Chapter VII

Conclusion: Coloring Outside the Lines

The term “South Asian post-colonial fictional writing in English” refers to the fictional works of the writers of the Indian subcontinent and its Diasporas. The works of the South Asian novelists has now developed into substantial literature in its own right and it is this sustained body of literature which is referred to as South Asian literature. There are a large number of eminent novelists from the region who have made their mark as renowned novelists by their creative genius. Some of the South Asian novelists have achieved a global prominence by their thematic maturity and sensibility towards the social issues. The South Asian fictional authors have mostly focused on the social issues, social evils that marginalize women individuality, issues of women’s segregation, social taboos, complexities of the contemporary life and East-West confrontation.

In the colonial period, many South Asian people migrated to various countries like England, South Africa, America etc. Now they are known as South Asian Diasporas. The major diasporic novelists, who have enriched the English language fiction, are Jhumpa Lahiri, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Bharti Mukherjee, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Kamila Shamshi, Nadeem Aslam, Bapsi Sidhwa. In South Asian diasporic fictional writings, there is expression of alienation, nostalgia, identity crisis and search for self. Bapsi Sidhwa is also one of the Diasporas. She was born in Karachi, brought up in Lahore and now lives in U.S.A.

Bapsi Sidhwa has drawn the material of her novels from wide spectrum of life. Her career as a novelist started with the publication of The Crow Eaters and she thereafter written four more novels The Pakistani Bride, Cracking India, An America Brat and Water. Her novels are social and historical documents that cover the contemporary realities of life and various cultures. Her odyssey as an author of fictional writing has been steady and made her established as one of the leading figures in Pakistani English fiction. Her novels are all about
the life and cultures of her native subcontinent. Her characters have been taken from all 
walks of life, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis etc. The major themes of her novels are Parsi 
milieu, cultural difference, the Partition crisis, expatriate experience, religious fundament-
alismand oppression of women. All these themes have been dealt with simplicity of narration. 
Sidhwa’s vast experiences of various South Asian cultures are perceptible in her works.

Sidhwa’s novels *The Crow Eaters, The Pakistani Bride* and *An American Brat* yield 
glimpses of the contemporary socio-political condition of Pakistan. Her first three novels 
have been written on the backdrop of Pakistan. In *An American Brat* the locale shifts from Pa-
kistan to U.S.A. *The Crow Eaters* deals with adventures and fortune of Faredoon Junglewalla 
and his family members in British India. *The Pakistani Bride* is the saga of escape of Zaitoon 
from the clutches of her barbarous and primitive husband Sakhi and his kin. *Cracking India* 
deals with the events during partition of India into India and Pakistan and aftermath. *An 
American Brat* is the story of Feroza Ginwalla, a Parsi rebellious girl, and her transformation 
into a girl of independent attitude. *Water* is the pathetic story of Chuyia and other widows 
living in an *ashram* in Rawalpur. There is the combination of imagination and reality in 
Sidhwa’s novels. She uses her imagination as a tool to depict the various traits of the different 
societies exposing the bitter realities of the world around. She has juxtaposed the themes of 
portrayal of Parsee community, East- West encounter, women predicament, extreme commu-
nalism and human relationship in her novels.

Sidhwa’s novels reflect the feminist concerns, for those who have been marginalized 
by the oppressive system of patriarchal society. Her novels explore those issues that have a 
direct concern with woman’s exploitation, segregation and marginalization. In an interview 
with Chelva Kanaganayakam, Sidhwa says:

Yes I do write with a feminine sensibility, although I was very complemented 
when a lot of reviewers in England didn’t know that Bapsi was a woman’s
name. When reviewing *The Crow Eaters* they referred to me as Mr Sidhwa. So there my feminine sensibility was not so obvious. In the other two novels it is. I hate to preach about feminism, but I let the characters speak for themselves and what the characters go through illustrates what a woman goes through in our part of the world. During those riots women were kidnapped and sold for ten rupees on the streets. Everybody turned bestial. I had ended *The Bride* with the girl dying, but I felt by this time that I had partially identified with the heroine. She became a deep part of me, and then I felt that she must be made to live. So I changed the ending of the book. In the case of the Ayah tragedy, again she is at least alive, but her reactions to Lenny are dead. (48)

To some extent, Sidhwa’s novels *The Crow Eaters* and *Cracking India* are autobiographical as she has skilfully blended the incidents and experiences of her own life into the main theme of her major novels. *The Crow Eaters* is a novel by a Parsi and about Parsis. In *Éntree: The Fiction of Bapsi Sidhwa*, R.K. Dhawan and Novy Kapadia write:

*The Crow Eaters* is an account of a way of life, a kind of saga like *The Forsyte Saga* (1922) of Galsworthy, in which the details accumulate to make the characters life-like. The novel describes the social mobility of a Parsi family, the Junglewalla, during the British Raj in the early twentieth century. The description of Faredoon, nicknamed Freddy, Junglewalla’s exploits is not just historical fiction but has a strong autobiographical element also. Sidhwa belongs to a pioneering family (the Bhandaras) of Parsi settlers in North Indian cities and was reared on tales both fictional and otherwise of the entrepreneurial skills of the elders of her community. (18-19)
Cracking India is absolutely an autobiographical novel broadly based on the real life experiences of Sidhwa. In an interview with Priti Singh, Sidhwa says:

In Ice-Candy-Man or Cracking India, the first part is autobiographical, except that the central character of the child is not me per se...This child is informed by my adult consciousness. So a lot of me is there, but other bits are purely imaginative. For instance, the relationship between Lenny and her male cousin - I had no such male cousin! I had no such Ayah either. But we did have servants like Imam Din and Yusuf. So partially I took things directly from my own experience, but the rest is created.” (My Place in the World 291)

Sidhwa has mingled facts with fiction in Cracking India, facts of her firsthand experiences of the partition and its aftermath. In an interview with Mayank Austen Soofi, Bapsi sidhwa says: “Even I often don’t know where fact ends and fiction begins…Because of childhood polio the doctor suggested I should not be burdened with school, I had light tuition thankfully no math’s…I’ve fictionalized biographical elements in the earlier part of Cracking India- Lenny is not me- Perhaps my alter ego.” (Soofi 2014)

Lenny is supposed to be a self portrayal. The various affinities between Lenny and Bapsi establish this fact. Bapsi Sidhwa was afflicted with polio from her childhood. Her childhood memories of the partition crisis seem akin to that of Lenny. Like Sidhwa, the child narrator is also a Parsi girl of Lahore that shows the similarity between Sidhwa and Lenny. The technique of the first person narration makes the novel more like an autobiography. Like Lenny, the child narrator, Sidhwa has been operated in her limping leg for several times during her childhood. Like Lenny, Sidhwa too had got her education at home.

Women’s issues, their marginalization, subordination and discrimination in male dominated society, are at the core of Sidhwa’s novels. In male dominated societies of the region, woman is supposed to play the role as per the instructions of patriarchal norms. In
Treatment of Women in The Pakistani Bride, Hilal Ahmad Dar writes: “A woman is supposed to be as bondage, a restriction and be at the beck and call of a man.” (35-36) In Indian sub-continent, woman does not enjoy an autonomous status. Her identity is assigned with her husband. It is her husband, who sets the standard of her life, that of a dutiful and obedient wife: “The very word Woman... emphasized a passive anonymous position. It derives from the Anglo-Saxon wifman literally ‘wife-man’, and the implication seems to be that there is no such thing as woman separate from wifehood. As individuals, with few exceptions, women did not count. They were mothers, wives, daughters, sisters.” (3) In Crow Eaters, Putli, Freddy’s wife is confined to her household jobs, taking care of her husband and children. She has no individuality of her own, a puppet like, meek submissiveness: “Putli was content. She fulfilled herself in housework and in the care of her children and husband... Blissful in her knowledge, she would, over the years, produce seven children. From the joyous climax of conception to the delivery, Putli would enjoy it all.” (CE 23-24) Billy’s wife Tanya, high born and educated woman, “lived on her toes and on edge” serving her husband who assumes the role of the patriarch. Sidhwa writes:

The pattern of Billy’s life was set, his tyrannies established. He governed his household with an authority that was inviolate. Lacking confidence in himself he found it necessary to command, demand, and order about. He required stringent discipline and prompt, unreasoning obedient.

Billy’s tyrannies began with sunrise. His eyes opened and urgent signals were transmitted throughout the house by Tanya... (CE 276)

In The Pakistani Bride, Carol, an American woman, refuses to be a submissive wife. Her culture and independent social environment was at her back in defying subordination of male authority. It was not a difficult task for her to break the bondage of her uncongenial marriage life. In fact, Zaitoon’s predicament was a catalyst. While Zaitoon had to pass
through an ordeal before she could achieve her individuality. About the epic struggle of Zaitoon, in *Bapsi Sidhwa*, Randhir Pratap Singh writes:

While they confine their search operation to the bridge at Pattan, she intelligently moves towards the bridge at Dubair. She has picked the most difficult route because she knows the easier passages will be the first to be searched by the tribals. On the fourth day Sakhi has a suspicion that Zaitoon has crossed the river at Dubair. His father, Misri Khan, goes to Dubair to inquire about her. He requests Major Mushtaq to inform him at once if he has any news of her. On the eighth day in the morning a vulture tries to attack her but she shooes it away by hurling a stone at it. In the afternoon she comes across a snow leopard. Luckily it is shot down by a hunter. On the ninth day she reaches the beach of the river where she is raped by two and she regains consciousness, she has no strength left in her body but she forces herself to move forward until she reaches the bridge in the evening. (29-30)

Sidhwa shows the perseverance and strong will power of Zaitoon, without being frail before the ordeal and odds in her ultimate struggle of survival: “I must find the bridge – I must get out of here . . .” (*PB* 232)

In *Cracking India* Muccho is portrayed as a submissive woman. Lenny’s mother is another submissive and subordinate woman though she asserts herself occasionally. Persuasiveness and emotional blackmail are the tools used to tame women by menfolk. In *Cracking India*, Mr. Sethi says: “You will be a merry widow. You will blow every pice I’ve saved.” . . . “Don’t say that, Jana. Even as a joke.” (*CI* 20)

*An American Brat* portrays the inferior position of women in the third world. When Cyrus, Feroza’s father, sees her talking to a young man in the sitting room, being suspicious,
he asks the boy to go out: “Cyrus stared at the petrified youth for an interminable moment and then swiveled his fearsome eyes to Feroza. Some trick of light had turned into sunken hollows and his own long, craggily handsome face chalky.” (AB 16) Sidhwa throws light towards the prevalent discriminatory societal practice in the matter of female education in Pakistan. In the progressive society like Parsi as well, boys and girls are treated differently in the issue of education. In An American Brat, Sidhwa writes:

All parsee boys, by virtue of their demanding roles as men, were presumed to be geniuses until they proved themselves nincompoops. And since the community’s understanding of genius was inextricably knit with the facility to make money and acquire a certain standing — the men generally measured up. The community bristled with financial, business, engineering, doctoring, accounting, stockbrokering, computing, and researching geniuses.

Not being burdened with similar expectations, the girls were not required to study abroad. If they persisted, and if the family could afford it, they might be affectionately indulged. It was also expedient sometimes to send them to finishing schools in Europe, either to prepare for or divert them from marriage.

(AB 39)

Feroza was not sent to U.S.A. for any education purpose, but to keep her away from the influence of Islamic fundamentalism and improve her mindset. In the good luck ceremony, Khutalibai wishes:

. . . May you return home safe and soon. May you marry a rare diamond among men. May you have many children and become a grandmother and a great-grandmother, and live in contentment and happiness with all your chil-
dren and their children. May you live a hundred years and always be lucky like me, and happy and God-blessed . . . Aa-meen! (AB 46)

*Water* has been written on women’ issues set in the late 30s India. Chuyia, the protagonist is married at the age of eight with an aged widower. The pathetic life of the widows living in *ashrams* has been focused in *Water*. In pre-independence Hindu society of India, man was a ruler and woman as ruled. In all the issues and matters, man was the sole decision taker of the life of woman. Chuyia has no will of her own nor her mother in the matters related to her life. She is also victimized by the patriarchy.

Sidhwa’s novels raise the issues of indecent assault, molestation, sexual abuse, exploitation, brutality, inhuman treatment and injustice committed towards women in the South Asian societies in general, but particularly in Pakistani society. In *The Portrayal of Women by Bapsi Sidhwa*, Dr. Madhavi Lata Agrawal writes: “Sidhwa seems to suggest that the predicament of a woman, more so a Pakistani woman is that she suffers for no reason. Being a woman is reason enough to invite violence against her.” (9) As a woman novelist, her focus is on women’s exploitation and discrimination. *The Pakistani Bride* has been written in a rich vein of realism. Sidhwa sheds light on the customs of the Kohistani society where woman is considered as commodity. Brutality and barbarity is in the veins of the mountainous men who time and again give evidence of their primitivism by their inhuman treatment of women. Afshan was married off, without her consent, to an eight years old boy Kohistani Qasim: “The girl didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. She had been told that her groom was very young, but she had thought that he would be like herself, at least fifteen. She began to laugh, while tears of disappointment slid down her cheeks.” (PB 10) The novel reveals the male chauvinism of the Kohistani men who opt beastly beating for establishing male superiority over women. On the very night of Zaitoon and Sakhi’s marriage, Sakhi’s inherent brutality is ex-
posed. The way he tears Zaitoon’s ghoongat and tugs the cord of her shalwar kicking her fiercely shows the beast in him “. . . she screamed . . . and she screamed and screamed. ‘Abba, save me,’ she shrieked. The Kohistani patriarchy has no reverence for womankind becomes apparent when Sakhi brutally beats his own mother who stops him from mercilessly beating an animal. Sidhwa writes: “He beat her on the slightest pretext. She no longer thought of marriage with any sense of romance. She now lived only to placate him, keeping her head averted unless it was to listen to a command. Then her eyes were anxious and obsequious like those of Hamida.” (PB 174) The unbearable tortures the womenfolk bear caused by their menfolk, in the male dominated World is terrible. Sidhwa writes:

Women the world over, through the ages, asked to be murdered, raped, exploited, enslaved, to get importunately impregnated, beaten-up, bullied and disinherited. It was an immutable law of nature. What the tribal girl done to deserve such grotesque retribution? Had she fallen in love with the wrong man? Or was she simply the victim of a vendetta? Her brother might have killed his wife, and his wife’s kin slaughtered her . . . . there could be any number of reasons . . . (PB 226)

_Cracking India_ shows the brutalities inflicted on women during the partition crisis, a time when women and young girls of the opposite community were treated as sexual objects. Showing the inherent reasons behind such inhuman treatment meted out to women during the communal violence, in _The Dilemmas of the Colonized Women_, Shivani Thakur writes: “The urge to humiliate the enemy people and to try to extinguish their ethnicity results in women being the main target of violence.” (279) During the communal riots, thousands of women and young girls were sexually assaulted by the communal frenzied mob. Delineating the brutality of the mob, in _The Other Side of Silence_, Urvashi Butalia writes: “Apart from the rapes,
other, specific kind of violence had been visited on women. Many were paraded naked in the streets, several had their breasts cut off, their bodies were tattooed with marks of the ‘other’ religion . . .” (132) Frenzied mob took over the complete possession of the cities, towns and villages openly threatening, murdering and raping the innocent women of the other communities. Sidhwa writes: “And on their heels a mob of Sikhs, their wild long hair and bears rampant, large fevered eyes glowing in fanatic faces, pours into the narrow lane roaring slogans, holding curved swords, shoving up a manic wave of violence that sets Ayah to trembling as she holds me tight . . .” (CI 144) Cracking India throws ample light on women’s suppression and marginalization portraying the plight of women under the patriarchal order. Men opts violence and brutality in establishing their supremacy over women. “In a “patriarchal social set up,” ‘masculinity’ is associated with superiority where as ‘feminity’ is linked with inferiority, and while masculinity implies strength, action, self-assertion, and domination, feminity implies weakness, passivity, docility, obedience and self-negation.” (Quoted in Chandra 177) Women’s world is restricted in the name of customs and creeds by the forces governed by men. Ayah’s abduction and her rape show the plight and agony of the women who had to undergo such bitter experiences during the partition riots: “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 debirs of our pasts. Hurt happiness... all fade impartially... to make way for fresh joy and new sorrow. That’s the way of life.” (CI 105) Hamida is the woman who not only suffers sexual assault in the hands of her kidnappers but also rejection of her family as she was now a fallen woman. Sidhwa writes: “Hamida was kidnapped by the Sikhs,” . . .” She was taken away to Amritsar. Once that happens, sometimes, the husband—or his family won’t take her back.” In The Parsi Voice in Recent Indian English Fiction, Nilufer Bharucha writes:
Women are more often than not caught in the crossfire of these clashes and their suffocating enclosures and limited spaces become even smaller as patriarchy closes ranks on either side of the divide to protect what it sees as its property. Women have always been the ultimate territories and countries on whom men have mapped their rights of possession (98).

Through Ayah’s victimization and later her rescue, Sidhwa has given a message that still a better future awaits her. In More than Victims: Versions of Feminine Power in Bapsi Sidhwa’s Cracking India, Kleist defends: “Sidhwa presents a uniquely gendered perspective of Partition. Moreover, Sidhwa’s novel provides a comparatively inclusive view of the diverse feminine roles during Partition, roles in which the female characters are not entirely empowered nor entirely victimized.” (70)

An American Brat deals with the oppressive system prevailed in Pakistan during the martial-law rule. The Hadood ordinances and the Zina ordinance were introduced in Pakistan by Zia under the influence of mullahs. These ordinances were against women, victims were often denied justice, and instead they were sentenced by the law. Sidhwa writes:

... the Hadood Ordinances had been introduced by General Gia in 1979 without anyone knowing what they were. The Federal Shariat Court, to oversee the Islamic laws, had also been established.

... Fatima and Allah Baksh... had eloped to get married, had been accused of committing adultery, or zina, by the girl’s father. They were sentenced to death by stoning.
The blind sixteen-year-old servant girl, pregnant out of wedlock as a result of rape, was charged with adultery. She was sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment, fifteen lashes, and a fine of a thousand rupees.

...Zina Ordinance... required the testimony of four “honourable” male eyewitness or eight female eyewitnesses to establish rape.

...The addition of zina altered the entire legal picture of sexual crime. The victim of rape ran the risk of being punished for adultery, while the rapist was often set free.

...The gender bias was appalling. (AB 236-37)

Water is an engrossing observation of the pathetic conditions of the widow like Kunti, Madhumati, Shakuntala, Kalyani, Shehalata and Chuyia in particular but the Hindu widows in general. Water reveals the exploitation, subjugation and segregation of widowed women in Hindu society in patriarchy led double standard social order. Kalyani’s sexual exploitation by Seth Dwarkanath exposes the Hindu social system where impure widows are considered pure as a sexual object. Narayan’s revelation of his lineage with Seth Dwarkanath makes Kalyani feel herself a guilty of that sin that she had not committed:

With every passing moment, a new tormenting thought struck her, and she flagellated herself with blame. How could she have ever imagined she would marry Narayan? Live happily ever after with him? ... Had she seduced him with languishing looks, small flirtations? She should not have allowed herself to fall in love with him, and let him fall so hard for her. Would he still want to marry her now that he’d had more time to mull over the matter? She suspected he would. But she knew she would never be able to face Seth Dwarkanath no
matter what. Not could she saddle Narayan’s noble family with a daughter-in-law whose every living moment would bring disgrace and dishonor to their house . . . What must they think of her? What contempt, what loathing, would the Seth have for her. What must his mother think of her? The thought was unbearable. Filled with self-loathing, she cringed in terror against the wall. (Water 201-02)

In Water, Sidhwa tries to established the fact that in Brahminical patriarchal society, social norms and customs are used to exploiting woman, be she is a widow or not. Woman is considered as an object to satiate man’s lust. Madhumati forces Kalyani into prostitution though she herself had undergone such brutality. When Madhumati became widow, she was raped by own brothers-in-law: “The two bastards raped me for a week. I was shorn and beaten and taken twenty miles into the wilderness and discarded.” (Water 86) Madhumati sends Chuyia with Gulabi, a pimp, for prostitution as a substitute of Kalyani. Chuyia is drugged and raped by Seth Bhupindernath.

The pathetic life of the widows living in ashram is described in Water. These poor unfortunate widows have been dumped in the ashram in the name of traditions, customs and belief. Chuyia is the flag bearer of the rebellion in the ashram dictated by the patriarchal rules. Later Kalyani tries to challenge the patriarchal authority by her love affair with Narayan and with the decision of marrying with him. Had Seth Dwarkanath not been Narayan’s father, Kalyani would have shattered the chains of the social and religious bondages by fulfilling her dream with Narayan.

Shakuntala is an archetypical woman who has great faith in the Holy books. Her advent in the ashram was akin to that of many other widows. Her life completely changed after her widowhood:
Her grief was compounded by her ill treatment at the hands of her in-laws . . . Her head was shaved to remove the sin and pollution residing in her hair, and to mark her as the asexual being a widow had to be . . . her mother-in-law . . . broke the glass bangles and ripped off the mangal-sutra from her neck in the first rites marking her passage into widowhood. She was stripped of all her jewellery and possessions and could cover her body with only a piece of white cloth; she was essentially slowly starved, as she was limited to one meal a day—and a meager one of unseasoned rice and daal at that—to cleanse her body of lust. She had to sleep on ground. Her only useful role, that of wife and producer of sons, was gone forever. She was not only viewed as responsible for her husband’s death, but also as a threat to her husband’s family and most of all, to that of her dead husband’s spirit, simply because of her vital womanhood and potential sexuality . . . (Water 175-76)

It is Shakuntala who realizes the truth behind the Holy texts, sees Gandhi as a Messiah, and resolves to bring a new hope in Chuyia’ life and keep her away from the marsh of prostitution. She sends Chuyia with Narayan to live in Gandhi’s care.

Sidhwa belongs to the Parsi community as such her community is in the centre of her novels The Crow Eaters, Cracking India and An American Brat. Though she was born in Pakistan, once lived in India as well, now lives in U.S.A., she considers herself first as a Parsi. In Crow Eaters and Cracking India, she depicts about the various aspects of her Parsi community. Her novels are manifestation of the distinctive Parsi identity, Parsi social milieu and mores. The Parsis prefer to wear their traditional clothes and maintain their separate identity. Sidhwa writes: “The Parsi women . . . tied their heavy silk saris differently, with a triangular piece in front displaying broad, exquisitely embroidered borders. The knotted tassels of their
kustis dangled as if pyjama strings were tied at the back, and white mathabanas peeked prim-ly from beneath sari-covered heads. The men wore crisp pyjamas, flowing white coats fast-tened with neat little bows, and flat turbans. They looked quite distinctive.” (CE 56)

In The Crow Eaters, she has given every minute detail of the Parsi community, its be-lief and superstitions, customs and traditions, rites and rituals. It is purely a Parsi novel as the narrative is about a Parsi family and community. Her novels reveal her social concern. In an interview with Chelva Kanaganayakam, Sidhwa show the reason of her love towards her community:

. . . I feel that Parsis are an endangered species. We are less than a hundred thousand in the world now. When I wrote that book I believe we were a hun-dred and twenty thousands. I had just finished The Bride when I started writ-ing The Crow Eaters; although it was published first, I wrote it second. I wanted to preserve my regard for this vanishing community. I felt it had so many charming manners, an exuberance and sense of humour. These strength-en the community as a minority. They were a beloved community. It was the first time the Parsis were written about in fiction. And there was a bad reaction to the book when it was published in Pakistan . . . the Parsis stopped talking to me. This is the natural reaction of a minority community when it is written about for the first time in fiction. Like all minority communities we wrote lit-tle books glorifying ourselves, and the Parsis were not used to having them-selves portrayed in this manner. The protagonist is not totally an honest hero, more a picaresque hero. But he is not as bad as a man can be. (45-46)

Sidhwa’s other novel Cracking India has been written from the Parsi perspective. The events of violence have been described by the Parsi child narrator. Sidhwa has given voice to
the Parsi predicament. In *The Fictional World of Bapsi Sidhwa*, Amit Kumar Dubey writes:

“Sidhwa gives an artistic dimension to the Parsi history . . . The insecurity of Parsis at the Jashan Prayer reveals volumes about the ambivalent position of the community.” (70)

Sidhwa has given minutest details about her community in this novel as well. The Parsis community, in general as a stand to show their loyalty, took no part in any sort of movement that was against the British. In a meeting, Colonel Bharucha says: “Gandhi says, we must stop buying salt. We should only eat salt manufactured from the Indian Ocean!” . . . “Who does this Gandhi think he is?” shouts an obliging wag promptly from somewhere in the middle. “Is it his grandfather’s ocean?” (CI 44)

*An American Brat* is an interesting story of a sixteen year old Parsi girl Feroza Ginwalla. Though *An American Brat* is a story of Feroza transformation from conservatism to an Americanized girl, Sidhwa raises several issues associated with the Parsi community. Feroza’s decision of marrying David, a Jew creates tumult in her family in Pakistan. Sidhwa reveals the changing attitude of the new generation of the Parsis:

—the youngsters, candid in their innocence, wondered aloud why the news should strike their elders as such a calamity. 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)

Like her other novel *The Crow Eaters*, Sidhwa raises the issue of interfaith marriages that has been haunted the Parsi community. Khutlibai’s reaction after Manek’s return to Paki-
stan shows the Parsi’ point of view in this regard: “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) In Zoroastrianism, the outside marriages are strictly prohibited and the culprit is debarred from the community. Sidhwa mentions the pamphlet message that warns those who dare to breach the social norms by marrying outside the community:

Please note that according to the Parsee, Zoroastrian religious beliefs, precepts, 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 inter-marriages, 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. (AB 305)

Feroza, shedding her social inhibitions, falls in love with a Jewish boy. Her desire to marry him agitates the elder members of her family back at home in Pakistan. Zareen, Feroza’s mother, flies for Denver to avert this social mishap. Interestingly enough, to Zareen, David appears to be a perfect match for Feroza at the first meeting with him. In The Theme of Marriage in Bapsi Sidhwa’s An American Brat, Jaydipsinh Dodiya writes: “Zareen, when she sees David and finds him a suitable match, has doubts about the rigid code. She expresses the author’s own unease with the ancient tradition. Zareen begins to understand the logic of the younger Parsi’s opposition to the prohibition.” (90-91) Like Yazdi in The Crow Eaters, Feroza in An American Brat is denied the permission of marrying outside the community. Yazdi opts for a life of renunciation while Feroza leaves her fate on time:
There would be no going back for her, but she could go back at will . . . Her break with David still hurt so much, especially the circumstances surrounding the break. If she flew and fell again, could she pick herself up again? Maybe one day she’d soar to that self-contained place from which there was no falling, if there was such a place. (AB 317)

In Marriage, the Ultima Thule of Woman’s Life, Indira Bhatt remarks: “It is the new mature Feroza fully understanding her predicament and the way to resolve.” (246)

Sidhwa depicts the American life style and culture in the novel An American Brat through Feroza, a Third World girl. Woman’s marginalization and immigration are the major theme of the novel.

In An American Brat, Sidhwa deals with the political scenario of Pakistan under the regime of President Zia-ul-Haq. Unlike Sidhwa’s other novels, Parsis are shown indulged and interested in the Pakistani politics. They are not entirely neutral in local politics as ever. Gin-wallas show their interest in Pakistan’s current politics. After the imprisonment of Bhutto, the Parsis’ life was also being affected by the increasing Islamic fundamentalism. Zareen’s apprehension is shown here:

“It’s absurd how things have changed. I was really hopeful when Bhutto was elected. For the first time I felt it didn’t matter that I was not a Muslim, or that I was a woman. You remember when he told the women in Peshawar to sit with the men? That took guts!”

They had watched the rally on television. Zulifikar Ali Bhutto, riding the crest of his popularity, had dared to fault the gender segregation practiced by his volatile tribal supporters in Northwest Frontier. (AB 11)
Sidhwa throws light on the changing political scenario in Pakistan and its impact on non-Muslims under the Zia’s regime.

India’s Partition and aftermath figure in Sidhwa’s three novels, *The Crow Eaters*, *The Pakistani Bride* and *Cracking India*. The novelist mentions about it in the last chapter of *The Crow Eaters*, in *The Pakistani Bride*, Sidhwa describes about it in chapter 3 and 4. Her third novel *Cracking India*, Partition of India is the main theme of the novel. In *A Passion for History and for Truth Telling*, Ralph J. Crane writes: “In both *The Crow Eaters* and *The Bride* Partition has been important, but not the shaping-force of either novel. in her third novel, *Ice-Candy-Man*, Partition is the shaping force.” (53) In *The Crow Eaters*, dying Faredoon castigates the Parsi leaders like Dadabhoy Navroji for the mess the Parsis have got into, and opines that the Parsis were betrayed by the Parsis in India’s Partition crisis. In *The Pakistani Bride*, the historical divide of India into India and Pakistan and its immediate aftermath has been dealt with in two chapters. Sikander and Zohra with their girl child Munni, the panic stricken family, hurriedly boarded a train at Ludhiana station. Qasim, a Kohistani, also boarded at Jullundur. The train going to Lahore, Pakistan, is attacked by the Sikh mob: “Qasim sees the men clearly. They are Sikh. Tall, crazed men wave swords. A cry: ‘Bole so Nihal’, and the answering roar, ‘Sat siri Akal!’ Torches unevenly light the scene and Qasim watches the massacre as in a cinema. An eerie clamour rises. Sounds of firing explode above agonized shrieks.” (PB 28-29) Sikander and Zohra became the victims of the carnage.

Qasim and Munni were few of the fortunate ones who survived the slaughter. Qasim takes Munni with him to Lahore. Sidhwa confines the depiction of India’s Partition within these two chapters only. The 1947 Partition of India is the backdrop of Sidhwa’s third novel *Cracking India*. In *Treatment of Partition in Ice-Candy-Man*, Rashmi Gaur writes:
*Ice-Candy-Man* also presents the horrifying details of cruelty, human loss and dislocation, but it does so with a subtle irony, witty banter and parody, forcing the readers to desist from the inscrutability of human behavior. It also describes a society which has lost its courage, and therefore only crumbles away. It not only presents the barbaric details of atrocities perpetrated by one community over other, but also delineates various manifestations of pettiness and degenerated values which, termite, had hollowed the inner structural strength of the society. (45)

Bapsi Sidhwa is an important signature in the Post-colonial diaspora literary writing. The great variety of themes in her novels, like her Parsi community, Partition issue, women subjugation, communal violence, Islamic fundamentalism, immigration issue and plight of Indian widows, enhances her reputation as a versatile writer of fictional writing. She has brought forth the invisible realities of the life of South Asian societies with their foibles, eccentricities, social behaviour, customs, creeds, beliefs, superstitions; living no aspect of life behind. It is because of her creative efforts that Pakistani writings in English have got recognition in the World literature. She draws her subjects from a very wide range. She has dealt with the issues from the history to contemporary reality. She holds a pride of place amongst the English language novelists of the contemporary period.