Preface

Pakistan’s leading diasporic and distinguished English language novelist, Bapsi Sidhwa is the author of the five novels. She is the first Pakistan-Parsi novelist who has achieved worldwide recognition as an author of fictional writing. Her novels are amalgam of her personal experiences of the Partition and its immediate aftermath, subordination, segregation, sexual abuse and exploitation of women in the South Asian societies, immigration issue, highly concerned with the Parsis, and issues concerned with her own Parsi community. Sidhwa is among those writers who perceive a dialectal relationship between a culture and its art. She is well aware of the dynamics between her role as a writer and the society she lives in. Sidhwa through her exceptionally engrossing and fascinating works seeks to contribute to the process of change that has already started all over the world involving a re-evaluation of women’s rights and status, and a drastic restructuring of social thought. Sidhwa belongs to that group of women writers who have started to depict determined women for whom the traditional role is inadequate, women who wish to affirm their independence and autonomy and are perfectly capable of assuming new roles and responsibilities.

Sidhwa has received a number of prestigious awards for fictional writings. Some of the awards, with which she has been honoured, are National Honours of the ‘Patra Bokhri Award’ in 1985, the Bunting Fellowship at the Radcliffe/Harvard in 1986, ‘Sitara-i-Imtiaz’, Pakistan’s highest honour in arts in 1991, Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest award in 1994 and Asian-American Legacy Award in 2008. She was a Visiting Scholar at the Rockefeller Foundation Centre, Bellagio, Italy in 1991. She has also taught Creative Writings at the University of Houston, St. Thomas University, Rice University, Columbia University, Mount Holyoke College and Brandies University. Her novel Cracking India was nominated for the
Notable Book of the year by the Library Association. She has been the chairperson of
(Eurasia) Commonwealth Writers Prize. Her works are translated into Russian, French,
German, Urdu and several other languages.

Bapsi Sidhwa is a promising novelist who has shown considerable accomplishment as
a skilled a novelist. Her novels have aroused a variety of reactions, positive and negative as
well. Her treatment of different subject matters is remarkable which makes her stand head
and shoulders above her contemporary novelists. There is a great variety of themes in her
novels. Her first novel *The Crow Eaters* is all about her own community, its various cultural
aspects, customs, traditions, ethos, milieus, mores, beliefs and superstitions, issues of
interfaith marriages, low birth rate have been dealt with. In *The Pakistani Bride*, Sidhwa
deals with women's problems living in distant land of Kohistan, a Pakistani mountainous
region where no constitutional laws prevail. Her third novel *Cracking India* has been written
in response to the other novels written by Indian authors on India's Partition and its crisis, but
with Pakistani point of view. The theme of her fourth novel *An American Brat* is the
expatriate experience. Her novel *Water* reveals the pathetic condition of the Indian widows
living in *ashrams*. By her novel *Water*, She was able to bring forth the sad plight of the
Indian widows before the whole world. Such wide variety of the themes is a testimony to her
greatness as a novelist. Her novels have some degree of autobiographical elements in them.
She picks up some significant incidents from her own life or from the lives of other people
and creates a larger reality of fiction. She is a keen observer of all social strata. Her use of
stirring humour and subtle characterizations, the strain of extraordinary ribaldry in her novels
are nowhere found in other English language novelists of the sub-continent, and that make
her Pakistan's finest English language novelist. Her sense of individualism and dexterous use
of humour makes her a fine comic writer in English. Her works have aroused a wide variety of reactions amongst the critics.

The present research aims to explore the complexities that surround the lives of women in Pakistani society (both inside and outside the country) and also in the Indian society. It also aims to explore the social and political realities, and provide a view of the possibilities of resistance of these patriarchal structures.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter I throws light on Sidhwa’s personal life—her childhood, her struggle with her deformity, marriage and drastic uprooting, transformation into a full-fledged novelist and her literary output.

Chapter II “Culture, Self, and Fragmentation: The Parsee Milieu in The Crow-Eaters” provides an in-depth analysis of Sidhwa’s recording of an immured community. It embarks upon theme of dispassionate and even caustically oriented account of the Parsee community. The chapter makes an attempt to establish the fact that the Parsees are a community like any other community with its own strengths and weaknesses.

Chapter III “Barbarism in Cultured Soil: The Cultural Articulation of Patriarchy in The Pakistani Bride” provides an incisive look into the treatment of women. Oppression of women forms the central narrative in this second novel of Sidhwa and portrays the conflict of values in Pakistani society. The chapter is an attempt to study how Sidhwa has very realistically illustrated women’s plight and exploitation in the patriarchal society.

Chapter IV “The Will of Men: Culture and Religion as Potent Tools in Cracking India” is an in-depth study of the frenzied partition crisis. Out of her five novels, Cracking India aka Ice-Candy-Man deals directly with the colossal upheaval of partition as it conceptualizes India-Pakistan partition as a physical breaking of both land and the people.
Chapter V “Female Agency and Empowerment: Assertion of Self in An American Brat” focuses on the issue of the upheavals of culture-divide presented in the fourth novel An American Brat. It is the story of a young girl who journeys through three cultures—her own Parsee community’s culture to her country’s Islamic culture and finally the western culture of the United States.

Chapter VI “In the Grip of Bad Karma: The Baleful Widow in Water” analyzes Water as the characters are constructed under conditions of repression and, although marginalized and subdued, are seen challenging the discourse of patriarchal mastery and moving toward freedom.

Chapter VII “Conclusion: Coloring Outside the Lines” sums up the findings of the study. It would also present the writer’s vision and view of various issues she takes up in her works. It would also thread in the recurrent patterns of major themes of Parsee life, plight of women, Partition crisis and cultural differences and the socio political changes.

In writing this thesis, the seventh edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers has been closely followed.