

## PANGS OF DISLOCATION IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S AN AMERICAN BRAT

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### Abstract

The diasporic writers try to write about their personal experiences concerning immigration and the problems faced by them while settling in an alien land either by themselves or by their parents or grandparents. The issues such as alienation, dislocation, homelessness, nostalgia, acculturation, survival, cultural change, and identity became prominent in diasporic writings. The feeling of being dislocated haunts an immigrant. There may be various reasons for movement and dislocation and they can be voluntary and non-voluntary.

Diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. These movements deal with settling down and putting roots elsewhere. Diasporic writings not only questions the identity, but at the same time dealing with other issues which are the after effects of migration, such as belongingness, dislocation, homelessness, alienation, nostalgia, acculturation etc. There have been a number of writings on the multifarious experiences of the immigrants who have settled in different countries. The diasporic writers try to write about their personal experiences concerning immigration and the problems faced by them while settling in an alien land either by themselves or by their parents or grandparents. The issues such as alienation, dislocation, homelessness, nostalgia, acculturation, survival, cultural change, and identity became prominent in diasporic writings. The feeling of being dislocated haunts an immigrant. There may be various reasons for movement and dislocation and they can be voluntary and non-voluntary. Voluntary movements can occur due to educational need and economic need. On the other hand, non-voluntary movements occur due to political and national compulsions and in the case of women, it could be

marital causes. When diasporic people find themselves dislocated from the home society, they are upset mentally and strive to remember and locate them in the nostalgic past.

Bapsi Sidhwa is one of Pakistan's most eminent English fiction writers. She was born in Parsi family in Karachi in 1939. In her childhood, she felt lonely and her sense of isolation was accentuated by polio that struck her leg when she was only two years old. She got married to Gustad Kermani but they were separated within five years. Later in 1963, she again married Noshirwan Sidhwa and settled in America. *An American Brat* is her fourth novel, after *The Bride*, *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice Candy Man*.

Bapsi Sidhwa's fourth novel, *An American Brat* (1995) revolves around Feroza Ginwalla, a pampered, protected 16-year-old Pakistani girl. The novel depicts her journey from an innocent adolescent child to a confident woman after rising fundamentalism in Pakistan; Zareen decides to send her to America to stay with her uncle, Manek for three months. After initial cultural and spatial shock, she decides to settle in America. She falls in love with a Non-Parsi man David. Her parents and other family members do not approve the match and ultimately Zareen flies to the USA and turns out to be successful in parting them. Manek and her roommate Jo try to teach her American ways of living and try to make her Americanized. Feroza, like any other immigrant, undergoes cultural and emotional shock, she feels dislocated but on the other hand, she is fascinated by the first world and wants to live there.

The conservative ideas and views are making her more and more isolated and lonely, she has started living alienated. Her parents want her to come out of this orthodoxy and to widen her outlook they plan to send her to the USA for a short vacation. When Feroza gets the news of her going to the USA to live with her uncle for three months, she feels all the more excited and she repeats to herself, "I'm going to America, I'm going to America means to her at the moment the land of glossy magazines, of 'Bewitched' and 'Star Trek', of rock stars and jeans..." (AB27)

When she steps for the first time at Kennedy airport in the USA, she faces a situation, which is unfamiliar to her, and she loses her nerves and the feeling of alienation and loneliness surround her. The behaviour of the custom officers and the search makes her feel even more alien in an unknown land.

Her happiness and excitement fade away when the customs authorities question her on her immigration. At this time, she feels like a stranger and lonely with no one to hold her hand and takes her out of this mess. She feels alienated. Feroza's happiness fades away when the airport authorities' fires questions on her purpose of immigration. They are not ready to accept what she is saying. She for the first time realizes that she is an alien in this strange nation; she is a stranger with no one around her to control and pamper her. Feroza when got stuck in the staircases finds no one to help her. This situation also makes her feel lonely and alienated. She feels that she does know anything. She feels so lonely and no one is there to pamper her in an alien land. An elderly couple helps her out to come out of that situation.

She is alone in the USA with only Manek at her side. She spends most of the time alone in the new country. However, while living there she feels the difference in her country and the newly acquired land. The Americans do not interfere with anybody and are busy with their matters only, they do not eve tease as she feels most often Pakistan. Here in the USA for the first time she tastes freedom, "She knew no one, and no one knew her; it was a heady feeling to be suddenly so free- for the moment, at least- of the thousand constraints that governed her life" (AB58).

Feroza's happiness fades away when the airport authorities' fires questions on her purpose of immigration. They are not ready to accept what she is saying. She for the first time realizes that she is an alien in this strange nation. She is a stranger with no one around her to control and pamper her. A feeling of alienation crosses her psyche. The officers repeatedly torturing her forcing her to accept the fact that she has come here to marry her fiancée. She felt broken from inside and feels lonely repetition.

When she landed in America, she finds a striking difference between her native land and America. The Americans do not interfere in anybody's matter, they are busy with their jobs, and they do not stare at girls. Here in America she feels a kind of freedom, although she is alone. She realizes "She knew no one and no one knew her; it was a heady feeling to be suddenly so free- for the moment, at least- of the thousand constraints that governed her life" (AB58).

Manek teaches her the first lesson of decorum that she must not lose her nerves and must learn to control her temper if she wants to live in America. Here she is an ordinary person and nobody cares for which family you belong. Nobody bothers about the honor. Manek exhorts “and you’d better forget this honor-shonor business. Nobody bothers about that here” (AB66)

Manek teaches her American way of living and to avoid humiliation and feeling of alienation she must learn them. If there’s one thing Americans won’t stand, it’s being interrupted it’s impolite. It’s obnoxious. You’ve got to learn to listen. You can’t cut into a conversation just as you like. You’ll be humiliated. Learn from someone who knows what he’s talking about. (AB101)

One day when they go out Feroza was stinging because of sweat. Manek understands that it must be by some Asian, and then he finds that she is none other than Feroza. This incident makes her feel alienated and humiliated. He then shows her how to use a deodorant stick in her armpits to make herself free from foul odor. Here Manek is preparing her for a new life in an unknown and alien land. Here they both are alone, away from their native land. He wants her to pursue her higher studies in America and asks permission from her parents and they permit her to study in America.

Feroza, a hybrid and diasporic character who tastes the taste of freedom but at the same time she faces discrimination and suffers from alienation and inferiority complex. She becomes aware of the fact that these white people do not consider her a part of their community. They do not accept her. Her classmates behave differently with her, same the saleswoman, who also does not talk in a polite manner with her. This incident makes her alienated and the major feeling of alienation passes through her. She:

...became aware of her different color and the reaction it appeared to have on stranger’s side that rude saleswoman, and on some of her classmates. She sensed she was not accepted by them. Dismayed by her own brown skin, the emblem of her foreignness, she felt it was inferior to the gleaming white skin in the washrooms and the roseate faces in the classroom. (AB152-53)

After joining the college Feroza feels less alienated and more independent. Her friend Jo helps her to learn American ways of living. Sometimes she feels hesitant and uncomfortable in mixing with the white people as she feels discriminated, she thinks that she is different from them; she is an alien among them.

Later in the company of her boyfriend David, she starts feeling less alien, she remains busy with him. His company takes away her bareness and loneliness. Due to her love for David, there is a great deal of change in her nature, as she states,

[S]he started seeing David everywhere. She saw him seated in shaded nooks in restaurants, slipping round campus corners and the counters in stores, cycling ahead of her on paths, climbing into the buses and riding past, walking away from her, always stepping away from her. Her heart pounding, she raced after him, her smile fading as she confronted strangers. (AB310)

Geoffrey Kain in his article *Rupture as Continuity: Migrant Identity and Unsettled Perspective in Bapsi Sidhwa's An American Brat*:

Theories of dynamic or turbulent identity are fore grounded when approaching a text like, most classically, Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* (1993), in which we encounter the increasingly familiar (though no less intriguing) narrative of "someone from out there" who comes "here," of a spirited character who, despite her strength of resolve and youthful vigor, is fundamentally and inevitably changed by her exchanging "verbal communities." As such, she helps us to see not only the power of culture to "select" behaviors and values, but also invites us to ponder the struggle of immigrants to retain their hold on what they value of their native (and—over time—increasingly distant) culture and, simultaneously, to relinquish those values and behaviors that are not reinforced by their present environment. (238)

The immigrants cannot free themselves from the feeling of being alienated. The first generation immigrants feel more alienated than the later generation. The language also becomes a barrier and this barrier makes them feel alienated. Jasmine and Nazneen both feel alienated

because of language and on the other hand, different cultural values and norms make them feel alienated. Alienation is a common experience of diaspora and migration. When an individual leaves one's native land and gets connected to the other land, at this point of time he is not able to behave or act comfortably in the new land. As a result, one starts feeling profound alienation and one starts thinking of either going back or starts compromising with the situations.

The immigrants when they stay in outside world, they feel much about their loneliness and isolation. The cultural environment is different and they feel more attracted towards their own values and ideals. There is a marked tendency among the immigrants to migrate to the economically developed nations. Once they reach the host country alienation begins, they find themselves marginalized, bewildered and there is yearning for home, to go back to the lost culture or imaginary homelands which is created from the fragmentary and partial memories of their homelands. The void created in their lives continues to engulf them and leave them stranded between the binaries of us/them, self/other, inside/outside and center/periphery. The memory of the past or the specters of absence give rise to trauma or mourning which leads to the alienation of the displaced subjects.

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