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## **Writings from The Margins: Contribution of Bapsi Sidwa in Marginal Literature**

**Dr. Simi Rizvi**

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Zakir Husain College, University of Delhi, New Delhi*

Literature after World War I became an object of academic discourse, discussion centred in designing literature and placing certain canonical texts within that definition. Much work has been done since the advent of structuralist and post-structuralist discourse in recognizing those spaces of marginality surrounding black writing, women's writing, gay writing, and colonial writing etc.

As a discourse in academia, alongside its canons and hierarchies, the turn to the marginal has eroded its definitions, its canonical categories. However as gay writing, women writing etc. have fought for their place to be studied, there is the underlying intent that says, "We can be literature too". This movement perhaps demarcates it still within the hierarchies and categories that maintained its marginality in the first place.

Literature as it is constructed today is not merely about what phrases are being taught in academia (i.e. classes on marginal literature) but also publication practices. The profligations of marginal writings within the literary canon has opened up possibilities and potentialities and is articulating this new space of literature within a particular text that dismantles what literature does.

Many marginalized voices have been raised in literature in English. Gayatri Chakravarty explores the issue of Subaltern Voice in one of the essays of post colonial studies, "Can Subaltern Speak"? An attempt to recover voices, perspective and subjectivities of socially outcaste. Homi Bhabha argues in favour of pathos of 'Cultural Confusion'. The questions of their identities have been tackled through Dalit Literature. There are many unmarginalized writers who have written a lot about marginalized lives to several Dalit writers who have translated other works in English like Lakshman Mane's Upara translated as 'The Outsider', Vasant Moon's 'Growing Up as an Untouchable' translated by Gair Omvedt, Late Kishore Shantabai Kamblie's, "Against All Odds" and works collected by Arjun Dangle's in 'Poisoned Bread' and 'Homeless in my land', Sharan Kumar Limbala's, 'Akkarmashi translation as 'The Outcaste'.

Among women writers of marginal literature, Parsi novel has developed as a sub-genre in recent years within English fictional tradition of the Indian sub-continent. Writers like Bapsi Sidwa, Firdaus Kanga, Robinton Mistry and Boman Desai have made significant contribution towards growth and development of this sub-genre lending its distinctive characteristic.

Bapsi Sidwa, an author of Pakistan origin who writes in English, raised in Parsi community, a religious and ethnic minority in Pakistan regarded her as a feminist post colonial Asian author whose novels including, 'The Crow Eater' (1978), 'The Bride' (1982), 'The Ice Candy

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Man'(1988) and 'An American Brat' (1993) provide unique perspective on Indian and Pakistan history, politics and culture.

Sidwa was raised in Lahore, Pakistan and currently resides in Houston, Texas. During her earlier years because of an attack of childhood polio, her parents were advised not to send her to school. She was therefore taught to read and write in English by a tutor at home and later gave matric exam privately at the age of thirteen. She graduated from Kinniard College for Women in Lahore in 1957 and got married at the age of nineteen and during a trip to Karakoram Mountains with her husband, she heard the story of a young Punjabi girl who had run away from her tribal husband due to intolerable marriage and was killed in Hindukush Mountain by her husband. The story obsessed her to reflect on the hapless condition of women not only in Pakistan but in Indian sub-continent as well. These thoughts culminated into writing her first novel 'The Bride'. She chooses to treat marginalized ethnic group of Pakistan in 'The Bride'. Qasim's marginalized position as a Kohistani tribal is made clear at the outset of the novel. The description of harshness of tribal life in the opening chapter and the brief description of his life in Jullundur where his tribal customs set him apart from the people of the plains, emphasize this position. His marginal position is confirmed when he witness the brutal attack on the refugee train. His detachment is clear when though horrified by the slaughter he feels no compulsion to sacrifice his own life. 'The Bride' also provides incisive look into the treatment of women. It is related to a girl, Zaitoon, orphaned by partition, adopted by Kohistani tribesman Qasim had escaped to the plains to overcome his grief. Social compulsion made him marry her. This allows Sidwa to contrast the brutal ways of Qasim's people with the gentle life Zaitoon has known in Lahore and sets the novel for an exploration of the cultural division Sidwa sees within independent Pakistan.

After completing 'The Bride', she started working on her second novel, 'The Crow Eater', her first published novel, a lively and humorous story about Parsi community of Pakistan. 'The Crow Eater', was successfully set in the marginalized Parsi community. The novelist's penetrative insight in presenting the marginalized Parsi milieu makes the novel both entertaining and educative. The novel describes the social mobility of a Parsi family, the junglewallahs during the British Raj in the early 20th century. The description of Faredoon, nicknamed Freddy Junglewallah's exploits his ultimate aim in achieving wealth and status. His acts of charity are not virtuous but tinged with self-promotion. He developed a philanthropic image to increase his business contacts, amassed capital by the dubious practice of setting his shops on fire, after hiding his goods in a hired godown to claim insurance money. The Parsi attitude was endorsed by the dying businessman, Faredoon Junglewalla who exhorted his offspring to remain loyal to the Raj and condemned the national movement. The novel is not just social mobility and values of a man and his family but the movement of the times. The nationalist movement and the Parsis ambivalent attitude towards it is also shown. The Parsis are depicted as cultural hybrids.

Success didn't come to Bapsi easily. She wrote her first two novels in Pakistan where no one was publishing in English at that time. So after many rejections, she decided to self publish and self distribute the novel, 'The Crow Eater.'

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Through her first two novels, she got recognition, it was third novel, ‘Cracking India’ (also published as Ice Candy Man) that earned her international acclaim and acceptance as one of the most promising English novelists from South Asia, placing her among Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai and R.K.Narayan.

‘Ice Candy Man’ is her most serious, political, narrative and child narrator. Sidhwa choose a marginalized narrator-a child, a female, a Parsi, a victim of polio. She approaches the idea of Indian Society pulling itself apart in its quest for a shared, post colonial, national identity by focussing on one small neighbourhood in the Punjab district. The inhabitants of this small insular community hardly notice the differences between one another until India achieves independence. It deals with partition of India through the eye of a girl Lenny, growing up in a Parsi family, of breaking of India as she witnesses Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Sikhs fighting for their land and lives during the division of the country into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan in 1947. Also there is an autobiographical element in the novel. Like Sidhwa, the young girl, Lenny is a polio survivor who was kept out of school because of her temporary disability. The character also shares Sidhwa’s religion. Like Lenny, she too had witnessed partition of 1947 caused by a complicated set of social and political factors, including religious difference and end of colonialism in India. Thousands were uprooted; many were victims of rape, torture and war refugees. Ayah, another important character in the novel is also shown as one of the victim of partition. Lenny spends her days with Ayah, her beautiful nanny, visiting with the large group of admirers that Ayah draws. It is in company of these working class characters that Lenny learns about religious difference and intolerance. Of suitors of Ayah were Masseur and Dilnawaz (Ice Candy Man) who have strong rivalry against each other to win the favour of Ayah. Meanwhile Ice Candy Man manage to kill Masseur, but soon his heart changed after witnessing ghastly sight in Lahore railway station with trains loaded with bodies of Muslims passengers. He abducted Ayah and only the urge of vengeance transforms him into beast.

Gradually Lenny begins to differentiate between Hindus, Muslima, Sikhs engulfed in political arguments. She enjoys a happy life in Lahore but kidnapping of her Ayah resulted in upheaval. Soon her world erupts in religious, ethnic and racial violence. Women, she learns, are often the victims, as in the case with Ayah and the women who have been raped then placed in the rehabilitation quarters.

Whereas her first three novels were set in Indian sub-continent, her fourth novel set partly in Pakistan and partly in U.S.A. It explored the tensions that arise in a Parsi family when their daughter Feroza leaves Pakistan to study in U.S.A. She is fallen in love with an American and a Jewish. Her mother is more conservative. She knows what Feroza marrying outside Parsi community will means. The mother-daughter relationship is perfect disguise for considering a number of related issues. The novel ‘An American Brat’ reflects a various conflicts between husband and wives, mother and daughter, young and old, conservative and progressive, east and west, India and Pakistan, Parsi and Muslim etc.

Bapsi Sidhwa has won international acclaim for her work. Her works have been translated into French and German. Both Pakistan and America have honoured her for writings. In 1991, she received the Sitara-i-imtiaz award. In Pakistan this is the highest honour

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in the arts bestowed on a citizen. Sidhwa's 'Cracking India' was named a notable book of 1991 by the New York Times and won the Literature Prize of the 1991 Frankfurt Book Fair 'Cracking India' was made into the film 'Earth' by Canadian director Deepa Mehta in 1998 as well as 2006 novel 'Water'; a novel based upon Mehta's film 'Water'. In 1993, she received from the Lila Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund, an award of US \$105,000. This is perhaps one of the largest grants in the country for writers.

An active social worker among Asian Women, Sidhwa represented Pakistan at the Asian Women's Congress in 1975. The great Urdu poet of the sub-continent, Faiz Ahmed Faiz has praised Sidhwa for her caustic wit, racy style, genial comedy and shrewd observations of human behaviour. He compared her to U. S. Naipaul and R. K. Narayan. Like all good novelists, her works have aroused a variety of reactions. Her interests are vast and she cannot be easily categorized as just a comic writer or a Parsi novelist. In her four published novels, the themes vary—the partition crisis, expatriate experience, the Parsi milieu and social idiosyncrasies of this small minority community, the theme of marriage, women's problems of migration etc.

Writers from distinct minority communities within a country are likely to have a different relation to it than writers from the majority community or culture, a facet evident in both First and third World countries, India, Pakistan, U.S.A, England, New Zealand and Australia. Bapsi Sidhwa has a distinctive Pakistani, yet Parsi ethos in her writings but above all a unique individual voice.

The Urdu writers that have influenced Sidhwa are Mirza Ghalib, Allama Iqbal (Pakistan's national poet), Faiz Ahmed Faiz (a Lenin prize winner) and women poets Zehra Nigar and Kishwar Naheed. She says, "Yes, my love of Urdu poetry overflows in this book (Ice Candy Man). I have made it part of this book and woven it into the structure because I feel it gives a resonance to the book, a cultural resonance. Something which is very eastern, Urdu has permeated the book in the form of poetry. Sidhwa is fluent in several languages—English, Urdu, Gujrati, Punjabi. The verbal jugglery which she uses in her novels makes writing style modernist or post-modernist. The influence of Salman Rushdie and the technique of Indianization of written English is obvious in her novels. The language resembles rhythms, styles and nuances of everyday speech in the sub-continent. Bapsi Sidhwa also has very lucid views on the role of a writer of fiction cannot alter social reality or change the world. She like, Mulk Raj Anand feel that the author has a proselytizing role to play. She talks about injustices in her various novels. Some of the injustices listed are the behaviour of superpower (evident in the Crow Eater and Ice Candy Man) or the oppression of women (The Bride) or an injustice done to a country [misrepresentation of Pakistan's view of Partition in Ice Candy Man or injustice done to a political leader (the presentation of Mohammed Ali Jinnah in the struggle for independence which she tries to rectify in Ice Candy Man). Her theme involves human relationship and betrayal, immigration, cultural hybridity as well as social and political upheavals. She links gender to community, nationality, religion and class demonstrating the ways in which those various aspects of cultural identity and social structures do not affect one another but are intervened. History, is said, is more often made by accident than design. This maxim is aptly illustrated in the manner in which Bapsi Sidhwa became a writer.

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