
Nurture, Resistance, and Identity: a study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*

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Abstract

As human beings, we come to this world with an inherent trait or nature that establishes a basis for our environment during our development. We encounter many elements in our surroundings that cause changes in our nature as we strive to adapt. Some individuals hold the belief that genetic factors shape behaviour, while others assert that environmental conditions influence it. Whether the identity of an individual is something given or something produced. My argument is to demonstrate that nurture exerts a greater influence on behavior than nature. An individual's origin does not necessarily determine their behavior or identity. My objective is to emphasize how individuals encounter environmental pressures necessitating their adaptation for survival. An individual, although being born with a specific disposition, is likely to experience a transformation in character at some stage in their lifetime due to environmental factors. I will examine how environmental factors are the primary determinants of behavior. This study constitutes an analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* (1993). It will emphasize how nurture shapes individuals' characteristics more than nature due to the environment in which they are reared throughout migration.

Keywords: Nurture, Resistance, Identity, Empowerment

Introduction

The discourse regarding nature and nurture has endured an extended period. Some people argue that both factors substantially impact one's character, while others believe that just one can change the traits of those nearby. It is essential to recognize that nature fundamentally relates to a person's genetic makeup, whereas nurture involves the environmental influences experienced throughout one's development. The environment and circumstances of one's upbringing can profoundly affect an individual's responses to future challenges. The surroundings and values that

influence a child's upbringing serve as vital examples of how nurturing impacts individual characteristics.

At birth, the human mind is a tabula rasa, subsequently 'filled' by experiences. (Locke) The nature of one's upbringing determines the psychologically significant aspects of the self. Nurture is often seen as the influence of external factors, such as exposure, life experiences, and education, on an individual. Throughout life, exposure to many environmental circumstances engenders alterations in our nature as we endeavor to adapt. An individual, while being born with a particular disposition, is likely to undergo a transformation in character at some point in their lifespan due to environmental influences. To endure, one must adapt to enhance his/her compatibility with the environment. Thus, nurture, which fundamentally relates to an individual's upbringing or environment, emerges as a more critical determinant of identity than nature since nature can be modified by exposure to diverse surroundings.

The concept of nurture encompasses the various environmental influences that contribute to the formation of our identity. This encompasses our childhood experiences, nurturing environment, interpersonal connections, and the prevailing cultural context. An individual's character is the ultimate result of upbringing. An individual's background does not intrinsically determine their behavior or identity. His upbringing shapes the essential psychological features of his character. Nurture is dynamic. It relates to the characteristics that emerge from experiences and the environment. The environment profoundly affects behavior.

The environment and ideologies experienced during one's upbringing are profoundly shaped during childhood. The child's psyche can become embedded with the viewpoints of parents or guardians due to the insufficient development of the mind. Childhood experiences have allowed youngsters to develop their own viewpoints and shape their identities. The inquiry "Who am I?" is frequently articulated at least once during a person's lifetime. (Ericson 1968) The search for self-identity, an essential component and driving force in an individual's life, is the preliminary phase in exploring this question.

The nurture theory asserts that, although genetic factors exist, environmental conditions are the principal determinants of behavior. Freud (1905) posited that childhood experiences profoundly shape adult life and personality development. In childhood, nurture exerts a more profound influence on individual qualities than nature due to the contextual backdrop and the values imparted by parents or guardians. He asserted that parenting is essential to a child's development, with the family being the paramount component of nurturing.

Identity is the amalgamation of personality, appearance, culture, physiological characteristics, and experiential background. Each individual is a unique combination of these characteristics, shaped by genetic and environmental factors. An environmental aspect that influences identity is the culture in which an individual has been nurtured. Individuals born into a certain culture are subjected to

the dominant perspectives, beliefs, and norms of acceptable conduct within that society. The culture and community in which they are nurtured is a crucial determinant. The characters must enhance their abilities over time, as the adaptation of values is essential for personality development.

Family plays a vital role in early personality formation. Individual behavior within a culture exhibits considerable variance, shaped by socio-economic level, age, education, occupation, and geographic location. It is sometimes claimed that "life is simply a collection of experiences." Each person's life is unique, defined by the events and experiences they undergo. Certain experiences can modify the essential composition of an individual's psyche. Occasionally, certain situations reveal facets of an individual's character that were previously hidden. Thus, personal experiences play a crucial role in identity formation. We frequently disregard stereotypes and confine ourselves to our individual histories; however, we sometimes fail to recognize that every individual harbour the boundless potential for transformation and development, making them infinitely comparable to us in complexity and advancement.

Environmental influences surpass genetic factors in shaping character. Socrates asserted that nurture profoundly affects individual development by enhancing self-awareness, forming perspectives, and influencing innate tendencies. By acquiring knowledge from the world, humans can understand their identities through the comprehension of thoughts, actions, and emotions.

Identities comprise intricately interwoven and continuously evolving memories, offering us a unique and empathetic perspective of ourselves. Our identity comprises a collection of choices, both inside and outside our control, that are perpetually deconstructed and reconstructed. Individuals can reflect on and alter past events, granting them a renewed perspective to confront the future. Humans may critically assess their unique experiences and apply that understanding to reevaluate their environment. Nurture denotes the way an individual interacts with their surroundings and how socialization aids in the internalization of particular roles or characteristics. This pertains to the self-conception and internalization of an individual's role within society. The principal agents of socialization are family, peers, beliefs, education, socioeconomic status, and geographical place, each exerting unique influences.

Freud asserted that our unconscious is molded by childhood experiences. He posited that to repress all conflict within our unconscious; we develop defenses, including selective perception, selective recollection, denial, displacement, projection, regression, dread of intimacy, and fear of mortality, among others. This research seeks to clarify the importance of character behavior and the artistic expressions they generate. One approach to implementing psychoanalytic theory involves understanding the psyche's operations and uncovering the concealed meanings behind the behaviors of individuals and fictional characters. They

demonstrate disparate adaptation to different environmental conditions based on their personality characteristics.

This paper analyses the substantial impact of childhood experiences and events on identity development. The portrayal of characters in their youth and the initiation of narratives provide crucial insights into their personality development. This will illustrate how early experiences, frequently embedded in an individual's subconscious, unintentionally influence their development into a specific type of person as they progress into adulthood. The latent emotions of the characters can be understood by exploring their childhood, which provides insight into their current attitudes and perspectives on life. The impact of both nature and nurture on an individual's development will be illustrated.

The novel *An American Brat* (1993) examines the emotional, psychological, social, and cultural obstacles encountered by the introverted, orthodox Pakistani girl Feroza throughout her relocation to America. It illustrates her displacement from her home culture and her compelled assimilation into the unfamiliar American culture. The story commences with a shy and tranquil little girl in Salwar-Kameez, but by its conclusion, she transforms into an emblem of a confident and independent woman, fervent about justice and freedom, unburdened by apprehensions regarding her autonomy and sexuality. Pants and shorts have replaced the Salwar-Kameez. The fundamental difference is exemplified between Feroza of Pakistan and Feroza of America, where the traditional and conservative girl transforms into an American brat. Initially portrayed as a timid girl, Feroza's move to America evolves her into a confident and assertive woman as the story progresses.

Her transformation in America occurs over several years rather than in a single night. Her parents sent her from Pakistan to America during her teens to promote her intellectual development, perceiving America as a land of freedom. Zareen, Feroza's mother, contends that things in Pakistan have worsened, perceiving the repressive atmosphere of Zia's Islamisation as concerning, and insists that Feroza ought to move to the United States. She informs her husband Cyrus that Feroza needs to travel to America for three to four months, claiming that "Travel will broaden her outlook and get this puritanical rubbish out of her head " (14). As she leaves, she quickly wipes away her tears at the airport. Her pride inhibits her from appearing herself with a pink nose and swollen eyes to people who have come to bid her farewell at the airport (47). Throughout her journeys, she adheres to the guidance of the elders. During the wait for transit, a Pakistani child offers to help her with her luggage and obtain a drink due to the prolonged delay. Guided by a religious perspective, she steadfastly rejects and declines. Her sense of self "expanded through the osmosis of identity with her community and her circle of school friends, remained with her as a constant" (52). Upon her arrival at Kennedy Airport, she emanates prosperity and vitality.

Feroza faces the brutal and harsh realities of life in America. She acknowledges for the first time that she is in an "alien land among unfamiliar individuals" (54). She is bewildered, and her legs tremble. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that this term accurately encapsulates her new experience. The individuals in this region are engrossed in their own affairs; none have taken the time to recognize her existence or observe her as they might have in Pakistan. An unusual consciousness envelops her: She is unknown to them, and they are unknown to her. It is a thrilling experience to be freed from the numerous constraints that governed her life. She acknowledges the importance of self-care, embracing adult duties, and being accountable for her actions. The New York experience immerses her in culture and enriches her intelligence. She strives to adapt to the unique lifestyle of Americans and the modern technology they utilize. Sidhwa explicates Feroza's existence in America in the following manner. She observes, "The unblemished enjoyment of telephones that operated irrespective of weather conditions, the efficacy of the water in the YMCA showers, and the uninterrupted electricity without the requirement for daily load shedding were pleasures Feroza was discovering for herself." The allure of the First World" (102).

In the United States, Feroza gains access to knowledge that is unattainable in Pakistan. Her grief and anxiety emanate through the window. She asserts with confidence that she will traverse the shops in New York and return, declaring, "I can look after myself" (86). She ignores the limitations imposed on her as a Pakistani girl within the exhilarating, uninhibited, and unfamiliar culture. Jamil, Manek's Pakistani acquaintance, asserts that Feroza understands the true nature of heroism and honor. She has become remarkably bold in her limited experience with American culture. In America, she discovers that one cannot acquire anything without exertion; if she wishes for something, she must toil for it. To attain independence and a gratifying existence, she must develop a robust work ethic. Feroza is escorted by Manek on all her travels. She encounters adventures, learns manners, and manages several unforeseen scenarios. Feroza's experience of being disoriented at the museum contrasts with her interrogation at the airport. She remains composed, refrains from seeking external assistance, and solicits support from the police, with whom she has a favorable relationship, assisted by Manek, Feroza's chaperone, who offers advice in all her attempts. He continually conveys to Feroza: You'll have to cope with all sorts of unexpected situations. This has taught you more about America than six months of pampering. You'll see, you'll gain confidence. You can't rely on anyone but yourself If you want to live in this country – not even on me!" (135) Manek permits Feroza to nurture her autonomy and pursue self-exploration.

The apprehensive, anxious, and intricately troubled Feroza absorbs the progressive and invigorating culture of the United States, and her reconciliation with old fears and inhibitions empowers her to liberate herself from long-standing constraints. Reconciling with her history equips her to navigate the present more effectively and strategize for her future. She attains self-sufficiency and independence. She observes that when she attempts to engage with American youth,

she experiences that she “had taken a phenomenal leap in perceiving the world from a wider, bolder and happier angle” (164).

In this exhilaration, she realizes that she is cultivating the wings that have been ruthlessly amputated in Pakistan. She is reluctant to reveal the secret of this feeling of advancement and exploration to anyone. Feroza's quest is a pursuit of freedom and joy. She acknowledges that the entrenched constraints have partly diminished their grip owing to Jo's influence. The new arrangement convinces her that "she was in the right place and that her life would evolve in unforeseen and significant ways" (212). Shashi's entrance reveals facets of Feroza, allowing her to explore more joyous dimensions within herself (215). Aldous Huxley's statement, "There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self" (Brave New World, Part II), is illustrated in Feroza's life.

She is exceedingly confident and flamboyant and communicates in an entertaining and candid manner. The apprehensive Feroza, who declines to answer a phone call prior to her trip to the United States, has developed a throaty, knowing, delightful laugh. Self-esteem refers to an individual's perception of their worth and their capacity to attain their aspirations and ambitions. In other words, robust self-esteem arises when an individual feels sufficiently empowered to care for themselves and their loved ones. For that to occur, sufficient resources must be available. It encompasses shelter, clothing, food, and other associated expenses. A suitable income source is essential to fulfilling fundamental necessities. Feroza derives a sense of autonomy and achievement from earning and expending her own finances. It facilitates her transition from a position of helpmate to a position of owned resource.

The persistent Parsi dilemma of interfaith marriage arises as Feroza plans to marry David Press, an American Jew. She assertively communicates to her mother her marriage to David Press in the following lines: "We're having a civil marriage regardless; a judge will officiate." "Certainly, you are familiar with David, and I am a Unitarian" (278). Despite Zareen's mother's efforts to impede her marriage, Zareen's reasoning fails to influence Feroza's resolution. Her enrolment in Anthropology at the University of Arizona allows her to form informed judgments, as evidenced by the following statement: "... constraints would crush her freedom, a freedom that had become central to her happiness." The autonomy with which she could navigate her life without interference was solely attributable to her distance from her family and the anonymity provided by America." (312)

The freedom provided by America and her exile enables a profound comprehension of her identity and culture. She analyses the complexities of Parsi identity and Pakistani nationality. The transformation she undergoes in the West alters her perception of Pakistan and America. She understands the societal decline in Pakistan post-independence, masked by religious pretexts, and acknowledges the detrimental effects of restricted religious teachings on women that advocate for gender segregation. Concurrently, Feroza recognizes that her journey to the U.S.A.

has broadened her outlook and generated other opportunities. She may represent modernity in its most genuine form. Through independent thought, women can challenge traditional viewpoints and rigid orthodoxy and surpass the constraints of societal conventions and patriarchal culture. The journey to the United States is allegedly an educational endeavor. She has altered the cultural perceptions of America and the Asian subcontinent. Feroza's unique experience as a student from a developing country influences her viewpoint on America. She acknowledges that young folks in the East are excessively protected, but in America, they exhibit independence by managing their own affairs and funding their education. She embodies the enjoyment of femininity and adapts the clothing, language, and comportment of an American girl. She understands that America is a country of ambitions. She has realized the advantages of autonomy and dismisses the limitations imposed by her community's conventional customs. She acknowledges the imperative for revision in the traditional Parsi code concerning inter-community marriage. She has adapted to a new culture, and there is no prospect of a return for her.

She desires isolation and emancipation from the societal restrictions imposed by the civilized world. The mature Feroza, despite a fractured romantic relationship and pervading sorrow, chooses the pursuit of freedom and self-actualization in the U.S.A. over a stable life, familial connections, and effortless contentment in Lahore. In Pakistani society, familial bonds are strong, and parental control is absolute. Zareen must reply to her mother, who questioned her choice to send her daughter to America in a derisive tone. Religion and morality are essential institutions that are largely unchallenged in Pakistani society. In Pakistan, negotiations about religious and moral principles are not permissible. The economic dependence of Pakistani women is marked by their complete reliance on men, including financial, emotional, and psychological components. Feroza has developed an autonomous mindset and is resolute in establishing her own career trajectory rather than depending on the guidance of her parents and elders. Immigrant Psyche exemplifies the interaction between traditional culture and that of a newly embraced foreign environment, leading to an alteration of the composite culture defined by collectiveness, varied experiences, static moments, and border crossings.

Migration leading to separation can be viewed as a type of rebirth, marked by a new locale or nation, unique cultural attributes, diverse flora and fauna, and requisite adaptations. Feroza attains a sense of autonomy and progressively modifies her behavior. She experiences the joys and difficulties of American university life. She regularly faces various obstacles that enhance her comprehension of her internal transformations. Her affiliation with Jo enhances her comprehension of the American way of life. Feroza completely integrates into an American lifestyle. The narrative, while superficially depicting a modest Parsi girl navigating a new land, fundamentally examines how ethnicity influences, regulates and eventually defines our identity. The individual's communal identity shapes environmental interactions, which in turn impact both the community's and the individual's identity. The individual classifies

people in society as either in-group members or out-group members. Individuals maintain a connection to their country irrespective of the circumstances prompting their absence.

Zareen's perspective at the outset of the narrative reveals her deep anxiety over self-identity. The narrative begins with Zareen's deep concern for her daughter's development in a world lacking technology. Zareen discusses Feroza's narrow mindset with her husband, Cyrus. "She's becoming more and more backward every day" (9). She tells to her husband how the socio-political context has influenced Feroza's actions. "She won't even answer the phone anymore! 'What if it's someone I don't know?'" Zareen is profoundly concerned about the prevailing system and practices in Pakistan and their adverse impact on her little daughter's mental development, which she articulates to her husband:

Could you imagine Feroza cycling to school now? She'd be a freak! Those *goondas* would make vulgar noises and bump into her, and the *mullahs* would tell her to cover her head. Instead of moving forward, we are moving backward. Our Parsee children in Lahore won't know how to mix with Parsee kids in Karachi or Bombay (11).

She subsequently examines the representation of women in her culture and community, where fundamentalism has made the establishment of a respectable and liberal identity almost impossible. In these circumstances, Zareen decides to send her daughter Feroza to America, where she remains an outsider, devoid of native identity, and must adapt to American culture.

After experiencing freedom in the U.S.A., Feroza becomes infatuated with modernity and finds it nearly impossible to reintegrate into her original traditional community. Sidhwa elucidates, via Feroza's perspective, Karl Marx's idea that "Social progress can be measured by the social position of the female sex." She keenly notices the discrepancies between the cultures and other aspects of life in the two nations. Her affiliation with American society broadens her perspective and allows her to embrace a new viewpoint. Feroza seeks to deconstruct the delicate religious and cultural taboos. She opts to preserve her American identity instead of returning to the confines from which she has liberated herself through struggle. This cultural convergence transforms her from a timid and introverted girl into a confident and outspoken individual. She experiences a sense of freedom with unfamiliar men and proceeds to consume two glasses of wine. Her life in America is exhilarating and dynamic, unlike in Pakistan, where she could never imagine a girl working as a waiter in a restaurant, as the men would see her as if she were an alien or committing an infraction.

In America, no one has time to observe others. Moreover, there is a lack of gender discrimination; this experience enravels her, and she takes pride in belonging to such an open-minded community. She was unable to conceive of residing independently in Pakistan. She justifies it as her engagement with American culture.

Another determinant for the acceptance and assimilation of the West as their principal identity is the liberty it provides.

In conclusion, individuals shape their identity through experiences, environment, and ideals, indicating that nurture is more influential than nature. The Nurture theory asserts that an individual's environment, upbringing, and surroundings significantly impact personal development more than genetic or ethnic factors. Contemporary social scientists predominantly contend that nurturing may transcend any detrimental natural factors. Sidhwa's work has repeatedly shown a preference for the 'nurture' hypothesis. Nurture entails the concept that the environment profoundly impacts individual development. While Sidhwa does not overtly endorse either side of the debate, I assert that the perspectives in the novel implicitly convey the author's belief in the primacy of nurture. She thinks that nurture is the principal factor in constructing identity. Feroza adeptly navigates society by nurturing and expressing her distinctive identity through her freedom and empowerment.

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