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A SAGA OF PARSI CULTURE IN THE CROW EATERS BAPSI SIDHWA'S NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

The Crow Eaters is slightly different from the other novels of Bapsi Sidhwa. Although the story is focused on a middle class Parsis family, the novel does not have an overtly political tone. Much of the novel is filled with interesting incidents which are comic with a touch of tragedy in them. This is the kind of writing Bapsi Sidhwa is known for and this book is a prime example of her art. This paper is written about Parsi characters and customs. The community, like all small communities, is very secretive and they felt Sidhwa had revealed too much about it. They felt disturbed that she had written so openly about its customs, values, and religious practices.

KEY WORDS: *Descendants, Corpse, Violation, Mysteriously, Monotheistic*

INTRODUCTION

Sidhwa shares in an interview that all Parsis are Zoroastrians, who fled from Persia at the time of Arabic invasion. They came to India as refugees. The Parsis are the descendants of Magi, also referred to in the *Bible* as *Magus*, so they are the descendants of the three wise men who followed Christ's Star to Bethlehem. "Zoroastrianism is one of the first monotheistic religions". Most Parsis are very comfortable in the religion to which they belong. A Parsi feels more comfortable where there are more Parsis. There are many Parsis around Bombay in India, "whenever she was in Bombay, Sidhwa felt embedded in her community" (Rajan Interview).

In the novel, *The Crow Eaters* story takes place over the first half of the 20th century and focus on the fortunes of a Parsi man. Faredoon 'Freddy' Junglewalla. At the age of twenty three, along with

his wife (Putli), mother-in-law (Jerbanoo) and an infant daughter (Hutoxi), Faredoon settles in Lahore, never to look back. In Lahore, he continues to live till the end of the novel i.e. in 1940. His family expands and with his pragmatic intelligence and fraud in the insurance company, he becomes a man of great reputation among the Parsis. People travelled thousands of miles to see him in Lahore, especially as they wished to escape the tight-spots they had got themselves into. This successful practical man is disappointed and at a loss at the death of his eldest son and due to the departure of his self-exiled second son. Meanwhile, his strong-willed mother-in-law, Jerbanoo, -makes his life increasingly difficult.

The Crow Eaters, While addressing serious cultural and historical issues, is written in a humorous, farcical style that satirises the practices of Parsi culture. Within this straight conventional

theme, Sidhwa flings her feminine imagination with an incongruous humour to talk about serious issues like national politics, fraud, superstitions etc. in Parsi community. But it is a true presentation of Parsi culture and history. Faredoon is a Parsi and his story takes the reader to the heart of that minority community. The focus on the Parsees, (their rites and customs) not only provides a rich subject in itself, but proves an ideal vehicle for observing the history of India. The title “The Crow Eaters” refers to the Parsis of India. The descendants of Persian immigrants are renowned for their generosity and good citizenship, as well as their lovable eccentricities, which include their gift for taking nineteen to the dozen, chattering always like crows. If one traces the origin of Parsis, Zoroastrian are Indo-Iranians who embrace the ideas of Zarathustra. The traditional Indo-Iranian revision is polytheistic. Zoroaster sights its revision and reform, claiming that there is one deity *Ahura Mazda*, whose nature and will required changes in men’s thought, worship, and mode of life. *Ahura Mazda*, or *Ormazd*, is the highest God of Zoroastrians. He is the creator, Judge, benefactor, protector, and upholder of Truth, righteousness and Asha, the cosmic order. He is perfection personified. He is the source of all that is good in the universe, which he guards with his story of Ahuras, angel spirits and universal beings. He ascribes all positive attributes of his followers and communicated personally through righteousness, sacrifice, prayers, rituals and invocations. But under no circumstances, He should be worshipped in an image form. The utterance of his very name destroys the malice of the *daevas* and the *druj*, the evil spirits. He is formless but called by many names.

In the *Khorda Avesta*, He proclaims to Zoroaster, his numerous names such as *Fiend-Smiter*, *herd giver*, *perfect holiness*, understanding, knowledge, lord, beneficent, harmless, unconquerable, all seeing, creator and all knowing (Mazda), and giver of prosperity. Once launched, the reformation movements made its way slowly across Iran to become eventually, as the good Mazdayasnian religion, the official creed of the late Achaemenid Kings.

Zoroastrian Culture is discussed in detail in the novel. Zoroaster theology is shown to have developed from the way in which he treated the traditional dual classification of the deities of the *Ahuras*, one hears of only one supreme deity worthy of worship, *Ahura* (Lord). He then linked it with that title another name *Mazda* (*wisdom*), a word already familiar in Iran. There may have been precedent for this association, nothing can be said with surety.

This is the story of Junglewalla family. Faredoon Junglewalla, (Freddy) is, famous in Parsi society. He has earned the respect and gratitude of his entire community. His name is also included in the “*Zarathusti calendar of great men and Women*”. Freddy makes a steady and systematic progress. He is

a dynamic character. At the beginning of the novel, he is nonentity but gradually he develops considerably. He makes remarkable progress in the field of business and in the art of diplomacy. His character is interesting as well as influential. His links with British officials are deep- rooted. His progressive and pragmatic outlook keeps him on the top in business, politics, money making, religion and social service. The name of this great man is also invoked in such ceremonies like “Thanksgiving” and death anniversaries. Thanksgiving ceremony or a ceremony of blessing is performed occasionally outside the premises of a fire temple in a clean place, by two or three priests to commemorate some important and auspicious occasion or an important public event.

During the Past years of the 19th century, Faredoon has decided to uproot his family from a non- descript village in Central India and move north to greener pastures. He is merely twenty three at that time. He does not find any future in his own village. So he resolved to seek his future in Punjab,(the land of five rivers) and Sind.

Freddy with a pregnant wife and infant daughter, Hutoxi, and mother-in-law commences his journey to Punjab on a bullock cart. The cart is made up of wooden platform wheels. It has sufficient space to sit, sleep and live. The back of the cart is heaped with their belonging. With the help of local Parsi families, the Toddywallas, the Bankwallas, the Bottliwallas and the Chaiwallas, Freddy settles himself in Lahore. He hopes that he will adjust into a new place has turned into a reality. In Lahore, his faith is rewarded. Small Persian community rushes to greet him and inspires him.

Faredoon Junglewalla settles himself in Lahore. He opens a small store. He adjusts his wife and grandmother on the top- floor of the house. What follows is a “cat eat mouse” game between him and his cantankerous mother-in-law Jerbanoo. Old Jerbanoo is often greedy, she is a glutton and empties the store where the food was kept. Freddy always retorts her. She is gaining weight day by day, on the other hand, Freddy is shedding weight day by day.

Jerbanoo has a very dominant position in Freddy’s home. She confidently manages the house. She may rightly be called a negative character in the novel as she is in the habit of poking her nose in every matter. The way she teases Freddy and spoils the atmosphere at home, has been depicted in detail in the novel at a number of places. Her influence in the house is temporarily hindered by Putli her daughter. One day when her mother is taking rest in the afternoon, Freddy(as advised by a necromancer) tries to procure lock of her hair to perform some black magic on her but she gets up at the eleventh hour and his plans ended in fiasco. Jerbanoo is aware of his bad designs and she starts wearing “mathabana” all the time. She applies ‘kajal’ in her

eyes and processes two large spots of soot on her temples. This is only to protect herself from envious eyes.

Putli circles a bit of meat membrane seven times over her mother's head and flings it out of the window to the crows. Jerbanoo suddenly turns excessively religious. She prays five times imitating the temple priests and she piles the kitchen fire with sandalwood. She fears that she will die soon and the very thought of death makes her worried about the disposal of her mortal remains as there is no *dungarwaree* or as the British call it, the "Tower of silence" in Lahore.

But he hates his mother-in-law. Freddy and Jerbanoo frequent quarrel reaches its summit, when Freddy tries to kill her by burning in his own house. In the afternoon of the day following the New Year's Day, Freddy with his wife and children visits the Toddywallas. Jerbanoo does not join them and goes to sleep in her own room. Later Freddy returns to his house sprinkles kerosene oil sets it ablaze. But Jerbanoo is rescued by firemen. The house and the shop are burnt. Freddy receives a sizeable sum of money from the insurance company. He opens up stores in Amritsar, Delhi and Peshawar and very soon becomes a big gun.

The parsi death rites are mentioned in detail in *The Crow Eaters*. According to Zoroastrian scriptures, one should isolate the dead body and stay as far away from it as possible to avoid any possible contact with its impurities that evil forces import to it by invading it and making it their residence. The Zarathusti religion has strong belief in keeping all the creations of *Ahura Mazda* in an environment friendly state; therefore, the disposal of the body within the traditional context is quite unusual. It is a belief in their religion that one should keep the dead away from all the material things including the elements of fire, water and earth. "Fire" is sacred symbol of God in the material plane. So fire should not be made impure by burning an evil ridden corpse with it. The "earth" is also sacred, so it should not be buried. It should not be thrown in rivers, lakes and oceans. Touching a corpse or dead material intentionally is fraught with the danger of severe pollution and turning oneself over to the force of evil. As Zarathustra himself suggested, in ancient times, such a violation invited the penalty of death sentence.

The best way to dispose of a dead body, according to Zoroastrian beliefs, is to let the body remain in the open and be consumed by vultures and crows, which were created by God for the specific purpose. Zoroastrians, therefore, leave the dead in house called *dakhmas* or (silent towers,) specially built for this purpose. In ancient times, the corpses were usually carried to the hills or a rising ground (*Yakshbum*) and placed inside an enclosure, where the corps-eating birds and animals would come and consume it there without dragging it to other places.

But the current practice is to give a bath to the body, after some prayers and carry it to a *Dakhma*, which is a kind of tower, a rounded structure with high walls and no roofs, where it is left in the open, to be consumed by the vultures and crows. After a few weeks, when the flesh is completely consumed, the bones are collected and stored in deep wells whose bottom is covered with charcoal and lime, where they are allowed to disintegrate slowly. Zoroastrians believe this is the best way to dispose of the dead rather than burning them in the earth or burning them in fire for different reasons.

This paper has also thrown light on the institutional structure of the Zoroastrians. Institutions may be established habits or actions. Three features of Zoroastrian religion are: the veneration of fire, the priesthood, and the fire temple. Both the priesthood and the ritual use of fire antedated the temples. It has already been noted that an Iranian priesthood as a class of ritual functionaries existed well before Zoroaster's time.

Zoroaster's special emphasis was on *Fire* as a symbol *par excellence* of the supreme deity, *Ahura Mazda*. Tradition cited by Jackson makes reference to at least ten locations in pre-Zoroastrian Iran where sacred fires were kept burning, and the Zoroaster's concern for their care and increase (Williams 98). It appears that the fires had been kindled originally in the open, on pyres built a top mountains or promontories, but that temple-building was eventually instituted as protective measure against the exigencies of weather that could extinguish the fire. Some of the fires on places, associated with the events or persons of religious import and which had burned without interruption for a long time, are known to have acquired special sanctity. The principal thrust of Zoroaster's information, in this connection, however, was towards the multiplication of shrines where freshly kindled fires would never be threatened by extinction. In this, Zoroaster is both logical and practical.

If there was one supreme God whose existence was eternal, the symbol most representative of Him should itself, once kindled, be preserved in perpetuity. Besides, if by this visible symbol the religion of Zoroaster could most practically be commended to laity and their fidelity given support by their sharing the responsibility of the fires, preservation, then it was merely common sense to establish a fire and to house it in some way in every community where his teaching gained acceptance (Pangborn 50,51). Adapting the "cult of the domestic fire," thought by Duchesne-Guillemin to be another already developed tradition," (Guillemin 66) served further to reinforce Mazdean commitment by making the morning re-kindling of the embers on the domestic hearth an act of daily devotion to *Ahura Mazda*. Bapsi Sidhwa brings forth the importance of "fire" in *The Crow Eaters* as well.

Zarathusti faith is based on charity. Parsis not only help the men of their community, they actively contribute towards the welfare of the society. Freddy has also shown religious tolerance. He respects all the religions. The different sacred books *The Bible*, *The Bhagwad- Gita*, *The Holy Kuran*, the books representing the Sikh, Jats and Buddhist faith along with *The Avesta* (the book of Persian) is on the shelf right above Freddy prayer table.

The plot of the novel revolves around the Jungewalla clan. The major and minor characters focus on superstitions, rituals and ceremonies of the Parsis society. Menstruation and child birth are viewed as a major source of pollution in Zoroastrianism. Sidhwa has highlighted the condition of women during menstruation through the character of Putli, who is Faredoon's wife. Women are advised to maintain seclusion and avoid contact with everything. In Zoroastrian it is an old belief that *Ahura Mazda* himself gave instruction to women that how much distance they should maintain with the things and people at this time. The servant who brings food to such women should maintain the distance of some paces. The food and drink should be brought to them in vessels of brass or lead or any metal. She should be not even touch pickles and flowers.

Like Hinduism, Parsis believed that a menstruating lady should not communicate or touch anything in a house. The family was permitted to talk to a menstruating woman through closed doors, or, in an emergency even directly. Even if she had to pass urine she had to take permission from the members of the household. She had to loudly proclaim her intention. Even if a child touches a women during this period, his body should be washed. Such instructions were given by *Ahura Mazda*. In *The Crow Eaters*, Putli is confined to one room for five days, when she is having her menstruation cycle. It is a tiny windowless cubical with an iron chair and small steel table. The room opens directly on the staircase landing opposite the kitchen.

This paper has thrown light on many rituals followed by Parsis. Zoroastrians wear *Sudra* a white upper garment, as a symbol of purity, and *Kusti*, a sacred thread, around their waists. They are worn for protection. It is believed that those who do not wear them are mysteriously harmed by the evil forces. They are also used to profess one's faith in the religion. A child wears them at *Navjote*, the ceremony of initiation in Zoroastrian faith. In Zoroastrianism, young boys and girls are admitted into the community through an initiation ceremony called *Navjote*. It is usually performed when a child is of seven or nine years of age. In exceptional cases the maximum prescribed age is fifteen. Age is important because a child is initiated into the religion only when he is intelligent enough to make choices in terms of religion and live a life of righteousness.

Unlike the vedic religion, the initiation ceremony is performed for both boys and girls without any discrimination. During the ceremony in Zoroastrianism the initiate is given a sacred bath and made to wear *Sudra* (white garment) and *Kusti* (sacred thread) which symbolizes good luck to the beginning of their lives. In the novel, it is one of the most proud moment for Putli when her children were formally initiated into this faith. Intercaste marriages are not permitted in parsi community. Freddy's happiness receives a blow when his second son Yazdi wants to marry an Anglo-Indian classmate. Faredoon gets angry when Yazdi tells him about Rosy Watson, he slaps him on the face and asks him to get out of his sight. This is for the first time, he has slapped any of his children. His wife, Putli, tries to pacify him. Yazdi describes how horribly Rosy is being treated by her stepmother and father, and says that he wants to pull her out from this unhappy situation by marrying her. Faredoon tells him that his love is born of pity. This is not enough for marriage and asks him in his own funny way if he pities dogs he cannot think of marrying them. Yazdi retorts that Rosy is not a dog. Faredoon says, she is a mixed-breed Mongrel. Yazdi retorts his father that she is a good human being.

Inter marriages are not allowed in Parsi community. Inter marriage leads to a dilution of faith and weakening of cultural bonds. Faredoon wants to show a racial superiority, thus, he does not allow Yazdi to marry Rosy Watson. The Persians consider themselves a different race, do not like to mix up with a different race. They do respect Englishmen but he does not like his son to marry an Anglo-Indian girl.

Faredoon tells him that he cannot force him to accept them but he will never permit him to marry Rosy. Thus, the relationship between Rosy and Yazdi is marred by racial and cultural differences.

The Crow Eaters tells the readers about the splendor of Lahore and describes the Red light area (Hira Mandi) which is an area marked for prostitutes. French author Cauldine Le Tournear d'Ison reflects on the making of her novel *Hira Mandi* –on the red light district in Lahore- and in Pakistan. Hira Mandi deteriorated from being refined part of the town where elegant courtesans and dancing girls held court to a crumbling red light district (d'Ison²). It was originally the centre of the city's *tawaif* culture in the Mughal era. Hira Mandi was famous for dance and music. People used to go there for a visual and musical treat. Beautiful girls (called Kanjris) used to sit in stall shaped balconies called *Kotha*, and to run their trade from the place.

The women of Hira Mandi were initiated into the profession at a very young age; as young as eleven. They would wear a nose ring during the initiation ceremony as a symbol of their virginity. The nose ring would be removed in the evening by

the man who paid the most money for it. As long as they were young and beautiful, the women often felt like movie stars desired by numerous men. As they aged, life became grimmer. The lucky ones were able to live off their daughters who followed in their footsteps. Others became ageing prostitute selling themselves for a few rupees (D'Ison 2).

However, slowly, the aesthetic pursuit became less art and more tartly. At one period of time, prostitutes were hired by wealthy families to teach their children social behaviour. All that is left of a colorful, gay street with music and the echo of *ghungroos* coming from carved wooden porticos are old prostitutes lurking in filthy corners, a rotten smell and drug addicts. The area now has become the centre of prostitution in Lahore. This is also called "the red light area" of Lahore city, which contains *tawaief* culture that developed in the Mughal rule. Girls dance for money in Hira Mandi. Girls who are working in Hira Mandi are trained by local professional of Hira Mandi. Prostitution is also another big business and activity of this red light area. So it describes the *Mujra* culture of Lahore.

When Freddy and friends visit Hira Mandi, they are shocked that Rosy is a whore. Yazdi happiness is tainted by his father's disclosure that he and Mr. Allen have enjoyed sexual relations with his beloved. Yazdi is disheartened to know that Rozy is a prostitute. He is grieved at the conspicuous commercialism and sycophancy of the Parsis. These entire developments make Yazdi revolt against the existing system in his family. His initial form of revolt results in many odd situations in the novel, which sometimes provide humour to the narrative. Yazdi indulges in extra-ordinary charity. One day, returned from school barefoot having given his shoes to an orphan in his class. Yazdi breaks away his family. His share of the family money is transferred to a trust and he gets monthly interest. Yazdi spends all the money to the dying children and also to buy medicines for the sick on road side.

Misfortunes are heaped upon Freddy one after another. When Freddy was trying to come to terms with Yazdi's tragedy his elder son dies due to minor illness. Soli is the elder son of the jungle Walla clan. He is a young and strong boy with long golden limbs and an intelligent red-lipped face. Freddy loves him more than any other child. He never looks at any of these children the way he looks at soli. Fareedoon likes to explain his business to soli. Soli learns it with interest. Fareedoon eagerly waits for the day when Soli will inherit the property. Soli would help his father in his business. He is used to checking the stock in the store and things like that. Soli had all the qualities of a good son. He was considerate, affectionate, quick-witted and intelligent. But of the same time, he is a very shy boy. Putli instructs Freddy to deal with Soli tactfully as he is a precious child.

Sidhwa focuses on age old, strange traditions prevalent in Parsi society i.e. when someone in Parsi family wants to marry, he/she will mix salt with the water and the finally member will know that the youngsters are ready for marriage. When Freddy tastes salt in drinking water, he takes the clue that someone in the family intends to marry. Though it was not Soli who mixed salt in the water yet he wants him to express his wishes, if there are any. He is very reserved during conversations. When Freddy goes to Gopal Krishan, an astrologer, and consults his *Janam Patri*, Freddy is overjoyed to know that one of his son will do better than him in business.

The incident also shows the belief of the Jews in astrology. The astrologer also announces the death of one of his sons at twenty first birthdays. This prediction makes Freddy very jittery. According to the predictions made by the astrologer, Soli will die at his twenty first birthday. Soli has been suffering from fever for few days. After the third day, Dr. Bharucha doubts that its typhoid. Soli turns pale due to illness in few days. His eyes appear abnormally large. Freddy always takes cares of Soli. Freddy lovingly strokes his burning cheeks. It is after the fourteenth day of his sickness that, Soli's condition deteriorates. He moans continuously and lapses into coma. Freddy has shown his *Janam Patri* to Gopal Krishan. Gopal Krishan assures him that Soli has been suffering from incurable disease. He confirms him that he will die in next three days. On the third day, his fever rises suddenly and he dies. It was the fifth day of December.

At this point of time, Sidhwa explains the death rituals of the Parsis in detail. Here is given a detailed description of Soli's funeral rites. His body is bathed and dressed in old garments of white cotton. Freddy wraps *Kusti* around his son's waist, reciting prayers. As there is no *Tower of Silence* in Lahore, the body is transported to the fire temple. It is laid on two stone slabs in a room in living quarters of the priest and a corpse bearer draws three circles around it with a sharp nail. Now, no one can enter the circle except the corpse bearers. On a white sheet spread on the floor, the grieved family members are sitting. The women are in white saris except Jerbanoo who is a widow and therefore wearing black. The priest's dog which has two eyes-like spots above his eyes, is brought into the room. It is believed by the Parsis that its four eyes can ward off spirits and can detect the faintest hint of life in the corpse. As dog shies away and all faint hopes of Putli are shattered.

In the night, the fire altar is brought-into the room and placed on a white cloth on the floor. Sitting cross legged before it, the priest-recites from the *Avestan* scriptures all through the night and keeps the fire alight and the room fragrant with sticks of sandal wood and frank incense. At the dawn, the mourners start pouring in and fill up the little room, the verandah and the compound between the priest's

quarter and the stone building of the fire temple. At three o'clock the pall bearers - husbands of Freddy's daughters, Hutoxi and Rubi, Mr. Chaiwalla's son Cyrus, and Mr. Bank Walla come into the room, carrying an iron bier. As the number of Parsis in Lahore is too small they have to call professional pall-bearers. These men have volunteered their services for the task. They are swathed in white garments. No part of their body, except the eyes and the nose, is visible. Even their hands are gloved in white cloth tied at the wrists. Their foreheads are bandaged with scarves and the sides of their face too. When the prayer ceremony for the departed is over, the mourners pass, one by one before the corpse to have a last look and bow before it. The dog is once again brought into the room. The pall-bearers drape a white sheet over the corpse, lift the body on to the iron bier and hoisting it to their shoulders, move out into the compound.

It is believed in Parsi religion that once the sacred rites of dead body are performed, no person of other religion is permitted to look upon it. It is considered sacrilegious. But Freddy with a sudden impulse removes the sheet from Soli's face. Freddy says it does not matter if the people of other religion want to see his face. This shows that he has a secular attitude and respect for the peoples of other religion.

Even at the small graveyard, the body is encased within four marble slabs and buried when the mound of earth is smoothened over. A corpse bearer claps his hand thrice and men turn towards the setting sun they pray over their sacred threads. At the end of the four days and night ceremony for the welfare of the departed soul, Freddy makes the customary proclamation of charity to construct a school in Karachi in the memory of his son.

Soli's death has changed Freddy's attitude to life. He becomes altruistic and religious. He donates benches for a sea-front promenade in Karachi, and funds for the graveyard at Quetta. He develops interest in mysticism and studies the *translation* of the *Gathas*. He transfers all the business responsibilities to his youngest son, Billy. Behram JungleWalla, (Billy) the third son of Freddy is a taciturn, monosyllabic, parsimonious and tenacious little man. Billy is an ugly child but he has a simple character. He is avaricious and he exposes this aspect of his personality in all his transactions. Billy is a miser man. When he takes the charge of business, he is often shown to march back in his flat to turn off the lights. No one is allowed to stay back in the office for a few minutes. He is tyrant who needs to have full control of his house. But he is an emotional man as well. He cannot bear to see tears in someone's eyes. Earlier in the novel, one sees that despite the repeated requests of his sister, he does not return the ring of his sister Yasmin. But when she weeps, he quickly returns the ring.

Billy falls in love with Tanya at first sight and loses his heart to her. He is once again emotional when he meets Yazdi at the beach and empties his purse on his hands to make him ready to visit them. Billy is very sensitive and cannot see Tanya weeping. As Billy is the last ray of hope of the family, his marriage is planned with utmost care. An advertisement is put up in the newspapers of Bombay and Karachi. Out of more than a hundred letters, one is finally selected. It is from the Khan Bahadur Sir Norshirwan Jeevanjee Easy money. He is one of the richest Parsis of Bombay. Billy with his mother Putli and grandmother Jerbanoo goes to Bombay. As Roshan (the girl whom he is expected to marry) is pock-marked, he decides to marry her younger sister, Tanya.

Sidhwa here talks about the varied ceremonies which are performed at the time of marriage. Sidhwa has given a detailed description of these ceremonies. She discusses the ceremonies such as token ceremony celebrated on the particular day when an appropriate day is fixed for marriage. 'Mada-sara' ceremony is performed before the four days of marriage. During the 'token money' ceremony, Billy is made to stand on a small wooden platform prettily decorated with the pattern of fish drawn in line. Tanya's mother Rodabai anoints his forehead. The ceremonies are meant to be attended by women only, except for Billy. The sisters, aunts and cousin sing traditional deities while Rodabai garlands Billy. She sings a little song about envelope containing the 'token money'. She gives him a heavy gold watch with a chain and tells him to step out with his right leg first. Tanya climbs up the platform and Putli performs the rites. She presents the girl with twenty one queen Victoria sovereigns while everyone sings. In the evening, the date of their marriage was fixed, on auspicious Sunday, a month away. For the entire month both the families are busy in marriage preparation. Billy and Tanya enjoyed their courtship period in between they meet Yazdi one day. Four days before the marriage, 'the Mada-sara' ceremony is performed.

The wedding takes place on flower-bedecked stage at the Taj Mahal Hotel. Tanya, wearing a white satin Sari, heavy with silver and pearl embroidery, is sitting demurely on a carved chair. Billy is sitting on an identical chair wearing a tall, dark *pagri*, and white coat and pajamas. Two priests are standing in front of them chanting and throwing rice, and rose petals at them. Freedoon and Putli are standing behind Billy and sir and lady Easymoney and standing behind Tanya, as witnesses, the wedding feast and other rites of marriage like their counterpart in all cultures are full of life. They are also essentially secular. If there is the appearance of uniqueness, it is because every culture evolves its own styles, its own forms of the ways of using these ceremonies in fashioning its rites of passage.

The wedding rites of Parsis are not clear as the religious texts are written in a dead language i.e. the Avestan language. The meaning of texts is not supplied, either by literal translation or by astute summations. Even the priests are not well - trained to teach. It is the rare priest, indeed, who is trained, competent, or even asked to explain the text of the wedding rites. Familiarity with it, therefore, is usually limited to having a rough notion of the content of the two brief-prayers *Ahuna Vairya* and *Ashem Vohu*, and a suspicion that the central address is recommending good thoughts, good words, good deeds and reproduction for some traditionalists, this is enough, since they told that prayers correctly spoken and rites correctly performed effectively establish connection with the divine realm and generate the flow of its benefits to the aspiring petitioners.

Eventually Sidhwa gives a glimpse into the history of partition and position of Parsis during this period. The non-committal attitude of Parsis during partition days has been typically expressed by Fareedon JungleWalla at the close of *The Crow Eaters*. It was 1940. Independence and partition were seven years away but they were very much on the horizon. Even some Parsis like Dadabhoy Navroji of Bombay and Rustom ji of Karachi had entered the fray. Fareedon was not very happy with their roles and burst out angrily and majority of Parsi community shared the views expressed by a dying Fareedon Junglewalla on the freedom struggle.

CONCLUSION

This paper is a reflection on how Bapsi Sidhwa has emerged as a leading woman novelist writing in English from Pakistan. Being a Parsi, she also introduces her community in her novels. She has distinctive Parsi ethos in her novels along with her individual voice. She possesses a sense of individualism and humour which makes her writing lively. She is gifted with the art of storytelling. Bapsi Sidhwa has emerged as a trend setter in English novel in the Indian Sub-continent. She provides insight into the antiquity of the Parsi faith with tolerance of other beliefs and their cultural values. She gives the reader a glimpse into the rites, customs, traditions beliefs and manners of the Parsi community, which was so far unknown to the world.

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