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Special Magazines

Love doesn't conquer all, in new play

By AARON HOWARD 08.MAR.07

In literature and on stage, the Jew has served as a potent symbol of minority-group member. If the Jew is marked off from the majority society, then the drama (conflict) comes from portraying how that plays out on cognitive, effective and behavioral levels.

Playwright Bapsi Sidhwa reverses this symbol in "An American Brat," which has its U.S. premiere here on March 9. Set in contemporary Houston, David, the young Jewish character, is more of a symbol of the majority culture. Feroza, a young Parsi woman, is sent by her parents in Pakistan to college here. Feroza's parents, Zareen and Cyrus, receive a letter from their daughter stating her intention to marry David. "Religious differences don't matter so much here," she writes. "We have decided to settle the issue by becoming Unitarians."

To Feroza's parents, marrying a non-Parsi means being cut off from the community. Zareen goes to America, to "do drama," to win her daughter back from this ill-advised marriage. The Parsis are, in fact, a tiny, vulnerable people. Each member lost represents a danger to the community's survival. For Zareen, the major issue is that her daughter's marriage will result in the loss of community support, leaving Feroza without any safety net.

Another issue is khandaan, which can be translated as family, although it represents something much larger. In India, there's a saying: You marry a family and not a person. And for Feroza's family, her decision to marry David out of love strikes at the very heart of the Indo-Pakistani sense of khandaan. The issue of arranged versus "love marriages" is a hot topic on a number of the Indian blogs I read. The issue seems to go to the core of group identity among many of the bloggers.

In "An American Brat," David has a few of his own issues. His grandmother is opposed to his marriage to a non-Jewish woman. And when Zareen attempts to bribe him to postpone the marriage, David begins to understand that he faces giving up his own authenticity.

Unlike many of the novels and dramas prior to "An American Brat," Sidhwa doesn't opt for the "melting pot" resolution. Without giving away the ending, the play takes a much harder, reflective resolution.

The U.S. premiere of "An American Brat" will take place at 8 p.m., Friday, March 9, at Stages Repertory Theatre, 3201 Allen Parkway. The play will run through March 25. For ticket information, phone 713/527-0123, or visit www.stagestheatre.com.

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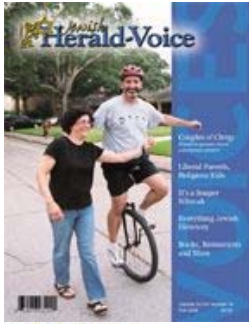
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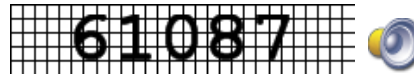
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