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Gendered Trauma Faced By The Expatriate In An American Brat

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Abstract:

This paper examines gendered trauma in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*, focusing on Feroza Ginwalla and what she goes through as an expatriate. When Feroza leaves Pakistan for the United States, her inner struggles only get sharper—she faces not just culture shock but even tighter patriarchal pressure. Using trauma theory, especially Cathy Caruth's ideas around belatedness and fractured identity, alongside Homi K. Bhabha's "third space" and hybridity, the study shows how Feroza's trauma isn't just personal—it's shaped by her gender. Her journey through sexual awakening, racial bias, forbidden love, and being pushed away by her family reveals how women's bodies turn into battlegrounds for cultural fears in a global setting. In the end, the paper argues that trauma for expatriates in this novel doesn't come just from being uprooted. It grows out of the tangle of gender, religion, and life in the diaspora.

Keywords: Gendered trauma, expatriation, hybridity, patriarchy, diaspora, identity crisis, transnationalism.

Introduction:

Migration literature usually paints exile as a mixed bag—there’s hope, sure, but also a real sense of crisis. In *An American Brat*, Sidhwa drops Feroza right in the middle of Pakistan’s Islamization in the 1980s. Her family sends her to America to get away from rising religious extremism, but what she finds isn’t exactly the freedom they promised. Instead, Feroza faces her own kind of culture shock.

Caruth describes trauma as “the confrontation with an event that... is not fully assimilated as it occurs” (Caruth 4). That’s what happens to Feroza in America. She grew up grounded in Parsi traditions, but now, surrounded by Western values, her sense of self starts to splinter.

Bhabha’s idea of hybridity fits Feroza’s situation, too. She stands between two worlds, never fully belonging to either. Bhabha calls this the “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” (Bhabha 4). But here’s the thing—it’s not a smooth ride. This in-between space doesn’t bring comfort. Instead, it leaves Feroza anxious and unsettled.

In the end, the novel digs deep into what it means to be a woman caught between cultures, wrestling with patriarchy, religion, race, and the push and pull of modern life.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the psychological and emotional trauma experienced by Feroza as a female expatriate.
2. To examine how patriarchy operates across national borders.
3. To explore the role of sexual awakening in shaping gendered identity conflict.
4. To apply trauma theory and transnational theory to interpret expatriate experiences.
5. To highlight the intersection of gender, race, and religion in diasporic identity formation.

Literature Review:

Jyoti Rana, in her article, *Pangs of Dislocation in Bapsi Sidhwa’s An American Brat* (2021), states that the diasporic writers attempt to write about their own immigrant experiences and the challenges they (or their parents or grandparents) experienced when relocating to a foreign country. Diasporic works began to focus on topics like identity, cultural change, acculturation, survival, alienation, homelessness, and nostalgia. An immigrant’s sense of dislocation lingers. A person may relocate or be dislocated for a variety of reasons, both voluntary and involuntary.

Wajid Riaz, Shaista Malik, and Bakht Rahman in their article *Quest for Identity in Bapsi Sidhwa’s An American Brat: A Postcolonial Perspective* (2017), state that In postcolonial literature, the topic of diasporic displacement brought on by crossing boundaries and its effects is heavily discussed. The goal

of the current study is to investigate Bapsi Sidhwa's (2012) *An American Brat's* latent optimism on diasporic displacement and its effects. The frameworks of Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha are combined in this qualitative study's eclectic methodology. The findings demonstrate that identity crisis is a relevant idea in diasporic literature and that the main character in the novel in question undergoes specific changes. The novel's protagonist has a cultural crisis and a displacement in relation to her cultural identity during this process. According to Said, her indigenous cultural roots prevented her from fully assimilating a foreign culture.

Dr. N. Lakshmi, in her article *Acculturation or Assimilation of the Diasporic Individual in Bapsi Sidwa's An American Brat* (2022), elaborates on global migration, which gave rise to the idea of "diaspora," which continues to be a social and political upheaval for the subalterns. The subalterns have to face the second-grade treatment in new foreign setups and have a need to acculturate themselves with the new identity and assimilate their indigenous identity. These victimized persons express voice against the discrimination of the social, cultural, and political structure of the country they live in. Through an analysis of Bapsi Sidwa's novel *An American Brat*, this article investigates whether a person truly becomes Acculturated or assimilated or continues to be the "other."

Discussion:

Feroza, a young girl belonging to the Parsee community who resides in Lahore, depicts her journey through three cultures: the Islamic culture of her nation, Pakistan; her local community culture; and the Western culture of the United States of America. The novel begins with . Zareen, a Parsee, sees a lot of cultural turmoil in the nation. She was a Bhutto supporter, and she could see how her daughter, Feroza, was becoming more conservative like her Muslim friends. Feroza's parents fear that their daughter may forget her Parsi practices and values. They resolve to shift their perspective by sending their daughter to America for a vacation.

"I think we should send Feroza to America for a short holiday" (Sidwa, 14).

In their opinion, the Parsee way of life and the Western lifestyle of the United States of America are very comparable. Feroza was thrilled with the outcome.

"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..." (Sidhwa, 27)

Feroza steps into Kennedy Airport for the first time, and the culture shock hits her hard. Everything feels strange and overwhelming. She loses her nerve pretty quickly, and a sense of loneliness just closes in. The customs officers don't make things better—they treat her like an outsider, and that old excitement she felt before landing disappears fast. When they start grilling her about her immigration status, they don't believe a word she says. That's when it really sinks in: she's a stranger here, no family, no one to land and disappear to comfort her or tell her what to do.

Later, she gets stuck in the stairwell, and there's nobody around to help. She feels lost, like she doesn't know a thing about anything. The loneliness is almost physical at this point. Just when she's at her lowest, though, an elderly couple notices her and helps her out. For a moment, that sense of isolation lifts.

Her adjustment to the new world is taught by Uncle Manek. Being from a traditional culture, Feroza is hesitant to change her outfit in front of her roommate Jo; however, Jo is an American girl and never bothers to change her attire, even in Feroza's presence. Feroza first hesitates to go to the evening party with Jo. The first sip of wine makes her feel less anxious, and she then feels at ease around boys. She starts drinking, dancing, and smoking, and she picks up an American accent. This transformation unsettles her family and destabilizes her own sense of self. Caruth argues that trauma disrupts identity continuity (Caruth 7). Feroza's confusion reflects this disruption. She oscillates between being a "dutiful Parsi daughter" and an independent, Americanized woman. Her identity becomes fractured, producing emotional instability.

Even though Feroza is in America, she can't escape the grip of patriarchal rules. The real trouble starts when she falls for David Press. Feroza wrote a letter to her parents stating:

"Please don't be angry, and please try to make both my grannies understand. I love you all so much. I won't be able to bear it if you don't accept David." (Sidhwa, 266)

Her relationship with David isn't just about sex—it cracks open a door to emotional freedom she's never known. But that freedom drags guilt along behind it. Feroza grew up with strict rules; she can't help but feel shame for wanting what she wants. The pain she feels isn't about wounds... It's all in her head—a tug-of-war between the values she grew up with and what she's living. Taking control of her own life feels powerful, sure, but it also leaves her feeling cut off from where she came from.

This is what gendered trauma looks like for her: Western culture tells her to be independent, to chase her own desires. But everything in her upbringing warns her against it. So she's stuck in the middle, fighting herself every step of the way.

Then comes the real breaking point. Feroza has to make a choice: family or love. She picks her family, but the price is steep. Letting go of David isn't just about ending a relationship—it rips open old wounds and shows just how deep her struggle runs.

Caruth talks about how trauma isn't always immediate. Sometimes, you only see how much you've lost after the fact (Caruth 10). Feroza figures out, a little too late, that her independence always came with strings attached. When she goes back, it's not her giving up—it's her facing the tough reality of carving out who she is, caught between two worlds.

Findings:

Expatriate trauma in the novel hits men and women differently—it's not some blanket experience. Patriarchy doesn't just stay in one country; it follows people wherever they go. For women, the struggle over sexual autonomy really shapes who they are and sparks a lot of inner conflict. Instead of setting people free, it actually messes with their sense of self and creates a lot of psychological tension. And honestly, the emotional fallout of living in the diaspora is tangled up in relationships and family ties more than anything else.

Conclusion:

In *An American Brat*, Bapsi Sidhwa doesn't treat expatriation as some simple escape. Instead, she shows it's a push-and-pull between freedom and new kinds of limits. Feroza's story makes it clear—just moving to another country doesn't break down patriarchy. It just shifts it around or gives it a new shape.

Looking through ideas from Cathy Caruth's trauma theory and Homi K. Bhabha's take on hybridity, the book highlights how being a woman makes the weight of exile even heavier. Feroza gets stuck between two worlds. That so-called "third space" isn't always a place to thrive. Sometimes, it just hurts.

By the end, Sidhwa isn't picking sides. She calls out both conservative nationalism and Western liberal promises, showing how, for women like Feroza, real independence still gets tangled up in all the old expectations—gender, religion, race, and community. The obstacles just wear different faces.

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