Bapsi Sidhwa is an important voice in Commonwealth as well as in Parsi fiction in English. She was born in Karachi in 1938. Apart from being a writer Bapsi Sidhwa’s interest in social work includes active participation in Women’s Rights and Social Investigation. She has participated in a women’s delegation to Iran and Turkey in 1970. In 1975, she represented Punjab at the Asian Women’s conference at Alma-Ata, in the republic of Kazakhstan, (then in the USSR). She was a voluntary worker on several social work committees and was actively involved in setting up the Destitute Women’s and Children’s Home in Lahore.

Sidhwa’s literary career began with *The Crow Eaters (1978)* which is focused on Parsi community, its values and paradoxes. *The Bride (1982)* has feminist overtones, as it deals with the woman’s search for human-status and liberation from cruelties of Muslim patriarchy. *Ice-Candy Man (1988)* portrays the horrors of partition and political passivity of the Parsis towards contemporary political movements. *An American Brat (1994)* paves new experiences in Sidhwa’s fiction related with migration to the West, and identity crisis as a result of migration.

Bapsi Sidhwa, well-known Parsi Pakistani English novelist, has mirrored her community brilliantly in her writings. Her novels aptly reclaim her fame as a Parsi writer. She deals with the predicament of her tiny microscopic community in the colonial and post-colonial era. Her fiction highlights various aspects concerning beliefs, ceremonies, death-rites, attraction for white-skin and the dilemmas that Parsis are facing on various occasions. Her fiction records the ethnographic history of her community. Following sections deal with her novels in chronological order to trace the ethnic angst as reflected in her writings.
II

The Crow Eaters

Sidhwa has shown peculiar traits of the Parsi community as exemplified in the beginning of the novel itself:

Because of a deep-rooted admiration for my diminishing community- and an enormous affection for it - this work of fiction has been a labor of love (emphasis added). 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 honor- not to mention its tradition of humor as typified by the Parsi natak (emphasis original)- are legend. (7)

The Crow Eaters being a pleasant comedy, human vulnerabilities and follies are treated with tolerance and meek curative irony. Sidhwa presents the hilarious saga of Parsi family. Her immediate concern is to present the marginal personality aspect within the Parsi surroundings. Most Parsis in the novel are shown as cultural hybrids, living and sharing intimately the cultural life, traditions, languages, moral codes, and political loyalties of two distinct peoples, “which were never completely interpenetrated and fused” [Park 1978:135]. The novel is about the Parsi community and all the major characters are Parsi Zoroastrian. Their ethnic peculiarities are focused in the novel. The characters and their tendencies are satirized, exploiting those ethnic features that are conducive to such satire. But at the same time, these characters are universal beyond any religion and ethnic group as such absurdities and characteristics can be found in a member of any religion or ethnic group as aptly reflected by Makrand Paranjape:

The Crow Eaters is not a novel particularly about Parsis; instead, it is a novel where characters happen to be Parsis. The characters could well have been Hindu or Muslim and a good deal of satire
would still have carried; each ethnic group, after all has its peculiarities and absurdities. [1996:90]

In this novel *The Crow Eaters*, Bapsi Sidhwa attempts to find out the answers of the queries of her microscopic minority community. Being the first ever novel about the Parsi community, she has tried to give the authentic account of the workings of Parsi mind, social behavior, value system, customs, and ethnic mores. Sidhwa has, very minutely and carefully, pictured the Parsi community. At the same time she has not let it degenerate into a mere sociological discourse. The characters make the novel an amusing piece of fiction emphasizing the harshness and gravity of the paradoxes of the community.

The novel opens with Faredoon Junglewalla’s depiction as a well-known Parsi patriarch who has created such a niche in his community that he is listed in the local “Zarathusti Calendar of Great Men and Women” (09). His name is recited in “all the major ceremonies performed in the Punjab and Sind” (09) as an acknowledgment to the accomplishment of his “charming rascality” (09).

The ethnic element of the Zoroastrian community and related tribulations can be traced in the novel. Zoroastrianism has its belief and value system. One of the most important Zoroastrian value is *Charity*. The novel contains ample references to the Parsi Charity. Freddy while preaching the importance of Charity cites the incident:

‘And once you have means, there is no end to the good you can do. I donated towards the construction of an orphanage and a hospital. I installed a water pump with a stone plaque and dedicating it to my friend, Mr. Charles P.Allen.’ (10)

But his charity is promoted by his selfishness or self-promotion as these English officers were useful for him to develop his business. Parsis allow their dead bodies to be consumed by vultures which is the last act of charity. Jerbanoo’s reminiscence of the final rites of her husband focuses
on how charity is an integral part of Parsi life: “It was his final act of charity! … As my beloved husband Jehangirjee Chinimini said, Our Zarathusti faith is based on charity” (47) (Emphasis added). After Soli’s death too, Freddy made the proclamation of charity by constructing a school in Karachi. Charity also evokes the sense of community and binding duties for the fellow-Parsi which is described as:

An endearing feature of this microscopic merchant community was its compelling sense of duty and obligation towards other Parsis. Like one close-knit family, they assisted each other, sharing success and rallying to support failure. There were 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)

Extremity of the charity can be seen in the character of Yazdi. He treated servants with extreme humanity. He took care of his grandmother. He offered all his as well as other’s possessions to the poor and needy. After Soli’s death, he retired himself from common life. He just wanted to serve those all who were humiliated, insulted by human beings, by God, or by destiny. He acquired the stoic status. These developments in his character turned him modern day hippie. On sea-beach when Billy saw Yazdi, Billy asked him:

‘Are you a communist?’
‘Maybe’, said Yazdi. ‘Perhaps I’m a follower of Mazdak.’ ‘Who’s he?’
‘The first communist. A Zarathusti ancestor. He realized centuries ago that all material goods, including women, had to be shared! (214-215)

This basic principle of the Parsis made them well-known by the saying ‘Parsi thy name is charity’ [Pestonji 1999:31]. Yazdi’s character reaches the heights of humanity where it doesn’t remain just a Parsi as aptly put in the words of Novy Kapadia: “The characterization of Yazdi
adds the variety to the novel. It tells that Parsis are not *types*, nor do they have stereotyped reactions” [1996:133] When Billy got married “Two hundred Parsi families living in a charitable housing scheme and not invited to the party were each given a sack of flour, a ten pound canister of rarefied butter, lentils and a box of Indian sweets” (224).

Being the minority minuscule community Parsis have great sense of community or brotherhood which helps them to establish strong bond among fellow Zoroastrians and to prove this Sidhwa describes:

*Visiting Parsis were rare. When they did steam into the city station, the community mood became festive. They were wafted from home to home for breakfast, brunch, lunch, tea, drinks and dinner. The morning after, fortified with enough roast chickens and hard boiled eggs to feed the entire train, the hung-over wrecks were seen off at the station. Grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles and children waved until the little fluttering handkerchiefs faded from view.* (54)

Another Parsi virtue is *cleanliness* that underlines the importance of purity of ones environment. Purity of the self enables the communion between Ahura Mazda and oneself. This obsession for cleanliness and ignorance about adult life created embarrassing situation for Billy. Billy and Tanya went to Simla by train. When he kissed her, she pushed him back and bit his tongue:

*You are a filthy sweeper fellow! Haven’t you studied hygiene? Poking your germs into my mouth!* (227)

In London the problems of sanitation services and uncleanliness, were critically slammed by Jerbanoo. The common bathrooms, toilets and lavatories of the hotel restricted Jerbanoo from bathing twice a day. The tiny cubicles offered flush bowls and toilet paper. Jerbanoo was not used to these systems. She scolded Freddy for his “dry-clean” (267). She was brought up to believe that “cleanliness is Godliness, and she refused to fail her religion” (267). Thus, Jerbanoo is a stereotype traditional Parsi woman
who clings to her culture steadfast and finds it difficult to adjust to an alien culture.

Parsis are famous for their love for food and excessive eating habits. Sidhwa highlights such Parsi gluttony. Freddy suffered the gluttony of his mother-in-law Jerbanoo which is another typical Parsi:

...she delighted in swiping these delicacies from beneath his very nose and stuffing them into her voracious mouth... pulling all the dishes close to her plate, proceed gluttonously to help herself to second favorites. ...Jerbanoo appropriated huge quantities of chocolate, biscuits, perfume and wines. (24-26)

Freddy’s helplessness caused great pain for himself. He complained fruitlessly about her:

I shall be as guilty in God’s sight as this glutton! (25)
...she eats like a horse at meals, and then swallows enough sweet chutneys, candied fruit and liqueurs to give an elephant diarrhea- (27).

Parsis are famous for their honesty. Sidhwa describes Freddy as:

“...the fact that he was a Parsi- whose reputation for honesty and propriety is a byword - made him a man of consequence in the locality” (23).

Sidhwa portrays the paradox in the character of Freddy when he planned to set the fire to his store and to encash the insurance policy. Sidhwa very brilliantly focuses the portrayal of oriental people. Sidhwa highlights Freddy’s shrewdness and cunningness and its existence in contemporary society which is inherited from their colonial masters:

A time-worn scheme- but not in India in the year 1901, among a semi-starved mass of superstitious people. Here a religiously conditioned, fatalistic people were unconditionally resigned to the ups and downs of life. They were an obedient and spiritually preoccupied race used to being governed, slavishly subservient to their master, to law, order and decree. In other words, an oriental people as yet quite unused to the ways of the West and its political, industrial and criminal practices.
Insurance in India was in its infancy. Its opportunities struck Freddy as a brand new; a creative thought without precedent. In its own way, Freddy’s brainwave was as unique as the discovery of the wheel. (76)

Here Sidhwa portrays the Freddy who very cunningly opted all the ways of the rulers, and wanted to be benefited from it at any cost. Freddy very acutely and effectively executes the plan and receives the insurance policy after due inquiry. He bribed the police officer to acquire the policy. Thus, Freddy becomes ‘truly colonized’ as he adopts the ways of the colonizers.

Parsi customs, ceremony and beliefs can be traced throughout this novel. Sidhwa tells about ethnic clothing of the Parsis. Parsis always cover their heads with a white kerchief or cap.:

...his wife and mother-in-law 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, worn beneath short blouses, modestly aproned their sari-wrapped hips. Stern-visage, straight-backed, the two women faced the world with such moral temerity that Hindu, Muslim or Christian, all had profound respect for the man and his family. (23)

In Zoroastrianism ladies wear mathabanus and men wear caps to avoid the evil attractions towards the hair. Hairs are used to spell black magic. When the havoc of bad luck entered into Freddy’s business and he was lagging behind as never before. He thought it as the curse of his mother-in-law. On consulting, a mystic advised him to snip the coil of Jerbanoo’s hair himself. He successfully did the same. But he didn’t like the dismal transformations in Jerbanoo after the black magic.

Sidhwa comments on some other aspects of Parsi family concerning woman. Putli retires to the “other room” (70) during her menstruation cycle. It is believed that even the sun, moon and stars are violated by
menstruating woman’s impure gaze as per a superstition which has its basis in primordial man’s fear of blood. But it was the time for women to take complete rest without guilt consciousness. Putli, too, enjoyed her retiring to the other room as “It was the only chance she ever had to rest. And since this seclusion was religiously enforced, she was able to enjoy her idleness without guilt (70). Thus, Parsi women were confined to the separate cells during their menstruation. Women followed the tradition without any complaint, thereby showing their attachment to the Parsi customs and beliefs.

Zoroastrians believe in the Good and Evil aspects of the life. There is constant struggle between these two and every Zoroastrian has the freedom of choice:

**Freedom of choice is a cardinal doctrine in the teaching of Zarathustra. A child born of Zoroastrian parents is not considered a Zoroastrian until he has chosen the faith at the Navjote ceremony. Zarathustra in his Gathas says:**

> Give ear to the Great Truths. Look within with enlightened mind (lit: flaming mind) at the faith of your own selection, man by man, each one for himself (emphasis original).

*And this freedom of choice extends also to Good and Evil aspects of God Himself. Evil is necessary so that good may triumph. Yet Evil by itself does not exist, it is relative, depending upon the distance from God at which the individual stands upon the Path of Asha - the Eternal truth - the grand cosmic plan of God. (124)*

Every Parsi household and its old women spun the sacred thread and shirt in leisure time. The initiation of Parsis into Zarathusti faith is completed with the Navjote ceremony where every Parsi is “invested with the outward symbols of faith- the undershirt, *sudreh* and the *kusti* they were girded to serve the Lord of Life and Wisdom”(124). Zoroastrians deeply believe in the prayers. For them the Parsi prayers are so strong that
non-Parsi could not listen to them. There are many prayers for each occasion. Sidhwa narrates Billy’s kusti prayers:

He dexterously undid the knots of the sacred thread and held the unravelled kusti in both hands. Billy did not understand a word of the ancient Avesta text, except the bit ‘Shikasta shikasta, sehtan’ which roughly translated means, ‘I shall conquer evil.’ When he came to this bit he whipped the tasseled ends of the thread so that they cracked thinly at the back. Once again he wound the kusti round his waist, tying it in a reef knot at the front and back. Each twist of the knot was meant to remind him that God is One Eternal Being, that the Mazadyasni Faith is the true faith, that Zarathustra is the true Prophet of God and that he should obey the three commandments: good thoughts, good words and good deeds. (139)

At the end of the novel Freddy contemplates on his life. He talked to his children at length cleverly introducing the lessons of his experiences and the rich outgrowth of his reflection on Evil and Good:

‘It has taken me a long time to comprehend Evil- and Good- and a lifetime to catch just a glimpse of the Path of Asha, God’s grand plan for man and the Cosmos. Yes, the strength of God comes to the man of Good Mind, the Vahu Mana, God’s own mind... Thus spake Zarathustra!’ (281)

Zoroastrians are often called as Fireworshippers. But they worship Ahura Mazda through the fire as His most sacred and purified aspect: “The fire, which stands at the centre of the religion, was considered only as the symbol of Ahura Mazda, the light and the truth” [Dalal 1995]. So to violate its purity in any way is sacrilegious. Smoking is considered as Cardinal Sin. When the household servant was caught smoking in the house, it caused great pain in the family. Sidhwa describes the religious importance of the fire and its sacredness:

In a house fragrant with sandalwood and incense the smell of tobacco is an abomination. Fire, chosen
by the Prophet as the outward symbol of faith, is venerated. It represents the Divine Spark in every man, a spark of Divine Light. Fire, which has its source in primordial light, symbolises not only His cosmic creation but also the spiritual nature of His Eternal Truth. Smoking, which is tantamount to defiling the holy symbol with spit, is strictly taboo—a sacrilegious sin. The cooking fire was never permitted to be extinguished; it was politely preserved in ashes at night, and fanned alive each morning. To blow upon fire is vile thing. Priests tending the temple fires cover their mouths with cloth masks, lest spittle pollute the Atash. (49-50)

Parsis follow the tradition of religious tolerance. They respect all the religions and show a sense of tolerance towards all religion which is noteworthy:

The muezzin’s cry, suppliant, plaintive and sensual, rose in the hushed air among the domes. Bells tinkled in a diminutive Hindu temple, snuggled in the shadows of the mosque. A Sikh temple, gold-plated, gleamed like a small jewel in the shadows and Freddy, responsive to all religious stimuli, surrendered his heart to the moment. (20) (Emphasis added)

Freddy had a collection of religious scripture and literature. He had a great respect for all religions in the world. On the shelf he had scriptures from all religions. In this way Freddy’s heart discovered an affinity with all religious thoughts. This can also be seen when Soli’s death ceremonies were being completed by the priest. Non-Zoroastrians could not witness the ceremonies as well as could not see the face of the dead once final rites were performed over the body.

Someone said, ‘Faredoon, this is sacrilegious! Pull yourself together!’ And Freddy, fighting desperately to keep his voice steady, said, ‘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!’
The bier moved slowly through the hushed, bowed heads lining the street. (179)

Here one can remember how Freddy cajoled Yazdi and tried to persuade from the Rosy Watson issue. The same Freddy at his son’s death preached the human love and brotherhood which is sans-religion.

There are many ceremonies related to marriage that Sidhwa has described at length. The process of marriage begins with the ‘token money’ ceremony. Sidhwa gives the details of marriage and related ceremonies particularly of Mada-sara ceremony:

This entailed much stepping on and off the small, fish-patterned platform. After the prospective bride and groom stepped off and planted the mango sapling that was to guarantee their fertility, the sisters hopped up to be garlanded, stained with vermilion and presented with their set of clothes and thin strings of gold. The gummy-mouthed aunts and uncles, eagerly awaiting their turn, came next. They were also garlanded, stained with vermilion, and given small envelopes containing cash. (218)

Sidhwa very minutely narrates the wedding ceremony of Billy. Faredoon and Putli stood behind Billy and Sir and Lady Easymoney behind Tanya, as witnesses:

The officiating priest eventually recited, ‘... Say whether you have agreed to take this maiden named Tanya in marriage to this bridegroom in accordance with rites and customs of the Mazda worshippers, promising to pay her 2000 direhems of pure white silver and two dinars of standard gold of Nishahpur coinage?’
‘We have’, answered Freddy and Putli.
‘And have you and your family with pure mind and truthful thoughts, words, and deeds, and for the increase of righteousness, agreed to give for ever and aye, this bride in marriage to Behram?’ the priest asked the bride’s witnesses.
‘We have agreed,’ they replied.
Then the priest asked, ‘Have you desired to enter into this contract with pure mind and until death do ye part?’
‘I have so desired,’ answered Billy and Tanya in unison.
After this the priest invoked the blessings of God on the married couple and advised them on how to conduct themselves properly. (223-24)

The details of the Parsi wedding depict the cultural hybridity of the Parsis. Parsis are “a cultural hybrid” sharing the “cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples” [Park 1978:892]. They partake of Hindu and Muslim ceremonies. The details of Mada sara ceremony have Hindu overtones and the wedding ceremony has Muslim overtones. No doubt Parsis have their own ethos of ceremonies.

Parsis have their own methods of final rites. They observe the purity of Fire, Earth, and Water. They neither offer their dead bodies to the fire nor bury in the earth nor drown in the water. Their final rites are called as Dokhma. They feed their dead bodies to the vultures as the final act of the charity. These rites are performed at the Tower of Silence which is also called as Doongarwari. Sidhwa discusses about the ‘Tower of Silence’:

Parsis are a tiny community who leave their dead in open-roofed enclosures atop hills- to be devoured by vultures. The British romanticized this bizarre graveyard with the title ‘Tower of Silence’…the marble floor slopes towards the center where there is a deep hollow. This receives the bones and blood. Underground ducts from the hollow lead to four deep wells outside the Tower. These wells are full of lime, charcoal, and sulphur and provide an excellent filter.
The outer rim of the floor is made up of enough marble slabs to accommodate fifty male bodies, then comes accommodation for fifty females, and the innermost space, around the hollow, is for children. It takes the birds only minutes to strip the body of all flesh.
Now, the height of the Tower is precisely calculated. The vultures, taking off at a full throttle, are only
just able to clear the Tower wall. If they try to get away with anything held between their claws or beaks they invariably crash against the wall. (45)

In Zoroastrian religion common Parsis are not allowed in Dungarwari because, “only professional pall-bearers are allowed to witness the gory spectacle inside the Tower” (45). Dohhma is considered “both practical and hygienic” (45). It originated in the “rocky terrain of Persia” (45). Parsi population is concentrated in the cities of Bombay and Karachi. There the Parsis have Doongarwari following traditional dokhma, but Parsis living in “far-flung areas have to be content with mere burial” (46). In Lahore too, there were no dungewarees. It caused great panic in Jerbanoo as she did not want to be buried like a Muslim or a Christian. She blamed Putli and Freddy for damning her soul in “an eternal barbecue in hell” (46). She was not in favor of polluting the sacred earth by her remains. Jerbanoo expressed the deep regret for the vultures on the top of a green tree:

“What a pity. What a shame. These poor birds are permitted to starve despite all the Parsis we have in Lahore ...‘all these vultures are going to waste - such a pity’. (50)

Freddy described this absence of Tower of Silence and dokhma ceremony as: “Vultures, vultures everywhere and not a body to share!” (51). Sidhwa gives the vivid details of final rites of the Soli. Dead body was bathed and dressed in white cotton. Prayers were recited and then dog was called to detect the life in the dead. It is believed that dog’s four eyes can sent off evil spirits and can perceive the slightest clue of life. It was “a precious faculty in premedical days when corpses were inclined to recover and sit up” (177). Once again prayers were recited for the dead. The burial of the dead is not allowed in the Parsis as it violates the sacred earth. But the lack of the Tower of Silence made them adjust with burial. Even Jerbanoo too wished to get buried next to Soli which was an
“unexpected…wanton act of sacrifice” (180). This “act of sacrifice” (180) wantonly brings to light the predicament that any expatriate or migrant faces in an alien land.

Parsi were given refuge on conditions. They were not allowed to marry local people and conversion of the masses to their faith was banned. Sidhwa deals with this issue of insular-marriage. Sidhwa focuses that the desire to marry is conveyed by dropping “a fistful of salt into the drinking water” (111). Yazdi expressed his desire to marry Rosy Watson. Freddy was shocked:

**Freddy had not been prepared for this. His face stiffened visibly. ‘What kind of name is that? I don’t think I know any Parsi by the name of Watson.’ ‘She is not Parsi. She is an Anglo-Indian.’…”You have the gall to tell me you want to marry an Anglo-Indian? Get out of my sight. Get out!” (123)

Sidhwa, in a paradoxical manner talks about the cardinal doctrine of *Freedom of Choice* and how Parsis oppose to the insular marriages just as they promised the king. Yazdi’s narration of Rosy’s story without embarrassment was very innocent. Freddy called her as “a mixed-breed mongrel” (128). Freddy’s abusing highlights the paradox of Parsi loyalty as well as racial and moral superiority over British. This is a paradoxical situation to what Tanya Luhrman said: “the moral qualities of the Parsis must be classified as more European than Indian, and, like the British, as superior to the moral qualities of the native Indian [1996:100]. Yazdi was shocked the way his father talked about her. Yazdi pleaded on humanistic ground:

‘What does it matter if she is not 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)

This emotional and righteous appeal suggests that “His (Zarathustra’s) beautiful religion was for everyone who was prepared to
join the fight of good against evil and live by the three guiding principles—good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. In Zoroastrianism rites are less important than ethical conduct” [Dalal 1995]. Hearing such humanistic pleading, Freddy calmed down himself. Freddy very cunningly expressed him his great philosophy of tiny spark of race and purity:

‘I believe in some kind of a tiny spark that is carried from parent to child, on through generations…. a kind of inherited memory of wisdom and righteousness, reaching back to the times of Zarathustra, the Magi, the Mazadiansians. It is a tenderly nurtured conscience evolving towards perfection.’

‘I am not saying only we have the spark. Other people have it too: Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists... they too have developed pure strains through generations.’

‘But what happens if you marry outside our kind? The spark so delicately nurtured, so subtly balanced, meets something totally alien and unmatched. Its precise balance is scrambled. It reverts to the primitive. You will do yourself no harm- you have already inherited fine qualities- you have compassion, honesty, creativity- but have you thought of your children?’

‘In case of the Anglo-Indian girl the spark is already mutated. What kind of a heritage are you condemning your children to? They might look beautiful but they will be shells- empty and confused; misfits for generations to come. They will have arrogance without pride- touchiness without self-respect or compassion; ambition without honor... and you will be to blame.’ (Emphasis added) (128-29)

Yazdi after listening such preaching wondered why he had expected his father to be different. His father was like anybody else, prejudiced, biased, ignorant and stereotyped. This generation gap increased the distance between a father and a son. Contradictory to the Yazadi’s case Sidhwa has given the typical Parsi methodology of the ‘Bride-hunting’ and importance of “accomplished Parsi girl of good family” (193) for a “Parsi
bachelor” (193). After an advertisement in a newspaper they received hundreds of letters and then selected a girl from Bombay. In due process Billy married Tanya. In the colonial period Parsis were at the height of their richness. They were able to spend lavishly on their ceremonies like wedding. Junglewalla family gifted Easymoney family with costly gifts like “chain of gold…a ruby-and-gold set necklace, earrings and ring… pearl studs and diamond tie-pins” (211). Then Sidhwa narrates the grandeur of the Parsis who lavishly spent money on their celebrations:

It was a memorable wedding. Years after people still talked about it. Hedges had been levelled in the compound of the Taj Mahal Hotel to clear parking space for carriages and limousines. Openings were dug in the walls dividing the banquet rooms, reception rooms, and lobby of service. Flowers were commissioned from Bangalore and Hyderabad, cheeses from Surat, and caviar from the Persian Gulf. There was lobster and wild-duck and venison. There was a bottle of Scotch and Burgundy for each guest; and ambulances, their motors idling, stood ready to convey the inebriated or overstuffed to their homes or to the hospital... There was a Police Band, a Naval Band, a dance orchestra and an orchestra that played chamber music. There was singing. (224)

Parsis identify themselves with the superiority of British, with whom they enjoyed superior status. But at the same time, they, too, have funny notions about the land of the rulers and rulers. So this fascination for white-skinned rulers is described as ‘gora complex’. The traces of such ‘gora complex’ can be seen at the end of the novel where Freddy took Putli and Jerbanoo on the tour of London. Sidhwa opens their mind to the readers as:

Putli and Jerbanoo had almost identical fantasies about the land of their rulers. Their thrill was imaginative. They envisaged an orderly kingdom under the munificent authority of a British monarch based on their knowledge of the gigantic statue of
Queen Victoria, cast in gun-metal and protected by a canopy of marble, in the centre of the garden on Charing Cross in Lahore. (252)

This illusion of the rulers and their homeland was shattered as soon as they landed on their land. It brought the disillusionment and confrontation to the English reality. They witnessed that English people are also very poor, dirty, working on deck. English people seemed very ordinary who are just waiting on Jerbanoo and Putli for their orders to follow. Sidhwa portrays it as:

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

Jerbanoo and Putli were shocked to see Mr. & Mrs. Allen just as a middle class family. Jerbanoo could humiliate Mrs. Allen only in England after witnessing their degradation in their own homeland. However, they were treated with great respect and awe in India as the representative of the Raj.

The close contact with the British brings in the westernization of the Parsis and their following of the Western-ways which can be aptly described as the disease of Anglo-mania. The first reference in the novel of this is given when the Parsi gluttony causes Jerbanoo into illness. Jerbanoo cries out in her illness: “Get an English doctor. Oh I’m dying. Get an
English doctor””(28). This shows fascination for everything which is English. That means they believed that whatever is English is the best and worthy to be followed and adopted. Mr. Easymoney entertained his guest by his stories of Sudan. He hailed his Parsi community as “the original… kafirs!” (221). Then he narrated the incident how he helped his soldier who was dying of thirst. ‘…though he might be a sir, and accustomed to the ways of British aristocracy, he was first and foremost a loyal and down-to-earth Parsi!” (221) This is an adequate remark where he admits their adaptations of British ways as well as maintaining the distinct identity as a Parsi community.

Freddy received the invitation cards from Government House for the parties along with his wife. Here Sidhwa has shown the interaction of two cultures. It produced tensions when Putli, Freddy’ wife, resists change. She was against to walk “a step ahead of her husband” (188) as “a dutiful and God-fearing wife” (188). She condemned it as “hypocritical and pretentious, and most barbarous” (188). Putli means a puppet which she is one in the hands of her husband. Putli adapted to what she considered new-fangled customs, when she along with her husband were invited to the formal tea-parties on the gracious lawns of the Government House. She is persuaded to these functions by her husband, for whom it is an opportunity for advancing contacts and consolidating friendships. The Parsi milieu of Putli had a different value system. But “their deportment was as painful to Putli as being marched naked in public” (188). As regards adapting 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, like walking behind her husband. However, her daughter Yasmin after marriage ignores such notions as old-fashioned and violently protests at the servile attitude of women:

Anyway it’s stupid to walk behind your husband like an animal on a leash- Oh mother! Hasn’t Papa been able to modernise you yet? (190-91)
Putli, the earlier generation Parsi, is shocked by Yasmin preceding her husband down the steps and into the carriage and her seeming equal relationship with her husband. Initially adapting the manners and customs of the ruling colonial power was gradual and Putli’s inability to understand change is seen as the ‘generation-gap.’ N.S. Ginwalla aptly points out such attitude: “These dressed up dolls of Parsi ladies pretend to be highly civilized and refined, and better socially, morally and intellectually than everybody else, simply because they are able to speak English and have a glimmering idea of English society, life, dress and manners” [1880:73]. But here paradox is Putli’s traditional attitude results into a comic situation. Putli had been instructed not to speak their Gujarati vernacular in the presence of Englishmen. As a devoted wife she started her conversation in typical Parisian accented English: ‘How doo doo?’(189), ‘Home! I go. You go!’ (190) Such fascination for the English resulted into caricaturesque portrayal of the Parsis. This is described as “Anglophilia…the Parsi disease” [Kanga 1991:161]

Sidhwa highlights the new generation of Parsi youth and their attitude towards life. Billy and Tanya entered their new home in the better localities of Lahore. Their new home and its atmosphere and life were completely different. This young generation wanted to throw off the yoke of old traditions and value system. Their eagerness to adopt western ways and assimilation into the changing social atmosphere compelled them to make friends with “modern couples equally determined to break with tradition” (245) who had “… a fanatical faith in the ways of English society in India, and a disciple’s knack at imitation” (245). These young people would speak in English fluently. Sidhwa also highlights that this young generation is ashamed of its own culture, traditions. She writes:

They were utterly ashamed of traditional habits and considered British customs, however, superficially observed, however trivial, exemplary. They entertained continuously at small, intimate, ‘mixed’
parties where married couples laughed and danced decorously with other married couples. ‘Mixed’ parties were as revolutionary a departure from Freddy’s all-male get-togethers at the Hira Mandi, and Putli’s rigid female sessions, as is a discotheque from a Victorian family dinner. These parties were fashionably cosmopolitan, including the various religious sects of India: Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians, the Europeans, and the Anglo-Indians. (245)

This broadening of the views and frank manners of assimilation were adopted from the British. Migration and identity crisis are the other problems which Parsis often suffer. Though the novel does not have these overtones, there are certain moments in the text which reveal these issues. Mr. Easymoney in the course of discussion very briefly comments on the bigoted attitude of the natives which mirrors the Parsi attitude too: “…Now take you and me: One leg in India and one leg in England. We are the citizens of the world!”(222) These are apt comments of Easymoney, because after the independence Parsis migrated in a large number to the West. This is what made them cosmopolitan citizens. Freddy’s visit to London has brought so many immigrants’ problems of adjustment with the new locality and culture. Jerbanoo felt uneasy with toilet papers so carried brass jar which embarrasses Freddy. He forbade her to use it. She scolded Freddy for his “‘dry-clean’…Jerbanoo was brought up to believe that cleanliness is Godliness, and she refused to fail religion” (267). This way Jerbanoo faced basic problems of cleanliness highly recommended by her religion. Later on she faced the problem of bathing too but overcame it. She used the balcony as a bathroom where she can bathe twice a day. But it didn’t work for long. It was revealed to people. On the fifth day she heard a furious voice bellow: “Bilmey! God, we’re being flooded!” (268). The matter grew worse and immediately Freddy decided to return to India. This failure of adjustment in a new locality and culture depicts the problems of migrants.
Political Ethos of the Parsi is always related with loyalty towards the Ruler. In Pre-independence era they readily sided with the British in colonized India. They fully co-operated with the British and invited the wrath of the Indians. They were looked upon as traitors and despised since then. The Parsis proved indifferent and disloyal to the country they had adopted. The Indian attitude towards Parsis changed drastically and they were considered as the different, or to quote Simone De Beauriou “the other”. Parsis had to side with the British since they were in power and decision of the Parsis was politically motivated. Thus, the Parsi community found themselves in a strange dilemma; of facing the hostility of the people of the country they adopted during pre-independence. However, they relegated themselves to the ‘margin’ ever after the independence of India. They remained on the periphery, allergic to mingle into the mainstream of the society, probably due to their guilt-conscience. Freddy preached the law of necessity (need) and success to the younger generation. He taught them how flattery and submission help man to fulfill his needs. Here ‘need’ can be seen as the peaceful survival and progress of this tiny community. He believed: “Need... will force you to love your enemy as a brother!”(10). He himself has buttered people from whom he wanted something. This attitude of Faredoon is symptomatic of the behavioral pattern of Parsi community. He also pointed that how humble nature helped one to make progress apart from the hostile nature of others and surroundings. Faredoon’s charity did not make him a paragon of virtue but was tinged with self promotion. His generosity was mixed with the self-interest. He developed his philanthropic image to increase his business contacts and to appear selfless and counter the impression of being toddy of British. He tells his young listeners:

‘I have never permitted pride and arrogance to stand in my way. Where would I be had I made a delicate flower of my pride- and sat my delicate bum on it? I followed the dictates of my needs, my wants- they make one flexible, elastic, humble.’ “The meek
shall inherit the earth”, says Christ. There is also a lot of depth in the man who says, “Sway with the breeze, bend with the winds”. (11)

Parsi community needs the meekness as prescribed by the Christ if they want to survive as well as submerge and bend their wills to the rulers.

Sidhwa highlights the anxieties of decline in numbers. She comments on the demographic status of her minority community and how it has survived and has created and maintained its own identity:

There are hardly a hundred and twenty thousand Parsis in the world- and still we maintain our identity- why? Booted out of Persia at the time of the Arab invasion 1,300 years ago, a handful of our ancestors fled to India with their sacred fires. Here they were granted sanctuary by the prince Yadav Rana on condition that they did not eat beef, wear rawhide sandals or convert the susceptible masses. Our ancestors weren’t too proud to bow to his will. To this day we don’t allow conversion to our faith- or mixed marriages. (11)

These comments of Freddy Junglewalla aptly describe the Parsi behavioral pattern of adjustment, commitment, truthfulness and loyalty to rulers, and to the country which has given them refuge at the time of need. Being in minority demographically Freddy has made friends, loved them with “ulterior motives” (11). He assures his young listeners about their survival under the British Raj because other Indian communities would throw them on the fringes of slavery or second-rate citizens, so he declares:

For us it rises - and sets- in the Englishman’s arse. They are our sovereigns! Where do you think we’d be if we did not curry favour? Next to the nawabs, rajas and princelings, we are the greatest toadies of the British Empire! These are not ugly words, mind you. They are the sweet dictates of our delicious need to exist, to live and prosper in peace. Otherwise, where would we Parsis be? Cleaning out gutters with the untouchables- a dispersed pinch of snuff sneezed from the heterogeneous nostrils of India! Oh yes, in looking after our interests we have
maintained our strength- the strength to advance the grand cosmic plan of Ahura Mazda- the deep spiritual law which governs the universe, the path of Asha. (12)

Here Freddy appears very selfish and rascal who knows how to extract desired things from others but actually it was the need of the hour, for one’s survival and existence. His preaching seems bitter but it is based on the factual conditions and naked reality. So the sycophancy is shown as a “need to exist” (12). The tone of the author is ironic. It is a protective irony in the novel, balancing personal inadequacies against the contradictions of life itself. Since the Parsis settled in India, they realized they could only survive as a minority by being strictly loyal to every ruling authority and avoiding tensions and conflicts between various groups and powers in the state. At no time in the subcontinent was the community itself a power that would have been able to enforce its own interests against the will of the rulers. Hence, Parsis learned to realize that only loyalty to the ruler generates that political climate in which they could remain undisturbed as a minority. The only condition for their loyalty was that they were not held up in the practice of their religion. Hence the exaggerated servility of Freddy, his son Billy and other Parsis towards the British is revealed as an act to ensure the legal security, peace and economic prosperity. With her ironic perspective the flattery of the Parsis is humorously revealed in the novel, but it also expresses an underlying identity crisis and quest for security among the community as a whole. Freddy traveled from North-India to Lahore. After reaching there, he visited Government House:

Having thus paid homage to the British Empire, established his credentials and demonstrated his loyalty to the ‘Queen and Crown’, Freddy was free to face the future. (22)
When Freddy came to Lahore there were only thirty Parsis in the city. After twenty years the number of Parsis swelled to almost three hundred. He became the undisputed head of his community. He was also spokesman and leader of the Parsis scattered over the rest of the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province right up to the Khyber Pass. Freddy’s willingness and ability to help to give his time, to intervene and intercede, were proverbial; his influence with men who wielded power was legendary:

‘Oh, he has the police in his pocket.’ They boasted, ‘He has the English Sahibs tamed so that they eat out of his hand.’ And this was no mean accomplishment for the aloof, disparaging and arrogant British rarely became pally with the ‘natives’. (150)

Sidhwa ends her novel with the Parsi neutrality towards politics where Freddy abuses the Parsis who took part in freedom fighting. He was stirred by the talk of rebellion, self-rule, and Independence from the British- and most of all by the role of a few Parsis in all this. He stated his opinions with a vigor and prophetic emphasis that infected his listeners:

‘Do you know who is responsible for this mess?’ …I’ll tell you who: that misguided(emphasis added) Parsi from Bombay, Dadabhoy Navroji! Things were going smoothly; there has always been talk of throwing off the British yoke - of Independence- but that fool of a Parsi starts something called the Congress, and shoots his bloody mouth off like a lunatic. “Quit India! Quit India!” You know what he has done? Stirred a hornet’s nest! I can see the repercussions. (282)

This Parsi attitude of loyalty to British rulers is aptly reflected as, “They, my children, shall be taught that fidelity to the British crown is their first duty- loyalty the first virtue” [Kulke 1978:139]. It is ironic that Parsis like Dadabhai Navroji began the freedom fighting and his community blames it as an act of betrayal to the rulers. But at the same
time Parsi community betrays the land that has given them refuge after driven out from Persia. This attitude of the Parsis’ is the direct result of the sieged mentality they have suffered during the Hindu and Muslim rulers of India. British Empire bestowed elite status, first class citizenship on them. Hence, the loyalty to the British rule is more important here. Children raised the doubt of future survival and predicament of the Parsi community in the independent India. Answering the question, “But where will we go? What will happen to us?”(282), Freddy assured the future security and existence:

Nowhere, my children ... 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 continues to set - in their arses...! (282-83)

His promise of secure future indicated the neutral positions Parsis would take in times of ethnic erasure. It is like: “Small fish must leave big fish alone, if they want to survive.”[Pestonji 1999:83]. So, these last remarks of Freddy leaves one with many questions, specially the Parsis, who are a minority community struggling for existence and individual identity, concerning their destiny in coming time. As per his comments Dadabhoy Navroji initiated the freedom fighting in an organized form, but the credit of all the great triumph of independence was taken by Gandhi and Nehru. No one has remembered the sacrifices or contributions of minorities in the independence movement, here Parsis. That’s why Freddy calls Dadabhoy Navroji a “misguided Parsi” (282). Parsis do not have any political identity in independent India or in independent Pakistan. That’s why his neutrality is not wrong. He predicated the future of the Parsi community in independent nations which were based on religion and more on languages. As Parsis are in minuscule and having, to be frank, no language of their own, so Freddy says: “If there are any rewards in all this, who will reap them? Not Sidhwa! Not Dadabhoy Navroji!”(282). He knows that as long
as British are ruling the country, Parsis have that royal stature. So he doesn’t want to betray their true friends who treated them on equal terms. Because Brahmins too in India are thinking them as untouchables:

Freddy bumped into a sauntering, decorated cow. The Brahmin priest accompanying the sacred animal cried, ‘Watch your step, babooji’, and sidestepped nimbly to avoid the preoccupied Parsi’s contaminating touch. (35)

It aptly describes the post-colonial predicament of the Parsis and their degenerated social and political status. Tanya Luhrmann aptly writes:

They [Parsis] were remarkably successful during the Raj. But their success came at the cost of jettisoning their adopted Indian identity in favour of western one. As a native colonial elite, Parsis were more westernized than most other Indian elites, and as displaced Persians, they committed themselves thoroughly to a non Indian sensibility. Now they feel marginalized in a postcolonial world, with an aching sense of loss of status, of cultural genius, of their historical moment.”[1996:81]

That’s why Freddy charged Rustom Sidhwa and Dadabhoy Navroji as: “Making monkeys of themselves and of us! Biting the hand that feeds! I tell you we are betrayed by our own kind, by our own blood!”(283). Freddy refers the Independence movement as a kind of prostitution and jail, a brothel, by comparing it with Hira Mandi and its prostitutes.

On superficial level these statements look very comic or notorious but they aptly expressed the anxiety and agony of all the Parsis at that time who had no ‘homeland’ once again. They were once again in limbo, in the enigma of existence. But at the same time, Freddy consoles himself and children, which is also a fact, that it doesn’t matter who the rulers are Parsis will be where they had been. It suggests the assertion of their positive existence and flexibility of adjustment with the changing political scenario on the horizon of country’s political movement.
III

Ice-Candy Man

This novel marks the second important phase of Bapsi Sidhwa’s literary journey. The novel deals with the upheavals in undivided India on the verge of partition. It is the journey of a child narrator from innocence towards the realization of the hostile, cruel, cunning, calculated crookedness of the world whose manifestation of the universal truth, “One man’s religion is other man’s poison” (117) is the undercurrent of the subcontinent’s traumatic, bloody partition story.

It is the story of Lame Lenny, who is a Parsi, member of minority community which is as lame as Lenny is. But as Lenny recovers from her physical impaired position, community too survives as a strong segment of the society. The novel also ends on other universal truth that love, compassion, and humanity can cure the disease of hatred, violence, and bloodshed. Jill Didur rightly describes the novel:

Conservative-nationalist discourse in Pakistan constructs Pakistani citizenship as normatively Muslim, elite, and feudal-patriarchal and pushes minorities, women, and subalterns, to the margins of the national imaginary. [Didur 1998:43-44]

Sidhwa opens her novel with Iqbal’s poem, “Complaint to God”, in which poet complains:

Sometimes You favor our rivals then sometimes with us You are free,
I am sorry to say it so boldly. You are no less fickle than we. (ICM: 01)

(Iqbal: ‘Complaint to God’)

It sets the tone of the novel. Hindu, Muslims, and Sikhs who are claiming for their ancestor’s land, are powerful at some point of time and
oppressed at another. But the Parsi community is far away from this suffering, and trauma. The narrator Lenny, who is a child, dwells in the heaven of innocence and ultimately her fall with the knowledge of brutality on humankind is the crux of the novel. Jill Didur aptly comments:

As the narrative unfolds, it quickly becomes apparent that her subjectivity is mediated by a community identity undergoing a double-crisis. The shift in power from British to the Hindu and Muslim centric states of India and Pakistan respectively signals the end of the Parsis’ privileged relation, despite their minority status, to the ruling class. [1998:46]

In this sense, this novel offers the reader an imaginary peek into the location of the Parsi community of Lahore as a “…conjunctural site indetermination” [Sangari, 1993:872] where the discursive meaning of belonging is under revision. The novel engages with the implications of the end of British rule in India and the rise of competing conservative-nationalist forces and their intersections with the patriarchal relations that circulate in the “compressed” (01) world of Parsi community.

Madhu Jain in her review of the novel highlights the dilemma which the Parsi community faced at the dawn of Independence: “The Parsi dilemma is: whom do they cast their lot with?” [1989:47] This sets the tone of the novel. Sidhwa introduces the Parsi character Col. Bharucha, Lenny’s doctor and head of the community. He scolds an ignorant Muslim father about his ignorance of his child’s health and their demand for a separate nation. It shows that people were ignorant of the political upheavals in the country. Col. Bharucha blamed, British for bringing “polio in India” (16). Lenny was shocked by this revelation as being Parsi it was not expected from Col. Bharucha. Lenny thought it as an open declaration of war by her tiny community to the British Empire because “the Parsees have been careful to adopt a discreet and politically naive
profile” (16). This tone of neutrality manifested in the narrator-character while describing the climactic incidents of Partition, is anticipated in the Parsi get-together for the Jashan prayer, to celebrate British victory at the Fire Temple in Lahore. While the Parsis have all along been loyal to the British government, they fear the Partition of India. Consequently they faced the dilemma to which community they should support. Col. Bharucha, the domineering Parsi doctor and the President of the ‘Parsi Anjuman’ cautioned his community as:

We must tread carefully... We have served the English faithfully, and earned their trust... So, we have prospered! But we are the smallest minority in India ...Only one hundred and twenty thousand in the whole world. We have to be extra wary, or we’ll be neither here nor there... We must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare! (16)

This Parsi meeting presents the humorous nature of Parsis and their concern with politics and mental state to support the freedom movement. It is at this moment of Prufrockian dilemma that Col. Bharucha spoke on the mike about the severity of the freedom fighting. He has seen the future tug-o-war play for power among the majorities of India i.e. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. In this power-play Parsis would “be mangled into chutney!’(36), if they did not “…‘stay at home - and out of trouble’” (37). Dr. Mody expressed his doubt about remaining “uninvolved” (37) and “siding with the English” (37) would be a betrayal towards fellow-Indians. It is important that with which community Parsi should remain loyal to as the possibility of two-nations based on religions was about to become a fact. At the same time, it was also problematic that to which neighbor they should be loyal to whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. Col. Bharucha feared the possibility of “two or even three- new nations” (37). He cautioned the Parsi audience to be very careful at this juncture of time as “the Parsees
might find themselves championing the wrong side if they don’t look before they leap!” (37)

The next problem this community faces is of consequent possibility of subjugation under Hindu, Muslim or Sikh majority. Parsis have suffered during Hindu as well as Muslim rulers as they were categorized as minority. Obviously, the anxieties of subjugation were renewed. It is aptly expressed as:

‘…If we’re stuck with the Hindus they’ll swipe our business under our noses and sell our grandfathers in the bargain: if we stuck with the Muslims they’ll convert us by the sword! And God help us if we’re stuck with the Sikhs!’ (37)

Col. Bharucha narrated the story of their uprooting from Persia, and settling in India. It underscores the reasons of the Parsi passivity towards the politics. Parsis were given refuge on certain conditions like not to enter into politics, accept the rulers’ culture completely without any distinct identity. It is this moment of Prufrockian dilemma that Col. Bharucha dismissed the fears of his community by advising them to cast their lot with whoever rules Lahore. It was their ageold strategy of passivity towards politics and loyalty to the rulers:

‘Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land!’ ‘…As long as we do not interfere we have nothing to fear! As long as we respect the customs of our rulers - as we always have - we’ll be all right! Ahura Mazda has looked after us for thirteen hundred years: he will look after us for another thirteen hundred!’ ‘…We will cast our lot with whoever rules Lahore!’ (39)

The memory of conversion by the Arabs before thirteen-hundred-years under sword gave way to another possibility of migration to Bombay where majority of the Parsis live. Col. Bharucha assured security of their
distinct religious identity as a Zoroastrian Parsi community. He recollected another story from Parsi history:

‘We prospered under the Muslim Moguls, didn’t we?’ … ‘Emperor Akbar invited Zarathusti scholars to his darbar: he said he’d become a Parsee if he could... but we gave our oath to the Hindu Prince that we wouldn’t proselytise - and the Parsee don’t break faith!’ (40)

Thus he denied the possibility of the subjugation under any rule if community maintains its low profile and passivity towards the politics. Sidhwa ironically comments on her community who migrated to the West after independence as Parsis thought themselves as “English king’s subjects” (40) and acknowledged themselves as “English!” (40). Col. Bharucha assured conditional security: “As long as we conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present no threat to anybody, we will prosper right here” (40). The banker cautioned not “to exercise real power” (40). Sidhwa with her bitter Parsi humor comments upon the historical facts of her community. She highlights the anxieties of the present existence and consistent future. This meeting highlights the Parsi attitude towards the Indian Freedom fighting. The Parsis were going to be neutral in the tug of war among the three major communities of India. The neutral attitude of the narrator character, Lenny, has its roots in this racial psychology of the Parsis. In a way, the attitude of the Parsi community revealed here is the externalized collective sub-consciousness of Lenny. Meher Pestonji’s story titled “Dilemma” has such echo which concludes that neutrality is the best policy adopted by the community to maintain safe distance for the survival, “There’s no reason for a Parsi to poke his nose into something that doesn’t concern him” [1999:82].

Though the novel has partition and subsequent ethnic anxieties as dominant theme, Sidhwa mentioned some Parsi ceremonies, beliefs and prayers. Lenny informs the religious tolerance towards all other religions
in her mother’s words: “‘I’ve to buy the children’s clothes for Christmas and New Year.’ (Christmas, Easter, Eid, Divali. We celebrate them all)” (69). Sidhwa narrates the ceremony of birthday celebration in brief:

She wishes me (Lenny) happy birthday and kisses me and instructs Imam Din to make sweet vermicelli with fried currants and almonds and hand Ayah a cup of milk afloat with rose petals to pour my head before my bath. (140)

Lenny doubted that her mother and aunty were rationing the petrol to set Lahore on fire. Lenny prayed to banish this evil from their mind to bring them on the virtuous path of Asha. She describes her prayers:

I cover my head with a scarf and in secluded corners join my hands to take the 101 names of God. The Bountiful. The Innocent. The Forgiver of Sin. The Fulfiler of Desire. He who can turn Air into Ashes: Fire into Water: Dust into Gems! The angle of the walls deflects the ancient words of dead Avastan language and the prayer resounds soothingly in my ears. (173-74)

As Lenny was about to confront her mother in this regard, mother was preparing for the Friday prayers “to invoke the Great Trouble Easers, the angels Mushkail Assan and Behram Yazd. (In troubled times they are frequently evoked by the Parsees.)” (241).

Clean and tidy surrounding is a highly recommended value of the Parsis. Sidhwa focuses on the purity of language of the Parsis who are away from abusive language. Imam Din explains Hamida this decency of the Parsis, “‘These are decent folk, mind you! They’re not the kind that let fly dog-and-cat abuses…’” (191)

Subcontinent people are highly attracted by the complexion of the Europeans. Parsis desired to be like them and this psyche of fascination of the British is aptly reflected in the novel. Lenny’s brother Adi is highly adored and loved by all for his fair complexion and his Eurocentric beauty. Ayah loved her “little English baba!” (25). She was often enquired about
his English parentage. Ayah readily denied by saying, “‘Of course not!’ …‘Can any dough-faced English’s son match his spice? Their looks lack salt!’” (25) Here Sidhwa subverts the importance of being English and asserts nativism. Ayah was proud of Adi’s paucity of pigment. Adi’s fair complexion allowed him to merge in white center:

Sometimes she takes us to Lawerence Gardens and encourages him to run across the space separating native babies and English babies. The ayahs of the English babies hug him and fuss over him and permit him to romp with their privileged charges. Adi undoes the bows of little girls with blue-eyes in scratchy organdie dresses and wrestles with tallow-haired boys in the grass. (25)

Simultaneously the anti-English discussions were in progress asserting the pride in national customs, culture, language, and dressing. Ice-candy-man quotes Subhash Chandra Bose, “‘If we want India back we must take pride in our customs, our clothes, our languages... And not go mouthing the got-pit sot-pit of the English!’” (28-29) This is an assertion of national aspect of ethnicity to get separate identity instead merging itself into the central or powerful and dominant ethnic group by adopting its norms. Here Sidhwa gives importance to ‘swadeshi’ rather than ‘videshi’. But she also highlights how Ayah instead of wearing Punjabi dressing, only for getting good salary wears sari like Christian-Goan ayah.

Sidhwa discussed the final rites of Parsis in details. Sidhwa shows differences among Parsis about their dokhma. Orthodox Parsis prefer tradition of dokhma or what is also called as sky-burial whereas modern Parsis are showing flexibility on various grounds like lack of Tower of Silences in remote or hill areas, decline in vultures etc. Lenny asked the Godmother about the ‘Tower of Silence’. Godmother describes it as “Dungarwadi: not Tower of Silence” (193). She blames British for its funny name of Tower of Silence. It is just a big round of wall without any
roof where the dead bodies are put inside and “The vultures pick it clean and the sun dries out the bones”(113). This traditional dokhma is considered as environment-friendly and final act of charity of the Parsis. Godmother favored dokhma on ecological as well as religious assumptions: “Instead of polluting the earth by burying it, or wasting fuel by burning it, we feed God’s creatures” (114). Lenny wishes to see the Tower of Silence. Godmother informed her reasons for the absence of dungarwadi in Lahore:

‘There are too few Parsees: the vultures would starve. But when you go to Karachi or Bombay you can see it from the outside. Only pall-bearers can go in.... We have a graveyard in Lahore.’ (114)

There is a constant controversy over the issue of dokhma on various grounds. This conflict of final rites is prevalent in Parsis today as lack of vultures also. Mini aunty expressed her opposition for it. For her it is outdated and some what horrifying: “I prefer to be buried…You know why! It gives me the creeps…The thought of vultures smacking their beaks over my eyeballs!” (114). Godmother stands for the traditional method of dokhma. She denounced Slave-sister for her anti-dokhma stand as, “I’d be ashamed to call myself a Zoroastrian if I were you” (114). Slave-sister (Mini aunty) ridiculed such religious stands and retorted satirically: “…Being devoured by vultures has nothing to do with the religion... Surely Zarathustra had more important messages to deliver…” (114). Such attitude seems against the norms of Parsi ethnicity, but at the same time it asserts the changes in the norms. Mini-aunty evoked Godmother’s anger who explained dokhma as the last act of charity of Parsis:

‘Haven’t you heard of Parsee charity? Only last month Sir Eduljee Adenwalla had his leg amputated in Bombay. Sick as he was, he sat in a wheel chair all through the ceremonies and had his leg deposited in the Dungarwadi! And what do you think happens when Parsee diabetics’ toes are cut off? Do you
think they discard them in the waste-basket and deprive the vultures?’ (115)

In this way Sidhwa very seriously contest the various opinions about traditional dokhma.

Through ayah, Lenny is exposed to various ethnic groups of India like Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu. Lenny being Parsi is identified as a member of harmless ethnic group and is appreciated by all of them. The synthesis of different cultures and unity of undivided India can be seen in the character of Ayah. She stands for unique culture of India. Her friends, who are from various ethnic groups, admire her. Ayah has great fan-following from all strata of the society irrespective of religion, cast and creed. The characters of Ayah and Lenny represent two different cultural, socio-economic classes but their strong bond harmonizes these differences in the colonial situation of subcontinent’s partition. The Ayah is undiscriminating towards all and due to this she is turned into a symbol of diverse culture of India. Lenny’s close association with Ayah takes her out of the margins of the bourgeois Parsi community and illustrates her to the heterogeneity of socio-cultural prospects of Lahore at the time of partition. Jill Didur aptly comments on Ayah and Lenny as:

Lenny’s intimate relationship with her ayah and her visits to the Sikh/Muslim village of Pir Pindo take her outside the bourgeois circle of the Parsi community and make her aware of the heterogeneous cultural context of her society at large. Sidhwa’s text figures Lenny exercising agency by questioning the hegemonic structures of meaning that infuse her “everyday” experiences. Her decentered view of the end of British rule within her local community helps to defamiliarize the dominant interpretation of history and nationalism at the time of Partition and disclose its patriarchal and majoritarian underpinnings. [1998:47]
Jill Didur’s reference to “the bourgeois circle” [Ibid, 47] can be seen as the urban elite class who estranges itself from rural crowd. It is obvious when Lenny saw the religious harmony and social synthesis in rural India (Pir Pindo). The village Choudhary defied the rumors of ethnic riots: “‘But all that is in the cities...‘It won’t affect our lives’” (55-56). It suggests that he has believed “the issue for some time” (56). Imam Din painfully expressed the possibility of “Sikh-Muslim trouble” as a result of “Ugly trouble” of “Hindu-Muslim” riots (56). Sikh granthis talked about the racial unity and denied the possibility of riots in the village: “…our villages come from the same racial stock. Muslim or Sikh, we are basically Jats” (56).

Chaudhary’s remarks on the strong bond among village ethnic groups and his observation of the contrasting communal attitudes of townsman and country-folk suggest the different attitudes. Here he asserts the division based on rural and urban settings. He describes it as:

‘But our relationships with the Hindus are bound by strong ties. The city folk can afford to fight... we can’t. We are dependent on each other: bound by our toil; by Mandi prices set by the Banyas - they’re our common enemy— those city Hindus. To us villagers, what does it matter if a peasant is a Hindu, or a Muslim, or a Sikh? ...the madness will not infect our villages.’ (56)

The remarks of the village Chaudhary have historical authenticity. A renowned sociologist, M.L. Darling, echoes the Chaudhary’s remarks when he says: “A class of Hindu money-lenders had arisen in the Punjab which had enriched itself by exploiting the helpless peasantry.” [1925:116]

Lenny witnessed the hot debate over the partition in her home at dinner party. Inspector General Rogers, Mr. & Mrs. Singh discussed current situation of partition and subsequent ethnic angst. Mr. Rogers as a representative of the empire considered the worse possibility of riots after independence. Mr. Singh accused him: “‘You always set one up against the
other... You just give Home Rule and see. We will settle our differences and everything!’” (63) Same echo can be seen in E.M. Forster’s novel *A Passage to India*. This view of Mr. Singh is highlighted by an Indian historian, M. Mujeeb: “[these] considerations made the Congress hold that the minority problem could wait till the country became independent” [1967:7]. Thus, Sidhwa portrays the changing scenario and gradual upcoming of the communal enmity in urban India as Jagdev Singh aptly writes:

> As the setting sun of the British Empire gathers its parting rays before sinking into oblivion, the lumpen element around Ayah meet less frequently at the Queen’s Park and more at the ‘Wrestler’s Restaurant’. The geographical shift in the get-together is a premonition of the emergence of the pattern of communal discord. The British Queen whose statue stands abandoned in the Park, is soon going to relinquish her suzerainty over India and the Wrestler’s Restaurant to which all flock now is a symbol of the wrestling ring that Partition is going to raise on the joint borders of India and Pakistan. [1996:170-71]

Butcher comments that initially Gandhijee very politically favored Muslims over Sikhs and then sympathized with Sikhs which resulted into confusions among common people. The Gardener concluded it as “the English mischief” (92). Butcher explained that the Hindus too manipulated one or two Muslims against the interest of larger community. Sikhs are deceived in politics. In the heat of discussions Lenny became aware of the religious differences. She noticed:

> It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves - and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just all-encompassing Ayah - she is also a token. A Hindu. Carried away by a renewed devotional fervor she expends a small fortune in
joss-sticks, flowers and sweets on the gods and goddesses in the temples.

Imam Din and Yousaf, turning into religious zealots, warn Mother they will take Friday afternoons off for the Jumha prayers. Crammed into a narrow religious slot they too are diminished: as are Jinnah and Iqbal, Ice-candy-man and Masseur.

Hari and Moti-the-sweeper and his wife Muccho, and untouchable daughter Papoo, become ever more untouchable as they are entrenched deeper in their low Hindu caste. While the Sharmas and the Daulatrams, Brahmins like Nehru, are dehumanized by their lofty caste and caste-marks.

The Rogers of Birdwood Barracks, Queen Victoria and King George are English Christians: they look down their noses upon the Pens who are Anglo-Indian, who look down theirs on the Phailbuses who are Indian-Christians, who look down up on all non-Christians.

Godmother, Slavesister, Electric-aunt and my nuclear family are reduced to irrelevant nomenclatures- we are Parsee.

What is God? (93-94)

Here Sidhwa comments how society, friends, neighbours, lovers, admirers servants, masters were categorized under the category of religion and God the supreme power has lost it hold on the human beings. But being the member of a minuscule community her community fellows were not even worth of nomenclatures. Sidhwa also describes that not only people but even jokes were categorized on the basis of religion and ethnic groups: “Cousin erupts with a fresh crops of Sikh jokes. And there are Hindu, Muslim, Parsee, and Christian jokes” (95). Lenny noticed changes in the Queen’s Garden. She noticed that people from all religion were sitting apart, separately. But the only group around Ayah remained unchanged. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee, were as always unified around
her. Here one could make observation that Ayah stands for the unity, harmony, beauty of people’s heart and mind. But in due course partition has corrupted everything and final blow was given with Ayah’s kidnapping and brutal gang rape.

Sidhwa also highlighted the minority status of the Parsis and even it is unknown religion to the most of the people in India of those days as she writes:

The Sikh women pull me in their laps and ask my name and the name of my religion.
‘I’m Parsee.’ I say.
‘O kee? What’s that?’ they ask: scandalised to discover a religion they’ve never heard of. (96)

But the revelation of Lenny’s religion caused fun for some of Hindu children who yelled at Lenny: “‘Parsee Parsee, crow eaters! Crow eaters! Crow eaters!’”(100). Lenny asked Ayah the reason. Ayah replied: “… because y’ll do “kaan! kaan!” at the top of your voices like a rowdy flock of crows” (100). Perin Bharucha comments on this matter that “It isn’t the Parsis who eat crows but the other way round. And anyway, they’re not crows but vultures to whom the dead are fed” [1986:37]. To divert the attention and soothe Lenny Ice-candy-man acted like Banya:

‘We were only seventeen; they were a gang of four! How we ran; how we ran; as we’d never run before!’ (100)

Sidhwa further explains the meaning of couplet as Lenny remembered: “A glimpse of four Sikhs, Muslims or Parsees is supposed to send a mob of Banyas scurrying” (101). This underlines the strong sense of ethnic identity and characteristics of specific ethnic group.

The fear of partition and the violence made common man to think about his safety. On Lenny’s second visit to Pir Pindo on the occasion of Baisakhi, Lenny went along with the members of Imam Din’s family to
Dera Take Singh. As they reached the village, the festivals were already in full swing. It was in the midst of these gay activities that Ranna sensed the suspicion and fear of ethnic enmity. Sidhwa captures this feeling thus:

And despite the gaiety and distractions, Ranna senses the chill spread by the presence of strangers: their unexpected faces harsh and cold. A Sikh youth whom Ranna has met a few times, and who has always been kind, pretends not to notice Ranna. Other men, who would normally smile at Ranna, slide their eyes past. Little by little, without his being aware of it, his smile becomes strained and his laughter strident. (106)

The village people came to know the vivacious and sinister designs of an attack on the village from the Granthi Jagjeet Singh. He fears about the plans of Akalis to wipe out or drive out Muslims out of East Punjab “if there is to be a Pakistan” (107). British lost their grip on Indians as their tricks (split-and-rule policy) were known to everybody. Sidhwa aptly reflects it by quoting Iqbal:

The times have changed; the world has changed its mind. The European’s mystery is erased.

The secret of his conjuring tricks is known:

The Frankish wizard stands and looks amazed.

(111) (Iqbal)

Parsis, who are charged aptly with Anglomania, too became aware of the British rule and its effect when they saw the turmoil and Hindu-Muslim-Sikh riots. Their neighbours became their worst enemies. Lenny and Yousaf happened to come across a Brahmin pandit. The incident shows Lenny the clear hints of their ethnic status as the other when the Pandit, a Hindu-Brahmin did the othering of Lenny, a Parsi and Yousaf, a Muslim. She pointed out:

Our shadow glides over a Brahmin Pandit. Sitting crosslegged on the grass he is eating out of a leaf-
bowl. He looks at Yousaf- and at me- and his face expresses the full range of terror, passion, and pain expected of a violated virgin. Our shadow has violated his virtue. The Pandit cringes. His features shrivel into arid little shrimps and his body retracts. The vermillion caste-mark on his forehead glows like an accusing eye. He looks at his food as if it is infected with maggots. Squeamishly picking up the leaf, he tips its contents behind a bush and throws away the leaf. (116-117)

Lenny thought herself as a contaminated maggot and Yousaf as composed of shit, crawling with maggots. Here Lenny learnt the greatest lesson ever that “One man’s religion is another man’s poison” (emphasis added) (117).

Sidhwa through the changing behavioral pattern of Ice-Candy Man towards Sher Singh showed the fundamental nature of ethnic behavior irrespective of emotions of shared friendship, love and longing. Ice-candy-man helped Sher Singh to evacuate his Muslim tenants preaching the lesson of friendship. Later on Ice-Candy-Man in the frenzy of ethnic riots raped and brutally killed the relatives of Sher Singh. He displayed his wrath:

‘I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur... that night I went mad, I tell you! I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I’d known all my life! I hated their guts... I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women ...The penises!’ (156)

This was the worst possibility of the revenge from someone like Ice-candy-man, who had never thought of insulting the women of his friends who shared joys and sorrows. This extreme fundamentalism destroyed the harmonious relations which were preserved, nurtured, and grown. He contradicted himself. He expressed his desire of cutting the penises of all
those Hindus and Sikhs whom he had known throughout the life. So it shows how his psyche is destroyed by the ethnic riots one the eve of the partition. Here, Sidhwa asserts that ethnic identity is so strong and so violent that with slight anxiety, it can make its presence felt and be able to destroy the other ethnic group.

Lenny witnessed the processions. Even Lenny and Adi too, walk their own processions calling “Jai Hind” or “Pakistan Zindabad” (127). All the friends were giving their opinions based on majority, money, lands etc. Sikh attendant of the zoo shouted: “The Sikhs hold more farm land in the Punjab than the Hindus and Muslims put together!” (129). Masseur pinchingingly advised him:

‘The only way to keep your holdings, Sardarjee, is to arrive at a settlement with the Muslim League,’...‘If you don’t, the Punjab will be divided... That will mean trouble for us all.’...‘You’re what? Only four million or so? ... And if half of you are in Pakistan, and the other half in India, you won’t have much clout in either place.’ (129)

Whereas Butcher added to Masseur’s advice: “The British have advised Jinnah to keep clear of you bastards!’ ...‘The Angrez call you a “bloody nuisance”!’” (129). Here othering of ethnic groups is guided by the white ethnic group. Sher Singh too, denied the presence of Muslim as necessary by calling them “bastards” (130). Masseur’s comments showing the othering of the Sikhs highlights the clear indications of the religious superiority and an effort to erase the majoritarian presence of Sikhs by denying it. Further, he underestimates the racial bravery and muscle power of the Sikh and tried to portray it’s origin as ‘a hybrid’ from the religions of Hindus and Muslims:

‘Shut up, yaar,’ says Masseur, his face unusually dark with a rush of blood. ‘It’s all buckwas! The Holy Koran lies next to the Granth Sahib in the Golden Temple. The shift Guru Nanik wore carried
inscriptions from the Koran... In fact the Sikh faith came about to create Hindu-Muslim harmony!’ (130-131)

But he soothes the atmosphere with humanistic pleading: “‘In any case,’ … ‘there are no differences among friends...We will stand by each other’” (131). Though he said so, he had shown his true color in the heat of discussion. He proved that when it comes to religion and existence human beings are bound to be brutal and vicious.

Sidhwa gives the glimpses of the paradoxes of the ethnic behaviors in the state of religious anxiety. She sketches the Sikh processions and Muslim procession complementary to it:

‘We will see how the Muslim swine get Pakistan! We will fight to the last man! We will show them who will leave Lahore! Raj karega Khalsa, aki rahi na koi!’…‘Pakistan Murdabad! Death to Pakistan! Sat Siri Akaal! Bolay se nihaal!’ And the Muslims shouting: ‘So? We’ll play Holi- with-their-blood! Ho-o-o-li with their blo-o-o-d!’ (133-134)

Sidhwa shows the paradox that these people are fighting on the basis of religion and still Muslims are ready to enjoy the Sikh and Hindu festival of Holi though with their blood. In Lahore humanity, love, caring, and human values were offered to the fire. British government distributed Pakistan to Jinnah and India to Nehru. Lenny was categorized as Pakistani: “I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that” (140). Jinnah declared his secular attitude of the Muslim state of Pakistan:

‘You are free. You are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or any other place of worship in the State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed, that has nothing to do with the business of State... etc., etc., etc. Pakistan Zindabad!’ (144)
Sidhwa portrayed Jinnah as a secular leader of the Muslim State of Pakistan, where he promised all religions can live and prosper peacefully and harmoniously. It is the irony of the later day Pakistan which is hailed as the ‘terrorist camp’ in the world, that they are misguided under the name of Jinnah and his concept of Muslim State. The subjugation of the Other nation/community is repeatedly associated with a feminization of the men and the violation of the women. Ice-candy-man reported breathlessly about the train carrying “all Muslim” containing “two gunny-bags full of women’s breasts!”(149) Ice-Candy Man too had his vengeance by raping and killing Hindu women and openly declaring the plan to kill Hindus to quench his hatred. The gardener provided information that he had sent his family to Delhi because “‘When our friends confess they want to kill us, we have to go...’” (157). Moti decided to get converted as Christian. Ice-candy-man suggested restlessly the change of name also. It suggests how he hated Hindus and Sikhs that he just wanted to erase their total identity. All the loving friends, neighbours left their homes in search of safe places. Here Sidhwa has used brilliantly the movie song that aptly had shown the feelings of parting, the agony, anxiety of going away from their homes, their friends, completely erasing their past, booting themselves to root in an alien land they had never been:

“Mere bachpan ke sathi mujhe bhool na jana—
Dekho, dekho hanse na zamana, hanse na zamana.

Friends from our childhood, don’t forget us -
See that a changed world does not mock us.” (159)

Lenny understood the meaning of the song as Rosy-Peter left Lahore for India. At the same time floods of Muslim refugees entered into Lahore and the Punjab west of the Lahore. Within three months seven million Muslims and five million Hindus and Sikhs were uprooted in the largest and most terrible exchange of population known to history. Lenny and Adi were confused after knowing their mother and aunt’s rationing of the petrol
as it was an offence. They doubted their mothers were setting the fire to Lahore. Lenny accused her mother of rationing petrol and its abuse. Mother was wondered by this revelation of Lenny. She explained her:

‘We were only smuggling the rationed petrol to help our Hindu and Sikh friends to run away... And also for the convoys to send kidnapped women, like your ayah, to their families across the border.’ (242)

This “across the border” (242) help claims Parsis as the synthesizer of Hindu – Muslim harmony in times of wrath. Here Sidhwa portrayed her community who had maintained a safe distance from the communal conflagration, act as the Messiah of Hindus and Sikhs trapped in the burning city. They, as Lenny learned later on, helped them in their transportations to India. Even Ayah was rescued by Lenny’s Godmother and was sent to her parents in Amritsar. Thus, inspired by a feeling of humanism, the Parsis shed off their passive neutrality and became the active agents of a healing process. Lenny after partition noticed the removal of cultural diversity for the cultural homogeneity of one ethnic group:

Lahore is suddenly emptied of yet another hoary dimension: there are no Brahmins with caste-marks - or Hindus in dhotis with bodhis. Only hordes of Muslim refugees. (175)

Later on Lenny noticed that Queen had gone from the garden. Now the Muslim families monopolized the garden. There were fewer women and more men as Pakistan was based on the Islam which demands women behind the veils. Gangs of fanatics were looting and destroying everything which was Hindu or Sikh, or belonged to Hindus and Sikhs. The goondas arrived in Lenny’s house looking for Hindus. They mistook ‘Sethis’ for Hindus. They wanted to ensure the conversion of Hari to Himat Ali. The Barber, “nai” (181) assured them of his conversion to Islam. To ensure the
conversion gang demanded recitation of the Kalma. Himat Ali recited it for them in the tone of chanting Hindu Mantra:

‘La Ilaha Illallah, Mohammad ur Rasulluah.’ (Italics original) (There is no God but God, and Mohammad is His Prophet.) Astonishingly, Himat Ali injects into the Arabic verse the cadence and intonation of Hindu chants. (Emphasis added) (181)

This suggests that one can’t shed off the originality or past identity of oneself when the new identity is imposed and opposed to the new one. One can’t erase one’s past totally: “that the former and present lives do not match, they quarrel, even contradict, cancel each other out” [Kuortti 1998:62]. Imam Din on oath told them that Ayah had gone. Here Imam Din comes out as the true follower of Islam who survives the humanity and compassion over hatred and communal anxiety. On the other hand Ice-Candy-Man not only kidnapped Ayah and raped her and thrown her to the wolves of the passion in the Kotha but also killed his co-religionist Masseur out of jealousy. Ice-Candy-Man very cunningly made Lenny to reveal Ayah’s hideout. Lenny witnessed the Ayah’s humiliation. Sidhwa narrates the incidents of partition violence and subjugation of the Muslims by Sikhs from Rana’s reconstruction of his memory of wounded past:

He began inching forward, prepared to dash across the yard to where the women were, when a man yawned and sighed, ‘Wah guru!’

‘Wah guru! Wah guru!’ responded three or four male voices, sounding drowsy and replete. Ranna realized that the men in the mosque were Sikhs. A wave of rage and loathing swept his small body. He knew it was wrong of the Sikhs to be in the Mosque with the village women.

‘Stop whimpering, you bitch, or I’ll bugger you again!’ a man said irritably.

Other men laughed. There was much movement. Stifled exclamations and moans. A woman screamed, and swore in Punjabi. There was a loud cracking noise and the rattle of breath from the lungs. Then a moment of horrible stillness. (203)
This is horrible how one could be so brutal and sinner to commit such heinous and sinful act in the house of God though in such rage of communal and ethnic anxiety that they can’t feel the presence of the God at least in the formal home of the God. It is what may be called as nature versus culture. Sidhwa presents the heart rendering, traumatic and nauseating picture of the partition objectively. She has not favored any religion. She has portrayed the suffering and victimization of the people from all religions whether Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh. She has humanitarian approach while sketching the bloodshed and uprooting of the people.

Sidhwa also shows that ‘forgetting’ the cruelties and adjusting to new atmosphere is the only way to overcome the grudges, whether personal or communal. Godmother said to Ayah after her recovery from red-light area:

‘That was fated, daughter. It can’t be undone. But it can be forgiven... Worse things are forgiven. Life goes on and the business of living buries the debris of our pasts. Hurt, happiness... all fade impartially... to make way for fresh joy and new sorrow. That’s the way of life.’ (262)

Godmother boarded Ranna into the Convent of Jesus and Mary as a boarder on Lenny’s insistence. It surprised Lenny how easily Rana had accepted his loss; and adjusted to his new environment. The fact of flexibility and healing the wounds which made Parsis survive in any hostile condition is expressed in Lenny’s words:

It surprises me how easily Ranna has accepted his loss; and adjusted to his new environment. So...one gets used to anything... If one must. The small bitterness and grudges I tend to nurse make me feel ashamed of myself. Rana’s ready ability to forgive a past none of us could control keeps him whole. (211)
Thus, Sidhwa very brilliantly portrayed the changing scenario of ethnic anxieties in this novel. She portrays Parsis as a synthesizer of humanity, love and compassion among the ethnic hatred and bloodshed on the eve of Partition.

IV
An American Brat

This fourth novel of Bapsi Sidhwa deals with her new experiences of a migrant as she has migrated to Canada. It is set in Lahore, Pakistan of 1970s and in USA. She 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. Sidhwa highlights the formation and maintenance of the community talk on new dimensions. It is a quest that preoccupies the immigrant caught between the world left behind and the new one he or she faces. In the novel Sidhwa explores the complexities of being a Parsi, of being a Pakistani, and of migration to the West while carrying the other two identities together. Various reasons are given for the migration of the Parsis to the West, as Nilufer Bharucha reveals with reference to India which can be co-related with Pakistan:

It is this distance between the Parsis’ elite consciousness and their downgraded position in postcolonial India, that the migrant Parsi is trying to escape. This end-of-Empire unease in the Indian Diaspora is a reason for the Westward movement by many Parsis in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. However, there is a certain degree of guilt connected with this Western Diaspora, which is a voluntary one, unlike the feeling of self-esteem generated by the forced diaspora from Iran. [Wasafiri, 1995:34-35]

The novel reflects the typical dilemmas of the Parsis today and their multiple alienations. It also reflects fractured images of their glorious past, their reduced present and insecure future. It talks of marginalization through
ethnicity and also mediated by the question of gender. In a comment on the novel, Sidhwa writes in the Indian Review of Books:

Not that the book lacks a darker side. You cannot comment on politics anywhere in the world, or on the politics within the community itself, without presenting a fairly grim picture. [1993:24]

The novel is a socio-political critique of a bleak society which suffers under political instability, military suppression and increased Islamic fundamentalism. It talks in detail of the increasing uneasiness that the Parsi community feels in Pakistan. Sidhwa discusses how there is a general descent into authoritarianism in the name of religion and how even the non-Islamic communities like the Parsis were affected by the increasing fundamentalism. She centralizes the Parsi community and examines several themes of vital importance to the Parsis in the last decade of the 20th century. Issues like colonial mentality in Parsis are one of the undercurrents of the novel. It also underlines the identity crisis and quest for security in the Parsi psyche and influence of a patriarchal society. Above all this novel examines a very controversial issue amongst Parsis, the taboo of insular marriage. In making this theme the central concern of the narrative, Sidhwa reveals her ongoing preoccupation with an issue that has very serious ramifications and implications for the Parsi community. In an interview with Naila Hussain, Bapsi Sidhwa says:

…the book deals with the subject of the ‘culture shock’ young people from the subcontinent have to contend with when they choose to study abroad. It also delineates the clashes the divergent cultures generate between the families ‘back home’ and their transformed and transgressing progeny bravely groping their way in the New World. [1993:19]
The novel deals with the Americanization of a young Parsi girl and reflects the new American theme in Sidhwa. Parsi values and beliefs can be traced in the novel.

Sidhwa comments that most of the young generation Parsis don’t know much about religious beliefs and prayers. Feroza was not much aware of her religion but had a comfortable relationship with her faith. She used to visit the fire-temple four to five times a year, mostly on New Year or on impending voyage. Feroza visited “to the trendy new agyari in the Parsee colony” (40). Zareen could not go along with her because she was having her menses as “her presence would pollute the temple” (40). Feroza said tandarosti prayer- the happy little Jasa-me-avanghe Mazda prayer in Avastan language of the Gathas. She knew its meaning from the English translation in her prayer book:

COME TO MY HELP, O AHURA-MAZDA!
GIVE ME VICTORY, POWER, AND THE JOY OF LIFE.
(42)

This is another problem of the Parsi community that Avastan language is no more understood and they have to rely on English translations of their religious prayers and gathas. All the members of the family prayed for Feroza and her safe journey. Sidhwa describes the effect of the prayers and the power on Feroza:

EVEN THOUGH SHE HAD NOT UNDERSTOOD A WORD OF THE EXTINCT LANGUAGE OF THE SACRED BOOK, FEROZA HAD BLIND FAITH IN THE POWER OF ITS VERSES AND IMBUED THEM WITH WHATEVER EXALTED CONCEPTS AND SPIRITUAL LONGING HER SOUL AND EMOTIONS PERIODICALLY REQUIRED.
(47-48)

In America after rescuing herself from stairwell darkness, Feroza surrendered herself to the God by reciting the “KEMNA MAZDA prayer” (90). In the process of Americanization Feroza once committed the cardinal sin of smoking. This pollution of sacred fire underlined her guilt. Feroza hunted out her Kusti and Sudra and said the “HORMAZD KHODA-AY
prayer” (165) to plead “divine forgiveness for desecrating the holy fire-the symbol of Ahura Mazda- by permitting it such intimate contact with unclean mouth” (165).

Parsi community has a strong belief in religious tolerance. They respect and pay homage to the saints and visit their tombs and sacred places. Zareen pays visit to the Muslim saint “Data Gunj Baksh’s shrine” (18). Sidhwa also comments how fundamentalism has overshadowed the communal harmony and tolerance. The novel being concerned with the politics of religion, Sidhwa significantly talks of how fundamentalism damaged peace in the subcontinent where all religious groups have co-existed over several generations. Zareen, despite being a faithful Zoroastrian, worshipped at the shrine of the Muslim saint Data Gunj Baksh, a sacred place of religious harmony and tolerance:

Given the medley of religions that exists check-by-jowl in the subcontinent and the spiritual impulse that sustains them, people of all faiths flock to each other’s shrines and cathedrals. They came to the fifteenth-century sufi’s shrine from all over the Pakistan, and before Partition they came from all over northern India. When Sikh and Hindu pilgrims from across the border in India visit the temples and gurudwaras in Pakistan, they never fail to “pay their respects” to the Muslim mystic known for his miraculous power to grant wishes. (18-19)

This act of Zareen can be seen as the desperate effort to conform to the religion of the nation she lives in. The variance in a language determines the ethnic identity. Manek had sold the Bible to maintain his financial status in his early days in the USA. “The moment Manek opened his mouth and spoke, the Atlanta Patel could tell from his distinctive accent that he was a Parsee.” (200-201)

Sidhwa has also mentioned the Parsi ceremonies like farewell, welcome, good luck etc, where all the elders bless the younger or
particular person for his betterment and security. Feroza was given the farewell which was an almost ceremonial occasion and an essentially Parsi affair:

She (Soonamai) stood before her granddaughter while Zareen stood at hand, holding the prayer-tray. Khutlibai put her thumb into the red paste in a silver container and left her imprint on Feroza’s forehead. Feroza leaned forward accommodatingly, and Khutlibai pressed the rice she held in her palm on Feroza’s forehead. Quite a few grains stuck to the drying paste, and Khutlibai was pleased. It meant as many blessings on the child. She next popped a lump of crystallized sugar into Feroza’s mouth, handed her a coconut, and bestowed a long list of specific blessings... God-blessed... Aa-meen! (46)

Parsi ceremonies, like this one, clearly show the cultural and religious hybridity. The first part displays the Hindu ceremony and the last word “Aa-meen”(46) is from Christianity and close to ‘Amin’ in Islam. Feroza came back to Pakistan to spend her holidays with her family. Feroza received a grand welcome in the same manner. Parsi community too believes in the good omen of a married woman, and the presence of a widow is considered inauspicious on certain religious or auspicious occasions. Khutlibai remains behind when good-luck ceremony is about to be performed for Feroza. Sidhwa describes it as: “Khutlibai, who had modestly hung back because she was a widow…” (46)

Parsi community does not allow the insular marriage. Sidhwa focuses on this aspect too in her novels. In An American Brat, this issue is prominent. Zareen insisted on Feroza’s visit to America. It made Feroza’s father anxious as he thought over the situation as forthcoming problem of insular-marriage:

Zareen might be complacent about Feroza’s taking part in a play, believing their daughter would come out of the experience unscathed to marry a suitable Parsee boy at the proper time. ...Zareen’s
complacence stemmed from her confidence in Feroza’s upbringing. Every Parsee girl grew up warned of the catastrophe that could take the shape of a good-looking non-Parsee man. Marrying outside her community could exclude the girl from community matters and certainly bar her from her faith. (17)

Manek planned Feroza’s education in the USA that was opposed by Khutlibai on the note of insular marriage and the USA’s exposure, broadmindedness and freedom which would push Feroza in the arms of a non-Parsi. It created the dilemma in Khutlibai’s mind. This dilemma of Khutlibai synchronizes the predicament of the Parsi community which is on the verge of extinction and the Parsis who are tradition bound and refuse to change. Khutlibai expressed her doubts about Feroza’s 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)

Khutlibai’s doubts aptly reflected the generation gap and changing of the time. At the same time she brings out the differences between the upbringing of male and female child:

“We don’t know what kind of friends Manek has. All I can do is pray he won’t marry some white tart. But he’s a man; he can get away with a lot. But who’ll marry a girl who’s been up to God knows what? Our elders used to say, keep the girls buried at home.” (121)

Khutlibai’s comments precisely reflect the orthodox attitude towards the upbringing of a female child and the restriction on female members of the family. Manek came to see Parsi bride for him. Khutlibai received him laughing with relief and giving his shoulder a shove after his mischievous behavior on the airport. She also revealed the fact that “in the end one is
comfortable with one’s own kind!” (196). So “one’s own kind” (196) is very important for the post-married life which is full of compromises and responsibilities. Khutlibai highly believed in the philosophy of “ours are ours!” (196). Manek expressed his desire to get married with “a Parsee girl” (203). Everyone appreciated his respect for the religion and the elders. Sidhwa also highlights the duality towards issues like marriage, as Jeroo says:

“I’ve told my Dara …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)

Jeroo’s advice to her son connotes some other implications related with the moral ethos. Dara can have “whatever fun” (203) implies the sexual extravagances “but when wants to marry… a Zarathusti” (203) is compulsory. Everyone adored Manek’s sentiments and took the racial pride. Thus Manek proved himself a champion of their community’s future by setting an example before the younger generation the Parsis. Manek married Aban in traditional way following all the ceremonies. After such a traditional wedding, Sidhwa begins her theme of insular-marriage against this traditional backdrop.

Feroza revealed Manek her plan to marry David. Manek responded maturely and tried to persuade her on the basis that “our cultures are very different” (263) (Emphasis added). Feroza wrote a letter to her parents about David, his parents. They were Jews. She also highlighted that the religious differences are irrelevant in America. They decided to solve the problem by becoming “Unitarians” (266). Zareen gave Feroza’s letter to Cyrus and told him about her desire to marry “a non” (266). Feroza’s informal tone in the letter appeared more dangerous to her parents. The letter caused uproar in the family where the argument among elders and younger clearly shows the generation differences and the changes that time
has brought. Young generation expects from their elders to move ahead with the time if their tiny community has to survive. Sidhwa writes:

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...the youngsters ...urged their uncles and aunts to enlarge their narrow minds and do the community a favor by pressing the stuffy old trustees in the Zoroastrian Anjuman in Karachi and Bombay to move with the times; times that were already sending them to study in the New World, to mingle with strangers in strange lands where mixed marriages were inevitable. (268)

This conflict between the generations was the result of changing time whereas the elders denied any change. Perin Bharucha in her novel Fire Worshippers has introduced this conflict in literature when Nariman wants to marry a non-Parsi girl. His father Pestonji Kanchwalla resists disintegration of his community. Rhoda, Nariman’s sister explains and interprets the change and new times to her parents:

And that isn’t your fault or Mama’s or any one’s, it’s the fault of the times we are living in. Everything is changing. The age of miracles is gone. There is no mystery left- no heaven and no hell, not even your Chinvd Pul. Zoroastrianism is no longer a faith to be believed, it’s just a unique cultural heritage.” [1968:194]

It is paradoxical that Parsis who take pride in themselves in being Westernized and liberated community that in fact is not so liberal. Sidhwa here portrays the Parsi community’s traditional dictum of double standards - one for man and another for woman. Man’s inter-faith marriage is
acceptable and his wife of other faith and their children are accepted into the Parsi fold. But if a woman marries a non-Parsi, she is an outcast and debarred from the community and even from the Fire Temple. The Parsis are fundamentalists to the core and the priests prove to be resistant to the change even when the community is dwindling. Freny in a very cajoling voice told tearful Bunny: “Parsee girls are not allowed into the fire temple once they marry out” (269). Elders gave the example of women who suffered due to their marriage with non-Parsis among them Perin Powri, who married a Muslim, was the prime example of victim of orthodox patriarchal Parsi community who denied her “accommodation in the Karachi *dokhma*, and the priests refused to perform the last rites”(270). Perin Powri’s body was eventually buried in a Muslim graveyard. The names of other transgressors were rehearsed, with each offense illuminating a new and catastrophic feature of the ill-considered alliance. Roda Kapadia, who married a Christian, was not permitted into the room with her grandmother’s body. She is called as a “misguided woman” (270). She was compelled to sit outside on a bench “like a leper!” (270). At this juncture, Sidhwa also highlights another aspect of this problem related with Parsi males, as a distant aunt says:

“What do you expect our girls to do? Our boys go abroad to study and end up marrying white mudums. You can’t expect our girls to remain virgins all their lives!” (271)

Sidhwa points out that since Parsi men marry non-Parsi women, Parsi women are also compelled to marry out of their faith due to lack of fellow Parsi men. Soonamai requested her thirteen year old grandson not to marry a “parjat” (271). In America Zareen enquired about David’s ancestry, “khandaan” (277). It made Feroza laugh. But Zareen considered it to be a very serious issue to her community. She expressed the fear of expulsion from community as well as becoming more religious once debarred from community:
“You’ll be thrown out of the community! Do you know what happens to girls who marry out? They become ten times more religious! ...Take Perin Powri. Like most of you girls, she never wore her *sudra* or *kusti*. After her marriage to a non, she wore her sari Parsee-style, and her *sudra* covered her hips! Her *kusti* ends dangled at the back! Till the day of her death, she missed her connection with community. She would have given anything to be allowed into the *agyari*. …They won’t allow you into any of our places of worship, *agyari* or *Atash Behram*” ((277-278)

This passion for racial purity caused great problems for Zoroastrians as younger generation Parsis are marrying outside the community. For them these are not important issues. Such “Nazi or Afrikaaner” way of thinking is outdated for them as “This is the age of democracy” and “The racial superiority humbug went bust long ago.” [Pestonji 1999:63]. Feroza intended to have “a civil marriage” (278) to keep their religion as they were “Unitarians” (278). Zareen was shocked as if Feroza was already converted. She was very anxious over her daughter’s “outcast status” (278). She persuaded Feroza:

“*It is not just a matter of your marrying a non-Parsee boy. ...your life -- it will be so dry. Just husband, wife and maybe a child rattling like loose stones in this huge America!*” ...“*It’s a different culture...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 your bones! ...You’ll disgrace the family!*”...“*Love? Love comes after marriage. And only if you marry the right man. Don’t think you can be happy by making us all unhappy.* (278-279)

In the course of her interaction with David she began to change the orthodox views and seriously thought over the reformation in Parsi Anjuman’s laws about the marriage. At such moments, Zareen yearned for David’s Parsee status or at least Zoroastrians would allow “selective conversion” (287) to their faith. For the first time, Zareen seriously
questioned the prohibition on insular marriage. She had often thought that it was unjust that a Parsee man can marry a non-Parsi woman and can preserve his faith as well as brought up his children as Zoroastrians. But a Parsee woman couldn’t do so. Sidhwa describes this inner turmoil of Zareen as:

_But she argued this from a purely feminist and academic point of view. ...How could a religion whose prophet urged his followers to spread the Truth of his message in the holy Gathas -- the songs of Zarathustra -- prohibit conversion and throw her daughter out of the faith? (287) (Emphasis added)_

Zareen came to know the problem of insular-marriage as a global phenomenon. But she lived in a country like Pakistan where fundamentalism reformation. Zareen was aware about the controversy raging surrounding these concerns in Bombay, Britain, Canada, and America “where the Parsees had migrated in droves in the past few years” (287). Sixty thousand Parsees, fifty percent of the total world population of Parsi community, resided in Bombay. Zareen believed that the Bombay Parsee Panchayat was the hub of influence on community matters. She was aware of its inclination “to be conservative” (287). She was vaguely sure that “the controversy would be resolved in an enlightenment manner (after all, her community was educated and progressive) and that she could live with its decisions whichever way they went” (Emphasis added) (287). Thus, Zareen felt herself suddenly aligned with the thinking of the liberals and reformists. She came to know that changes are unavoidable. Zareen understood the teenagers in Lahore. She too focused the need for “minor reforms if they wished their tiny-community to survive” (288). Zareen discussed the matter with Manek who advised to leave things alone so the romance would “die a natural death” (290). He also predicted the possibility of the opposite. She retorted angrily on Manek’s suggestion because Manek married a Parsi woman. Zareen declared her departure and pleaded Feroza to get married properly. Zareen offered an invitation to
David with all his relatives for the marriage at Lahore. Later on Zareen started to narrate all the ceremonies in such a way which startled and frightened him. With that Zareen took on cultural onslaught and humiliated David with his religion and its tradition in a comic way. She felt she was seeing him in his true colors:

...“we break a coconut on your head,” ...David blinked his bewildered eyes and looked profoundly hurt. “She’s only kidding,” Feroza said. “Then we have the adarnee and engagement. Your family will fill Feroza’s lap with five sari sets, sari, petticoat, blouse, underwear. Whatever jewelry they plan to give her must be given then. We give our daughters-in-law at least one diamond set. I will give her the diamond-and-emerald necklace my mother gave me at my wedding... We’ll give your family clothes--suit-lengths and shirts for the men, sari sets for the women. A gold chain for your mother, a pocket watch for your father. Look here, if your parents don’t want to do the same, we’ll understand. But we’ll fulfill our traditional obligations.” (Emphasis added) (297-98)

David controlled his anger as he realized that Zareen’s offence was not personal but communal. He knew that a Jewish wedding would be similarly a grand affair, and though he did not want to go through that either, he felt compelled to defend his position:

“My parents aren’t happy about the marriage, either. It’s lucky they’re Reform Jews, otherwise they’d go into mourning and pretend I was dead. We have Jewish customs, you know. My family will miss my getting married under a canopy by our rabbi. We have a great dinner and there’s a table with twenty or thirty different kinds of desserts, cake and fruit. Then there’s dancing until late at night.” David stopped to catch his breath and looked angrily at Zareen. “I belong to an old tradition, too.” “All the better,” Zareen said promptly, “We will honor your traditions.” (298)
This stance taken by both Zareen and David suggests that modernity is a fragile veil which can be easily unveiled by the cultural abuses and underestimating other culture. Such kind of ethnocentric attitude is aptly defined by CHAMBERS 21st century Dictionary as: “relating to or holding the belief that one’s own cultural tradition or racial group is superior to all other.” This cultural ‘othering’ and differences surely resulted into the breakup of Feroza and David’s love affair who decided that all these cultural, religious differences would never come in between their relationship. Zareen’s humiliations were powerfully affected which she was sure of the break up:

“Next, we come to the wedding. If there is a wedding,” Zareen said solemnly. ...“I thought you said the priests refused to perform such marriages.” David was sarcastic, a canny prosecutor out to nail a slippery opponent. “I know of cases where such marriages have been performed,” Zareen said, as if confessing to knowledge better left concealed. “Feroza’s grandmother has ways of getting around things -- she’s president of the Anjuman. The ceremony won’t make you a Parsee, or solve Feroza’s problems with the community, but we’ll feel better for it; so will Feroza.” (Emphasis added)(298-299)

Feroza explained David about grandmother’s status as “a tribal chief” (299). Zareen’s shock was natural because it attacked her racial superiority and modernity because:

As far as she was aware, tribesmen inhabited jungles and mountain wilderness, observed primitive codes of honor, and carried out vendettas. A far cry from the Westernized and urban behavior of her sophisticated community. (299)

This underestimating of David’s culture left him hurt. The meeting ended in great emotional theatrics with silence and changing attitudes of all three towards each other. Zareen’s performance was unbelievable and magically guided by the idea, “If you can’t knock him out with sugar, slug
him with honey” (302). David ridiculed Feroza as ZAP on the basis of her cultural heritage. But Zareen could not understand it. Feroza laughed explained to Zareen that “ZAP stood for Zoroastrian-American Princess, an innovative spin-off on JAP, Jewish-American Princess” (302). After the fiasco, Zareen boarded on the plane for the return journey. Once she was airborne, she removed the notices, papers and started reading. The message was typed in capitals:

NOTICE
PLEASE NOTE THAT ACCORDING TO THE PARSEE, ZOROASTRIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, PERCEPTS, TENETS, DOCTRINES, HOLY SCRIPTURES, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS, ONCE A PARSEE-ZOROASTRIAN MARRIES A NON-ZOROASTRIAN, HE OR SHE IS DEEMED TO HAVE RENOUNCED THE FAITH AND CEASES TO BE A PARSEE-ZOROASTRIAN. THE LAWS OF PURITY OF THE ZOROASTRIAN FAITH FORBID INTERMARRIAGES, AS MIXING PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL GENES IS CONSIDERED A CARDINAL CRIME AGAINST NATURE. HENCE, HE OR SHE DOES NOT HAVE ANY COMMUNAL OR RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OR PRIVILEGES. (305)

The notice from the religious institution compelled Zareen to realize that however her community boasts to be westernized, educated and modernized is still a fundamentalist when it comes to issues like race and purity. These educated guardians of the Zoroastrian canon were as rigid and ignorant as the fanatic Muslims Pakistan. She felt sorry as “This mindless current of fundamentalism sweeping the world like a plague had spared no religion, not even their microscopic community of 120 thousand” (305). After the great fiasco of David-Feroza love-affair, Zareen had convinced David that “the differences mattered” (309). Zareen had made David feel that they had been arrogant and immature in dismissing the dissimilarities in their backgrounds. He felt scarce, marveling whether he could manage with some of the rituals seemed bizarre. Zareen made the details horrible. He knew she was just teasing but “her attitude had
distressed and humiliated him” (309). Thus Zareen dexterously championed the cause of racial purity.

Parsi community also suffers from identity crisis. Sidhwa opens her novel with the discussion of Zareen and her husband Cyrus about their daughter Feroza. Feroza’s unParsi outlook and orthodox behavior in the fundamentalist Pakistan worried Zareen. She complains of Feroza’s “becoming more and more backward every day” (09) because of the Islamic conservatism in one way or the other and forgets her own Parsi tradition:

“I went to bring Feroza from school today. I was chatting with Mother Superior on the veranda- she was out enjoying the sun- and I had removed my cardigan. Feroza pretended she didn’t know me. In the car she said: ‘Mummy, please don’t come to school dressed like that.’ She objected to my sleeveless sari-blouse! Really, this narrow-minded attitude touted by General Zia is infecting her, too. I told her, ‘Look, we’re Parsee, everybody knows we dress differently.’ Instead of moving forward, we are moving backward. What I could do in ’59 and ’60, my daughter can’t do in 1978! Our Parsee children in Lahore won’t know how to mix with Parsee kids in Karachi or Bombay.” (10-11)

Cyrus provided the possibility of her attitude towards Zareen as Feroza probably felt “to conform, be like her Muslim friends. There are hardly any Parsee girls of her age. She wants you to be like her friend’s mothers, that’s all.”(12) Here, Cyrus’s remarks suggest that minority takes efforts to merge in the majority by confirming the majority traits. This effort to shift this marginal people to center leads to the identity struggle i.e. cultural identity. To save her daughter from this fundamentalism of Pakistan, Zareen suggested sending Feroza to America to her brother Manek. This made Cyrus anxious about another kind of loss of identity. He fears that his vulnerable young daughter would fall in love and marry a non-Parsi. So the solution to send the girl for a holiday to USA is doubtful
though later he thinks, “Travel will broaden her outlook, get this puritanical rubbish out of her head” (14). The paradox is described by Novy Kapadia as:

The paradox, here is self evident. It adds to the irony that exists throughout the novel. The Ginnawallas fail to realize that the journey to the USA (the New World) will broaden her 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 communality and the norms of a patriarchal society... 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 Ginnawalla acquires, ironically isolates her from her Parsi heritage. [1996:188]

Zareen explained at length how upsettingly “timid and narrow-minded Feroza was becoming” (31). Khutlibai abused Zareen about her carelessness towards the upbringing of her child. She also charged her about the political nonsense fired up in their house and religious carelessness. She expressed her concern for religion: “If I hadn’t been around, God knows who’d have taught my granddaughter to pray” (31).

Away from Pakistan, Feroza wanted to know all the affairs of Pakistan during and after the death of Bhutto. Her argument highlights her longing for homeland and struggle for national identity. Feroza’s reminder of her nationality shocked Zareen:

“After all, it’s my country!” Zareen did not mention the innuendo, the odd barb, that had suddenly begun to fester at the back of her consciousness. The insinuation that her patriotism was questionable, or that she was not a proper Pakistani because she was not Muslim. What was she then? And where did she belong, if not in the city where her ancestors were
buried? She was in the land of the seven rivers, the Septe Sindhu, the land that Prophet Zarathustra had declared as favored most by Ahura Mazda. What if, on the strength of this, the 120 thousand Parsees in the world were to lay claim to Punjab and Sindh? ((237-238)

Zareen found Feroza fussy over national issues in relation to her micro community. She thought it as “absurdity” (238). Sidhwa captures this alienation from national concerns. Zareen thought that such remarks were a passing thing. She blamed the fanatical Islamization encouraged by General Zia. It has supported “religious chauvinism” (238) and harassed “the marginalized people like her - the minorities” (238). The paradox of the situation is that Feroza denies marrying any Pakistani or Parsi and return to Pakistan, after her break from David. For her Pakistan is not the country where she could explore the possibilities of her individual existence and development. Sidhwa ends her novel on such a note that Feroza could not regain her former identity after gaining new American identity of universal citizen sans boundaries of religion or nation. It suggests her complete assimilation into American melting pot.

Sidhwa also commented on the attraction of sub-continent people (here Parsis) about white-skin which is called as gor a complex. Feroza in excitement of her visit to America talked loudly on telephone. Manek calls her “Third World Pakis” (26) warns her to stay away from “gora complex” (26) and to get rid of “white man complex” (26) before coming to America. In USA, Manek stopped her from offering a dollar bill to an American young man to make her aware of their status as “ignorant and dirty …bastards” (84). In college, Jo mistook Manek and Feroza as “Mexican” (147). But Manek’s revelation of their Pakistani identity changed Jo’s attitude. She answered only with more than a monosyllable. Here the racial prejudice is evident to prove that brown races are not accepted in the sphere of white circle which often lead immigrants to keep
to their own communities. Neil Bisoondath also highlights such a problem. In the story “Dancing”, Shiela James, one her arrival in Toronto, is cautioned by her sister Annie: “You must stick with your own, don’t think that any honky ever going to accept you as one of them. If you want friends, they going to have to be West Indian” [1985:198]. Though it is paradoxical here that Manek was pleased with the reactions from Jo as it helped Feroza to realize “the dimensions of the *gora* complex that constantly challenged his brown Pakistani psyche. And he’d been so prompt to accuse Feroza of her awe of the whites!” (147).

Sidhwa deals with the cultural encounter of Third World and First world. Sidhwa cleverly pictures the conflicts and differences between these two worlds. She analyzed how an individual from Third World aspire for the First World to develop himself/herself by merging their Third World identity in First World for the survival. Feroza was extremely happy and started dreaming about “the land of glossy magazines, of “Bewitched”, and “Star Trek,” of rock stars and jeans...” (27). She asked her parents innocently, “Why am I a Paki Third Worlder?” (27) The creation of third world is western capitalist product. So Feroza’s question that why she is a third world Paki can be answered when this structure is noticed:

The capitalist West as the First World, the socialist block as the Second World, and the non-aligned, the underdeveloped (the former colonies) countries as the Third World have been posited as enemies one against the other. [Purushotham K. and N.S. Rahul. 2003:45-46]

This innocence was shattered on the airport where authority abused her and Manek as lovers. This innocence is like an identity trait of the girls from the Third-world. Manek discussed about the backwardness of Pakistan and Feroza guessed the probabilities:

“Are we stuck in the Middle Ages because we were colonized? Because we are illiterate? Because we
Manek denied and explained her reasons of the backwardness, i.e. waste of time. Feroza’s consciousness of surrounding compelled Manek: “Only illiterate natives like you, from Third World countries, waste time...” (77). It occurred to her that Manek might not want to return to Pakistan. She felt a surprising and “almost tragic sense of loss” (78). She was trapped in the cubicle of YMCA building. After rescuing from it she heard Japanese man’s irritable voice. She found: “His rage was protective, fussy, Asian” (emphasis added) (94). Feroza’s observations about Manek clarified Feroza how Manek had encountered the hazards and humiliations while adjusting with the First World:

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… Manek was humbler and, paradoxically, more assured and quietly conceited, more considerate, yet she sensed that at an essential level he had become tougher, even ruthless. ...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. (102-103)

Manek taught Feroza the importance of hard work in America. Manek revealed the secret of America’s richness in its free economy and a true democracy. Feroza got offended by the mentioning of “Third World” (124). Further he added, “You and your Bhutto, with his socialist ideas, are like those lazy Communists” (124). Feroza warned him not to say anything abusive about the “voice of the masses” (124). Manek called him “Third World crook” (124). Sidhwa attacks the paternalism that marks all Western communication with the economically weaker Asian nations. Zareen
complains about the behavior of an American who tried to establish the complexity of western countries showing it as the sign of the progressed and developed nations:

“The man did not think me as a person, as somebody. I was not Zareen, just some third-rate Third Worlde, too contemptible to be of the same species... He was so cynical. He asked the most simplistic questions, as if the complexity that makes up our world doesn’t exist. I’ve never felt the way he made me feel... valueless... genderless.” (177)

Thus, Sidhwa very minutely discussed the vivid problems and conflicts between the First World and Third World countries focusing various aspects.

Sidhwa highlights the problems of immigration and related issues of assimilations and changing patterns of one’s identity after adopting the culture and the language of one’s host country. She focuses on the dark as well as bright aspects of one’s host country (here USA) and how it helps the immigrant to develop the personality after due explorations of one’s individual talents and possibilities of progress. Feroza’s visit to USA was fixed under the guidance of her uncle Manek. Khutlibai opposed it because of his quarrelsome relations with Feroza in childhood. Zareen assured her mother about his responsible and dependable personality and maturity to look after Feroza in an alien country. Sidhwa talks about the outlook of Parsis towards the Parsis who had migrated abroad. She also highlights the double standards concerning male and female migrants. All Parsee boys as the future of the community were accepted as geniuses until they turned out to be “nincompoops” (39). This is calculated in terms of money, business and social reputation. For this community stands up with financial, business, engineering, doctoring, accounting, stockbrokering, computing, and researching masterminds, of course male. Girls are not considered worthy to these measures to they are confined to home. If they
insist to go abroad to study, they were allowed to do so “either to prepare them for or divert them from marriage” (39).

Landing in New York, it was the new world for a girl like Feroza. When she asked for the help to a young man, he stared at her. Sidhwa exposes Feroza to the cruel and harsh realities of life when she lands in America. On the air-port she was harassed by an immigrant officer. Immigration officer exceeds his bounds and abuses Manek, as her lover. Feroza being a typical oriental (Pakistani) girl, where the respects for the elders is observed, was not able to put up with the way immigrant officer handled her mother’s nightgown. Manek advised her that she had to learn to stand so many things in this world. Feroza reacted violently. In oriental countries respect is given to elders in everything. Feroza felt humiliated due the maltreatment of her mother’s clothes. She scolded Manek for that as: “Look. You didn’t stand up for your sister’s honor. So don’t shout at me for defencing her izzat” (66). But Manek being in America has changed his notions of these all thing and in a very casual way he suggested to forget such “honor-shonor business” in America (66).

Sidhwa describes vividly the impressions a new arrival has about modern America. Adam L. Penenberg rightly calls the novel, “a sensitive portrait of how America appears to a new arrival” [1994]. This was the first step towards the Americanization of Third World Paki girl, Feroza. For the first time in her life Feroza saw the glamour in the world. Such an advanced, lighted cities, skyscrapers, traffic, roads etc. She was fascinated by all these. America had mesmerizing effects on her mind. Feroza witnessed “a rich slice of the life and experience she had come to America to explore” (83) as well as “the callous heart of the rich country” (81). Manek planned for Feroza’s education in USA. He chose completely puritanical environmental university of Salt Lake City for her to protect her virtues and values to assure her granny and parents. Even Coke and beer were forbidden in the state governed by Mormon values. Even Khutlibai
would appreciate the sobriety of Mormon principles. Manek felt that the junior college and the size of the city would ease her assimilation into the American way of life. Manek through letter described Khutlibai, Zareen, and Cyrus about the Mormon faith. Idaho State did not allow the liquor, striptease, prostitution, discos and all forms of provocative dancing. Even tea or coffee was not served in most restaurants as it contains caffeine. He left it to them to assume that “a community that forbade even coffee was not likely to permit promiscuous sex” (139).

Manek promised her to treat with free dinner in McDonald. But both of them were badly humiliated. Feroza was ashamed of what had happened. On the other hand Manek told her to be humble and not to be proud to feel the humiliation. He taught her “to get over culture shock” (144) and to “learn humility” (144). He showed her American way of life. Manek observed her licking rice off her fingers in an Indian restaurant. He cautioned her not to do it because following one’s cultural habit in USA is hailed as inferior and coarse:

“You’ve got to stop eating with fingers,” he said. “It makes them sick.” …“It’s very nice and cozy to be ‘ethnic’ when we’re together, but those people won’t find it ‘ethnic’, they’ll just puke.”(145)

Here, Manek’s remembering of his home atmosphere and its irrelevance in America can be described what Irwing Howe has identified nostalgia as “the real reason for the expatriate’s need to evolve ethnic origins” [1978:174].

Sidhwa points out that the loss of mother-tongue is inherent in diasporic experiences. Rushdie too, talked about the ‘loss of language’ as one of the undercurrent in diasporic discourse:

Manek had not spoken Gujarati in so long. He relished each word and enjoyed the sound of his voice uttering the funny little phrases that have crept into the language since the Parsees adopted it almost fourteen hundred years ago, when they fled
to India as religious refugees after the Arab invasion of Persia. (68-69)

Though here, Sidhwa is talking about the ‘Farsi’ which Parsis lost when given refuge in India and adopted Gujarati as mother tongue. So a migrant can suffer again and again when he/she is moving from one place to another.

Manek was happy that Feroza was living with Jo because Feroza could learn more from her about the American ways. Sidhwa describes the conditions of Jo and Feroza when they were trying to talk in a normal tone. Jo was surprised when Feroza talked in a very humble manner and typical British accent. Sidhwa comments that extreme politeness in speaking with Americans is suspected as the appeal for charity. This difference in outlook towards the public interaction is the outcome of oriental and occidental mind-set. Feroza asked very politely to see some items from the store and the woman replied: “You’ll have to pay for it. This isn’t the Salvation Army, y’know; it’s a drugstore” (150). Jo scolded Feroza, “Y’gotta learn! You don’t have to take shit from trash like her!”(151) Within few days, Feroza adopted the American pronunciation: “Hey, you goin’ to the laundry? Gitme a Coke!”(154). Feroza also learned the coarse and abusive language like, “motha-fuka” (154).

A Parsi girl like Feroza had never shown any part of her anatomy. But in USA she is highly impressed by the American life. When Jo undressed, Feroza would change direction. When Jo talked to her in a state of semi-or entire nakedness, Feroza avoided her or gazed fixedly into Jo’s eyes. But Feroza could not avoid all these natural passions, though strictly supervised in Parsi families by the hordes of elders specially, mother, grandmother, aunts etc. Feroza soon realized that all these things are natural in other cultural atmosphere i.e. American. Sidhwa portrays Feroza’s realization of sexual desires. She relished the thought of copulation with pink, soft bodies as well as dreamed the close physical
relationship with the “fully clothed, hard, brown bodies of the men she had had crushes on in Lahore” (152). Such thinking would be considered as the sign of ill or vulgar mind in her own country. Though Feroza changed her attitude and outlook towards American life style, she never got over of her feelings of guilt. Jo instigated Feroza into American life i.e. she flirted modestly with young men, began to drink the wine. Feroza wondered and enjoyed the freedom that American has offered to “independent and unsupervised lives of young people in America” (164). In their company Feroza thought “she had taken a phenomenal leap in perceiving the world from a wider, bolder, and happier angle” (164). In this way Feroza was Americanized. In the process of Americanization, she even committed the cardinal sin of smoking. Feroza started living with David. In course time, their physical intimacies were grown up. They indulged in sexual intercourse. It was kind of exploration of Western life and culture. These close physical intimacies between Feroza and David show that Feroza was not comfortable with Shashi because they shared the “common culture” (256) whereas David has released her from the “baffling sexual limbo” (256). Both of them were captivated by “the otherness of the other-- the trepidation, the reticence imposed on them by their differing cultures” (256).

When Feroza returned Pakistan for a few days she found herself alienated from her motherland. This alienation was the direct result of her assimilation into the melting pot of USA. Feroza completely sheds off her Parsi Pakistani cultural identity. She is completely absorbed by American multicultural mosaic society. Her understanding of America’s immense possibilities of progress compelled her to defend America. Sidhwa writes:

Feroza, who had been scathingly critical of America, of its bullying foreign policy and ruthless meddling in the affairs of vulnerable countries, in her discussions with her roommates and the new friends she had met through Shashi, found herself defending it in unexpected ways. Which other
country opened its arms to the destitute and discarded of the world the way America did? Of course, it had its faults-- terrifying shortcomings--but it had God’s blessings, too. Feroza was disconcerted to discover that she was a misfit in a country in which she had once fitted so well. (239)

This division of her identity raised the questions of her belonging. She no more identified herself with fundamentalist and patriarchic communities of Pakistan. Feroza in her due stay in USA witnessed the racism, poverty among American people. She also found gender, ethnic bias in American society. It was like she witnessed miniature Pakistan in USA. This experience is aptly pointed out as:

**Coming to the First world, it is not altogether free from the characteristics of the Third World. The backwardness and the race and the gender-based exploitation in the First World is as predominant as it is in the Third World.** Similarly, within the Third World, there are the ruling classes that are at one with the First World in their typology. In other words, some of the characteristics of the Third World can be seen in the First World, and *vice versa*. It can be argued that the Third World features, namely the backwardness and the exploitation based on caste, class, race, gender and religion- within the Third World get submerged in the tripartite division. [Purushotham, K. and N.S. Rahul, 2003:46]

Thus Sidhwa reveals another feature of the American experience. Sidhwa also dealt with the problems of changing identity in migrated country by changing the names according to the host country. Manek handed his business card to Feroza with his new name as it was difficult for the people at work. For them it is “too foreign” (260) making them uneasy. But being “Mike” (260) is like “one of the guys” (260). This urge to assimilate complete into the American ethos can be traced in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* where narrator says: “If you look like them and talk like them and think like them then you are them” [Atwood 1983:113]. Sidhwa suggests that in a foreign country, assimilation and adaptation is
very necessary. But here Manek had completely changed his identity to become “one of the guys” (260). It also connotes his loss of identity i.e. ethnic, cultural, religious, national and individual too. Here, Manek in his obstinate enthusiasm to disguise himself as *them* renounces all that is his – his inherited culture, beliefs, language and sensibility, he risks being a “free floating… citizen of the world” [Atwood 1983:113].

Another problem which immigrants suffer from is the sense of loss of one’s people. But in the host country immigrants too always communicate through formal organizations of the ethnic groups where they celebrate every occasion and try to relive the homeland. Aban complained about her loneliness in America:

*…they conversed about the Parsees they had met in Houston. There were almost four hundred Parsees, if you counted the suburbs, and the community organized functions almost every month. (262)*

When Feroza visited David’s parents, Feroza observed their culture and noticed some of the cultural similarities in it like breaking bread, sharing salt: “-- these concepts curled in her thoughts with comforting familiarity-- they belonged also to the Parsee, Christian, and Muslim traditions in Pakistan.” (257)

During her visit to USA, Zareen realized that one night Feroza was not in her cot. For the first time, Zareen suspected that her daughter probably slept with David. Zareen feared the ultimate loss and accused Feroza of losing her virginity. Feroza shouted, “I’m perhaps the only twenty-year-old virgin in all America… Examine me if you want!” (292). This incident made Zareen nervous and regretted sending Feroza to USA. Zareen complemented Laura and Shirley as “decent girls” (299) without boyfriends focusing on studies alone. But it caused great shock to Zareen when she came to know Feroza’s explanation of their being “lesbians” (299) and Laura’s detailed explanation of their relationship. Zareen came to know Feroza’s loss of innocence and acquisition of “worldly wisdom”
Zareen was shocked to witness this transformation in Feroza because she had been properly brought up into “respectful, sexually innocent, and modest” (300) Parsi family.

Feroza noticed the changes within her as well as her point of view of the world after her break up with David. She knew that the way her life bloomed and fallen apart in America would be put together in America itself. Feroza suffered “the sense of dislocation, of not belonging” (312), which was more intense in America, but at the same time she too came to know: “it would be more tolerable because it was shared by thousands of newcomers like herself” (312). Feroza realized that her experiences in America have transformed her immensely: “She was dislocated, perhaps forever, like the clock in Strasbourg Cathedral” [Gallant 1981:204]. Feroza’s attitude completely changed towards life since she became flexible and more optimistic, self-asserting, and self-confident:

There would never be another David, but there would be other men, and who knew, perhaps someday she might like someone enough to marry him. It wouldn’t matter if he was a Parsee or of another faith. ...It really wouldn’t matter; weren’t they all children of the same Adam and Eve? As for her religion, no one could take it away from her; she carried its fire in her heart. 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 Parsees that no one would know if she was married to a Parsee or a non (emphasis added). There would be no going back for her, but she could go back at will. (317)

In this connection Novy Kapadia writes aptly: “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 USA instead of the settled life, family and every contentment at Lahore.” [1996:191]
Most Parsis identified themselves with British, and considered themselves different from Indians during the Raj. Both the Parsis who migrated to West and the stay-at-home faced severe identity confusion. In the West, they found themselves being grouped together with other subcontinental Asians- an identity they were trying to escape. In Indian and Pakistan too they came up against the hegemonic community.

Thus, Sidhwa very minutely highlighted various themes, issues, problems and dilemmas concerned to her Parsi community. In this way Sidhwa has focused various issues regarding her miniscule community i.e. insular marriage, dokhma problems, conversion, minority, subaltern status, political passivity, post-colonial crisis of identity etc. which caused the ethnic angst for her community. All her novels chosen for this study, show variety of ethnic anxieties Parsi community suffers due to internal or external factors.