



19-4 Oct - Dec 2025

Published on 14, Oct-Dec 2025

ISSN:2320-4842 (P) 3049-2688 (O)

The Cultural Identity and the Complexity of Family Dynamics in Bapsi Sidhwa's The Crow Eaters and Rohinton Mistry's The Family Matters

* **M. Sameera**** **Dr. R.S. Sabeetha**

Abstract

Cultural Identity neutralizes the existing cultural crisis and the conflicts in the society. Cultural identity plays an important role in both Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Crow Eaters* and Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*. This article explores the experience of parsi communities interaction with British and mainstream Indian and Pakistan culture. Both novels portrays the complex family dynamics within the parsi community and it also highlights the issues of cultural identity, social climbing and gender roles. 'Family Matters' tries to explore the boundary of nation, ethnicity and times and the thematic problem such as familial bondage, human relationship, immigration and suffering and death. The novel *Crow Eaters* depicts the patriarchal society where men hold significant power and women are often relegated to traditional roles.

Keywords: cultural crisis, family dynamics, Immigration, sufferings and death

Introduction

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel 'The Crow Eater' was set in Lahore; the style of the novel was written in a Satirical way that deals with comic and insightful glimpse of a parsi family in 20th century. The novel describes the main character Freddy Junglewalla, a successful businessman and his mother-in-law Jerbanoo who plays an important role to create a problem for him. Sidhwa's novels often centre on 1947 partition of India and its consequences, exploring the violence, emigration and her novels basically addressing the issues of marriage and social expectations. Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters* deeply rooted in the specific cultural and social landscape of parsi community, an Iranian Zoroastrian minority group in India. The novel is set in Mumbai, a city known for its highly spirited social and political changes, providing a backdrop for the family's struggles and highlighting the broader of societal context. The novel highlights the strained

* (Reg. No: MKU23PFOL11050)

Part-time Research Scholar, Research Center in English
E.M.G. Yadava Women's College, Thiruppalai, Madurai.

** Assistant Professor, Research Centre in English
E.M.G. Yadava Women's College, Thiruppalai, Madurai

relationships between Nariman and his step-children, Coomy and Jal who lives with him in a large apartment. Nariman, a retired professor, who is diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and experiences a broken ankle, forces his family to confront their dynamics and make difficult choices about his care. The novel explores the theme of aging, illness and the challenges of societal issues on individuals and families.

Remarkable works of Bapsi Sidhwa and Rohinton mistry.

Bapsi Sidhwa and Rohinton Mistry are on-spicious authors known for their works dwelling into the themes of identity, cultural dislocation, and the outcome of historical events on individual and parsi community of a changing world.

Bapsi Sidhwa: Bapsi Sidhwa was a remarkable Pakistani novelist who was born in Karachi, Pakistan . She is also considered as one of the best novelist by her country, the New York Times praised her as the "Pakistani's finest English -Language novelist ". She is the author of several novels, including *Cracking India* (1991) , A semi autobiographical novel set during the partition of India, *The Crow Eaters*(1978) is the first novel of her, the background of the novel is set in ironic and in a comic way. *An American Brat* (1993), the novel highlights with the central idea of racial Identity, where a young Pakistani girl Feroza Ginwalla who relocate to United States from Lahore, who is ready to face the Cultural difference and leads to search her cultural identity. *The Pakistani Bride* (1984) the story is set against the cultural dynamics of Pakistan, exploring the fight between tribal tradition and urban life in Lahore. *Water* (2006) the novel was written after the adaptation of a flim by Deepa Mehta, it examine the lives of widows in India.

Rohinton Mistry: Rohinton Mistry is an Indian born Canadian author. His writing style is characterized by subtly, humour and emo-

tional depth. Realism is his preferred style. His most notable works are *A Fine Balance* (1995) the background of the novel is set during 1975, it explores the theme of poverty, political turmoil and resilience. The novel received many awards including the Commonwealth Writers Prize and Giller Prize and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. *Such a Long Journey* (1991), the background of the novel is set in Bombay in 1971 against war and political unrest.. *Family Matters* (2002) the novel carries with the idea of intricate dynamics of a Parsi family in Mumbai, and specially immersed with family dynamics, aging and illness. His story collection, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) it is a collection of 11 short stories about the residents of Firozsha Baag, a Parsi dominated apartment in Mumbai. His novel basically deals with the themes of Cultural identity, family dynamics, tradition and the challenges faced in the modern culture.. His stories are depicts with humour and pathos of everyday life and the complexity of cultural preservation.

The Hypocrisy and the Post-Colonial cultural difference in Bapsi Sidhwa's The Crow Eaters and Rohinton Mistrus Family Matters

The Crow Eaters: The novel opens with the story of a Paris family, the Protagonist Faredoon (Freddy) Junglewalla, who lives with his wife Putli and his mother in law Jerbanoo and his three children. The novel clearly explains Freddy's initial struggles and ambition in a humour way. His relationship with his mother-in-law is violent and dubious. The title "The Crow Eaters" is directly refers to the parsi community for being loud and talkative by personified the image of Crow. The protagonist Freddy was considered as handsome, dulcet-voiced adventurer, who struggle lot to be a successful man. He also succeed to earned respect and recognition by his community. When he died at the age of sixty five, he was listed for an award of a 'Great men and

Women' in Zarathusti Calendar. Bapsi Sidhwa critiques the hypocrisy within Parsi cultural tradition by highlighting the gap between outward adherence to customs and the actual behaviour of characters.

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel clearly picture how men succeed to control over women. The novel somehow manages to combine a perfect sense of tradition with poignant insights onto women's life. The Jerbanoo character is pictured to capture how women are the reason for exploitation by dwelling to imperceptible convention and stereotype. Sidhwa tries to highlight the issue of changing generation in the Freddy's family. The new generation, with their multiple economic with the British become more westernized in life and style, this type of cultural difference in life style is reflected in Behram and her fashionable wife Tanya. They actually forget about the Parsi's cultural dynamics and acted as modern couples. "They were utterly ashamed of traditional ethics and considered British customs, however superficially observed, however trivial, exemplary" (245). These cultural clashes substantiate the analytical models of cultural dialectics. Bapsi Sidhwa pictured Jerbanoo's character as a best example for Parsi's cultural tradition. She always wears 'Mathabana', a light weighted cloth tied around the head of Parsi women to protect from evil eyes. It shows the respect of their cultural tradition. This article explores the concept of post-colonial cultural heritage that, how Parsi community struggle to face racial attitude of natives and British rulers.

Family Matters: The novel focus on the protagonist Nariman Vakeel and his family. Nariman, a retired professor who affected with Parkinson disease. Coomy and Jal his stepchildren feel burdern to take care of him. Nariman's daughter Raxona and her husband Yezad and their two sons, are forced to take him due to the stepchildren's unwillingness to take care of him. Rohinton Mistry explores hypocrisy within the Parsi community of Bombay through the lens of Nariman's family.

The novel explores how social and economical changes critique the community's tendency to idealize its past. The novel is a literary achievement that masterfully navigates the intricate layers of Parsi family life and the broader complexities of contemporary Indian society. The theme of morality and legacy plays an important role throughout the novel. The novel invites the readers to question themselves that, 'What one leaves behind and how one's life is remembered'.

Rohinton Mistry is widely appreciated for his postcolonial approach to the marginalized. In his novel he is not only highlighted the marginal position of the poor parsi community but also in the wider Indian society. Mistry shows the impact of family setup as the aged people are objects of neglect, more in poor families where financing the upkeep of old people seems burden. The city of Mumbai itself is a significant presence in the novel, depicted as a both vibrant and challenging environment. The novel is slowly elaborating the Parsi culture and Zoroastrian faith. It's important to acknowledge that family dynamics isolated in the external world. Economic hardship, illness, job loss, societal pressures, and cultural influences all play a significant role in shaping family relationships.

The characters in the novel struggles with their cultural identity and the pressures of conforming to societal expectations are central to their experiences. Nariman's past, marked by a forbidden love affair with non – Parsi woman, underscores the rigid cultural boundaries and the consequences of transgressing them. Yezad's character further explores the theme as he navigates his identity in this changing socio-political landscape. This article explores the cultural thematic motive of Rohinton Mistry to achieve his aim through his novels.

The study of Isolation and the role of Female characters in Bapsi Sidhwa's The Crow Eaters and Rohinton Mistry's Family Mat-

ters:

Both Bapsi Sidhwa and Rohinton Mistry have depicted the way how Parsi community struggle to interact with the world. This article tries to explore the female-male discourse and presents the marginalisation of Parsi community. Sidhwa's novel 'The Crow Eaters' highlights the migration of the Parsi family to UK to find a new life and their struggle to live in the unknown city. Mistry's novel 'Family Matters' is about the life style of a Parsi middle class family and the protagonist Nariman's physical struggle with his illness and how he is isolated by his own children. Both novels carry with the theme of immigration, isolation, communal disharmony, illness etc.

The novel 'The Crow Eaters' is pledged with the theme of isolation and migration this evidently showed in the entire novel, where the protagonist Freddy commence on a journey in search of greener pastures from Central India to Lahore leaving everything, he is ready to face all the challenges in the unknown city with his wife Putli and his mother-in-law Jerbanoo, who is ready to cause a problem for him but Lahore becomes a luckiest city for him, he embark to sail leaps and bounds there. Freddy and his family struggle to integrate into the dominant muslim culture in Lahore. Bapsi Sidhwa beautifully portrays how Freddy navigates different forms of isolation while facing difficulties to maintain his cultural identity and traditions in different environment. Freddy's son Yazdi experiences isolation when he falls in love with the British girl, as his family rejects due to cultural and social norms.

In the novel 'The Family Matters' the theme of isolation is explored through the character's experiences of loneliness and their efforts to have a meaningful relationship with their family members. Nariman's difficult illness and dependence on others creates a sense of isolation, as he grapples with his loss of identity and independence. His loneliness is clearly

pictured when his interaction with his family members especially with his daughter Rexona and his grandsons. Commy's character also deals with the theme of Isolation, as her resentment and bitterness alienate her from her family. His cunning actions and inevitable death underscore the consequences of emotional loneliness. Female characters plays an important role in portraying the complexity of parsi identity, social norms and the challenges of cultural assimilation within a patriarchal structure in both Bapsi Sidhwa's and Rohinton Mistry's novel.

The article discusses the prominent feminist views of Bapsi Sidhwa's 'The Crow Eaters'. Sidhwa portrays female characters like Putli, Rodabai, Jerbanoo and Tanya, these characters deals with the imaginary lines of carnality and points to dual social standards. Within four walls of the house, she describe the limitation on women. Freddy exploits woman not as music as his mother in law Jerbanoo and also use economic superiority to subordinate them to women. Putli presented as someone who doesn't challenge the established norms of her society. She is ready to accept the stereotypes assigned to women. Putli and Rodabai were the next generation women; they love to cherish themselves in the traditional look. Through their roles, the signs of modernity were obvious; they did not want themselves indolent in riches as both of tier husbands had earned too much. The two women were more pragmatic and inclined as a problem solving and relation preserving in family atmosphere. Freddy felt that his mother in law was the reason for his bad luck so he planned to get a coil oh her hair to cast a spell on her. Though Putli suspected him but she pretended to agree with him, instead she tried to make a peace among her family; 'Putli prudently took the domestic reins into her hands. She put an end to Jerbanoo's extravagant gossip session and family controlled her ransacking of the store' (CE,41) Rohinton Mistry's Family Matters clearly portrays that all women are not same, well they

are educated or uneducated their character is depend upon their atmosphere. Being a Parsi, Mistry often set his novel against the social dynamics in India, his works mainly focus on the unique life style of a Parsi people because they are considered as a minority group in India. Mistry has depicted different kinds of women in his novel who are partially different from each other. Rexona's character plays an important role in the novel, She is the Biological daughter of the protagonist Nariman Vakeel, she is considered as a selfless woman who manage to live in a very tiny flat with her husband and two children. Rexona is very careful of maintaining the economy of her family. Though her husband earns less she is very happy with that and she often questions them whether they are happy or not:

'She usually asked daddy, Are you happy Yezdaa, is everything okay? This question Mummy asked Murad and him too, she wanted happiness for all of them, needed to check it constantly.'(92). Mistry strongly portrayed Lucy, Nariman's girlfriend a non- Parsi women who is very strong and stubborn by nature. Nariman loves Lucy but with his mother force him to marry a Parsi girl but Lucy follows him even after his marriage, she discontinue her studies and worked as a helper in the same apartment where Nariman lives." She had abandoned her M.A., she did not have a job and was still living at the YWCA".(65). Nariman request her to return back to her native place but she is very stubborn not to leave him.

Commy, the step daughter of Nariman who behaves very rude to her step father, she is not ready to take care of him. She always put forth too many rules and regulation to be followed. Being a old man, affected with Parkinson's disease Nariman expect some love and care from his children, when Jal request Commy to behave kind to Nariman, she frankly admits "I was eleven years old when he became our step father. I was not like a baby growing up with her real father". (64). Commy feels that

Nariman was the responsible for her mother's death , so she is not ready to be kind and lovable.. Mistry has explained different women characters in a single novel as caring, rude, stubborn and loving.

Conclusion

Bapsi Sidhwa along with Rohinton Mistry is one of the very few authors who have written about Parsis, a small but prominent people who follow their culture and traditions. This article aims to highlight the issues of ethnicity, especially in Post-colonial era. Thier novels are also highlights the problem of Parsi community and their cultural conflicts which they faced in sub continent especially in Lahore, Pakistan. Moreover the article supported with the theory of Post - Colonialism, it explores the post- colonial ethnicity that how Parsi community had faced ethnic attitudes of native and the British rulers.

Bapsi Sidhwa and Rohinton Mistry belong to two different geographical locations, Pakistan and India respectively, but they both share the common element of Cultural identity and family dynamics. Both the writers have interpreted the community's self centeredness, cultural difference and its isolation. They attempt to raise concerns and stop the rapid decline in Parsi population through their works.

References

- 1.Sidhwa, Bapsi. The Crow Eaters. Delhi: Penguin Books, 1980. Print.
- 2.Mistry, Rohinton. Family Matters. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2002. Print.
- 3.Pandey, Indu. *Ethnic Anxiety, Cultural Clash reflected in the work of south Asian Writers: Indian review.*
- 4.Senthilkumari S, Pridershini Pameela B.S, Women in Rohinton Mistry's Family Matters: IJAHMS, volume 1 No.8, August 2015. Print