CHAPTER – 2

Parsi Ethos in Bapsi Sidhwa’s

The Crow Eaters and An American Brat
Parsi writing in English especially after Independence is ethnocentric. The literature produced by Parsi writers is characterized by both ethnocentric and minority discourse features. It depicts all the concerns of the modern day Parsis. Being the miniscule minority in India, the Parsis do experience ethnic anxieties. They feel insecure, experience identity-crisis and feel threatened by possible submersion in the dominant Hindu culture, a prospect which they never want to come true. Besides the issues of sense of insecurity and identity crisis, there are other disturbing ethnic features namely declining population, late marriages, low birth rate, high rate of divorce, attitudes to the girl child, urbanization and alienation etc. All these issues find expression in the post-independence Parsi writing. The literature produced by Parsi writers is community specific. As A.K. Singh point out:

Their works exhibit consciousness of their community in such a way that the community emerges as a protagonist from their works though on the surface these works deal with their human protagonists. (66)

Parsi writers like Firdaus Kanga in *Trying to Grow*, Rohinton Mistry in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* and *Such a long Journey*, Farrukh Dhondy in *Bombay Duck* and Bapsi Sidhwa in *The Crow Eaters* and *An American Brat* delineate the various anxieties felt by their community. They are all sensitive to their community’s hopes and fears, aspirations and frustrations, struggles for survival and identity crisis.

The Parsi writers through their works intend to preserve their ethnicity for ages to come. Hence, creative writing is one of the media for them for the purpose. V.L.V.N. Narendra Kumar aptly puts it:

Parsee novel in English, i.e. novel portraying Parsee life, is a potent index of the Zorastrian ethos. It voices the
ambivalence, the nostalgia and the dilemma of the endangered Parsee community. In Parsee novel in English, the ‘Operative sensibility’ is Zoroastrian. The Parsee novelists have forged a dialect, which has a distinct ethnic character.

Besides being innovative, the Parsee novelists describe in detail, the esoteric rituals, and the Zoroastrian customs such as Navjote. Thus, Parsee novel in English gives a peep into the turbulent Parsee mind of today. (Quoted in Dodiya 27)

Before Siddha, only Nergis Dalal in *The Sisters* (1973) and Perin Bharucha in *The Fire Worshippers* (1968) had dealt with certain Parsi paradoxes and behavioral patterns of this minority community, though not fully. As she offers a fuller exploration of the Parsi community, she is therefore a trendsetter for later Parsi novelists like Firdaus Kanga, Rohinton Mistry and others. As a chronicler of Parsi community, Siddha is keenly aware of her community’s predicament. Siddha’s novels are artistic expression of Parsi ethos.

Siddha feels it incumbent upon her to explain her Pakistani background to those unfamiliar with her milieu. Because she is also a Parsi, she attempts to explain this heritage as well. *The Crow Eaters*, her first novel, which describes itself as “the hilarious saga of a Parsi family”, was a controversial novel. Bapsi Siddha first published *The Crow Eaters* herself in Pakistan, where English language publications are very limited. According to the Karachi Herald of May 1987, this novel made Siddha the ‘Parsi whom other Parsis love to hate’. She was disliked because she revealed the community’s secrets to the whole world. In a way, Siddha became the colloquial version of Gayathri Spivak’s ‘privileged native informant’ (Dhawan 18). *The Crow Eaters* is a very humorous novel with a distinctive authorial voice which
celebrates the achievements of a tiny community which has survived migration, resettled peacefully and prospered without losing their cultural identity. This novel breaks new grounds as for the first time in literature, the Parsi community is portrayed. Sidhwa has tried to immortalize this endangered species by capturing its quintessential ethos in her novel. In an interview with David Montenegro, Sidhwa tells that she faced several difficulties with in the community at Lahore when the book was launched:

The book launch took place at an international hotel in Lahore and since there are not so many books written in English launched it was quite a function. . .

And there was a bomb threat which subsequently I realized was from a Parsi who felt very strongly about the book. It took me some time to realize the turmoil the book had created within the community. They thought I was revealing the secrets that I had no business giving out. . . they felt I was damaging the image. . . they felt threatened by it, although it was written out of great affection. (Montenegro 18)

Sidhwa belongs to a pioneering family (the Bhandaras) of Parsi settlers in North Indian cities and was reared on tales both fictional and otherwise of the entrepreneurial skills of the elders of her community. Sidhwa, in the Preface of the book writes:

Because of a deep rooted admiration for my diminishing community— and an enormous affection for it — this work of fiction has been a labour of love.
The nature of comedy being to exaggerate, the incidents in this book do not reflect at all upon the integrity of a community whose honesty and sense of honour—not to mention its tradition of humour as typified by the Parsi natak—are legend. (Preface The Crow Eaters)

In her article ‘Why Do I Write?’ Sidhwa admits:

In The Crow Eaters, a novel about my own community, the Parsis, I wanted to tell the story of a resourceful and accommodating community tucked away in the forgotten crevices of history. (Quoted in Dhawan 33)

In The Crow Eaters, Sidhwa recreates a fictional yet typical saga of a Parsi family and the corresponding social milieu. It is the only novel of its kind, as it is the first account of the workings of the Parsi mind, social behaviour, value systems and customs. All the major characters of the novel are Parsis, and the Parsi life and rituals including Navajote ceremony, wedding, death-rites, and aspects of Zarathustrian religion are minutely described in the novel. Although many Parsis did not at first appreciated Sidhwa’s boisterous portrayal of a fictional group of their community in colonial Lahore, the outsider could not help but love these people and identify with them as they faced life’s most rewarding yet most difficult task: the formation of relationships—that is, the maintenance of community:

Migrants may well live in news places, but they can be considered not to belong there and qualified from thinking of new land as their home. “Instead their home is seen to exist elsewhere back across the border.” (Quoted in Gupta)
The novel celebrates the community—and, in turn celebrates the all encompassing idea of community. In the novel, *The Crow Eaters*, the title of which refers to the crow; symbolizing high pitched garrulousness of the Parsis. Sidhwa has used the story merely as a scaffold to build their grand exotic world. Faredoon Junglewalla leaves his ancestral village in Central India, with his wife Putli, mother-in-law Jerbanoo and his infant daughter Hutoxi, to seek his fortune in the hallowed pastures of Punjab, the land which is held by the Parsis in high esteem:

> Of the sixteen lands created by Ahura Mazda, and mentioned in the 4,000 year old Vendidad, one is the ‘Septa Sindhu’, the Sind and Punjab of today.

(*The Crow Eaters* 12-13)

Wealth and status is the ultimate aim for Faredoon Junglewalla. He achieved his ambition. The novel commences on a note of praise for Freddy. He has been described as a strikingly handsome, dulcet-voiced adventurer. About his career it is said:

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

Sidhwa portrays the dying businessman Faredoon Junglewalla’s appeal to his offspring to remain loyal to the British Empire. The Parsis’s long-standing attitudes of loyalty to the British stemmed from the Zoroastrian religious belief of loyalty to a
ruler and a close relationship between state and community. The Parsis wanted to have religious autonomy and protection from the ruling British authority and they got both. Such feelings were prevalent in the Parsi milieu and Sidhwa aptly conveys it in *The Crow Eaters*. Freddy took every opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to the British. Self preservation is of primary concern to the Parsis. We see this operating principle at work when Faredoon, soon after his arrival in Lahore, goes to the Government House and signs his name in the Visitor’s Register:

> Having thus paid his homage to the British Empire, established his credentials, and demonstrated his loyalty to Queen and Crown, Freddy was free to face the future. (22)

Freddy’s visit ‘emblematises the traditional submissiveness and pragmatism of the community’. (Quoted in Kapadia 30)

Hence, the exaggerated servility of Freddy, his son Billy and other Parsis towards British is revealed as an act to ensure legal security, peace and economic prosperity. The maintenance of identity, of which Faredoon is so proud, is shown as mere public relations, bordering on sycophancy. So the sycophancy is shown as a “need to exist”, neither lauded nor condemned. In the course of the novel, Freddy himself admits:

> Yes, I’ve been all things to all people in my time. There was that bumptious son of a bitch in Peshawar called Colonel Williams. I cooed to him, salaamed so low I got a crick in my balls – buttered and marmaladed him until he was eating out of my hand . . . And once you have the means, there is no end to the good you can do. (10)
Parsis had inherited the habit of flattery for self-interest. Loyalty and faithfulness towards the ruler is a feature of Parsis. Parsis can be hybrid and adjustable to any extent but when it comes to their Parsism, their survival as a community, they do not allow conversion or mixed marriages.

An endearing feature of this microscopic merchant community is its compelling sense of duty and obligation towards other Parsis. Like one large close-knit family, they assist each other, sharing success and rallying to support failure. There are no Parsi beggars in a country abounding in beggars. The moment a Parsi strikes it rich, he devotes a big portion of his energies to charity. He builds schools, hospitals and orphanages; provides housing, scholarships and finance:

Notorious misers, they are paradoxically generous to a cause. (21)

The Crow Eaters can well be called a study of Parsi value systems and customs. Parsis are religious-minded, strict followers of the teachings of their religion. This is evident by the behaviour and attitude of Putli and Jerbanoo. These ladies followed a conventional mode of dress. They never appeared in public:

without “mathabanas” – white kerchiefs wound around the hair to fit like skull caps. The holy thread circling their waist was austerely displayed and sacred undergarments (“Sudra”) worn beneath short blouses, modestly aproned their sari–wrapped hips. (16)

Parsis maintained group identity by their dress. Faredoon and his family took pride in their traditional mode of dress. Whenever Faredoon went to Government House for formal parties or to pay homage to the British Empire he would consciously be, “rigged out in a starched white coatwrap that fastened with bows at the neck and
waist, and crisp white pyjamas and turban" (The Crow Eaters 15). But even in the matter of dress, generational change is evident. The next generation of Parsis; Behram and Tanya slowly discard the tradition dress. Tanya is completely modernized. Fareedoon and later his son adopt double standards. Behram especially wants Tanya to appear Westernized and talk in English. However at home, he wants his wife to be servile and domestic, always at his beck and call. The novel aptly reveals the Parsi milieu in the throes of change:

Parsi and Hindu myths and beliefs find an equal space in the life and characters of her maiden novel. The Crow Eaters (1978), in which Sidhwa has dexterously maintained her role as preserver of culture, a folk historian and myth maker by projecting the life and customs of her community and their assimilation into the Indian way of life. (Iyengar 3)

Sidhwa gives a detailed description of the Parsi household also. Parsis are extremely religious minded. They respect all religions but they strictly follow their own. Jerbanoo, Freddy’s mother-in-law is shown as a religious lady. She prays five times a day and each time, imitating the example of temple priests, plies the kitchen fire with sandalwood. She fears she will die very soon and the very thought of death makes her worried about the disposal of her mortal remains as there is no dokhma, or dungarwadi or as the British call it, the Tower of Silence in Lahore. Sidhwa takes this opportunity to describe in detail the structure of the Tower of Silence for the benefit of the Non-Parsis. In The Crow Eaters, Sidhwa tells that the system of disposing of the dead body originated in the rocky terrain of Persia at a time when arable land was too precious to be used as a graveyard. Sidhwa describes Parsis’ religious tolerance
and reverence for all faiths. Commenting upon Freddy’s player table, Sidhwa eulogizes the Zoroastrian faith and tradition:

The table once again echoed his reverence for all faiths;
a tradition dating back 2,500 years to the Persian kings, Darius and Cyrus the Great, who not only encouraged religious tolerance, but having freed the Jews held captive by the Babylonians, rebuilt their Temple . . . Zoroastrianism lies, thus, at the centre of all the great religions of the world, Aryan and Semitic . . . (52)

_The Crow Eaters_ is a study of the Parsism in detail. Sidhwa explores each and every aspect of Parsi faith. She refers to the ‘Other Room’ and describes the condition of Parsi Women in menstrual period. Parsis can be hybrid to any extent, but they do not allow mixed marriages or conversion to their faith. Freddy’s second son Yazdi requests his father to permit him to marry his Anglo-Indian classmate Rosy Watson. Freddy tells Yazdi that he cannot allow him to marry Rosy since their faith forbids mixed marriages. Seeing his son’s enthusiasm for the girl, he reminds him of the teachings of his Zoroastrian religion which does not allow marriage outside the race. He further refers to his Parsi religion and says:

I believe in some kind of a tiny spark that is carried from parent to child, on through generations. . . ?

Kind of inherited memory of wisdom and righteousness, reaching back to the times of Zoroastrian, the Magi,
the Mazdians. It is tenderly nurtured conscience evolving
towards perfection. . . But what happens if you marry outside
our kind? (128-129)

On the same day in the evening Freddy with his British friend Mr. Allen visits
the Hira Mandi and comes to know that Rosy is a whore. Yazdi's happiness is blasted
by his father's disclosure that he and Mr. Allen have fucked his beloved. After
sometime he renounces his family and becomes an ascetic. The characterization of
Yazdi adds to the richness and variety of the novel, as it shows "all Parsis are not
types nor do they have stereo type reactions". (Kapadia 133)

The changing social milieu and identity crisis which Bapsi Sidhwa accurately
depicts was distinctively visible amongst Parsis in British India. In the newspaper,
The Parsi, published since 1905 in Bombay an article appeared stressing that the
ambitions of most Parsis were aimed at a close connection with the English as
possible:

The closer union of the Europeans and Parsis is the
finest thing that can happen to our race. It will mean
the lifting up of a people who are lying low, though
possessing all of the qualities of a Eurpoeon
race. (Quoted in Kapadia129)

Such feelings were prevalent in Parsi milieu and Bapsi Sidhwa aptly conveys
it in The Crow Eaters. It is the limited status as a minority community, which is the
motivating factor for the supreme respect and regard the Parsis had for the British.
The basic attitude of the followers of Zarathustra towards a ruler was that of loyalty.
Bapsi Sidhwa constantly lampoons the zeal with which Parsi business magnates,
Faredoon Junglewalla, Mr. Toddywalla and the baronet Khan Bahadur Sir Noshirwan
Jeewanjee Easymoney championed the British cause. However, hilarious their outbursts of loyalty may seem, the Parsis in British India were a schizophrenic community. A persual of social history reveals the causes for the insecurity and alienation of many members of the community.

The views expressed by dying Fareedoon Junglewalla on the freedom struggle and nationalist movement are shared by the majority of the Parsi community. One evening, gathered around Fareedoon in the bedroom, his family finds him animated as of old, yet perturbed by the trend of political events in India. He is stirred by the talk of rebellion, self rule and independence from the British and most of all by the role of a few Parsis, especially Dadabhoy Navroji of Bombay and Rustam Sidhwa of Karachi. He bursts out angrily:

... I tell you we are betrayed by our own kind, by our own blood! The fools will break up the country. The Hindus will have one part, Muslims the other. Sikhs, Bengalis, Tamils and God knows who else will have their share; and they won’t want you! (283)

Fareedoon’s apprehensions are based on social reality. Following a query by his son-in-law Bobby Katrak about the future of the Parsis after Independence Fareedoon makes a prophetic reply:

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

Fardeeon’s views are representative of the Parsi compromise. They are loyal only to the land they inhabit. They adopt to whichever culture they find themselves in
and normally keep aloof from politics. It is their non partisan and non sectarian attitude that has helped them survive successfully for centuries in the Indian subcontinent. Sidhwa has done a great service to the Parsis by showcasing the different aspects of their life in her novels. Her most perceptive insights are in presenting the marginal personality aspect within the Parsi milieu. She has not only preserved them but also provided the non-Parsi world with a better understanding of their ways of life, their faith and values. She has, thus, fulfilled M.G. Vasanji’s concept of the essential role of “the writer as a preserver of the collective tradition, a folk historian and myth maker.” (Quoted in Dhawan 26)

Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel An American Brat is the first to be set in America. Sidhwa belongs to the minority community of Parsis in Pakistan and all her writing invokes the Parsi way of life. Sidhwa tries to acquire her own space and her community’s identity through the character of Feroza, a representative of the younger generation. In this novel, Sidhwa centralizes the Parsi community and examines several themes of vital importance to the Parsis in the last decade of the Twentieth century. As is rightly said:

Diasporic writers continue to be hung up on their national identities even if they may not sometimes be aware or admit it themselves. The prominent feature of diasporic literature lies in its continued projection of the writer’s motherland and its culture. (Kaushik 58)

The underlying identity-crisis and the quest for security in the Parsi psyche and influence of a patriarchal society also form the basis of An American Brat. Sidhwa focuses on the immigrant’s experience as well as raises the basic questions related to politics, Parsism and status of women. The novel examines a very
controversial issue amongst the Parsis, the tradition of prohibition of marriage to a non-Parsi. The Parsi, a minority culture group anywhere in the world, have a tradition of not allowing either conversion or marriage to a non-Parsi and expelling those who marry outside the community. This tradition is based on certain historical factors, like the five conditions, imposed by the King of Sanjan Yadav Rana, to allow the persecuted Parsis to settle in his territory, over a thousand years ago. More than twelve centuries have passed but the Parsis still abide by their word they gave to the Indian Prince. They do not allow conversion to their faith or mixed marriages and that is one important reason why their population is ever on the decrease. However, the repercussions of the prohibition of marriage to non-Parsis, is causing grave concern, as it is linked to the survival of the community. Sidhwa has tried to immortalize this endangered species by capturing its quintessential ethos.

Sidhwa’s novel *An American Brat*, addresses another aspect of community: the immigrant’s experience. As people move from one part of the world to another, seeming to dissolve national boundaries, the formation and maintenance of community take on new dimensions, as community becomes even more fluid. “The novel focuses on the search for community that has turned fluid, a quest that must surely pre-occupy the immigrant caught between the world left behind and the new one he or she faces” (Quoted in Ross).

In an interview with Preeti Singh, Sidhwa speaks herself on being a member of the marginalized minority community. Sidhwa writes for her cultural identity. She admits:

But the more important point in all this is that the Western world does not know us. And many of us feel that it is time our voice
heard there, that our cultures should be seen by them. I have always been very conscious of this. Here we are, living in huge communities in hidden corners of the world. It is the time that these were seen, understood and recognized for what they are. We may be living in other parts of the world, worshipping other religions, but we also laugh, cry and deal with similar issues, have the same notions and live through similar turbulences. (Interview Singh Preeti 6)

On being asked by Preeti Singh that she is a Parsi and Parsi life is very overtly a part of her fiction; she replies:

Any Parsi living outside of Bombay knows what it means to be marginalized. Parsis in Pakistan are known for their honesty and integrity. But no matter how well you are treated – parsis are generally lionized in Pakistan – it is Parsi attitude to themselves that distances them from others. This sense of alienation is very hard to overcome. I realized this when I lived as a young woman amidst a whole lot of relatives in Bombay. That was the time when I found my place in the world, my sense of belonging in the great Parsi diaspora spread over the globe. I think though, that this experience of marginalization has shaped me as a writer. It creates a continuing sense of tension and conflict. There are some things one feels compelled to express. One does not know immediately what these pressures are, but they emerge in various forms of creativity. There is a great dearth of candid writing about our expatriate community here and its experiences with the mainstream American Community. (Singh 290-98)
*An American Brat* chronicles the adventures of a young Pakistani girl in America with an enormously satisfying story and characters. Feroza, a Parsi teenager is packed off to America by her parents Cyrus and Zareen Ginwalla, in order to escape the increasing fundamentalism in Pakistan. Feroza is sent to America as her family believes that America with its liberal traditions was akin to the liberated Parsi traditions. The novel deals with a minority community’s reaction to the nation which they consider as home and from which they are increasingly marginalized and their consternation at realizing that the Western tradition with which they feel kinship is unsuitably liberal. The novel is reflective of the typical dilemmas of the Parsis today and their multiple alienation. The novel talks in detail of the increasing feeling of unease that the Parsi community feels in Pakistan. Sidhwa describes how the non islamic communities like the Parsis were affected by the increasing fundamentalism and authoritarianism in the name of religion. Zareen is very much conscious of her daughter’s conservative attitude who is totally under the impact of existing state of affairs. Zareen says:

She objected to my sleeveless soul blouse!

Really, this narrow minded attitude touted by General Zia is infecting her, too. I told her:

look, we’re Parsee, everybody knows we dress differently. (*An American Brat* 10)

Rahul Sapra expresses similar views about *Am American Brat*.

In *An American Brat*, Sidhwa highlights the predicament of the Pakistani people in general and of the Parsi community in particular vis-a-vis the emerging fundamentalist politics in Pakistan. (Sapra 9)
Zareen believes that her daughter has adopted unParsi like orthodoxy and outlook, thereby making her a misfit in her community. On the other hand, Cyrus Ginwalla, Feroza’s father is worried about another kind of loss of identity. He fears that his susceptible young daughter would fall in love and marry a non Parsi boy:

Marrying outside her community could exclude the girl from community matters and certainly bar her from her faith. (17)

He thinks that the only solution to this problem is to send Feroza for a holiday to the U.S.A. Zareen proposes the idea and says:

Travel will broaden her outlook, get this puritanical rubbish out of her head. (14)

Feroza is highly delighted at the news. She repeats to herself, “I’m going to America, I’m going to America!” America meant to her:

the land of glossy magazines, of “Bewitched” and “Star trek”, of rock stars and Jeans . . . (16)

At the airport, Feroza is given a farewell by the relatives and friends and lots of instructions by elders while leaving her country “her sense of self, enlarged by the osmosis of identity with her community and with her group of school friends, stayed with her like a permanence-like the support that ocean basins provide the wind-and moon-generated vagaries of its waters (18).

In the United States, Feroza’s uncle Manek is a student of M.I.T. He is six years older than Feroza and who is familiar with American ways. He introduces Feroza to American life. During the course of the story, Sidhwa touches upon almost all those aspects that new immigrants and visitors to the United States experience at first hand. Sidhwa exposes Feroza to the cruel and harsh realities of life when she lands in America. So far, she was a protected child but here at the airport she realizes
that she has to look after herself and act as a grown up person answering for herself. The novelist 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 others, one has to be one’s own. Sidhwa provides for a gradual transformation in Feroza:

Finding herself awash in this exhilaratingly free
and new culture had made her forget the strictures
imposed on her conduct as a Pakistani girl. (99)

The initial journey of Feroza in America is simple. Her uncle Manek takes her around and shows her the museums, 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:

America assumed a ruthless hollow, cylindrical
shape without beginning or end, without sunlight,
an unfathomable concrete tube inhabited by her
fear. (90)

Sidhwa jolts Feroza into 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. Back home, Feroza’s family, her grandmother is concerned about their daughter especially regarding her marriage:

Good Parsee boys are scarce, and you know how quickly
They are snapped up. The right time will come and go,
and mark my words, the child will be lost to us. God knows what kind of people she'll mix with Drunks,
seducers, drug addicts . . . (121)

But they are rest assured that she has been brought up in a way that she will not let any unhappy thing happen to her and her uncle Manek is there to protect her:

You know Manek will guard her like a Lion!

You know how strictly we have brought her up.

She'll never do anything to disgrace us. (121)

If America is a land of dreams, it also has its darker side. The novelist exposes Feroza to both the aspects of America. Feroza takes shock of herself. She succumbs to the charms of America and decides to stay and study there. From this point, Feroza's life takes a new turn and Sidhwa very realistically delineates the various experiences and how Feroza is totally Americanized adopting its various ways of life. First, she enrolls in a small college in Idaho in Twin Falls where she is much impressed by the campus life and under the guidance of her room-mate Jo, she acquires the American style of living and speaking. She discovers the joy of being a woman and dresses, talks and acts like an American girl. No longer is she shy and conservative girl of Pakistan who would be shocked by her mother's dress. 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. (163)

But, in her heart of hearts, she realizes her folly and prays with her Sudra and Kusti. Then, Feroza enrolls at the University of Denver where she becomes confident,
assertive young woman and acquires boy friend. She learns to dance and drink, drive and even flirt with boys. She is no longer shy and realizes what life really means. Infact, Feroza’s journey to America was not only of her education and the development of her personality but also her induction into the self-sufficient, industrious and independent way of life.

She may be under the impact of Americanism but her religion has an important place in her life.

Parsis may stay anywhere and may adopt the colour of the country of their inhabitancy but when it comes to marriage, they make it sure that they marry a Parsi only. This is best exemplified by Feroza’s uncle Manek, who has stayed for long in America, who himself is Americanized, settled comfortably there but he marries a Parsi girl Aban.

The elders take pride in that because it is must for their survival and maintenance as a minority. When Manek announced that he had come to Pakistan to marry a Parsi girl and take her with him to America, the members of his family are satisfied and happy by his words. Jeroo says:

When he goes for foreign education he can have whatever fun he wants. But when he wants to marry, it must be to a Zarathusti. He will be happy only with a Parsee. Isn’t that so? (203)

Manek by his decision to marry a Parsi had made them so proud that:

The faces circling Manek beamed with admiration and social pride, their faith in the future of their miniscule community affirmed by the scion of Junglewalla family, the unlikely standard bearer of
noble tradition... Manek was providing himself a
champion of their community's future. (204)

Manek's marriage to Aban was entirely a Parsi affair. All the ceremonies have been
 minutely described in detail by Sidhwa.

In America, at Denver, Feroza falls in love with a Jew David Press and when
Feroza's parents learn of her love for David they decide to call her back and persuade
her to marry a Parsi boy. Her decision to marry a non-Parsi had shaken the whole
community and all had gathered to plan how to avoid this marriage. For the subject
was much larger than just Feroza's marriage to an American:

Mixed marriages concerned the entire Parsee community
and affected its very survival. God knew, they were few
enough. Only a hundred and twenty thousand in the whole
world. And considering the low birth rate and the rate at
which the youngsters were marrying outside the community
and given their rigid non-conversion laws and the zealous
guardians of those laws- Parsees were a gravely endangered
species. (268)

Sidhwa, here in detail mentions all the consequences of marrying a non-Parsi as it was
harmful for their minority identity and a peaceful survival.

You know Parsee girls are not allowed into the temple
once they marry out. You know what happened to Perin
Powri. (269)

Further, Zareen, Feroza's mother is sent to the United States to stop Feroza to
marry David. During the arguments between the mother and the daughter Sidhwa
narrates in detail the Parsi attitude towards marriage to a Non-Parsi. Zareen tells Feroza:

It is not just a matter of your marrying a non Parsee boy. The entire family is involved – all our relationships matter. . . And you’ll have to look at it our way. It’s not your culture! You can’t just toss your heritage away like that. It’s in you bones! (279)

In persuading Feroza not to marry David, Zareen is trying to preserve her community. Later when Zareen spends few days with Feroza and David, she is highly impressed by him and as a mother knows that her daughter’s happiness is in marrying David who was the most suitable match for her. She is seriously thinking that the priests in Bombay must do something, some changes to be made, some laws to be relaxed for they should move with the times for their new generation. For the first time, she found herself questioning the ban on inter-faith marriages. Zareen seriously thought that the various Anjumans would have to introduce minor reforms if they wished their tiny community to survive. But the various NOTICES and WARNINGS and the plight of her daughter if she married David, soon overpower her thoughts and she again starts making efforts to break the relationship. Zareen becomes a mouthpiece for Sidhwa. In her conversation with David, Zareen speaks highly of her Parsi religion and tells every minutest thing about a Parsi marriage. Not directly, but Zareen succeeds in her plans and David is highly distressed and humiliated by her attitude. There is estrangement between Feroza and David and finally this relationship comes to an end because of the religious difference.

Feroza becomes alone but she decides to stay in the country of her own choice. She has experienced freedom in America and refuses to live without it now.
She realizes that she has changed too much to ever go back to Pakistan. Her mother may consider her an American brat but she too knows that Feroza is now capable of being herself. She is free to do what she wants to and whom she wishes to marry:

It wouldn’t matter if he was a Parsee or of another faith.
she would be more sure of herself, and she wouldn’t let anyone interfere. (317)

She takes out her Sudra and Kusti and prays to Ahura Mazda for his blessings and favour:

As for her religion, no one could take it away from her; she carried its fire in her heart. (317)

It is her boldness to think that if the priests in Lahore and Karachi did not let her enter the fire temple, she would go to one in Bombay where there were so many Parsis that no one would know if she was married to a Parsi or a non.

Most Parsi writers feel isolated and conscious of their identity. They struggle to create their own space and Sidhwa too tries in this novel to acquire her space and her own community’s identity through the character of Feroza, a representative of the younger generation. Thus, Sidhwa through these novels tries to acquire her community’s identity. Being a member of the minority of Parsis, she has given an expression to Parsi ethos like many other Parsi writers who feel isolated and conscious of their identity.

By providing insights and detailed information about the Parsis and their culture Sidhwa attempts to foster a better understanding of her community and curbs possible prejudicial misconceptions of the Parsis. (Kapadia 126)
Works Cited


