

EXPERIENCES AND ENCOUNTERS IN THE NOVELS OF IMMIGRANT WRITERS

Ms.H.Surya Prabha¹ and Dr.K.M.Sumathi²

¹Assistant Professor of English, M.V.Muthiah Govt. Arts College for Women, Dindigul.
Email: suryasri1909@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor of English, M.V.Muthiah Govt. Arts College for Women, Dindigul,
sumaangel@yahoo.com

Abstract

Perspectives that emerge from at least two cultures, identities and in some cases, languages, forge the recent literature of emigration and exile. The themes in migrant literature, however, vary depending not only on country of origin but also on the pattern of migration itself. The main focus of migrant literature is often directed at the act of migration to another land, issues of ruthlessness and racism, nostalgia and longing. Recently, there is recognition that global uprootedness is a global phenomenon and the focus, in an odd way, is not on the country of origin or of arrival but on the community that that does not fully belong either. The paper aims at conventions and customs discussed in the novels of the two immigrant writers, Bapsi Sidhwa and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

Keywords: Biculturalism, marginalization, fundamentalism, authoritarianism.

For the immigrants, the process of fitting into their new home country involves the loosening of ties with the country of their origin, a strong sense of dislocation within the family where traditional gender roles are newly defined under the pressure of the surrounding society in the newly acquired community. They are in between the more traditional expectation on one hand and their own practical choice for the acquiring of a new identity on the other. They undergo the plight of identity crisis, cultural dilemmas and displacement.

Biculturalism has impinged upon the consciousness of a number of South Asian writers who have been uprooted from their soil sometimes for the glamour and sometimes for greener fodder or the no-hold-barred sort of lifestyle. The writers feel an archetypal urge to scrutinize their colonial existence and the lure of the western world. They explore

the sub-continental expatriate sensibility in the backdrop of intense political environment with its impact on their personal life.

Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani novelist and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an Indian novelist are immigrants to the United States of America. They have tried to explore transformations in one's life and subsequent consequences in the wake of Americanization and globalization. They project the political background and biographical details through their novels. The gender marginalization and exploitation has jeopardised their existence first as immigrants and then as women, despite the change in locale and culture. As the Asian women expatriates in the USA, they use their novels as the socio-political commentary of both the Asian and the Western societies.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* is a tale of a young Parsi girl Feroza, set in the late 1970s Lahore, a testing time for Pakistan when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's popular Prime Minister has been overthrown by the army dictator, Zia-Ul-Haq. In Pakistan, there is general descent into authoritarianism in the name of religion and the non-Islamic communities, like the Parsis are affected by the increasing fundamentalism. To the Parsi community, Bhutto comes across as a hero, the embodiment of liberalism, progress of rigid thinking and the champion of women's rights, Bapsi Sidhwa, born in Lahore in undivided India, belongs to the Parsi community in Pakistan. During the time of British Colonialism, the Parsi community enjoyed an exclusive status on par with the ruling English. After the partition, like many other Parsis, in Lahore and Karachi, Sidhwa's family decided to stay in the newly, created state of Pakistan and later has settled in the USA. She feels that she is a Parsi first, then a Pakistani specifically a Punjabi and a woman simply by gender. Her novels are fictional expansion of the varied experience of life and society in Pakistan and America. In *An American Brat*, she chronicles the adventures of a young Pakistani Parsi girl Feroza Ginwalla in America.

The novel exhibits three phases of Feroza's life: the first phase in her hometown, very timid, tense and complex-written, the second phase, the process of learning through experience and the third phase, the climax of expansion and transformation. Feroza represents the expatriate youngsters who are trying to strike a balance between tradition and modernity, past and present dependence and freedom. Sidhwa contrast the combined atmosphere of girls in the subcontinent and the freedom in the USA. But the migrant

Feroza has learnt to adjust herself to a different culture. She has resolved to marry a man whom she comes to like without bothering herself whether he is a Parsi or different faith. She decides to manage her life without allowing anyone to meddle in her personal affairs. *An American Brat* is a fine combination of conventions and customs. As a writer from the Parsi community, Bapsi Sidhwa picks her character against a time period (1970s) creating within a perspective with which the character views the world, based on the events of the story. Like the author, the protagonist is the 'other' in Pakistan, in more senses than one 'othered', since she is one of the minority Zoroastrian communities living in Islamic Pakistan.

Like other Third World Women, who are expatriated in the West, Bapsi Sidhwa who lives in the USA does not totally cut off from home. When she goes back to Pakistan, she feels like an exile. The voice of self-discovery and self-assertion of her protagonist Feroza is the voice of marginalised. Asian woman who protests the narrowness of religion and society. Sidhwa, through feroza, shows the consciousness of her privileged status and a greatly the privileges granted to her in the West. Sidhwa describes the increase of islamization of Pakistan and the reactions of minority Parci group to these major political changes through Feroza.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, like Bapsi Sidhwa, is an immigrant in the United States. She is unable to connect herself with the situation of American authors. She decides to insist on the oppression of women in India as well as in America. She came across several women who were victims of abuse, victimised by the uncomfortable workings of American Society. She founded MAITRI, the first South Asian service helpline to help families from South Asia facing domestic violence, emotional abuse, cultural alienation and human trafficking. Much of Divakaruni's writing is inspired by her experiences and encounters suffering women in the organization MAITRI. Most of the Divakaruni's works are partly autobiographical, mainly the experiences of women who visited MAITRI and her exuberant first novel the *Mistress Of The Spices* highlights how transposed traditions survive on foreign soil. Laura Merin in a review in *World Literature Today* states. "Divakaruni builds an enchanted story upon the fault line in American Society that lies between the self and the community. Addressing the immigrant experience in particular,

she asks how to negotiate between the needs of each under the earth-moving stress of desire” (207).

The novel follows Tilo, an immigrant from India who runs a spice shop in Oakland, California. Tilo provides spices not only for cooking but also for the home sickness and alienation for the Indian immigrants. Divakaruni combines the unfamiliar, the female Indian immigrant experience with the familiar urban life in America, blending the two into a magical narrative that relates a gifted young woman’s plight as an outsider in Southern California as a ‘mistress of spices’ the protagonist is named Nayan Thara, the star of the eye, though her parents were heavy with fallen hope at another girl. But the girl is special endowed with supernatural powers with uncanny clarity to see into the distant future. She is unloved by her parents but duly appreciated for her superfluous income. The pirates take the uncared daughter away to aid them in their plundering. She becomes Bagyavathi, bringer of luck by the pirates. In the Island, the snakes named her, Sarpa Kanya. For becoming the mistress of spices, she changed her name into Tilo, meaning ‘a life giver’ and a restorer of health and hope. Tilo’s multiple identities, Chamelon like, make clear how complex in the problem of identity crisis that it Indians try to cope with in a foreign land. She encounters the various people who come to her for help exerts her magical power Geeta, Lalitha and Ahuja.

The protagonist Tilo is born from the experience of Divakaruni. In an interview to Mortin Marcus, Divakaruni admits that when she gave birth to her second child her incisions became infected and she had to have another surgery reminding in the hospital for a month and only half-conscious, most of time she had the sense that she was hovering between life and death, moving back and forth between and one existence and another. She bridged the purely realistic and mystic one, dealing exclusively with the Indian American community inclusive of three other ethnic groups living in the inner city Latinos, African Americans and the Native Americans.

Divakaruni as a social activist of MAITRI, delineates the various aspects of life in a post industrial consumerist and technology dominated society. Through Tilo, Divakaruni talks of the boundaries that separate communities and people. Tilo becomes the mistress on a faraway island, the female universe, and traditional geographic locations and out of the conventional male world. This world though inhabited by both halves of humanity-

male and female-is actually a male world. Tilo selects one such male world America to help the battered, marginalized and suppressed women. Within the male universe, she lives in the store,an isolated female world.

Both Feroza and Tilo present the different cultures-home, culture of origine and host land, the culture of adoption. Though they have conservative background, they take bold independent decision. They refuse to be suffocated by the male dominated environment. whether in California, Chicago or Calcutta, they learn to their new and changing culture with the clearer vision and careful introspection, they understand that a brave new world has come into bring and in that world bold decisions have to be made. They symbolize the necessity of inventing and re-inventing one's self by going beyond what is given and by transcending one's origin.

REFERENCES

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee, *The Mistress of Spices*. London: Black Swan books, 1977.Print.

Mehan, Upinder. “*Fire in the Heart: Review of An American brat* by Babsi Sidwa.” *The Toronto review of Contemporary Writing Abroad* 12..2 (Spring 1994) Print.

Merlin Lara. “Review of the *Mistress of Spices*.” *World Literature Today* 72.1 (Winter 98) Print.

Sidwa, Bapsi. *An American Brat*. Delhi: Penguin Books 1994. Print.

“Writing as an Immigrant” *The Atlantic literary review* 1.2 (Oct.- Dec. 2000) Print.

