Cultural Difference in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *The Crow Eater*

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**ABSTRACT**

Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the prominent writers of South Asia. In her novels, she has taken up the issues of the cultural difference and the identity crisis. Culture is the most influential things to every individual from all walks of life. It has influenced people in all times and all places. Every nation or community has its own different culture and often within it, there are different cultural groups. Cultural diversity divides people into many groups, causing rift in human relationships. This paper focuses on Sidhwa’s unique perceptions of Parsee’s life as an ethnic minority, residing either in Pakistan or in India, and their sense of anxiety.

**Key Words:** Parsee ethos, Cultural difference, Expatriate experience, Identity crisis, and Victimization.

In every society, culture plays a vital role to mold and shape the lives and thoughts of people through its ideals. People have always shown loyalty to given ideals and patterns of behavior provided by the motivating force known as culture. Culture can be considered as an essential source of basic education in society. Therefore, every nation or community has a distinct culture and within it, there are divergent cultural groups.

Bapsi Sidhwa in her novels obsessed the problem of the cultural distinction and the ensuing psychological state. Sidhwa is widely known jointly of the foremost writers from South Asia. She is a religious, born and observed in the Asian countries and migrated to America. She delightfully calls herself as Pakistani-Parsee-American. Sidhwa skillfully relates gender to the community, status, religion, and class, and demonstrates that the phases of cultural identity and structure do not just have an effect on or replicate each other. However, additionally her novel gets ensuing into the quagmire of cultural variations and psychological state. Sidhwa in her novel *The Crow Eaters* has known clear information related to the customs, beliefs, ceremonies, superstitions, rituals, myths, legends, rites, and alternative aspects of the Parsee life. The novel describes the humorous and adventure story of the Parsee family was a contentious novel. *The Crow Eaters* is one of the novels which expresses the Parsee mind, value systems, social behavior, and customs. It is an attempt to trace the Parsees culture, within the late Nineteenth century, migrating from the geographical region and subsiding within the additional wholesome climate of North Indian cities. Sidhwa accurately depicts the historical facts filled with complex sarcastic fiction and lampoon that competently recreates the environment of Parsees. The Junglewalla family enlarged their business from single commercial store in Lahore to a series of stores in many North Indian cities.

Sidhwa has attempted to immortalize this sort by capturing its attribute in three of her five novels. Sidhwa writes her works to keep her Parsee community that is around on the border of extinction. The novel breaks bright grounds and it portrays the Parsee community in an ironical mode in literature. It had been attacked by the separation of the Parsee community and they thought it as an unfair portrayal. According to Upadhyay in *Parsi Community in Bapsi Sidhwa’s The Crow Eaters Parsi Fiction*, the novel created Sidhwa the “Parsi whom alternative Parsis like to hate” (28). However, this criticism arises from the belief to the main concern of the novel is to depict the lifetime of Parsee in India. She is disliked for revealing the community’s secrets to the entire world. The author herself made an attempt to disclaimer by acknowledging, in a way, the idea for the disputation, in her Author’s Note within the novel *The Crow Eaters*.
Because of a deep-rooted admiration for my diminishing community—and an enormous affection for it—this work of fiction has been a labour of love. The nature of comedy being to exaggerate, the incidents in the book do not reflect at all upon the integrity of a community whose honesty and sense of honour—not to mention its tradition of humour as typified by the Parsi natak—are legend. (7)

Sidhwa in her novels suggests different facet of cultural distinction and identity crisis. An important facet is that she depicts cultural difference as victimizing the people. Cultural victimization creates troubles for the characters. In The Crow Eaters, for instance, Faredoon, the protagonist also called as Freddy, gets irritated when he comes to recognize that his son Yazdi needs to marry Rosy Watson, an Anglo-Indian girl. He objects to his son’s inter-community marriage and says that Parsees are not allowed to marry back yard their neighborhood and highlights the need for retaining the ethnic purity. Freddy argues that the teens born to humans who marry outdoor the neighborhood will be misfits. The relationship between Yazdi and Rosy is destroyed with the aid of the racial and cultural differences:

I believe in some kind of a tiny spark that is carried from parent to child, on through generations...a kind of inherited memory of wisdom and righteousness, reaching back to the times of Zarathustra, the Magi, the Mazdians. But what happens if you marry outside our kind? The spark so delicately nurtured, so subtly balanced, meets something totally alien and unmatched. Its precise balance is scrambled. It reverts to the primitive. (128-129)

The Crow Eaters raised uproar in her community for revealing the secrets of the Parsee faith within the sort of caricature. But it has instances of Sidhwa’s conformity to the suited and benevolent standards of the Zoroastrianism. Jaydipsinh Dodiya in his book Bapsi Sidhwa says: “The Crow Eaters depicts the Parsi mind, their social behaviour, their customs and traditions and their rituals. For Bapsi Sidhwa this novel has been a labour of love because of a deep-rooted admiration for her diminishing community and an enormous affection for it” (40).

This monotheistic faith believes in action and not asceticism and worldly renunciation. Moreover, accentuation on the tradition of serving to the poor neighbors and generosity to its own group of people and all, this oldest ethnic non secular group founded nearly concerning 2000 B.C. demands three ethics from its followers. So, Freddie takes his whole life to appreciate the laws of Ahura Mazda in very poignant and proves Sidhwa’s internalization of the fundamental and essential of Zoroastrianism. The cultural difference that makes Jerbanoo, in The Crow Eaters, feel very uncomfortable, first in the home of Charles P. Allen, her son-in-law Freddy’s bosom friend, and after that at a motel in England. Before leaving for England she and her daughter Putli enclose remarkable fantasies on the land of their rulers:

To them England was once a land of crowns and thrones; of tall, splendidly attired, cool-eyed noblemen and imposing, fair-haired girls gliding previous in sparkling carriages; of elegant lords in tall hats and tails, taking walks with languid female who swept spotless waterfront promenades with trailing gowns, their gestures gracious and charming, marked by an exquisite reserve.(252)

But they landed in London, their disillusions started evading off. “They saw grubby Englishmen, in ill-fitted woolen garments, scurry past with faces that betokened a concern with the ordinary aspects of life”(253). The appearance on the looks of Londoners was not alike from that stamped on the faces of a cross section of India. “Where were the kings and queens, the lords and ladies and their gleaming carriages? Where were the men and women with haughty, compelling eyes and arrogant men?” (253).

The view of their host, Mr. Charles P. Allen, rubbing out his lavatory bowl, it is the last blow. Jerbanoo cannot believe herself when she sees that Mrs. Allen is an overworked housewife barring any servants. Due to her outlandish behavior, Freddy has to depart Charles residence and step into a hotel in Oxford Street. Jerbanoo enjoys roaming around the vicinity by herself and her fat determine wrapped in a sari attracts many attention. The spaces in their resort do not have attached baths. There is one lavatory at the quiet of their passageway and three small lavatories. In the toilets, no taps and no water, only flush bowls and paper. Every time Jerbanoo goes to wash, she adds up water in the brass jar, which was carries from India. Freddy feels make uncomfortable to see his mother-in-law by this old fashioned water container and prohibits her to use. Jerbanoo finds out a way. The moment Freddy and Putli depart the inn, she hurries to the lavatory with her jar. As result of such behavior, they have to face lot of problem by the people in the hotel. It is the feeling of isolation in an alien tradition that gets revealed through Jerbanoo’s behaviour.

The identity crisis in shifting social milieu which Sidhwa accurately depicts in the novel used to be distinctively a social crisis for the Parsees of the British India. The Parsees stayed in India, they understand they could survive as a minority through being strictly faithful to each and every ruling power and evading worries and clashes between the groups and the authorities in the state. Parsees realized that their only way in which their community can stay undisturbed is by means of displaying loyalty to the rulers. The only situation for their loyalty used to be that they have been no longer hindered in the practice of their religion. But progressively British value system started out assimilating in the Parsees community. This resulted into clashes between the ancient and the new generations. Putli, for instance, tried to hold Parsees customs, like taking walks in the back of her husband. However, her daughter Yasmin after marriage ignores such notions as ancient created and strongly protests at the servile mind-set of women: “Anyway it’s stupid to walk behind your husband like an animal on a leash—Oh Mother! Hasn’t Papa been able to modernise you yet?” (190-191). Putli, the present era until Parsees, is outraged with the aid of her daughter’s trust in equality in the man-woman relationship. The hassle of a gap is clearly presented by this incident.
The new generation, like Freddy’s Son Behram and his wife Taniya, adopts western way of thinking and go with the flow away from the Parsee culture. Parsees maintained group identity through their dressing style. Whenever Faredoon went to the Government House for official events or to forfeit respect to the British empire, he would aware: “rigged out in a starched white coat wrap that fastened with bows at the neck and waist, and crisp white pyjamas and turban” (21). His wife Putli, and his mother-in-law never regarded in public “without ,mathabanas”—white kerchiefs wound around the hair to fit like skull caps. The holy thread circling their waist was austerely displayed and sacred undergarments, worn beneath short blouses, modestly aproned their sari-wrapped hips” (23). But the next era of Parsees, Behram, and Tanya, slowly discard the ordinary dress. Hence the novel aptly exhibits the Parsee neighborhood on the threshold of change. But whatever the characters do, Sidhwa vividly displays that it is out of the act of self-preservation and self-advancement of the Parsees. Sidhwa throughout her novels presents Parsee inclination to move beyond the usual boundaries and their longing back for the Parsee tradition. The pain in excess of the vanished custom shows too deep for her characters and nothing pay off it at the end.

References