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Cultural Dialectics in The Novel The Crow Eaters by Bapsi Sidhwa

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Abstract :- Culture is a non-essential entity of our society under which the multiple social institutions like religion, art, cast, class, economy, race, ethnicity among other play a vital role. Culture also plays a fundamental role in the making of nationalities that means the idea of culture is the determining force for the unified social structure. Besides, culture could be analysed through the various facets of social rituals, religious beliefs and different institutions of law. Talking about art in general and literature in particular, as the store house of human life styles and psychological patterns across the long timescale that have a powerful impact on the composition of cultures. Bapsi Sidhwa, as a literary doyen, has played a major role in the process of softening the cultural clutches to emancipate human civilizations. *The Crow Eaters* represent the voice for change that has lessened the clashes between the various religious and ethnic groups. The ideas reflected in the novel entitled “*The Crow Eaters*” have the potential to play a crucial role in the cultural complicacies that are prevalent in the South Asian context.

Keywords:- Dialectics, Ethnicity, Hybridity, Society, Clash.

Introduction :- Cultural Dialectics is an appropriate term to understand the ideas of Bapsi Sidhwa in the context of her novel *The Crow Eaters*. The term cultural dialectics means to take all the cultural complexities for their proper interpretations. Habib writes in his book *Modern literary criticism and theory* ‘It is evident that much of what falls under Cultural Studies could easily be classified under various other labels such as Marxism, Structuralism, New Historicism, Feminism and postcolonialism’ (174) As we are

aware that in any given place there exist many cultures raised by political, religious, intellectual, racial or any other aspects of life, so greater chances of cultural conflicts and cultural clashes are obviously apparent in our societies. This challenging situation that has become the burning issue in the multicultural societies demands a serious attention from the contemporary social scientists and literary scholars. It is the responsibility of these intellectuals and methodical minds to analyse, synthesize and channelize the various cultural perspectives for a harmonious intellectual relationship. Hence, Cultural Dialectics seems to be quite suitable and applicable to neutralize the existing cultural crisis and conflicts in the society. She has created many socio-cultural angles in the “*The Crow Eaters*” that help in developing such a sphere under which it becomes easy to live amicably. She is a writer who has got the commitment for cultural dialectics vis-à-vis the relation between culture and literature. *The Crow Eaters*. seem to be didactic in nature with moral consciousness and ethical assessment.

There is a greater view of the social perspective in which cultures all over the globe are in continuous clash. It is said that uprooting of the individuals or individuals as a part of a disadvantaged social group from their native lands and subsequently, their efforts to settle in a country with alien socio-cultural life style. Coming against the local culture, foreign culture displaces the main structures of the dominated society. This paves the way for the cultural conflicts across societies. As Rath says:

the more complex but valuable interplay of ideas across cultures and time as a way of making sense of the intricate process of encounters between cultures, despite the more obvious signs of many forms of conflicts resulting in violent political and ideological clashes (12).

Sometimes life compels Human beings to run away and left behind things in life, accommodate in far destinations, and then long to return back to the native habitats. Constantly on the move they become the victims of clash, having left behind every pleasant moment, are thrown into a bitter and aggressive world. They get victimized of an endless nostalgia and an infinite desire for home. Millions of people who are far away from their parent culture or home have been shaken while memorizing tradition, family and geography. The pain of adaption in an alien culture, owing to differences in culture, religious faith, caste, community, color, language separate them from ones identity and self. Therefore cultural dialectics

becomes a debatable room for subjects such as image, individuality, discourse, politics, morals and aesthetics. This confrontation helps us in understanding the cultural differences that are dominant in the modern world, in the costume of diasporic experiences. This way of wider spectrum of human experiences are analysed to reach a certain notion of cultural dialectics.

The specters of the past continue to haunt the psyches of such dislocated characters that somehow move from one culture to another and feel rooted in a new home. There is also an everlasting feeling of isolation among her characters throughout this novel, an anxious fight to put them in the jigsaw puzzle after their exodus. This novel focuses on the puzzling pattern of inconsistencies and ambiguities, hidden agendas and mysterious motives that mark the socio-cultural life. This really takes the analytical mode of multiculturalism that in turn takes the stage cultural dialectics.

Within this motive, the novel center towards building up a private life and unmask public incidents that represent change in terms of cultural resistance and dialectics. At the initial stage of adaptation, the characters gone through many problems and they exercise their force to disclose the dynamics of life. *The Crow Eaters* clearly clarify that when the settled characters are able to cooperate and get absorbed in the new land their problems got less with the passage of time. But when they could not find a proper space in the alien culture it leads to mental stress, helplessness as well as inequality. Sidhwa clarifies that they try to create individual identity in the alien land by exercising their parent land cultural practices. By presenting the homeland's cultural practices in the settled society, Sidhwa tries to create her individual identity in the settled society.

The Crow Eaters highlights the tale of migration, relocation and its conflicts for adjustment in a society. Faredoon Junglewalla with his wife Putli and his mother-in-law Jerbanoo shifts from Bombay in order to settle in Lahore. The novel, constructed in a loose narrative, with the flashback technique, starts with migration of the protagonist, Faredoon. It recalls the attempts of the Parsi community, in the late nineteenth century, migrating from the Persia and finding shelter in the climate of North Indian cities.

Freddy started his packing and loaded all the items on bullock cart. He is accompanied by his widowed mother in-law Jabernoo, and his pregnant wife, Putli. Bapsi Sidhwa has introduced the comic elements in the novel which suggests that migration is essential rhythms practiced by the Parsis. The novel

exercises his quest and outsider struggle to achieve success and social recognition in the alien community but at the end of the novel he achieves name and fame and has secured self-esteem and self-respect by his identity as a Parsi Zoroastrian. This also indicates to the commitments to local culture and at the same time alienation towards the foreign cultures.

As we know that one has to submit very often to the charming notions of foreign culture. This leaves a space to the notions of cultural dialectics. Changing times compels us to adopt customs and etiquettes of the alien culture. Putli is not willing to change the culture, and adopt alien culture. Putli resists change and feels very sad at an interaction of two cultures. The adjustment of self in two cultures naturally victimizes and feels stressed, thus Putli, resists change, 'What revolted Putli most was the demand that she, a dutiful and God-fearing wife, must walk a step ahead of her husband. She considered this hypocritical and pretentious, and most barbarous' (*The Crow Eaters* 188). Putli tries to adapt the new customs, when she along with her husband is invited to the formal tea-parties on the gracious lawns of the Government House. She is persuaded by her husband to attend these functions and grab an opportunity for modern contacts and consolidating friendships. This development provides new ways and adopts space to the certain innovations in the one's own culture. In Parsi environs Putli has new conventions and social obligations. This can be authenticated by the article "Imaginary Homelands", wherein the sentiments of people who have immigrated have identities that are both "plural and partial" is points out:

Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground maybe, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles. (257)

The Crow Eaters shows the gradual assimilation of British value systems in the Parsi milieu. Putli on the other hand tries to preserve certain Parsi customs respecting and walking behind her husband. Yasmin, the daughter of Freddy, after marriage blindly ignores such traditional and old fashioned customs and notions and vehemently protests in order to serve the women, 'Anyway it's stupid to walk behind your husband like an animal on a leash-Oh Mother! Hasn't Papa been able to modernize you yet? (190-91). Putli

feels angry after watching Yasmin equality with her husband who precedes him into the carriage. Putli could not bear this change in Yasmin who has adopted the manner and customs of the ruling colonial power and considers it the generation gap. It is these changes that suffice the cultural hybridization.

Sidhwa highlights this issue of changing generations in the Freddy's family. The new generation, with their multiple economic contacts with the British becomes westernized in life and style. This type of tendency is reflected in life-style of the Behram and her fashionable wife Tanya. They forget Parsi traditions and got affinity with modern couples: 'They were utterly ashamed of traditional habits and considered British customs, however superficially observed, however trivial, exemplary' (245). They have now mixed identity with western cultural dominance.

Behram is somehow traditional in dressing and has the capability of mixing freely with other men. These contradictions and changing personality of the character is expressed by Sidhwa to illustrate the established crisis in the Parsi psyche and the various ways to maintain its decorum and importance in society. These cultural clashes substantiate the analytical modes of cultural dialectics.

Jerbanoo feel very awkward and humiliated after finding these cultural changes first in Freddy's bosom friend, Charles P. Allen, and then at a restaurant in England. Before leaving for England she and her daughter Jabernoo and Putli have wonderfully imagines and fancies about the land England. The meeting with Mr. Charles P. Allen, who was coming out his toilet bowl, rendered their sentiments and it was a hard blow. His wife being overworked housewife having no servants except a rude maid who comes and works only one hour in the morning. Jerbanoo cannot reconcile herself to what she considers Mrs. Allen's unfaithful deprivation. When Faredoon, Putli and Mr. Allen go for a visit around the city from morning till evening, Jerbanoo prefers to spend the time in the house with Mrs. Allen. Mrs. Allen with her wit and cleverness tries to engage her every whim but unsatisfied Jerbanoo is only making demands. She constantly speaks: 'Why you not make curry today?' 'Why you not cut onion proper?' 'Why you not rinse O.K.? I not drink with soap!' 'No chilli? I no digest!'" (255-56). Sometimes her remarks are disgracing and personal insult.

Jerbanoo even touches up her skirt with a fork to check her undergarments and exclaims, 'Shame, shame, shame! You are wearing such a small knickers!' (256). The patience in Mary now ended and she

complains and instructs Jerbanoo mind her delinquency, she rebuffs her violation by defecating on a newspaper. Mary shouts, 'This is the last straw! I will not have that-that demon in my house another minute! Get her out! Get her out!' (262). Her cultural bond of customs with her homeland and her failure to be westernized signify her cultural displacement and racism that makes her adjustment more complicated in a foreign country. Hence, it is a sort of cultural interaction, where one culture is playing and trying to dominate the other culture. In such cultural dialectics, various issues are surfacing to the foreground and Sidhwa has solved them amicably. Theodore Tsimpouki quotes in his essay Representations of Identity in Contemporary Ethnic American Fiction:

Unlike Native-Americans and Chicanos ... African-Americans never possessed a 'home', a piece of land they could claim as their own. Carried forcibly across the ocean, African captives were immediately introduced into a white culture from which they were systematically excluded by virtue of their visible physical difference. (103-104)

As a Parsi, Jerbanoo feels guilty of her attitudes and adaptation and yearns for the previous culture that has provided her such norms and habit like bathing daily. Her anger against the customs of England can be seen when she misbehaves at hotel in Oxford Street which has kept bowls and toilet papers in the toilet instead of water. Whenever Jabernoo goes to washroom, she does not forget to take the brass jar with her brought from India, a typical habit of Indian people. The trouble of bathing still hunts Jerbanoo, she rushes to the lavatory with her jar when she finds that Putli and Freddy are out. Freddy has advised her to take bath once every three days instead of daily basis. An idea that can solve the bathing problem flashes her mind when she was peering from the balcony. She hears an alarming voice: 'Blimey! God, we're being flooded!' (268). She quickly covers her shoulders with the towel glances over the balcony into the crimson, wet and angry face of an Englishman. Presuming the situation, Jerbanoo put forward her hands at the blue sky and says: 'Rain! Rain!' (268) and enters into her room. After a while, the door was banged by an Englishman. He threatens Jabernoo and demands her that what she was peering from the balcony. Jerbanoo says, 'I tell you! I wash my bottom. I no dry-clean like you dirty Englishmen. I wash my bottom!' (269). The Englishman was furious and protested with the manager before leaving the hotel. This degusting behavior of Jabernoo frustrates Freddy and he decides to back to Lahore. The older generations of the

Parsis always desire to settle back in the Indian soil. *The Crow Eaters* explains a journey to establish superiority over westernization for identity in alien land and hybridity to adopt some customs, and a subsequent journey back to reassert the cultural nativity. Nativity of cultures determines the behavior of most of the characters in the novel. Here it is cultural reformation that paves the way to the characteristics cultural hybridization. In this daily gesture he lives his own traditions far from home; and proves the assertion of the native culture. This claims the greater standards of his home culture. Here the instances of the cultural hybridization with the flights into the foreign culture and then returning back to the roots of home culture.

Bapsi Sidhwa is exposed to the norms and customs of hybridization during her childhood which shapes her mental cum cultural exile easier to depict in her novels. Her writings are considered the battle field of crisis and identity. Thus cultural determination works greater to control the psyche of an individual. Sidhwa being the Pakistani American novelist captures the global attention for the hybridized characters in *The Crow Eaters*.

Conclusion:- *The Crow Eaters* portray the cultural clash between Parsi identity, British advancement and mainstream Indian or Pakistani. Sidhwa throughout her novels portrays Parsi desire to move beyond the customary boundaries and their yearning to prosper their Parsi tradition. The pain of the lost tradition of Pakistan proves too heavy for her characters and nothing balances it in the end. To conclude, Jaberanoo and Putli got mental confusion typifies the dilemma of the modern multicultural society.

Jerbanoo and Putli feel no solace in western culture as they too did not be able to hybridize their culture and wished to return back to their native culture among their own people of Parsi community. An analytical study of conflicts and clashes in a society shows its impact on ones identity and self and portraying that in literature is the epitome of cultural dialectics. Bapsi Sidhwa in *The Crow Eaters* portray this cultural clash in their settled lands and most probably the victimized class remain women only. The use of East-West technique shows the acumen and better understanding of Sidhwa with such issues, as she himself has been a diasporic author; autobiographical element enriches the plot of the saga as well as presents a lively and realistic image of immigration and its problematic after-effects. These all socio-cultural issues are dominant in the fabric of her *The Crow Eaters*.

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