Chapter I

Bapsi Sidhwa: The Paradox of Visible Invisibility

The most distinguished Parsi-Pakistani novelist, and winner of numerous prestigious awards, Bapsi Sidhwa occupies a pride of place in South Asian fiction. Sidhwa was born in Karachi, Pakistan, then undivided India on August 11, 1938. Her parents, Peshotan and Tahmina Bhandra soon shifted to Lahore where she grew and spent most of her time before moving to Houston, America where she now-a-days lives. Parsis, then in Lahore were extremely small in number. The family was, thus cut off from the main stream of Parsi-life and culture. The up-rooting of her family from Karachi deprived her from a typically Parsi-social life.

Revealing her agony to Feroza Jussawala, Bapsi says:

If I were brought up in Karachi which is again very much a part of Pakistan, my experience as a child would have been totally different. I would have been brought up among the Parsis. I was brought up apart from my cousins and other relatives. My family was not a big joint family. In my home, my paternal grandmother was with us for a few years, but there was not much influence of the joint family calibre. I was largely brought up by the servants. (207)

Sidhwa’s childhood was entirely a tedious one. She was afflicted with polio from the age of two. She had to undergo several surgical operations, but proved futile. At the suggestions of the doctors, she was not sent to school for formal education. An Anglo-Indian lady was employed to teach her at home. Since her parents did not live in joint family household, she had to spend an isolated life within the boundaries of her house. It deprived her from the company of the children of her own age. She spent large part of her time under the care of servants or alone. When Sidhwa was eleven, her tutor gave her to read a copy of a novel, entitled Little Women. This novel was written by an American author, Louisa May Alcott, espe-
cially for the adolescent girls. This novel was highly responsible in germinating in her the seeds of interest in reading. In an interview with Feroza Jussawala, Bapsi says:

From the age of about eleven to eighteen, I read non-stop because I did not go to school. I had nothing else to do, no other form of entertainment to fill my life with, and a big slack was taken up by reading. This did turn me, I now realize, into a writer. I must have read *The Pickwick Papers* at least four times during that period. I would laugh out loud. I recently reread *The Crow Eaters* and reread *The Pickwick Papers* and realized there were so many parallels. I subconsciously absorbed a lot of that book and years after when I wrote *The Crow Eaters*, it influenced that book without my being aware of it. I think all that I read then was an influence—a lot of Tolstoy has influenced my work, many British writers. And Naipaul was very good to begin with. (217)

Sidhwa passed here matriculation at the age of thirteen as a non-regular student. After the gap of a year, she was admitted to Kinnaird College, Lahore for her bachelor’s degree in English which she got in 1956. Sidhwa was able to get higher education which was denied to maximum part of women population in undivided India. In *The Parsees*, Dosabhour Framjee writes: “Of all the natives of India this race has shown itself the most desirous of receiving the benefits of an English education; and their eagerness to drink the waters of the science and literature of the West has been conspicuous.” (187)

Sidhwa was brought up in a strict Parsi middle class household. The Parsis are members of a minority religious ethnic group immigrated to India near about eighteenth century. The Parsis follow Zarathustra, their Prophet. The Parsi religion is known as Zoroastrianism on the name of Zarathustra, founded centuries before the Christian era. The Parsis were forced to run away or convert into Islam after the Arab invasion in Persia. Most of the Parsis
who uprooted from Persia landed in Sanjan in Gujrat. The Parsis were permitted to settle in India on the conditions that they would be away from the act of conversion of Indians into their Zoroastrian faith. They are a minuscule community on the verge of extinction. The Parsis have mostly confined themselves within the limits of their religious faith. But, they always made attempts to maintain friendly relationships with the followers of the other ethnic and religious groups in their pursuits to remain neutral. But, while perusing the life and culture of Parsis in modern times, it is found that they are not intact from some of the practices of the majority Muslim and Hindu communities whether it is in Pakistan or India. With the passing of time, the Parsi community has attained great prosperity and has sustained a distinct identity of its own keeping intact their rich culture in a multi-cultured land India. Much of the Parsis’ prosperity is indebted to the British under whose regime the Parsi community as a whole prospered. In History of the Parsis Vol. I, Dosabhai Framji Karaka writes:

Parsi prosperity may be said to date from the first connection with the English, and still more precisely from the time of settlement in Bombay. But it is a characteristic fact that in the history of my people that they have invariably lived on good terms with the other races with whom they happen to have been brought into contact, no matter how different their creeds and their customs, and that they have always adapted themselves to circumstances, however unpleasant they might be. (4)

Sidhwa was married to Gustad Kermani at the age of nineteen who was a Bombay (Now Mumbai) based Indian-Parsi. Her married life with Kermani did not last long. After bearing two children, a boy and a girl, she got divorced and made the way back to Pakistan. She got the custody of her daughter but was denied the custody of her son. The mother and the son were able to live together only after the demise of Mr. Kermani, Sidhwa’s divorced
husband. The period spent in Bombay broadened her horizon of knowledge and experience of life. She again entered in conjugal life, this time with Noshir Sidhwa, a Parsi businessman of Lahore. After her second marriage, she spent her life as a house wife, constrained within the boundaries of her house. But the seeds of creativity germinated in Sidhwa when she met an Afghan woman on a plane. Her persuasion made Sidhwa write a short piece. It was published in a magazine. While she was on a vacation tour to Northern Pakistan with her husband, she came to know about a young Punjabi girl who was married to a Kohistani tribesman. The city-bred girl could not adjust to tribal customs and tries to run away from her husband’s home. She thus fails to observe the tribal code of honour and hurts the respect of her husband. She was hunted down by her husband and other tribesmen and was slain. Sidhwa was touched so inner-mostly by the story of the girl that she decided to bring out it writing a short story but later on, she expanded it in the form of a narrative which turned to be her first novel *The Bride aka The Pakistani Bride* when published in India. In an interview with Kalsoom, Sidhwa says:

> When I went on my honeymoon to the Karakoran Highway, I heard this story of this little girl from the Punjab, who was taken across Indus River into the unadministered territory. I was living in a little remote army camp at the time and they told me the story of how, she had run away. And I realized in that area, she was obviously brought; and a run-away bride who is bought and the runs away is like stealing, the villagers chased her and killed her at the Indus. (*changinguppkistan 29 August 2008 *)

Sidhwa, Pakistan’s leading fiction writer was honoured with the Sitara-i-Imtiaz award in 1991, the most prestigious award of Pakistan, Lila Wallace Reader’s Digest Winter’s award, Premio Mondello award for Foreign Authors, the National award for English Litera-
ture by Pakistan Academy of Letters. It is because of her novels that Pakistani writings in English got great deal of recognition in the world literature. The antiquity of Pakistani fiction in the realm of English literature is not very long. At the time of its origin as a new state in 1947, Pakistan was bereft of any name in the World literary horizon. There were very rare number of writers who wrote keeping themselves confined to their specific cultural and social circles. But, the Pakistani fiction in English evolved because of the diasporic writers, and due to their efforts the Pakistani fiction has received recognition and occupied a place of pride. In Critical Responses to Literatures in English Reena Mitra writes:

Bapsi Sidhwa, a Parsi domiciled in Pakistan, is a novelist who has an abundance of inventive and narrative energy manifested in her fiction, which warrants the careful critical attention of those interested in new possibilities for imaginative prose which resorts to viable fictional means largely realistic for tracing the compelling force of historical events on individual lives and presenting a collage of the lives and experiences of men and women caught in the web of history. It is Sidhwa who gave to the Pakistani novel in English a distinct identity. (111)

Writers such as Ahmad Ali, Monica Ali, Zulfiqar Ghose, Mumtaz Shahnawaz, Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, Tariq Ali, Aamer Hussain, Bina Shah, Mohammad Hanif, Feryal Ali Ghuhar, Sara Suleri, , Uzma Aslam Khan and Qaisra Shahraz, Nadeem Aslam, Hanif Kureshi are some of the major writers of Pakistani English fiction.

The first-ever name that is acknowledged as a renowned novelist of Pakistan is that of Ahmad Ali, considered as the pioneer in this genre of Pakistani English novelists. His novel Twilight in Delhi is regarded as the first Pakistani-English novel as Ahmad Ali, though born in Delhi in undivided India, migrated to Pakistan during the upheavals of partition. The novel
portrays the decline in the ancestral culture. *Ocean of the Night* (1964) and *Rats and Diplomats* (1985) are his other renowned novels. After Ahmad Ali, the Pakistani fiction lost its way and no significant voice was heard in this genre of literature. Then, Attia Hosain, a highly renowned, and of much repute English language novelist of Pakistan, wrote her novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) on the life of a family.

Zulfikar Ghose is one of the most renowned novelists of Pakistan who wrote in English. *The Contradictions* (1966) is his first novel written on the theme of cultural dislocation. His highly appreciated novel is *Murder of Aziz Khan* (1967) which is regarded as the first genuine Pakistani novel because of Ghose’ being an expatriate writer of Pakistani origin.

*Murder of Aziz Khan* is applauded as Pakistan’s most significant novel for its social realism. With the publication of Ghose’ novel *Murder of Aziz Khan*, the Pakistani fiction in English burgeoned to receive World recognition.

Monica Ali was born in Dhaka (East-Pakistan), now in Bangladesh. *Brick Lane, Alentejo Blue, In the Kitchen* and *Untold Story* are her renowned novels. She had been nominated for some prestigious literary awards. She has gained International recognition for her novel *Brick Lane*. Mumtaz Shahnawaz is a very least known name. Mumtaz Shahnawaz wrote *Heart Divided* (1959) on the partition of India into two states, India and Pakistan. *Heart Divided* proved her first and the last novel as well which was published posthumously.

Kamila Shamsie is one of the new generation Pakistani English language novelists. Her novels, *In the City by the Sea* (1998), *Salt and Saffron* and *Kartography* have received great critical attention. The novel *In the City by the Sea* is responsible in helping her in earning recognition as a renowned novelist. She was honoured with her country’s the Prime Minister’s Award.
Mohsin Hamid, internationally recognised as a novelist, has written *Moth Smoke*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* which are highly popular amongst the readers. *Moth Smoke* was awarded the Betty Trask Award. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* generated widespread appreciation and became one of the best-sellers of its time. The book was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.


The second half of the twentieth century is known for the production of the novels which brought great glory and recognition to Pakistani English novels. It was the time when a number of Pakistani writers drew the world attention towards Pakistani fiction writings, and some of them were shortlisted as well for various international awards. The slow but steady evolution of the Pakistani fiction has made a mark of its own in the realm of English fiction. The Pakistani fiction truly began to derive worldwide recognition after the emergence of Bapsi Sidhwa in the horizon of Pakistani fictional writing. Speaking about the sluggish pro-
gress of Pakistani English fiction in *A History of Pakistani Literature in English 1947-1988*,
Tariq Rahman writes:

... there were hardly any major writers, so that a distinctively new literary
tradition did not emerge. One reason for this could be that there has never
been any encouragement of creative work in English in Pakistan either at the
official level or at the public one. Even Pakistani Universities have never giv-
en attention to this literature and the best Pakistani writers have never given
attention to this literature and the best writers have had to settle abroad or, at
any rate, publish abroad. Thus, Ghose lives in Austin, Texas and is supported
by the University there; Bapsi Sidhwa lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and
is supported by Harvard University, and Hanif Kureishi lives in London. Daud
Kamal was published by Peter Dent in England and Alamgir Hashmi was pub-
lished in the United States. (289)

Bapsi Sidhwa is a renowned and leading diasporic writer. The word “Diaspora” has
been used for those writers who shifted from their native country to other. It is derived from
the Greek word “Diasperio” which means “scatter abroad” or “scatter”. The word “Diaspora”
originally refers to Jewish dispersion from Israel that took place in the past. Defining ‘Dia-
spora” in *Diaspora: Genealogies of Semantics and Transcultural Comparison*, Martin Bau-
man writes: “...expressing notions of hybridity, heterogeneity, identity, fragmentation and
reconstruction, double consciousness, fractures of memory, ambivalence, roots and routes,
discrepant cosmopolitanism, multi-locationality and so forth” (324). The South Asian di-
asporic writers are those who have mostly shifted to U.S.A., U.K., Canada and other Western
countries, but write about their own native country. Dislocation is the major theme of di-
asporic fiction of such dislocated authors. The major diasporic writers who belong to India
and Pakistan are Jhumpa Lahiri, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Bharti Mukherjee, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Kamila Shamshi, Nadeem Aslam, Bapsi Sidhwa etc. Jhumpa Lahiri, born in London and brought up in Rhode Island in U.S., is one of the highly acclaimed diaspora writers. Her first and the most renowned novel *The Namesake* is the story of an immigrant family. Salman Rushdie is one of the most controversial novelists. His reputation as a novelist chiefly rests on his novels *Midnight’s Children* and *Satanic Verses*. V.S. Naipaul, born in Trinidad, has won the most prestigious the Nobel Prize for literature. *Area of Darkness* and *A House for Mr Biswas* are his highly acclaimed novels. Bharti Mukherjee is an Indo-American author whose novels *The Tiger’s Daughter*, *Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughter* have earned her a great deal of fame. Kamala Markandaya is the author the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, the best seller that is translated in several languages. Her novel *The Nowhere Man* is about the diasporic experiences.

Vikram Seth is known for his highly applauded novel *A Suitable Boy*. The novel throws light on identity crisis and the issues of marriage. Meera Sayal, born in England, is an accomplished novelist. *The House of Hidden Mothers* is her popular novel that deals with the issue of surrogacy industry in India. Kiran Desai is known for her novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. *The Inheritance of Loss* won the Man Booker Prize in 2006. These Diaspora writers have represented their pang of nostalgia in their works. Nadeem Aslam, born in Pakistan, wrote *Season of the Rainbirds* and *Maps for Lost Lovers*. About the Pakistani Diasporas, Pnina Werbner writes: “... the Pakistani diasporic community, the earliest and by far the largest and most prominent internationally, which emerged in the 1900s (is) a major player in global diaspora religious politics.”*( Werbner 476 ) In Cultural Identity and Diaspora: *Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake*, Anita Singh writes: Diaspora is today an incontestable fact of world culture. It is beginning to occupy a greater place in transnational economic and cultural exchange.” *( The Atlantic Review Quarterly 2 ) Anita Desai, shortlisted for the Booker
Winning three times, she is renowned Indian diaspora novelist. She was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*. Other books include *Fasting, Feasting, In Custody*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Bye-bye BlackBird*, and *Cry the Peacock*. These works are her major novels.

South Asian women writers have received considerable attention in the literary world. They have made substantial contributions in raising the voice against the women’s subjugation, servility, and marginalization in highly male-dominated societies. They have given potent voice to the voiceless gender of the society in their endeavours to change the image of women as depicted in earlier fictional works. Instead of self-sacrificing women, these women characters are exceptional in their struggle against male domination and in their quest for identity. The voice of the voiceless has been portrayed phenomenally realistic and lifelike. *Post Colonial Women Writers, New Perspective*, Sunita Sinha opines: “The changing images of women in south Asian novels, from the suffering women to the assertive ones, redefining self and defying traditional mores, are beautifully documented in the novels . . .” *xvi* The majority of the Anglophone novelists have questioned the patriarchal authority heaping severe opprobrium on its functioning challenging “the assumption that gender oppression is the primary force of patriarchy.” *Sinha 7* Bapsi Sidhwa’s novels are the quintessence of feminists concern for women’s liberation and struggle against exploitative male forces. *Contemporary Indian Women Writers in English*, Sumathi remarks: “Sidhwa offers . . . a glimpse into the realistic, kaleidoscopic images of the psyche, cultural prejudices, and striking imagination of Indian Women . . .” *53*

Postcolonial fiction has been enriched by the emergence of the Parsi novels. Parsi novel in English is the portrayal of Parsi nostalgia and dilemma. The Parsi fiction is the depiction of Parsi rites, rituals and customs. The novelists like Firdaus Kanga, Cornelia Sorabji, B.K. Karanjia, Nergis Dalal, Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, Boman Desai, D.F. Karaka, Boman
Desai, Saros Dara Cowasjee, Rohinton Mistry, Farrukh Dhondy, Dina Mehta, Bapsi Sidhwa etc. have made significant and considerable contribution in English fiction figuring this miniscule community in their works. The Parsi literature is ethnocentric, expressing identity crisis of its small community whose post colonial writers have focused their writings on major issues like constant declining of the Parsi population, highly low birth rate in the community and mixed marriages. In Parsee Novels, V.L.V.N. Narendra Kumar writes:

Parsee novel in English i.e. novel portraying Parsee life, is a potent index of the Zoroastrian ethos. It voices the ambivalence, the nostalgia and the dilemma of the endangered Parsee community. In Parsee novel in English, the ‘operative sensibility’ is Zoroastrian. The Parsee novelists have forged a dialect which has a distinct ethnic character. The tempo of Parsee life is fused into their English expression just as the tempo of Jewish life has gone into the best work of Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud. The triumph of the Parsee novelists in the use of English language is largely due to westernization and exposure to English culture . . . Parsee novel in English gives us a peep into the turbulent Parsee mind of today. (17-18)

The sub-continenal Parsi novelists have focused their attention in delineation of the Parsis’ lifestyle. They have given valuable contribution enriching the post-colonial South Asian fiction writing in English. Cornelia Sorabji is a renowned Parsi novelist. B.K. Karanjia is also a renowned novelist whose More of An Indian is a significant Parsi novel that deals with the problem of interfaith marriages in the Parsi community. Dina Mehta writes about the varied aspects of her own Parsi community. And Some Take a Lover is her highly popular novel. Saros Dara Cowasjee’s novel Goodbye to Elsa brought him great fame as a novelist. Firdaus Kanga is a Bombay born Parsi novelist whose novel Trying to Grow, a semi autobio-
graphical novel, brought the novelist international attention. The novel is a rejection of Hindu belief of ‘karma’. Firdaus Kanga throws light on the Parsis’ ethnic identity. Trying to Grow is one of the best novels written by Kanga upon a disabled boy. Nergis Dalal, the most prolific of the authors, wrote more than seventy years. Skin Deep is Dalal’s highly applauded novel that deals with the sisterhood bond in the family. She sheds enough light on the Parsi milieu in her novels. Rohinton Mistry occupies a pride of place as a novelist. Mistry’s novels focus on the Parsi ethos. Family Matters by Mistry is about a Parsi family concerned with the Parsi identity. Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, D.F. Karaka and Boman Desai are the Parsi novelists but with little repute. In Of Parsis and their Novel, Keki Daruwalla writes: “When we deal with fiction written by Parsis, we are dealing with expatriate writers who bring their own complexes and mental baggage with them.” (84)

Sidhwa, one of the most renowned Parsi novelists, received widespread acclaim as a novelist with the publication of her five novels. Her novels The Crow Eaters (1978), The Pakistani Bride (1983), Cracking India aka Ice-Candy-Man (1991) An American Brat (1993) and Water (2006) established Sidhwa as Pakistan’s leading English language novelist and gave Pakistani fiction a new direction and dimension. Sidhwa’s first novel, The Crow Eaters is a ribald comedy that narrates the story of its protagonist Faredoon. The Pakistani Bride is the story of Zaitoon who is a born Punjabi but adopted Kohistani girl. Cracking India aka Ice-Candy-Man is the story of India’s partition and its aftermath observed through the eyes of Lenny, a Parsi girl. The partition of India and communal violence that took a heavy toll of life is the backdrop of the novel Cracking India. An American Brat is written on the theme of immigrant experience. The novel is an account of the Parsi migrant to U.S.A. Feroza Ginwalla, a Pakistani Parsi girl, is the protagonist of the novel who is sent to U.S.A. by her parents to keep her intact from the influence of fundamentalism under the regime of Zia-Ul-Haq, the Pakistani dictator president. Her fifth novel Water exposes the ills of the Hindusim. Chuiya
is the eight year old protagonist of the novel. The novel deals with the pathetic condition of the widows in ashrams and brings forth their poverty and sexual exploitation that occur in the name of culture, creed and customs. With her five novels, Sidhwa has “shown considerable accomplishment as well as promise.” (Paranjape 88)

Though the Parsees are highly progressive in their outlook and education, being a handicapped girl Sidhwa got her early education at home on the advice of her doctors. She passed her Matric examination as a private student. Thus, she spent much of her childhood at home in isolation. Living in an Islamic country like Pakistan, moreover few Parsi inhabitants in Lahore caused her undesired segregation. But, migration to U.S.A. broadened her creative horizon. Sidhwa was appointed as an Assistant Professor of creative writing at University of Houston. She taught at Rice University, Columbia University and Brandeis University. She worked as a Professor of English at Mount Holyoke College in 1997. In an interview with Julie Rajan, Sidhwa says:

As a woman, it has given me a tremendous amount of freedom. The sense of being able to just take off, on your own, without having to have company. In Pakistan and India, we tend to move in bunches and do things together, and you're always part of a family, or a group. Here, you don't carry so much “baggage” with you when you take off. No, it wasn't that hard really. Phillip Lopate at the University of Houston suggested that I teach, to which I replied, “How can I teach with just a bachelor’s degree from Punjab University?” And he said, “You've published two very good novels—that is like getting several PhDs! You're qualified to teach Creative Writing.” I went into it with a lot of hesitation because I didn't have role models. But, I did it and I have enjoyed it.

( Rajan )
Most of the novels of Sidhwa are women centred, examining the various issues associated to women and their struggle for empowerment. In *The Pakistani Bride*, she deals with the struggle of Zaitoon against repressive patriarchal society of mountains. *Cracking India* portrays Ayah fighting against the communal forces led by men of the different community. *Water* is a picture of widowed women of Pre-independence India. The protagonist Chuyia, Kalyani and Shakuntala are the women characters who fight to find a way to defy male subjugation. *The Pakistani Bride*, *Cracking India* and *Water* end with a positive note of women’s escape from the clutches of their oppressors. In *Feroza in An American Brat*, G.D. Barche observes:

> Sidhwa is recognized as Pakistan’s only international novelist and her attempt to exemplify the role of women in a patriarchal society makes her not only a significant figure in women’s literature but also a singular one as well. In Sidhwa’s works, themes diverge from traditional to contemporary. Her concern ranges from a pre-independence social scene to partition and its aftermath, her timeframe is fifty years. Being a writer, she relies more on her imagination than on values. (99)

The representation of women in Sidhwa’s novels is the significant aspect of her fictional writing. Through Zaitoon, Carol, Feroza and Chuyia, Bapsi Sidhwa raises the voice against age old customs and traditions. Her novels expose the patriarchal tyranny that crushes the individuality and recognition of women as human beings.

Sidhwa, a polyglot who has command of several languages like English, Punjabi, Gujarati and Urdu, opted English as the medium of writing her literary works. In an interview with David Montenegro, Sidhwa justifies her choice:
I find myself comfortable writing in this language. My written Urdu is not very good, though I speak it fluently. As for Gujarati, hardly anyone in Pakistan knows the language. In Britain, of all places, people say, “Why don’t you write in your own language?” And they bring very heavy political overtones to bear on this. But I think, well, the English don’t have a monopoly on the language. It is a language of the world, now. And it is a means of communicating between various nationalities and the most immediate tool at hand. So I use it without any inhibitions or problems. (523)

Sidhwa belongs to Parsi-Zoroastrian community, originally emigrated from Persia, now-a-days Iran. Parsis are a distinct ethnic community who maintain their cultural identity. She is belongs to the group of prominent Parsi writers like Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanaga, Boman Desai, Farrukh Dhondy, Ardashir Vakil who have given Parsi community and culture the worldwide recognition through their fictional writings. These formidable writers have earned great fame and recognition by their creative writings. The Parsi milieu, expatriate experience, identity crisis, interfaith marriages and migration are the major concerns of these Parsi writers. Sidhwa’s novels reflect the Parsi perspective

In her first published novel, The Crow Eaters, Sidhwa deals with the Parsi community which she herself belongs to. The novel provides a deep insight into the life of the Parsis with a comprehensive account of their ceremonies, customs, traditions, rites, rituals, beliefs and disbeliefs. Though she is a Parsi, she neither applauds nor criticizes the Parsi-way of life. She has employed humour and irony in the novel. Irony has been used very dexterously in the novel by Sidhwa. The way, Junglewala sets his house and shop on fire to get rid of his mother-in-law and be profited through insurance in this way, has been depicted ironically. The very title of the novel indicates the richness of humour. The title The Crow Eaters misleads
people to regard Parsis as eater of crows. It is borrowed from the idiom Kag-Kharo prevalent in the countries like India and Pakistan where a talkative man is said to have eaten crows. The Parsis are known for talking too much in a loud voice, hence the title is meant in this regard.

The narrative of the novel is woven round the character of Faredoon Junglewalla aka Freddy. Through the portrayal of Junglewalla, Sidhwa attempts to reveal the experience of the Parsi community as a whole. Being a minority community, it is in constant strife to retain its unique identity and heritage:

There are hardly a hundred and twenty thousand Parsis in the world—and still we maintain our identity—why? Booted out of Persia at the time of the Arab invasion 1,300 years ago, a handful of our ancestors fled to India with their sacre fires. Here they were granted sanctuary by the prince Yadav Rana . . . Our ancestors weren’t too proud to bow to his will. To this day we do not allow conversion to our faith – or mixed marriages. ( CE 11 )

The Crow Eaters brings forth the Parsis’ quandary in assimilating the host culture as they are scared of losing their identity as a community. Amongst the Parsis, India’s possible partition caused great deal of apprehension of the danger of being extinct because of the demands being raised for separate state for Muslims, Sikhs and other major communities in India. In Post Colonial Appraisal of Bapsi Sidhwa’s Fiction, Rahul Sapra asserts:

. . . all the efforts the Parsis have made over the centuries to assimilate themselves into Indian culture are futile since the community all of a sudden faces the threat of extinction/annihilation in the wake of the partition. Thirteen hundred years ago, the Parsis had tried to accept Indian culture with all its diversities, but now at the moment of partition they might be forced to take part with
one of the dominant communities/religions in India—Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs. (10)

The first two novels *The Crow Eaters* and *The Pakistani Bride* were written by Sidhwa in Pakistan but she was unable to find any publishers to publish her novels. After being rejected from the publishers in her country, Sidhwa herself published her novel *The Crow Eaters* in 1978 which was later published by *Jonathan Cape* in 1980. In an interview with Shoma Chaudhury, Bapsi said:

> Our friends and relatives were all business people and to confess I wrote would have exposed me to ridicule. I would be considered affected and at best thought to be writing romantic nonsense. Writing in a vacuum didn't bother me - in fact I can't imagine writing as a team effort. But one writes to be read, and *The Bride* and *The Crow Eaters* gathered rejection notes from both sides of the Atlantic: It was heart-breaking to read that the publishers loved my writing but felt Pakistan was too remote in time and space for my work to be commercially viable. My agents in the U.S. and U.K. gave up after two years, and I gave up writing. I was able to write *Cracking India* only after *Jonathan Cape* published my novels to encouraging reviews in Britain. (deep-blueink.com)

*The Crow Eaters* is a revelation of the Parsis’ strategy of servility towards the British. Faredoon is the representative of his community in this regard, his excessive fawning of is observed when he visits in his cart to Government House wearing a white starched coat and white pyjamas and turban. This approach of Parsis helped them in securing security in the British regime in India that resulted in their highly economic prosperity. At the sudden visit of Mr Charles P. Allen at his store, Faredoon lavished battery of titles on him: “My lords,
Your Honours and your excellencies.” (CE 119) It is Freddy’s exaggerated fawning towards the British that he was able to dupe the insurance company exploiting his relations with the British.

*The Crow Eaters* is a minute depiction of the Parsis’ beliefs and superstitions. The Parsis are fire worshipper. It is taken as a Holy symbol in the Zoroastrianism, a symbol of Divine spark, a symbol of Ahura Mazda, as such great reverence is paid to it in Parsi households and preserved it in ashes not to let it extinguish. Sidhwa describes about the Parsis’ act of charity. It is an essential part of the Parsi life. As soon as Faredoon’s fortune takes a turn from rags to riches, he began to give much to charity: “And once you have the means, there is no end to the good you can do. I donated towards the construction of an orphanage and a hospital. I installed a water pump with a stone plaque dedicating it to my friend Mr Charles P. Allen.” (CE 10) After renunciation of the earthly life, Freddy son, Yazdi donates every bit of his share of property in charity:

A few days later he returned home without his shirt, and the day after climbed up to the flat in only his homemade underpants. He had distributed his apparel among four beggars near the Regal Cinema square.

The family discovered that Yazdi had given up eating tuck. He spent his pocket money and the money he borrowed from Yasmin and Billy on the unfortunates. (CE 158)

Sidhwa depicts about *Jashan*, a religious thanks giving ceremony. *Jashan* is a commemoration of any occasion or event- a religious, seasonal or historical. Freddy offers *Jashan* prayer: “We owe Him thousands, nay millions of thanks for His grace . . .” (CE 17) Sidhwa delineates in detail the Parsi-rituals of marriage. She depicts about the *Mada-Sara* ceremony associated with the marriage of the Parsis. The issue of interfaith marriage has also been dealt
with in the novel. Sidhwa describes about the ‘Tower of Silence’ where the dead persons of the Parsi community are disposed of.

*The Crow Eaters* is a loosely constructed novel that portrays Parsi-milieu and culture. Sidhwa throws enough light on the Parsee belief, conventions, customs, superstitions, loyalty etc. The Parsi cultural values and religious faith have been brought forth in the novel. *The Crow Eaters* is the voice of the Parsi community throwing ample light on the Parsi life and its varied traits.

The most significant aspect of the novel is the use of humour and mild satire with which nearly all the characters have been portrayed. In *The Parsi Paradox in The Crow Eaters*, Novy Kapadia remarks: “The overall mode of the novel is comic. It is not a social comedy like that of Jane Austen or a satirical comedy of Swift or a comedy of manners, but a genial comedy.” (134-35)

*The Pakistani Bride* reflects the struggle of a girl in particular but of women in general. From the time immemorial, women have found themselves conflicting with their male counterparts, homes and society for their dignity and respect, and they have been trying to break those social and familial boundaries which are meant to confine them in the name of customs and honour. *The Pakistani Bride* came into its existence by Sidhwa’s chance meeting with an Afghan woman on an aeroplane who became inspirational for her in writing this novel. In an interview with David Montenegro, Sidhwa says:

I am so fond of reading, and I used to think that a writer was some sort of a being who lives in another sphere. I never thought of the writer in human terms but almost as some disembodied power that automatically produced books. And suddenly by telling me that she [the Afghan woman] was a writer,
she made me realize that writers were very fresh and blood persons. And that did make me want to write. ( 5 )

*The Pakistani Bride* was written first but published second by Sidhwa, and *The Crow Eaters* was written second but published first.

The story of Zaitoon reflects the dominion of patriarchy in the tribes and Pakistani society. *The Pakistani Bride* mirrors the social status of women in this society and focuses on the violence and oppression faced by them. It is a society where women are imprisoned in the cultural boundaries. At the same time, the novelist, through Zaitoon, depicts the inherent courage and will power of women to survive. The novel is a sort of challenge to the patriarchal culture and values of society through the character of Zaitoon. In *The Bride: The Treatment of Women*, Robert L. Ross writes: “While *The Bride* has much to say about a patriarchal culture where women have little control over their fates, it does so without forsaking the demands of effective storytelling. Sidhwa has succeeded in embedding ideas within a novel that is breath-taking in its action, engaging in its characterization, and exotic in its rendering of place.” ( 164 )

*The Pakistani Bride* is set in Lahore, Pakistan in the wake of India’s partition in 1947 that resulted in the emergence of a new state, Pakistan which is the predominant setting of her other two novels *The Crow Eaters* and *Cracking India*. The story begins its journey from Kohistan, then the locale shifts to Lahore, and ends in Kohisatan. Before shifting its setting to Lahore, the novelist has merged the partition crisis and its aftermath to turn the focus of the story towards Zaitoon, its protagonist. Qasim, Zaitoon’s foster father, is a man from the mountains of Karakoram region of Pakistan. When he was still a little boy, he was married to Afshan, a budding young girl: “Chiselled into precocity by a harsh life in the mountains, Qasim had known no childhood. From infancy, responsibility was forced upon him and at ten
he was a man, conscious of the rigorous code of honour by which his tribe lived.” (PB 7)

When small pox epidemic took the life of his children and wife, Qasim moved to Jullundur. But, the train is ambushed by the Sikhs who butchered mercilessly a number of innocent passengers. Qasim survives the attack. He meets a little girl Munni, whose parents were killed in the same train massacre. He adopts the girl and names her Zaitoon. In Lahore, he meets Nika whose wife Miriam takes care of the little girl until the setting shifts to Kohistan.

Zaitoon is married off to Sakhi, a tribe boy of Qasim’s native land. The marriage of Zaitoon, a girl from the plain, with Sakhi, who was born and brought up in the mountainous region, where barbarity towards women in the name of honour is frequent, proves disastrous. No sooner Zaitoon steps into the region than she begins to realize the savagery of the mountainous tribesmen. The inherent harsh behaviour of the mountain people shatters her hopes and gets disillusioned. In The Pakistani Bride: From Fantasy to Reality, Indira Bhatt aptly narrates: “The novelist places Zaitoon in the unfamiliar savage surroundings and describes fully the mountain people and their life . . . (155) The savagery and brutal treatment meted out to Zaitoon makes her break the bond of her marriage with Sakhi. She runs away challenging the tribal code of honour where death is the only sentence for it. Unlike the real story, heard by Sidhwa, Zaitoon is able to survive the hunt. She is saved by the Major Mushtaq. In Women, Identity and Dislocation in The Bride, Furrukh Khan writes:

“Sidhwa implicitly suggests that the Kohistani people and society as a unit exist in a state of historical and cultural petrification. It is quite apparent that she perceives these Kohistanis (who may symbolize the Pathans as a whole) as inextricably caught in clutches of their “ancient” (thus barbaric) traditions, belonging to a distant past mode of life, a world of ignorance in contrast to the sophisticated, “civilized” narrator who embodies the “new world.” (150)
Carol is an American woman, falls in love with a Pakistani man, Farukh who is possessive and jealous in nature. She opts to live in Lahore after her marriage with Farukh. She retains her American identity. Carol’s romantic illusions are soon shattered. She finds herself unfit in the conservative society of Pakistan where there is no regard for women. *The Pakistani Bride* tells about one more bride, Afshan. Afshan is married off at the age of fifteen to Qasim, a boy of ten, as a repayment the loan borrowed by her father, Resham Khan from Qasim’s father, Arbab. Her marriage with a small boy reveals the bitter reality of tribal society where women are treated as commodities. Afshan and her six children die of small-pox. Sidhwa draws her readers’ attention towards the poor medical facilities in such mountainous areas.

*The Pakistani Bride* is written on the theme of marriage, the marriage of two persons of entirely different cultures, one civilized and the other barbarous that is nowhere in touch with the main stream of the nation. In particular, the status of women in male dominated Pakistan’s tribal patriarchal society has also been focused in the novel. The savagery and brutality is inherent in the Kohistani society, whose codes of conduct are different for men and women. The plight of women in such tribal culture is terrible. In *Pathetic Condition of Women in Bapsi Sidhwa’s Pakistani Bride*, Suraj and Pawan Kumar write: “. . . the cultural system of patriarchal society creates impediments in the life of women . . .” (222) Once a woman is married to a tribal man, there can be no escape except death.

In *The Pakistani Bride*, Sidhwa has tried to portray the fate of the tribal women living in the mountainous area as well as the women living in cultured society of Pakistan. Zaitoon, Sakhi’s mother Hamida and Carol had to fight for their survival though in different ways. Zaitoon survives because of her zeal to live in a world where she can breathe freely, away from the oppressive system of the uncultured and barbarous tribes. Carol’s survival is a
comeback to her civilized society, a rebuff to an inferior culture to regain her identity. As far as Sakhi’s mother Hamida is concerned, she stands for those submissive and helpless women who have no way ahead, no resistance but to endure the tyranny of men, be it her husband or her son:

Sakhi glowered in insane fury. ‘I’ll teach you,’ he hissed, ‘I’ll teach you meddling women. You think you can make a fool of me? Do you?’

Hamida covered under the raised stick. The blow caught her shoulder. She scrambled like a crab down the sloping terrain. Sakhi skidded after her, wielding his staff. She tried to run, but a blow hit her legs and she fell forward . . .

‘For God’s sake stop it,’ she [Zaitoon] wailed. ‘For God’s sake, you’ll kill her!’ . . . Sakhi struck her on her thighs, on her head, shouting, ‘You are my woman! I’ll teach you to obey me!’ . . . (PB 172-73)

The Pakistani Bride is a poignant novel that describes the harrowing experiences of Zaitoon in the male dominated Kohistani community. The novel shows the transformation of women from submissive to assertive, articulating for their rights, individuality and ‘Self’, resonating the message that it is through struggle only, women can attain them.

Sidhwa’s third novel, entitled Cracking India aka Ice-Candy-Man, was published in 1991 by Milkweed editions. This is the novel which brought Sidhwa international recognition and fame as a novelist. Partition of India is the major theme of the novel, presented from the Parsi and Pakistani perspective. The novel was produced as a film entitled Earth 1947 by Deepa Mehta. Cracking India is a horrifying tale of what happened during the days of Partition of India. Millions of innocent people of both sides—Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, were butchered in the riots. Thousands of women were abducted and raped. There was widespread
savagery. *Cracking India* articulates the tragedy of Partition in a comprehensive manner, and presents the socio-political realities of Indian sub-continent just before the partition of India. Sidhwa as a realist reconstructs the scenes of violence with minute details in her novel.

The turmoil of the partition of India has been captured from a Parsi perspective. The novel shows the attitude of Parsis with regards to the Indian freedom movement and demand of swaraj. It shows the dilemma of the Parsi community as whom to cast their lot with, whether to support ‘Swaraj’ or to be loyal to British Raj. Parsis were feeling being trapped in the difficult situation during the upheavals. Though Parsi community was neutral as a whole in the struggle going on between the two major communities of the region, there were apprehensions swirling in the consciousness of the Parsis, lest the tranquillity of their life should not be disrupted.

The Parsis are known as peace-loving people, far away from the conflict of any sort of power. They adopted it as a strategy for their survival. Sidhwa shows the other side of the coin as well. Though the Parsis do not directly took part in tug of war between two major communities, they act as Messiahs as well, being instrumental in saving the lives of innumerable number of Hindus and Sikhs in Lahore that was under the grip of severe communal riots. Godmother informs Lenny: “Mummy and your aunt rescue kidnapped women. When they find them, they send them back to their families or to the Recovered Women’s Camps . . .” ([CI 251](#))

Through the child narrator Lenny, an eight year old Parsi girl, Sidhwa portrays the social, political and cultural realities of the time. Novy Kapadia writes: “The precocious girl-child narrator in Ice-Candy-Man provides a new perspective on the traumas of Independence and Partition. Her astute and instinctive observations are often an apt parody of the adult world of poses and rigid stances.” ([122](#)) Since the child narrator belongs to the Parsi com-
munity, it becomes easy for the author to record every detail through her eyes even amidst the partition horror. As a neutral observer, she watches the events minutely with unbiased eyes. Lenny is a self portrayal. Lenny’s “compressed” world is akin to the author’s compressed world who shares several similarities with her creator.

The novel reveals how the congenial relations between the people of two opposite communities change because of the aggravating communal tension and rumours. This happens not only in cities but also in rural areas that shows the changing pattern of communal relations: “There’s no telling who’s about these days . . . and not all of them are your friends.” (CI 116) The communal amity and feeling of fraternity between Muslims and Sikhs in two neighbouring villages Pir-Pindo and Dera Tek Singh began to be contaminated amidst rumours of communal clashes from various cities of India and Pakistan:

Their numbers have swollen enormously. They are like swarms of locusts, moving in marauding bands of thirty and forty thousand. They are killing all Muslims. Setting fires, looting, parading the Muslim women naked through the streets—raping and mutilating them in the center of villages and in mosques . . . (CI 209)

The murder of Masseur, the narrow escape of Rana, a young Muslim boy, the mass killing of Muslims in the village Pir-Pindo and numerous other incidents of brutalities and atrocities have been narrated by the child observer, Lenny. She records what was happening around her, in her home town Lahore and other parts of India and in new born country Pakistan. The nightmarish experience of Lenny resembles the experience of the author who was herself of the same age at the time of the Partition of India and the turmoil that took place before and after the Partition. Sidhwa, in an interview with Feroza Jussawalla tells:
When I was a child living in Lahore at the time of Partition, my maiden name was Bhandara, which sounded like a Hindu name. After most of the riots were over, a gang of looters came in carts into our house thinking it’s an abandoned house. They were quite shocked to see us and my mother and everybody there. At that time our Muslim cook came out and said, ‘What do you damn people think you’re doing? This is a Parsi household,’ and they said, ‘we thought it was a Hindu household,’ and they went away. I decided to write a story about Partition because this scene was vivid in my mind. (Jussawalla)

During the widespread massacre, young girls were abducted and forcefully converted to the other religion. To avoid persecution, many Hindus opted to convert into other religion. Hari converted into a Muslim, got his penis circumcised. Moti became David Masih converting into a Christian. Partition proved horrific for those who have to migrate to their unknown distant land. Sidhwa depicts the psychological impact of the horror on the lives of people. In Bapsi Sidhwa’s Ice-Candy-Man as a Partition Novel, Mallikarjun Patil regards the novel as one that:

“. . . deals with the partition horror and the life of Lenny, a limping girl, an Ice-candy-man, a Muslim and an ayah, a Hindu. Lenny, the Ice-candy-man and Ayah’s lives are governed by the event of partition and its consequences. Still a number of characters are affected by the 1947’s communal troubles. Bapsi Sidhwa succeeds in elaborating the intercommunity life from Parsi angle.” (74)

Sidhwa depicts the events of partitions as a historian. Cracking India is a sort of social history that describes the British colonialism, independence movement and the communal frenzy of partition. In Reading between the Borderlines, Vishnupriya Sengupta remarks:
“Bapsi Sidhwa appears as a social historian who perceives the event through the eyes of Lenny, an eight-year-old Parsi girl.” (157) As a historian, Sidhwa portrays all the eminent political readers like Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah. She has given much importance to Jinnah in comparison to Gandhi and Nehru. She describes the role of the political leaders objectively, but at times, she appears to be bias towards the Indian leaders while eulogizing Jinnah: “His training at the Old Bailey and practice in English courtrooms has given him faith in constitutional means, and he puts his misplaced hopes into tall standards of upright justice. The fading empire sacrifices his cause to their shifting allegiances.” (CI 170)

Lenny’s Ayah, a Hindu young girl, is the centre of attraction because of her magnetic beauty. Her suitors belong to different communities. She is Lenny’s caretaker and sole source of knowing the world around: “I learn of human needs, frailties, cruelties and joys. I also learn from her the tyranny magnets exercise over metals.” (CI 29) Ayah’s abduction and molestation and forceful conversion by Ice-Candy man with the help of the communal frenzied Muslim mob is the most shocking and shattering event that shows the strong loathing and aversion caused by the religion based partition of India, and how women were victimized during the communal riots: “The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces.” (CI 195)

Partition caused communal violence had great traumatic impact on the psyche of children. As a child observer Lenny also undergoes such a harrowing experience: “The last thing I noticed was Ayah, her mouth slack and piteously gaping, her disheveled hair flying into her kidnappers’ faces, staring at us as if she wanted to leave behind her wide-open and terrified eyes.” (CI 195) Sidhwa depicts the ferocity of the communal riots that stained humanity and divided the human hearts, as well forced innocence of the children to wither untimely.
Ayah’s story shows the degree of violence committed against women at the time of India’s partition. *Cracking India* is a saga of suppression and marginalization of women in general.

Sidhwa’s novel *An American Brat*, appeared in 1993 is an account of the experience of a Pakistani migrant Feroza Ginwalla, her adventures in America and her struggle in assimilating Western culture with her own Parsi culture. The novel is written against the background of political unrest when Zia-ul-Haq imposed martial law, overthrowing Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s democratic government. Like Sidhwa’s other earlier novels, the locale shifts from Lahore to U.S.A. The novel also mirrors the predicament of the Parsis living in Pakistan where fundamentalism is growing rapidly. In *The Fictional World of Bapsi Sidhwa*, Amit Kumar Dubey 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. This results into unleashing a rule of terror during which all opposition and dissent is muzzled and people are cowered into a state of submission. While dealing with history she puts into her novel fictional characters from her own Parsi community, which has a chequered history of migration, and makes us take a peep into the history tangentially through the actions and reactions of those characters regarding their experiences in Pakistan and America. (85)

*An American Brat* moves its locale, for the most part the United States of America. The novel reflects the recent trend of globalization, the concept of the world as a global village and increasing movement of professionals from the third world to first world nations like the United
States of America. As people move from one part of the world to another, national boundaries dissolve the formation and maintenance of community takes on new dimensions.

The intercultural theme in *An American Brat* has been dealt with by Bapsi Sidhwa. The values of the West have been portrayed in comparison to that of the East. The conflict between the two entirely opposite cultures is perceptible on the personal and social level. Sidhwa shows the interaction of the two cultures in *An American Brat*. Feroza, a Parsi girl living in Islamic country, comes across with the modern American way of life that gives higher priority to the material prosperity, in stark contrast to that of Feroza. Feroza is caught between the two worlds-the one she had abandoned behind and the other which finds difficult to assimilate despite its openness. She dwindles between the old and new world to find some solace. The expatriate experience is the core of *An American Brat*, but a number of pertinent issues such as mixed marriages and oppression of women have also been dealt with.

Feroza Ginwalla, a pampered, sixteen year old girl, is sent to U.S.A. by her parents to escape growing fundamentalism in Pakistan. Feroza Ginwalla goes through three cultures, her own Parsi community’s culture, her country’s fundamental Islamic culture and then Western culture when she migrates to America. About Feroza’s struggle between her ethnicity and her Americanness, In *Bapsi Sidhwa’s An American Brat*, Dalia Gomaa aptly remarks: “The story of *An American Brat* revolves around the struggle of Feroza, who tries to become “American,” struggling to be accepted as an “American” while unwilling to abandon her “ethnic loyalties.” (67)

Parsis are diaspora as a community. They had to leave Iran to escape their forceful conversion into Islam by Muslim invaders. The major theme of *An American Brat* is thus immigration round which other themes have been interwoven. In an interview with Naila Hussain, Bapsi Sidhwa says: “. . . the book deals with the subject of ‘culture shock’ young
people from the sub-continent have to contend with when they chose to study abroad. It also delineates the clashes the divergent cultures generates between the families ‘back home’ and their transformed and transgressing progeny bravely groping their way in the New World. (19)

Feroza, who was leaning towards the conservative Islamic fundamentalism, initially struggles hard to her effort “to broaden her outlook, get this puritanical rubbish out of her head” (AB 14) Zareen’s younger brother and Feroza’s uncle, Manek looks after Feroza in the metamorphosis of his tradition bound niece into the progressive Western values. Feroza undergoes through the process of her transformation from a orthodox girl to a free and liberal young girl via numerous experiences that help her convert into a mature young maiden who “is all set to realize her potentials in a country where freedom is a cherished ideal . . .” (Rengachari 57)

Sidhwa shows the fact that the life of an immigrant is not that much easy in America. She reveals the challenges that an immigrant has to undergo. At Kennedy Airport, Feroza faces the hostility of an Immigration officer. It was her first encounter with the harsh realities of life in U.S.A. Later, she learns about the dreaded drug dealers and male prostitutes in America. When Feroza “began to notice odd embraces and movements in shadow spaces”, Manek warns her: “Don’t stare, it’s dangerous—they don’t like it.” (AB 79) Amidst her pleasant and unpleasant experiences, Feroza goes through a very dangerous situation when she enters mistakenly into men’s bathroom and a black man present there lewdly blocks her path. Sidhwa establishes the fact that sexual harassment prevails everywhere, even in an advanced country like America. Feroza goes through a horrifying experience when she finds herself in stairs in the YMCA. It is through the help and guidance of her uncle Manek that Feroza learns the bitter realities of the American life and culture.
Sidhwa has dealt with the issue of intercommunity marriage in *An American Brat.* Feroza’s love affair with David, a Jew, later her decision to marry him causes tumult in her family back at home in Pakistan that makes Zareen hurry to U.S.A. to handle the situation. Mixed marriages are considered a sort of threat to the existence of the community that is already under the severe threat of extinction because of low birth rate and inter religion marriages. In *Theme of Marriage in An American Brat,* Novy Kapadia writes: “In making this question the central concern of the narrative, Sidhwa reveals her awareness of an issue that has serious ramifications and consequences for the very existence of the Parsi community.” (193) However the younger generation of the Parsi uphold Feroza’s decision. Bunny, Jeroo and Behram’s daughter says: “She is only getting married, for God’s sake!” (AB 268) Feroza’s process of Westernization, from the influence of Islamic conservatism, reaches its final stage with her desire to marry David. In *Theme of Marriage in An American Brat,* Novy Kapadia writes:

Sidhwa’s handling of the theme of inter-community marriages is very relevant and contemporary. The issue of inter-faith marriages still arouses acrimonious debates amongst the Parsi community. Orthodox priests and reformists delve into the scriptures to argue over what it takes to be a Parsi. By the traditional rules of the community, a Parsi could be one only by birth. In the wake of a spate of mixed marriages, a number of children were thus deemed ‘lost’ to the community as were the erring parents . . . (196)

*An American Brat* is written by Bapsi Sidhwa on her own perspective as an immigrant in America. Through Feroza, she depicts about her own experiences as an immigrant in U.S.A. She has brought forth the challenges encountered by the Pakistani immigrants in
America. She constitutes the theme of expatriate-experience in *An American Brat*. In *Theme of Marriage in An American Brat*, Novy Kapadia writes:

> The ruthless interrogation by the Customs, incredulity in the lights, museums, opulence and shopping at New York are aptly portrayed. Her innocence is shown in getting lost on the fire stairs at the YMCA, in a museum at Boston and her confusion when confronted by a sex maniac at the YMCA bathroom. Feroza’s initiation, both her naivety and amazement reflect the culture shock of migrants during their initial trip from the third world to the first world. (188-89)

Like the earlier novels of Sidhwa, *An American Brat* delineates the socio-political conditions of Pakistan. With the imposing of martial law in Pakistan and with the advent of Zia, the Pakistani Army Head, as the centre of power, the process of Islamicization of Pakistan heightens with the coerced support of judiciary and all the leading political parties of Pakistan. Zia introduced the Hadood Ordinance and the Zina Ordinance that were totally oppressive practices against women of all sects and communities. The issue of the cultural differences has been brought forth emphatically by investigating the migrants’ predicament in the civilized Western culture of U.S.A. through Feroza’s experiences.

Sidhwa’s fifth novel *Water*, based on the film by Deepa Mehta, is a moving account of widows’ victimization in particular but women’s in general. The locale of this novel is India, unlike her other novels. *Water* deals with the repression of women in Brahmin dominated Indian Hindu patriarchal society. The novel throws light on the pathetic status of Hindu women in pre-independent India in 1930s. The protagonist of the novel is six year old girl Chuyia. *Water* deals with the dire issues of poverty, child marriage and widowhood and widows’ exploitation.
Merely six year old Chuyia is married off by her parents with a rich but elderly widower, Hira Lal. It is the poverty of the family that compels the parents to marry their little daughter with a wealthy man. Chuyia is soon transformed from a child bride to child widow as her aged husband dies of typhoid. No sooner the cremation of Hira Lal is over near the ghats of Ganges than Chuyia too dies ‘socially’:

Before Chuyia could protest, the woman pulled down her skirt and pulled her blouse up over her neck and saying, “You can’t wear colours or stitched clothes,” threw them in a heap to one side. She hunkered down and in swift, sleight-of-hand motions removed the girl’s silver anklets and secreted them on her person. Chuyia stood naked as the day she was born, staring at the vibrant little red-and-blue heap her clothes made... Vulnerable and embarrassed, she stared at the woman in mute appeal. (Water 42)

Sidhwa vividly portrays the shocking condition of widows in the ashrams meant for them and their sad plight there. Like other widows, Chuyia is compelled to live in a widows’ ashram. Chuyia become instrumental in sowing the seeds of rebellion in the ashram. Determined to defy her fate in the confinement of the ashram, Chuyia created such a tumult that all the widows in the ashram were shaken by her strong resistance:

Inside the ashram, Chuyia continued to shriek her outrage at finding herself deserted in her strange surroundings. “Let me go! I’m not staying here!” she screamed over and over as Kunti, using both hands, pulled her into the courtyard. A couple of elderly widows who had been tending a tulsi plant sprouting from a concrete planter on the verandah straightened their backs to watch. Another, applying fresh clay to the unpaved courtyard, hastily carried her bucket
out of harm’s way to a groove beneath a weedy, slanting tree that cut into the verandah roof.

Kunti, grimacing with the effort, held Chuyia by both shoulders as the girl continued to kick and scream. Chuyia managed to free one hand and struck the widow wherever she could . . . ( Water 50 )

Patriarchy and religion are synonymous of women’s subjugation and segregation. They are the chief contributors in enforcing those dogmas that enslave the very sensitive and vulnerable women. But it is observed that even women show sexist attitude against women. The oppressed assumes the form of oppressor as Madhumati in Water:

Chuyia was shocked into silence by the power of the voice, and watched in amazement as a large old woman, supported by two widows, emerged from the shadowy recesses. Madhumati hobbled precariously to the takth, her accustomed perch in the courtyard, and sat down heavily on the weathered planks. In contrast to the stringy widows, Madhumati had an abundance of slack flesh that made her look much older than her fifty-odd years, and though she wore the same drab white sari as the other widows and her grey hair was as closely cropped to her scalp, she was clearly the ruler of the dilapidated ashram. ( Water 51 )

Sidhwa raises the issue of forced prostitution prevailed in the widows’ ashrams. The widows in the ashrams are forced to sell their bodies to meet the expenses. They have to suffer extreme sexual violence as well. When Madhumati cajoles Kalyani making her sit beside her, Kalyani is scared of her wicked contrivance: “The last time Madhumati had given her a new sari and spoken to her in these syrupy tones, she had been sent to a house outside Rawalpur, where she had been brutalized and Gulabi had to come to her rescue. It had taken her
a long time to recover from the gang rape . . .” (Water 152) In Bapsi Sidhwa’s Water: The Voice of the Marginalised, Beena Agrawal aptly remarks: “The novel Water tears the veil of hypocrisy of the Ashrams of widows, where instead of social security and dignity, they are forced to face all sort of humiliation, torture and prostitution of their virginity.” (67)

Madhumati’s authority in the ashram is questioned by Chuyia by her indomitable spirit: “I don’t want to be a stupid widow! Fatty!” (Water 53) Chuyia functions as a catalyst for Kalyani who resists against her own exploitation: “This is an ashram, didi, not a brothel.” (Water 152) Brooding over the unjust treatment meted out to widows, Shakuntala questions Sadananda about the teachings of the Holy books: “Panditji, I have read the Holy Books without questioning them. But you have studied all the Holy Scriptures . . . I have great respect for your learning . . . Panditji, is it written that widows should be treated badly?” (Water 184).

Sidhwa divulges the unsympathetic approach of elite class of India towards widowed women. Sidhwa shows the various ways by which the dominant Brahmin class of society exploits widows in the name of social norms and traditions. In Women’s Bodies, Women’s Voices Exploring Women’s Sensuality, Madhuri Chatterjee writes: “The socio-moral code of religion excludes women not only from power structures and social constructs but also from her own body, the idea of a self and her sexuality.” (81)

The bastion of male chauvinists is so crafty in interpreting the ancient Holy text that they have been able in segregating women merely to prove its superiority in the society. In Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India, Uma Chakravarti remarks: “The general subordination of women assumed a particularly severe form in India through the powerful instrument of religious traditions which have shaped social practices.” (579)
Sidhwa skilfully brings forth the injustice and exploitation committed against widows in *ashrams*. The inhuman treatment meted out to widows exposes the evil of the Hinduism who live there an isolated, deprived and degraded life. Madhumati, Shakuntala, Kalyani, Bua, Kunti, Snehlata suffer atrocities and even brutality in the hands of their own relatives, mostly in-laws. She ridicules the concept of purity and pollution regarding the Brahmical treatment of widows who are considered as inauspicious and evil. Seth Dwarkanatha is such a portrayal of exploitative wealthy landowners who sate their lust with these unfortunate widows paying them meagre amount.

Narayan, in the novel, is the flag bearer of the social reform and follower of the Gandhian ideals. His desire to marry Kalyani, the widowed prostitute, poses a challenge against the Brahmin dominated Hindu patriarchal society. He promotes the message of women’s emancipation from the rigid constraints of Hinduism, in helping them to shake free from the shackles of caste and religion:

“Who is she? Do I know her?”

“No.”

“Is she Brahmin?”

“She could be.”

Bhagwati looked at him sharply, “You want to marry her and you don’t even know her caste?”

“Ma, caste doesn’t matter to me. You should know that by now.” (Water 160)
Kalyani’s falling in love, though aware of the numerous social and religious bondages and restrictions, shows the feminist’s desperate longing for emancipation from the shackles of social and cultural taboos. Sidhwa writes: “Kalyani felt her body drain of strength and her blood thud in her ear. Taken aback by the effect his physical presence had on her, Kalyani stood rooted to the earth . . .” (Water 144) But, her dreams to live a new life with Narayan prove short lived as she learns that Narayan is the son of Seth Dwarkanath, her exploiter. She ends her life drowning herself in the river Ganges.

*Water* depicts the major powers that are behind the victimization of widows. It exposes the evils prevailed in Hinduism that belittle the individuality and freedom of women. Sidhwa has exposed the Brahmanical harsh treatment towards widows. The role of elite class of society, the priests, rich landlords and gentry responsible for it, has been exposed skilfully and dexterously by Sidhwa. *Water* is not merely criticism of Hindu patriarchal order but also an invocation for social change. It stands for the revolt of all women against any sort of subjugation and segregation.

Apart from being a novelist, Bapsi Sidhwa is a social activist and upholder of women’s empowerment. Through her novels, she has raised those grave issues that are overtly associated with women’s psyche. She has written her novels with social concerns in her mind, amalgamating facts and fiction together. Some of her novels have autobiographical elements as well. *The Crow Eaters* is a portrayal of her own parents, *Cracking India* is a short portrayal of her own childhood. *An American Brat* is the description of Sidhwa’s own migratory experiences in U.S.A. *The Pakistani Bride* and *Water* brings forth the issue of marginalization of women in the patriarchal societies of both Pakistan and India. Her novels show the women’s struggle for her ‘Self’.