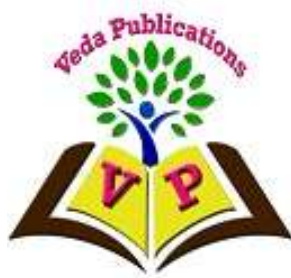


**DISPLACEMENT IN BAPSIDHWA'S AMERICAN BRAT**Y.Sudha devi¹, M.Sai Divya²^{1&2}(Research scholar, Acharya Nagarjuna University)**ABSTRACT**

Sidhwa is best known and the most successful English language novelist. In the context of writers of English fiction in the Indian subcontinent, she is unique because of her raucous humour, cosmic wit, a sense of fair play and shrewd observation of human behaviour. Sidhwa, a versatile writer, one of the most prominent writers of fiction, and a significant voice on scene of Commonwealth literature. BapsiSidhwa, one of the most prominent Parsee Pakistani writers, has established herself a distinguished international writer with five powerful novels to her credit. She has been on South Asian literary scene for many years now.

Keywords: *Displacement- Commonwealth Literature- Bapsisidhwa- Raucous Humour*

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BapsiSidhwa, a recipient of the South-Asian Excellence Award for literature and excellence in literature at the Zoroastrian congress in Chicago, was born on 11th August, 1938 to Zoroastrian parents in Karachi, British India and later moved with her family to Lahore. BapsiSidhwa has many honours and achievements to her credit. Brought up and educated in Lahore, she was graduated from the Kinnaird College for Women in 1956. She comes from a prominent Parsee business family, the Bhandaras of Pakistan. Her husband Noshirwan, a respected Lahore businessman, is the son of the late Mr. R.K. Sidhwa, former mayor of Karachi and a renowned freedom fighter. BapsiSidhwa, mother of two girls and a boy, she was initially a house wife and an active social worker.

BapsiSidhwa, a leading diasporic writer and all her novels reflect her personal experience of the Indian subcontinent, Partition, abuse against women, immigration to the US, and membership in the Parsee/Zoroastrian community. BapsiSidhwa, a prominent literary figure on the map of world literature, has got five novels to her credit, namely *The Crow Eaters (1978)*, *The (Pakistani) Bride(1982/1990)*, *Ice-Candy Man / Cracking India (1988/1991)*, *An American Brat (1993)*, *Water (2006)* and also books on *Lahore: City of Sin and Splendour: Writings on Lahore (2006)*, *Jungle Wala Sahib (translation, Urdu)*, and *Their Languages of Love (2013, Pakistan)*.

Themes in her novels diverge from traditional to contemporaneity and range from a pre-



independent social scene to partition. Displacement is a key notion and theme that we come across in postcolonial and modern literatures alike. Displacement is always featured in post-colonial writings. In its most literal sense, "displacement" refers to the act of moving or being put out of the usual or original place. As such, displacement may be perceived as voluntary or involuntary and can take many forms depending on the contextual circumstances in which it happens. Migration, desertion, exile, diaspora, exodus, eviction, banishment, travel, discovery, imprisonment, escape, among others, are all different forms of "displacement" and as such, these conditions might share many traits. Displacement frequently forces subjects to confront a sense of loss, alienation and disorientation, but it may also lead displaced subjects to experiment a taste of newly gained power and freedom. In any case, the displaced undergo a process of transformation and renewal that involves a refashioning of identity. As a metaphor, displacement can also describe a wide range of phenomena, from social mobility to imperialistic conquest, intellectual retreat, marginalization and gender crossing.

Displacement and multiculturalism is a volume which seeks to address the most ancient problems of human society as well as the greatest challenges of our times. Human society has developed from a nomadic culture into a rooted one. But with new capitalistic forces unleashed, migrations and displacements have become the order of the day. The boundaries of the nation – state are getting fainter and fainter paradoxically at a time when nationalism itself is resurfacing with unprecedented aggressiveness. No human society has been able to avoid either migration or displacement for what so ever reasons, and consequently none has been able to avoid multiculturalism. India, Malaysia, Singapore, UK and USA, Canada and Australia, European nations whether large or small all have a mixed population where different languages, nationalities and races intermingle. Displacement is inevitable.

Colonial displacement occurs essentially because of politically, historically motivated and exploitive cultural reasons as in Salman Rushdie's

Midnight's children, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, etc., Displacement engendered by modernity is philosophical and epistemological in nature and it may be as a result of marriage, for higher education, for a better opportunity, for financial betterment and so on as in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife* etc., Alienation, disassociation and deracination are salient features of displacement.

An American Brat is a story of Feroza, a young Parsee girl's coming of age with her adventures in America. In the opening chapter, we find that she is to be sent to the states by her mother Zareen and father Cyrus Ginwala, owner of a sports goods store. The plot is set in Lahore, in the year 1978. General Zia has seized power and the liberal Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is in jail, to be executed soon. Zareen's problem is that being a Bhutto supporter, she sees that her sixteen year old daughter is becoming conservative like her Muslim friends. Pakistan is under Zia's military-Islamic fundamentalist rule which is oppressive for an open minded Parsees like Zareen. The solution she thinks of is to send her daughter to the United States for a few months, where she will stay with her slightly older uncle Manek, a doctor-a candidate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Despite his own initial difficulties in adjusting to the American way of life, Manek convinces Feroza to stay on as a student majoring hotel management, a suitably practical field, at a junior college in Idaho. Americanized enough to change his name to Mike and work for NASA in Houston, Manek is traditional enough to return to Pakistan to marry a suitably submissive Parsee wife Aban. Feroza goes a step ahead when she decides to marry David Press, an American Jew, thus participating her mother's frantic flight to the United States to stop marriage. Zareen is not merely a closet conservative. She is very conscious of her minority status and is obsessed with the fact that she is a Parsee, one of only 1,20,000 in the world. She knows that Feroza's marrying outside the small Parsee community will mean spiritual exile for her daughter as the Parsees forbid inter-marriages, considering them as a crime against nature. Despite having a relatively progressive outlook, the members of this community, according to surveys and historical records- mainly doctors, engineers and paid



professionals, are staunch isolationists when it comes to the matters of religion and marriage. Even though a Parsee man can marry a non-Parsee woman invoking scorn from the community, a Parsee woman invoking scorn from the community, a Parsee woman cannot marry a non-Parsee man without being excommunicated from the faith. By making Feroza fall in love with a non-Parsee, Bapsi Sidhwa dares to question this law which is held sacred by the holy men of Parsee faith. Even though Feroza loses the love of her life, the reader is left with an impression that Feroza is determined more than ever before to marry outside the faith even as she is determined to remain in it herself.

In *An American Brat*, Bapsi Sidhwa shifts the predominant locale of her work from Lahore and Pakistan to various cities across America as she explores the Parsee/Pakistani diaspora. Sidhwa gave a detailed picture of customs, ceremonies, superstitions, rites, beliefs, myths, rituals, legends and various aspects of Parsee's life through this novel. It is a novel of cultural clashes, and the adjustments and compromises required for a young Parsee woman to settle in America. It portrays the journey of timid pampered young Pakistani Parsee girl from innocence to experience.

An American Brat talks in detail of the increasing feeling of unease nothing but displacement that the Parsee community feels in Pakistan. Sidhwa talks of how there is a general descent into authoritarianism in the name of religion and how even the non-Islamic communities like Parsees were affected by the increasing fundamentalism. Zareen complains about her daughter's attitude being affected by the laws. She says she objected to my sleeveless sari blouse! Really this narrow minded attitude touted by General Zia is infecting her, too. I told her: "Look we're Parsee, everybody knows we dress differently.

When I was her age, I wore frocks and cycled to Kinnaird College. And that was in 59 and 60-fifteen years after Partition! Can she wear frocks? No woman mustn't show their legs, women shouldn't dress like this, and women shouldn't act like that. Girls mustn't play hockey or sing or dance! If everything corrupts their pious little minds so easily, then the Mullahs should wear burqas and stay within

the four walls of their houses!

(An American Brat, 1994: p.10)

This then is a comment on the regression in social mores that has taken place in Pakistan since independence, in the name of religion. Women, it is seen, are most affected by the dictates of narrow religious sanctions which propagate gender segregation.

The theme of displacement is quite prominent in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*; the book deals with the subject of the cultural displacement, young people from the subcontinent have to contend with when they choose to study abroad. It also delineates the clashes the divergent cultures generate between the families back home and their transformed and transgressing progeny bravely groping their way in the New World. Transformation of the character Feroza is well developed throughout the novel, Sidhwa's first three novels are set in the Indian subcontinent her fourth novel is set partly in Pakistan and partly in the USA. The tie is in the late seventies. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is in jail and Islamic fundamentalism is growing in Pakistan. The heroine of the novel, Feroza, carefully brought up in the small but prosperous Parsee community in Lahore is to be sent to America to be saved from being further influenced by Muslim government and behaving that travel will broaden her outlook.

Travel will broaden her outlook; get this puritanical rubbish out of her head.

(An American Brat, 1994: p.14)

Though the suggestion to send Feroza off to the US is quite audacious, Cyrus accepts it because he remembers how timidly Feroza had behaved with a young boy in their drawing room a week ago. Feroza's joy knows no bounds as the plans for her trip to the USA are finalised.

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

To the land of glossy magazines, of "Be witched" and Star Trek", of rock stars and jeans...



(An American Brat,1994:p.27)

How eager and excited she is to go to America! Throughout her journey, Feroza behaves as instructed by the elders but as soon as she reaches America she is a changed person. As the plane lands at Kennedy Airport, Feroza is triumphant and glowing. She is dazzled by the orderly traffic of rushing people, the bright lights and warmed air, the extraordinary cleanliness and sheen of floors and furnishing, the audacious immensity of the glass and steel enclosed spaces. In spite of all this excitement, Feroza starts experiencing displacement: when she is subjected to a rather inhuman treatment by the custom officials in form of confusion as her Pakistani passport opens from the wrong end. Unlike English, Urdu is written from right to left and not vice versa. And then there is a barrage of question-how long she would stay, where she would stay, who would support her, how old was her uncle, what did he do, was he a US citizen, resident or visitor. Feroza's answers do not seem satisfactory to the hostile officer and she is directed to go in for secondary inspection after collecting her luggage. Her trouble even starts with the modern technology used by them though Feroza tries to cope with the different lifestyle of the Americans and the modern technology used by them. Feroza is quite unfamiliar with the escalator, the moving staircase, which one finds in abundance in even small store in the USA. An elderly American couple helps her cross this hurdle-the man takes the duty free packages from her hand and the woman takes hold of Feroza's arm to help her get on and off the escalator. The next problem Feroza faces is of carrying her outsized suitcases. Approaching an immensely tall porter with a large cart evokes no response. Thrown to her own resources, Feroza finds people carrying the luggage on carts and asks a grey haired woman where she had gotten her cart. Directed to a shining caterpillar of stacked carts, she struggles to extract one but fails. She finds young men coming and taking away carts one by one after inserting a dollar bill in a slot. As the next man hassles up with the same intention, Feroza steps right in front of the box, barring access and says:

"It's my turn!"

Jolted by her somewhat rude and strange behaviour, the youth comes to an astonished halt.

"I don't know how to get this," she explained, half-apologetic and half appealing for help. "Can you show me?" (An American Brat,1994:p.57)

Feroza has a horrifying experience when she is locked out in the YMCA fire-stairs. Returning from shopping around 1 o'clock Feroza is surprised by the long lines of people waiting for the elevators. Wondering which line to stand in, Feroza sees one line being rapidly absorbed through open doors into an elevator and joins it. Only when the elevator sails past the fifteenth floor where she is staying does she realise that the different elevators are meant for different floors of the building. The elevator stops on the twenty-second floor the level reserve for women and she steps out, not knowing what to. A sympathetic soul asks her to go down again, get into the correct line, and then take the elevator that goes to the fifteenth floor, the numbers being marked on the top. Feroza feels that this will take a long time and the amiable woman shows her the fire stairs-she can run down to the fifteenth floor. Feroza steps inside the door hesitantly. As the woman shuts the door at her back, Feroza has a feeling that she has been shut out of New York. She feels disoriented- the air is rank with the smell of stale cigarette smoke and food. She gets a whiff of urine and of decaying refuse too. After a minute or so, she tries to open the door but fails to do so. The feeling of displacement is reflected in the atmosphere that is weird enough- the shallow steps dissolving in the darkness. Unsettling creeps into her legs. She tries the doors on different floors but all of these are locked. She shouts for help but no one listens. She prays to God but it does not help. It seems to her nothing exists outside the stairwell.

America assumed a ruthless, hollow, cylindrical shape without beginning or end, without sunlight, an unfathomable concrete tube inhabited by her fear. She was sure something monstrous was crouched in the impervious shadows that patrolled this alien domain- ferocious sewer rats, a brutish Doberman breathing softly, waiting patiently.

(An American Brat, 1994:p.90)

The fear of stairs makes Feroza fly up the steps. Her heart pounding, she runs up flight after flight of stairs still she feels her lungs would explode and flings herself at a door. Banging on it with her



fists, with the palms of her hands, rattling the rod and the handle, she screams:

Open the door... For God's sake, open the door! Can't anybody hear me? Please, somebody...

(An American Brat, 1994:p.92)

Her scream finally attracts a Japanese man who opens the door with a sharp metallic click. Like an uncle or a family friend, he scolds Feroza for her irresponsible act and warns her:

Never do that...never! You could be murdered... No one would know. All kinds of shitty people... drugs!

(An American Brat, 1994:p.94)

It is only later that Feroza realizes that she had been marooned in that hell for only half an hour.

When Feroza finds Jo, her American roommate, her dressing, her etiquette and the way she makes company with boys she feels that she is culturally displaced. But under the influence of her American roommate Jo, Feroza completely adopts an American lifestyle. She acts, talks and dresses like an American girl. The shy and conservative Feroza turns into a confident and self-assertive girl. She learns to drive, drink, dance and use the American slang: she flirts with an Indian student Shashi at the University of Denver where she studies hotel management. Later, she has a tempestuous love affair with a handsome young American Jew David Press.

Displacement, migration, culture-shock, multi-culturalism are akin to each other. Feroza, the protagonist of the novel journeys through three cultures- her own community's Parsee culture, her country Pakistan's Islamic culture and western culture of the United States of America. It is the story of sixteen year old Feroza's dilemma of "who I was and what I have become."

The narrow mindedness of American society in a variety of setting is also imposed. An example is the way Feroza's secular fiancé David in response to Zareen's intransigence regarding Parsi customs flaunts his Jewish heritage. Sidhwa shows that ironically people get limited by the various religious teaching and cultural mores that shape us from infancy. It is Sidhwa's humour, irreverence, astute characterization and positive outlook which enables her tackle contemporary problems like fundamentalism, expatriate experience, cultural clashes, and displacement and inter- faith marriages

amongst the Parsees with great aplomb in An American Brat. Bapsi Sidhwa highlights the sensitive issue of inter community marriage amongst the Parsi. On the theme of marriage, she maintains a clever balance, implicitly opposing the rigid code but not appearing overtly rebellious.

In this novel *An American Brat* Sidhwa addresses another aspect of community: the immigrant experience and displacement. As people move from one part of the world to another, seeming to dissolve national boundaries, the formation and maintenance of community take on new dimensions, as community becomes even more fluid. With *An American Brat* Sidhwa has made an admirable contribution to the literature of the diaspora, which seems sure to expand in the years ahead. This novel once more focuses on the search for community that has turned fluid, a quest that must surely preoccupy the immigrant caught between the world left behind and the new one he or she faces. Such a conflict provides readymade fiction.

An American Brat is a humorous portrayal of alternately funny and terrifying perceptions of an upper middle class Parsee family about the USA, but the novel functions on two levels. The expatriate experience in which the novelist cleverly juxtaposes first and third world perceptions provides humour. At a serious level, the problem of intercommunity marriage and adjustment of a migrant to a different culture is carefully and often ironically delineated. The deft of handling of such modern themes by Sidhwa makes her novel both complex and entertaining.

The theme of displacement is highlighted in Feroza's initiation to the USA and the ruthless interrogation by the customs. Feroza's experiences in Museum, getting lost on the fire stairs at YMCA are aptly portrayed. Feroza's initiation both her naivety and amazement reflect the cultural displacement and culture shock of migrants during their initial trip from the third world to the first world. Creditably during this initial phase of the novel, Sidhwa doesn't emerge as an apologist for the first world or the USA. She chronicles the glamour and efficiency of the USA but also delineates the seedy and violent aspects of life in a post-industrial, consumerist and technology dominated society.



An American Brat has two distinctive movements. Initially there is the movement towards self-actualization in the life of Feroza Ginwalla made possible by acculturation to the American way of thinking and life styles: later as Feroza achieves a synthesis between tradition and modernity, the theme of marriage is elaborately examined with reference to the Parsees attempt to maintain the status quo as regards the sanctity of their religion and continuity of their inherited cultural traditions. By providing insights and detailed information about the Parsees and their culture Sidhwa attempts to foster a better understanding of her community and curbs possible prejudicial misconceptions of the Parsees. In this task she fulfils the essential role of the writers as a preserver of collective tradition, a folk historian and myth maker.

Thus, the study of *An American Brat* reveals that displacement could be voluntary or involuntary even for personal development. The theme of displacement is well presented through different characters, narration and experiences.

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