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## RELIGION, CULTURE AND HUMAN DIGNITY IN THE WRITINGS OF PARSI WRITERS

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### Introduction :

Though a small population in India, Parsi community has gained unique identity and importance in this era. The writers like Farrukh Dhondy, Bapsi Sidhwa, Dina Mehta and Rohinton Mistry realized that they are few in numbers in a large country like India. In their publications, they discuss the myths, tenets, rites, and ideas of the Parsi society. In India, the issues of minorities are crucial, extremely complicated, and in many respects unresolved. Indian Parsi writers have shed important light on their community's way of life, which is notably distinct from that of other Indians. Through their writings, they yearn for human dignity.

**Key Words:** Religion, Human Dignity, Culture, Sensibility, Identity, Minority, Westernization, the Quit India Movement

Through authors like Rohinton Mistry, the Parsi community, a small population in India, gains unique identity and importance. Farrukh Dhondy, Bapsi Sidhwa, Dina Mehta, etc. realized that they are few in number in a large country like India. In their publications, they discuss the myths, tenets, rites, and ideas of the Parsi society. In terms of fiction, writers from the Indian subcontinent have contributed the most. Dorothy Spencer talks about it as, “a systematic study of cultural contact and cultural change” and would enhance the readers’ “knowledge of acculturation process.”<sup>1</sup>

Minority-written literature is especially significant because it gives us a close look into their psychology. In India, the issue of minorities is crucial, extremely complicated, and in many respects unresolved. The issues of social insiders and outsiders have been emphasized in political debate since the 1990s, but the minority literary discourse in this context does not appear to have gotten the attention it merits. To disprove the idea and take good care of the minority's perceived sentiments of their status in the subcontinent as well as their psychological vulnerabilities, a rigorous investigation and evaluation are necessary.

Indian Parsi writers have shed important light on their community's way of life, which is notably distinct from that of other Indians. These writers share Bapsi Sidhwa's perspective, which she immortalized in the Preface to her book *The Crow Eaters* (1978). Because of a deep-rooted admiration for her diminishing community – and an enormous affection for it – this work of fiction has been a labour of love. The nature of comedy being to exaggerate, the incidents in this book do not reflect at all upon the integrity of a community whose scrupulous honesty and



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sense of honour.... Are legend.<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible to ignore the Parsis' contributions to build a better India, starting with her liberation struggle. Their creations also reproduce their neighbourhood, which takes delight in coexisting, exchanging stories, and preserving the worth of its history.

In Dina Mehta's novel *And Some Take a Lover*, Roshani, the leading character, is aware of how Westernization is hurting Parsis people, including herself: She (Roshni) spoke English better than her adopted mother-tongue, Gujarati. She even thought in English.....She read no Gujarati books or papers. She did not know Persian, the language of her ancestors... she did not know a word of Avesta, in which her prayers were written. She knew more about Christianity than of her own religion .....She was more familiar with the Bible than with the Gathas, with the Acts of Apostles than with the life of Zarathushtra. (188)

Roshni also acknowledges that the design of the home itself, from its Victorian mass and hardness to its Venetian glass vases and Dresden artwork, is influenced by Western design. Thus, the English language and other aspects of English culture are fundamental to the Parsi ways of life. Their worldview and outlook on life are significantly influenced by this Eurocentric perspective. As they think that Eurocentric perspective have changed them and encouraged them to leave the life of human dignity.

Some of the most distinctive characteristics of the Parsi people are also emphasized by Bapsi Sidhwa in *The Crow Eaters*. The Parsis protect their distinct identity and forbid conversions or mixed marriages. Freddie explains to Yezdi, who desired to wed an Anglo-Indian woman: "the children born "might look beautiful but they will be shells-empty and confused; misfits for generations to come. They will have arrogance without pride-touchiness without self-respect or commission". (128-29)

Slow-thinkers and stereotypical cranks may be the result of this sort of claustrophobic exclusivity. Another deadly vice that seduces the Parsis greatly is gluttony. The mother-in-law of Freddie frequently overeats. She used to easily apt "huge quantities of chocolate, candied fruits and liqueurs to give an elephant diarrhea."(27) This excessive eating will eventually leave middle-aged prima donnas with swollen proportions.

The subjects of the Quit India Movement, the Partition, the Independence, the British Colonial rule, and other significant events impacting the subcontinent have all been explored by Parsi authors. However, they have a split personality. For instance, in *The Crow Eaters*, Freddie fiercely opposes the nationalist movement and urges his kids to be devoted to the British Empire. He will not tolerate anybody who defies the wishes of the English as "Quit India! Quit India!" Freddie is predictably, "Perturbed by the trend of events in India"; he is "stirred by [the] talk of rebellion, self-rule, and Independence from the British- and most of all by the role of a few Parsis in all this." (282) Persons such as Naoroji, he thinks, are nothing but "making monkeys of themselves." By destroying the nation, others will profit, and the Parsis will be hated everywhere. So the Parsis feel constant fear and insecurity in India.



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Bapsi Sidhwa conveyed the Parsi perspective on the impending Partition and the idea of "Swaraj" in her subsequent novel *Ice- Candy-Man*. The book emphasizes the fragility of interpersonal ties since it is set in pre-Partition Lahore. Again, the Parsis have to choose between being loyal to the British Raj or supporting the "Swaraj." An argumentative discussion on the political scenario is held at a special gathering called in the temple hall in Warris Road. The Parsis are advised by Col. Bharucha to stay aloof from the nationalist struggle. Dr. Mody appeals for participation in the Indian freedom struggle movement for the reason that "our neighbors will think we are betraying them and siding with the English."<sup>3</sup> At the Banker Toddywalla's initiative, Parsis make the decision to go along with their tried-and-true course of compromise and flexibility.

The political unrest that followed the Quit India movement and the Naval Ratings Mutiny is also described in Dina Mehta's book *And Some Take a Lover*.<sup>4</sup> Roshni's mother, who speaks for senior citizens in her neighbourhood, is certain that if the English left, the country would be overrun by canines. The conflicted loyalties of a Parsi family caught up in the political and social unrest, are the subject of an engrossing book by Dina Mehta.

Several notable Indian leaders have struggled in such a contradictory circumstance which was not unexpected. Gandhi is just "that scoundrel and vagrant the arch-traitor, the unmentionable, except with abuse." (38) in the eyes of Roshni's mother and those who share her viewpoints. Roshni's aunt Piroja believes Gandhi is pro-Japanese and a fifth-communist, while her cousin Framroze views his fast as "political blackmail." An angry Roshni starts to think of Gandhi as a dictator after she is unsuccessful in getting married to Sudhir. Despite never having seen Gandhi, Roshni was aghast when she thought of the strange, awesome power he wielded over other people's lives." Indira Gandhi and Nehru were not exempt either. Through their writings, the Parsi authors have explored the predicament faced by the minority population and its identity conflicts. It makes sense that an Anglicized group would find it very challenging to relate to other Indian Communities.

In Farrukh Dhondy's *Bombay Duck*, the reference of Zoroastrianism is given in it. (and some other religions). An informal conversation goes between Lyla and Xerxes Xavaxa , it is given below: "What do you feel, Mr. Xavaxa, or Xerxes? As a Parsee." " Parsees. We don't feel threatened, I don't .... Sikhs do and Muslims do and there has been slaughter these last forty years."<sup>5</sup> The majority of these individuals, despite of their confidence, have some form of cultural neurasthenia.

The same case can be found in Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow*, where Daryus Kotwal , who is anxious by societal alienation so as he is "Educated, speaking [English] so well"<sup>6</sup>. His community shows loyalty to the British Realm.

He shares his community's tendency to live in the past and identifies psychologically with the King .The Hindu religion and the Indian ways of life are despised, along with everything else that is Indian. The level of admiration for the British royal family is absurd. The hero himself says, "We are reluctant Indians".



Literature serves as an example or excellent illustration of a general pattern or condition since it is a subsystem of a particular culture. In addition to the desire to adapt and integrate, minority discourse is distinguished by a tradition of dissent and resistance. Culture unites people in communities on more than just an organizational level.

M.J. Akbar said that the Muslims had "a siege mentality" in his 1988 book *Riot after Riot*, which he wrote about. Many people have experienced the effects of cultural colonialism or subjugation for this to constitute a detailed account. It generates two opposing impulses, namely imitation of the "colonizer" and historical resurgence. Kenneth Frampton put forwards, modern art forms may have "the capacity to cultivate (a) resistant, identity-giving culture".<sup>7</sup> The importance of the rediscovery and repatriation of what has been suppressed in a minority's past has been highlighted more vehemently by the Resistance Theory which has been elaborated in recent decades. The Resistance Theory suggests reclaiming "the place reserved for subordination" and views cultural colonization as a type of historical denial and cultural deracination in addition to servitude and a loss of cultural freedom. 'Imperialism' is believed of today "not as a hierarchically structured system of global capitalism but as a relation."<sup>8</sup>

Edward Said urged resistance to accept self-exile and marginality in his 1994 Reith lectures, *Representations of the Intellectual*. He has previously given a minority group three options: One choice is to do as Ariel does, that is... when he gains his freedom he returns to his native element, a sort of bourgeois native untroubled by his collaboration with Prospero. A second choice is to do like Caliban, aware of and accepting his mongrel past but not disabled for future development. A third choice is to be a Caliban who sheds his current servitude and physical disfigurements in the process of discovering his essential, pre-colonial self.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

It is past time to properly acknowledge the relationship between the centre and the periphery—the majority and the minority communities—and to make genuine attempts to create more diverse forms of togetherness that may be in line with the complexity of our subcontinent. So through the writings of Parsi writers, they have delineated the issues related with culture, human dignity, identity, Religion and Human Dignity.

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