CHAPTER – 3

Cultural Hybridity in Bapsi Sidhwa’s

The Crow Eaters and An American Brat
Migration is a phenomenon that has been going on since times immemorial. For varied reasons people have migrated from one place to another and therefore are better placed as ‘displaced communities’. The migrations have resulted in building up a diasporic community who share a common sense of rootlessness, pain and agony of homelessness, experience the anxiety and turmoil in a new land and the nostalgia for their homeland. Thus, the strong emotional bonding despite a diversification of cultures, traditions and values makes this community interdependent on each other and live homogeneously in the host nation. The ambience and milieu of the adopted nation co-mingles with historical and cultural conditions of homeland. Old symbiotic ties give way to new attitudes as one changes locations. A hybrid culture evolves as a result of synchronization of the inherited culture and the adopted culture.

The global trend of hybridization is impossible to miss. As one migrates from one country to another, the writings of diasporic writers also shift and in this inevitable process of exchange of thoughts and ideas, social culture and individual identities also change. As one shifts, one maps not only the geographical dislocation but also the politico-socio-cultural boundaries. Diasporic person lives in two lives simultaneously; he/she lives in two cultures at the same time. The psychological movement from one state of mind to another causes dilemmas, nostalgia, sense of displacement and loss. Yet the people get cushioned into a comfortable living in the new nations and try to carve an identity for themselves. Biocultural pulls and the dynamics of shift is just one part of the story of the hyphenated individuals. Cultural interactions have led to growth and transformation and given birth to multicultural societies. Vaclav Havel (1994), in his speech “Needed: a new spirit for a new world” in New Delhi, remarked that:
We need a new kind of approach to cultural diversity, a new kind of inclusive universalism, if we are to survive peacefully as a world community. (Quoted in Peetush 194)

As a global village, we are increasingly becoming interdependent. Along with this new closeness, we have to learn new ways of getting along, we have to broaden our horizons. Our interdependence requires the development of a new social fabric that is based on mutual recognition and respect. Our fear of differences must be replaced with an appreciation for the diversity of human life and the possibilities it inhabits. As Octavio Paz writes about the survival of humankind:

What sets worlds in motion is the interplay of differences, their attractions and repulsions. Life is plurality, death is uniformity. By eliminating different civilizations and cultures progress weakens life and favours death. The ideal of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress of technique, impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility. (Tully 186)

Our approach to cultural differences must be from the onset, explicitly anti-imperial. According to Lyotard:

Post-colonialism elaborates the convictions that “it is both possible and necessary to break with tradition and institute absolutely new ways of living”. (Quoted in Poornima 47)

We should try and understand the beliefs and views of others communities, with the future hope of mutual accommodation in mind. Siddha’s novels are also
based on this theory of hybridity. The characters are presented as cultural hybrids for sustenance and recognition.

_The Crow Eaters_, Sidhwa's first published novel is about the vicissitudes of a Parsi family in Lahore. The title is taken from a proverb: Anyone who talks too much is said to have eaten crows. Faredoon Junglewalla is never at a loss of words, nefarious though they may be.

_The Crow Eaters_ is the saga of the Junglewallas, a leading business family of Lahore; their customs, beliefs, how they survived by serving the British and maintained their cultural identity even being a minority community. Sidhwa very realistically depicts the changing social milieu and identity crisis which was distinctively visible amongst Parsis in India and how these Parsis were loyal to the British for their survival and the cultural change which was taking place in their lives. At the age of twenty three along with his wife Putli, mother-in-law Jerbanoo and an infant daughter, Faredoon Junglewalla settles in Lahore, never to look back. In Lahore he continues to live till the end of the novel, that is 1940. His family expands and with his pragmatic visions becomes a man of great consequence amongst the Parsis. In an interview with Laila Kazmi, Sidhwa says:

...we are a people who have no land, so we have to adopt to whichever culture we find ourselves in.

I would describe myself as a Punjabi -Pakistani-Parsi woman, because all the three societies influenced me. I guess I actually have a whole medley of identities. And that’s wonderful because this combination made me the writer I am. (Kazmi 4)
The novel is not just the social mobility and values of a man and his family but the movement of the times. The Parsis are depicted as cultural hybrids.

The central character of the novel Faredoon Junglewalla regales us with his “charming rascality.” The head of the Parsi community in Lahore was loyal to the British not for any other reason but for the survival and identity of his minority community:

Survival is the most basic instinct of every living being and it is this very instinct the makes the Parsis adapt and assimilate into their immediate environment making the most of the situation they are in; not only surviving but also triumphing over it. (Tully)

The novel is a fast-paced, entertaining tale of Faredoon Junglewalla’s rise from rags to riches. He prospered in Lahore because of his sycophancy towards the British officials in the guise of public relations. In just one generation, the Junglewallas increased their business from a single general merchant store in Lahore to a chain of stores in several North Indian cities and “licence for handling all traffic of goods between Peshawar and Afghanistan”.

In the course of the novel, he tells his younger generation about his being loyal to the British; he believed that the Englishmen were their sovereigns – “Where do you think we’d be if we did not curry favour?”

Next to the nawabs, Rajas and princelings,
we are the greatest toadies of the British
Empire! These are not ugly words, mind you.
They are the sweet dictates of our delicious
need to exist, to live and prosper in peace. (The Crow Eaters 12)
Narrating his tales of success and his peaceful survival to his offspring, he tells them the basic principle of his survival and suggests them to be flexible for self interest and self progress:

I have never permitted pride and arrogance
to stand in my way. . . I followed the dictates
of my needs, my wants — they make one
flexible, elastic, humble. (11)

Moreover, he mentions Christ and says ‘sway with the breeze, bend with the winds’ (11). Freddy’s attitude emblematizes the traditional submissiveness and pragmatism of the community par excellence. The Parsis have always seen themselves as attainers of hybridity. Parsis adopt the ways and colour of the country in which they reside. This attitude is based on the age-old promise given to the king Yadav Rana, adding sugar in the milk sent by him; as a means of communication that they will blend with the people “like milk blends with sugar.” Till date they have kept their promise. They became hybrid. They adopted the Gujarati language, the customs, several religious rites and lived in general harmony until the British arrived. Soon they became hybrid with the British, quickly mixing, merging, adopting their language and cultures. In Avtar Brah’s concept:

. . . “A diaspora space” is an intersection of borders where all the identities and subjectivities become “juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or perpetually interrogate imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition. (Brah, 208).
Nobody has shown the readiness to hybridity as the Parsis have shown over the centuries. It is therefore perfectly normal for Homi Bhabha to espouse or rationalize hybridity and say that

because the world is shrinking and because

cultures and languages are coming in contact

hybridity is the bon mot of all times. (Quoted in Jussawalla 82)

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, inspite of being a microscopic minority, of which Fardeoon is so proud, is shown as mere public relations, bordering on sycophancy. All this loyalty and adaptability is for personal upliftment. After his initial adjustment in Lahore, Freddy soon found a place in Punjabi hearts.

Sidhwa very authentically describes the Parsi customs, manners, myths and beliefs followed by the elderly people. She also portrays the changing generations in the Junglewalla family which was adopting English ways and increasing their economic contacts with the British.

Life started moving on smoothly with Freddy becoming more and more involved in his business and gaining success and prosperity. Small quarrels between Freddy and his mother-in-law Jerbanoo was a regular affair. Putli became more busy in looking after her house-hold and her seven children. While Freddy followed all the faiths and other religious beliefs, Putli and Jerbanoo strictly restricted themselves to their Parsism. The Bhagwad Gita, the Bible, the Quran, the Avesta and all the books on Sikh, Jain and Buddhist faiths found a place in Freddy's house near his prayer table. He even consulted a mystic Fakir to get rid of his troublesome mother-in-law. The hybridity made him follow different religious faiths. He could not get rid of his
mother-in-law but was able to encash a handsome amount of money from the insurance company because of the accident in which his shop was burnt and Freddy increased his business and never looked back:

Years went by. Freddy expanded his business.
He hob-nobbed with Maharajas and Englishmen.
As opportunity beckoned, he dabbled in a variety of trades, deftly buttering and marmalading the Col.
Williamses of his acquaintance and obliging others like all Allen with scotch and dancing girls. (101)

Whereas the generation of Jerebno and Putli were restricted to the commands of their faith, the younger generation of Yazdi, Billy and Soli was more flexible for a change. As the result, Freddy’s son Yazdi wants to marry his Anglo-Indian classmate, Rosy Watson. Freddy gets fierce, he slaps Yazdi on his face and asks him to get out of his sight. Faredoon later tells Yazdi that his love is born of pity but that is not enough for marriage. Further, he calls Rosy, a “mixed-breed mongrel”. Defending her against his father’s social prejudice, Yazdi says:

What does it matter if she is not a Parsi?
What does it matter who her parents are...
she is a human being, isn’t she? And a fine person. Better than any Parsi I’ve met. (128)

Seeing his son’s enthusiasm for the girl, he reminds him of the teachings of his Zoroastrian religion and the relationship is crushed by the social and cultural differences.

But Freedy had a strong belief in Hindu rituals. He pays visit to a Hindu priest, Gopal Krishan and is highly impressed by him:
For Freddy was of India: and though his religion
preached but one God, he had faith in scores of
Hindu deities and in Muslim and Christian saints. (162)

It is his religious tolerance of other faiths that he starts believing in Janam
Patri and is eager to find out his own. It is through the Janam Patri only that he comes
to know about the impending death of his dearest son Soli. He pleads the priest to find
some "preventive measures" to save his son. But all in vain. Soli passes away and at
his death all the people, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and a few British officials
come to share Freddy's grief. Though his religion does not permit him to show his
dead son's face, once it is covered but Freddy removes the sheet from Soli's face and
says:

They had stood all this while to see my
son: let them. What does it matter if they
are no Parsis They are my brothers; and if
I can look upon my son's face, so can they! (179)

Freddy has throughout his life lived in general harmony with the people of
different faiths. Doesn't matter if some of the friendships were for his personal and
professional interest, but he has enjoyed them all. Confessing this to his offspring,
Freddy mentions:

I've made friends --love them-- for what could be
called "ulterior motives", and yet the friendships
so made are amongst my sweetest, longest and most
sincere. I cherish them still. (11)

Freddy as a good human being and a friend indeed always helped his near and
dear ones.
The interaction of two cultures naturally produces tensions when for instance Putli, wife of Freddy, resists change. Putli adopted to what she considered new fangled customs, when she and Freddy were invited to the formal tea-parties on the gracious lawns of the Government House. Though she did it only for her husband but the Parsi milieu of Putli had a different value system, which the author highlights:

Deep-rooted in the tradition of a wife walking
three paces behind her husband their deportment
was as painful to Putli as being marched naked
in the public. (188)

As regards adopting customs of the British the novel shows the gradual assimilation of British value-systems in the Parsi milieu. Putli tried to preserve certain Parsi customs, however, her daughter Yasmin after marriage ignores such notions as old-fashioned and vehemently protests the servile attitude of women:

Anyway its stupid to walk behind your husband
like an animal on a leash – oh Mother! Hasn’t
Papa been able to modernize you yet. (190-91)

Bapsi Sidhwa portrays the changing generations in the Junglewalls family. The new generation, with their increasing economic contracts with the British, like Billy’s scrap iron-deal, become increasingly westernized. This is best exemplified by the lifestyle of the youngest son Billy and his fashionable wife Tanya.

Parsis maintained group identity by their dress. But even in the matter of dress, generational change is evident. Faredoon and his family took pride in their traditional mode of dress. His wife Putli and his mother-in-law Jerbanoo never appeared in public without “mathabanas.” The next generation of Parsis Behram and
Tanya slowly discard the traditional dress. Tanya, for instance, still wore a sari, but it was more revealing:

She became daring in her attire and tied her sari in a way that accentuated the perfection of her body.

She took to wearing a little make-up and outlined the astonishing loveliness of her lips... (246)

Tanya looked straight into men’s eyes and regularly attended the ‘mixed’ parties. These ‘mixed’ parties were a revolutionary departure from Freddy’s male get-togethers at the Hira Mandi:

The parties were fashionably cosmopolitan, including the various religious sects of India: Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, the Europeans and the Anglo-Indians. (245)

*The Crow Eaters* ends with the dying Faredoon Junglewalla’s vehement protests against the nationalist movement and exhortations to his offspring to remain loyal to the British empire:

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)

The apprehensions of Faredoon are not the figment of a dying man’s fevered imagination but based on social reality. We can say that it is the paranoid feelings of being a miniscule minority, which is the motivating factor for the behavioural pattern of the Parsis, ranging from quest for excellence to eccentricity.
The *Crow Eaters* is a very compact novel and shows a network of the human relationships and the reality of a whole family. The saga which is not just the social mobility and value system of a man and his family but the movement of his times. Most Parsis in the novel are shown as cultural hybrids, living and sharing intimately in the cultural life, traditions, languages, moral codes and political loyalties of two distinct people which never completely interpenetrated and fused. In his essay "In Good Faith," Rushdie writes of his wish:

\[\text{to celebrate} \ '\text{hybridity'}, \ \text{impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs.} \ \text{(Quoted in Bhabha 394)}\]

Bapsi Sidhwa’s fourth novel *An American Brat* also deals with the aspect of cultural hybridity. The novel begins in the city of Lahore and from there the story shifts to America. The novel is the story of the adventures of Feroza Ginwalla. Her Lahore based family send her to the U.S.A. for a three month vacation to broaden her outlook on life. They are concerned at Feroza’s conservative attitudes. Feroza adopts American ways and decides to stay there realizing that she has changed too much to ever go back to Pakistan. This brings out the characteristic quality of Parsis as shown in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa. The Parsis adopt the ways and colour of the country and the society in which they live. Parsis are cultural hybrids as it is a must for their peaceful survival. Sidhwa in an interview herself says:

This is particularly true of Parsis; we are a people who have no land, so we have to adopt to whichever culture we find ourselves in. I would describe myself as a Punjabi-Pakistani-Parsi woman, because all three societies influenced me.
I guess I actually have a whole medley of identities.
And that's wonderful because this combination made me
the writer I am. (Kazmi)

*An American Brat* is the story of a young woman who journeys through three
cultures her own community's Parsi culture, her country Pakistan's Islamic culture
and the Western culture of the United States of America:

It is the story of sixteen-year-old Feroza's dilemmas
of who I was and what I have become. (Bhatt 93)

In *An American Brat*, Sidhwa expresses the complexities of being Parsi, of
being a Pakistani, and of migration to the West while carrying the other two identities.
Feroza, a Parsi teenager is packed off to America by her parents Cyrus and Zareen
Ginwala, 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 the western world with which they feel kinship is unsuitably liberal.
The novel is reflective of the typical dilemmas of the Parsis today and their multiple
alienation. Feroza's passage to America; her education, and her transformation into a
mature young woman, all set to realize her potentials in a country where freedom is a
cherished ideal form the basis of the novel. *An American Brat* talks specifically of the
woman in exile and celebrates the better understanding of oneself and one's culture
that distance and exile offer. The novel describes the heroine's adaptability and her
adjustment into the alien culture. It is the hybridity of Parsi Feroza, which enables her
to understand America, its people and its various ways. Once, she has adjusted well,
she comes out with flying colours; though with a broken love affair but a more
confident and self-sufficient young woman. To a question put by Naila Hussain about the theme of *An American Brat*, Sidhwa replies:

Naturally, the book deals with the subject of the ‘Culture shock’ young people from the sub-continent have to contend with when they choose to study abroad. It also delineates the clashes the divergent cultures generate between the families ‘back home’ and their transformed and transgressing progeny bravely groping their way in the New World. (Hussain 3)

When the story of the novel begins, we find a Parsi family who is totally involved in the Pakistani politics, an inseparable part of the Pakistani society. General Zia and Bhutto are part of their conversation of daily routine life. Feroza Ginwalla, the daughter of Cyrus and Zareen Ginwalla, is under the impact of Pakistani fundamentalism. Her mother is very much upset because of her conservative attitudes and both the parents think that Feroza must be sent far away from Pakistan to prevent her to be involved in Pakistani politics. Zareen suggests to send Feroza to America for a short holiday when her brother Manek, a graduate student at MIT will take care of her:

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

Before leaving for America, Feroza goes to pay homage to a Sufi Saint’s shrine with her mother. People of all faiths Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims came there and Parsis belief and their visit to such places shows their religious tolerance.
When Khutlibai, Zareen's mother, comes to know that Feroza is being sent to America, she is very angry. Zareen tells her that she is going only for three or four months and explains at greater length how upsettingly timid and narrow-minded Feroza has become:

You've no idea how Feroza's been of late. All this talk about Islam, and how women should behave, is turning her quite strange. And you know how Bhutto's trial is getting to her. (30)

Feroza is highly delighted at the news. She repeats to herself "I'm going to America. I'm going to America!" and as Feroza, reaches in America, she is under the complete guidance and care of her uncle Manek who helps her understand America more swiftly and clearly. Manek takes Feroza on a tour of New York. First, he shows her the glitzy and glamorous face of the city and also the seamy side of New York. He shows her the real inner picture of America. According to Vijay Mishra:

the latest advancements in information and communication technology and the fastest means of transportation have enable "the late modern hypermobile diaspora" (Vijay Mishra) to make the cultural assimilation faster and being global and local cultures together. These migrants of "the new diaspora" are "inhabiting the contested global-local spaces" (Sura P. Rath) and are transplanting and reinventing their home cultures in new lands. This "new found conservatism" (Vijay Mishra) of the migrants has made" the globalization of the local" which has "Localised the globe". (Rath)
After spending few days with Manek in this free culture, Feroza notices the change that was visible in Manek. Manek was a changed man and more Americanized:

She could only guess at how he had been taught American ways, American manners.
He must have endured countless humiliations.
And his experiences – the positive and the humiliating – had affected him, changed him not on the surface but fundamentally. (102)

After initial shocks and struggle, Manek had now adjusted himself well into this culture to survive happily in America. And this change was for good:

Feroza vaguely sensed that America had
tested Manek. Challenged him, honed him,
extended his personality and the horizon
of his potential in a way that had made
him hers. (103)

Manek considers it his responsibility to broaden her outlook and to improve her mind and derive pleasure from his selfless part in shaping her future. And his duty was not only of:

Feroza’s education and the development of her personality
but also her induction into the self sufficient, industrious,
and independent way of American life. (119)

Thus, Manek undertakes the task of preparing Feroza for life in an alien land. He wants her to continue her studies in America and writes to many universities and colleges for information. The best offer comes from a junior college in Twin Falls, Idaho, where Feroza takes admission and her American room-mate Jo, takes charge of
Feroza’s life. She first teaches her to speak English the way it is spoken in America and improves her pronunciation. She brings about a complete change in Feroza’s personality. Her dress, her attitude changes. She becomes daring, confident and manages her life well in an alien land and a different culture. Feroza’s Pakistani outfits and outrageously dangling earnings were banished to her suitcase and her wardrobe replenished by another pair of jeans, T-shirts, sweaters and blouses. She starts drinking wine, flirts with boys, works part time to bear her expenses and even commits the cardinal sin of smoking:

Feroza discovered that she became less self-conscious,
more comfortable, and that it mattered less what impression
she made, whether she spoke or was tongue-tied. (163)

There was a complete transformation in Feroza:

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)

Feroza had adapted herself completely in American culture. She sometimes has feelings of guilt. She wonders what her family will say of her conduct if they come to know about it, but she takes it as her assimilation into the American way of life:

She felt she was being initiated into some esoteric rites that governed the astonishingly independent and unsupervised lives of young people in America.

Often, as she sat among them, Feroza thought she had taken a phenomenal leap in perceiving the world
from a wider, bolder and a happier angle. As the pressure of constraints, so deeply imbedded in her psyche, slightly loosened their grip under Jo’s influence. . . This was her secret, this sense of growth and discovery, and she did not want to divulge any part of it, even to Manek. (163-164)

Feroza was thankful and highly indebted to Jo. Manek was right when he’d told her she was lucky to have Jo as her roommate, that Jo would teach her more about America than he ever could. Feroza felt that living with Jo helped her to understand Americans and their exotic culture. How much an abstract word like “freedom” could encompass and how many rights the individuals had and, most important, that there rights were active. This hybridity is visible in Manek also. After a long stay in America he is totally Americanized and changes his name to Mike Junglewala to fit in well with the American society. Initially survival was tough for Manek but he soon adopted American ways and did everything to settle there in U.S.A. He says:

The people I have to deal at work find it hard to remember Manek. It’s too foreign, it makes them uneasy.

But I’m one of the guys of I’m Mike.” (260)

It again is the hybrid nature of Parsi Feroza which makes her see more deeply into different people’s lives. She adjusts herself well in the company of Jo, Rhonda, Gwen, Shashi, Shirley and Laura and then David Press. Feroza, who was brought up in a Parsi culture with regular teachings of the Zoroastrian faith becomes so liberal and free that she does not mind marrying a Jew, David Press. Rather she likes his culture and finds similarities between the two cultures. Her Parsism and her hybridity enable
her to understand David’s religion. Feroza believes that underneath the religious and cultural differences, she and David are alike: When she visited David’s house Adina, David’s mother had covered her head with a lace scarf, lit the candles,ightly cover her face with the palms of her hand and silently prayed; her gestures and rituals were very much like those performed by her mother and grandmother when they prayed before the atash. When Feroza visits Lahore during her winter vacation, her grandmother and mother are astonished at the change in her. The timid Feroza has grown into a confident creature. Khutribai, Feroza’s maternal grand-mother noticed her vibrant face. She saw life and intelligence shining in her face, but there was too much life there and too much intelligence. Zareen was astonished at the change in Feroza:

Was this flaming, confident creature, who
talked so engagingly and candidly and had
acquired a throaty, knowing, delectable
laugh, the same little timid thing who
had refused to answer the phone? (236)

Feroza was changed so much, she had adopted the culture and ways of America so deeply that during her stay in Pakistan, she was disconcerted to discover that she was a misfit in a country in which she had once fitted so well. After her return, she meets David and falls passionately in love with him. Feroza decides to seek permission from her parents to marry David. Her mother goes to U.S.A to dissuade Feroza to marry David. When Zareen broaches the subject of Feroza’s marriage, Feroza praises David’s parents and says that they are respectable people and moreover she says:

If you go about talking of people’s pedigrees,
the Americans will laugh at you (Quoted in Singh 80)

Feroza is adamant. She entreats her mother to look at things in a different way as the Americans have a different culture. Zareen regrets her having sent Feroza to America:

I should have listened. I should never have
let you go so far away. Look what it’s done to
you. You’ve become an American Brat. (279)

Zareen’s stay with Feroza and David brings about a change in their relationship and finally the relationship comes to an end. Feroza feels shocked, insecure and uprooted for some time but she soon bounces back. She decides not to go back home but live in America. Although the sense of dislocation, of not belonging, is more acute in America, she feels it is bearable because “it was shared by thousands of newcomers like herself” (312).

Feroza has tasted freedom and she now cannot give it up. She decides to manage her life to suit her heart and pursue happiness in her own sweet way. She desires privacy, plenty and the freedom from social inhibitions which only the first world can provide. 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 at the U.S.A instead of the settled life, family and easy contentment at Lahore.
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