Chapter V

Female Agency and Empowerment: Assertion of Self in An American Brat

An American Brat is remarkable in that it reveals the diasporic identities of the women, as against the traditional gender roles of the women in Pakistan. If in The Crow Eaters the displacement is within the sub-continent i.e. form Lahore to Central India; in Cracking India from Lahore to Amritsar; then in An American Brat from Lahore to New York. Sidhwa unequivocally deals with the theme of immigrant experience, cultural consciousness and marginalisation. Interestingly, the novel problematises the concept of the fixed identity, indicating the valences of the representations of the women in the novel. Sidhwa has presented the multiple representations of women of colour, in contrast with the fixed, monolithic colonial representations, which render them incapable of reacting to the oppression. Such fixed politicized representations result from power relations and are highly motivated. A major issue of Sidhwa’s writing involves various dimensions of culture. If on one hand, she examines the dissimilarities between a number of ethnic and religious groups from Pakistan and India, then on the other hand, she also explores the cultural differences between the people of entirely different nations, one highly civilized and the other Islamic conservative country. The clash of cultures, of the two countries U.S.A. and Pakistan, evolves into generational strife between mother and daughter in the novel. Also through her characters, Sidhwa appreciates the different types of poverty in the East and to the surprise of the East, in the West as well.

The novel has Feroza, a 16-year-old young girl at its centre. Her troubles centre around her love for an American who is outside of her faith and the effort by her mother to prevent the couple’s marriage. Feroza depicts the difference in culture, as she is both attracted to and repelled by many aspects of American culture and society.
Sidhwa has always been regarded as a feminist and a realist writer who effectively addresses issues of cultural differences, and the place of women in the society of Indian and Pakistani. One can see, in her women characters, the strength of passion, the tenderness of love, and the courage of one’s convictions. They struggle to overcome the hurts of time and escape the grip of fate in whose hands they are often mere puppets. Both *The Pakistani Bride* and *An American Brat* examine the cultural conflict through the strong characterizations of the protagonists in the respective novels. *An American Brat* is a compelling delineation of both the coming of age process and the immigrant experience in the United States.

The novel deals with the small Parsee community in orthodox Pakistan, and the problems of the lives of Parsees as members of a marginalized minority population. It is concerned with the socio-political situation of Pakistan and draws on subcontinental religious and political history which forms the back-drop for the story. Feroza depicts the experiences of people migrating from then underdeveloped Indian subcontinent to the developed American. Apart from Feroza, the other characters like Manek, Zareen and Satish too are able to construe the extensive polarity between the two cultures when they live in America. However, America with all its merits and demerits work differently for different individual.

The outward opulence of America strikes the characters upon their first visit and it is definitely love at first sight especially compared to the poor country they are coming from. With the passage of time, the wonders of the physical world give way to deeper psychological alchemy that transforms their outlook. Living in America, the characters discover that there is much more to America than its mere outward charm and they realize how this beauty is man-made. Slowly but steadily, they, by reforming themselves through a series of mental conflicts and gradual adoption of reasonably logical American values, succeed in securely fastening themselves to what was once a fancy world to them. At the end of the novel, we see
them acquired more by the New World and distanced from their own. Their conservatism and marvel for their country goes over a sea-change and then there is no coming back for them. However, in the heart of hearts, they carry their ethnicity and faith wherever they go. One can say, they have their piece of cake and eat it too! Their faith, culture and language are borne in their hearts yet they enjoy the extra benefits which only progressive values of America and its assured success can offer. Thus, when nostalgia for own people, mother tongue, way of life and country haunt, they return to their roots for a vacation and when individual independence asserts they go back to America.

“When I was her age, I wore frocks and cycled to Kinnaird College. And that was in ’50 and ’60 – fifteen years after Partition! Can she wear frocks? No. Women mustn’t show their legs, women shouldn’t dress like this, and women shouldn’t act like that. Girls mustn’t play hockey or sing or dance!” (AB 10)

The lines told by Zareen to Cyrus with regards to the retrogressive outlook of Feroza, on account of Islamicization of Pakistan under the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, exhibits the overall concern of a community that enjoys a repute of being progressive in its outlook and belief. The apprehension of Zareen is the outcome of Feroza’s objection of her mother’s coming to her school in her sleeveless sari-blouse. Feroza’s bigotry and her conservative thinking makes Zareen believe that “She’s becoming more and more backward every day.” (AB 9) She persuades Cyrus to send Feroza to America for three or four months as “Travel will broaden her outlook, get this puritanical rubbish out of her head.” (AB 14) Both expect that Manek, Feroza’s uncle, will look after her there. In Parsi English Novel: Within the Subcontinent and Beyond, Jaydipsing Dodiya writes: “This act of apparent audacity arises from concern over Feroza’s conservative attitudes, which stem from Pakistan’s rising tide of fundamentalism.” (93)
The novel is a matriarchal assertion of ‘Self’ defying the patriarchal attempts to shackle and minimize the autonomy of female in a society that is male obsessed, and where patriarchal set is dominant. The deteriorating situations of women and the retrogressive elements like Mullahs in Pakistan, after the arrest of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, begin to affect even the life of the Parsees, living in the country. This disquietude of the Parsee community is obvious from Zareen’s talk to Cyrus in *An American Brat*:

Could you imagine Feroza cycling to school now? She’d be a freak! Those goondas would make vulgar noises and bump into her, and the mullahs would tell her to cover her head. 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 to mix with Parsee kids in Karachi or Bombay. (*AB 11*)

Sidhwa, being a Parsee, induces her culture, belief and traditions, and even the orthodoxies of her community in her works. She handles the change in theme and locale, expertly, with a lot of humour and from a coeval perspective. Sidhwa has dealt with the theme of inter-community marriage as well as the shoddy condition of the women in the Pakistani society. What makes *An American Brat* an interesting novel is that in addition to the story of how the protagonist fares in a foreign land, the novel deals with other deeper themes like modernity versus tradition, isolation versus assimilation, tolerance versus parochial and also third world versus first world. It is Sidhwa’s humour, irreverence, sharp characterization and confident outlook which enable her tackle present day problems like fundamentalism, expatriate experience, cultural clashes and inter-faith marriages amongst the Parsees, with great aplomb.

Amit Kumar Dubey in *Fictional World of Bapsi Sidhwa* writes: “In *An American Brat*, she focuses on the chequered history of Pakistan, especially the years of the tyrannical rule of
General Zia-ul-Haq during which a theological state based on obscurantist and fundamentalist Islamic doctrines is sought to be created.” (85) During the military rule of Zia, there was significant amount of political and military repression of the people in Pakistan. The autocratic rule of Zia was legitimised by using Islamic doctrines. In Fire in the Heart, Uppinder Mehan expresses his view that by the depiction of Zia rule and mentioning of Bhutto-family, Sidhwa “. . . contextualizes Pakistani politics in a personal immediacy lacking in her representation of politics in America.”(109) Sidhwa, as a keen observer, depicts the socio-political reality of the time and how politics was being amalgamated with the marital law and religion: “In Pakistan, politics, with its special brew of marital law and religion, influenced every aspect of day-to-day living.” (AB 11) Zia-ul-Haq imposed numerous restrictions on his countrymen that began to affect the lives of the Parsees as well. The most damaging effect of the conservative outlook fell upon women. Zareen tells Cyrus: “I’ll dress the way my mother dresses, and I’ll dress the way my grandmothers dressed!” (AB 13)

Parsee as a community is acclaimed for its broad and progressive outlook. At a time, when the fundamental ideology in Pakistan begins to cloud the innocent mind of Feroza, her mother makes up her mind to send her daughter to U.S.A. in the hope that it will helpful in changing and transforming her daughter in a progressive girl with broad outlook and thought. For the east, U.S.A. is a dreamland, a gateway of prosperity and a place where great future awaits. In Migration and Bapsi Sidhwa’s An American Brat, Dr. Lata Mishra aptly writes: “American culture is apprehended as modern, rational, efficient and democratic as opposed to the culture in Pakistan.” (26)

Sidhwa highlights the South-Asian youngsters’ infatuation of visiting America which is like dream come true for them. While talking to Manek, Feroza is overjoyed. Her exclama-
tion with joy mirrors the dream and aspiration of the South-Asian youth to have an access to migrate to U.S.A. Sidhwa narrates:

Feroza slipped under her quilt fully dressed, her eyes wide open, her mind throbbing with elation. She was going to America! She found it difficult to believe. She repeated to herself, “I’m going to America, I’m going to America!” until her doubts slowly ebbed and her certainty, too, caught the rhythm of her happiness.

To the land of glossy magazines, of “Bewitched” and “Star Trek,” of rock stars and jeans … (AB 27)

Khutlibai’s opposition of sending Feroza to U.S.A. reflects the prejudice and misconception of the people of her age towards the modern life style of U.S.A. that is thought to be a life of open sex and licentiousness. Khutlibai expresses her concern to Zareen: “The there was pregnant with unspeakable knowledge of the sexual license allowed American girls and the perils of drink and drugs. Compounding the danger were vivid images of rapists looming in dark alleys to entice, molest, and murder young girls.” (AB 30) She even accuses Zareen of ignoring her duty as a mother: “You’ve never shown much sense where Feroza’s upbringing is concerned.” (AB 31)

The Parsees willingly or unwillingly bear a repute of the Diaspora for several subjective and objective reasons—whether for personal gain, or to keep intact the sanctity of their religion. Feroza’s migration to U.S.A. is a fragmentary yet realistic portrayal of the characteristics of the community which she belongs to. The varied problems, confronted by her in America while assimilating the way of life there, are the quintessence of what her forefathers confronted after being migrated from Iran, and it is an assertion of the experience of the novelist as a writer who herself has been a Diaspora, shifting from Karachi to Lahore, and then to
U.S.A. The chief focus of the theme in the novel is on immigration. In *The Fictional World of Bapsi Sidhwa*, Amit Kumar Dubey writes: “. . . She describes the story of a young protagonist Feroza who straddles between two distant cultures and civilization.”(86)

In *Bapsi Sidhwa’s An American Brat*, Dalia Gomma aptly writes: “Feroza’s growing-up story is interwoven with her going-to-America story to portray the protagonist’s struggle with the Islamization of Pakistan and the opposite notions of choice and individualism in the U.S.” (71) Feroza goes through some initial soothing experience as she lands in America. What she observes from the airport lounge is quite contrary to her native country, and quite quintessence to what the people of the third world imagine and dream about America: “The orderly traffic of rushing people, the bright lights and warmed air, the extraordinary cleanliness and sheen on floors and furnishings, the audacious immensity of the glass-and-steel enclosed spaces dazzled her.” (AB 54) But, Feroza soon steps into bizarre experience while she is cross-questioned by the immigration officer who showers her with a number of questions:

“What is your uncle’s occupation?” her interrogator asked. “Can he support you?”

“He’s a student. But he also works at two other jobs to make extra money.”

She had stepped into the trap. Didn’t she know it was a crime for foreign students to work, he asked. Her uncle would be hauled before an immigration judge and, most likely, deported. She would have to go back on the next available flight. He knew she was a liar. She had no uncle in America. Her so-called “uncle” was in fact her fiancé. He wished to point out that she was making false statements; would she now speak the truth? (AB 61)
Chawla 165

Feroza now realises that she is away from the boundaries of her native land in an alien country. “It was Feroza’s first moment of realization—she was in a strange country amidst strangers. She became quite breathless. The line behind her was getting restive; some in it were already looking at her with the distrust and hostility reserved for miscreants.” (AB 54-55) The immigration officer’s quizzing appears to be a maltreatment based on cultural bias, undergone quite often by the people of the third world while travelling to America. It indicates the numerous other problems faced by the non-American in America. She finds herself all alone amongst the strangers, but “. . . the collective feeling of anonymity among strangers offers Feroza a paradoxical sense of freedom.” (Gomaa 73) After being upset by severe treatment, Feroza bursts with anger and said: “To hell with you and your damn country. I’ll go back!” (AB 64) Feroza’s immigration ordeal eventually comes to an end when Manek assures the officer about Feroza’s return when her visa expires, and to present all the necessary documents about him to dispel his doubts manifested by him. Feroza, whose day passes with a bitter experience at Kennedy Airport, her first night at the YMCA is also an unpleasant one: “Outside their room, the night was full of unfamiliar smells and alien sounds that kept Feroza’s eyes wide awake and her breath tentative. She fell asleep to the shrill, eerie cry of the sirens that patrol New York, just when she was convinced she would never sleep at all.” (AB 68)

Feroza’s frightful experience at the immigration soon fades away, but the next morning in YMCA, Feroza escapes from sexual harassment when she confronts two man who lewdly rush towards her saying: “How ya doin’, baby? Ya wanna poke?” (AB 70) Feroza clutched her toothbrush as a weapon, snatching her bag as she tried to elude them the other man tries to clog her way and says obscenely: “Howja like it if I rub it up against ya?” (AB 70) Feroza manages to evade their capture, and succeeds to track down their room. It is a dawning realization for Feroza, the harsh reality of an alien country: “And sure enough,
Feroza soon discovered that when she passed close to the men hanging around in the building, it was more likely than not they would mutter something obscene, fill her ears with the kind of abusive talk the man in the restroom had frightened her with.” (AB 71) It was a terrifying experience for Feroza, as in The Fictional World of Bapsi Sidhwa, Amit Kumar Dubey views that it “exposes the lurking danger in free culture.” (93) The same afternoon, Manek takes Feroza to Bloomingdale’s, a large departmental store in New York City:

It was like entering a surreal world of hushed opulence festooned by all manner of hats propped up on stands and scarves and belts draped here and there like fabulous confetti. The subtle lighting enhanced the plush shimmer of wool and leather and the glowing colors of the silk. Feroza felt she had never seen such luxuriant textures or known the vibrant gloss of true colors. And it was merely the entrance foyer that had affected her so. (AB 73)

Sidhwa has vividly portrayed the various places of historical importance in the novel. Manek takes Feroza to numerous places in New York. They visit Lexington Avenue, all the major museums, Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, the Twin World Trade Towers, and Wall Street. In Lexington Avenue, by the smelling of sweat in air, Manek presumes as if there is the presence of any Indian or Pakistani there: “I bet there’s an Indian or Paki in the room. One can smell a native from a mile.” (AB 73) Finding Feroza smelling the odour, he asks: “Don’t you use deodorant?” . . . “That’s the trouble with you desis. You don’t even know what a deodorant is, and you want to make an atom bomb!” (AB 74) Sidhwa’s use of irony is apparent here with regards to the attempt of making atom bomb by Pakistan amidst the scarcity of basic things in the country.
Manek, as the custodian of Feroza, strives to improve her niece’s mind, and makes her acquainted with the new culture. He ushers her on a tour to all the major museums in New York:

They visited the Museo el Barrio, devoted to Hispanic-American art, and the Jewish Museum in the Warburg Mansion. The spectacular Guggenhein, with its impressive spiraling interior, delighted Feroza more than the paintings on its curving walls. They took a bus to the Museum of Modern Art and even dashed off to the Military Museum in the permanently docked aircraft carrier Intrepid on the West Side. (AB 75)

Like a Guru, Manek preaches his disciple, Feroza the worth of time, and makes her known how much importance is given to time in the American life, and explicates why third world people are backward: “It’s because we squander time! It is the single most precious commodity besides money, and we act as if we are millionaires in eternity. But time is running out … and time will catch up with you. Then you’ll say —” (AB 77) Sidhwa draws her readers’ attention towards the American way of life that is quite contrary to as prevailed in the third world countries where people have ample time to peep into other’s matters. When Feroza becomes embarrassed by Manek’s teasing remarks for dissipating time on Fifth Avenue gazing the strands of pearls and diamonds, and while she asks him to behave properly as people were looking at them, Manek utters: “They are Americans. They will not waste their time on usssss. Only illiterate natives like you, from Third World countries, waste time …” (AB 77) Feroza’s androgyne makes her assertive, and she kicks Manek in his shins. She hissed: “You Third World native yourself! It’s my time, and my life, and I’m answerable to no one but my parents and my God!” (AB 77)
Sidhwa portrays a dark and squalid side of American life in the novel. When Feroza and Manek suddenly find themselves in Eight Avenue, Feroza is absorbed in the squalid atmosphere, with widespread titillation. Feroza is astonished when her uncle draws her attention towards a male whore- an American-style eunuch. She gains the knowledge about the other side of American life, like pimps with their gold chains and open shirt collars, and mini-skirted prostitutes. She notices young men of about twenties and thirties in jeans, sneakers, windbreakers, and warm-up jackets in the corners: “... It was like surveying a clandestine army of commandos. People seemed to converge suddenly on key figures and as swiftly move away, as if quick transactions were being accomplished. Feroza felt a sinister prickling in her spine. She felt she had descended into a pit and was looking at something she was not meant to see.” (AB 79-80) She comes to know through Manek about the gang of the drug mafia. In Port Authority bus terminal, Feroza observes the poverty, shabby and unkempt men and women, laying cardboard boxes to sleep there. She was accustomed to see all this in Pakistan, but here in America, it is a shocking realization for her, a sort of disillusionment:

But those were smells and sights she was accustomed to and had developed a tolerance for. This was an alien filth, a compost reeking of vomit and alcoholic belches, of neglected old age and sickness, of drugged exhalations and the malodorous ferment of other substances she could not decipher. The smells disturbed her psyche; it seemed to her they personified the callous heart of the rich country that allowed such savage neglect to occur. (AB 81)

Feroza comes to know that “America is not all Saks and skyscrapers.” (AB 81) Manek takes her to Times Square, known for theatres, cinema, and bright light, adorned with billboards flashing their neon in various colours. It is quite contrary to what Feroza observes on Forty-second Street: “... and her lighted heart thrilled to the rhythm of the garish lights,
to the sights of Japanese tourists taking jewelry, scarves, tacky T-shirts, and buttons. Feroza felt it all represented a rich slice of the life and experience she had come to America to explore.” (AB 83)

Manek suggests Feroza to go for breakfast at window-shop around the YMCA. When Feroza returns to the YMCA, after breakfast, she finds a long line of people waiting for the elevators. She chooses the line, quickly being absorbed through open doors into an elevator. Feroza becomes aware of her mistake when the elevator stops directly on the twenty-second floor, the level reserved for the women only. She approaches a woman who had got off with her. The woman urges her to go down again, and to take the correct elevator that goes to the fifteenth floor. Seeing Feroza caught in a dilemma, the affable woman offers her to take the fire-stairs, and giving her a push, she closes the door. The air, inside, was fetid with the sniff of cigarette smoke and food, and a whiff of urine as well. She tries to open the door but is unable to do so. Finding no escape, Feroza begins to move down the stairs. She feels entirely disorientated, she tries the doors to open on different floors, she yells for help, but to no avail. She begins to feel suffocated, she also feels panic rising within her. She begins to scream for help, but there was no response:

Feroza felt the skin on her scalp tighten and lift the roots of her hair. She tried to dispel the dreadful illusions her fear had bred by deliberately recalling images of the well-lit halls, the building crowded with people, the bustle on the streets, and the acres of shops stretched round the YMCA. She whispered the one hundred and one names of Ahura Mazda like an incantation: One Who Relieves Pain and Suffering, The Lord of Desire, The Causeless Cause, The Cause of Everything, The Creator of All That is Spiritual, The new world gradually commences to yield novel experiences to Feroza empowering her
which she otherwise was deprived in the veiled society of her country. The empowerment of the female agency, through Feroza, defies the boundaries meant for the confinement of her individuality. The Undeceived, The Forgiving …

Then her panic gave way to a more focused fear: a self-preserving fear that permitted her to assess her situation.

Someone was bound to hear her sooner or later. She had no other recourse. She banged on the door again and, more in control, shouted, “Is anyone there? I’m locked in the stairway. Can anyone hear me? Open the door, somebody. (AB 90-91)

Finally, her frightening screams are heard by a Japanese man who opens the door of the fire stairs and rescues her from the terrifying experience of her life. The man, scolding for her irresponsible act, warns her of what might have happened: “Never do that . . . Never! You could be murdered . . . No one would know. All kind of shitty people . . . drugs!” (AB 94) Manek’s consoling words help to normalise her from the trauma. Manek, next, takes Feroza to Boston, the largest city of New England. Feroza is mesmerised by the green landscape of the place that helps her to forget the reminiscence of the stairwell horror and, as in The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa, Suman Bala writes, “Feroza realizes that she had been marooned in that hell for only half an hour” (218).

As soon as Manek is ascertained about Feroza’s arrival to America, he shifts to a two storey three-bedroom house in Somerville near Union Square. The house is shared by five Pakistani and Indian students; one of the Pakistanis was Jamil. Seeing a huge luggage with Feroza, Manek acquaints her with another aspect of American life. He criticises Feroza saying: “The family’d better learn to travel light if they want to come to America. There are no
coolies here to carry memsahib’s trunks up and down on their heads. If Jamil and I develop hernias and premature prostate conditions, it will be because of your ridiculous luggage.” (AB 97) Manek finds Feroza growing so brazen and shameless when she begins to assert herself before Jamil, narrating the incident in which she had kicked on the sensitive part of a ruffian who was posing and staring at her at Al-falah Cinema in Lahore. Manek recollects Feroza’s recent behaviour after her arrival in America, how disrespectful and insolent she has been towards him. He resolves to improve her manner. While driving across the Charles River with Feroza in his fifth hand, two-door 1971 Ford convertible, as Manek begins to tell about the fitness of his car, Feroza interrupts him again. Manek castigates her:

There you go, interrupting again. You won’t even let me finish a sentence. I don’t know when you desis will learn good manners. If there’s —”

“What do you mean, ‘you desis’! What’re you? A German?

Manek lifted both hands from the steering wheel in a gesture combining exasperation and disgust.

Feroza, who had a mind to express herself more fully, curbed her speech.

After a half-minute of absolute silence, Manek said, “As I was saying, if there’s one thing Americans won’t stand, it’s being interrupted. It’s impolite. It’s obnoxious. You’ve got to learn to listen. You can’t cut into a conversation just as you like. You’ll be humiliated. Learn from someone who knows what he’s talking about. (AB 101)

Manek takes Feroza around Boston. They visit Up Commonwealth Avenue, through the streets of Beacon Hill, shops and salons on Newbury Street; drive along the Public Garden and down Malborough Street. Later, the same evening, in the Holyoke Center, at the
square, while sipping coffee as the Americans do, without cream or sugar, Manek, Jamil and Feroza assume that they have become part of the gaiety of the privileged people of America: “The heady sense of freedom, of youthful happiness, deepened in Feroza.” (AB 105) While coming back to the car, Feroza unconsciously begins to gaze at women, Manek dissuades her to do so. He tells Feroza: “You’re embarrassing them. If you look at them, they have to smile back. It’s like holding a gun on them or something. It’s rude.” (AB 108) Manek sticks with his task of improving Feroza’s aberrant behaviour. The very next day of their visit to Boston, Manek takes Feroza to the improvised bathroom in the dark basement, piled with boxes, furniture, old bags and with stored belongings. With a rusted shower and a large cockroach sliding along the edge, Feroza scarcely managed to take her bath and hastened to the room. She bangs into the room and hurls a slipper and then a book and another slipper towards Manek. She bursts out: “You didn’t even mind the door!” (AB 110) Manek urges her:

If you’d behaved yourself, I’d have shown you how our shower works. Or taken you to the good bathroom. Don’t think you can be smart all the time and get away with it. You behaved disgustingly in front of my friend yesterday. Let this be a lesson to you. There will be many lessons till you learn to behave properly. You have to learn that in America you don’t get something for nothing. (AB 110)

In the afternoon, Feroza is compensated by Manek who takes her to M.I.T. She is impressed by visiting the centre of learning where her uncle belongs to, and Manek feels relieved by her response. He also treats her with juicy lobster of Maine at Legal Seafood. In the evening Father Fibs, the story teller, his wife Mrs Fibs visit Manek on his invitation to dinner, accompanied by Jamil and few other students dwelling downstairs. Father Fibs appreciates Feroza’s manner of speaking. Like a philosopher, Father Fibs makes them realize the realities
and challenges of life in America. He exhorts them that struggle and hard work would make them stronger:

“You think you are already flying?” Father Fibs paused, looked long at them, and slowly shook his head. “No. You are protected innocents, secure in your chrysalises. When you leave your universities, you will test your wings. You’ll fly and fall, fly and fall.” His lithe hands weaved and turned, showing beige palms. “It will hurt. You’ll be frightened. Don’t be. Your wings will become stronger.” (AB 116)

Feroza realizes that being this far from her country, it is a test for her to cope with strangers and mysterious rites in America. On the other hand, Manek conjectures that Feroza is the first of the nieces and nephews who are ready to migrate as soon as they are grown up. He feels his responsibility in widening her niece’s outlook, and to improve her mind. He is keen to assist his younger kin with his experience:

From the moment of Feroza’s arrival in New York, Manek had begun mentally to chalk out a program for her future. Although it was not a conscious exercise to begin with, it had bloomed into a full-fledged vocation in a couple of weeks. The call involved not only Feroza’s education and the development of her personality but also her induction into the self-sufficient, industrious, and independent way of American life. (AB 118-19)

Manek reckons that being the citizen of the Third World; their vision is narrow and disoriented. He opines that Feroza should make optimum use of the opportunity of her being in America, as visa rules are getting stricter everyday and to visit America, in times to come, might be a demanding task. He makes up his mind to strive for Feroza’s better future in America. After Manek’s persuasion to study in America, Feroza gives her consent, and they
both write long letters home spelling everything out with regards to Feroza’s admission in college. While driving to the MacDonald’s at Porter Square, when Manek asks Feroza whether she has taken any decision regarding which college she is going to apply to, Feroza replies in negative. Her lethargic attitude makes Manek urge:

The first lesson you learn in America is ‘You don’t get something for nothing,’ Manek said. “If you want to get into the right college you have to work for it. Nothing is given to you on a plate. You don’t know that, because nobody works in Pakistan. Not your father, your grandfathers, or your uncles. They think they work, but compared to America, everyday’s Sunday. If you want to be independent and enjoy the good life, you have to get into the habit of working. ( AB 123-24 )

To Feroza, Manek divulges the secret of success Americans have acquired through their hard work, and how fast paced the American life is. Because of Feroza’s persistent behavioural denialism, Manek is goaded on to think: “You’ve got a lot to learn. Never mind, I’ll teach you.” ( AB 125 ) Manek despises Feroza’s act of immersing while watching the artefacts at the Museum of Fine Arts of Raphael. He begins to realize that Feroza is growing ingratitude, and her respect for him is also on decline. On their tour to the museum in Salem, Feroza is again stuck gazing the Eastern miniatures and Persian rugs. Manek is amazed to see her still at the same spot. In order to make her to be self reliant and gutsy, Manek leaves her at the museum. Feroza manages to stumble upon Manek’s car with the help of the police officers. Manek tells her:

I’ve taught you a very important lesson: how to look out for yourself.”

Manek’s insinuating voice was superimposed on her thoughts. “You’ll have to cope with all sorts of unexpected situations. This has taught you more about
America than six months of pampering. You’ll see, you’ll gain confidence. You can’t rely on anyone but yourself if you want to live in this country — not even on me! (AB 135)

Manek receives information from various colleges he had written to about the admission of Feroza. He finds Boston College the best as it is near for him to be available in the hours of need and counsel for Feroza. Instead, Feroza prefers to a college in California. But, they both eventually agree for junior college in Twin Falls, Idaho as the college offers a stipend: “Manek felt that the junior college and the size of the city would ease her assimilation into the American way of life.” (AB 138) Idaho is in Mormon territory, a state that does not permit the sale of liquor, nor does it allow striptease, prostitution is restricted here, discos and provocative dances are deterred, restaurants do not even serve tea and coffee as tea and coffee are source of caffeine. Considering all this, Feroza’s parents consent for her admission in the junior college in Idaho.

Manek sets up the schedule of their tour to Twin Falls. He wishes to pack Feroza’s mind with worldly wisdom in the short span of time she sets off for the college:

“You’ve got to skim what you can off the system, otherwise the system will skin you. I learned this the hard way,” said Manek the Sage. “After the accident, I had only the tuition money. Hardly any insurance. It would’ve taken our family seven generations to pay the hospital bills. It taught me many things. It’s lucky for you I’ve taken the knocks and you’re reaping the rewards. I’m giving you a crash course. It’s the best way to get over culture shock. Pampering only prolongs the agony. I didn’t have anyone to take my hand and guide me and say, ‘Look, sweetie, this is how you open a wrapper,
and this is how you open a jar!’ But you’re young, you can be molded. You’ll
do all right if you learn humility. (AB 144)

Manek finds the city and the college as he had anticipated. He finds the campus at-
mosphere affable, placid and morally good. The amiable tone of voice of the counsellor puts
Feroza at ease: “Emily tucked Feroza’s arm beneath her protective wing and walked them to
the neat, two-storied brick-and-glass dormitory. Feroza found its simple straight lines elegant
and architecturally satisfying.” (AB 146)

Feroza is introduced to Jo, her roommate, who takes over the role of Feroza’s men-
tor hereafter. Jo becomes instrumental in converting Feroza from orthodoxy to American way
of life. Feroza’s scrupulously polite way of speaking causes the salesman at Walmart mis-
takes her as if she were craving in charity. Sidhwa humorously narrates this incident:

Feroza read the labels on each and, holding the can she had selected timidly
forth, nervously adjusting the shawl that had slid off her shoulder, ventured,

“May I have this, please?”

You may not. You’ll have to pay for it. This isn’t the Salvation Army,
y’know; it’s a drugstore. (AB 150)

Feroza’s roommate Jo and her life style begin to astonish her, who occasionally swigs
liquor, and is a shoplifter as well, whose ethical unorthodoxy and behavioural traits as well
are horrifying: “Feroza, nothing if not inquiring, realized she was going through a rare and
unusually enlightening experience. And she was as loath to abandon the challenge, daily un-
raveling new and unexpected insights, as any of her intrepid and fierce-eyed foremothers
would have been.” (AB 154) Jo teaches her pronounce American English words like “may-
nayze” for mayonnaise and “mother-fuka” in lieu of mother-fucker. She causes Feroza to re-
hearse sentences like “Gimme a lemonade. Gimme a soda,” and corrects her of saying “May I have this – may I have that?” As the first term is over, Jo and Feroza decide to get out of the restrictions of dorm and to shift to an off-campus apartment. Feroza is ecstatic at the thought of living independently with Jo. While living there, Feroza comes to know that Jo fetches young men from various places to her room. Feroza finds herself uncomfortable and awkward with the boys in the company of Jo. Jo convinces her to be accustomed to such things. Sidhwa writes: “At Jo’s insistence, Feroza asked for a glass of wine the next time and nursed the drink all evening, taking small sips. Feroza discovered that she became less self-conscious, more comfortable, and that it mattered less what impression she made, whether she spoke or was tongue-tied.” (AB 163) Jo’s life style gradually begins to influence Feroza. She becomes more and more extrovert, and her dose of wine is now doubled. She considers it an extraordinary step on her part to know this new world. Sidhwa writes:

As the pressure of constraints, so deeply embedded in her psyche, slightly loosened their grip under Jo’s influence, Feroza felt she was growing the wings Father Fibs had talked about, which, even at this incipient stage, would have been ruthlessly clipped in Pakistan. Feroza was curious to discover how they might grow, the shape and the reach of their span. This was her secret, this sense of growth and discovery, and she did not want to divulge any part of it, even to Manek. (AB 164)

At the insistence of Jo’s friend, Feroza smokes a cigarette while she was a little drunk, an act against the teachings of her religion, a community known as worshipper of fire. Later that night, Feroza realizes her mistake and begs for divine forgiveness for her misdeed against the belief of her community. It is obvious that the roots of her religion are still intact in her psyche as a guiding force.
Jo’s company Americanizes Feroza at large. She learns what independence and rights are. Jo’s company makes her understand Americans and their culture. It is Jo who makes her acquainted with America and American way of life, at the same time, Feroza too stimulates interest in Jo with regards to the country where Feroza belongs to. Sidhwa writes: “And while Feroza was groping to understand America through her friend and her friend was beginning to grasp the reality of a world that existed outside America, an American in Pakistan, in an unexpected encounter, filled Zareen’s heart with fear and loathing.” (AB 172)

Sidhwa exposes the harsh realities of American life through the character of Mike, the druggie boyfriend of Jo. At first, Mike lifts Feroza’s gold chain, and then, Jo’s electric clock is stolen. One day, when Feroza returns from her chemistry class, she finds her TV and typewriter is missing from the room, and Jo’s stereo system, speakers, computer and its monitor are also missing. Later, for Jo’s amazement Mike accepts his deed of stealing all those things from her apartment.

Manek returns to Pakistan after a lapse of four years. He feigns of being hurt in his jaws by wrapping them with white bandages. In typical Gujarati idiom used by his community he says, “Speaking this wretched English all the time has worn away my jaws. Don’t anyone dare talk to me in English!” (AB 196) Khatalibai reckons it Manek’s yearn and infatuation for their culture. She tells: “Now I know why you haven’t picked up an American wife! Say what you like, but ours are ours! Didn’t I tell you– in the end one is comfortable only with one’s own kind!” (AB 196)

Manek rhapsodizes over American way of life sharing his observations and experiences as an expatriate. He talks about Americans’ habit of squandering food, and tells how the American poor devour better food in comparison to the rich in Pakistan. Manek depicts the extravagant life style that Americans lead:
You can drink water straight from the tap without worrying how many cholera and jaundice germs you’re swallowing. You can have tub-baths ten times a day if you want to: there’s no shortage of water. The landlord usually pays for it, and for the electricity. Everybody keeps their lights and air conditioners on all the time. Huge football stadiums and offices and shopping complexes are air-conditioned all summer. You have to wear a cardigan indoors, one forgets what summer is: it’s as if you are always at a Hill Station. The same thing in winter; everything is centrally heated and you can walk about in shirtsleeves. (AB 197)

Meanwhile, Manek begins his mission of searching suitable Parsee bride for himself, and finds himself married with Aban, a Parsee girl from Karachi. On the other hand, Feroza visits Jo’s family in Boulder, Colorado.

The highly liberal outlook of the American social life is shown when Feroza meets Jo’s parents Mr. and Mrs. Miller. She finds Jo’s parents extremely understanding and hospitable in nature that draws her attention towards the unpleasant behaviour of her aunts and uncles in Karachi and Lahore where “everybody considered it their bounden duty to offer up advice on how to conduct every aspect of your life, undeterred by lack of qualification, expertise, or experience.” (AB 208) On the contrary, Mr. and Mrs. Millers exercise remarkable restraint while dealing with the matters of their children. The congenial atmosphere of their home and the polite and friendly relations Mr. and Mrs. Millers with their daughters that provides enough freedom of thought overwhelms Feroza with amazement: “And, surprisingly, even though Feroza found the Millers’ way of life admirably tolerant and eminently desirable, she could not imagine it transposed to any community, whether it was Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, or Parsee, in her part of the world.” (AB 209)
Sidhwa reveals another significant aspect of the American life in *An American Brat*. At Denver, Feroza sees a number of children, all nieces and nephews of Jo, bustle around Jo hugging and kissing her. Later, she comes to know that some of the kids are foster children. She tells her that the children are assigned the care of her brother on contract by some upper class people. What she sees and hears from Jo is incredible and bewildering: “It was so unlike anything in Pakistan. She had never heard of children being sent to foster homes. If a man could not for some reason provide for his family, usually because of sickness, death, or some other calamity, his wife and children would be provided for by relatives. Children were not given up for adoption or “farmed out,” so long as there were family members alive.” (AB 212)

Denver casts a spell on Feroza with its high skyscrapers twinkling with lights, sharp edged wall of mountains looking impressive at the time of sunset. She decides to attempt for her admission at the University of Denver for the undergraduate course in hotel management. Jo also consents to do the same. After few days, they are informed of the acceptance of their applications by the University of Denver. Both of the girls rent an apartment in a building near the campus. It is here where a new phase of experience in Feroza’s life begins. She meets Shashi, a lean, handsome, dark brown faced Indian boy who is a year senior to her in the hotel management program. Shashi helps her by providing his notes and copies of the assignments and term papers of the previous year, introduces her with his Bangladeshi, Shri Lankan, Tibetan, Pakistani, Indian and several other friends of diverse countries. Feroza now begins to make friends on her own, finds herself experiencing a new sort of experience at Denver, and she thinks “that she was in the right place and that her life would bloom – now appeared affirmed.” (AB 215) Shashi emboldens Feroza to work as an assistant to the bartender. It is a highly valiant step on her part being a Parsee and more especially a Pakistani Parsee, as:
There were no waitresses in Pakistan, only waiters. Since there were no bars, there were no bartenders. Even had the jobs been available and the stigma attached to them had not existed, Feroza would have found working at these professions in Pakistan intolerable. Her slightest move would attract disproportionate attention and comment, for no other reason except that she was a young woman in a country where few young women were visible working. (AB 216)

Manek returns to America with his wife; and in Denver, Jo leaves her hotel management course for the sake of her boyfriend, Bill. Feroza now shifts to an apartment with Rhonda and Gwen, one white, the other black. Shashi visits them but Feroza’s relationship with Shashi is not a sexual one, but romantic: “They kissed when they were out alone and indulged in light and playful petting. But Feroza never felt as though she might be swept away by a grand passion, or that Shashi might want her to be. This restraint was also supported by the taboos that governed the behaviour of decent unmarried girls and of desi men.” (AB 230) Feroza and Shashi could never cross their ethical boundaries that restrict them in their sexual advance and confines their relation to merely friendship.

After the graduation program in hotel management, Shashi gets himself enrolled in the master’s program in business management. As the fall term reaches near, the students get themselves busy in exams. They commence their planning to leave their dormitory and rented apartments for the upcoming winter vacation and begin to plan for Christmas. Feroza makes her mind to go to Lahore for the vacation.

Amidst the exhilaration and excitement of her returns to Pakistan, Feroza is welcomed with garlands and gets a warm welcome on her return home, and all the Parsee rituals are performed. Sidhwa reveals varied social and religious customs of her community. An egg is
moved round Feroza’s head by Zareen which she cracks on the floor as sacrifice. A red paste mingled with rice is smeared on her forehead and Ahura Mazda’s blessings are invoked. Zareen blesses her daughter: “May you go laughing-singing to your in-law’s home soon; may you enjoy lots and lots of happiness with your husband and children.” (AB 234) Khutlaibai cracks the joints of her fingers on her temples, and then Feroza enters her home. The family throngs around her as warmheartedly as Manek had been. Feroza becomes aware of the changes taken place all around. Time has caused great transformation in the people and places. Her grandmothers now appear older; Khutlibai has also stopped dying her hair. Feroza describes about her adventures in America that causes Zareen to look at Feroza in amazement whether she is “the same timid little thing who had refused to answer the phone.” (AB 236) It makes Zareen think over her past decision of sending Feroza to America but seeing Cyrus utterly relaxed at the absolute change of Feroza causes Zareen to keep her thoughts confined to herself.

Feroza’s realisation of her grandmother’s inability because of her ripening cataract and being dependent on others produces feeling of sadness and sympathy for her. She also realises that the sacrifice of her hero Bhutto has been forgotten by the people. She finds that Islamic fundamentalism has overpowered the life of the people. The plight of women has worsened because of the Zina Ordinance. In the case of sexual assault, woman is being charged with fornication. To prove herself a victim of rape, woman is made produce four “honourable” male eye-witnesses or eight female eye-witnesses, in lieu of which the rapist is escaped most of the time: “Yet there were many apologists, upright men learned in jurisprudence, who agreed with the letter of the law, if not its spirit. They produced a litany of precedent and dire argument to support the verdicts. The gender bias was appalling.” (AB 237) She finds that some of her friends were pursuing for their graduation degree from the Kinnard and Lahore colleges, some of them have left for the villages of their forefathers, and a few
have got married and immersed in their household talks. It appears to her as if “. . . she was a misfit in a country in which she had once fitted so well.” (AB 239) Feroza discloses her intention of going back to America for her graduation. After initial negation, Zareen consents: “Okay, baba, finish your studies,” Zareen said. “I know how obstinate you are.” (AB 240)

Feroza spends her remaining days in Pakistan with her friends and relatives on their invitations to lunches, dinners and breakfast as her farewell parties. The life in Pakistan is static and dull, while it is fast in U.S.A. In Migration and Bapsi Sidhwa’s An American Brat, Dr. Lata Mishra writes: “In Feroza’s Pakistan relation to time and place is the opposite of the one in America. At Lahore Feroza has no goal, no hurry, no task, no direction . . . In America her time is structured around a task and a logical method.” (28) When she is on her back flight, she becomes ecstatic to learn that envelops gifted to her by her relatives contain a little over seven hundred dollars, astronomical sum of money to buy a decent second-hand car. Her arrival is welcomed with surprise by Gwen and Rhonda. She comes to know from Gwen that Shashi visits nearly every day to know about her arrival. The next day, Shashi meets her. He informs her about the arrival of his brother and sister-in-law, Mala who is there to deliver her baby in Denver so as to ensure the baby the citizenship of America if it required in future. Feroza meets Deepak and Mala the same evening in their apartment. A week later, she hears the news of Mala’s premature baby girl’s birth that is put in an incubator.

Feroza gets her driving license renewed, scrutinises the classified ads, and consults her friends. On the suggestion of Rhonda and Gwen, she goes to inspect a two year old hand gear Chevette owned by David Press. When she first meets David in his garage, she feels “Her heart pounding, she blushed and stammered something inaudible.” (AB 245) In the bar, while dancing with David, she feels “as if she could not sustain herself without David’s support. She felt David’s heartbeat against hers, sounding loudly in her ears, and she wanted that
sturdy heart to beat and beat forever like that, close to her . . . ( AB 252 ) Feroza falls in love with David.

Through Feroza-David episode, Sidhwa brings before her readers one of the major issues of her community. She reveals the psyche of the youth of her community that is reluctant to cross the boundaries of cultural bondages, a community where mixed marriages are considered as threat for the very existence of the community. But, Feroza, far away from the cultural and social confinement, experiences a new wave of zeal in her life:

Ever since Feroza had met David and bought his car, every atom of her being seemed weightless, and the very air she moved in was buoyant, and with every breath she inhaled happiness.

It was one thing to love. But to be loved back by a man who embodied every physical attribute of her wildest fantasies, with whom she could communicate even without speech, who understood the sensitive nuances of her emotions that were so like his own insecurities, was akin to a transcendental, fairy-tale experience. ( AB 255 )

Feroza and David’s emotional intimacy draws them towards their physical intimacy. They touch each other tenderly. Feroza, who belongs to Pakistani-Parsee family where women have to observe the conservative approach in the life, begins to peel off the layers of fundamentalism from her life and outlook. With the advent of David in her life, her Americanism is towards its completion: “. . . And the instinct that had guarded her before, now let her go as David released her from the baffling sexual limbo in which Shashi’s cooler rhythm and the restraints of their common culture had set her adrift.” ( AB 256 ) Feroza and David belong to two extremely different cultures which keeps them under a sort of reserve.
Feroza gets an opportunity to visit to David’s parents, and join a Sabbath meal in Boulder. Feroza is welcomed whole-heartedly by David parents Abe and Adina. Feroza realises that their life is entirely centred on David as he is “obviously their pride, hope, and happiness.” (AB 256) She keenly watches the rituals associated to Sabbath meal. She sees David and his father worn small round Jewish caps on their heads. Adina covers her head with a scarf, she lights candles, and covering her face with her palms, she offers prayer. Though the rituals are Jewish, they are akin to how Feroza’s mother and grandmother perform while praying before the atash. Thereafter, a short prayer is uttered holding a Kiddush cup of wine which is passed to everyone to have a sip: “It was the first time that Feroza had been confronted with the fact that David’s religion was different from hers. So far, she had refused to think about it. She wondered what David’s parents had thought of her and what they might have said to their son. How would her family react when they found out?” (AB 257)

Feroza gets an opportunity of disclosing her relationship with David to Manek while she goes to spend her Charismas vacation in Houston who has bought a new three-bedroom house on the outskirt of the city. One day, after the dinner, Feroza accumulating courage tells Manek and Aban about her love affair with David. Manek is stuck dumb by the revelation made by Feroza. He tells her:

“I suppose these things are bound to happen when one lives here for long. But I don’t think the family will understand that.” He paused, marshalling his thoughts, and Feroza remained quiet.

“I think you have to be sure first. Give it time . . . There’s no big hurry. He’s probably the first man in your life . . . Manek stole a glance at Feroza. Her face was set in the haughty mold he knew so well. “It all seems wonderful now, but marriage is something else: our cultures are very different. Of course
I’m not saying it can’t work, but you have to give it time. We’ll keep in touch on the phone, see how it goes?” Manek ended on a tentative note, at last looking directly at Feroza. It was a caring look, and Feroza felt a surge of relief and gratitude.

“I wish you have brought up the subject earlier,” Manek said. (AB 263)

A deep emotional intimacy, between Feroza and David, develops when Feroza moves to live in David’s house, in a recently vacant room. Their emotions for each other gradually heightens more and more; and their relations much more complex. A Parsee girl, influenced by Islamic fundamentalism, who was sent to America to be cured of that menace, and who is expected to follow her cultural norms and restrictions, crosses the socio-cultural boundaries of her community under the influence of the liberal American life. At the deep level of her psyche she knows that what she is doing is wrong: “Feroza was riven by bouts of guilt. Once when she was sneaking back into her room at three o’clock in the morning with her shoes in her hand, she wondered if she was the same girl who had lived in Lahore and gone to the Convent of the Sacred Heart.” (AB 264) Lovesick Feroza ultimately makes her mind to get wedded to David, and as such writes a letter to her parents in Lahore. In Marriage, the Ultima Thule of Woman’s Life, Indira Bhatt aptly writes:

Bapsi Sidhwa portrays the predicament Feroza in An American Brat faces, Sidhwa focuses on the issue of inter-faith marriage in Parsi community and highlights the Parsi traditions and culture, the orthodoxy of the elders and the parents and the double standards vis-a-vis the inter-faith marriage of the sons and daughters of the Parsi community. (245)

Feroza’s letter causes a tumult in the family. Cyrus feels that: “the casual note their daughter had adopted stabbing his heart and guts like so many daggers.” (AB 266) All the
relatives are summoned to discuss the grave crisis looming over the family. The decision of Feroza to marry outside the community was a serious issue for the whole family. Sidhwa writes:

For the subject was much larger than just Feroza’s marriage to an American. Mixed marriages concerned the entire Parsee community and affected its very survival. God knew, they were few enough. Only a hundred and twenty thousand in the whole world. And considering the low birth rate and the rate at which the youngsters were marrying outside the community — and given their rigid non-conversion laws and the zealous guardians of those laws — Parsees were a gravely endangered species. (AB 268)

In an interview with Naila Hussain, Sidhwa tells that An American Brat “… delineates the clashes the divergent cultures generate between the families ‘back home’ and their transformed and transgressing progeny bravely groping their way in the New World.” (19) The opinions of the youngsters, who are the representatives of the new order and mouthpiece of protest against the conservatism, are quite contrary to the elders in the family who are the stubborn adherent of old order of the community. In fact, youngsters do not find anything disastrous in Feroza’s decision of marrying outside the community:

“They politely informed their parents that times had changed. They 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.” (AB 268)
Jeroo and Behram’s daughter exclaims: “For God’s sake! You’re carrying on as if Feroza’s dead! She’s only getting married, for God’s sake!” (AB 268) Fenny auntie urges them saying that if Parsee girls marry outside the community, they are not allowed into fire temple. She tells them about what happens to Perin Powry who had married a Muslim and died four years later: “Perin Powri’s body was denied accommodation in the Karachi dokhma, and the priests refused to perform the last rites.” (AB 269)

Zareen flies for Denver, Colorado. After a long journey, the plane lands at the Mile High city. Zareen looks out through the window of the plane; she sees “the mountainous, almost uninhabited spread of the new country, so different from the crowded vistas of her flights over Lahore and Rawalpindi with the untidy rectangles of flat roof-tops and flat fields.” (AB 273) When she comes out, she is welcomed by Feroza accompanied with a young man in long pants and long-sleeved shirt, in short haircut wearing steel-rimmed glasses. Feroza introduces him as David. Zareen watches him with astonishment: “The little knot of happiness and love in her heart was nudged aside to make room for a harder substance as Zareen assessed her adversary. The photograph had been misleading. David bore little resemblance to the confident, actorishly handsome image. His shy blue eyes blinked with anxiety to be liked behind the un-adorned squares of glass.” (AB 274)

The next day Zareen gets an opportunity to talk to Feroza with regards to her marriage. She informs her about some proposals of her marriage received from various Parsee boys living in Lahore and Karachi. The discourse between Zareen and Feroza reveals the clash of two generations, one is of the elders that gives utmost importance to the socio-cultural values, and makes attempts to preserve its so called sanctity, and the other is of the youngsters, always ready to free the wings from the traps of the religious and cultural restrictions:
“You know what we do when a proposal is received,” Zareen continued, ignoring the change in her daughter’s regard, warned though that she must be more guarded in her choice of words. “We investigate the boy’s family thoroughly. What is his background? His standard of living? His family connections?”

A well-connected family conferred advantages that smoothed a couple’s path through life, and not only their own life, but the lives of their children! What did she know of David’s background except that his father worked in some Con company? Of David’s family connections? His antecedents?

“What do you mean, ‘antecedents’?”

“His ancestry, his khandan.”

“Oh, you mean his pedigree?”

“If that’s how you like to put it.”

“Don’t be absurd, Mum,” Feroza said. “If you go about talking of people’s pedigrees, the Americans will laugh at you. (AB 277-78)

Sidhwa portrays the role of matriarchy in the victimization of women in the face of Zareen who tries utmost to thwart Feroza’s attempt of marrying David, not letting her cross the socio-religious boundaries whether it is by hook or crook. She tries to persuade her how a new bunch of Parsee in-laws would become the source of joy for the whole family of theirs. Instead, she is trying to deprive them from their rights of such joy: “What will you bring to the family if you marry this David? His family won’t get involved with ours. But that doesn’t matter so much . . . What matters is your life—it will be so dry. Just husband, wife, and may
be a child rattling like loose stones in this huge America!” (AB 278) Zareen feels sorry for her decision of sending Feroza to America, as she has become an American brat. She is also amazed by Feroza’s use of churlish language.

Zareen realizes the depth of affection between her daughter and David when David touches Feroza’s nose with his thumb during their visit to an abandoned mining town. She wishes that David were a Parsi or “Zoroastrians would permit selective conversion to their faith.” Seeing Feroza’s happiness at stake, the mother in Zareen yearns for reforms in her community. In Parsee English Novels, Jaydipsing Dodiya writes: “Zareen is now trapped in a dilemma. She finds David admirable and appealing. Yet she is also aware that such a marriage would deprive her daughter of her faith, heritage, family and community.” (96) But, Zareen’s momentary bent towards David is jolted by the letters sent from Pakistan which are enclosed with two pamphlets titled “WARNING” and “NOTICE” sent by the Athornan Mandal, the Parsee priest’s association Bombay whose head is Dastur Feroza Kotwal, the other is from the Bombay Zoroastrian Jashan Committee. Zareen is scared at the thought of her daughter being deprived of her faith if she marries David. She realises that “… he would deprive her daughter of her faith, her heritage, her family, and her community. She would be branded as an adulteress and her children pronounced illegitimate. She would be accused of committing the most heinous sacrileges…” (AB 289)

When Zareen tells Manek about her helplessness to handle the situation, he replies matter-of-factly “Our young people are bound to marry out.” (AB 290) It shows that the crossing the socio-cultural boundaries by youth in such circumstances is inevitable and they can go to any extreme. The trend of interfaith marriages has such a rapid rate in overall world scenario that a community like Parsee that is thought to be at the verge of extinction takes it as a severe threat. And as such, the elders and authorities of the community try their utmost to
prevent such marriages. Zareen realizes David’s introversion and reserve. She asks David if
they are bent to marry with each other then, he should come to Lahore to get married, accom-
panied with his parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts. She tells him:

We’ll have the madasara ceremony first. You’ll plant a mango tree. It’s to en-
sure fertility. May you have as many children the tree bears mangoes. In all
ceremonies we mark your foreheads with vermillion, give you envelopes with
money, hang garlands round your necks, and give you sugar and coconuts.
They’re symbols of blessings and good luck.

. . . 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. ( AB 297 )

Zareen’s obnoxious remarks hurt David for being highly communal instead of per-
sonal. He tells her that even his parents are against their marriage. He states that he too be-
longs to an old Jewish tradition. Zareen is able to distract David from the thought of marrying
Feroza. In fact, she is able to “slug him with honey”. David starts calling her “Apple of
Mommy’s eyes”, and a time comes, when there is no talk between Feroza and David. His
feelings for Feroza undergo a change: “He felt inadequate, wondering if he could cope with
some of the rituals and behavior that, despite his tolerant and accepting liberality, seemed bi-
zarre.” ( AB 309 )

The result of Zareen’s effort came in the form of break-up between Feroza and David.
David’s passion of love for Feroza gets cooled. He goes to California to join a job in a firm.
Feroza’s spirit is extinguished. She appears as if without any enthusiasm but she does not col-
lapse, she keeps her nerve and resolves to continue in America: “She must put it together again, heal her lacerated sensibility. But she could only do the healing right here...” (AB 311) She decides not to slide backward but to move ahead amidst the feeling of dislocation and not belonging to. She decides to live a meaningful life in a country where she has the right and opportunity to assert her individuality and self, and pursue her dreams instead of a life of numerous restrictions of her country. She hopes that though there would be no other David in her life, may be, she might like someone else and get married with him. In Dangerous Crossings, Lori Gravley-Novello writes: “Feroza now believes that true freedom cannot be had within the bounds of a traditional marriage. She will not be happy with the subversive influence of the marginalized wife; instead, she wants to try for independence and real authority, ...” (92) In Bapsi Sidhwa, Randhir Pratap Singh asserts: “Feroza’s mental turmoil typifies the predicament of the modern multicultural society. She also represents the youngsters, especially the expatriate ones, striving hard to strike a balance between tradition and modernity, past and present, dependence and freedom and so forth.” (84)

Feroza’s willingness to stay in a country, which is more liberal and progressive than her own, to face the socio-realities and hurdles of life is a deliberate and well contemplated decision. It shows the strife and struggle for empowerment and emancipation of female agency from the clutches of societal servitude and patriarchy. Feroza is aware of the fact that the socio-political mores and norms of her native country, under the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq and domination of the Islamic fundamentalists, will only reduce her status and autonomy. Her determination to remain in America stands for the deep yearning of woman who has been victim of constant subjugation- chained and restrained by social and traditional boundaries.
In *Post-Colonial Women Writer, New Perspective*, Sunita Sinha writes: “Sidhwa has added a new dimension to the expatriate experience by exploring the cultural differences which alienate a person in his own country.” (252) Sidhwa reveals the impact of expatriate experience as well on the life of the Parsee youngsters who find themselves conflicting between the old traditional values of their community and the new liberal and modern way of life of the First world and who are ready to transgress the social and cultural boundaries though they may be debarred and deprived of their rights of the religious rituals, but such a step would aid and abet their empowerment. In *Parsi Fiction*, Latha Rengachari writes: “Sidhwa’s protagonist celebrates the marginal status which expatriation affords her. She becomes reconciled to her marginality and sees it as a great freedom, a means of feeling at home everywhere.” (70)

*An American Brat* is a sensitive portrayal of the impact of modern America on a new arrival like Feroza, as Sidhwa is concerned with the marginalization and the discriminations against woman. In the novel one encounters what can be referred to as America verses Pakistan in the ripening consciousness of the young girl of sixteen. By the end, Feroza accepts being both American and Pakistani, without necessarily resolving the tension between the ethnic and the American. One gets to see both the societies in all its hues and shades. Zareen’s statement in the beginning of the novel, “Travel will broaden her outlook, get this puritanical rubbish out of her head” (*AB 14*), becomes the leitmotif for the novel. Feroza’s journey from Pakistan to America turns into a journey from innocence to experience. It is in America that she discovers her 'truth' through self-knowledge.