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Hybrid's Hunt for Home: A Postcolonial Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's Fiction

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
History: Accepted 22 December 2021 Available Online December 2021	<p><i>The present study aims at exploring the elements of hybridity and assimilation in the fictional expedition of Bapsi Sidhwa. The work in question adheres to the theoretical construct of Postcolonial theory by utilizing Bhabha's concept of Hybridity which suggests that the colonizers and the colonized, through their interaction, mutually construct their subjectivities and this interaction destabilizes the hierarchy of superior and inferior cultures. The research is primarily qualitative in nature and the selected texts namely, An American Brat (1993) and The Crow Eaters (1980) are subjected to close reading for explicating the instances where the characters' social practices and personal experiences display hybrid cultural forms, patterns and parameters. The novels actually depict a clash and an unbalanced conflict between different cultures. Though the characters yearn for saving their own cultures yet at the same time they are forced to sacrifice their traditions. . The current research shines light on the implications of multiculturalism and highlights an increasing interaction between different nations. The study contends that identity is a process, constantly being redesigned and refashioned. In the light of the findings, it can be concluded that identity is fluid, never complete, always in process owing to transnational and transcultural flows in the globalized world of today. The current study can be helpful in understanding the dynamics of identity and the challenges to the cultural purity in the world of diaspora.</i></p>
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1. Introduction

Intercultural phenomenon is one of the most significant themes of the Postcolonial writing. *The Crow Eaters* (1980) and *An American Brat* (1993) deals particularly with this theme. The narratives actually offer a vivid description of the conflict between the West as a set of values and the East. The novels are all about the quest for identity found not only on the social plane of life but in the personal lives of the characters also. Sidhwa tries to analyze the interaction between two cultures existing side by side in *An American Brat*. Feroza ... the protagonist of the novel finds herself caught between two cultures which have matchless friction. Novy Kapadia discusses that Feroza's experiences enable the readers to understand the process of assimilation to the ways of the New World (Kapadia, 1996, p. 191). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) discuss that a major concern of the Postcolonial literature is to explore the relationship between place and displacement. Its attention is focused upon the Postcolonial crisis which springs from the experiences of being displaced. Postcolonial literature attempts to trace out the development of an effective identifying relationship between place and self (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 8-9). Here displacement erodes Feroza's sense of *self*. She is disoriented by the two worlds found at two opposite poles.

The current study is concerned with the multicultural approach and adaptability of the community. As the protagonist in *The Crow Eaters* (1980) says that the center of earth for the Parsi community is Englishman's arse. They are not concerned about the realities of life. The only point of their attention and focus of their struggle is to obey and follow the British colonizers. Faredoon very happily accepts that the British are actually their sovereigns. He knows that the only way for their social survival is to curry favor. He uses the words "the greatest toadies of British Empire" for the Parsis. He advises his next generation also that they need not be ashamed of this title. The need to make a successful community and to live a prosperous life should be the first and foremost dictate of one's life (Sidhwa, 1980, p. 6).

The subject of identity has always been a disputable issue in Postcolonial literature. Since the outbreak of independence of the nations who got liberation from the colonizers who expanded their foreign settlement at the cost of the colonized nations' culture and identity the challenges to identity have been the most urgent thing to be answered. The scholars have become interested in inspecting, researching, explaining and presenting the contentions about this issue. The present study too is an endeavor in this regard.

These are following research questions of this study:

- 1) How does cultural hybridity and assimilation challenge the concept of inherent authenticity and the purity of culture?
- 2) What is Sidhwa's perspective on cultural hybridity and assimilation?

2. Literature Review

Postcolonial theory and literature have been dedicated to explicate and illustrate the identities and images constructed to maintain a hierarchy of the colonizers and the colonized as superior and inferior. Alam (2014) has examined that Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* challenges the stereotypical portraits drawn through the discourse of the colonizers. The novel gives a vivid description of the life in Igbo before the arrival of the colonizers and after the arrival of the colonizers. Being a Postcolonial writer Achebe has tried to earn acceptance and respect for his culture. He draws different settings of pre-colonial and post-colonial society and in an ambiguous manner shows the authenticity of his culture. This strategy suits the purpose of Postcolonial literature to write back by

rewriting the history of the lost culture and traditions. The motivation for Achebe to write *Things Fall Apart* is his indignation at the European representations of the Africans.

South-Asian writers like Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Khushwant Singh, Bapsi Sidhwa and Manto etc. have made significant contribution through their writings about multiculturalism, identity crisis, and the impacts of colonialism in redesigning the identities in the context of colonialism. Kumar (2016) traces the theme of inter-culture in Bapsi Sidhwa's works which can be interpreted as the site of conflicts and reconciliations between the East and the West. Speaking about the east- west encounter Meenakshi Mukherji observes Sidhwa's intentions to present the West and concludes that sometimes she portrays the West as a character or sometimes as a set of practices and norms. In *An American Brat* the quest for identity and cultural conflict can be observed on the social plane and on the personal level also. Bapsi Sidhwa is actually interested in the interaction of the two different sets of values existing side by side. Feroza is continuously moving between conservatisms, religious exclusiveness and universalism.

Pandya (2013) has examined the aspects of rootlessness, ethnic anxiety and culture clash in *An American Brat*. The research study begins with the views by Bapsi Sidhwa that the Western approach and attitude towards the inhabitants of Pakistan cannot make them worthless, primitive and fundamentalist. The people and their lives in the so-called fundamentalist and primitive countries are worthy and worth presenting.

Pandya (2013) opines that the underprivileged social group is compelled to migrate from its native lands are a major part and a serious matter of concern for the Post colonial writing. The process of uprooting and the hurdles and hardships to settle in an alien country and culture create a strong desire in them to move towards their roots and this desire for roots is the actual essence of Postcolonial writing.

3. Theoretical Framework

The current study is based upon Bhabha's concept of Hybridity which celebrates the cultural differences without acknowledging the colonizer's claims of superiority. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) asserts that the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized results in fading identity. He contends that all cultural systems are constructed in a space that he calls the "Third Space of enunciation", "the willingness to descend into this alien territory (the third space) can create opportunities to conceptualize an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). Hybridity "confuses the signs of difference as signs of authority" (Rothenburger, 2001, p. 4).

Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.

4. Research Methodology

The current study follows the parameters of qualitative research and focuses on the Postcolonial texts namely, *The Crow Eaters* (1980) and *An American Brat* (1993) as a primary source

of data. The research is based on a close reading and a thorough analysis of these texts. To reach at the findings, textual evidence has been interpreted in the light of the Bhabha's concepts of *third space* and hybridity which manifest that identity has fragmented nature and hybridity challenges the claims of cultural superiority. The relevant passages have been used as a reference to support the researcher's argument and assertions. The available literary critical writings, reviews and commentaries about the fiction of Bhabha and Sidhwa have been referred to and utilized to support and understand the research findings.

5. Data Analysis

An American *Brat* (1993) as a Postcolonial novel deals with the theme of intercultural. This narrative actually reflects a series of compromises and contrasts between the East and the West. Sidhwa attempts to show the circumstances resulted as an interaction between the two opposite cultures. The cultural and traditional modes of life of the protagonist come into clash with the modern ways of life. The clash compels the protagonist to make a moral choice which is the fate invariably shared by all the expatriates. Conservatism and progressive liberalism are the two possible choices for her. But the both are inevitable for her. She is like being between the devil and the deep sea. Feroza bears a loss of 'self' because she experiences displacement from her culture and her roots and she is caught between two worlds; the exhilarating surreal world of America and the conservative milieu of Pakistan. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) summarize a major trend in Postcolonial literature and state that, 'Place' and 'Displacement' are the aspects of major concern for Postcolonial literature. These two notions are actually analyzed with reference to the identity crisis, and the efforts to develop an effective identifying relationship between self and place.

The novel is no doubt imbued with the instances of assimilation to the new ways of life in an extremely new world. As Novy Kapadia discusses the major themes of the novel and states that Sidhwa narrates the experiences of Feroza and this narration reflects the process of assimilation to the ways of life in the New World (Kapadia, p. 191). Feroza's and Manek's attitude are diametrically opposite because Manek adapts himself and smoothly accepts the new world and Feroza very slowly and gradually experiences the process of assimilation. Father Fibs summarizes this process of assimilation in these words, "And once you're no longer afraid to fall, away you will soar-up, up, to where you need never fall!" (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 721) The words have a catalyst effect for Feroza and her process of assimilation gets faster and her traditional psyche loosens its grip. Kirpal's (1989) opinion can enable us to understand Feroza's experiences and occurrences; "to cling to one's traditions and to develop a deep interaction with the people of his own country is more than a need and no less than a basic survival-strategy of a migrant" (Kirpal, 1989, p. 65) She being an expatriate tries to establish her ethnicity. After committing the sin of smoking Feroza tries to beg divine forgiveness and performs Kusti ritual. Despite her deep contact with the American culture Feroza's interior landscape is stuck to Zoroastrianism and she preserves her ethnic identity. She yearns for social space to establish her identity and at the same time wants self-development also. Being a Parsi she is desirous for ethical perfection and at the same time she is attracted towards the freedom she is unable to enjoy in the Pakistani society.

The characters in the novel are suffering from the complex love-hate feelings resulting from being between the migrants and love for the homeland. Feroza's life clearly depicts the process of marginalization because she is not willing to forget or discard her old values and the new world is unable to give her satisfaction and pure sympathies. The sense of dislocation has a strong grip on Feroza. The thought of going away from her country, her culture, her religion, the songs, sounds and

fragrance of her land is extremely painful. In the airplane she has been struggling to get rid of this pain. To divert her attention she focused her attention outside the window. (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 661). This sense of dislocation never ends in Feroza's life even after a long period of time she has spent in America. The distance from her homeland and the experience of being anonymous in America bless her with a strong sense of freedom. This 'distance' gets her released from the interference she used to experience in the Pakistani culture (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 312).

The two worlds of Feroza are contrary to each other. One is full of happiness and freedom and the second one is gloomy and bleak. The following words can portray the picture of these two worlds,

"Feroza hugged the adventure of her travel to America to herself throughout the flight. As she hurtled through space, she became conscious also of all the gravitational pull of the country, she was leaving behind. Her sense of self enlarged by the osmosis of identity with her community and with her group of school friends, stayed with her like permanence – like the support that ocean basins provide the wind and the moon-generated vagaries of its waters. And this cushioning stilled her fear of the unknown: an unconscious panic that lay coiled somewhere between her ribs and was just beginning to manifest itself in a fleeting irregularity of her heartbeat" (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 665).

Bapsi Sidhwa uses the adjectives like "gravitational pull", "osmosis of identity", and "support that ocean basins provide". These adjectives can give us a clear description of Feroza's sense of self and love for her land. And the words like "her fear of the unknown", "unconscious panic" and "fleeting irregularity of heartbeat" portray a picture of her being marginalized and the negative impacts of being the migrant. But at the same time this experience of dislocation is blessing her with a new "surreal world of hushed opulence". Sidhwa narrates this experience in the given words; "Feroza went into Bloomingdale's. It was like entering a surreal world of hushed opulence festooned by all manner of hats propped up on stands and scarves and belts draped here and there like fabulous confetti. The subtle lighting enhanced the plush shimmer of wool and leather and the glowing colors of the silk. Feroza felt that she had never seen such luxuriant textures or known the vibrant gloss of true colors" (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 683). Though the initial efforts to find integration between Feroza's self and society have been futile yet after sometimes she achieves the fusion of mind and heart and the moral crisis reaches the stage of resolution. A thorough study of the novel unfolds multiple layers of meanings and themes in the novel.

By employing some situations in the novel Sidhwa uses this narrative to throw light upon the issue of dissent among the younger generation. It can be interpreted that Sidhwa demands for rethinking with reference to some rigid code. She neither advocates rebellion nor the blind mimicry or imitation of any code of conduct. The attitudes of the old and the new generation find reflection in the gestures of the protagonist and her mother. Like the other Postcolonial writers Bapsi Sidhwa also emphasizes upon the need for compromise particularly compromise on some crucial issues. For the successful survival, one has to keep a pace with time and to stick to one's roots also. Survival in a society is possible only if we can resolve the conflict between the demands of the time and our traditions. The new world offers the protagonist an adequate space to grow and her own traditions give her an emotional and religious space. Sidhwa uses the novels to advocate this change and observes the need of minor reforms and changes which are inevitable for the survival of the Parsi

community. Sidhwa states in the novel that The New World wants the world to move with the demands of the times. The various Anjumans in Karachi and Bombay would have to introduce minor reforms if they wish their tiny community to survive (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 288). These themes make this novel a significant contribution to the body of diaspora literature.

The episode of stairs place actually symbolizes Feroza's sense of dislocation, disorientation and confusion she feels in a new world and a new culture. The way she finds no way out is just like the way she is forced to adjust with the new culture and she finds no way to get rid of the new culture and to maintain her self-identity. Bapsi Sidhwa delineates this in the words "It was instantly very dark and quiet, as if in closing the door, the amiable woman had shut Feroza out of New York. It was also much colder", Feroza felt disoriented, confused for a moment about where she was, "the air was rank with the odor of stale cigarette smoke and food, she got a whiff of urine and of decaying refuse" (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 696).

'In closing the door' means the way back to her culture is shut for her. This blind alley makes her unable to move forward and she is in the bitter claws of confusion and disorientation. This new experience negatively affects Feroza. Feroza stood still, blinking, trying to accustom her eyes to the darkness and adjust them to "the weak cone of light from a bulb hanging over the landing" (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 696). In the beginning she stands still because she can neither understand nor move in the new society. Her efforts to accustom herself to the American culture are very meek and futile. 'The weak cone of light from bulb' is a little hope of survival by adapting herself with the new culture and compromising with the traditions. Many of the problems about hybrid identities lie in its existence, which is possible only by forming hybrid specie in the sphere of 'third space'. For the process of hybridity, Bill Ashcroft (1998) uses the expressions like 'grafting', 'cross-pollination', 'the cross-breeding of the two species' form a third, 'hybrid' species" (p. 118).

Throughout the novel her mind is grasped in the conflict and struggles to find resolution. The novel *An American Brat* (1993) is no less than a sensitive portrait of America for the new arrivals and an exploration of its influence on shaping the identity of the expatriates. The beauty of America is very attractive and surprising for her. For the Parses, America is a land of freedom, liberty and dreams to be released from the shackles of conventions. But the experience makes the immigrants discover another side of America other than the alluring magic "... an 'alien filth', so you've seen now, America is not all Saks and skyscrapers" (Sidhwa, 1993, p. 156). Just after the episode of dehumanizing behaviors and insults by the officers, Feroza moves towards the attractions of the American culture and attractions of a foreign culture.

Sidhwa's maiden novel *The Crow Eaters* (1980) has proved her to be an effective preserver of her culture, and an advocate for the change according to the changing circumstances. With the help of Faredoon Junglewalla's story Sidhwa presents the migratory experiences of her community, their capacity to adapt and assimilate a new culture, and their eccentricity, religious beliefs, ethnic customs and rituals. *The Crow Eaters* (1980) is all about an undivided India, realities of the Colonial rule and the Western ways transforming and affecting the Parsis. Parsis' diasporic genes have blessed them with an adaptable nature and the manners to live as an expatriate community. The skill of adaptability runs in the blood of this community and its evidence can be found in their easy assimilation of Gujarati customs, language and norms into their culture. In the sub-continent they adapted themselves with the Western culture and gained the patronage by the British colonizers. Survival is the instinct that compels the Parsis to assimilate and adapt the environment.

A postcolonial critic or writer has to perform the role to preserve his cultural tradition and behavioral patterns as well as the modern modes of life with new patterns of expression and thinking. In a quest for their ethnic identity they struggle to redefine the hybrid identity of their nation. Bapsi Sidhwa as a Postcolonial writer fulfills her responsibility to portray the picture of the hybrid cultural forms struggling to preserve their identity and to successfully survive in the society. Descending from a minority community of the Parsis newly migrated and settled in the subcontinent of India, she has made efforts to successfully perform the role of a mythmaker and folk historian.

The most prominent feature of Postcolonial fiction is its obsession with history. Postcolonial writers try to unveil the perspectives hidden under the layers of colonial consciousness. A Postcolonial writer attempts to represent history with the lenses having altered spectrum of the postcolonial consciousness. Postcolonial fiction heavily relies upon inter-textuality. Sidhwa being a Postcolonial writer shows a repertoire of rich cultural heritage of the sub-continent. The characters in *The Crow Eaters* show the same tendency towards the Parsi and the Hindu myths and beliefs and the Western ways of life. Sidhwa retells the tale of the last century which is marked with the colonial rule of Britain. The Parsi community being experienced in the migratory manners followed and sided with the colonizers, and got economic freedom and favors as a reward for their assistance and loyalty.

Faredoon in the given lines advises his children to be loyal for the rulers; “Oh yes, in looking after our interests we have maintained our strength- the strength to advance the grand cosmic plan of Ahura Mazda the deep spiritual law which governs the universe, the path of Asha” (Sidhwa, 1980, p. 6). He narrates his own life experiences of offering support and help to the British rulers in sub-continent. For Faredoon to support the British rulers is in complete accordance with the teachings of their religion. Zoroastharism preaches to be loyal to the rulers to promote a strong bond of gain and benefit between the state and community. By visiting the Government House Faredoon registers his loyalty to ‘Queen and Crown’. Sidhwa sketches the divided loyalties of the people, the colonial history of the sub-continent and the sycophancies adopted by Faredoon to show loyalty towards the British rulers. The Parsis also being marginalized faced to be ‘subservient other’ for the British colonizers. Though they patronized the Parsis yet this patronage was limited to their own interests in economy and business. Kapadia (2001) summarizes the situation in the words that Sidhwa portrays the Parsis as the ‘mimic men’ struggling to copy and assimilate the Western modes. Sidhwa draws an exaggerated image of the servile attitude of the Parsi towards the British to earn economic prosperity, peace and legal security. Though she has an ironic attitude towards the flattery of the Parsis yet she successfully and sympathetically exposes the hidden quest for security and identity crisis amongst the whole community.

The Crow Eaters narrates the journey towards the process of hybridity and Westernization and the journey back to reassert inactiveness. Freddy, Putli and Jerbanoo embark on the much-awaited trip to England, “.... the England of their imaginings was burnished to an antiseptic gloss that had no relation to human menial toil” (Sidhwa, 1980, p. 252) But as soon as they reach England they are absolutely disillusioned because the land of their dreams betrays them and they face the reality of their rulers. The Englishmen working as clerks and sales girls and sweeping streets are a source of their disillusionment. The image of their rulers having no servants and washing their toilets is a source of disgust and disappointment for them. Jerbanoo cries after observing it; “I want to go back to my Lahore. I don’t want to die in a foreign land” (Sidhwa, 1980, p. 258)

The Crow Eaters is a novel having exuberance, and charm. This novel vividly portrays the color and magic of India. Freedy's attitude is a combination of love for tradition and compromise for the sake of survival. His son Soli shows an extremely rebellious attitude. We can observe a wonderful amalgamation of innovation and tradition, Eastern norms and Western modernity. Through a humorous narration of the life story of a Parsi businessman, his journey from rags to riches, Sidhwa portrays an attractive world of the British India. She has presented the life of ordinary people in an extraordinary tale which is full of many twists and explores the generation gaps also. The pictures are colorful and vivid and the descriptions are concrete. Sidhwa's mind and pen miss nothing about the delightful and idiosyncratic manners and life patterns of the Parses. The result is a gallery of pictures but prose remains boisterous and baroque.

Sidhwa shows the Parsis always ready to abide by Westernization and to mimic the British ways. The actual purpose behind this long standing practice of support towards state, and a relationship between community and state is financial security by the state. Being a minority community, the Parsis need social protection and religious autonomy. The British colonizers gave them financial security in return for their loyal attitude. That's why Freddy leaves no stone unturned to express his undying loyalty and support towards the British people in the sub-continent. To visit the Government House he used to wear his best clothes and to ascertain his testimony and loyalty towards Queen and Crown he signed his name in visitor's Book. Sidhwa in her fiction presents the Parsi tendency to move beyond the traditional approach and their love for their homeland and the Parsi culture. So her novels are full of the new and hybrid cultural forms.

Postcolonialism is a field of study and research which aims at discovering and demonstrating the way identities are invented, shaped, reinvented and reshaped by the political, cultural and historical factors. It challenges the practice of making boundaries between the cultures of the colonizing nations and the cultures of the colonized nations. It exposes the way different rigid cultures make a code dissolve and the result is an intermixture of many identities. The researcher has explored, examined and analyzed the instances of code dissolve and the intermixture of identities. This study has successfully analyzed the passages from the novels; *The Crow Eaters* (1980) and *An American Brat* (1993). By providing an analysis of the passages, the researcher has tried to explore Sidhwa's approach and attitude towards the hybrids produced as a result of an interaction amongst the colonizers and the colonized nations.

A rapidly increasing interest in Postcolonial perspective has aided various disciplines to understand the world from outside of the traditional Eurocentric point of view. The experiences and occurrences from the colonized people have enabled Postcolonial theory to establish a new kind of understanding about Eurocentric scientific teleology. Like an umbrella Postcolonial theory leads towards a long list of provocative and productive debates which invariably advocate a similar approach of taking the traditional understanding beyond Eurocentricism. Bapsi Sidhwa has also challenged the Eurocentric point of view towards different nations and cultures. Her novels question the ideas of the East being primitive and the West being civilized. In the both novels she has portrayed the darker sides of the Western culture. She has portrayed the colonizers and the colonized people influencing and being influenced by each other.

Though she advocates change and invites the audience to compromise with the traditional outlook towards life yet she explores and unveils the shallowness and invalidity of the Western and the American ways of life. Jerbanoo and Feroza observe these negative sides of the Western and the

American society and they realize the reality of their rulers. They are not only disillusioned but afraid and disoriented also.

6. Conclusion

The present research aims at locating the elements of hybridity and assimilation in *The Crow Eaters* and *An American Brat*. The interpretation of the selected fiction unveils that postcolonial and multicultural settings are the sites of hybridity and assimilation. The multicultural social settings in America and pre-independence subcontinent directly influence the life patterns and the social cultural aspects of the characters and give birth to the hybrid cultural patterns of the colonized striving survival. The study concludes that Sidhwa through her writings challenges the notions of cultural purity and she addresses the question of identity which is complex and to be understood not as a product but as a process. The characters either as colonized subjects or immigrants try to fit into the culture of America. The cultures of the colonizers or the super power America is as exotic for them as the East is exotic to the West and after assimilating the American cultural norms the diasporic communities can't identify themselves with the colonizers. In the light of the research findings, it can be concluded that the diasporic communities survive in the *third space* which is neither absolutely *one* nor essentially the *other* but partially *one* and partially *other*. This concept of *third space* and hybridity prove that identity has fragmented and dichotomous nature which is problematic for the claims of cultural superiority.

The significance of the research lies in the field of cultural studies. The social and cultural trends can hardly escape the attention of the most sensitive souls of the society.... the artists and the writers. Bapsi Sidhwa a Pakistani- Punjabi- Parsi writer is one of those who use their mind and pen to portray the cultural conflicts and social conditions caused by any relationship between different nations particularly the colonizers and the colonized ones. The current study may elaborate the notions of identity crisis in the context of multiculturalism.

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