

**RESEARCH PAPER****American Imperialism: An Analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*****<sup>1</sup>Samra Bahisht, <sup>2</sup>Asma Ikram and <sup>3</sup>Aman Ali**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research aims to discuss the causes that attracted Feroza, Manek, and Zareen to American society in the novel *An American Brat*. While people become more conscious about themselves, they prefer embracing other cultures if they offer more opportunities and comfort. The study depicts Zareen in general and Feroza and Manek in particular who preferred the American lifestyle over Pakistani and chose to settle in America to have a free, independent and luxurious life and avail the unlimited opportunities that the country provides. The research uses qualitative research methodology where textual evidences are provided and analysed using the theory of American imperialism as a theoretical framework. Primary as well as secondary sources have been consulted to carry out this study. The study shows how the economic and cultural aspects of American imperialism caused Feroza and Manek to embrace American society. This research helps understand the influence of America over the Third World countries.

**Keywords:** American Imperialism, *An American Brat*, Feroza, Manek, Zareen**Introduction**

After the downfall of the Soviet Union, America claimed to be the superpower. Since then, it has not stopped showing its influence upon the developing and underdeveloped countries all over the world. Whether it is military, political, economic or social influence, America has been using all aspects of imperialism to influence other countries. Imperialism refers to the economic, military, and political influence of one nation over other nations (Hobson 1902). Countries that are impacted by America include Pakistan as well. However, the influence that America has over Pakistan does not include military but economic, cultural and political influence. The novel *An American Brat* is based on a story that portrays the experiences of those Pakistanis who are living in America. Sidhwa's *An American Brat* is the story of the adventures of a young Pakistani girl "Feroza" in America. She is staying with her uncle, Manek who helps her in exploring the best that America could offer. During her stay in America, Feroza begins to admire everything about that country. She is in love with all the facilities, liberty and individualism which are the part of American lifestyle. Later, her mother, Zareen also comes after her to America. After staying for some time in America, Zareen also gets inspired by American culture and society. Although, Zareen tries to persuade Feroza to return to Pakistan after completing her education, yet she fails. In the end, Feroza chooses to stay in America and pursues her career.

Despite all the emotional shocks, Feroza finds America a place which meets her to her real self. All these years, she has been in America, she undergoes a lot of changes that mould her personality in a way that enables her to stand by herself. What Feroza, Manek and Zareen like the most about America is its culture which is rooted in liberty and individualism, and the rich economy that results in the availability of all possible facilities. So, this research aims to trace the elements of American imperialism in *An American Brat*

and its impacts on the lives of Feroza, Manek and Zareen. This novel is rich in portraying American culture and economy and its influence on Americans' lifestyles. So, the purpose of this research is to find those cultural and economic aspects of American society.

### Literature Review

Several researches have been conducted on *An American Brat*. From the colonialist perspective, Singh (2016) says, "an attempt of homogenizing the nation in a post-colonial era has only perpetuated the colonial ideologies, now in the hands of once colonized, to transform culture and identities for the nationalist projects" (P.4). The article focuses on the nature of identity in general and its relationship with women in particular, in the light of this novel. In the post-colonial era, nations are still homogenized at the hands of once colonized while they attempt to transform culture and identity for nationalist projects. The dynamic nature of identity is closely linked to culture which takes a restrictive turn for women in *An American Brat*. The function of women is measured as the establisher and maintainer of culture. Their identity is conflated with that of the nation resulting in the re-colonizing of their minds and bodies. Singh (2016) concludes that the escalation of fundamentalist tendencies in Pakistan has been exhibited through *An American Brat* that in the post-independence era, the psyche of people in general and women in particular is likely to have been re-colonized in an attempt to rediscover and preserve the original national values of the State (P.4). The new socio-political order projects the damage brought in by colonialism in the post-colonial era. In a postcolonial analysis of *An American Brat*, Riaz et al. (2017) discuss, "identity crisis is a pertinent concept in diasporic literature and the protagonist in the novel undergoes certain transformation" (P.8). Riaz et al. (2017) focus on the diasporic dislocation and cultural crises in terms of cultural identity which is a commonly highlighted issue in postcolonial literature. The clash between the indigenous and the foreign culture splits one's personality and one searches for one's identity. The complex issue of identity is represented in *An American Brat*. The characters of the novel try to adopt the American culture. In an attempt to be accepted by American culture, they reject their own culture. Being exotic to them, American culture neither accepted them nor identified them. Denial of her own culture and rejection by American culture become the cause of Feroza's identity crisis while she lives in Diaspora. She had been provided a chance to choose the best of both the cultures and she prefers to enjoy the liberty of the free world without any obstacle, yet she could not assimilate into a foreign culture completely due to her indigenous cultural roots to apply Said's terminology. In the thematic study of *An American Brat*, Naeem (2018) says "*An American Brat* highlights the phenomenon of neo-colonialism in Pakistan, and the most remarkable thing is its dual perspective which is based on both the Pakistani and the Parsee point of view".

The above-mentioned reviews reveal several different perspectives of research on *An American Brat* which focus on the impact of colonial ideologies on the once colonized nations, the identity crisis and the neocolonial aspect that the novel depicts. However, this research aims to analyze the novel from the perspective of American Imperialism. The part of American imperialism that this research uses is, to some extent, synonymous with neo-colonialism which uses cultural, political and economic influence to control other countries. The only difference is that neo-colonialism is used only by the nations who used to be the colonizers while American imperialism is associated with America. So, the gap that the researcher has highlighted is to find out the causes that attracted Feroza, Manek and Zareen towards American society and its effects on their lives, using the theory of economic and cultural imperialism.

### Material and Methods

The research uses the qualitative method, and data has been collected from the primary source, the text of *An American Brat*, and secondary sources such as articles and papers. The theoretical framework of the study is American imperialism. The theory of

imperialism was introduced by J.A. Hobson at the beginning of the 20th century. Imperialism refers to the economic, military, and political influence of one nation over other nations (Hobson 1902). "American imperialism" is a term that refers to the economic, military, political and cultural influence of the United States on other countries. It was in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the presidency of James K. Polk, when the emerging industrialization in America caused businessmen to seek new international markets for selling their goods, such as textile goods and agricultural tools. In addition, the increasing influence of social Darwinism led to the belief that the United States was responsible for bringing the concepts of industrialization, democracy, and Christianity to less developed societies. The combination of these attitudes and other factors led the United States toward imperialism. American imperialism is partly rooted in American Exceptionalism, the idea that the United States is different from other countries due to its specific world mission to spread liberty and democracy. A similar idea could be traced in the words of French observer Alexis De Tocqueville (1835) who concluded that the United States is a unique nation, proceeding along a path to which no limit can be perceived. Modern American imperialism is considered synonymous with neocolonialism which uses soft power rather than military takeover. Neocolonialism uses cultural, political or economic influence to control other countries, and this is what America has done to most of the developing countries. Although several countries have been controlled by America through military interference, yet American free economy and democratic culture have influenced many developing countries including Pakistan whose citizens dream of living in America. Resultantly, the element of imperialism is frequently reflected in most of American-Pakistani writers. For instance, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, as Haider (2017) mentions "Analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* from the political perspective of a 9/11 novel, creates counterintuitive rethinking on the Clash of Civilizations theory and to elucidate the linkages between new American imperialism, fundamentalism, globalization and terrorism". In the light of the novel, *An American Brat*, the researcher explores the cultural and economic aspect of American imperialism which has inspired Feroza, Manek and Zareen. It is different from the perspective of imperialism which has been applied in the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* because it will not include the military influence, rather its focus is the economic and cultural influence of America on the lives of Feroza, Manek and Zareen in particular. This is a qualitative research methodology that uses the theory of American imperialism as theoretical framework. The data has been collected and analyzed by providing textual evidences.

## Results and Discussion

American imperialism has several aspects, including political, military, economic, and cultural imperialism. Two influential factors that have largely dominated Pakistanis are the cultural and economic outcomes of American policies that offer a free and luxurious life to its citizens. This research concerns the analysis of these two factors in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*.

### Economic Imperialism in *An American Brat*

Economic imperialism involves the economic influence of one nation over the other nations. Pakistan, being a third-world country, lacks many of the basic facilities in almost every sector. Furthermore, the country constitutes some cultural restraints which are not appreciated by a larger part of the youth, especially the liberal community. Being chained in the societal codes and deprived of the physical luxuries that a third world fails to provide, a large proportion of Pakistani youth in general and privileged class, in particular, are inclined towards America and its lavish lifestyle that offers boundless liberty and all possible comforts to its dwellers. *An American Brat* unveils the marvels of America and the excitement of Feroza, her uncle Manek and her mother Zareen while they

are experiencing them, which the researchers have analyzed that reveal the causes that attracted Feroza, Manek and Zareen towards American society.

The economic excellence of America, like the rest of the world, has equally influenced the people of Pakistan. In the very first chapter of the novel, Sidhwa (1993) mentions that the second-hand bonanza of Americans is found all across Lahore city every winter. It shows the credibility of American products and their significance that even after being used by Americans; the products are still welcomed and admired in countries like Pakistan. After it is decided by her family that Feroza will be sent to America for the vacations, she feels overly enthusiastic imagining herself in America. The land of America is again admired for its rich and innovative lifestyle while it is attributed to the land of glossy magazines, *Bewitched* and *Star Trek*, of rock stars and jeans.

When Feroza arrives in America and meets Manek, she is exposed to the city of New York. She could not help herself from turning away her eyes from the bright tall building and the incredibly enthralling view of the river and the bridges over it. The scene is described in the book as:

Immediately Feroza noticed the garlands of lights outlining the iron rhythm of the bridge they were racing along, the sumptuous red tail lights of the cars ahead. Then she realized they had driven over other bridges, equally long. And then they were climbing ... an incredible river. How deep the river must be to hold the ships. Feroza couldn't credit everything her eyes saw. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.64)

These lines show, how extraordinarily attractive the infrastructure and the decoration were that enchanted Feroza's sight and was excitingly fascinated with the view of everything around her. When they are on the way to Lexington Avenue, Manek asks Feroza, "do you know, more money changes hands here in one hour than in a whole year in Pakistan?" (Sidhwa, 1993, P.69-70). It shows how rich and prosperous are the people of America as compared to Pakistan. When Feroza visits Bloomingdale's, it is like entering a dream:

Feroza went into Bloomingdale's. It was like entering a surreal world of hushed opulence festooned by all manner of hats propped up ... gloss of true colours. And it was merely the entrance foyer that had affected her so. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.70)

The products inside Bloomingdale's were of standard quality and well arranged. From hats to belts, everything was finely manufactured with all varieties and colours. Feroza finds herself in surrealistic world because she has never been exposed to such ideal materials back in Pakistan and it is America that allows her to experience such ideals for the first time. It is mentioned, "Feroza, still disoriented by her sudden swing from Lahore to New York, a trajectory that appeared to have pitched her into the next century, had a surrealistic impression of blurred images" (Sidhwa, 1993, P.73). These lines show Lahore as a city which is a century behind from New York. For Feroza, the development, variety and diversity that New York possesses are incomparable. The technological and mechanical advancement is another landmark that America has attained. It is mentioned in the book as follows:

The sheer bliss of telephones that worked come cloud or drizzle, the force of water in the YMCA showers, electricity that never fluctuated or broke down or requires daily hours of 'load shedding' were joys Feroza was discovering for herself. The enchantments of the First World. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.102-103)

In Pakistan, Feroza had experienced some of these facilities but those were limited, unlike America which provides every opportunity to be availed with innovative technology to the fullest. Things that only the upper class in Pakistan entertain are of common access

to every citizen in America. The use of technology is not just time-saving but it also makes things easy to be tackled. When Manek sees Feroza wrestle with a juice bottle, he says, "remember this; if you have to struggle to open something in America, you are doing it wrong. They've made everything easy. That's how a free economy works" (Sidhwa, 1993, P.143). Free economy brings ease as it is mentioned above. While ease bears comfort, it attracts every sane human being. Likewise, it plays a vital role in assuring quality education which was one of the reasons that Zareen wanted Feroza to stay in America. Zareen, in an attempt to convince her mother about Feroza, tells her, "a lot of people are sending their daughters for education to America" (Sidhwa, 1993, P.122). Develop countries like America provides equal opportunities to its entire citizens to be availed and have comfortable living. When Manek comes to Pakistan for a visit and is surrounded by all the members of his family, he begins to narrate the wonders of America to them:

You think we eat well because we're rich? You should see how the poor in America eat! Every day chicken! Every day baked-beans, hams and sardines! What the Americans throw away in one day can fill the stomachs of all the hungry people in Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan for two days. You can drink water straight from the tap ... at a Hill Station. The same thing in winter; everything is centrally heated and you can walk about in shirtsleeves. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.205-206)

While comparing Pakistan and America, according to Manek, what the rich families eat in Pakistan is celebrated by poor people in America. Not only that, rather the powerful economy has enabled them to facilitate their citizens with all kinds of luxury and ease and there is hardly anything which could be assumed as scarce. It is not just Feroza or Manek who get inspired by America's economic abundance but Zareen also is attracted while she witnesses the marvelous infrastructure, wonderfully decorated shopping malls and the physical ease that she experiences. When she is brought to that small house in which Feroza and David dwell along with two other girls, Zareen is surprised as she beholds the interior of the house. It is described as, "but once she stepped inside Zareen was pleasantly surprised by the thickly carpeted interior, the evenly hung drapes, the comfortable furniture, and she fell in love with the large green fridge and matching dishwasher in the spacious kitchen" (Sidhwa, 1993, P.292). Having technological and material excellence as a result of a strong economy, America's first impression on Zareen was so enchanting that she forgot the purpose of her visit. Whenever Feroza would drop her mother off at one or another of the gleaming shopping malls, each time Zareen finds herself in a place she could only dream of. It is given in the book, "to Zareen's dazzled senses, they were pieces of paradise descended straight from the sky, crammed with all that was most desirable in the world" (Sidhwa, 1993, P.301). A free economy leads to an independent life, not just in national terms; rather it also ensures independence to its citizens by providing every individual with better earning opportunities. While the economy is what defines a national prestige, it does influence a culture often. Like American economy, American culture also encourages liberty and individuality. During her stay in America, Feroza gradually realizes the significance of being independent. She says to her mother, "You've never worked, Mum. You don't know how thrilling it is to earn your own money. And spend it" (Sidhwa 1993, P.253). Modern mechanical inventions have not just reduced human efforts; they also help humans in securing their privacy and self-sufficiency. Being highly technological and sophisticated, American people rejoice in anonymity, privacy and independence which have become part of their culture. While Feroza has all these inspirations, she also realizes the value of time being part of a hardworking and competitive nation. The sense of freedom that Feroza has would no longer exist if she has to resettle in Pakistan. The following reference elaborates Feroza's feelings and perception of the new World life:

The abandonment with which she could conduct her life without interference was possible only because of her distance from her family and the anonymity America provided. In a way, Manek was right when he carried on about time. Not that she thought

... each individual, each child, almost as a birthright. She realized now that the convenience provided by servants ... for dependence on relatives one might need to call upon in a pinch. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.329-330)

### **Cultural Imperialism in *An American Brat***

Cultural imperialism comprises cultural aspects of imperialism. Cultural imperialism is the imposition by one usually politically or economically dominant community of various aspects of its own culture onto another non-dominant community (Tobin, 2007). In other words, it promotes the culture of a politically powerful nation over a less powerful society. The cultural influence of America on Feroza, Manek and Zareen is obvious which the researcher depicts in *An American Brat*.

“The pursuit of happiness” has become a common slogan of America, it mirrors the liberty and opportunities that this nation provides to its citizens. It allows people to go with their desires and chase their dreams without being socially judged. This slogan has become one of the reasons for Feroza while she settles to stay and pursue a career in America. It is quoted from the novel, “she would manage her life to suit her heart; after all, the pursuit of happiness was enshrined in the constitution of the country she had grown to love” (Sidhwa, 1993, P.331). Having learnt about the American lifestyle, from the first day of Feroza’s arrival, Manek had begun to plan a program for her future. He was planning to develop Feroza’s personality in accordance with American culture and society. It is stated in the novel, “the call involved not only Feroza’s education and the development of her personality but also her induction into the self-sufficient, industrious and independent way of American life” (Sidhwa, 1993, P.120). In America, they do not judge, for it is against their culture to stare at someone or interfere in others’ affairs. While they value time and care about it, they won’t waste it looking at someone or something that has no concern to them, unlike Pakistan where people prefer to spare their time in useless and irrelevant things. The first thing that Feroza notices about Americans in New York is their confinement to their jobs. It is at Kennedy Airport that Feroza experiences:

That was it: the word she was seeking to define her new experience. He was unselfconscious. And, busy with their own concerns, none of the people moving about them had even bothered to glance their way or stare at her, as they would have in Pakistan. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.54)

Something of a similar nature occurs when Manek instructs Feroza in a little high tone and she scolds him to behave himself and that people are looking at them, Manek exclaims, “oh, no! They are Americans. They will not waste their time on ussss. Only illiterate natives like you, from Third World countries, waste time ...” (Sidhwa, 1993, P.75). Americans’ consciousness about the worth of time is realized by Feroza again when she takes lunch at McDonald’s. She wondered not only about the quick service but also about the quantity of food. It is addressed in the novel, “after a leisurely hamburger lunch at McDonald’s, which left Feroza struck with wonder at the quick service and the quantity of fries, ketchup and the ice in the Coke” (Sidhwa, 1993, P.69). Liberty is every human’s core desire and so does Feroza wish to have a free living. Especially, for a person who has been under certain restraints being chained in cultural and societal bondages, freedom could be overwhelming. When Feroza is taken from rigid Pakistani culture to free American culture, she soon forgets the cultural obligations that were imposed on her back in Pakistan. It is obvious from the statement, “finding herself awash in this exhilaratingly free and new culture had made her forget the strictures imposed on her conduct as a Pakistani girl” (Sidhwa, 1993, P.98). Being in a free society liberates the mind. It widens not just imaginations but the practical possibilities of several dreams as well. Being in an open American society for a while, allows Feroza to think freely. She begins to learn from people their lifestyle while opening herself to acquire it. The idea is addressed in the following lines:

Feroza's perception suddenly ignited when she remembered the smiling blonde with the transparent green eyes in Harvard Square and the thought struck her like a jolt; what extraordinary sexual possibilities they would avail themselves of. Might not she, too, wish to prove herself? Even if she ... on an evanescent new horizon. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.117)

When Feroza's parents agree and permit her admission in an American college, the other day Manek drops Feroza at the Boston Public Library in front of a stack of college guides before going to his class and asks her to learn the details about every college. Feroza studies about few colleges and then abandons, finding it a boring and laborious task. That moment, Manek gives her the first lesson about America, that is:

The first lesson you learn in America is "You don't get something for nothing. If you want to get into the right college you have to work for it. Nothing is given ... every day's Sunday. If you want to be independent and enjoy the good life, you have to be into the habit of working". (Sidhwa, 1993, P.126)

It shows how American culture is moulded by the American economy. The harder work brings more luxury. So, in America, the best opportunities are grabbed by those who believe in effort and utilize their talent. While American society believes in individualism, it assists a person in discovering and bringing forth his/her hidden abilities. Being unsupervised, one is at the mercy of one's own supervision. At the same time, an independent environment allows one to act freely inside the domain of oneself. During her company with Jo in their college days, Feroza began to work in the college registration office. She felt delighted earning money for herself. Those were the days; she would enjoy meeting new people and having parties, for she was not dependent on her parents' expenses. She was practically experiencing the American lifestyle.

At the same time, she felt she was being initiated into some esoteric rites that governed the astonishingly independent and unsupervised lives of young people in America. Often, as she ... and happier angle. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.169)

Jo, being Feroza's roommate would teach her about American culture. It was through her, that Feroza learnt how practical America is regarding its slogan of freedom, unlike Pakistan which has strong laws but weak implementation. It is explained:

Feroza felt that living with Jo helped her to understand Americans and their exotic culture; how much an abstract word like 'freedom' could encompass and ... constitution but otherwise comatose. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.177)

When Feroza visited the house of Jo's parents, she was attracted by their behaviour and their attitude towards their children. They were hospitable, yet they were practically advocating the American social system. Neither were they judgmental about Jo nor were they interfering in her plans. Feroza's experience about Jo's parents was:

Feroza found Jo's parents preternaturally understanding and unobtrusively hospitable. It was refreshing. The hospitality of her aunts ... expertise or experience. Although she had long ago guessed from Jo's behavior that the Millers did not meddle in their children's affairs ... they associated with each other. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.218)

Feroza is amazed by such open open-mindedness of Jo's family. In Pakistan, the case is quite the opposite, where the family members do interfere and they also expect one to be obedient towards the elder's advice regardless of how liberal or sophisticated a family is. Feroza has the same problem:

Feroza's parents, her aunts and uncles, for all these assertions of being broad-minded and modern, would expect unquestioning obedience on certain matters ... straying from the established path. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.218)

Feroza could imagine the difference while comparing Jo's parents' tolerant attitude towards Jo, and her parents' extravagant guidance and family interferences in Lahore. During her stay in America, Feroza gradually discovers all the merits that a free society bears. One of the major reasons why America became the land of opportunity is that people there do not look down on any profession rather job of any kind is appreciated, for it would be a sign of self-sufficiency. Besides, no profession is limited only to men; rather women could equally join any profession they like. Jobs, that are confined only to men in Pakistan are common to everyone in America. Feroza is astonished when she discovers this:

Feroza found the very concept of these jobs breathtaking, beyond the compass of the possible in Pakistan. There were no waitresses in Pakistan, only waiters. Since there was no bars ... where few young women were visible working. (Sidhwa, 1993, P.226)

Despite several shortcomings, America is dominant regarding its positive impacts on the Third World countries. As for concern to Pakistanis, they are largely inspired by American culture and economy which distinguishes the country because of its extraordinary technological achievements, liberty, luxury and opportunities it provides to its dwellers. This idea is depicted in the novel by Bapsi Sidhwa through the characters of Feroza, Manek and Zareen who find America as the place of their dreams. They couldn't see half in Pakistan of what they experienced in America. They love the independent and individualistic lifestyle surrounded by all kinds of latest technological and mechanical facilities. All the enthusiasm and affection they had for America could be summed up in one line spoken by Manek to his family during his visit to Pakistan which will surpass all the reasons for their affection towards America. When Manek is surrounded by his family members in their house in Lahore and they are talking about America, Manek says, "America is Paradise!" (Sidhwa, 1993, P.207).

## **Conclusion**

The phenomenon of American imperialism is common with most of the Third World countries. After the downfall of the Soviet Union when America claimed to be the superpower, it gained global importance on a larger scale. The economic revolution that America has undergone has attracted people on a large scale from many countries. *An American Brat* depicts the same ideology which shows how a rich economy and a free culture could be enchanting and make America a dreamland for young Pakistanis in particular. In the very first impression, the protagonist is attracted towards American society. Feroza's later experiences while living in America add to her excitement and affection towards the country. The endless resources, the unrestricted culture, the privacy and the unlimited opportunities are some of the economic and cultural aspects of American imperialism that influence Feroza. America enables her to discover her real self. She realizes the value of being independent. Due to legal, social and political restraints in Pakistan, she could not celebrate the liberty and mental peace that she experienced in America. Similarly, Manek is also inspired by America's economic achievements which have dominated American culture that ensures liberty and individualism. The non-judgmental aspect of American culture is one of the most appreciating things for Feroza and Manek because the situation in Pakistan was entirely adverse to it. Similarly, Zareen is also inspired by the development and liberty that America offers.

To conclude, it is obvious from the analysis of the novel that the major causes of Feroza, Manek and Zareen for their liking and attraction towards America were cultural and economic imperialism. What they enjoy and experience in America could not be found



in Pakistan. Things that were of common access to all American citizens, could hardly be utilized by the upper class in Pakistan. While America is the land of opportunities, it invites one to discover oneself and achieve what one deserves with talent and hard work, which is not the case with most of the Third World countries.

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