



“Fractured Identity and Diasporic State of Parsee Community” under the Selected Writings of Bapsi Sidhwa



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Abstract: *As both, the issues of fractured identity and diaspora have been applied to archaeology over the course of the past decade they are usually treated exclusively. Occasionally, they have pertained together as the backdrop to many studies which aim to highlight political influences on contemporary state representations of the past. Both fractured identity and diasporic identity are central to this research and all the discussion about these concepts have been highlighted under the umbrella of Bapsi Sidhwa’s selected writings. An important and great deal of information has been gathered through the views of Edward Saeed, Smith and Fanon. This study discusses the role of identity in the partition of Pakistan and India and how it turns into splintered identity. This study relates the relation of identity which later on changes into diasporic identity and then changes into displacement which leads a person towards homelessness, which ultimately turns into exile.*

Key Words: Culture, Multiculturalism, Diaspora, Displacement, Homelessness, Exile

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A Voyage of Identity towards Diasporic Identity

Culture plays an important role in a nation's life. It comprises the belief, ethics, values, worth, customs and objectives of a nation that live together. Culture presents a nation that how they live their lives, their language, food and their dress. These all are the traits which distinguish people from their neighbours. Culture can be spread through communication and through social relationships. Culture represents a nation

that from where they come and to which country, origin or state they belong. Sidhwa as a Parsee writer has explained in every nation multicultural people live together because of dirty politics, at the time of the separation of India and Pakistan, the same has been done to make the Pakistani culture hybrid. Later on, one comes to know that it helps the nation to support the economy. Most people suffer because of multi-culture, and some multicultural people always remain busy reconstructing their identities. People always move from one place to another and

experience different things in life, and then they decided to live their life the way they want. They experience different circumstances in different environments, they get tact's that how they have to behave according to situations.

Multiculturalism creates awareness as well as problems in the lives of refugees. Although multiculturalism promotes the economy, it always creates identity issues. Multiculturalism creates hybridity. Hybridity is a term which has become the subject of post-colonial writers after colonial times. When migrated people's culture mixed and it merges with other cultures, they become hybrid. As time passes, it has been experienced that hybridity changes into diaspora.

Diaspora is closely related to the traditional concept of exile. Basically, diaspora is a political idea, when people get merge because of the multi-cultural society and adopts other cultures, they become the victim of diaspora. Diaspora and displacement both are the same ideas. Displacement is a postcolonial term which has been used for all migrant conditions. Sidhwa has discussed not only physical displacement but also deliberates on social, cultural, and psychological displacement. Displacement is mentioned as the concept of disorder of an individual's culture that how one has to accept a new culture and his old one is displaced by a new one without his desire. When an individual migrates to another country, his culture also migrates with him but the problem occurs when one remains in between when one is unable to accept the new one and unable to follow the old one. Displacement and diaspora are situations from which a person cannot get out even by his will. One gets stuck into a situation which becomes critical day by day and leads towards homelessness. Homelessness is a vast idea which has been introduced by Salman Rushdie, he shared the experience of migrants by stating:

"The effect of mass migration has been the creation of radically new types of human beings: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places in memories, as much as in material things, people who have been obliged to define themselves. because they are so defined by others- by their otherness, people in whose deepest slave's strange fusion occur, un-precedent unions between what they and where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature" Rushdie, (1981)". Homelessness leads towards exile. Naturally, a person who does not have a home becomes dispersed. Exile is a political phenomenon it disturbs the depth of human beings which leads them towards destruction. Exile is a state which destroys the basis of the social reality of the people who have been affected because of the political condition of the nation. "A romantic glow veils the word exile, reinforcing the myth that a life between two cultures affects intellectual activity creatively. Eastmond, (1997)".

Identity turns into Hybridity

In *An American Brat* Sidhwa has introduced two female Parsee characters Zareen, the mother and Feroza the daughter. One who can never compromise her identity and one who is ready to lose her identity at every second. Sidhwa has discussed in *An American Brat* when Zareen goes to pick up her daughter from school, Feroza behaves very strangely. In fact, she gives the message to others that she does not know the lady who has come to pick her up, Feroza does this action because she studies in a school where Muslims are more in numbers, she does not want to give a message to others that she is different from other. She tries to hide her identity. That is why she does not like her mother when she comes to pick her up in a sleeveless sari because the Muslims have the concept of Pardah. Feroza tries to hide her

identity. Zareen while coming back to her home, she tells her mother Jerbanoo that: 'In the car, she said: "Mummy, please don't come to school dressed like that." She objected to my sleeveless sari-blouse! Really, this narrow-minded attitude touted by General Zia is infecting her, too" (2). It is the demand of every national boundary towards their nation that they have to adopt their culture, they cannot allow the creation of multiple cultures because it creates negative effects for the people of the nation and the nations bear bad consequences in the end. The writer has shown her concern about a very common but important issue of identity crisis which has been prevailed at the time of partition. Zareen becomes very much disturbed because of her daughter's act and recalls her old days and says that when she used to be in her age, she always used to wear every type of clothes and Froks even though she has been used to cycling on daily basis and no one never stops her, in fact, she has been never felt bad, but on that time, she has become unable to digest that the time has changed now, people have become more conservative. There are seas of differences between Zareen and Feroza. One tries to hide her identity and the other wants to tell other from which community she belongs too.

Zareen gets disturbed and criticizes the Muslim Mullas as she utters: ".....women mustn't show their legs, women shouldn't dress like this, and women shouldn't act like that. Girls mustn't play hockey or sing or dance! If everything corrupts their pious little minds so easily, then the mullahs should wear burkas and stay within the four walls of their houses!" (3). In fact, Zareen becomes a rebel and says that she will do whatever she wants and no one can stop her from doing that. In the night, even she is unable to sleep and when Cyrus goes to sleep she talks to herself: "If you think I'm going to cater to this...this mullah-ish mentality of yours, you're mistaken,' she said, slamming the door shout. 'I'll dress the way my mother dresses,

and I'll dress the way my grandmothers dressed! And no one's ever called the Junglewalla women indecent!" (5). She becomes very loud, Cyrus even gets up and becomes surprised to see her wife like this. Cyrus remains quiet, he does not try to make her calm, because nobody can change his/her lifestyle because of others. Cyrus knows that the ladies of her house have to remain within their limits because they live in a different nation. Zareen is the representative of society who struggles hard to remain on their own. Who can never compromise their identity? Who does not want to become the victimizer of a diasporic state, because they know that after this state their exile comes? To avoid these circumstances, they struggle hard and stand against their family as well. As Zareen stands in front of her husband and tells him that no one has the right to give us instructions that how we have to spend our lives.

Feroza Represents of new Generation/Feroza is as Empty Hand

In *An American Brat*, Feroza's family decides her future. They sent her to America. The family thinks that Feroza is unable to live according to her customs and beliefs because of the religious boundaries in Pakistan but later it proves that it is their misconception because when Feroza lives in America she adopts American culture. Feroza always remains in a suspended condition because of her family. Feroza is the representer of a new generation who believes that where a person lives, he should adopt the culture of that place. Feroza becomes excited that she is going to America, Manek his uncle says to her:

'Oh God... Please don't bring your gora complex with you.'

'Why should I have a gora complex? I'm quite light-skinned.'

'If that's what you think, you're in for a big shock.'

‘Black, brown, white are all the same to me,’ Feroza said, adopting her grandmother’s expedient piety. ‘We are all God’s creatures.’ ‘Stop it. And listen—get rid of your “white-man” complex before you come to America.’ (20).

Manek discloses to Feroza in America that there is no caste system here as it is in Pakistan. In America, every person has the right to spend his/her life the way he/she wants. There are no set patterns and rules for human beings which have been implemented by the nation. They have no restrictions on food, clothes, dress, religion, or customs about anything, everyone is equal there. When Feroza reaches, she gets completely different things. She realizes that every nation gives a tough time to the migrants. At the time of immigration to the American embassy, Feroza becomes disturbed after so much investigation. Feroza realizes that every nation has boundaries and set patterns which people have to follow because the nation gives them shelter as Manek says to Feroza: “The first lesson you learn in America is “you don’t get something for nothing”. “.....Nothing is given to you on a plate’. “.... You don’t know that, because nobody works in Pakistan. Not your father, Your grandfather or your uncles”. “... People here work much harder. Husband and wife both work.....” (126). When Feroza listens to all of this from Manek, she becomes disturbed and thinks about the hard, fast and tough life of America. It has been observed that dress, cuisine and culture show from which nation a person belongs, when on the first day Feroza goes to university she meets an English student who says: ‘You must be the new Pakistani student. I’m Emily Simms,’ She said, extending her hand. She looks admiringly at Feroza’s embroidered shirt and came around her desk to examine it. ‘Now isn’t that pretty? (150).

Feroza’s Homelessness

Instead of this that Feroza should feel proud of her cultural dress, which makes her distinguishable from others. Others at once get the idea of her identity that from where she belongs too. But she feels complex that she is not like them and from inside she wants that they should invite her to be like them. Feroza has the problem that she never thinks from her mind she never wants to tell others that they have to adopt her the ways she is. In fact, she is always ready to adopt others’ identities to be like them. It has been observed through Sidhwa’s writing, this flaw of Feroza leads her towards homelessness gradually. Sidhwa has revealed the problems of migrants in her writings. Whether they live in Pakistan or America. The migrants think that they have to be dependent on others. They know it is the only way of their survival was to live with others. One has to follow the culture where he/she lives, same happens with Feroza, her friend Jo helps her to change her dress according to the culture so, she can look like others. Feroza’s friend Jo tries to change her identity because Feroza herself wants to be like others. Whenever a migrant leaves his national boundary his own identity shatters with the passage of time. “Feroza’s Pakistani outfits and outrageously dangling earrings were banished to her suitcase and her wardrobe replenished by another pair of jeans to supplement the pair she had purchased at Bloomingdale’s and some T-shirts, sweaters and blouses. But no matter what Jo said, Feroza could not bring herself to wear skirts. Instead, she bought a pair of pleated woollen slacks for a more formal occasion” (155). Feroza tells her friend Jo that in Pakistan girls live in Pardah which is an Islamic nation. It’s not good to show your naked legs to others in fact it is not allowed. Jo does not care about these things because she has never faced these types of circumstances. So, it has a very strange and indigestible thing for Jo to understand why it is so. ‘It’s not decent to show your legs in

Pakistan,' Feroza said. Recalling the Punjabi movie, she had seen before leaving, she used it as an example to explain her culture to Jo" (156). One can change his outer appearance just to be part of society but the instinct of a person remains the same, when Manek comes to meet Feroza on weekend, he admires Jo's dress but about Feroza he says: "In an aside to Feroza in Gujrati, 'A buffalo will remain a buffalo in skirts or in pants' (161). Manek her own uncle feels that Feroza has become a hybrid character. She becomes the mixture of West and East, she becomes the victim of multiculturalism who losses her identity and lives between.

Feroza as a free Person

Wherever a person lives, he adopts all the things from them, Feroza after living in America becomes very different. She becomes very free in her decisions even though she does not realize to take permission about certain things, she just takes her decisions without keeping in mind what effects they will have later on, on the family and on her own self also, by living in America she also becomes a carefree individual who cares about only herself and does not even think that one's action can hurt many people. She takes a very big decision in her life, her marriage with a non-Parsee boy. She does not even think for a single minute about what other Parsee community will say to her family. By adopting the American lifestyle, she just forgets that one day she has to go back to her own country and then how she will adjust there. She only writes a letter to her family not to ask them just to tell them when her family read the letter they become very disturbed especially her mother as she says: 'Do you know how selfish you are, thinking only of yourself?'. "..... It is not just a matter of your marrying a non-Parsee boy. The entire family is involved-all our relationships matter (294)". This is what always happened with hybrid people. They forget their values, customs and ethics which

leads them towards diaspora where one does not stand anywhere.

Psychologically an attachment is a relation of association developed with that border as Feroza declares: "Boston promptly became Feroza's second favourite city". (104). Feroza completely adopts the American way of living. She wears English clothes, speaks English, and loves to eat canned food. "She had presumed that canned foods like olives, mushrooms, condensed milk, asparagus, clams, were as precious and rare in America as they were in Pakistan, to be served up only on special show-off occasions" (113). Sidhwa throws light on the problem which occurs in a hybrid society. There is a big difference between the East and West, in the West to take puffs of smoke or to have boyfriends is not a big thing, but in the East, girls have certain limitations. They are not that much bold to puff smoke or to have boyfriends. Later on, Feroza herself changes a lot when she goes to the West, she puffs smoke every day and has a boyfriend which is not a big deal for her. This is the demand and culture of the West. "She took a few puffs from a cigarette at Jo's guitarist boyfriend's insistence. Jo had tried to protect her friend. 'Lay off. It's against her religion to smoke. She worships fire" (170). Feroza completes her acts as she wants to do them. The multicultural person, in the words of Peter Berger (1973) is a "homeless mind," a condition which, though allowing great flexibility, also allows for nothing permanent and unchanging to develop (Adler web).

In *An American Brat*, Feroza goes to America and adopts their way of living and culture but initially, she remains to fail and bears the criticism from his own uncle as Manek says to Feroza "That's the trouble with you Desis. You don't even know what a deodorant is, and you want to make an atom bomb!" (71). When Feroza attends these words from her own uncle she becomes very disturbed and thinks about her decision of living in America as Americans use to live.

Society forces her to adopt other cultures like Feroza used to force her mother Zareen she should not wear a half-blouse sari when she comes to pick her up from school in Pakistan. But Zareen does not listen to her daughter, because she has the self-confidence that she looks perfect in her real self. She does not want to be fake as her daughter becomes. Zareen knows that fakeness cannot survive and destroys soon.

Homelessness Effects Nation

Sidhwa has revealed through her writings that homelessness is not the problem of an individual, it is a worldwide problem, homelessness is not something related to our luck or an individual does not face it because of his/her deed it depends on a nation that how they deal with their people. Most of the time homelessness occurs in a nation because of economic marginalization. This study explores the concept of home as an evaluation of political liberty in the contemporary modern nation. Home facilitates long-term aims and develops social work and maintains social relationships, it signifies and surpasses the idea of nationality and indicates independence. A home is a place where everyone feels safe and do not have any problems or difficulty. When Feroza lives in Pakistan in her hometown she feels comfortable and happy. She does not bear any type of torture or difficulties because she has opened her eyes there. It is her family who sends her to America. As for as homelessness is concerned, it breaks social relationship and the loss of independence in both private and public places, because of the homelessness people faces broken marriages, poverty, and immorality. Homelessness is long-lasting instability. When Feroza lives in America. She forgets her values and ethics. She adopts the American style of living, she drinks and has a relationship with boys as is normal in American society.

Migrants who have come to Pakistan after the separation of India and Pakistan

after the War of Independence in 1947, have suffered a lot because of their difference in culture and religion. Parsee community who has migrated to Lahore have faced very rude behaviour and marginalization because of their different religion. Sidhwa has shown how Parsees face instability their whole life because of their homelessness. In *An American Brat*, Feroza leaves her own home and family just to make her life better and to be independent in making decisions but she remains failed, she adopts the American style of living and their culture even though she remains unsuccessful, she does not get anything at the end. She leaves America and comes back to Lahore, Pakistan. Throughout her life, she bears homelessness which leads towards her self-exile, when she comes back to Pakistan she becomes depressed and finds nowhere to stand.

Hybrid Identity vs Individual Identity

"The idea of hybrid identity in the diaspora is as an anchor has its advocates. Paul Gilroy once suggested diaspora as an alternative to the stern disciple on kingship and rooted belonging" (Virinder Kalra, reminder Kaur, Jhon Hutnyk 5). Borders most of the time conjured in a debate of hybridity. Hybridity is the first stage when an individual's downfalls start, gradually it turns into diaspora, raising an individual to force exile from a nation.

In *An American Brat*, the writer has revealed Zareen, the wife of Cyrus as a domestic and loving lady, as the writer has portrayed her character very artistically "ZAREEN GINWALA HURRIED" into the hall when the bell rang, waved the cook who had popped out back into the kitchen, and opened the portals of their home to her husband" (1). Unlike Putli she never wants to finish herself, she wants to be independent and this happens because Cyrus also gives proper space to his wife. "... Zareen followed her husband into the bedroom. She always wore high heels, 'to measure up to my

husband,' and removed them only when she got into bed or stepped into her bath" (2). Feroza, the daughter of Zareen also wants to be independent, when her parents call her back after her studies she is not ready to come back because she wants herself as individual as she says to her parents "I'm not settling anywhere without a career, 'Feroza said, 'I don't want to be at the mercy of my husband. If I have a career, I can earn a living, and he will respect me more" (252). Later on, she comes out from the imaginary world and comprehends the bitter reality of life.

The character of Feroza is the portrait of hybrid people who always remain unsatisfied because their social relationships, ethics, and values always change in the different cultures. They face the miseries of life more than others because they have no set pattern in life which they have to follow. They can never take positive decisions for themselves in life which becomes the reason for their

downfall. Sometimes migrated people are unable to fix the parameter for themselves in life. They are always ready to accept different challenges without thinking that what consequences they have to bear.

Ishfaq Ahmed the great Urdu Pakistani novelist and drama writer says that a woman's mind is like a drawing room, if someone tries to change the setting, the whole drawing room gets disturbed. So, it's better not to change the settings because it disturbs a woman completely. Sidhwa has painted how both mother and daughter have different views about lives. She has also exposed Feroza the daughter who always remains ready to adopt others' identities, to become the victimizer of displacement, she does not stand anywhere at the end. Zareen the mother who always remains in herself and never gets ready to adopt others' culture, spends a contented life.

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