Chapter V: Cultural Conflict in the Novel: *An American Brat* by Sidhwa and *Mother of 1084* by Devi
(A) Bapsi Sidhwa’s *An American Brat*

5.1 Introduction

Bapsi Sidhwa’s major novel *An American Brat* chronicles the adventures of a young Pakistani Parsi girl, Feroza Ginwalla. Her Lahore-based family sent her to the USA, for a three-month vacation to broaden her outlook on life. They are concerned about Feroza’s conservative attitude, which stems from Pakistan’s rising tide of fundamentalism, during the reign of the late President Zia-ul-Haq. Her mother Zareen is perturbed to see that her daughter Feroza has adopted Pakistani orthodox attitude thereby making her a misfit in her community. There are some examples of her conservatism that have been brought to the fore in the course of the novel’s action. Feroza, thus, “won’t even answer the phone anymore.” (10) and even objects to her mother’s wearing the traditional Parsi “sleeveless sari blouse.” (11) Cyrus Ginwalla, the father is apprehensive about another kind of loss of identity. He fears that his susceptible young daughter would fall in love and marry a non-Parsi, so, the solution is to send the girl for a holiday to the USA. He says: “Travel will broaden her outlook, get this Puritanical rubbish out of her head.” (14)

Feroza’s parents fail to realize that the journey to the USA (the New World) will broaden her thinking and open up further avenues of independence for her, she will become ‘modern’ in the truest sense of the word. By thinking for herself, she will challenge the traditional views, static orthodoxy and grow beyond the confines of community and norms of a patriarchal society. Bapsi Sidhwa, too, shows that the journey to the USA is supposedly a learning process but instead it makes her modern with her patriarchal culture. So, in this novel of self-realization, the self-awareness that Feroza Ginwalla acquires ironically isolates her from her Parsi culture.

During this initiation period, Feroza’s guide is her uncle Manek, the experienced expatriate studying at the MIT, Boston. He wants Feroza to imbibe the progressive and stimulating culture of the U.S.A. Manek’s role as guardian angel is later on taken by an American girl, Jo. Feroza begins to assimilate the independence of mind and spirit and sturdy self-confidence offered by the New World which is alien to her Third World experience and sheltered upbringing.

Manek enjoys the company of liberated women, but when it comes to marriage, he returns to Lahore and agrees to an arranged marriage. The author shows that Feroza is like a typical girl of the subcontinent, initially shy, conservative and
helpless but willing to strive. Feroza is also depicted as a representative of the Parsi milieu with an inherent fondness for a western life style, So, she absorbs the cultural shock, alters her life style, learns to drive, drink, dance, use a more direct and less polite form of language. The shy Feroza, who at Lahore hesitantly talked to young men, now flirts with Shashi, an Indian student at the University of Denver. Later, she has a tempestuous love affair with an American Jew, David Press. The love affair with David disintegrates due to her mother Zareen’s interference. She makes him conscious about their cultural disparities and differences. The novel ends with Feroza’s becoming in her mother’s words “an American Brat.” 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 USA instead of the settled life, family and easy contentment at Lahore.”

5.2 The Role of Culture in the Society

Literature is a subsystem of a given culture. Minority discourse is characterized by an urge to adapt and assimilate. It is also characterized by a culture of protest and resistance; culture is not merely an organizational principle holding together the members of a community; it is also a means of establishing its separateness from and resistance to other communities. T. S. Eliot maintains that there are three modes of cultural studies the culture of the individual, the culture of a group or class, or the culture of a whole society. He asserts:

The culture of the individual is dependent upon the culture of a group or class, and the culture of a group or class is dependent upon the culture of the whole society to which that group or class belongs. Therefore, it is the culture of the society that is fundamental. (Eliot, 1948:21)

What Bapsi Sidhwa intends to suggest is the clash between the different ways of the individual, group and society as a whole, though the novel depicts the difficulties of passage in and out of Pakistan and America, and points at bridges that cannot be built between the two cultures?

Bapsi Sidhwa is the doyenne of Pakistani literature in English. She is the first Pakistani writer to have been published in the West. She likes herself to be described as a “Punjabi-Pakistani-Parsi woman.” (Rajan). The issue of the cultural conflict,
clash or difference moves from periphery to centre in Sidhwa’s fourth novel, *An American Brat*. Naila Hussain has raised a question about the theme of the novel; Sidhwa replies to it by saying:

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

Sidhwa in her novel has taken up the issue of the cultural difference and the problems arising out of it. But the issue of the cultural difference moves from periphery to centre mainly in Sidhwa’s fourth novel, *An American Brat*. This novel basically deals with the intercultural theme, which has assumed vital significance for many postcolonial novelists. *An American Brat* was written after Sidhwa’s immigration to America. It is the story of a young girl, Feroza, whose journey through three cultures—her own community Parsi culture, her country Pakistan’s Islamic culture and the Western culture of the United States of America. In this narrative, the West is depicted as a set of values in conflict with the value system of the East. Here 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 a keen interest in the interaction of two cultures that exist side by side: Feroza is caught between conservatism, which is an offshoot of the rising wave of fundamentalism in Pakistan and progressive liberalism for which her mother Zareen stands.

### 5.3 Encroachment of the Islamic culture throughout Pakistan

The novel is set partly in Pakistan and partly in the USA. The time is the late seventies. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is in jail and Islamic fundamentalism is growing in Pakistan. Therefore, Feroza’s parents think that she should be saved from being further influenced by the Islamic orthodoxy. Her mother Zareen is perturbed, because Feroza is becoming more and more backward, every day. Zareen says:
I went to bring Feroza from school today. I was chatting with mother Superior ... In the car, she said: “Mummy, please don’t come to school dressed like that.” She objected to my sleeveless sari blouse! Really, this narrow-minded attitude touted by General Zia is infecting her, too. I told her: “Look, “Were Parsis, everybody knows we dress differently.” (11)

They feel that Feroza should go to the USA during the summer vacation. ‘Travel will broaden her outlook; get this Puritanical rubbish out of her head. (14)

Feroza’s journey to America serves the novel in two ways: It is her journey towards self-discovery and also serves to give the author and the protagonist precious objectivity which enables a fair evaluation of both the societies that she is connected to. The separation from home and family results into her moving from Pakistan to America. Struggle is, again, an underlying motif of An American Brat Feroza’s frustrated question goes thus: “Why am I a Paki Third Worlder? (27) Throughout, her journey to and in America, Feroza struggles to know who she is, why she is, and how she relates both to the body politic of her own Parsi community and that of the larger community of America. In that regard, the novel is certainly a bildungsroman. Jussawalla posits in Navjote ceremonies the location of Bapsi Sidhwa’s culture that the bildungsroman is the primary form and characteristic of the post-colonial novel (Dhawan, 80). As she states:

The bildungsroman journey seems to be the basis of every so-called post-colonial ... novel. It is the initiation process that leads not just to a general self-awakening process, but to an awakening into one’s nationalism and to an understanding of one’s self as located in a particular and in a particular cultural political framework. (80)

Feroza’s journey to self-awareness begins with her flight to America; practically it turns out to be a journey from innocence to experience. The flight of the plane symbolizes the shift in culture and tradition. Consequently, Feroza feels a sudden gravitational pull:
Her sense of self, enlarged by the osmosis of identity, with her community and with her group of school friends, stayed with her like permanence, like the support that ocean basis provides the wind and moon generated vagaries of its waters in a fleeting regularity of her heart. (52)

As the flight halts at Dubai, Paris and London, people who had boarded the plane with her, had almost all left, and new passengers joined her for the rest of the journey substituting cultures for cultures, preparing Feroza for the alien culture with its exotic milieu and atmosphere. The cultural bias comes along with third world tag at the passport counters, where she is quizzed on different things. She was quite new to such unfriendly dispositions: “It was Feroza’s first moment of realization she was in a strange country amidst strangers.....” (54)

The humiliating mistrust that meets her at the immigration counter further shocks her solid sheath of dignity and pushes her down the threshold of the third world prejudice and demoralization. She screams: “To hell with you and your damn country. I’ll go back.”(58). It shows the contrast between two opposite cultures. Manek, her uncle introduced her to the new world culture. He was a student there and, therefore, had great knowledge and experience of New York. It seemed that he was a proud representative of what he had become a part. Manek’s consistent reminders of her desi behavior and ‘third world attitude’ reflects his own hurt of having been branded so, and his success in levelling himself consequently in the new society. The countless humiliation and experiences he endured had affected him and changed him fundamentally. She says: “A kind of cultural metamorphosis is that had taken place on psychological level. He had weathered the trauma of cultural shock after cultural shock; the new world had buffeted him with emerged toughness.” (119)

5.4 The Theme of Homelessness and Struggle for Identity in the New Land

The novel dwells on the motif of expatriation dealt with very extensively by Bharati Mukherjee in her novel Jasmine, the story of an Indian immigrant’s encounter with the new world and her transformation as she gradually imbibes the new culture. 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 an integral part of the diasporic experience. Like Feroza, Mukherjee’s protagonist Jane in Jasmine leaves her own culture and enters another which results in a cultural uprooting. Both the
writers differ radically but both are expatriate novelists. Sidhwa’s roots continue to exist in Pakistan. This is precisely what sustains her as a creative artist and complements her expatriate experience. Though the experience of exile plays an important role in her writing, she has not really experienced it. She observes:

I have not really experienced exile I have Chosen to be in America. The Minute I Feel Like an exile, I go back to Pakistan. I have been lucky to be able to do that. And I don’t feel exiled Pakistan as such (Kanaganayakam, 1992 p. 50)

This is an advantage which many expatriate novelists do not enjoy. Feroza rises above the restraints and confines of the patriarchal Parsi society in Pakistan, and dares to question and revolt against the tradition that bound her to her community. She succumbs to the charms of America, and enrolls in a University, where she comes to terms with the American life style, by the help of her roommate friend, Jo. The shy and conservative Feroza turns into a confident and self-assertive girl acts, talks and dresses like an American girl, learns to drive and shed her inhibitions to drink and dance with her fellow friends. All Parsi customs are blown to dust within some days by Feroza. Novy Kapadia in Expatriate Experience and Theme of Marriage in An American Brat points out:

The paradox here, of course, is self-evident. It adds to the irony that exists throughout the novel. The Gingwalla’s fail to realize that the journey to the USA will broaden Feroza’s thinking and open up further avenues for her. She will become ‘modern’ in the truest sense of the word. By thinking for herself, she will challenge traditional views, static orthodoxy and grow beyond the confines of community and the norms of a patriarchal society. Bapsi Sidhwa shows that the journey to the USA was supposedly a learning process but instead it makes her ‘too modern’ for her patriarchal and seemingly liberal family. So, in this novel of self-realization, the self-awareness that Feroza Ginwalla acquires ironically isolates her from her Parsi heritage. (Kapadia, 1996: 188)
In *An American Brat*, there is an ironic exposure of the Parsi attitude to inter-faith marriage. Sidhwa has explained a very different type of the experience through Feroza’s character. She finds Jo’s parents the Millers, preternaturally understanding and they are 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, expect unquestioning obedience on certain matters, like relationship between boys and girls and view with consternation any straying from established path. She finds the American way of upbringing entirely different. When she comes to know that the children have been farmed out by the country for a fee. Feroza becomes aware of another cultural difference between her country and the *US*, she says:

> 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 reason. … Children were not given up for adoption or *farmed out*, so long as there were family members live. (212)

In *An American Brat*, Sidhwa deals explicitly with the theme of immigrant experience. She uses Feroza’s as an instrument to depict the expatriate experiences of the *Third Worlder’s*, people migrating from underdeveloped Indian subcontinent to the ‘First World’ of the Americans. Apart from Feroza, Manek, Zareen and Satish, too, are able to decipher the wide differences between the two cultures by their stay in America. 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 Ferozas experiences, Sidhwa also shows the expatriate’s assimilation to the way of life of the new world.” (Kapadia, 1996:191). The attitude 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, it is assimilation which is a far slower process. Her ability to react instinctively and emotionally to the culture or the new world shortens her period of adjustment.

Sidhwa has discussed 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 traditions and to mix with people of his own traditions and to mix with
people of his own country.” (Kirpal, 1989:65). He keeps his ethnicity alive. Feroza, like most expatriates, revives her ethnicity, the cause of which is nostalgia. In Bapsi Sidhwa’s fiction, there are different layers of displacement or diaspora: within the sub-continent from Lahore to central India in the *Crow Eaters*, from Lahore to Amritsar, in *Ice-Candy-Man* and from Lahore to New York in *An American Brat*. Diaspora, thus, becomes a creative requirement of her fiction in which history is a compelling factor. As in all diasporic fiction, the reasons for dislocation are usually economic which further results in ‘alienation’ and then following ‘quest of identity’ of personal level and within the Parsi community at large. Moving to the USA expose Sidhwa to the challenges of an immigrated life. The theme of immigration is quite prominent in Sidhwa’s *An American Brat*. In an interview to Naila Hussain, she says that the book deals with the subject of the ‘culture shock’ young people from subcontinent have to contend with, when they choose to study abroad. It also demonstrates the clashes of the different cultures generate between families. *An American Brat* deals with the intercultural theme which has assumed vital significance for many a post-colonial novelist. In this narrative, the West is depicted as a set of values conflicting with the value system of the East: In the present novel, the protagonist belongs to Eastern Value System but she has struggled to establish her identity in the Western Cultural system. Therefore, the conflict occurs in her life. Sidhwa evinces a 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 American way of life with its stress on material prosperity. The resulting friction impels her to make a moral choice in life. Such a fate is shared by a good many expatriates today.

In *An American Brat* Feroza takes the reins of her life in her hand as she decides to lengthen her stay and join a college in America. This new status draws unto maximum tier potential and she learns and adapts the new country technique of survival. She even changes the way, she dresses banishing her colorful salwar’s and dangling earrings and fitting herself into a pair of jeans and t-shirt. She thinks of waitressing working in a bar, becoming a salesperson or selling ticket at an amusement Park. Feroza finds the very idea of these jobs beyond the compass of the possible in Pakistan. She observes:
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. (216)

As Feroza uses more and more into the new society and her life style gets on par with that of her peers, she finds herself completely changed in life style and decides to take up a job as a waitress on the insistence of her friends. While in the sub-continent, women are supposed to live within the four walls of the house. The old culture of the sub-continent had assigned to women the passive role of waiting for their husbands. But Feroza is a tool for modernity and a voice for rights of women amid patriarchal societies of Indian sub-continent. She chooses her way after being thrown into American culture, though she is uneasy at every moment of her stay in America, yet she hates the womanish life of talking about babies, husbands and sisters-in-laws, etc.

5.5 The Minority Culture in Crisis

Bapsi Sidhwa has presented that the Parsi’s have a distinct culture and within it there are divergent cultural mores. These minority people are found preserving their culture at every moment. Bapsi Sidhwa has taken up the issue of the preservation of minority culture in her novels. So, it becomes indispensable to have a precise idea about Zoroastrianism. The Parsi’s follow the prophet named Zarathustra. Their religion known as Zoroastrianism was founded around 2000 B.C. These Parsis, originally belonging to Iran, left their homeland over twelve hundred years ago to save their religion intimidated by conversion to Islam by the Arabians that invaded in the seventh century A.D. Zarathustra preached monotheism that is the religion of the one supreme God Ahura Mazda. His message is based on life affirming principles that demand action on the part of every individual. According to the prophet Zarathustra two fundamental forces, Good and Evil, rule the entire creation. John R. Hinnels summarizes the Zoroastrian teachings as follows:
When men are judged of death, it is their thoughts, words and deeds that are weighed in the balance. Men’s as well as women’s own lives are the only basis on which they are judged. Unlike in Christianity, there is no idea of one man dying to save all, or of salvation by faith. In Zoroastrian belief, man has free will to think, speak and do as he pleases. It is how he uses that freedom throughout his life, which will cause him to go heaven or hell. The person who goes to heaven is the one who has cared for and expanded the good creations both spiritual and materials and who has been truthful, wise and generous. In addition to these positive duties, there is also the reverse, the rejection of evil. Zoroaster taught that men should render evil to evil. Evil should be vigorously opposed in every possible way; from cleaning a house to overcoming suffering or misery. (Hinnells, 1999:38)

Therefore, the basic conviction that every Parsi must cling to goes thus: Clean Thoughts, Right Words and Noble Deeds. These values stressed in Zoroastrianism influence the daily life of the Zoroastrians. The prayer called Ashem Vohu means: “Truth is the greatest virtue.” Then come charity, purity etc. In her interviews, Bapsi Sidhwa has said repeatedly that she is first and foremost a Parsi. She is proud of her Zoroastrian faith. The author herself attempts:

Because of a deep rooted admiration for my community and an enormous affection for its few eccentricities this work of satirical fiction has been a labour of love. The nature of satire being to exaggerate, the incidents in the book do not reflect at all the integrity of a community whose scrupulous honesty and sense of honour are renowned. (Sidhwa, 1990)

There are several references scattered throughout the novel about her Parsi community and culture. The fire is the symbol of the Zoroastrian faith just as the cross is a symbol of Christianity. In a Zoroastrian temple, the only symbol before which prayers are said is the fire which is tended by a priest five times a day. The fire stands for a number of things. It is a symbol of purity: fire purifies everything. It also stands
for the “inner fire” in a human being. There are many events that are related to Parsi customs and traditions. In an interview to Bachi Karkaria, she says:

I’m a Parsi first, then a Pakistani specifically a Punjabi. I’m a woman by gender. I don’t feel American at all. My consolidated 3p identity enriched my writing. (Karkaria, 2005; P-4)

Sidhwa’s protagonist celebrates the marginal status which expatriation offers her. “She becomes reconciled to her marginality and sees it as a great freedom, a means of feeling at home anywhere. It is this acceptance of her marginality and its attendant freedom that resolve the crisis of religious faith that she undergoes in America.” (Sidhwa, 1990). While her reaffirmation in the Parsi faith is not postmodern, she decides that since she carries the Holy Fire of her religion in her heart always, it is unnecessary to confine the practice of her faith within the confined and suffocating Parsi religious establishment in Lahore. Feroza learns to carry her religion around within her as part of the socio-cultural baggage that every migrant carries around. In An American Brat, Sidhwa shows the complex love-hate relationship that exists between the land and the migrants. Feroza’s nostalgia with the passage of time is typical of an exile. Thus, Feroza is caught between the two worlds.

It is natural that direct presentations of many Parsi cultural events have been depicted by the author. In An American Brat, there is a reference to the Dokhma. There is a custom among the Parsi that if a girl marries outside the caste, she defies the purity of her religion and is denied entry into the Fire Temple. Her polluted body is denied deposition into the Dokhma. At a hot discussion that took place at Zareen’s mother’s house, there is the story of Perin Powri, who married a Muslim, and at her death, her body was rejected by the Parsi priests and Dokhma was denied to her. As a result, she had to be buried like the Muslim’s. It is an example of disgrace to Perin Powri who committed the mistake of marrying outside the community. Sidhwa says:

Without the uthamna ceremony, the soul cannot ascend to the crucial Chinwad Bridge, which, depending on the person’s deeds, either expands to ease the soul’s passage to heaven, or contracts to plunge it into hell...the poor woman’s appalling fate was dangled as an example of the evil
consequence of such an alliance each time the occasion arose. (270)

Similarly, a Zoroastrian child is formally initiated into the religion through the Navjote Ceremony in which the child is made to wear Sudra for the first time. After a short prayer, they tie the Kusti around the waist. When Feroza commits the sin of smoking, that night she performs the kusti ritual, bows her head to beg divine forgiveness for desecrating the Holy Rise. The interior landscape of Feroza remains Zoroastrian and her triumph lies in preserving her ethnic identity despite her long stay in America. Feroza is forsaken, because it offers no hope and prosperity and the other which has failed her despite initial promises. Thus, she stays as a marginal being, unable to discard the old 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. In a review, Edith Villarreal suggests that the coming of age theme is closely linked with the theme of immigration in novel: Coming of age is never easy. Coming of age as a woman is even harder, but coming of age as a female immigrant in a foreign country may be the most difficult of all. For any woman born into societies with restrictive social and political codes however, immigration may be the only real way of coming of age.” (Villarreal, 1993)

Bapsi Sidhwa has presented the protagonist of the novel An American Brat totally changed in her perception and caught between different views i.e. now she has returned from America to her homeland during the winter vacation, Feroza perceives many changes in her family as well as in her country. Feroza is disconcerted to discover that she is a misfit in a country in which she once fitted so well, because 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 disease. Her family members are astonished at the change in her. The timid Feroza has grown into a confident creature. When her mother broaches the subject of Feroza’s marriage, she does not want to give up her studies. Zareen says:

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
There is a conflict between mother and daughter. Zareen represents traditional views whereas Feroza becomes a voice of modernity. Therefore, there is a conflict between tradition and modernity. She is able to realize how much America had succeeded in influencing and transforming her. Zareen too noticed it: “Was this flaming, confident creature, which talked so engagingly and candidly and had acquired a throaty, knowing delectable laugh, the same timid little thing that had refused the answer the phone?”(236). Feroza delved deep into her heart and compared various aspects of Pakistan and America. She pensively compared her life and that of her old school friends. Most of them were married and insinuated into family life. There were so many cases of female oppression before her eyes that government mutely seemed to sanction. Suddenly Feroza’s heart surged with admiration for America. The blow of dislocation was so severe that she felt being misfit in her own country, she had loved so much. It pointed out that a gradual shift in Feroza’s preferences. She felt more dislocated in Pakistan than in America.

While studying the novel, the two things that are more discernible go thus: identity crisis in the Parsi psyche and the influence of a patriarchal society. The novel features the conflict between the Parsi’s Pakistani identity and their attraction to the West. The protagonist in this novel Feroza Ginwalla is drawn from Islamic elements of Pakistan. Once in America Feroza is shocked by the free and easy relationship between the sexes but soon adjusts and acquires an American boyfriend. The Parsis, too, have decided views about their exclusive religion and culture. Therefore, they try to preserve their identity and cultural heritage. Sidhwa, at the very beginning of the novel, mentions and that she has admiration for her own community. So, she has portrayed several aspects of the Parsi community, along with their human irrationalities and imperfections. The American theme allows Sidhwa to broaden her canvas. Sidhwa also is careful to keep Feroza in touch with her culture and heritage, despite her Americanization and discontent towards her third world status.

Sidhwa makes an attempt to show here how the ethnic groups are struggling for identity. The Parsi’s strive to retain their identity by upholding traditional values and customs as well as seeking assimilation in a multi-racial, modern and changing society. Feroza undergoes the initiation into the indigenousness of her country and
culture and the need to bond her identity to it in the course of the novel’s action. Manek has changed his name from Manek Junglewalla to Mike Junglevala to fit in well with the American society. Thus, he has succeeded in establishing his identity in the American Society.

5.5.1 The Cultural Conflict between the Jews and the Parse’s

Bapsi Sidhwa has discussed theme of love, marriage and the consequent complex issues. When the protagonist expresses her thought about marriage to her uncle Manek, she tells him about David despite his Jewish is origin, she has a mind to marry. 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 touching on the phone, seeing how it goes?” (263) the cultural consciousness makes Manek think twice about such a marriage proposal. He has spent his life in American culture, when it is the time for marriage, he returns to Lahore. It is noted that he marries a Parsi girl called Aban which shows that he does not want to part with his culture at any cost. Now it is Feroza’s turn to face the dilemma.

Through the novel Sidhwa has tried to expose the discriminatory aspects of the laws of the Parsi community showing gender bias towards women. While men in Zoroastrianism are allowed to marry outside their community and can retain their right to freely practice their faith. The same law does not apply to Parsi women. If a Parsi girl marries a non-Parsi, she commits a cultural suicide, for the act bans her entry into their Fire temple and is denied all religious rites. Even the disposal of her corpse in Dungarwadi is prohibited. Feroza, too, is exposed to such a situation. Her letter to her family, to seek permission from her parents to marry David, an American Jew and the man of her heart, causes flutter in the family. It is an attack on the Parsi culture. Her family in Pakistan is both agitated and shocked. Zareen flies to Denver to dissuade Feroza from taking a step that would lead to her being ex-communicated and expelled from the faith. The parents are also concerned that such a marriage would bring shame upon the family’s honour. The family’s opposition to Feroza’s impending marriage represents the predominant traditional view of the Parsi community to such inter-community marriage. However, the author depicts the growing discontent with such ancient time honoured customs and traditions amongst the younger generation of the Parsi’s.
Zareen, when she looks at David and finds him a suitable match, has doubts about the rigid code of her community. She expresses the author's own uneasiness with ancient tradition so diligently followed. When Zareen begins to understand the logic of the younger Parsi opposition to the prohibition, she says: “Perhaps the teenagers in Lahore were right. ... The various Anjumans would have to introduce minor forms, if they wished their tiny community to survive.” (291) However, Zareen’s plan succeeds; David becomes conscious of the dissimilarities between the two cultures. She must protect her daughter from him by hook or by crook. She consents to their marriage but wants it to be a regular wedding. She describes speciously the details of the Parsi wedding rituals and customs to David. He realizes that Zareen’s offensive is not personal but communal. David tells Zareen that a Jewish wedding is an equally elaborate affair: “My parents are not happy about the marriage, either. It’s lucky they’re reformed Jews, otherwise they’d go into mourning and pretend I was dead ... I belong to an old tradition, too.” (298). Such anger shows that Zareen has succeeded in causing estrangement between him and Feroza. He called her ZAP standing for Zoroastrian American Princess, and JAP/ standing for Jewish American Princess. Bapsi Sidhwa’s handling of the theme of inter-community marriage is very relevant and contemporary. The issue of inter-faith marriage still arouses acrimonious debates amongst the Parsi community. Orthodox priests and reformists delve into the scriptures to argue over what it takes to be a Parsi, by the traditional rules of the community. One could be a Parsi by birth. As the Parsi’s are a patriarchal society, there is a strong masculine bias. The rules tend to favour the men who marry outside the community and their children. The same does not apply to the Parsi women. That is why; Feroza’s mother was worried about her daughter’s future.

*An American Brat* has been noted for its examination of cultural conflicts. Sidhwa is also called a post-colonial feminist writer depicting issues like cultural differences and the place of women in Indian and Pakistani society. Kamal Edwards has observed:

> Sidhwa is a feminist and realist. One sees in her women characters the strength of passion, the tenderness of love, and the courage of one’s conviction. They struggle to overcome the hurts of time and escape the grip of the fate in whose hands they are often mere puppets. (Edwards, 1991:47-48)
It is observed that Feroza rises above the restraints and confines of the patriarchal Parsi society in Pakistan, and dares to question and revolt against the traditions that bound her to her community. She denies an arranged marriage with one of the three boys chosen for her; she cannot deprive herself of her own life and the freedom that goes with it. The migrant Feroza adjusted herself well to a different culture and ‘there would be no going back for her.’ (317) Sidhwa tells us:

> From her visit to Lahore, Feroza knew she had changed, taken a different direction from hers. Their (of the inmates the family) preoccupation with children and servants and their concern with clothes and furnishings did not interest her ... Although the sense of dislocation, of not belonging, was more acute in America, she felt it would be more tolerable, because it was shared by thousands of newcomers like her. (312)

Feroza’s mind rises to the unforeseen heights, and she revels in the freedom and the privacy that America grants her. She is intensely conscious of her privileged status, and values greatly the privileges granted to her in the West. The novel concludes with her vowing to fight against injustices wherever she finds them. Feroza’s self-discovery leads to her commitment to the social world as she is now a changed woman; vastly different from the innocent girl of the novel’s beginning, now eager to exercise the infinite options that America has offered her. Aware of her roots, she turns to her religion, culture and civilization, the music, ghazals and memories that connect her to a well-ordained identity.

### 5.5.2 Disintegration of Self and the Society

Shashi, her friend at the university, tries to comfort a dejected Feroza, after her break-up with David, by dramatically uttering a ghazal by Iqbal Banoo “Ulfat ki Naeema mazil ko chalay…you who have broken my heart, look where you’re going; I too lie in your path.” (311) it means:

> Her life that had bloomed in such unexpected ways had just as unexpectedly fallen apart. She must put it together again, heal her lacerated sensibility. But she could only do the healing right here in America. For even in her bereft
condition, she knew there was no going back for her, despite
the poets and her friends. (311)

Self-realization is a very strong trait of Feroza’s character. Feroza, in spite of
everous pressure at her home, becomes American. Thus, Sidhwa’s women are
strong-willed, assertive, and courageous. They resolve their crisis in their own way.
Speaking about man’s quest for happiness, Bertrand Russell observes:

All happiness depends upon some kind of disintegration
within the self through lack of coordination between the
conscious and unconscious mind; there is lack of integration
between the self and society where the two are not knit
together by the force of objective interests and affections...
Joy is to be found. (Russell, 1989: 191)

In Feroza, there is such a lack of integration between the self and society: However,
she achieves the fruitful fusion of heart and mind emphasized by Russell and thus
resolves the moral crisis in her life.

Feroza’s mental turmoil typifies the predicament of the modern multicultural
society. She is surer of herself and her choices. She also understands that no one can
take away her religious beliefs. 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-fulfillment in the USA instead
of the settled life, family and every contentment at Lahore (Kapadia, 2001)

An American Brat is of course, a powerful and moving tale story of a Parsi
family and presents also the heart-rending real and intimate accounts of cultural,
traditional norms of the Parsi community. So, Sidhwa, all through the novel, presents
the cultural dilemma of the inclination to move beyond the customary boundaries on
the one hand and their longing back for the Parsi tradition on the other.
(B) Mahasweta Devi’s Mother of 1084

5.6 Introduction

The novel Mother of 1084 is an exploration of the nature of the cultural and social construction of female identity and behavioural pattern particularly of a wife and a mother together. It projects a multitude of women’s problems, dilemmas, disputes and frustrations. Mother of 1084 is an English translation of Mahasweta Devi’s Bengali novella Hazaa Chaurashir Maa, inspired by Maxim Gorky’s famous novel Mother (1907). Mother of 1084, was written by Mahasweta Devi in 1973-74 and translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay in English language in 1997. This is a very sensitive and thought-provoking novel centered on a young, idealistic, intellectual student, Brati Chatterjee, who is treacherously betrayed to the police by a mole in his revolutionary group. The history of the eastern states in the 1960’s and the 1970’s is the essential background of the novel. She has felt an urge and an obligation to document the events of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s from a feminist, activist and humanist point of view. Her works concentrate on the issues of exploitation and marginalization as long continuing socio-historical process embedded in social and cultural practices. It focuses on the interlocking structures of oppression, the criss-cross of multiple hierarchies of class, caste and gender.

The Naxalite movement that initiated in Naxalbari area of North Bengal and spread throughout the state in the late 1960’s and the early 1970’s. Devi brings a sense of comprehension, compassion and rationality to one of Bengal’s most turbulent times when aggrieved tribal communities and landless labourers rebelled against their exploitation at the hands of landlords and moneylenders. This work also marked the beginning of Devi’s explorations of gender relationships in the context of “Subalternity” (Bhattacharya 97). Devi does not give any detailed historical account of the Naxalite movement; rather she would explore the politics and the passions of the peasant tribal revolt turning into a student’s revolt against bourgeois values and the academic institutions they sustained. For her authentic documentation is the “best medium for protest against injustices and exploitation.” (Devi, 1997: XIII). The novel Mother of 1084 touches on almost all the features of the urban phase of the 1971-74 Naxalite movement. The tortures inflicted by police on the Naxalites, the ideological deviations of the movement, the beauty and honesty of the dreams of the Naxal youth like Brati and his comrades, the brutality and ugliness of their cold blooded genocide by the state, the weaknesses of the movement at that time and its capacity to learn from mistakes, etc. Devi has depicted many aspects of this movement; violence is one of the major factors dealt with by the author, as the Naxalites had to face inhuman treatment by the police. In order to suppress the movement, the police-men tortured the Naxalites and killed them brutally. The brutal killing and violent actions were for the common people also, to show
them the power of police and the disastrous results of being involved in the movement. The author has mentioned that it was rare request from the urban youth who has suffered tremendously during that bloody period of West Bengal and found no one writing about them and their cause that compelled our activist author to write this insightful and stimulating novel:

*Mother of 1084* was written in the background of 1970’s Calcutta. That time at Calcutta so many Naxalites were killed all over Calcutta. I remember I was going to villages all the time. So one day I still remember the young boys came, they didn’t enter my house; they stood outside the Veranda and told me “You are writing about the villages in the rural context … Who will write about us? We are being killed on the streets all the time.” (Agarwal, 2010)

While writing this novel, Devi has fulfilled her self-declared activist aim of recording history and giving voice to the voiceless.

Devi’s literary work exposes the legacy of violence that has been passed into the lives of generations of women. She has, however, always refused to accept the tag of feminism along with any other ‘isms’ that certain critics assign to her writings. Her works portray women as victims of the politics of gender, class and caste played at various levels of social relationships. Her stories are a study in brutality and degradation wrought on women for centuries. She has depicted the horrifying tales of women forcibly straitjacketed into the mythical assumptions of ‘womanhood’ disturbed through patriarchal ideology; she also documents women’s act of revenge against subjugation, which becomes the means to their potential emancipation.

### 5.7 Psychological Conflict of a Mother

Mahaweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084* appeared in Bengali *Hazar Churashi Ki Ma*, a novel, in the special autumn festival issue of the periodical, *Prasad*, in 1973. It was translated into several Indian languages. The Naxalite movement of the late 1960’s was also an important influence on her work. Devi, in a 1983 interview, pointed out, pertaining to movement, as the first major event which makes her feel “an urge and an obligation to document.” (Bandyopadhyay, 1986). It was a leftist militant movement that had started in the West Bengal beginning as a rural revolt of landless workers and tribal people against the landlords. This movement has turned its mode in the urban areas; it attracted student’s participation in the political struggle. Devi’s focus is on the young intellectuals who were
drawn to the cause of their idealism and on the peasants and tribals, who were drawn to it because they were victims of centuries old oppression. “Its author does not lament on the failure of the movement but discovers and unravels the social complexities.” (Bandopadhyaya, 1997: VIII). This is a very emotional and thought provoking novel centred on a young, idealistic and intellectual student, Brati Chatterjee, the younger son of Sujata. Brati’s commitment to the revolutionary and communist Naxalite movement has labelled him as a rebel and he is killed ruthlessly by the police in an encounter. Brati is identified only as Corpse Number ‘1084.’ The novel is a story of his mother’s reconstruction of Brati’s other life, his true life. She sets out on a journey to discover what made her dear son reduced to be a mere number, 1084. During this journey a parallel is drawn by the novelist of her personal life and that of her Naxalite son.

Sujata, the protagonist of the novel, a middle-aged woman belonging to a bhadralok, bourgeoisie Calcutta family. She was born into a conservative, affluent family. She is advised to pursue her B.A. so that it helps her marriage prospects, but is ultimately married off to Dibyanath Chatterjee, a chartered accountant. In thirty four years of their married life, Sujata gives birth to four children, two sons (Jyoti and Brati) and two daughters (Nipa and Tuli). When the novel opens, two of her children are already married, Jyoti to Bina and Nipa to Amrit. Sujata, the protagonist of the novel, recalls her past. Two years ago, it was seventeenth of January, Nineteen Seventy. It was Brati’s birthday, then telephone rang, there was a call from Kantapukur, she was asked to go there and identify her dead son. The mother, who was preparing for his son’s birthday, was shocked to hear the news of his death. Her husband, Dibyanath told her that he would not allow her to take his car to police station, because he feared the loss of his prestige in the eyes of the society. According to him, it would be a matter of great shame for him. He had died for Sujata, when he placed his own security before his dead son. He says:

That day, with Brati’s death, Brati’s father had also died for Sujata. The way he had behaved that day, that moment, had shattered numberless illusions for her. It had burst upon her with explosive force… he never knew that he did not exist for Sujata from that day when he had placed his own position and his own security before the dead Brati. (Bandopadhyaya, 1997:7-8)

It is pointed out that, Dibyanath was a cold-blooded, corrupt person and belonging to the sophisticated family as well as society. There were many events; he had behaved like a depraved human being. Sujata did not expect anything from him. At Brati’s birth, she was
amazed to think that she was not expecting her husband to come with her at the sensitive moment like childbirth. She came alone to the hospital; neither her husband nor her mother-in-law cared for her. Even though, she is a bank employee and the mother of the title of the novel, who is reduced to a mere cog in her household: “Dibyanath and his mother constituted the centre of attraction in the home. Sujata had a shadowy existence. She was subservient, silent, faithful, and without an existence of her own” (9). These events of awakening propel her on a journey of discovery and thus move her out of her cocoon of social respectability and civilized façade. She discovers a stranger in her that she had never comprehended. She tries to gain a more enlightened understanding of the circumstances that forced Brati to make the kind of choices he did. She begins to recognize her own alienation as a woman and wife from the complacent, hypocritical, bourgeois society, her son has rebelled against and refused to accept the code of a decadent society. Like Sujata, Brati has no fancy for the luxuries that their rich background is to offer. Thus, Sujata is caught in the conflict within herself between a sympathetic mother and a silent protester against the immoral life which her household stands for.

Mahasweta Devi does not give any historical account of the Naxalite movement, “but concentrates on the later reactions and lack of reaction of a cross-section of the survivors, both who bear the scars and wounds-both literally and figuratively of those horrible days and those who had lived through the days of violence in stimulated insularity.” (Bandyopadhyaya, 2001: XV). It gives the most passionate and heart-rending expression of the excruciating agonies of thousands of mothers whose beloved son has taken part in the movement and become martyrs. Sujata Chatterjee is the representative of such miserable mothers who are pathetically ignorant of their son’s activities. At the same time, she is aware of her husband’s womanizing and corrupt practices, yet she says nothing against him. When Sujata meets with Somu’s helpless and submissive mother, she provides a more inchoate version of her own dogged resistance to the power structure imposed on her. She discovers here that Brati and his friends, Somu, Parth and Laltu, have been betrayed by a new member of their group named Anindya. She enters into the world of slum dwellers which is a world of primitive squalor, poverty, degradation and sub-human existence. The relationship is established between Sujata and Somu’s mother and both of them are victims of the holocaust during the 1970’s. Sujata wanted to know more ideas and information from Somu’s mother, but she is not in the position to convey the same to Sujata and therefore, she makes Sujata conscious, saying that there is no need to visit their area and home. Her confrontation with Brati’s girlfriend and fellow comrades leads to the realization of the darker and seamy side of life where persecution of the innocent continues unabated. Nandini tries to explain her everything about Brati’s ideological commitment and the issues of rebellion, power, betrayal and also
revolutionary optimism. She narrates her shocking experiences during her imprisonment which moved Sujata to pathos and exposed her to the harsh realities of contemporary society.

The novel ends with Sujata breaking down at her daughter’s engagement party; Dibyanath says “the appendix has burst.”(127). The novel is a deep psychological portrayal of a bereaved mother who, instead of drowning her son’s memory in tears, keeps his zealous ideal alive through her social work.

5.8 Cultural and Social Construction of Female Identity

Mahasweta Devi procures an international recognition as an activist writer. She has a ‘luminous anger’ to tackle the issues of underprivileged classes and their struggle to save their rights as well as role of socio-culture ethos to control the lives of women in her oeuvre. Her works are symptomatic of the feminist consciousness exhibited and developed in subsequent Indian fiction. The novel Mother of 1084, offers a strong criticism on the way a woman is being treated in our society. Her subjectivity is either denied or defined according to phallocentric norms. Devi’s works highlight the role of various institutions and practices at work in the patriarchal society of India that objectify and engender the bodies of women in ways that are advantageous for men. Devi has explained that Indian woman despite of various laws and constitutional safeguards and always defined and differentiated with man. In the family and in the society, she is considered as subordinate to man. The novel Mother of 1084 is an exploration of the nature of the cultural and social construction of female identity and behavioural pattern particularly as a wife and a mother. It projects a multitude of women’s problems dilemmas, disputes and frustrations.

She depicts the life of a bourgeois woman, Sujata, fifty-two years of age living in Calcutta. It deals with the psychological and emotional trauma of an upper middle class ‘apolitical’ mother Sujata Chatterjee who awakens one morning to the earth-shattering news that her favourite son Brati Chatterjee is lying dead in the police morgue at Kantapukar. Devi says in an interview that this story is about “the awakening of an apolitical mother”. She further explains “Sujata, in Mother of 1084, is essentially apolitical. Yet as she reaches towards an explanation of the death of her son killed in the seventies, she too finds the entire social system cadaverous, and as she takes a closer look at society, she finds no legitimacy for his death.” (VIII). When she has attended the insistent call from the police station, she is asked to identify her son’s body. The uncomprehending Sujata is set as a strong contrast to her materialistic husband, Dibyanath and her elder son Jyoti who “look at each other, with a clear understanding of what has happened.” (Deshpande, ed, 681). It would be a matter of great shame for them. Sujata’s husband was dready dead for her, when he placed his own security before his dead son. Dibyanath Chatterjee, the husband of Sujata is an overbearing and complacent man. He does not hesitate to risk the private sentiments to keep his public
stature untarnished, whereas Sujata finds a moral rationale for her son’s revolt. Dibyanath and other family members have detached feeling for Brati’s death. She experiences a special concern for Brati and his daily humiliation and suffering in the Chatterjee’s household. Sujata is caught in the conflict within herself between a sympathetic mother and a silent protester against the immoral life in her household. The corrupt and degenerated, values of her husband are the most characteristic of the elite class indulging in self-care and self-love. Samik Bandyopadhyaya makes a highly pertinent observation in his “Introduction” to the English translation of the novel:

What stands out in Mahasweta’s elaborate exposure of the Chatterjee family and its art of survival is their systematic denial of Brati and his defiance of the family beginning with Dibyanath active concern to keep the news of the manner of Brati’s killing hidden ‘from the people who knew him.’ (XV)

His indifference to the death of Brati is clearly evident from the fact that he refused to identify the death body of his son and disallowed Sujata to take his car: “Dibyanath had succeeded in his mission, his string-pulling: The next day, the newspapers reported the death of four young men. Their names were reported. Brati was not mentioned in any of the reports.” (8). Brati would only live with the tag of a misguided youth, and his case would close as No. 1084. Brati’s family except his mother considered him “as a stigma, a conspicuous blot on their names, hindering their careers and relationships.” This action of Dibyanath was only one example of being a cold-blooded, corrupt person belonging to the sophisticated society.

In contrast with her husband, Sujata begins to recognize her own alienation, as a woman and as a wife, from the complacent hypocritical bourgeois society her son had rebelled against. Devi writes:

I set an apolitical mother’s quest to know her martyred Naxalite son, to know what he stood for; for she had not known true Brati ever, as long as he had been alive. Death brings him closer to her through her quest and leads the mother to a journey of self-discovery and discovery of the cause of her son’s rebellion. (31)

After Brati’s death, his mother Sujata has started journey into the past and undergoes a process of self-introspection and wonders at herself and her family members, or at the society which is responsible for his death. As she finds a reason for the death of her son, she too finds
that entire social system is cadaverous and she moves from closer look at the society, she finds no legitimacy for his death. Devi has explained the transformation and self-liberation that Sujata undergoes within the novel. How Sujata is transformed from being an apolitical mother to political one. Now, she becomes a socially and politically conscious member of the society. All these aspects create revolutionary ability for Sujata to go against her own belonging. The time that Sujata experiences in the novel, is not a linear one, but a circular one, that has no starting and no end. She moves in and out of present reality and visits her past through a flashback and through recourse to her memory.

Sujata turns politically, morally, socially and ideologically conscious to usher in social changes. Her husband’s denial to identify the dead body of his own son, in the police morgue, marked the real beginning of her revolt against the complacent and hypocritical bourgeois society. With Brati’s death, she considered herself ‘a widow’ as her husband also died for her the same day. She repents and feels guilty for not having understood Brati and his revolutionary activities. She feels very sorry for Brati who died in a state of disgrace so much so that his own family refused to cremate him. The family members even locked up all his memories into an attic room and not even allowed Sujata to articulate her grief.

Her husband asked the family members to remove Brati’s portrait and other things to the second floor and thus tried to wipe out Brati’s existence and everything that bore his memory. (13)

Sujata is angry at such behaviour of her husband. Her husband represents the existing state power and authority and his house is representative of the society of West Bengal of the 1970’s: Sujata represents the oppressed and marginalized, sections of this society. How, as a woman, who remains on the margins of society, she questions the people belonging to the centre.

Dibyanath Chatterjee, father of Brati Chatterjee, is represented, as an honest representative of the male dominated society. He was a great womanizer, an avid promiscuous, who never showed any respect and regard for his wife and never tried to make secret of his affairs outside wedlock. Indeed “he felt it was within his rights.” (Devi, 2008: 45). For him “a wife had to love, respect and obey her husband. A husband was not required to do anything to win his wife’s respect, love and loyalty.” (Devi, 2008: 45). In fact, Dibyanath Chatterjee’s favourite daughter Tule used to help her father in his extramarital affairs. This shows the extent to which Dibyanath had imposed his immoral social codes on his children, who grew up to accept an artificial atmosphere. Naturally, Brati grew a stranger and an alien to his family day-by-day. As he grew up, he found his family (which is the
representative of the society against which Brati and his comrades rebelled) the hub of immorality and hypocrisy where his mother is reduced to a mere puppet and a sex object, and accorded a marginalized status. Devi has depicted the protagonist of the novel, who has set her journey of the several discoveries, only after the sudden and mysterious death of Brati, her younger and loving son, with whom she had always shared a very special relationship. For instance, she discovers that all her thirty-four years of her married life, she has been living a life. He fixed up a petty bank job for her, when Brati was three years old, not out of any consideration for her economic independence, but essentially to help the family tide over a temporary financial crisis. When the economic problem was over, he would want her to give up the job, which Sujata simply refused. When she remembered her past life, she had a very bitterly mentioned all the events, for instance at the time of Brati’s birth, she was amazed to think that she was not expecting her husband to come with her at the sensitive moment like childbirth. She came all alone to the hospital; neither her husband nor her mother-in-law cared for her.

Mahasweta Devi has a very successfully depicted the hypocrisy of the upper class along with its poor mentality. The domestic violence which the protagonist of the novel had to face is presented very skillfully in it by the author. Mary Wollstonecraft commented on the condition of woman in her book. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, that “Women are … so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men.” (Wellstoncraft, 1996: 25). The concept of *ardhangini* is prevalent in the Indian society but the real life is far removed from reality. Women are always considered inferior human beings having no choice of their own, dependent and obedient to their husbands and other family members for everything and every decision of their life. The woman who is obedient, delicate, meek, fragile, weak, and having no spirit of protest is called an ideal woman in this society. So, like an ideal woman, a wife and a mother, Sujata performed all her duties, yet she had to face humiliations from her family members. They could not understand what the need of job was for Sujata. They had no idea that as a human being she also had an identity and wanted her own space but women in the society are not normally expected to do anything for their own sake. It is the duty of every woman to support her family whenever needed but there is no such rule to support a woman to find her own identity or to let her live in her own space. Dibyanath used to say, “I am the Boss in this house” (43), when Sujata refused him for bearing another child, “His sex life outside the house became more active (47), whereas Brati said to Sujata “Father used you like a door mat” (81), on which Sujata had nothing to reply, because she was trained to be dependent upon her husband. She was a meek woman throughout her life, except in some instances.
Refusing to leave her job was Sujata’s second act of rebellion. Her first act of rebellion was when Brati was two. She refused to be mother for a fifth time. (Bandopadhaya, 1997: 46)

Such an act of protest was not within her nature, so, she had to bear all ill-treatment by her family members.

5.9 Marginalization at Personal and Cultural Level

Mahasweta Devi has depicted the plight of marginalized people. The word ‘marginalize’ refers to the group of people who are deprived of their minimum rights and are exploited. The term ‘Subaltern’ or ‘Marginalized’ incorporates the entire people who are subordinates in term of class, caste and gender. The lack and deprivation, loneliness and alienation, subjugation and subordination, neglect, etc. mark the life of Sujata. She always helplessly suffers and gets marginal place in the house, and culture which she belongs to.

After Brati’s death, Sujata has started her journey into the past and undergoes a process of self-introspection and wonders the society which is responsible for her son’s death. When she discovers that Brati’s has rebelled, because he was not happy with the ways things were. The whole family disowned Brati, because he had refused to accept the value system of the present state. He had questioned the decadent and the self-indulgent society. Sujata now realized that her son was not the antagonist of society, but had died, because he had “lost faith in the social system.” (17). He started to become ideologically dislocated. Gradually differences started brimming up between him and his family who began to treat him as belonging to the ‘other camp’ because he never followed their so-called modern life-style and never agreed to their point of view. As the authorial third person narrator tells us:

If Brati drank like Jyoti, if he could go about drunk like Neepa’s husband, if he could flirt with slip of a typist the way Brati’s father did, if he could be a master swindler like Tony Kapadia, if he could be as loose as his sister Neepa, who lived with a cousin of her husband’s, then they could have accepted Brati as one of them. (Devi, 2008: 31)

According to Sujata, Brati was different. Instead he resented and revolted against their immoral life-style. He revolted against the values and customs they stood for and desired to fight the social malaise that permeates his private and public domains. Besides rationalizing Brati’s rebellion, the author here tried to make us realize that any act on the part of a child was the responsibility of the family she belongs to. In fact, the family is the first school of a
child. Its influence can either make or mar the future of their wards. There are some occasions, when Dibyanath accused Sujata for misleading their son which had led him to become a rebel. The egoistic nature of the father is understood in his words: “Bad company, bad friends, the mother’s influence.” (29). It is a well-known fact in the society that father and mother play an important role in bringing up the children, but it is ridiculous to notice that when the children get spoiled, complete blame is thrown on mother. Devi’s novel shows that by absorbing the dominant patriarchal, ideological structures, women endure and suffer at the hands of male discrimination and oppression as a natural course of action.

Mahasweta Devi considers women as one group among the exploited and under subjugation. At every step, Sujata, a subjugated woman, had to take permission from her husband; she did not even have the right to buy a sari of her choice when her mother-in-law was alive. As a woman, she did not have any authority regarding her home. She had done all her duties, as a daughter, a wife, a mother but as a woman she could find no space for herself. An anonymous writer has rightly mentioned about the roles of woman: she is a daughter, a sister, a wife and a mother but never an individual in her own right: “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not man with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute, she is the other” (Beauvoir, 51). Beauvoir’s words ring true for the women in Devi’s novel. Mother of 1084, Discriminatory treatment becomes the fate of a girl with her birth; she is treated as a second class citizen. As a wife, a woman’s dharma is pativrata – i.e. constancy of love and allegiance meaning ‘to worship her husband completely, to obey his command and follow him, in life as well as death, without any consideration of his merits or demerits as a person. Mahasweta Devi’s predominant concerns are tribal back waters, the “exploitations of the Adivasis by the landed rich or the urban-administrative machinery callously perpetuating a legacy of complicity with the colonizers, bonded labour and prostitution, the destitution and misery of city dwellers who are condemned to live at the fringes and eke-out a meager livelihood, the plight of women who are bread-winners and victims of male sexual violence, dependent widows, ill-treated wives, and unwanted daughters whose bodies can fetch a price are adequately represented.” (Sen and Yadav, 2008). It is pointed out the insignificant role of Sujata in the novel Mother of 1084, as a woman who has been relegated to the position of a neglected, suppressed, ill-treated, mechanical and marginalized women in all forms in the male dominated society that consider woman as an object of sex, only to reproduce, bring
money when needed and does not possess even voice to express her own concerns.

Virginia Woolf, while defining women’s place in the globally prevalent patriarchal set-up, voices the sentiments of millions of her sisters. She bemoans the unenviable position of women in these words:

A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically, she is completely insignificant. She provides poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in Literature fall from her lips; in real life, she could hardly read, could scarcely spell and was the property of her husband. (Woolf, 1999: 41)

The description of a woman goes on with the same words as it used to be in Woolf’s time. A woman is still of the highest importance but only up to extent man determines for her. So, the life of a woman can constantly be monitored by the parameters of myth and reality. In reality a woman is nothing but a ‘womb’, her role is always determined by the male dominated society as ‘secondary.’ Sujata’s life is not an exception. Woolf’s conception about women is perfectly applicable to Sujata’s character in the novel Mother of 1084. Sujata’s decision to visit Brati’s political comrades who survived the struggle and their families proved to be the rediscovery of her own suppressed self-esteem and assertion of individual identity. Her gradual transformation from a weak-willed, hopelessly decadent and a non-assertive moral coward, into a morally assertive, politically enlightened and a socially defiant individual is connotative of her initiation and evolution into an authentic and self-liberated world. It is ironic that Sujata fails to connect her son with the Naxal Movement raging in the contemporary society. It shows that the simple, trusting mother has ample trust in her son. She can hardly believe that her son is mature and grownup enough now to participate in a mass movement that involves strategy and manipulation. It is, thus, that she fails to make a correct estimate of her own son whom she loves so dearly, and who is practically the succor for her existence in a house filled with selfish, material-minded strangers. Therefore, she has started her
journey in search of unknown aspect of Brati’s life. She decided to go and meet Somu’s (Brati’s friend) mother to share her sorrow. Sujata vowed to know the cause of Brati’s transformation. Brati, Sujata’s simple-minded son, while he is an educated but unemployed youth, his heart shook with pain and he left his life of comfort and luxury to help them which leads to his brutal killing. Why he secretly chose the path of terrorism; what is the morale rationale of his rebellion? Sujata, besides realizing that Brati’s rebellion, may have been caused in part by the disenchantment with hypocrisy, immorality, repression and narrow-mindedness detectable in the domestic and social world to which his family belonged.

5.9.1 Socio-economic and Cultural Conflict

Sujata’s meeting with Somu’s helpless and submissive mother provides a more inchoate version of her own dogged resistance to the power structure imposed on her. She discovers here that Brati and his friends, Somu, Parth and Laltu had been betrayed by a new member of their group named Anindya. She also learns from Somu’s mother that Brati had spent his lives last night in the same room. She also gets an eerie glimpse into how these youths were brutally tortured and murdered by the so-called guardians of justice. She enters into the world of slum-dwellers which is degradation and sub-human existence. Sujata could never imagine a world which could be so full of poverty. She comes into contact with this world of slum-dwellers that was degrading and full of filth. The conditions of this household awaken her to another form of reality. She realizes a different possibility of existence. She becomes somewhat jealous of Somu’s mother, who is aware of Brati’s spontaneous and revolutionary career. In the Dibyanath household, Brati is someone else and cannot be as spontaneous as he has been at Somu’s house. She learns another form of reality and becomes aware of the injustice that is part of the society, she lives in, and she becomes socially conscious and learns that the world outside her own house is very different. Across the class and caste divide, a strange bond develops between two suffering mother’s, enabling Sujata to see the chaotic nature of her personal loss, suffering and grief within a much wider framework of social and historical injustice.

5.9.2 Inhuman Government Policies and Naxalitism

Mahasweta Devi has raised many questions related to Naxalism, “was there anything in the way she (Sujata) had brought up Brati that had made him into No.
1084 in the decade that headed towards liberation? Or was there anything that she could have done, or no done, to make him no. 1084? Where did she fail?” (Devi, 2008:10-15). There are many aspects that make Sujata realize that Brati’s transformation into a Naxalite may have been caused in part by her own failure as a mother. For Mahasweta Devi, a mother has a socio-political duty of moulding future citizens capable of creating a better world. She wants that only those women with a moral and social conscience ought to enjoy the right to bear springs off. This ideal construction of maternal ideal by our activist writer has been beautifully summed up by Radha Chakravarty in these words:

This is a visionary dimension to Mahasweta Devi’s construction of this maternal ideal. Unlike mythical archetypes, this ideal is rooted in particularities: instead of unthinkingly valorizing motherhood per se, it demands that the women prove themselves worthy of the role. The proof resides as much in the life style and values of the women themselves as in the way they bring up their children. (Chakravarty, 2008:113)

Sujata visits Nandini who is one of the living revolutionaries of the Naxalite movement and also Brati’s girlfriend. It is through Nandini that Sujata learns about the Naxalite movement, its causes and aims. She also informs Sujata about the internal working of the movement and how the revolutionaries were fighting against the existing world order which had become repressive and destructive for the poor and oppressed sections of society. Mahasweta also raises her finger at the inhuman government policy. According to her there are more dangerous anti-social elements in our society like food and drug addicts than the Naxalites, but the administration has never cared to take any decisive action against them, she writes:

It is a social system which has the capacity to contaminate even the child in the womb, and where the killers in society, those who adulterated food, drugs and baby food, had every right to live. The leaders, who led the people to face the guns of the police and found for themselves the safest shelters under police protection, had every right to live. But Brati was
a worse criminal than them. Because he had lost faith in this society ruled by profit-mad businessmen and leaders blinded by self-interest. He had rejected a society of spineless, opportunist time servers masquerading as artists, writers and intellectuals. (Devi. 2008:19)

Mahasweta expects, rather, demands a little more humanity and leniency against such so-called anti-social elements. She narrates her shocking experiences during her imprisonment which moved Sujata to pathos and exposed her to the harsh realities of contemporary society. The police tortured her with thousand watts bulbs glowing over her forehead, with cigarette butts being stabbed in her breasts. She tells her about the inhuman police atrocities during her detention: “The person in-charge sat in the dark, a smoker or not a cigarette glowed between his fingers. From time to time, So many questions raised by the Police interrogator, educated and sophisticated, could ask a civil and harmless question like-'oh, so you are Chatterjee’s friend? And clamp the burning cigarette to the skin of the face naked under the thousand watt lamp.” (73). Nandini’s crippled condition due to the police torture grieved her very much and led to the realization that the hypocrisy of the hierarchic societal orders which seem to be void, baseless and futile need to be questioned and challenged. Nandini questions like “How can you be so smug and complacent? With so many young men killed, so many imprisoned, how can you wallow in your complacency? Where does such complacency come from?” (86) make her aware of her own multiple oppressions within a stifling, familial, patriarchal and feudal order. Therefore, she comes to the conclusion that, the men who rejected the parties of establishment were killed in a ruthless manner and to kill these faithless men, one did not need any special sanction from the courts of law or the courts of justice.

5.9.3 Ideological Conflict

Mahasweta Devi has described two ideologies represented by Brati and his father. At Somu’s house, when Somu’s mother, told Sujata about her husband’s attempt to save the lives of Brati, Somu and their friends, she started comparing that “the two fathers, Somu’s and Brati’s, lived in the same country, but poles apart.’’(Devi, 66). Here, she observed, one was ready to die to save his son and another had no concern with his son’s death, he was busy in hushing up the incident because they felt embarrassed at Brati’s involvement in the movement. One sacrificed
his life for others and the other was more concerned about his status and reputation in the society for the sake of which he forgot the brutal killing of his son and was busy in removing his name from all the records. The relationship, established between Sujata and Somu's mother, both of them victims of the holocaust during the 1970’s, is not unnatural and it possibly turns a major threat to the prevailing social system as the victims learn to make common cause by revolting against all kinds of oppression. Somu’s mother asks Sujata not to come again to her house for “They tell her, why she comes to your house? Forbid her. It’ll be dangerous otherwise.” (20) While talking about the effect of the Naxalite revolt on the life of the common man, Sumanta Banerjee in an article entitled “Sting of Betrayal” rightly states that there are hundreds of victims “Who are not being allowed to lead a normal life. For years the police have been trained to suspect every young man as a potential rebel and they find ready preys even among those unfortunate youth who were perhaps once on the fringe of the Naxalite movement but has no political connections whatever now.” (Banerjee, 1983 : 176). Finally, she realizes how she is chained everywhere and how she fails miserably to rid herself of the constraints of the culture of the society. Sujata says: “I won’t go to Somu’s mother. I won’t come to you [Nandini]. I won’t go to the place where Brati exists. May be that’s my punishment for not knowing Brati.” (30).

Mahasweta Devi with her penchant for realism presents the tragic stories of three women belonging to different strata and cultures in the novel – Sujata, Somu’s mother and Nandini. She deftly conveys the family structures and their economic implications as they are instrumental in defining the individualities of the three women, to the point of setting up a hierarchy of self-assertion and independence. Somu’s mother belongs to the lowest rung whereas Nandini to the highest and Sujata at an intermediate level, to use Mahasweta Devi’s own famous expression the *bhadralok*. Samik Bandyopadhyaya rightly sums up that “Sujata’s process of understanding ended with a compulsion to decide.” (XVIII). Nandini gives strength and confidence to Sujata as it is quite evident from her day-long odyssey. She angrily shout “get out” hit him ‘like a whiplash,’ Bandyopadhyaya calls it “a step up the hierarchic ladder.” (XVIII). The rift between Dibyanath and Sujata has widened further when the former accuses her of being responsible for the death of Brati. She seems to have felt relieved of the burden of sinful life she has lived all these years. She is a working mother for whom her work is in it a form of protest and self-
assertion against the patriarchal authority of her husband. This was a difficult but
decisive and much needed step towards Sujata’s emancipation. Her realization of the
falsities of the system helps her in raising her voice against it with a fierce vengeance
for the murder of her son:

Did Brati die so that these corpses with their putrefied lives
could enjoy all the images of all the poetry of the world, the
red rose, the green grass, the neon lights, the smiles of
mothers, the cries of children forever? Did he die for this? To
leave the world to these corpses? (127)

Sujata happens to be the one who is more self-assured, morally confident and
politically sensitive, because her husband treated her like a lifeless creature with
which he expects to play and satisfy his desire. She knows that the material aspect of
the life and money were the only things which were necessary for him. Like her
husband, her children were also corrupt and selfish as they came to her only for their
selfish motives. Highlighting the plight of a woman, the novelist has tried to give the
picture of a woman’s life, which is not treated as a human being rather member of her
family treated her like a non-existing entity. She becomes more assertive and
determined now, when her daughter Tuli asks her for her entire jewellery, Sujata
gives her all the jewellery, she has got from Dibyanath, but refuses to part with the
jewellery her father has given to her. Her whole body and soul instructs her not to
take part in Tuli’s engagement, but out of her moral duty, she has joined the party.
Even though Sujata has now become completely transformed still she decides to
fulfill her moral responsibility towards her family. She decides to fulfill the role that
has been allotted to her by the society she has lived in. She wears a white sari for the
ceremony, signaling for her transformed sel
She shouts at her husband, she says:

For thirty-two years, I never asked you where you spent your
evenings, or who accompanied you on your tours for the last
ten years or why you paid the house rent for your ex-typist.
You are never to ask me a thing never. (94)

Sujata’s transformation from a weak-willed, hopelessly dependent, and a non-
assertive moral coward to a morally assertive and a socially defiant individual.
According to her, only the morally assertive, socially defiant and politically conscious
women deserve and can prove to be better mothers. That is why Brati’s mother Sujata after her long quest realizes that “if only she had the strength to come out with the truth and challenge Dibyanath while Brati had still been alive! Even then she might have been able to affect the course of events.” (Devi, 2008: 94).

Mahasweta Devi has presented the end of the novel with a different message to the reader. It ends with the various questions raised in the mind of protagonist. At the engagement party, no one seems to bother about the feelings of the mother who still pines for her dead son. Ironically, the family selects seventeenth January as the day of engagement. The relatives gather to celebrate it. Among the invitees is Saroj Pal, the O.C. in the morgue who had denied handing over the body of Brati to his mother. The re-appearance of the man shatters Sujata’s peace of mind altogether. She is unable to bear the fact that her son’s sacrifice will go in vain. She collapses, then, Dibyanath, the thick-skinned husband moves towards the wife and comments: “It must be the appendix! It’s burst!” From the very beginning of the novel, it is noted as mentioned by the author about her appendix operation, yet she does not have any desire to live her life anymore; so, she continuously refuses to get operated and ultimately it bursts out in the end and she meets her unfortunate fate. It is not an accidental death rather a self-chosen fate to get relief from all the sufferings and pain of the world. She says:

Why don’t you speak? Speak, for heaven’s sake, speak, and speak! How long will you endure it in silence? Speak! . . .

Let it tear down the happiness of every one cooped up in his own happy happiness. (80) Sujata’s voice comes out as a universal protest against the heartless society in which we all live. From silent suffering and a sense of imprisoned guilt within, Sujata moves in the direction or issuing a clarion call to women in society to awake and arise or be forever fallen (81).

However, Sujata’s search for Brati does not end with her death. It continues as a problem very much alive.

Mahasweta Devi shows that within this kind of society, a woman could only resist by dying. She remains on the periphery from the beginning to the end. Being on the boundaries of the society, she could see the loopholes in the networks of this society. Devi has to create Sujata, a woman to be her protagonist as Devi herself was
aware that Sujata could never be an agent of change within a patriarchal society. Women are still treated as puppets and are subjected to emotional abuse. Mahasweta Devi may not qualify as an objective writer and may be accused for emotionality and sentimentality, but she has certainly qualified as a humane and a socially committed and dedicated activist writer.

The fictional odysseys of Mahasweta Devi and Bapsi Sidhwa seem quite identical, owing to their humanistic vision, deep social commitment, cultural consciousness and cultural differences, social hypocrisy, and multiple hierarchies of class, caste and gender. Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084* and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *An American Brat*, both the novels are an exploration of the nature of the cultural and social construction of female identity and behavioral pattern particularly as a wife, a mother and daughter. It projects a multitude of women’s problems dilemmas, disputes and frustrations. Their protagonists are all major women enduring the burden of socio-cultural and political oppression. Both of them depict the predicament of women under patriarchal societal structures. Like their creators the protagonists of their novels try to assert their individual identity and independence. It is clearly evident in such selected works as Devi’s *Mother of 1084* and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *An American Brat*.

Mahasweta Devi and Bapsi Sidhwa, both of them have taken a slightly different stance in the depiction of the agonizing experiences of women through the stories of their protagonists like Sujata Chatterjee and Feroza. Moreover, they also narrate the lives of tribal and marginalized communities with added emphasis on women’s suffering and exploitation. They seem to underline, what Alice Walker called “triple jeopardy” “of caste, class and gender. Both the protagonists are victims of male dominance and cultural marginalization and therefore, they are caught between different conflicts. It is observed that all these issues are elucidated in an explicated manner by the novelists. Sujata Chatterjee, who is the protagonist of the novel *Mother of 1084*, is portrayed as a middle aged, traditional, middle class woman with a shadowy existence. Like Mahasweta Devi, Sidhwa focuses on women’s predicament and victimization in the Parsi community in Pakistan. What distinguishes Bapsi Sidhwa from Devi is her firsthand experience of the Parsi culture and tradition. Feroza Ginwalla, who is a protagonist of the novel *An American Brat*, is a Parsi girl of
16 years old. Her life is engrossed within the Pakistani Islamic culture. Therefore, she migrates to America, for her further education.

Both the protagonists have announced the revolt against the patriarchy culture. Sujata Chatterjee revolted against her husband, Dibyanath Chatterjee, who is an example of being a cold-blooded, corrupt person belonging to the sophisticated society. Feroza also revolted against patriarchy and the Parsi culture. Sujata and Feroza have recognized their own alienation as a wife, a mother and a daughter from the hypocritical culture and society. Therefore, conflict occurs in their life. Even though Sujata and Feroza have now become completely transformed still they have decided to fulfill their normal responsibility towards their family. They decided to fulfill the roles that have been allotted to them by the society and culture, in which they live. At the end of the novel, it is observed that, both of them transform from a weak willed, hopelessly dependent and moral coward to a morally assertive and a socially defiant individual. It is observed that Sujata and Feroza rise above the restraints and confines of the patriarchal society in Bengal and Pakistan, and dare to question and revolt against the tradition that bound them to their society and community.

In both the characters, there is such a lack of integration between the self and society. Mahasweta Devi and Sidhwa try to show the hypocrisy of the upper class and the poor mentality of it. The domestic conflict which the protagonist of the novel has to face is presented very skillfully in it by the writer. Mary Wellstone-craft commented on the condition of women in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that “women are ... so weak that they must be entirely subjected to superior faculties of men.” (P, 25). Sujata Chatterjee revolted against patriarchy because her son Brat, who dies in the Naxalite movement and her family members do not consider his death in normal way where as they have tried to push such news of death which brings stigma on their family. Like Sujata, Feroza has revolted against patriarchy because she wishes to marry a Jewish boy. Her family considers that such marriage will bring stigma on their Parsi culture and family. Therefore, they try to stop her from such cultural suicide. It is observed that both the female protagonists belong to different socio-cultural contexts but their sufferings and problems are more or less similar, if not identical.
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