Chapter IV

Depiction of Parsi Lifestyle

The objective of this chapter is to shed light on the traditions and conventions of Parsis and also to explain the unique features of Zoroastrian religion they belong to, as portrayed in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa. The novelist has given a deep depiction of Parsi culture, life style and civilization. The advantage of the novelist is she herself is a Parsi who has embraced Zoroastrian religion about which she has got thorough knowledge that finds expression in the novels.

Sidhwa wants to accentuate the resourceful Zoroastrian community, which is tucked away in the forgotten crisis of history, mainly in her novel, The Crow Eaters. But she is misunderstood by the Zoroastrian people and it is clearly evident with the following mock bomb threat incident during the publication event of the novel in Lahore. And it is revealed by Sidhwa in the following passage, in an interview with David Montenegro:

“The book launch took place at an international hotel in Lahore and there was a bomb threat. . . . It took me some time to realize the turmoil the book had created within the community . . . they felt I was damaging the image . . . they felt threatened by it, although it was written out of great affection.” (n.p.)

In a realistic way, she minutely describes the psyche of the Parsis and their tradition because of her collective consciousness in the beliefs and customs of her own community. Sidhwa does not subjectively want to project
the Parsi community in the rich flash of mere pride. But the ultimate aim of
the author as an objective observer is to bring her tiny miniscule community
into limelight, which lies at a brink of extinction among the major religions in
the society. Sidhwa strives to commemorate the endangered species by
detaining their classic ethos in her works.

The novelist sheds light on the Parsi customs, ceremonies, rites, rituals,
beliefs, superstitions, legends of the Zoroastrian community in her following
novels: *The Crow Eaters, An American Brat* and *Ice-Candy-Man*. In a neutral
way of narration, she honestly exhibits both the pros and cons of the
Zoroastrian community. Sidhwa provides a mixture of both the good and evil
aspects of the Parsi religion with ironical narration, which arouses laughter but
conveys the serious exploration of the Parsi psyche. And her urge to expose
her small minority community to the world, is focused in the author’s note
from her novel, *The Crow Eaters*, as follows:

Because of a deep-rooted admiration for my 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 honesty and sense of
honour—not to mention its tradition of humour as typified by
the Parsi *natak*—are legend. (*TCE* 7).

As the chapter revolves around the Zoroastrian community, the history
of the Parsis is affixed. Zoroastrianism is one of the ancient religions in the
world. It is one of the first monotheist religions which was founded by its
Persian prophet, Zarathustra also called as Zoroaster and they believe in one God, Ahura Mazda. The origin of Zoroastrianism dates back 1500 BC in Persia (Iran at present) and the word ‘Parsi’ derived from the name of their native place ‘pars or fars’, which once was an ancient province, now located in the southern part of Iran.

The Zoroastrians prospered under the rule of the Persian kings: Achaemenians, Parthians and Sasanians. But things turned down during the 9th century AD, where the Zoroastrians were mistreated in their motherland by the Arab invaders. Zoroastrians were subjected to heavy taxes and were gradually forced to Islamic conversion. Most Zoroastrians who did not accept the Muslim conversion, wanted to preserve their ancient religion. And hence they fled to India as religious refugees.

In that time, a bunch of Zoroastrian refugees migrated to India and arrived at a small village called Sanjaan in the southern part of Gujarat. There the Parsi head priest sent a message seeking shelter, to the Indian prince Yadav Rana. Because of their language difference, both parties commenced a remarkable wordless conversation between them. And the Indian prince sent a messenger with a bowl full of milk to the head priest, who represented the Parsis. The milk was filled up to the brim of the bowl, which indirectly indicated that there was no place left for the outsiders in the Indian subcontinent. The milk also signified the purity and unity of the integrated Indian population. In response to the message, the head priest dropped a lump of sugar into the bowl and slowly mixed it with the milk, without letting a drop to spill out of the bowl.
Their clever response signified that the Zoroastrian refugees would blend in easily with the Indian populace without causing any commotion to them. And at the same time they would sweeten India, like the invisible sugar in the milk. Impressed by their intellectual culture, the Indian prince Yadav Rana granted them home in India with a condition that they should not insist on the conversion of Indians into their religion. And till date, the holy fire they brought from Persia still burns uninterrupted in *Atash Behraam*, the holiest of the Parsi fire temples, in a small village located in the southern part of Gujarat called Udwada.

The Parsis who are well known for their loyalty to the ruler, kept their promise till date. Thus they never allow conversion of people into their faith and they also never involve in the Indian politics. Generally the Parsis are hardworking community notable for their loyalty and charity. They have a great sense of religious tolerance and adoptability without losing their own cultural identity. Significantly they follow a strict hand against mixed marriages and hence their population is an all-time decrease in the society. And this aspect of the Zoroastrians is clearly exhibited by Sidhwa in the novel, *The Crow Eaters*, through the words of the protagonist Faredoon Junglewalla as follows:

There are hardly a hundred and twenty thousand Parsis in the world – and still we maintain our identity – why? Booted out of Persia at the time of the Arab invasion 1,300 years ago, a handful of our ancestors fled to India with their sacred fires. Here they were granted sanctuary by the Prince Yadav Rana on condition that they did not eat beef, wear rawhide sandals or
convert the susceptible masses. Our ancestors weren’t too proud to bow to his will. To this day we do not allow conversion to our faith – or mixed marriages. (TCE 11).

Through the character of the protagonist, Faredoon Junglewalla, Sidhwa efficiently represents the lifestyle of the Parsis in a realistic way of narration. Faredoon Junglewalla, Freddy for short, achieved a legendary status in his community through his successful career in his life. In this novel, Freddy who always feels so proud of his microscopic community appears as the symbol of the psyche of the Parsis. And Sidhwa has offered an account of the legendary status, Freddy enjoys in his community. It is their practice to remember all those who champion their cause of important ceremonies. As Sidhwa denotes:

When he died at sixty-five, a majestic grey-haired patriarch, he attained the rare distinction of being locally listed in the ‘Zarathusti Calendar of Great Men and Women’….At important Parsi ceremonies, like thanksgivings and death anniversaries, names of the great departed are invoked with gratitude – they include the names of ancient Persian kings and saints, and all those who have served the community since the Parsis migrated to India….Faredoon Junglewalla’s name is invoked in all major ceremonies performed in the Punjab and Sind… (TCE 9).

Sidhwa justifies the title of the novel, *The Crow Eaters*, with the nature of the Zoroastrian people. She describes with humour, the unique ability of the
Parsis, who have an energetic pulse in their speech with a high pitched voice. Through the portrayal of some Parsi characters, she vividly expresses the oratory skills of the Zoroastrian community. Sidhwa exposes the mocking tone of the society in treating the Parsis, by labelling them as *Kagra-Khaw*, meaning Crow Eaters. She uncovers it as where some children playfully addressed Freddy’s family along with a group of Parsi families as Crow Eaters in the airport: “Two of the children stayed to dance a jig and sing: “‘Parsi, Parsi, crow eaters! Parsi, Parsi, crow eaters!’” (*TCE* 56).

Sidhwa expresses the tiny community’s uniqueness in the oratory skills in the society as “Jerbanoo took a threatening step forward and they scampered away….This little ditty was a well-earned tribute to their notorious ability to talk ceaselessly at the top of their voices like an assembly of crows.” (*TCE* 56). Because of their element of joy and emotional uproar in their speech they are mockingly called by this label in the society. But Sidhwa effectively turns the mockery into a form of identity for the skill of oratory of the Parsis.

It is clearly evident with the author’s own words about Freddy’s oratory in the lines as “In his prosperous middle years Faredoon Junglewalla was prone to reminiscence and rhetoric.” (*TCE* 9). And Freddy’s skill in speech was evidently expressed by Sidhwa in the following lines were Freddy’s son Billy who had an impression for his father’s oratory: “Billy devoured each word….he believed his father’s utterances to be superior even to the wisdom of Zarathustra.” (*TCE* 10).
Sidhwa also exhibits the loyalty of the Zoroastrians through the characteristics of the Parsis to the ruler in her works. Generally the Parsis have a great sense of loyalty to their ruler and it is aptly revealed by Sidhwa in the novel, *The Crow Eaters*. Sidhwa, who sets the novel in the pre-independent period, skillfully details the loyalty of the Parsis to the British empire, through Freddy’s words as “And where, if I may ask, does the sun rise?...No, not in the east. For us it rises – and sets – in the Englishman’s arse. They are our sovereigns!” (*TCE* 12). And Sidhwa also conveys the adaptability of the migrated Parsis in the novel, who get easily mingled with the native population without creating any chores. Sidhwa remarks: “These are not ugly words, mind you. They are the sweet dictates of our delicious in peace. Otherwise, where would we Parsis be?” (*TCE* 12).

The neutral state of the Parsi psyche is also revealed by Sidhwa in the novel, *Ice-candy-Man*. As mentioned earlier, the Parsis who are known for keeping promises remain uninvolved in the politics of the country. It is apparent through the words of Col.Bharucha’s speech in the Parsis’ community meeting. Col.Bharucha appeals to them to remain neutral and impartial without taking sides with any party during partition. He also insists that the Parsis need not have any place in politics. It is exemplified by Sidhwa as “‘Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power: and if you jokers jump into the middle you’ll be mangled into chutney!’” (*ICM* 36).

He also highlights the neutral role of the community in a migrated land: “‘I hope no Lahore Parsi will be stupid enough to court trouble….I strongly advise all you to stay at home – and out of trouble….Don’t forget, we are to run with the hounds and hunt with the hare.’” (*ICM* 36-37). The loyalty
and adaptability of the Zoroastrians are gracefully rendered by Sidhwa through Col.Bharucha’s refined speech. They always respect the norms of their ruler without any disagreement. And this aspect of the Parsis is expressed by Sidhwa as follows:

Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land!... As long as we do not interfere we have nothing to fear! As long as we respect the customs of our rulers – as we always have – we’ll be all right! Ahura Mazda has looked after us for thirteen hundred years: he will look after us for another thirteen hundred!... ‘As long as we conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present no threat to anybody, we will prosper right here,’ roars the colonel over the mike. (ICM 39-40).

The Zoroastrians have an admiring strength and unity among their community. Because of its diminutive nature, the power of their friendship has a thick domination when compared to other enormous communities in the society. They have a deep passion for their friends in their life and it is exemplified by Sidhwa in novel The Crow Eaters. Sidhwa reflects Freddy’s love and priority to his friends as “‘I’ve made friends – love them – for what could be called “ulterior motives,” and yet the friendships so made are amongst my sweetest, longest and most sincere. I cherish them still.’” (TCE 11).

Sidhwa remarks the hospitality of the Parsis in serving their guest friends in the novel, The Crow Eaters. The trivial group of Parsi families
collect themselves to the railway station, when they hear of their friend Mr. Adenwalla’s arrival. They never welcome their guest individually; their groupies lucidly represent their community’s unity and strength. And they also serve the guest in a passionate manner with rich foods and joyful parties. This feature of the Parsis is described by Sidhwa in the novel, by means of Mr. Adenwalla’s arrival to Freddy’s home.

Their festive mood is depicted by Sidhwa as “Visiting Parsis were rare. When they did steam into the city station, the community mood became festive. The Toddywallas the Bankwallas Chaiwallas Bottliwallas and Junglewallas vied with each other in making the visitors welcome.” (TCE 54). The Parsis collective consciousness and communal mentality is vividly described by Sidhwa through their friendship and hospitality. The Parsi families always encourage communal group prayers in their Parsi community hall and also in their Parsi Fire temples. It clearly exposes the unity among the tiny community. Sidhwa renders the Parsis’ hospitality by stating that though the guest is not so close to them, they treat them well. It can be known from the following lines:

They were wafted from home to home for breakfast, brunch, lunch, tea, drinks and dinner. The festivities ended with a gala farewell shindig in which the whole community participated…. Hospitality was accorded even to those Parsis who merely passed through the city. It did not matter if no one knew the travellers. As long as news spread, and it invariably did, that a Parsi was on a train, some family or other was sure
to meet him. Bearing gifts of food and drink, they helped pass the time for the duration of the stop. (TCE 11).

The Zoroastrians hold fire as their holy symbol and thus they are called as the Fire worshippers. Sidhwa showcases the religious aspects of the Zoroastrian community in many of her works. The Parsis believe that the fire symbolizes the divine light of their God, Ahura Mazda. Hence each Parsi prays in the direction of fire or light. And the important role played by the fire in the Zoroastrian religion is cited by Sidhwa in the novel, The Crow Eaters:

Fire, chosen by the Prophet as the outward symbol of his faith, is venerated. It represents the Divine Spark in every man, a spark of the Divine Light. Fire, which has its source in primordial light, symbolises not only His cosmic creation but also the spiritual nature of His Eternal Truth. Smoking, which is tantamount to defiling the holy symbol with spit, is strictly taboo – a sacrilegious sin. Theirs was a household in which candles were snuffed with a reverent pinch of the fingers....To blow upon fire is vile. Priests tending the temple fires cover their mouths with cloth masks, lest spittle pollute the Atash (sacred fire). (TCE 49-50).

Because of the Parsis’ belief in the holiness of the fire, smoking is considered as a cardinal sin in Zoroastrianism. The Parsis won’t smoke and it is exhibited by the novelist through the following incident from the novel, The Crow Eaters. Where Freddy’s mother-in-law Jerbanoo, catches a servant and lucidly offends him for his sin of smoking in the lines as “Jerbanoo toddled off
to the kitchen to fetch the boy, and she caught him smoking a biri. The room was acrid with tobacco smoke….Hauling him up by his ears Jerbanoo slapped him and yelled for Putli to come and witness the crime.” (TCE 49). This incident clearly reveals how the Zoroastrians believe fire as a pure holy symbol and hence they consider polluting the fire as a serious sin in their Zoroastrian faith.

The novelist depicts the details about the agyari, the Parsi Fire Temple, in her works. In the novel, An American Brat, Sidhwa describes the Fire Temple and the religious rituals performed in the temples. Through the protagonist Feroza’s way of prayer in the Fire Temple, Sidhwa conveys the spiritual side of the Zoroastrians. Sidhwa explains in detail the rituals and prayers of the Parsi Fire Temple, with Feroza’s visit to the agyari, in order to get the blessings of Ahura Mazda for her voyage to America. Sidhwa describes: “The atash – the consecrated fire in the agyari that is never permitted to go out – had been lovingly tended for eighty years by mobed (Zoroastrian Priest) Antia and his son, who was also a mobed.”(AAB 40).

The Zarathustrian ways of faith and their spiritual paces in their prayers is finely denoted by the novelist. The Parsi Fire Temples and their ways of prayer are rarely described by writers. Hence Sidhwa vividly portrays religion and their ancient rituals and beliefs in her works. She mentions the atash, the holy fire, which burns always uninterrupted in the Parsi Fire Temples. These facets are clearly depicted in the following passage in the novel, An American Brat:
The narrow side door of the agyari was open. Feroza covered her head with a scarf, daubed her eyes with water from a silver jar, and performed her kusti [sacred thread] in the lobby. As she unwound the sacred thread girdling her waist and retied the knots in the front and the back, she asked Ahura Mazda’s forgiveness for every ignoble thought, word and deed….Feroza took a few steps backwards and, holding her palms together, raised her eyes to the atash. The holy fire glowed serenely on its bed of pale ashes in a round tray on top of the fire altar. The altar was like a gigantic, long-stemmed silver eggcup with a turned out lip. (AAB 41).

The infrastructure of the Parsi Fire temple and the role of the priest are also exhibited by Sidhwa in the novel, Ice-Candy-Man. It is narrated by Sidhwa in the lines as “The main hall of the temple is already full of smoke. Two priests, sitting cross-legged and swaying slightly, face each other across a fire altar. They are robed in a swollen froth of starched white muslin. They wear cloth masks…” (ICM 32). The priest ties the white masks around their face in order to prevent their breath and spittle from contaminating the sacred fire. It illustrates their deep sense of spirituality towards the holy fire, which they do not even want to pollute its purity with their breath.

It is expressed by the novelist as “Their chanting voices rise and boom in fierce competition and the mask prevents specks of spittle from profaning the fire….They go through a ritual established a millennium ago. They stroke the fire with silver tongs and feed it with sandalwood and frankincense.” (ICM 33). The Zarathustrian prayers and their spiritual life is accurately exemplified
by Sidhwa in her another novel, *The Crow Eaters*. She uncovered some spiritual elements in the Zoroastrian faith. She describes *kusti* [sacred thread worn by the Zoroastrians] and *sudra* [Zoroastrian religious undergarment] which symbolise their spirituality and their faith. And these things are exposed by Sidhwa in the following passage from the novel, *The Crow Eaters*, where Billy offered his prayer:

Billy stood up and solemnly turning to face the bathroom mirror began to mumble his prayers. He dexterously undid the knots of the sacred thread and held the unraveled *kusti* in both hands. Billy did not understand a word of the ancient Avesta text, except the bit ‘Shikasta shikasta, sehtan’ which roughly translated means, ‘I shall conquer evil.’... Once again he wound the *kusti* around his waist, tying it in a reef knot at the front and back. Each twist of the knot was meant to remind him that God is One Eternal Being, that the Mazdayasni Faith is the true faith, that Zarathustra is the true Prophet of God and that he should obey the three commandments: *good thoughts, good words and good deeds*. (*TCE* 139).

In the above cited passage, Sidhwa gives a detailed description about the prayer rituals of the Zoroastrian community. The novelist mentions the sacred thread, *kusti*, woven from seventy-two strands of wool. It is considered as one of the holy symbols in their Parsi faith and thus it should be worn around the waist of every Zoroastrian. The *kusti* should be girded around the waist three times over the *sudra*. Each Parsi should also wear the Zoroastrian religious undergarment, *sudra*, made of pure white muslin.
It must be worn like a slip next to the skin. The *sudra* has a small pocket in V shape, which is religiously believed as the repository of good deeds. Sidhwa also narrates the *navjote* ceremony (Initiation ceremony into the Zoroastrian faith), where the Parsi children are legally welcomed into the Zarathustrian faith. In the *navjote* ceremony, the child should wear the *sudra* initially along with the *kusti* to mark its Zoroastrian identity. The Parsi children who grow up along with these *kusti* and *sudra* from their *navjote*, where taught to follow their Zoroastrian religious faith from the very young age. Sidhwa minutely explains the religious beliefs of the Parsis in the lines as “Each twist of the knot was meant to remind him that God is one Eternal Being…” (*TCE* 139).

Their religious followings are also evidently narrated as “…he should obey the three commandments: good thoughts, good words and good deeds.” (*TCE* 139). The three knots in the *kusti* always remind them of their three religious directives. And the Zoroastrians also follow the principle of duality in their religion. Their duality comprises their God, Ahura Mazda and his antithesis, *Ahriman* [the deceitful]. They consider *Ahriman* as the evil spirit who seduces the human mind with sick thoughts. In order to get rid of this evil spirit every Zoroastrian should follow the path of *Asha* (path of righteousness) with his pure mind and spiritual dogmas.

Sidhwa exemplifies Parsis’ sense of charity, important aspects of the Zoroastrians. Generally the Parsis as a rich community spend a lot on charity. And this side is illustrated by Sidhwa through Freddy’s words from *The Crow Eaters* as “And once you have the means, there is no end to the good you can do. I denoted towards the construction of an orphanage and a hospital. I
installed a water pump with a stone plaque dedicating it to my friend, Mr. Charles P. Allen.” (TCE 10).

They do not help people for mere publicity but they view charity as a holy thing, which has been prophesied by their Prophet Zarathustra. Hence they devoted their wealth mostly for the welfare of the poor by constructing schools and hospitals and orphanages. Sidhwa narrates: “the moment a Parsi strikes it rich he devotes a big portion of his energies to charity. He builds schools, hospitals and orphanages; provides housing, scholarships…” (TCE 21).

The Parsis are not only involved in charity during their lifetime but they also follow charity even at their death. In the Zoroastrian faith, the corpse of a Parsi should be placed in a stone dakhma [tower shaped graveyard], which is open to the sky at the roof. The birds would prey on the corpse and it is believed in the Zarathustrian faith that, the departed soul would enter into the food chain to complete its life cycle. The Zoroastrians call this way of disposal as Dakhma-nashini.

And the open-roofed, tower shaped grave was called as the ‘Tower of silence’. It is mentioned by Sidhwa in the novel, Ice-Candy-Man, when the protagonist small girl Lenny asked her Godmother about the Tower of Silence: “What is the Tower of silence? I ask…We call it Dungarwadi [graveyard]: not Tower of Silence. The English have given it that funny name. . . Actually it is quite a simple structure: just a big round wall without any roof,’ says Godmother.” (ICM 113). And she also explains the unique aim of the tower of
silence as “‘The dead body is put inside the Dungarwadi,’...the vultures pick it clean and the sun dries out the bones.’” (ICM 113).

Sidhwa details the infrastructure of the Tower of silence in the novel, *The Crow Eaters*. She exhibits the Zoroastrian beliefs in the afterbirth. They consider that the human soul entering into the cycle of the afterbirth through its entry into the food chain of the animals. It is denoted by Sidhwa in the following passage as follows:

Parsis are a tiny community who leave their dead in open-roofed enclosures atop hills – to be devoured by vultures. The British romanticized this bizarre graveyard with the title ‘Tower of Silence.’...the marble floor slopes towards the centre where there is a deep hollow. This receives the bones and blood. Underground ducts from the hollow lead to four of lime, charcoal and sulphur and provide an excellent filter....The outer rim of the floor is made up of enough marble slabs to accommodate fifty male bodies, then comes accommodation for fifty females, and the innermost space, around the hollow, is for children. It takes the birds only minutes to strip the body of all flesh. (*TCE* 45).

In the novel, *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sidhwa explains the reason for the Parsis’ unusual way of disposal of the corpses. It is narrated by the novelist in the following words of Godmother to Lenny as “Mind you... It’s only the body that’s dead. Instead of polluting the earth by burying it, or wasting fuel by burning it, we feed God’s creatures.” (ICM 114). It clearly revealed the
Zoroastrian people’s collective consciousness that they do not want to pollute the sacred earth with their remains. It is because they consider the earth as one of the God’s creations, which should not be kept in purity without any contamination.

This spiritual attitude of the Parsis is represented by Jerbanoo in the novel, *The Crow Eaters*, when she feared about the absence of the Tower of silence in Lahore, in the lines as “When they first came to Lahore, Jerbanoo had been mildly troubled by the discovery that there was no Tower of Silence in the city…What would happen to her remains when she died?” (*TCE* 46). Being a Parsi, she does not want to get buried in the earth and pollute the holiness of the earth. And her grief is expressed by Sidhwa in the following lines as “she absolutely refused to be shoved beneath mounds of maggot-ridden earth… She would not permit the sacred earth to be defiled by her remains…” (*TCE* 46).

Sidhwa represents the deep faith of the Zoroastrians through Jerbanoo’s strong opposition to pollute the holy earth with her remains after her death. Sidhwa not only exemplifies the deep faith of the Zoroastrians in their religious belief but also their charity at death, which they consider as one of their foremost duties, which has to be filled to complete the meaning of their birth. It is revealed through the words of Jerbanoo as “It was his final act of charity! Every Parsi is committed to feeding his last remains to the vultures’…“Our Zarathusti faith is based on charity.” (*TCE* 47). Sidhwa posthumously mentions the teachings of the prophet Zarathustra, about the duty of the Parsis in giving charity throughout their life. Hence the charity at their death is considered as the final act of charity in their lifetime.
Their obligation in spirituality and the strong faith in their Zarathusti faith is recited by Sidhwa in her another novel, *Ice-Candy-Man*. Sidhwa uncovers the sincerity and loyalty of the Parsis towards their Prophet’s words, when Lenny’s Godmother Rodabai talked about the Parsi charity towards her servant, who wants to get buried instead of being placed in the Tower of Silence. Sidhwa delivers the sincerity of the Parsis through Godmother’s words as follows:

‘I don’t know what you have against the poor vultures…ashamed to call myself a Zoroastrian if I were you’…. Haven’t you heard of Parsee charity? Only last month Sir Eduljee Adenwalla had his leg amputated in Bombay. Sick as he was he sat in a wheelchair all through the ceremonies and had his leg deposited in the Dungarwadi! And what do you think happens when Parsee diabetics’ toes are cut off? Do you think they discard them in the waste-basket and deprive the vultures?’ *(ICM 115)*.

From the above mentioned lines, Sidhwa vividly reciprocates the Parsi psyche, where charity is believed to be a sacred thing in their life and also even in their death. The question of Godmother, “And what do you think happens when Parsee diabetics’ toes are cut off? *(ICM 115)* exposed the tiny community’s honesty in charity to the world. Sidhwa highlights the unique nature of the Zoroastrian community in the lines as “…Here’s an architectural wonder created exclusively by the charitable Parsees to feed God’s creatures…” *(ICM 114)*.
Sidhwa reproduces the sense of humour among the Zoroastrians through the portrayal of the Parsi families in her works. The author highlights the humour in the Parsi families in the novel *The Crow Eaters*, through the conversation between Freddy and his mother-in-law Jerbanoo. During their picnic, Jerbanoo commented on the absence of the Tower of Silence in Lahore in the lines as “Clucking her tongue sympathetically, Jerbanoo commented on their rather lean and mangy appearance….‘What a pity. What a shame. These poor birds are permitted to starve despite all the Parsis we have in Lahore.’” (*TCE* 50).

Sidhwa expresses the sense of humour of the Parsis, through Freddy’s ironic words, “Vultures, vultures everywhere and not a body to share!” which is a constant joy in any Parsi household. She also highlights the ironic citation of Freddy’s temper in order to mock Jerbanoo with another following incident, where Jerbanoo talks about her husband’s death and his sense of charity. Freddy interpreted with his ironic tone in the following passage as:

‘I remember the time of your dear husband’s death. My maternal aunt died a month later and I went to Sanjan for her rites. Those vultures were so fat they could barely fly. One of the pall-bearers told me that your beloved Jehangirjee Chinimini’s right leg was still sticking out heavenward – uneaten a month after he was placed in the Tower! After all there’s a limit to how much those overfed birds can eat!’ (*TCE* 47).
The religious tolerance of the Zoroastrians is admirably exhibited by Sidhwa in the novel, *The Crow Eaters*. Sidhwa describes about Freddy’s study room as “…on a shelf above the prayer table, snug between the Bible and the Bhagvad Gita… Other books on the shelf were a translation of the Holy Quran…” (*TCE* 52). This description vividly exposes Freddy’s respect for all faiths and his broad sense in religious tolerance. Through Freddy, Sidhwa represents the broad minds of the Zoroastrian people, who give respect and admiration for all religions apart from communal consciousness.

It is expressed by the author in the following lines as “…and Avesta [the holy book of the Parsis]… and books representing the Sikh, Jain and Buddhist faiths.” (*TCE* 52). Sidhwa narrates the mindset of the Parsis, who draw knowledge from other religious faiths, at the same time they maintain the dignity of their own Zoroastrian faith. Sidhwa writes: “Beneath the shelf, on the prayer table, burnt the holy lamp with a likeness of the prophet Zarathustra stamped on its glass shade.” (*TCE* 52).

The Parsis’ religious forbearance dates right from their ancient history in the Persian land and it is evident with the books written on Zoroastrianism. It is reflected in the novel, when Sidhwa recounts about the Persian king’s broad mindset in following other religious groups in their land, in the passage as follows:

The table once again echoed his reverence for all faiths; a tradition dating back 2,500 years to the Persian kings, Darius and Cyrus the Great, who not only encouraged religious tolerance, but having freed the Jews held captive by the
Babylonians, rebuilt their Temple. The Torah, written at this time, testifies to the influence of Zoroastrianism on Judaism,…’the Gospel of Zarathustra, the Gathas covered all the ground from the Rig-Veda to the Bhagwad-Gita, a period extending over 1,500 years at least, in the short span of a single generation. . .and it is little wonder that Faredoon Junglewalla’s yearning heart discovered an affinity with all religious thought. (TCE 52).

Freddy’s attitudes reflect his ancestors in the sense of religious lenience and respect for other religions in the society, with the above mentioned passage. And it is aptly reproduced by Sidhwa as “A picture of the Virgin Mary was framed with an inset of the four-armed, jet-haired Laxmi. Buddha sat serenely between a sinuous statue of Sita,…and an upright cross supporting the crucified Christ. Photographs of Indian saints crowded the table.” (TCE 52).

The death rituals of the Zoroastrians are rendered by Sidhwa with the death of Freddy’s son Soli in the novel, The Crow Eaters. She showcases the funeral rites followed by the Parsis as “The body was bathed and dressed in old garments of white cotton. Freddy wrapped the kusti around his son’s waist reciting prayers.” (TCE 176). It exemplifies the Zoroastrians’ belief in their religious holy symbols, when they give importance to the scared thread, kusti.

The sacred thread plays a prominent role in the life of the Parsis right from their navjote ceremony till their funeral. And she also mentions the optional custom of the Zoroastrians, if there is no Tower of Silence in their residing place. In this case, the Parsis bury their remains after finishing the
death rituals in the Fire Temple. And it is expressed by the novelist in the lines as “Soli was laid on two stone slabs and a corpse-bearer drew three circles round it with a sharp nail. No one could enter the circle, except the corpse-bearer.” (TCE 176).

In the Zarathustrian faith, it is believed that the dog of the priest would go near the corpse and would detect the evil spirits around the corpse. And it would also make the corpse to get alive after the subjugation of the evil spirits. Here Sidhwa uncovers some blind religious beliefs of the Zoroastrians, which can never become a reality. As Sidhwa denotes:

The priest’s dog, adopted by him because of the two eye-like spots above his eyes, was brought into the room. It is believed that his four eyes can ward off evil spirits and can detect the faintest hint of life; a precious faculty in premedical days when corpses were inclined to recover and sit up….The fire-altar was brought into the room and placed on a white cloth on the floor. Sitting cross-legged before it, the priest began to recite from the Avestan scriptures. He chanted through the night and kept the fire alight and the room fragrant with sticks of sandalwood and frankincense. (TCE 177).

The Zarathustrian ways of the final rites and prayers in a Parsi household are clearly recited by Sidhwa with the tragic incident of Soli’s death. It is explicable in the following lines as “…the pall-bearers came into the room carrying an iron bier. They placed it beside the body and recited a short prayer: ‘We do this according to the dictates of Ahura Mazda…” (TCE
The Zarathustrian faith which mainly stands for purity symbolises it with the Parsis’ use of the white cotton garments in their funeral rituals. Sidhwa depicts it as “They were swatched in white garments. Even their hands were gloved in white cloth tied at the wrists.” (TCE 178).

The unity and strength of the Parsi bonding is once again represented by Sidhwa with the following incident in the funeral of soli. Apart from his relatives, his friends took the role of the pall-bearers in the funeral ceremony. And it is emphasized through Freddy’s wife Putli’s emotions, when she recognized the emotional support of their friends: “The other two men wore Mr. Chaiwalla’s son Cyrus and Mr. Bankwalla. Immediately she was touched and overwhelmed with gratitude.” (TCE 178). Their volunteered efforts for their miniature community are accentuated in the lines that “The number of Parsis was too small to warrant professional pall-bearers and these men had volunteered for the task.” (TCE 178).

Freddy’s broad mind in keeping friendship with all religious people and his adaptability with all of them is also revealed in this novel. It clearly shows the Parsis’s friendly nature with other religious people in the society. Sidhwa mentions: “The compound between the priest’s quarters and the stone building of the fire Temple filled up with non-Parsis. Indian-Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus…waited patiently to see the body when it emerged from its mysterious rites.” (TCE 178). The mourners in the compound, who waited so patiently, were eager to console their friend in his misery. It is narrated by the novelist in the following passage as follows:
Freddy saw the surge of faces through an unnatural vision....These were the faces of friends; of people he had helped, of people who had aided him....there were princes and beggars....They were familiar faces; all of them, at this moment, particularly dear....Once the scared rites are performed over the body people of other faiths are not permitted to look upon it. Someone said, ‘Faredoon, this is sacrilegious! Pull yourself together!’ And Freddy, fighting desperately to keep his voice steady, said, ‘they had stood all this while to see my son: let them. What does it matter if they are no Parsis? They are my brothers; and if I can look upon my son’s face, so can they!’ The bier moved slowly through the hushed, bowed heads lining the street. (TCE 179).

In the above quoted segment, it is clear that, according to the Zarathustrian religious norms, “Once the sacred rites are performed over the body, people of other faiths are not permitted to look upon it.” (TCE 179).

But the novelist weaves the broad sense of a human being through Freddy’s following words, where humanity dominates community, in the lines as “‘They stood all this while to see my son: let them. What does it matter if they are no Parsis? They are my brothers; and if I can look upon my son’s face, so can they!’” (TCE 179). These words of harmony underscore Freddy’s brotherhood with all the religious people in the society. And the Zoroastrians’ final act of charity is also stated by Sidhwa as “The ceremony for the welfare of the departed soul went on for four days and nights. At the end of this
Freddy made the customary proclamation of charity. His family would construct a school in Karachi.” (TCE 180).

Sidhwa not only depicts the death rituals of the Zoroastrian religion but she also describes the marriage rituals of the Parsis in her works. The Zoroastrian marriage ceremonies and rites followed during their wedding are gracefully replicated by the novelist with Billy’s marriage in the novel, *The Crow Eaters*. Sidhwa mentions about the ‘token money’ ceremony, which is an initiation ceremony during the Zoroastrian wedding. During the ceremony the bride and the bridegroom would get rich gifts from their In-laws family. And it is profoundly reflected by Sidhwa in the passage as follows:

He was made to stand on an a small wooden platform which was prettily decorated with patterns of fish drawn in lime. Rodabai anointed his forehead with vermilion, touched vermilion to the toes of his shoes, and pressed rice on his forehead. The ceremony was restricted to women, except for Billy. The sisters and a collection of aunts and cousins sang traditional ditties while Rodabai garlanded Billy. She gave him a little envelope containing the ‘token money’. She gave him a heavy gold watch on a chain and told him to step off – right leg first....then it was Tanya’s turn to mount the platform and Putli performed the rites. She presented the girl with twenty-one Queen Victoria sovereigns, and everyone sang. (TCE 210).

Sidhwa also features the *Mada-sara* (planting mango saplings) ceremony, which is also a part of the Zoroastrian wedding. According to the
Zarathustrian faith, the mango saplings planted by the Parsi couples during the ceremony, would symbolize their fertility in their life in a positive light. And it is referred by Sidhwa in as “After the prospective bride and groom stepped off and planted the mango sapling that was to guarantee their fertility, the sisters hopped up to be garlanded, stained with vermilion and presented with their set of clothes and thin strings of gold.” (TCE 218). The Parsi wedding is as outstanding as a festival and it is revealed by the novelist through Billy’s wedding in the novel, The Crow Eaters. It is rendered by Sidhwa as “It was a memorable wedding. Years after people still talked about it. (TCE 224).

Freddy’s grand wedding arrangements and the rich foods served in the wedding convey the Parsis’s magnificent wedding style. These features of the grand wedding are described by Sidhwa: “Hedges had been leveled in the compound of the Taj Mahal Hotel to clear parking space for carriages…Flowers were commissioned from Bangalore and Hyderabad, cheeses from Surat, and Caviar from the Persian Gulf.” (TCE 224). The lines, “Two hundred Parsi families living in a charitable housing scheme…were each given a sack of flour, a ten-pound canister of rarefied butter, lentils and a box of Indian sweets” (TCE 224) reveal the sense of charity among the Zoroastrians during their weddings.

Sidhwa details the account of the marriage rituals of the Zarathustrian faith in a majestic way in this novel. Their marriage customs involve the couple’s parents as the witnesses of the marriage. Sidhwa exposes the Zoroastrian wedding, which has both the hybrid variety of the Hindu and the Muslim faiths. The use of rice, coconuts and vermilion in the auspicious wedding rituals represent the Hindu faith. And the way of agreement
committed by the couples is a mark of the Muslim faith. These rites and rituals of the Parsi wedding are recited by the novelist in the passage as follows:

Two priests stood before them chanting and throwing rice, coconut silvers, and rose petals at them. Faredoon and Putli stood behind Billy and sir and Lady Easymoney behind Tanya, as witnesses….The officiating priest eventually recited,’ . . . Say whether you have agreed to take this maiden named Tanya in marriage to this bridegroom in accordance with the rites and customs of the Mazda worshippers,… ‘We have,’ answered Freddy and Putli…. ‘And have you and your family with pure mind and truthful thoughts, words, and deeds,... agreed to give forever and aye, this bride in marriage to Behram? The priest asked the bride’s witnesses…. ‘We have agreed,’ they replied…. Then the priest asked, ‘Have you desired to enter into this contract with pure mind and until death do ye part?’ … ‘I have so desired,’ answered Billy and Tanya in unison. (TCE 223-224).

In the novel, The Crow Eaters, Sidhwa describes the characteristics of the Parsi family. If a Parsi youth has a desire for marriage, he can indicate his desire to his parents by dropping salt into the drinking water in their household. Sidhwa depicts this behaviour of the Parsi household through Freddy’s desire for marriage in his young age. It is narrated by Sidhwa through Freddy’s words as “I thought, ‘Here is my chance!’ And every morning, for three days, I dropped a fistful of salt into the drinking water.” (TCE 111).
This incident is recited by Sidhwa in the following lines as “Ahura Mazda is better pleased with a married man than with an unmarried man – and one evening I brought home a ten pound sack of salt...and continued pouring, until the family, fed up with drinking brackish water, finally gave in.” (TCE 112). But Freddy’s family, which runs it’s living only out of his salary, is not able to answer his desire for marriage. Finally his elder sister responds to his wish and it is brought out recited by Sidhwa with a sense of humour in the lines as follows:

“Fredee, I think I detected a trace of salt in the water this morning!” she said, as coy and insinuating as a kitten.

‘A trace of salt! My word! They had swallowed ten pounds of salt in twenty days! It oozed from their bodies. I could see the chalky moustache on her upper lip where her sweat had dried. Her children ran around with salt glistening on their sickly faces. And she had detected a trace of salt only that morning! (TCE 112).

Though the Parsis are humorous in nature, they are very much serious in mixed marriages. Zoroastrianism will not allow interfaith marriage and even conversion into their faith. And this fact is evidently conveyed by Sidhwa with the following incident where Freddy’s youngest son Yazdi faces opposition in his family, when he wishes to marry a non-Parsi. It is described by Sidhwa when Yazdi reveals his wish to his father as “She’s not Parsi. She is an Anglo-Indian.” (TCE 123).
Naturally Freddy, who has a broad mind, initially gets interested with his son’s love, but cannot stand it anymore after the revelation that his son loves a non-Parsi girl outside his Parsi religion. And his anger reaches the peak in the lines, “‘you have the gall to tell me you want to marry an Anglo-Indian? Get out of my sight. Get out!’” (TCE 123) This clearly exhibits the collective consciousness of the Zoroastrian parents, who cannot accept mixed marriages in their faith.

The novelist portrays the protagonist Freddy as a broad-minded man with the sense of religious tolerance and with friendly adaptability with people of other religion. But she also realistically uncovers the Parsi prejudice through the following conversation between Freddy and his son Yazdi as follows:

‘She is so unhappy, father. I’ve got to marry her. I promised . . . and I love her,’ Yazdi cried desperately.

‘You love her? No my child; you want to marry her because you pity her. But you cannot marry all those you pity. I pity the mangy dogs on our street, the beggars, the noseless leper who comes every Friday – do you expect me to marry them? Your heart is too soft. You cannot expect to marry the dogs you pity!’

‘She isn’t a dog.’

‘No, but a mongrel . . . a mixed-breed mongrel.’ (TCE 128).
The above conversation aptly depicts the communal prejudice of the Zoroastrians, where Freddy describes Yazdi’s Anglo-Indian lover as a ‘Mixed-breed mongrel’.

Yazdi who cannot stand the rude comment of his father, pours his anger towards Freddy as “What does it matter if she is not Parsi? What does it matter who her parents are . . . She is a human being,…Better than any Parsi I’ve met.” (TCE 128).

Yazdi’s logical questions to his father stand for the voices of the people in the world towards the Zoroastrians. Sidhwa portrays the Parsi psyche which cannot resist any longer the interfaith marriage because of their mere religious beliefs. Though they are not able to stand on mixed marriages, they have a good sense of adaptability with other religious people. Sidhwa exposes the bitter reality of the Parsi youngsters in the society who cannot convince their parents in the interfaith marriages.

It is clearly echoed through the characterization of Yazdi in the novel, The Crow Eaters. Being in true love, he is utterly helpless because of his father’s blind religious preconception. Sidhwa writes: “He had somehow imagined him, of all people to be above these antiquated prejudice.” (TCE 129) It accentuates his heartbreak for the unexpected communal prejudice from his father. Just because of Freddy’s friendliness and adaptability towards other people of different religions, Yazdi cannot take up his father’s Parsi consciousness against his wish. The heartbreak of Yazdi because of the crucial role played by the communal indifference in his love is poetically expressed by him in the following poetic lines as follows:

The eyes in your eye touch me deep down somewhere.
They require me most casually
To inquire into desire
While the world holds us apart . . .
They demand me
Through the indolent glint of half-closed fire
To sink deeper in the stupor of unfulfilled love.
They urge me to
Give from a depth in myself . . .

What am I to do? (TCE 155).

The strict stubborn behaviour of the Parsis in opposing the interfaith marriage is vividly depicted by the novelist through the following explanation of Freddy to his son. The lines, “...there is one thing I would like to explain to you. Now, this is not something I alone believe. It is want our ancestors professed; and our race will go on believing till the end of time.” (TCE 128) emphasize the inherited Parsi consciousness of the Zoroastrians from generations.

They want to follow the path of their ancestors in the strong belief that mixed marriages would pollute the holiness of their religion. And it is aptly exhibited by Sidhwa through Freddy’s words as “I believe in some kind of a tiny spark that is carried from parent to child, on through generations...a kind of inherited memory...to the times of Zarathustra, the Magi, the Mazdians.” (TCE 128). The Zoroastrians’ believe that through the
interfaith marriages, they would do harm to the purity of their sacred strains of their Zarathustrian community and consider it as a cardinal sin.

It is revealed by Sidhwa as “But what happens if you marry outside our kind? The spark so delicately nurtured, so subtly balanced, meets something totally alien and unmatched. Its precise balance is scrambled.” (TCE 129). And Freddy finally conveys his objection to Yazdi’s wish for the mixed marriage in the lines as “In the case of the Anglo-Indian girl the spark is already mutated….What kind of a heritage are you condemning your children to? They might look beautiful but they will be shells…misfits for generations to come.” (TCE 129).

The novelist practically showcases the communal dominance in the Zoroastrian families where the humanity left unseen by smashing the true hearts, only because of their mere religious beliefs. Sidhwa sympathetically weaves the injustice laid for Yazdi by the community indifference, in the poetic lines as follows:

What makes me seek
And want to know
Your nearness?
Why does the uncertain void in me
Wish to perceive
Your form?
Who are you?
Remove the veil.

An undecided deep am I

And thirst is a fever.

Thankless of the blessings of Ahura am I

For I seek the impossible . . .

How can I fight the maniac force of society?

Of my father? (TCE 156).

Sidhwa also underscores this Parsi opposition for the interfaith marriages in her another novel, *An American Brat*. Like Yazdi in, *The Crow Eaters*, Feroza too faces objection from her Zoroastrians family, because of her wish to marry a Jewish boyfriend. In Feroza's case, her mother Zareen tries to convince her daughter to change her wish to marry a non-Parsi. Through Zareen’s words, Sidhwa uncovers some bitter doctrines imposed by the Zoroastrian religion against mixed marriages. And it is reflected in Zareen’s words of threat towards Feroza as “They won’t allow you into any of our places of worship, agyari or Atash Behram.” (AAB 298).

The norms of the Zoroastrians not only disallow the Parsis, who indulge in mixed marriages, enter into their holy places but they also restrict the person even from the death rituals in their Parsi family even for their own parents’ death. And these cruel norms are lucidly exposed by the novelist as “your poor grandmother actually fainted! She told me to beg you on my knees
not to marry this boy…you won’t be permitted to attend her funeral rites – or mine or your father’s!” (AAB 278).

These norms of banishment from the religion make the Zoroastrian parents to fear for their children’s future in the community. It is depicted through Zareen’s inner struggle within her between her community’s norms and daughter’s happiness. Even though she likes Feroza’s boyfriend David, she is not able to allow mixed marriages because of Feroza’s risky future under the Parsi community’s restrictions. It is expressed by Sidhwa as “…his wry sense of humor that had so touched Zareen…At such moments, Zareen wished David was a Parsee—or that the Zoroastrians would permit selective conversion to their faith.” (AAB 287).

Zareen’s sense of disappointment and grief for the love of Feroza and David get exposed as “How could a religion whose Prophet urged his followers to spread the Truth of his message in the holy Gathas—the songs of Zarathustra—prohibit conversion and throw her daughter out of the faith? (AAB 287). Zareen’s sense of disappointment for the ban of conversion into the Zarathustrian faith is effectively featured by Sidhwa in the novel. By this way, Sidhwa conveys the truth behind the all-time decrease in the Parsi population in the society. It is also recorded by Sidhwa through the words of Zareen as “Bombay had sixty thousand Parsees—fifty percent of the total world population of her community.” (AAB 287).

Sidhwa reproduces the Zoroastrians strong opposition for mixed marriages through many firm bans and punishments in the novel. as Sidhwa denotes: “On the other flyer, the High Priest, Dausturjee Rattan, had declared
that a girl who married outside her faith was an adulterers and her children illegitimate.” (AAB 305). The novelist dynamically illustrates the cruel banishments of the Zoroastrian religion in case of interfaith marriages, in the following lines from a notice received by Zareen which is highlighted in frightening capitals as:

NOTICE.

PLEASE NOTE THAT ACCORDING TO THE PARSEE, ZOROASTRIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, PERCEPITS, TENETS, DOCTRINES, HOLY SCRIPTURES, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS, NON-ZOROASTRIAN, HE OR SHE IS DEEMED TO HAVE RENOUNCED THE FAITH AND CEASES TO BE A PERSEE-ZOROASTRIAN. THE LAWS OF PURITY OF THE ZOROASTRIAN PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL GENES IS CONSIDERED A CARDINAL CRIME AGAINST NATURE. HENCE, HE OR SHE DOES NOT HAVE ANY COMMUNAL OR RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OR PRIVILEGES. (AAB 305).

Sidhwa not only focuses the blunders and bitter norms of the Zoroastrians but she also covers the Parsi culture like their dressing styles and their domestic lifestyles. Sidhwa illustrates the Parsi identity through the dressing sense of the Zoroastrians: “The Parsi women whom they ogled tied their heavy silk saris differently, with a triangular piece in front displaying broad, exquisitely embroidered borders.” (TCE 56). Sidhwa also mentions the traditional dressing code for men in the Zoroastrian community: “…the men
wore crisp pyjamas flowing white coats fastened with neat little bows, and flat turbans. They looked quite distinctive.” (TCE 56).

Sidhwa highlights the restrictions made for the Parsi women through Freddy’s family, in their dressing with the mathabanas (white kerchiefs worn around the head) in order to symbolize their modesty, in the lines as “…his wife and mother-in-law never appeared in public without mathabanas – white kerchiefs wound around the hair to fit like skull caps.” (TCE 23).

Sidhwa also features the Parsis’s traditional religious objects along with the women’s traditional way of dressing: “The holy thread circling their waist was austerely displayed and sacred undergarments, worn beneath short blouses, modestly aproned their sari-wrapped hips.” (TCE 23). Sidhwa denotes: “Stern-visaged, straight-backed, the two women faced the world with such moral temerity that Hindu, Muslim or Christian, all had profound respect for the man and his family. (TCE 23)

The sincerity of the Parsi women in their Zoroastrian household is also emphasized by the novelist through Freddy’s wife Putli. Though the Parsis are generally rich, the Parsi women never allow themselves idle instead they play the role of dutiful wives and caring mothers in their home. It is rendered by Sidhwa with Putli’s dutifulness in her household, in the following passage as follows:

She had an entire family of servants working for her…but she insisted on doing all the little things for her husband and her sons herself. She rose at the crack of dawn and dutifully filled the house with song. She sang with a determined cheerfulness,
inviting the spirits of prosperity and good health to her household. Then she set about adorning the landings with parents of fish, and entrance doors with garlands of fresh flowers – omens of good fortune….Loath to see the servants idle, she kept them busy. The house was thoroughly scoured every day….Putli industriously supervised all the work,…(TCE 124).

In the above cited passage, Sidhwa describes Putli as a diligent housewife, who has admirable passion for her family. And she also plays the role of a caring mother, who makes kusti on her own for her children. It is narrated by Sidhwa as “spare moments were devoted to making kustis. She spun the white lambswool into seventy-two fine strands and wove them into a long thin hollow tape….Her finely made kustis were in great demand,…” (TCE 124). Sidhwa also portrays express her as a proud mother who received happiness with her children’s welfare: “Her proudest moments came when her children were formally initiated into the Zarathusti faith at their Navjote ceremonies….invested with the outward symbols of the faith…they were girded to serve the Lord of Life and Wisdom.” (TCE 124)

Sidhwa exposes the Parsi men’s domination over their womenfolk in their family through some male characters from the novel, The Crow Eaters. The lines, “Freddy gently governed and completely controlled his wife…” (TCE 13) straightforwardly exemplifies the dominating nature of Freddy towards his wife in their family. The novelist mostly underlined the aspect of most of the Parsi families depicted in her works as, men dominating their wives in decision making in their household.
Sidhwa conveys: “If she did or wanted to do something that he considered intolerable and disastrous, he would take a stern and unshakable stand.” (TCE 13). Sidhwa also sketches the Parsi families where men always have their hand higher in controlling their womenfolk. This is appropriately reflected by Sidhwa through Billy’s attitude towards his wife Tanya. Billy rules his household with tyranny and controls his wife a step ahead when compared to his father, and it is demonstrated by Sidhwa with the following list of tyrannical commands ordered by Billy in his family:

Thou shalt not spend money!

Thou shalt not waste.

Thou shalt give me a minutely detailed account of expenses.

Thou shalt bring up thy children to obey and to love me more than they do you.

Thou shalt never require anything.

Thou and thy children shall not disturb me.

Thou shalt switch off all lights and fans. (TCE 278).

With her works Sidhwa features not only the lifestyle of the Zoroastrians but also about the religious tenets and virtues of their religion. She mentions about the Gathas divine songs, which is a part of the Zoroastrian holy book, Avesta. It is considered to have been compiled by the Prophet Zarathustra himself and the verses have been composed in the metrical forms of ancient Indo-Iranian religious poetry. The Gathas have been written in
Gathic language, which belongs to the old Indo-Iranian group of languages, and it also otherwise called as the Old-Avestan language.

The book comprises about 6000 words with 1300 lines in 238 verses and collected in 17 chapters. The chapters are called as Haiti and the 17 chapters of the Gathas are incorporated into a long prayer and recited at the Parsi ceremonies. The five major sections of the Gathas are as follows: Ahunavaiti, Ushtavaiti, Spenta Mainyu, Vohu Khshathra and Vahishto Ishti. The verses of the Gathas are addressed to their supreme Divinity, Ahura Mazda and it has been framed as dialogues between the Prophet and God. Through the divine songs in the holy book, Zarathustra exhorts his readers to follow the path of Asha [path of righteousness] which is directed by their God Ahura Mazda.

In the Gathas the prophet preached that each human possesses the quality of divine creation which is called as the Vohu-Mana [Good mind]. And the good mind enables the human beings to grasp the path of Asha, which stands for the ideal truth and righteousness. It is emphasized by the Prophet through the divine songs that, the individual who travels in the path of Asha, reaches the state of well-being and spiritual integrity which is considered as the complete perfection in the earthly state of life. The divine songs often repeat the religious trilogy of Zoroastrianism which is as follows: Good thoughts, Good words and Good Deeds.

The Zarathustrian theology also encompasses the following six Amesha Spentas which are the six abstract concepts: AshaVahishta [The Highest Truth], Vohu-Mana [The Good-Mind], Spenta Armaiti [The Holy
Attitude], *Khshathra Vairya* [The Ideal Dominion], *Haurvatat* [The State of complete Well-being] and *Ameretat* [The State of Immortal Bliss]. Sidhwa has cited about the *Gathas* of the Zoroastrians in many of works. In *The Crow Eaters*, she illustrates about the knowledge of the Parsis from the teachings of Zarathustra in the *Gathas* as “Hinted at in the Gathas Songs of Zarathustra, the knowledge is now lost to the Parsis. Legend says it was withdrawn when unscrupulous elements degraded the knowledge to sorcery.” (*TCE* 159). The following divine verses from the *Gathas* stress the spiritual path of ideal truth and righteousness, which a Zoroastrian should follow in his life:

Clear is this all, to the man of wisdom,
as to one who thinks with care:
He who upholds Truth with all the might of his power,
He who upholds Truth the utmost in his word and deed,
He, indeed, is Thy most valued helper, O Mazda Ahura!

(*Yasna* 31-22)