakedness, her swelling breasts, were imprinted in his mind as the essence of desirability. Both were intrigued by the otherness of the other – the trepidation, the reticence imposed on them by their differing cultures” (An American Brat 256).

One Sunday evening David takes her to his home in Boulder for a Sabbath meal with his parents, Adina and Abe Press. When his mother Adina makes a few polite queries about her religion, she for the first time realizes that David’s religion is different from hers.

Feroza goes to Houston to spend her Christmas vacation with her uncle and aunt, Manek and Aban. Manek has changed his name from Manek Junglewalla to Mike Junglevala
to fit in well with the American society. Feroza enjoys her ten-day stay with them very much. On the last day, she tells them about David and says, “I really love the guy” (*An American Brat* 262). For a moment there is absolute quiet. Manek says thoughtfully:

It all seems wonderful now, but marriage is something else: our cultures are very different. Of course I’m not saying it can’t work, but you have to give it time. We’ll keep in touch on the phone, see how it goes? Manek ended on a tentative note, at last looking directly at Feroza. It was a caring look, and Feroza felt a surge of relief and gratitude (*An American Brat* 263).

Feroza returns to Denver. After some time she leaves her apartment at David’s request and moves in the vacant bedroom in his house. The other bedroom is shared by two lesbian girls, Shirley and Laura. David himself lives in the converted garage. Living in the same house affects the level of their intimacy. Their feelings for each other become much more intense and their relationship, more complex. It is as good as living together. Feroza is driven by bouts of guilt. Once when she is sneaking back into her room at three o’clock in the morning with her shoes in her hand, she wonders if she is the same girl who lived in Lahore and went to the Convent of the Sacred Heart.

Feroza decides to marry David Press, an American Jew. But when her mother Zareen hears about this, she sets out for America to dissuade her rebellious daughter from marrying a non-Parsi. When Feroza does not agree to her wish, Zareen rages: “I should never have let you go so far away. Look what it’s done to you—you’ve become an American brat!” (*An American Brat* 279) Zareen feels that Feroza’s marriage to a non-Parsi would be nothing less than cultural suicide. Conversion is not permitted among Parsis and a Parsi girl marrying outside the faith is expelled from the Zoroastrian religious community. She can no longer practice her religion and is no longer considered a Parsi. However, the same law does not apply to Parsi men.

Zareen’s emphasis on the difference between the Zoroastrian and Jewish cultures frightens David away from Feroza. When Zareen insists on fulfilling her traditional obligations by giving fabulous gifts to David’s relatives and making the marriage a big affair, David feels compelled to defend his position. A Jewish marriage is an equally elaborate affair and he tells Zareen:
My parents aren’t happy about the marriage, either. It’s lucky they’re Reform Jews, otherwise they’d go into mourning and pretend I was dead. We have Jewish customs, you know. My family will miss my getting married under a canopy by our rabbi. We have a great dinner and there’s a table with twenty or thirty different kinds of desserts, cake, and fruit. Then there’s dancing until late at night . . . . I belong to an old tradition, too (An American Brat 298).

Though he knew that Zareen was joking, her attitude had distressed and humiliated him. His anger shows that Zareen has succeeded in causing estrangement between him and Feroza. David starts calling Feroza ‘ZAP’. Feroza laughs and explains to Zareen that ‘ZAP’ stands for Zoroastrian–American Princess, an innovative spin-off on ‘JAP’, Jewish-American Princess. But when he starts calling her “Apple of Mommy’s eye,” (An American Brat 302) Feroza feels offended. Zareen notices sadness, resignation and flicker of fear in Feroza’s eyes and wonders why her fearless daughter should be afraid. And then it occurs to her that her own admiring and loving eye has cast a malign spell on her daughter and caused her unhappiness. She drags the drowsy Feroza into the kitchen. She takes out three jalapeno peppers from the fridge, and holding them in her fist, draws seven circles in the air over Feroza’s head, whispering all the while a hodgepodge of incantations. Then she casts the peppers on the hot griddle placed on the stove, and with a dark look, watches them sputter, shrivel and char to cinders. The room is filled with an acrid stench. David cries out, “Oh, God! What are you? A witch or something?” (An American Brat 304) It finally becomes clear to him that Feroza’s culture is entirely different from his and he cannot adjust himself to it:

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. 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 honor of having his remains devoured by vultures and crows in a ghastly Tower of Silence (An American Brat 309).
His feelings for Feroza undergo a change. Her exoticism which once attracted him to her, now frightens him. He thinks of going out of her life. Luckily he gets a job with a firm in California and leaves Denver at the end of the summer term.

Zareen goes back to Lahore. Feroza feels shocked, insecure and uprooted for some time but she soon bounces back. She decides not to go back home but live in America. Although the sense of dislocation, of not belonging, is more acute in America, she feels it is tolerable because “it was shared by thousands of newcomers like herself” (An American Brat 312). Besides, she has become used to the seductive entitlements of the First World: “Happy Hour, telephones that worked, the surfeit of food, freezers, electricity, and clean and abundant water, the malls, skyscrapers, and highways” (An American Brat 312). The attraction of America lies not only in the material comfort it provides but also in the relief it gives from the pain of watching grinding poverty and injustice. Above all, in America freedom is considered a birthright of every individual.

There was also the relief from observing the grinding poverty and injustices she could do so little to alleviate, the disturbing Hadood Ordinances that allowed the victims of rape to be punished, and the increasing pressure from the fundamentalists to introduce more Islamic law. These and the other constraints would crush her freedom, a freedom that had become central to her happiness. The abandon with which she could conduct her life without interference was possible only because of the distance from her family and the anonymity America provided (An American Brat 312).

Feroza is prepared to struggle her way into the new free world, her freedom to choose what she wants to do and whom she wishes to marry. She decides to manage her life to suit her heart and pursue happiness in her own sweet way. She will marry a man whom she comes to like and love without bothering herself whether he is Parsee or of different faith. She has learnt her lesson and in future she will not allow anyone to meddle in her personal affairs. As for her religion, she is Parsee and she will continue to be Parsee. If the priests in Lahore and Karachi do not let her enter the fire temple, she will go to one in Bombay where there are so many Parsees that no one will know whether she is married to a Parsee or to a non-Parsee.

Feroza is more sure of herself and her choices. She also understands that no one can take away her religious beliefs. She “carried its fire in her heart” (An American Brat 317). It
is her boldness now to think of attending her religious Fire Temple in Bombay if not in Lahore or Karachi. She takes out her Sudra and Kusti, says her prayers invoking Ahura Mazda’s blessing and favour. As Novy Kapadia puts it: “The novel ends ambivalently, the mature Feroza, despite an estranged love affair and general feeling of depression, prefers the struggle for freedom and self-fulfilment at the United States of America instead of the settled life, family and easy contentment at Lahore” (Bhatt 97-98).

For Feroza there is no going back. She has tasted the fruits of freedom and does not wish to be bound by the traditional ways of her community. Though she does not discard her religion and is at peace after saying her prayers, she wants to live a free life of a bird. She attains her self-hood and maturity. Her mother may consider her an American brat but she too knows that Feroza is now capable of being herself. From the innocent naive child, Feroza has now become a self-confident young woman. She has decided to chart her own cultural heritage, journeying through the Pakistani Islamic culture and Western culture of America. Hers will be a new way of life, her personal religion intact coupled with the western freedom to choose her life-style. She remembers Father Fibs: “Had she flown and fallen and strengthened the wings he had talked about? He had told them not to be afraid. But she was. Her break with David still hurt so much, especially the circumstances surrounding the break. If she flew and fell again, could she pick herself up again? Maybe one day she’d soar to that self-contained place from which there was no falling, if there was such a place” (An American Brat 317).

To conclude, Feroza’s mental turmoil typifies the predicament of the modern multicultural society. She also represents the youngsters, especially the expatriate ones, striving hard to strike a balance between tradition and modernity, past and present, dependence and freedom. While flying and falling alternately, they are trying to soar to the state of being self-contained from where there is no falling.

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