

# PROBLEMATIC IMPACT OF INTER-COMMUNITY MARRIAGE IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S 'AN AMERICAN BRAT'

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper talks about the issues of inter-community marriages among Parsees. Their distinctive conventions and customs in regards to marriage are likewise managed in this part. Parsees are not permitted to wed outside their culture. The tenets support the Parsee men who wed outside the group. Parsee ladies wedding outside are ousted from their society. These issues of inter-culture marriage still offers ascend to extreme level headed discussions in the Parsee group. The developing dispute among the more youthful Parsees and need of specific changes in such inflexible convention is likewise appeared. Sidhwa's own particular unease with this dubious issue is additionally examined. An American Brat shows this problem through a female character Feroza who shifts from Pakistan to America where she gets herself enticed for an inter-community marriage. The paper appraises the perspective of Feroza who manages to say no to marriage within the faith after getting disappointment earlier.*

**Keywords:** *Inter Community Marriage, Rituals, Rebel*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mixed marriages concerned the entire Parsee community and affected its very survival. God knew, they were few enough. Only a hundred and twenty thousand in the whole world. And considering the low birth rate and the rate at which the youngsters were marrying outside the community – and given their rigid non-conversion laws and the zealous guardians of those laws – Parsees were a gravely endangered species (AAB, 268).[1]

Bapsi Sidhwa is a reputed feminist and socialist Parsee novelist. More than a litterateur, she is a dynamic communal reformer. She has chiseled four masterpieces entitled; The Crow Eaters (1980), The Pakistani Bride (1982), Ice–Candy-Man and An American Brat (1993). She is the recipient of many international honors. Her works of fiction have also been published in many other languages.

Her last novel 'An American Brat', diasporic in appeal, is set to a certain extent in the Third World and in part in the First World. She has aptly presented and distended her minority community being a citizen of America. The novel dovetails between independence of the First World America and dependent Third World Pakistan [2]. The novel An American Brat consolidates the attributes of Parsee people, their hidden quest for self identity and feeling of

uncertainty. Parsee society is a little and confined group. A few people have portrayed them as a minority inside minorities. There are around 120000 Parsees all around the globe, generally engineers, doctors and business experts. Parsees are considered to be very simple and peaceful people. They are never heard doing any crime. In fact they believe in doing business and earning money. In spite of having a generally dynamic standpoint and progressive inclination, the individuals from this little group are hardcore stereotypes with regards to the matter of religion or marriage. They seem to be very rigid in these matters. By and large, there is no negotiation in these issues.

They do not appreciate converts and also expel those who show interest in marrying outside their community. In fact Sidhwa expresses her own agitation on this sensitive issue of inter community marriage in the novel by highlighting the motif. This issue has a very serious impact on the Parsees belief system. The basic motive for this custom is connected to the survival of the community. Parsees have a rich cultural legacy. In their marriages many customs and practices are followed such as Madasara ceremony, shagun ceremony, etc. Their rituals and traditions are quite distinct in contrast to others. This is also a major cause for prohibition of inter-community marriages.

## **II. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

Sidhwa has discussed this problem of marriages outside the community in almost all her novels by showcasing the revolt of new generations against the accepted ideologies. In her first novel *The Crow Eaters*, the character Yazdi, rebels by refuting his father's decision to marry his childhood friend. In this novel, Sidhwa does not offer any resolution but rather simply portrays the Parsee philosophy about inter-community marriage. In her second novel *The Pakistani Bride*, the issue is brought to limelight in a non-Parsee context. In this novel, two marriages outside the faith are depicted but both prove to be failures. Here Sidhwa demonstrates the marriage outside group as self-harming. She seems to be connecting these occurrences to the conventional Parsee thinking. In her next novel *Ice-Candy-Man*, the inter-community marriage between a Hindu girl and a Muslim ice candy man is portrayed. The relation in this novel ends due to communal riots and chaos of Partition. Bapsi Sidhwa suggests that even love is unable to overcome the communal frenzy. In her latest novel *An American Brat*, the idea of inter-communal wedding is elaborated in a Parsee milieu. Feroza, a young Parsee girl from a Pakistan based family is sent to USA to expand her horizon and conservative attitude. For Parsee ladies, marriage is the fundamental concern in their life. The author has indicated at this concern quite often. On her departure Feroza is blessed with:

May you marry a rare diamond among man? May you have many children and become a grandmother and a great grandmother and live in contentment and happiness with all your children and their children [AAB, 46].

In the First World, America, her outlook and approach towards life expands after joining a university in Denver. She lives with two American girls in a shared apartment. She discards a large number of her social restraints in the first world. Her feeling of self-emancipation and individuality culminates when she begins to love David Press, a Jewish man, with whom she comes in contact at Denver. She shifts in David's house after few days. She informs her parents about her anticipated marriage with David. Her family feels stunned and disturbed. Her mother Zareen rushes to Denver to stop Feroza, because her love marriage would cause her being banished from the Parsee

community. By depicting the opposition of the family towards her mixed marriage, Sidhwa highlights the prevailing conservative vision of the Parsee community. Parsee men marrying with women of different social groups are given constrained identification in the Parsee faith. The children conceived of such liaison are acknowledged under some exceptional conditions yet the mother stays alien to the group. However, "Parsee women who marry outside their faith along with their children are lost to the community" [3]. Here, Sidhwa has elucidated smartly the increasing displeasure with such prevailing customs amongst the youngsters of the community through a character Bunny, who is just fifteen years old cousin of Feroza. The family is confused at the proposed marriage, whereas he expresses his disgust at such strict conventions. The other youngsters there have the same opinion as Bunny, but they don't express their feelings on the grounds that the seniors would overwhelm such defiant opinions. Thus Sidhwa insists on positive improvements in the strict conventions.

There is a very crucial reason behind this rigidity. At the outset, on meeting David, Zareen feels that he is an appropriate match for her daughter. She feels critical and dubious about the orthodox tradition. She also realizes the reason why the youngsters of the community are getting rebellious. Thus, through Zareen, Sidhwa conveys her self-restlessness with this established tradition.

Now Zareen gets into a fix. She thinks David to be an interesting match. However, she likewise imagines that such a merged marriage would ban her daughter from her tradition, culture, and family. She gets a letter from her family encasing two handouts titled "WARNING " and "NOTICE". She feels resentful about the notice from the Athoran Mandal and the notice from the Bombay Zoroastrian Jashan Committee. She reads the notice which is written in capital letters:

### **NOTICE**

PLEASE NOTE THAT ACCORDING TO THE PARSEE, ZOROASTRIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, PERCEPTS, TENETS, DOCTRINES, HOLY SCRIPTURES, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS, ONCE A PARSEE-ZOROASTRIAN MARRIES A NON-ZOROASTRIAN, HE OR SHE IS DEEMED TO HAVE RENOUNCED THE FAITH AND CEASES TO BE A PARSEE-ZOROASTRIAN. THE LAWS OR PURITY OF THE ZOROASTRIAN FAITH FORBID INTERMARRIAGES, AS MIXING PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL GENES IS CONSIDERED A CARDINAL CRIME AGAINST NATURE. HENCE, HE OR SHE DOES NOT HAVE ANY COMMUNAL OR RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OR PRIVILEGES (AAB, 305).

As a mother, Zareen fears that after marriage Feroza would be cut off from her way of life and society. Her feelings of dread about Feroza change her supposition about David. She utilizes the strategies discussed at home to obstruct their marriage. She acts as if she consents to the marriage, but demands the rites and rituals of her community that terrify David. She draws seven circles in the air over Feroza's head whispering a chant, which stuns David. This is finished by Zareen to cast out the spell of evil eye that she feels has influenced Feroza, "May the mischief of malign and envious eye leave you" (AAB, 303). She burns jalapeno pepper on the burner and tosses it on the floor. Then she pounds it with her heel. This makes David disturbed. The relationship deteriorates and David leaves both Feroza and Denver.

Zareen succeeds partially. As a Parsee author, Sidhwa does not take a disloyal stance against the predominant belief system of her community. Nonetheless, she doesn't endorse the unbending Parsee code on interfaith marriage. Rather through the responses of Zareen and Feroza, she indicates the need of specific changes. Paradoxically, Zareen understands that by smashing the independence of her daughter in selection of a spouse, she and custodians of the Zoroastrian principles were no less stiff and rude than the *fundos* in Pakistan. Feroza is disturbed after David abandons her. In any case, she stays firm on her choice of not submitting herself to the dictates of the Parsee law against interfaith marriage. She communicates her conviction toward the end of the novel:

There would never be another David, but there would be other men, and who knew, perhaps someday she might like someone enough to marry him... It wouldn't matter if he was a Parsee or of another faith. She would be more sure of herself, and wouldn't let anyone interfere... As for her religion, no one could take it away from her; she carried its fire in her heart (AAB, 317).

In this way Sidhwa highlights the serious and sensitive issue of inter-community marriages among the Parsees. This issue of inter-community marriages still arouses severe debates among Parsees. According to the traditionalist view of the Parsees, a Parsee is only by birth. In these mixed marriages, a number of children are lost to the community as are the erring parents. The rules favour the Parsee men who marry outside the community and their children because Parsees are a patriarchal society with a strong masculine bias. The same rules do not hold true for Parsee women. Their marriage to a non-Parsee is treated as a cultural suicide. The reformists are trying to save this tiny community. They advocate that a child born of a marriage between a Parsee mother and non-Parsee father should be treated as one of the community and a person desiring conversion to their faith should be accepted. The orthodox priests are of the view that the purity of the community should be preserved under all conditions. Parsees who marry outside their faith are considered to be living in adultery and it is also believed that Ahura Mazda is never pleased with these Parsees. Preserving of the purity of the community is considered as a phobia by the reformists. The reformists argue that if a non-Parsee spouse is agreeable to the children's initiation or thread ceremony; there is no reason why anyone should object. However, the orthodox Parsee does not accept this ruling.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Bapsi Sidhwa's handling the theme of inter-community marriages is very relevant and contemporary. The ambivalent ending conveys a number of possibilities. As Feroza does not marry David, so the novel upholds the traditional view. On the other hand, the novel ends with rejection of an empty and rigid tradition. Bapsi Sidhwa hints at such rejection through her mouthpieces Zareen and Feroza with great maturity. Thus, the theme of marriage is examined in detail taking into consideration the Parsees' attempt to maintain a balance as regard to the sanctity of their religion and continuity of their inherited cultural traditions. So, she fulfills the role of "the writer as a preserver of collective tradition, a folk historian and myth maker" (Vassanji, 63).



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