Chapter II
The Parsi Ethos

Bapsi Sidhwa is proud of her Zoroastrian faith as Zoroastrianism is based on the central tenet of prophet Zoroaster’s teaching. The foundation of the Zoroastrian ethical system is humata (good thoughts), hukhta (good words) and hvarshta (good deeds). All the social, cultural, economic, political, religious and ritualistic attitudes centrally emanate from this basic tenet of Zoroastrianism. At the social level, Parsi life is characterized by humanism and universal brotherhood. Brotherhood of man is a cardinal doctrine of prophet Zoroaster’s message. The true Parsis are always tolerant about the faiths and beliefs of others. They mix freely with members of other faiths, sympathise with them in their sorrows and afflictions and work to alleviate their misery. Zoroastrianism attaches great importance to righteousness and honesty in connection with work and in the economic sphere. One of the notable features of Zoroastrian life is that there is no usury in Parsi life. Zoroastrianism always lays emphasis on charity. The tendency to be loyal to the state gives Parsism the rank of a state religion. Loyalty is a self-evident perpect for the Parsis. These certain good principles of Zoroastrianism continue to offer sustenance and moral strength to the Parsis.

Zoroastrianism is one of the earliest religions and its origin goes back to 2000 BC. The Zoroastrians lived in the ancient Persia now called Iran. After the conquest of their country by the Muslim Arabs, they fled to India as religious refugees. They first landed in Diu in Kathiawar in AD 766, and later moved to Sanjan on the Coast of Gujarat. In her novels, The Crow Eaters, and Ice-Candy-Man, Sidhwa recounts the traditional story of the Parsis’ arrival from Iran to India in the seventh century in which the Indian Prince sent his Vazir to them with a glass of milk filled to the brim signifying that his land was full and prosperous and he didn’t want outsiders with a different religion and alien ways to disturb its harmony. In response, the Parsis stirred a teaspoonful of sugar carefully into the milk and sent it back suggesting that they would get absorbed into his country like the sugar in the milk, and with their decency and industry sweeten the lives of his subjects. The Prince, Yadav Rana, impressed by their intelligence and civilized behaviour, permitted them to live
in his kingdom on the condition that they would not eat beef, wear rawhide sandals or convert the susceptible masses.

More than thirteen centuries have passed but the Parsis still abide by their word they gave to the Indian prince. They do not allow conversion to their faith or mixed-marriages and this is one important reason why their population has decreased to such an extent that there are hardly a hundred thousand Parsis in the world. Sidhwa has tried to immortalize this endangered specie by capturing its quintessential ethos in three of her four novels. The Pakistani Bride is largely about Muslims in Pakistan. In Ice-Candy-Man, An American Brat and especially in her first published novel, The Crow Eaters, Bapsi has given detailed information about the customs, ceremonies, beliefs, superstitions, rites, rituals, myths, legends and other aspects of the Parsi life.

The Crow Eaters, which describes itself as the hilarious saga of Parsi family, was a controversial novel. Its publication was marked by a mock bomb threat. She herself tells Montenegro in an interview:

The book launch took place at an international hotel in Lahore and since there are not so many books written in English launched it was quite a function. . . And there was a bomb threat which subsequently I realised was from a Parsi who felt very strongly about the book. It took me some more time to realize the turmoil the book had created within the community. They thought I was revealing secrets that I had no business giving out. . . they felt I was damaging the image. . . they felt threatened by it, although it was written out of great affection (33).

Bapsi Sidhwa’s The Crow Eaters, as the title speaks for itself, is about the Parsi community whose members are called Kagra-Khaow. The element of joy, the slapstick uproar, has earned the Parsis the label Kagra-Khaow, that is, Crow Eaters. When Freddy and his family along with the other Parsis go to the station to bid Mr. Adenwalla farewell, a group of children seeing the Parsis shouted: “Parsi, Parsi, crow eaters! Parsi, Parsi, crow eaters!” (Sidhwa, The Crow Eaters 56) To this Bapsi Sidhwa herself explains that this little ditty is a well earned tribute to their notorious ability to talk ceaselessly at the top of their voices like an assembly of crows. But it is not a crowd-eating community. As Nariman says to Portia in
Perin Bharucha’s *The Fire Worshiper*, “It isn’t the Parsis who eat crows but the other way round. And anyway, they’re not crows but vultures to whom the dead are fed” (37).

*The Crow Eaters* is a fictional yet typical saga of a Parsi family and the corresponding social milieu. It is the only novel of its kind, as it is the first account of the working of the Parsi mind, social behaviour, value systems and customs. It also traces the attempts of Parsis, in the late nineteenth century, migrating from the west coast and settling in the more salubrious climate of North Indian cities. Bapsi accurately depicts historical facts interwoven with satirical fiction and lampoon which aptly recreates the Parsi milieu and yet makes for delightful reading. In just one generation, the Junglewalla family increased their business from single general merchant store in Lahore to a chain of stores in several North Indian cities. The novel begins with Faredoon Junglewalla, the patriarch of the Parsi community at Lahore, explaining the secret of his success by its parallel with the history of his people, “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 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” (*The Crow Eaters* 11).

*The Crow Eaters* is a comic work of fiction by Bapsi Sidhwa. Creditably Bapsi never lets the novel transform itself into a mere sociological treatise. The satirical fiction, mock-epic tone and lampoon of major characters like the successful businessman, Faredoon Junglewalla, his equally successful son Billy and mother-in-law Jerbanoo make the novel an entertaining piece of literature. It emanates organically from a rich network of details of Parsi life. Ultimately the worldview is quintessentially Zoroastrian in its celebration of the values of charity and Asha (uprightness and harmony). Almost a three generational saga, “it renders the adventures of an insouciant rascal who lives by his wits. The narrative depicts the meteoric rise of Freddy, the Parsee protagonist and his worldly prosperity. *The Crow Eaters* is a novel about Sidhwa’s own community the resourceful and accommodating Parsees. In capturing the Parsee ethos, she strikes an unexpectedly rich vein of humour” (qtd. in Kumar 34). Sidhwa wrote it to preserve her regard for the Parsi community which is virtually on the verge of extinction.
The novel is a fast-paced, entertaining tale of Faredoon Junglewalla’s rise from rags to riches. The narrative commences in a retrospective manner. Now in the twilight of his life, Faredoon Junglewalla, nicknamed Freddy renders for his grandchildren and the neighbouring children a dramatized account of his rise in life. At the age of twenty-three, he sets out to seek his fortune in the fertile land of Five Rivers, for *Septa Sindhu*, the Sind and Punjab of today. With his manly bearing and charm, he has evolved as a man of consequences in the Zoroastrian community at Lahore. Wealth and status is the ultimate aim for Faredoon Junglewalla. He achieves this ambition but at a high cost. Bapsi Sidhwa’s mode of perception is ironic. As we appreciate Junglewalla’s achievements, doubts are raised about his integrity. The novel commences on the note of praise for Faredoon Junglewalla. About his career it is said, “He not only succeeded in carving a comfortable niche in the world for himself, but also earned the respect and gratitude of his entire community. 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’ ” (*The Crow Eaters* 9). He regales us with his “charming rascality” (*The Crow Eaters* 9). He has no qualms in setting fire to his own shop and perhaps to even get rid of his tiresome mother-in-law Jerbanoo as well, to claim insurance money. Though the dramatic escape of Jerbanoo from the jaws of death comes as a telling blow, the sizeable cheque from the insurance company stabilizes him in life. He is capable of sharing his largesse and his influence to help and serve his Parsi community at the same time. Thus he attains material prosperity and social recognition—two aspects of life highly valued by Zoroastrianism. The maintenance of identity, in spite of being a microscopic minority, of which Freddy is so proud, is shown as mere public relations, bordering on sycophancy. As Faredoon says:

And where, if I may ask, does the sunrise? ‘No, not in the East. For us it rises – and sets – in the Englishmen’s arses. They are our sovereigns! Where do you think we’d be if we did not curry favour? Next to the nawabs, rajas, princelings, we are the greatest toadies of the British Empire! These are not ugly words, mind you. They are the sweet dictates of our delicious need to exist, to live and prosper in peace. Otherwise, where would we Parsis be? Cleaning our gutters with the untouchables—a dispersed pinch of snuff sneezed from the heterogeneous nostrils of India! Oh yes, in looking after our interest we have maintained our strength—the strength to advance
the grand cosmic plan of Ahura Mazda—the deep spiritual law which governs the universe, the path of Asha” (*The Crow Eaters* 12).

So the sycophancy is shown as a prerequisite to exist, neither lauded nor condemned. The tone of the writer is ironic. There is a protective irony in the novel, balancing personal inadequacies against the contradictions of life itself.

Freddy’s ostensibly humorous comments, his obsequious behaviour towards Mr. Charles P. Allen, the Deputy Commissioner and his frequent visits to the Government House to pay homage to the British Empire, underline a basic attitude to the ruling colonial power which Bapsi Sidhwa carefully explores. Since the Parsis settled in India, they realized they could only survive as a minority by being strictly loyal to every ruling authority and avoiding tensions and conflicts between various groups and powers in the state. At no time in the subcontinent was the community itself a power factor that would have been able to enforce its own interests against the will of the rulers. Hence, Parsis learned to realize that only loyalty to the ruler generates that political climate in which they could remain undisturbed as a minority. The only condition for their loyalty was that they were not hindered in the practice of their religion. Hence, the exaggerated servility of Freddy, his son Billy and other Parsis towards British is revealed as an act to ensure legal security, peace and economic prosperity. With her ironic perspective the flattery of the Parsis is humorously revealed in the novel, but it also expresses an underlying identity crisis and quest for security amongst the community as a whole. Such a prevailing attitude to changing times also leads to adopting customs and manners of the British. Knowledge of English education in a Christian missionary school was considered essential, not because of superior instruction or knowledge but as it offered a chance for rapid social mobility. The interaction of two cultures naturally produces tensions when for instance Putli, the wife of Freddy, resists change: “What revolted Putli most was the demand that she, a dutiful and God-fearing wife, must walk a step ahead of her husband. She considered this hypocritical and pretentious, and most barbarous” (*The Crow Eaters* 188).

Putli adapted to what she considered new-fangled customs, when she and her husband were invited to the formal tea-parties on the gracious lawns of the Government House. She is cajoled to these functions by her husband, for whom it is an opportunity for advancing contacts and consolidating friendships. The Parsi milieu of Putli had a different value system,
which the author highlights: “Deep-rooted in the tradition of a wife walking three paces behind her husband, their deportment was as painful to Putli as being marched naked in public” (The Crow Eaters 188). As regards adapting customs of the British the novel shows the gradual assimilation of British value systems in the Parsi milieu. Putli tried to preserve certain Parsi customs, like walking behind her husband. However, her daughter Yasmin after marriage ignores such notions as old fashioned and vehemently protests at the servile attitude of women: “Anyway it’s stupid to walk behind your husband like an animal on a leash—Oh Mother! Hasn’t Papa been able to modernise you yet?” (The Crow Eaters 190-191)

Putli, the earlier generation Parsi, is outraged by her daughter Yasmin when she precedes her husband down the steps and into the carriage and her seeming relationship of equality with her husband. Initially adapting the manner and customs of the ruling colonial power was gradual and Putli’s inability to understand change is seen as the generation gap. However, the scope of the novel is large; it shows the reality of a whole family and its network of relationships, spreading out to encompass a wide variety of human beings of different ages. Bapsi Sidhwa portrays the changing generations in the Junglewalla family. The new generation, with their increasing economic contacts with the British, like Billy’s scrap iron deal, becomes increasingly westernised. This is best exemplified by the life-style of the youngest son Billy and her fashionable wife Tanya:

They made friends with modern couples equally determined to break with tradition. It amounted to no more than a fanatical faith in the ways of English society in India, and a disciple’s knack at imitation. They were not of the masses, this young crowd. If their wealth did not set them apart, their ability to converse in English certainly did. They were utterly ashamed of traditional habit and considered British customs, however superficially observed, however trivial, exemplary (The Crow Eaters 245).

The changing social milieu and identity crisis which Bapsi Sidhwa accurately depicts in the novel was distinctively visible among Parsis in British India and is a social problem for many in the community. In the newspaper, The Parsi, published since 1905 in Bombay, an article appeared stressing that the ambitions of most Parsis were aimed at as close a connection with the English as possible: “The closer union of the Europeans and Parsis is the
finest thing that can happen to our race. It will mean the lifting up of a people who are lying low, though possessing all of the qualities of a European race” (qtd. in Kulke 138). Such a feeling is conveyed in the novel but Behram Junglewalla and his family do not consider westernization as a conscious abandonment of their own group identity. They observe the trapping of ostensibly liberal western culture:

They entertained continuously at small, intimate ‘mixed’ parties where married couples laughed and danced decorously with other married couples. ‘Mixed’ parties were as revolutionary a departure from Freddy’s all-male get-together at the Hira Mandi, and Putli’s rigid female sessions, as is a discotheque from a Victorian family dinner. The parties were fashionably cosmopolitan, including the various religious sects of India: Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, the Europeans, and the Anglo-Indians (The Crow Eaters 245).

Parsis maintained group identity by their dress. But even in the matter of dress, generational change is evident. Faredoon and his family took pride in their traditional mode of dress. Whenever Faredoon went to the Government House for formal parties or to pay homage to the British empire, he would consciously be, “rigged out in a starched white coatwrap that fastened with bows at the neck and waist, and crisp white pyjamas and turban” (The Crow Eaters 21). His wife Putli, and his mother-in-law Jerbanoo never appeared in public “without ‘mathabananas’—white kerchiefs wound around the hair to fit like skull caps. The holy thread circling their waist was austerely displayed and sacred undergarments, worn beneath short blouses, modestly aproned their sari-wrapped hips” (The Crow Eaters 23). 

_Sudra_ and _Kusti_ symbolise Zoroastrian faith and they are worn by both men and women. _Sudra_ is a Zoroastrian religious undergarment made of pure white muslin, worn like a slip next to the skin. White is a symbol of purity of spotlessness thereby representing that deeds of the Parsis should be pure. _Kusti_ is a sacred thread woven from seventy-two strands of wool, girdled around the waist three times, worn over the _Sudra_. A child first wears them at the _Navjote_, the ceremony of initiation into the Zarathustri faith. “Freedom of choice is a cardinal doctrine in the teaching of Zarathustra. A child born of Zoroastrian parents is not considered a Zoroastrian until he has chosen the faith at the _Navjote_ ceremony” (The Crow Eaters 124).
The next generation of Parsis Behram and Tanya slowly discard the traditional dress. Tanya, for instance, still wore a sari, but it was more revealing: “She became daring in her attire and tied her sari in a way that accentuated the perfections of her body. She took to wearing a little make-up and outlined the astonishing loveliness of her lips” (*The Crow Eaters* 246). However, in form of dress, even Behram is still traditional. He urges and argues with Tanya not to reveal midriff so glaringly or to look boldly and mix freely with other men, as the intentions are misconstrued: “Even in the relationships between man and woman, Faredoon and later his son Behram adopt double standards. Behram especially wants Tanya to appear westernised and talk English” (Ginwala 73). However, at home, he wants his wife to be servile and domestic, always at his beck and call. So the novel aptly reveals the Parsi milieu in the throes of change.

Besides their limited status as a minority community, another reason for the supreme respect and regard the Parsis had for the British was the social code of their religion. The basic attitude of the followers of Zarathustra towards a ruler was that of loyalty akin to the Iranian traditions. This concept of loyalty to the ruler gave Zoroastrianism the rank of a state religion, which meant a close relationship between state and community based on mutual support. All that the Parsis wanted from the ruling British authorities was religious autonomy and protection. They got both. The ideal state in Zoroastrian philosophy is free of a deification of the ruler. The conception of a good ruler is more of a just and religiously tolerant exercise of authority. That is the reason why loyalty was a self-evident percept for the Parsis. They traced their secured status as a minority from the advent of the British rule in India. Loyalty, thus, is born, at least in the case of Parsis, of the instinct of self-preservation and self-advancement. The British rule was identical with good governance. Hence, their loyalty was the result of a deep-rooted conviction. Another sound sociological factor which explains the consistent loyalty of the Parsis to the British is aptly enumerated by famous historian D.F. Karaka in his scholarly work, *History of the Parsis*: “When they (Parsis) compare their condition in India with that of their co-religionists in Persia (Iran) who were reduced until recently to a miserable state of persecution, they fully and rightly appreciate blessings, which they enjoy under the British Government” (qtd. in Kulke 134).

Such feelings were prevalent in the Parsi milieu and Bapsi Sidhwa aptly conveys it in *The Crow Eaters*. Freddy took every opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to the British.
Self-preservation is of primary concern to a Parsi. We see this operating principle at work when Faredoon, soon after his arrival in Lahore, goes to Government House and signs his name in the visitor’s Register. “Having thus paid homage to the British Empire, established his credentials and demonstrated his loyalty to ‘Queen and Crown’, Freddy was free to face the future” (The Crow Eaters 22). Freddy’s visit symbolises the traditional submissiveness and pragmatism of the community. If such an act seems absurd, social historians will recall that on occasions like royal birthdays, coronation ceremonies, arrival of a new viceroy or death in the royal family, the Parsis demonstrated their collective loyalty by public meetings and Jashans (group prayers). In cases of British military entanglements outside India, Parsis adopted the terminology of British imperialism. They termed Britain’s wars as just and essential for world peace, for the progress of civilization and freedom.

Bapsi Sidhwa in Ice-Candy-Man describes Jashan prayer which the Parsis of Lahore celebrate on British victory in World War II in all its details. The occasion is marked by all the sacred rituals pertaining to the holding of thanksgiving ceremony: “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 like the one Col. Bharucha wore in the hospital. Their chanting voices rise and boom in fierce competition and the mask prevents specks of spittle from profaning the fire. They sit on a white sheet amidst silver trays heaped with fruit – grape, mango, papaya – and flowers. And the malida cooked by the priest’s wife . . . . The priests cannot be hurried. They go through a ritual established a millennium ago. They stroke the fire with silver tongs and feed it with sandalwood and frankincense” (Sidhwa, Ice-Candy-Man 32-33).

It is the paranoid feelings of being a minuscule minority, which is the motivating factor for the behavioural pattern of the Parsis, ranging from quest for excellence to eccentricity. Bapsi Sidhwa constantly lampoons the zeal with which leading Parsi business magnates, Faredoon Junglewalla, Mr. Toddywalla and the baronet Khan Bahadur, Sir Noshirwan Jeevanjee Easymoney Championed the British causes. However, hilarious their outbursts of loyalty may seem, the Parsis in British India were a schizophrenic community. A perusal of social history reveals the causes for this insecurity and alienation of many members of the community. For purposes of trade and business, the British granted the Parsis
a special status as a broker and reliable trading partner. However, rapid social mobility amongst the Parsi community led to a conscious group desire to identify themselves all too closely with English themselves. The willingness to grant the Parsis a special status had its limits. The English refused to consider Parsis as their own kind even if they were equally educated and extensively anglicized. Similarly the Parsis, inspired by the behaviour and statements of community leaders like Sir Jamesetjee Jeejeedhoy and the prevailing social milieu, developed an aversion to identifying themselves with other Indian communities. This led to a mental estrangement from India for many Parsis without, however, finding an identity of their own, free of both the English and other Indians. Being a shrewd observer of human fallibility Bapsi Sidhwa reflects the identity search of Parsis in several situations and aspects in *The Crow Eaters*.

A striking manifestation of this identity crisis is the dying Faredoon Junglewalla’s vehement protest against the nationalist movement and exhortations to his offspring to remain loyal to the British Empire. Dadabhai Navroji is referred to as “that misguided Parsi from Bombay, . . . starts something called the Congress and shoots his bloody mouth off like a lunatic. Quit India! Quit India!” (*The Crow Eaters* 282) However shocking Faredoon Junglewalla’s views may be, they were representative of a majority of Parsis, especially the business class, bankers and civil servants. In *Ice-Candy-Man* Col. Bharucha, the spokesman of the Zoroastrian community in Lahore, observes: “I hope no Lahore Parsee will be stupid enough to court trouble. I strongly advise all you to stay at home—and out of trouble” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 36-37). He argues that it would be very difficult to predict the outcome of Partition. He caution them: “There may be not one but two—or even three—new nations! And the Parsees might find themselves championing the wrong side if they don’t look before they leap!” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 37) His word is almost a law for the Parsi community. He resolves that Parsis of Lahore should cast their lot with whoever rules Lahore. He, too, like Freddy in *The Crow Eaters*, believes that there is no need for the Parsi community to leave Lahore. He tells them: “Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land!” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 39) The proclamations of Col. Bharucha at the community dinner reflect the stance of the majority in the Zoroastrian community in the pre-Partition context. He aptly predicts that Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs would jockey for power. He cautions the Parsis of Lahore not to jump on the
bandwagon of power. To Lenny, a child who is caught up in the whirlpool of religious disparities, Col. Bharucha’s proclamation is a revelation. Except for a fringe minority, drawn into the vortex of the nationalist movement, the majority of the Parsi community shared the views expressed by the dying Faredoon Junglewalla in *The Crow Eaters* on the freedom struggle:

> He utters ideas. People like Gandhi pick them up – people like Valabhbhai Patel and Bose and Jinnah and Nehru . . . and that other stupid fool in Karachi, Rustam Sidhwa, also picks them up! What does he do? He sacrifices his business and abandons his family to the vicissitudes of chance and poverty. He wears a Gandhi cap, handloom shirt, and that transparent diaper they call a *dhoti*. He goes in and out of jail as if he were visiting a girl at the Hira Mandi! Where will it get him? Nowhere! If there any rewards in all this, who will reap them? Not Sidhwa! Not Dadabhai Navroji! Making monkeys of themselves and of us! Biting the hand that feeds! I tell you we are betrayed by our own kind, by our own blood! The fools will break up the country. The Hindus will have one part, Muslims the other. Sikhs, Bengalis, Tamils and God knows who else will have their share; and they won’t want you! (*The Crow Eaters* 282).

The apprehensions of Freddy are not the figment of a dying man’s fevered imagination but based on social reality. There were three anti-Parsi riots in Bombay and other cities in 1851, 1874 and 1921. On the last occasion, Gandhi called for a boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales to India. Many Parsis refused to join this boycott, which sparked off a violent riot and anti-British and anti-Parsi aggressions persisted for a couple of years. Memories of such incidents and happenings were an integral part of the Parsi milieu and increased their loyalty to the British. However, displaying remarkable adaptability, the Parsis on realizing the inevitability of Independence altered their allegiances. With a dying man’s perceptiveness, Freddy hints at the necessity of changing allegiances. Following a query by his son-in-law Bobby Katrak about the future of the Parsis after Independence, Faredoon makes a prophetic reply: “We will stay where we are … let Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or whoever, rule. What does it matter? The sun will continue to rise—and the sun continue to set—in their arses…” (*The Crow Eaters* 283). Such witty remarks are the hallmarks of Bapsi Sidhwa’s style and the genial satire both shocks and offends Parsi sensibilities in the subcontinent. These kinds of
remarks in the novel led to the function held in Pakistan to launch the novel being sabotaged by a bomb scare which was suspected to be the work of some irate Parsis. Although *The Crow Eaters* is a novel that may shock, offend and dismay, it never ceases to entertain. It is a rambunctious mixture of gentle perceptiveness and wild humour. The satire of Bapsi Sidhwa, though sharp, is never castigating and censorious like that of Swift. It is rather genial tolerance of the foibles of a community, full of paradoxes with an identity crisis caused by their minority status and ideas of loyalty to the ruling authorities.

The anxiety for maintenance of their identity is further revealed in the manner Parsis stick to each other through thick and thin. Parsi is a studiedly socially oriented community which cherishes the names of all those prominent members of their community who have served their tiny society. Remembering the departed ones is a way to connect the community to its roots and maintain a relationship with the past. Bapsi Sidhwa in *The Crow Eaters* emphasizes the prevalence of this custom in her community: “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” (*The Crow Eaters* 9). Another representation of this collectivity of Parsi society is revealed in the manner a new comer is welcomed by the settled members of the community. Whenever some Parsi visits a city where some Parsi families are settled, the whole community participates enthusiastically in his welcome. The same hospitality is accorded to the Parsis on train passing through the city: “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” (*The Crow Eaters* 55). Further, whenever a member of the community gains advancement and money in the world, he invariably undertakes philanthropic works like building of hospitals, schools etc. When Lenny in *Ice-Candy-Man* is to undergo an operation, the news spreads quickly and “the small and entire Parsee community of Lahore, in clucking clusters descends on the Sethi household” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 7). Col. Bharucha, who is the spokesman of the Parsi community in the same novel, is well respected not only by the Parsis but by all his clients also, most of whom are non-Parsis, due to his professional integrity. Col. Bharucha can be magnanimous enough not to charge any fees from his poor customers. In *The Crow Eaters* Faredoon Junglewalla becomes a guiding light for Parsis
everywhere and helps them in coming out of the tight spots. It is only through his charitable work that he is able to earn the respect and gratitude of his entire community. Their philanthropic, hard-working nature and the sense of devotion to community is acknowledged by the writer Bapsi Sidhwa as the hallmark of Parsi community: “An endearing feature of this microscopic merchant community was its compelling sense of duty and obligation towards other Parsis. Like one large close-knit family they assisted each other, sharing success and rallying to support failure. There were no Parsi beggars in a country abounding in beggars” (The Crow Eaters 21).

Another aspect of identity crisis which just verges on paranoia among the Parsis, is exemplified by the escapist behaviour of Yazdi, the second son of Faredoon Junglewalla. A sensitive boy, Yazdi, is aggrieved at the conspicuous commercialism and sycophancy of the Parsis. A human dimension to his revolt is also introduced, as his father refused him permission to marry a childhood sweetheart, an Anglo-Indian Rosy Watson. All these factors make Yazdi revolt against the existing system in his family. Yazdi takes charity to the extreme. He initially returned from school barefoot having given his shoes to an orphan in his class: “A few days later he returned without his shirt, and the day after climbed up to the flat in only his homemade underpants. He had distributed his apparel among four beggars near the Regal Cinema square” (The Crow Eaters 158). Then he is transferred to a boarding school in Karachi. There he becomes a dropout, a modern-day hippy. He squanders his allowance and fees on beggars. He drifts about the city and sleeps on park benches and pavements. He seeks solace by assisting the lepers outside Karachi.

Finally, Yazdi makes a total break from his family. His share of family money is put in a trust and he gets monthly interest. Yazdi uses this money “to feed dying children... buy medicine for the sick left to decay like exposed excrement in those choked bazaar lanes” (The Crow Eaters 184). He becomes a follower of Mazdak, the first communist. Yazdi calls Mazdak, “A Zarathusti ancestor. He realised centuries ago that all material goods, including women, had to be shared!” (The Crow Eaters 214-15) His family does not meet him or hear from him. Strolling along Chowpatti Beach in Bombay, Billy is the last person to see Yazdi who is now an emaciated vagrant lying on a bench. The characterization of Yazdi adds to the richness and variety of the novel. However, there is a structural flow in the presentation of Yazdi. He is never shown practising his professed charity like Dr. Kenny in Nectar in a Sieve
by Kamala Markandaya. The progression of Yazdi, on the other hand, in realizing and practicing the quintessentially Zoroastrian values is more direct and urgent. Although this progression is through his supposed disillusionment with Rosy, an Anglo-Indian girl, he appears destined for the nobler values of Zoroastrianism. He is a living practitioner of the Zoroastrian value of charity to the level of self-denial. He nearly acquires a saintly disposition and purpose in this world. He represents, more than his father Freddy, the value of total selflessness and denies himself joys for the welfare of everybody. Seeking collective universal good is his deeply felt and ingrained spiritual need, which he practices in his real life. When Freddy tries to reason with him, Yazdi expresses his anguish at the materialistic outlook of Parsis like his father and brother Billy. He says to Freddy: “I cannot eat a bellyful and sleep between silken sheets when my brother have nowhere to stay!” (The Crow Eaters 185)

*Ice-Candy-Man* too, at least to some degree, illustrates the principal value of compassion and charity in the Zoroastrian worldview. In the narrative, Lenny’s mother and Electric-Aunt smuggle the rationed petrol to help their “Hindu and Sikh friends to run away. . . and also for the convoys to send kidnapped women to their families across the border” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 242). Godmother and Lenny’s mother are engaged in the relentless task of rehabilitation of ‘fallen’ women like Ayah and Hamida during the Partition. Lenny’s mother employs Hamida, a woman who had been kidnapped, rescued and later on spurned by the family, as Lenny’s new Ayah to rehabilitate her. Lenny’s Godmother Rodabai, who “has access to many ears” (*Ice-Candy-Man* 211), also arranges Ranna’s education in a boarding house after he had been orphaned. The social commitment and willingness to help the needy is best perceived in Godmother’s rescue of Ayah. Ayah was kidnapped by some rogues led by Ice-Candy-Man. She is forced to become a dancing girl. Later on Ice-Candy-Man marries her, converting her to Islam and rechristening her as Mumtaz. But when Godmother finds out that Ayah does not want to stay with Ice-Candy-Man, she rescues her, sends her to Recovered Women’s Camp and then helps her to return to her relatives in Amritsar. Godmother’s deft handling of the situation is an example of the humane acts performed by Parsis during the stormy days of Partition. Thus, though they are minor characters and of peripheral interest in the narrative, they nevertheless take the path of *Asha* (uprightness and harmony) as highlighted in the Zoroastrian ethics.
Zoroastrianism thus lays emphasis on charity. Charity is an integral part of the Parsi value system as it stems from a firm religious conviction. The religion founded by the prophet Zoroaster is monotheistic, with the sole God *Ahura Mazda* (wise Lord) being the creator as well as the judge on the day of the last judgement. *Ahura Mazda* rules over the good spirit (Spenta Mainyu) created by him, which are opposed to this world by the evil spirits (Angra Mainyu). The ethics in Zoroastrianism demand active defence of the good which explicitly includes truthfulness, righteousness and charity. Earthly renunciation and asceticism are condemned by Zoroaster which is in sharp contrast to Hinduism and Buddhism. The prominent trait of the Parsi life is its philanthropy and public spirit. In proportion to their numbers and means, they raise more money for charitable objects than any other religious sect. Thus economically, Zoroastrianism recommends and propagates active life. Religion providing the impetus for charity is an aspect well portrayed by Bapsi Sidhwa. The history of the delightful rascal Freddy is mingled with accounts of his charitable deeds.

Charity is the value which provides the impetus for Freddy’s sustained mercantile activity. He tells his audience once: “And once you have the means, there is no end to the good you can do. I donated 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” (*The Crow Eaters* 10). Freddy’s charitable deeds may not exalt him as a paragon of Zoroastrian values, as they are certainly tinged with self-promotion. He himself admits once: “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” (*The Crow Eaters* 11). A shrewd and tactful Parsi, Freddy blends generosity and self-interest. Sidhwa, an ‘insider’ in the Parsi community, writes about charity which is the part of the Zoroastrian ethos: “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 and finance. Notorious misers, they are paradoxically generous to a cause” (*The Crow Eaters* 21). Examples of the mingling of generosity and self-interest are numerous. When he helped Bobby Katrak escape charges for killing a beggar while rashly driving his silver Ghost Rolls-Royce, the amiable Faredoon claims Rs. 50,000 as expenses to bribe Mr. Gibbons the Inspector General of Police. The bribe is only Rs. 10,000 and the remaining forty is stowed in his special kitty. So the novelist shows that Freddy developed his philanthropic
image to increase his business contacts and to appear selfless and counter the impression of being a toady of the British. It is this ambivalent attitude towards charity, which has really piqued Parsi sensibilities, as generosity is shown as not just part of the value system but linked with the appearance and reality theme. Charity for Faredoon is neither a pocketful of poses nor is it completely philanthropic. Bapsi Sidhwa uses irony to create humour and to present the ambivalent attitude towards charity of Freddy.

Some of the prevalent Parsi customs show how strong the idea of equal status of all in a society is as is revealed by the Parsi system of disposal of the dead bodies. They are exposed to sun’s rays and offered to birds on the same platform so that a king’s corpse may lie side by side with that of a pauper. All are equal and no monument is erected to tell the glory of the great as no costly funerals or coffins for the rich and the powerful. Parsis still stick to the ancient method of disposal of dead bodies. There is an explicit prohibition against cremation or burial underground. A Parsi’s last charitable act on earth is the donation of his dead body to hungry vultures. Bapsi Sidhwa describes:

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.’ Just a word or two about the Tower: the marble floor slopes towards the centre where there is deep hollow. This receives the bones and blood. Underground ducts from the hollow lead to four deep wells outside the Tower. These wells are full 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. Now, the height of the Tower is precisely calculated. The vultures, taking off at full throttle, are only just able to clear the Tower wall. If they try to get away with anything held between their claws or beaks they invariably crash against the wall. Understandably, only professional pall-bearers are allowed to witness the gory spectacle inside the Tower (The Crow Eaters 45).

In The Crow Eaters, Sidhwa says that this system of disposing of the dead body originated in the rocky terrain of Parsia at a time when arable land was too precious to be
used as a graveyard. But in An American Brat, she puts forward a religious argument: “Since the Parsees consider earth, water and fire holy, they do not bury, drown, or burn polluted corpses. Instead, as a last act of charity, they leave the body exposed to the sun and the birds of prey, mainly vultures, in these open-roofed circular structures” (Sidhwa, An American Brat 269-270). In The Crow Eaters, one night Jerbanoo refers to this custom with pride much to the embarrassment of Freddy. She says: “It was his final act of charity! Every Parsi is committed to feeding his last remains to the vultures. You may cheat them but not God! As my beloved husband Jehangirjee Chinimini said, ‘Our Zarathusti faith is based on charity’ ” (The Crow Eaters 47). But Jerbanoo gets pacified only when Freddy promises her that he will take her body to Karachi and deposit it in Tower himself.

‘The Tower of Silence’ or Dungarwadi, the “architectural wonder created exclusively by the charitable Parsees to feed God’s creatures” (Ice-Candy-Man 114), represents Parsi faith in the sanctity of natural elements: “Instead of polluting the earth by burying it, or wasting fuel by burning it, we feed God’s creatures” (Ice-Candy-Man 114). The Parsis have their own belief system regarding the journey of soul after death. It is believed that if uthama ceremony is not done, the soul of such a person cannot ascend to the chinwad bridge and remains in limbo. The chinwad bridge allows the passage of soul to heaven and hell. If the deeds are good, the bridge expands and the soul gets a passage to heaven, but if the deeds of dead person are not good the bridge contracts and the soul falls to hell.

One day Freddy’s eldest son, Soli, aged nineteen, dies unexpectedly from a minor wound. Sidhwa gives a very detailed description of Soli’s funeral rites. His body is bathed and dressed in old garments of white cotton. Freddy wraps the kusti (sacred thread) 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 the living quarters of the priests and a corpse-bearer draws three circles around it with a sharp nail. Now, none can enter the circle except the corpse-bearers. On a white sheet spreaded on the floor, the grief-stricken women are sitting. They are in white saris except Jerbanoo, who is in her widow’s black. The priest dog adopted by him because of the two eyes-like spots above his eyes is brought into the room. It is believed that his four eyes can ward off evil spirits and can detect the faintest hint of life in the corpse. As the dog shies away, all fond hopes of Putli are shattered. At 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* (Persian language) scriptures all through the night and keeps the fire alight and the room fragrant with sticks of sandalwood and frankincense.

At dawn the mourners start pouring in and fill up the little room, the verandah and the compound between the priest’s quarters and the stone building of the Fire Temple. At three O’clock the pall-bearers, husbands of Freddy’s daughter Hutoxi and Ruby, Mr. Chaiwalla’s son Cyrus, and Mr. Bankwalla come into the room, carrying an iron bier. As the number of Parsis in Lahore is too small to warrant professional pall-bearers, these men have volunteered their services for the task. They place the bier beside the body and recite a short prayer, “We do this according to the dictates of Ahura Mazda . . .” (*The Crow Eaters* 178) and sit down to one side. 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.

The prayers for the welfare of the departed soul being over, the mourners pass, one by one, before the corpse to have a last look and bow before it. The dog is brought into the room once again. The pall-bearers drape a white sheet over the corpse, lift the body onto the iron bier and hoisting it on their shoulders and move out into the compound. People, mostly non-Parsi, standing in the compound feel disappointed at not being able to see the face of Soli. Freddy on an impulse removes the sheet from Soli’s face. Scandalised, the men of his community crowd round the bier. Once the sacred rites are performed over the body, people of other faiths are not permitted to look upon it. Some one says, “Faredooon, this is sacrilegious! Pull yourself together! And Freddy, fighting desperately to keep his voice steady, says, ‘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 Crow Eaters* 179) At the small graveyard the body is encased within four marble slabs and buried. When the mound of earth is smoothed over, a pall-bearer claps his hands thrice and men turn towards the setting sun to pray over their sacred threads. At the end of the four day ceremony for the welfare of the departed soul, Freddy makes the customary proclamation of charity to construct a school in Karachi. After Soli’s death, Freddy’s attitude to life gets mellowed. He becomes altruistic and religious. He donates water troughs for tonga horses, 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*. 
Most of the Parsi characters in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa have strong faith in their religion. To visit a ‘Fire Temple’ or an Agyari which is a dark, cold and tranquil place preserving its quite even in the middle of the busiest, most-crowded city streets, is more of a personal act of devotion than a compulsion. Feroza, the protagonist of the novel An American Brat, observes the rituals of her religion with devotion, but she is not a zealot and has liberal conception of her religion. She had “a comfortable relationship with the faith she was born into” (An American Brat 40). Before leaving for America, she visits agyari where she is fascinated by the atash, the sacred fire. Feroza is enthralled to see the priest who was “luminous in a froth of starched white robes” (An American Brat) who was making the offering of sandalwood to the fire from “a long-handled silver ladle” (An American Brat 41). Feroza’s experience at the Fire Temple shows her commitment to Parsi rituals and her deep attachment to them:

Feroza whispered her prayers and gazed devoutly at the small flames licking the crisscross of sandalwood, and, suddenly, she felt the spiritual power of the fire reach out from its divine depths to encompass her with its pure energy. She was at once buoyant, fearless, secure in her humanity. And as the lucid flame of the holy vision illumed her mind and was absorbed into her heart, she felt herself being suffused with God’s presence. She felt He was speaking to her, acknowledging her prayers” (An American Brat 42).

When Feroza is trapped in the fire escape of YMCA, she instinctively recites Kemna Mazda Prayers: “Who shall protect us when the vengeful harm of the wicked threatens us but Thee, O Mazda! May the Evil utterly vanish and never destroy Your Creation. . .” (An American Brat 90). She, in desperation, repeats the one hundred and one names of Ahura Mazda: “One Who Relieves Pain and Suffering, The Lord of Desire, The Causeless Cause, The Cause of Everything, The Creator of All That is Spiritual, The Undeceived, The Forgiving. . .” (An American Brat 90-91). Her instinctive return to the liturgy of her religion shows that despite her modern outlook, she has inculcated a deep attachment towards her religion. She reverts to its unfathomable resources when there is no human help possible.

Whenever faced by some problem too large for human efforts, the Parsi characters in Sidhwa’s novels invariably turn towards their religion for strength and solace. In The Crow
Eaters, it takes almost a life-time for Freddy to have a glimpse of the law of Ahura Mazda governing the universe. Freddy’s realization of his limitations is accompanied with self-knowledge. Freedom in his last days is able to comprehend the philosophy of living life according to Zoroastrian tenets: “It has taken me a long time to comprehend Evil—and Good—and a lifetime to catch just a glimpse of the path of Asha, God’s grand plan for man and the Cosmos. Yes, the strength of God comes to the man of good action, and such a man is gifted, progressively, with the Good Mind, the Vahu Mana, God’s own mind” (The Crow Eaters 281). The religious sensibilities just lurk beneath the surface and reveal themselves at such moments. Lenny in Ice-Candy-Man suspecting her mother of indulging in arson when she discovers that her mother was smuggling petrol in a clandestine manner finds shelter in invoking Ahura Mazda: “For the first time, unbidden, I cover my head with a scarf and in secluded corners join my hands to take the 101 names of God. The Bountiful. The Innocent. The Forgiver of Sin. The Fulfiler of Desire. He who can turn Air into Ashes : Fire into Water : Dust into Gems! The angel of the walls deflects the ancient words of the dead Avastan language and the prayer resounds soothingly in my ears” (Ice-Candy-Man 173). The reversion of adolescents like Lenny and Adi to religious rituals in hours of need presents the great hold of rituals of Zoroastrianism have on its followers. Even mother of Lenny holds prayers and invokes angels to let them have a smooth sailing through the troubled times. She invokes angles Mushkail Assan and Behram Yazd and prepares for the ceremony by “spreading a white sheet on the bedroom floor and placing the small fire altar and photographs of saints on it … kneels on the floor and strikes a match to light the joss-sticks. She arranges the sandalwood shavings on the fire altar and places a criss-cross of small sandalwood sticks on top of them” (Ice-Candy-Man 241-242).

Contentment, a virtue in the Zoroastrian way of life, is the cornerstone of Freddy’s life as shown in The Crow Eaters. According to him one must respect one’s needs. He argues, “But God has fashioned man as a creature of desires and fulfilling desires brings contentment; the driving force, the essence of life. Such a man follows the divine path of Asha. But a discontented man creates chaos! Thus spake Zarathustra!” (The Crow Eaters 113) He realises, though late in life, that only a content mind is receptive to spiritual knowledge. Tariq Rahman remarks, “Freddy’s slang words mark him out as the kind of person who is indifferent to the norms of ordinary moral behaviour” (8). Thus Sidhwa
successfully brings out his lack of conventionality by her use of deviant English. Pragmatic and tactful, Freddy is a ‘man of realities’ who does more good than a do-gooder. According to the Zoroastrian faith, man exists in a self-governing state. Freedom of choice is a cardinal principle in Prophet Zoroaster’s teaching. The humanity of a moral agent requires that he be free to choose and then be held responsible for that choice. Not only is the value emphasised in moral notions in the Gathas, it is made the basis, the full basis of the judgement of human behaviour. Though not overtly religious, Bapsi Sidhwa attaches much importance to the Zoroastrian worldview. She writes: “And this freedom of choice extends also to Good and Evil; aspects of God himself. Evil is necessary so that good may triumph. Yet Evil by itself does not exist, it is relative, depending upon the distance from God at which the individual stands upon the path of Asha—the Eternal truth—the grand cosmic plan of God” (The Crow Eaters 124). Prophet Zoroaster says in one of his sermons: “Ye Men! Understand the laws of happiness and misery that God has fixed for you. Those who wrought evil must suffer for long. Those who behaved aright, would have benefit. These laws are for man’s happiness” (qtd. in Kumar 35).

If Angra Mainyu (evil principle) provides the thrust for Freddy in the first half of his life, Spenta Mainyu (divine or good principle) acts as the guiding force in the later half. In the narrative, Soli’s untimely death and Yazdi’s renunciation of worldly life are the corresponding reactions of his sinister deeds. His initial failure to comprehend the laws of happiness and misery is in sharp contrast to his charity, benevolence and philanthropic deeds which are the result of self-knowledge. Thus Zoroastrian worldview constitutes the core of the narrative in The Crow Eaters.

The Crow Eaters serves as a sound introduction to Parsi life in that it abounds in description of many rituals and ceremonies. Every Parsi, be he in India or on an alien soil, attaches great importance to Fire. The Parsis do not worship Fire as God. They regard it as an emblem of refulgence, glory and light. It is the perfect symbol of Ahura Mazda. In worshipping Fire, a Parsi attempts at self-exultation, to purify his manashni (thoughts), gavashni (words) and kunashni (deeds). In short, Fire serves as a constant monitor to a Parsi in preserving piety, purity, humility and brotherhood. One afternoon, Jerbanoo catches a servant-boy smoking biri in the kitchen. She hauls him up by ears, slaps him and yells for Putli to come and witness the crime. Freddy is also called from the store to deal with the
outrage. He is shocked as smoking considered one of the cardinal sins by the Parsis. In an
authorial aside Sidhwa dwells on the importance of the fire to the Parsis:

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 . . . . To blow upon fire is
t犀e. Priests tending the temple fires cover their mouths with cloth masks, lest spittle
pollute the Atash (The Crow Eaters 49-50).

Freddy and the members of his family like any traditional Parsi, do not permit the
cooking fire to be extinguished. It is preserved in ashes at night, and fanned alive each
morning. But Feroza, Freddy’s great–great–grand-daughter, in An American Brat, defiles the
holy fire by lighting her cigarette at the insistence of the guitarist boyfriend of her friend, Jo.
At night she realizes the gravity of her sin. After performing the kusti ritual – winding it three
times round her waist, knotting it at the front and the back to the accompaniment of the
appropriate prayers, she bows her penitent head to beg divine forgiveness for desecrating the
holy fire, the symbol of Ahura Mazda. The knots on the kusti represent Parsi belief 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” (The Crow Eaters 139).

The novelist has also drawn our attention to the Parsis’ love for money and their
enviable business sense. Freddy is presented as “a dulcet—voiced adventurer with so few
scruples. . . . and a charming rascality” (The Crow Eaters 9). He says, “The sweetest
thing in the world is your need. Yes, think on it. Your own need—mainspring of your wants,
well-being and contentment” (The Crow Eaters 10). Need, he would add, “makes a flatterer
of a bully and persuades a cruel man to kindness” (The Crow Eaters 10). There is not much
scope for pride and arrogance in his system, he would follow the dictates of his needs, which
make one flexible, elastic, humble. In support of his stance, he would misquote Christ: “The
meek shall inherit the earth . . . sway with the breeze, bend with the winds” (The Crow Eaters
11). “Business is business” (The Crow Eaters 181) was the guiding principle of his life.
What he dreaded most was “ruin, disgrace and business annihilation” (The Crow Eaters 190). Billy surpassed Freddy in this respect and “he was suspicious. . . avaricious. . . cunning. . . had a simple vocation in life. MONEY! He existed to make, multiply, and hoard it. He was notoriously and devoutly penny-pinching… his frugality he might have inherited from an undiluted line of Parsi forebears” (The Crow Eaters 192). Bapsi explains: “If Faredoon was meticulous, Billy was systematic. His mind worked in bracketed numericals” (The Crow Eaters 230). Money was his real love. “Never was a man so parsimonious—or a woman more extravagant” (The Crow Eaters 247). He was obliged to face “a gigantic conflict between his passion for his wife and his passion for money. Money, being his first love, triumphed” (The Crow Eaters 247). His ‘commandments’ directed at his wife included:

Thou shalt not spend money!
Thou shalt not waste.
Thou shalt give me a minutely detailed account of expenses.
Thou shalt obey thy husband, and jump to his bidding.
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 (The Crow Eaters 278).

The commandments continue endlessly. Few, like Billy, have the overriding tenacity to enslave.

Bapsi Sidhwa, in The Crow Eaters, has also highlighted some other distinguishing traits of the Parsis e.g. gluttony and superstitions. Gluttony is another deadly sin which lures the Parsis in a big way. Freddy’s mother-in-law is an inveterate over-eater. Freddy’s relationship with her has never been cordial as she is a quarrelsome and gluttonous woman. Whenever Freddy is away, she would easily appropriate “huge quantities of chocolate, biscuits. . . and wines (The Crow Eaters 26). Freddy says: “She eats like a horse at meals, and then swallows enough sweet chutneys, candied fruits and liqueurs to give an elephant diarrhoea” (The Crow Eaters 27). She often sends Harilal the clerk and the two salesmen on errands for her. As a result Freddy’s business is badly affected. He decides to consult a mystic. The mystic asks him to procure a coil of his mother-in-law’s hair. Freddy tries to snip
her hair while she is having her afternoon siesta but she gets up in the nick of time and frustrates his plan. After this incident, Jerbanoo becomes very careful about her hair. She wears her mathabana all the time. She blackens her eyes and presses two large spots of soot on her temples to protect herself from the envious and evil eye. One day she hands her daughter a tattered bit of meat membrane, dipped in turmeric, commanding, “Here, protect me from evil spell! Putli resignedly circled the membrane seven times over her mother’s head and flung it out of the window to the crows” (The Crow Eaters 41). This episode shows that Parsis, though quite progressive in their outlook, are not unaffected by superstitious beliefs and practices prevalent in the subcontinent. In An American Brat, Zareen thinks that her own admiring and loving eye has cast a malign spell on her daughter and caused her unhappiness. She drags the drowsy Feroza into the kitchen and steers her to stand by the stove. She takes out three Jalapeno peppers from the fridge and holding them in her fist, draws seven circles in the air over Feroza’s head, all the while whispering a hodgepodge of incantations, “May the mischief of malign and envious eyes leave you, may the evil in my loving eye leave you, may any magic and ill will across the seven seas be banished, may Ahura Mazda’s protection and blessings guard you” (An American Brat 303). Then she casts the peppers on the hot griddle placed on the stove, and with a dark look, watches them sputter, shrivel and char to cinders.

In An American Brat, Manek’s return to Pakistan is celebrated with characteristic gusto and rituals. Khuthlibai welcomes him with a garland of roses and sprinkles him with rice and to ward off “stray evil and envious eyes” cracks “her knuckles on her temples” (An American Brat 194). Feroza, too, is welcomed with rituals depicting the community life. She receives the coconut from her mother before entering into the house. Her forehead is marked with red paste and rice. An egg is sacrificed and Zareen invokes Ahura Mazda’s blessings and proclaims: “May you go laughing-singing to your in-law’s home soon; may you enjoy lots and lots of happiness with your husband and children” (An American Brat 234). A lump of sugar is put into Feroza’s mouth and Khutlibai “drew circles over Feroza’s head with her arms, loudly cracked her knuckles on her temples” (An American Brat 234-235). A tray with water in it is circled around her head seven times to remove the envious eye.

Parsi women have a unique custom of retiring to the other room during their monthly cycle. In The Crow Eaters, when Freddy asks Jerbanoo where his wife Putli is, he is informed
that she has retired to the other room. Bapsi Sidhwa explains: “Translated into plain English, Jerbanoo had only said that Putli, being in one of her rare non-pregnant phases, had started her monthly cycle” (The Crow Eaters 69). Describing the other room Sidhwa says: “It was a tiny windowless cubicle with an iron bedstead, an iron chair and a small steel table. The room opened directly on to the staircase landing opposite the kitchen. Every Parsi household has its other room, specially reserved for women. Thither they are banished for the duration of their unholy state. Even the sun, moon and stars are defiled by her impure gaze, according to a superstition which has its source in primitive man’s fear of blood” (The Crow Eaters 70). When a Parsi woman stays in the other room, “the family was permitted to speak to her through closed doors, or, in an emergency, even directly. Provided they bathed from head to foot and purified themselves afterwards” (The Crow Eaters 70). The woman is supposed to leave the other room only to use the bathroom. She is served meals in her cubicle. A tin plate and spoon, reserved for the occasion are handed over by the servant boy. She can’t help herself to pickles or preserves for they will spoil at her touch.

According to Zoroastrianism, a true marriage is the sacred union of two souls, competing with each other in the ideal practice of self-abnegation. The marriage ritual is also symbolic; fire which is present at the agreement-stage, is taken as the witness to the union of two souls. The religious spirit of Parsism is against divorce. Although divorce is allowed among Zoroastrians, the priest stresses the permanency of the marriage tie. Monogamy is still a cherished ideal for the Parsi community. Bapsi Sidhwa gives a detailed description of the marriage ceremony of the Parsi community in The Crow Eaters. The marriage ceremony in the Parsi community is preceded by preliminary ceremonies four days before the actual ceremony.

As Billy (Behram) is the last hope of the family, his marriage is planned with utmost care. Tanya, the daughter of Khan Bahadur Sir Noshirwan Jeevanjee Easymoney, one of the richest Parsis of Bombay, is chosen for Billy. Billy with his mother Putli and grandmother Jerbanoo goes to Bombay to perform the ‘token money’ ceremony. Billy is made to stand on a small wooden platform prettily decorated with the patterns of fish drawn in lime. Tanya’s mother Rodabai anoints his forehead with vermilion, touches vermilion to the toes of his shoes, and presses rice grain on his forehead. The sisters, aunts and cousins sing traditional ditties while Rodabai garlands Billy. She gives him a little envelope containing the ‘token
money.’ She also gives him a heavy chain watch of gold and tells him to step off with his right leg first. Then Tanya mounts 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 is fixed. Four days before the actual wedding ceremony the Madasara ceremony is performed. In this ceremony, would be bride and groom take a bath to signify purity of the body. It entails much stepping on and off the small, fish-patterned platform. After Billy and Tanya step off and plant a mango sapling to ensure their fertility, the sisters mount the platform to be garlanded, stained with vermilion and presented with their set of clothes and thin strings of gold. The aunts and uncles, eagerly waiting their turn, come next. They are also garlanded, stained with vermilion and given small envelops containing cash. Rodabai performs the honours for Jerbanoo and Putli, and then with a great deal of coaxing mounts the platform herself.

The wedding takes place on flower-bedecked stage at the Taj Mahal Hotel. Tanya, wearing a white satin sari, heavy with silver and pearl embroider, is sitting demurely on a carved chair. Billy is sitting on an identical chair wearing a tall, dark pagri-hat, and white coat and pyjamas. Two priests are standing before them chanting and throwing rice, coconut slivers and rose petals at them. Freddy and Putli are standing behind Billy and Sir and Lady Easymoney behind Tanya as witnesses. The novelist reports on the core ceremony of the Parsi marriage:

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, promising to pay her 2000 dirhems of pure white silver and two dinars of standard gold of Nishapur coinage?’

‘We have,’ answered Freddy and Putli.

‘And have you and your family with pure mind and truthful thoughts, words, and deeds, and for the increase of righteousness, agreed to give for ever 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.

After this the priest invoked the blessings of God on the married couple and advised them on how to conduct themselves properly.

The bridal couple were smothered to garlands and presented with thousands of envelopes containing money and gold coins. (The Crow Eaters 223-224)

Thus, the Parsi mode of marriage is a mix of the Hindu and Muslim modes of marriage. In fact, the Parsis are cultural hybrids as they have adopted the customs of Hindus and Muslims both. But it is interesting to note that the actual ceremony is performed after sunset. Also, part of the ceremony is repeated in Sanskrit—as a reminder of pledges given to king Yadav Rana who gave refuge to the Zoroastrians when they landed in India about 1300 years ago.

Mixed marriage is one of the challenges which the microscopic Zoroastrian community confronts today. Bapsi Sidhwa has hinted at the problem of inter-community marriages in all her novels. This controversial issue of the prohibition of inter-community marriages among the Parsis is elaborately examined in An American Brat. In making this question the central concern of the narrative, Sidhwa reveals her awareness of an issue that has serious ramifications and consequences for the very existence of the Parsi community. However, the first Parsi novelist to highlight the contentious issue of inter-community marriage is Perin Bharucha in The Fire Worshippers. In her novel, Bharucha tries to reject the concept of ethical purity through Nariman, an idealist, who wants to marry outside his community. Nariman's father, Pestonji Kanchwalla, resists disintegration of his community beginning from his own family through the proposed mixed marriage of his son with Portia Roy, a non-Parsi girl. The younger Parsis revolt against such artificial restrictions. Nariman's sister, Rhoda, supports her brother's marriage. Later Parsi novelists also show that racial rigidity to inter-community marriage is gradually getting eroded. Firdaus Kanga in his novel Trying to Grow shows that the protagonist Brit's family allows his sister Dolly to marry a Muslim, Salim. Initially Brit and Dolly's parents resist the marriage as the Muslims are traditionally the historical enemies of the Parsis. When Dolly refuses to change her stand, the parents give their consent.

Bapsi Sidhwa hints at the problem of inter-community marriage in her first novel The
Crow Eaters. In this novel Freddy, like the majority in the Parsi community, does not favour mixed marriage. Faredoon gets fierce when his fifteen years old son Yazdi tells him that he wants to marry his Anglo-Indian classmate, Rosy Watson. He slaps him on the face and asks him to get out of his sight. This is the first time he has struck any of his children. His wife Putli advises him to sit down with Yazdi and talk things over. He goes to Yazdi’s room, embraces him and encourages him to talk. Yazdi describes how horribly Rosy is being treated by her step-mother and father, and says he wants to extricate her from her unhappy situation by marrying her. Faredoon tells him that his love is born out of pity but that is not enough for marriage and asks him in his own funny way whether he can think of marrying the dogs he pities. Yazdi retorts that Rosy is not a dog. Faredoon says she is a “mixed-breed mongrel” (The Crow Eaters 128). Defending her against his father’s racial prejudice, Yazdi says, “What does it matter if she is not Parsi? What does it matter who her parents are ... she is a human being, isn’t she? And a fine person. Better than any Parsi I’ve met” (The Crow Eaters 128).

Sensing that his son’s enthusiasm for the girl cannot be toned down by everyday exhortations, Freddy argues that they are the Parsis and Parsis are not allowed to marry outside their community because Zoroastrianism emphasises the need for preserving the ethnic purity. But when Yazdi declares despondently that he will never swallow such disgusting notions, Faredoon tells him that he cannot force him to accept them but he will never permit him to marry Rosy. Faredoon tells his son Yazdi who is keen on marrying Rosy:

I believe in some kind of tiny spark that is carried from parent to child, on through generations. . . a kind of inherited memory of wisdom and righteousness, reaching back to the times of Zarathustra, the Magi, the Mazdiansians. It is a tenderly nurtured conscience evolving towards perfection. I am not saying only we have the spark. Other people have it too: Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists. . . they too have developed pure strains through generations. 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. It reverts to the primitive. You will do yourself no harm—you have already inherited fine qualities—you have compassion, honesty, creativity—but have you thought of your children? 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—empty and confused; misfits for generations to come. They will have arrogance without pride—touchiness without self respect or compassion; ambition without honour. . . and you will be to blame (The Crow Eaters 128-129).

Freddy argues that children born to people who marry outside the community will be misfits. He emphasises the need for preserving the ethnic purity. Mixed marriage was not conceived as a threat by the Parsi community during the colonial period. But Freddy opposes it since it involves a challenge to patriarchy. The motif of mixed marriage is peripheral to the narrative in The Crow Eaters whereas it becomes central in An American Brat. Bapsi Sidhwa describes the Zoroastrian beliefs in An American Brat, in detail: “Once a Parsee-Zoroastrian marries a non-Zoroastrian, he or she is deemed to have renounced the faith and ceases to be a Parsee-Zoroastrian. The laws of purity of the Zoroastrian faith forbid intermarriages, as mixing 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” (An American Brat 305).

In An American Brat, the marriage theme is examined in detail and in Parsi context. Feroza, a young Pakistani Parsi girl’s horizons widen when she joins a larger university in the more cosmopolitan city of Denver in the United States of America. She moves into an apartment with two American girls and sheds many of her social inhibitions in their company. Her newly acquired confidence and sense of freedom culminates in her falling in love with a Jewish boy, David Press, at Denver.

Feroza decides to seek permission from her parents to marry David and sends a letter along with his photograph to her mother. The letter causes a flutter in the family. At the first hastily summoned family conference in Zareen’s sitting-room, the elders and the youngsters get into acrimonious arguments over Feroza’s proposal to marry a non-Parsi. The youngsters inform their parents that times have changed. They urge their uncles and aunts to enlarge their narrow minds and do the community a favour by pressing the stuffy old trustees in the Zoroastrian Anjuman in Karachi and Bombay to permit mixed marriage as it has become inevitable now. Jeroo and Behram’s fifteen year old daughter, Bunny, says, “For God’s sake! You’re carrying on as if Feroza’s dead! She’s only getting married, for God’s sake!” (An American Brat 268) The elders are outraged. Jeroo, sensing the mood and consensus of the
assembly, yells at her daughter: “Don’t you dare talk like that! One more peep out of you, and I’ll slap your face!” (An American Brat 269) She asks her to apologize at once and Bunny with tearful eyes says, “I’m sorry” (An American Brat 269). Freny and other aunts scare the adolescents into accepting the community values by citing a few cases of transgression and the consequent miseries.

After the youngsters have left the room, the elders settle down to thrash out the problem created by Feroza. It is decided that Zareen should go to the United States of America to prevent Feroza from marrying a Jew. They arm her with instructions to face varied situations. They tell her, “If you can’t knock him out with sugar, slug him with honey” (An American Brat 272). Cyrus gives her a bank draft for ten thousand dollars and tells her to offer it or part of it to the scoundrel David Press to leave their daughter alone. Here again one wonders how the novelist sends a woman all along to the new world to bring back her daughter. But then as Sidhwa has portrayed in almost all her novels, and as other Parsi writers have done, it is the woman who is stronger and more powerful in Parsi family, though she is not accepted into the Parsi-fold if she marries a non-Parsi.

At the Denver airport, Zareen is received by Feroza and David. Zareen finds David in long pants and a long-sleeved shirt bearing little resemblance to his image in the photograph showing his hairy legs bared almost to his balls. The next day Zareen broaches the subject of Feroza’s marriage by lauding the virtues of three marriageable Parsi boys in Lahore and two in Karachi, whose mothers have expressed an ardent desire to make her their daughter-in-law. Feroza praises David’s parents and says that they are respectable people though they are not rich. This gives Zareen the opening she has been looking for. She asks about David’s ancestry and his family connections. Feroza says, “If you go about talking of people’s pedigrees, the Americans will laugh at you” (An American Brat 277). Cut to the quick, Zareen explains to her the risks of marrying outside her faith. She would be thrown out of the community. She would not be allowed to enter the Parsi places of worship, nor to attend the funeral rites of her grandmother, or her parents.

Feroza entreats her mother to look at things in a different way as the Americans have a different culture. Thumping the table as if she were going to score over Feroza, Zareen says: “And you’ll have to look at it our way. It’s not your culture! You can’t just toss your heritage away like that. It’s in your bones!” (An American Brat 279) When Feroza speaks of
love, Zareen says that love comes only after being married to a right person. She regrets her having sent Feroza to America: “I should have listened. I should never have let you go so far away. Look what it’s done to you — you’ve become an American brat!” (An American Brat 279)

Over the next two weeks Zareen enjoys eating out, shopping and visiting different places in Denver. She feels as happy as a captive seal suddenly released into the ocean. Entranced by the New World she forgets the purpose of her visit for the time being and she even starts liking David. For the first time she finds herself seriously questioning the ban on interfaith marriage. It seems unfair to her that while a Parsi man can marry a non-Parsi and still remain Parsi bringing up his children as Zoroastrians, a Parsi woman cannot. She wonders, “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?” (An American Brat 287) Zareen feels herself suddenly aligned with the thinking of the liberals and reformists. She recalls Bunny’s protest and thinks that the teenagers in Lahore were right. The various Anjumans must introduce minor reforms if they wish their tiny community to survive.

And then, in the third week of her visit, a spate of anxious letters from Pakistan arrives, recalling Zareen to her mission. Frey has enclosed copies of two pamphlets titled ‘WARNING’ and ‘NOTICE’. One is from the Athornan Mandal, the Parsi priests’ association in Bombay, and the other is from the Bombay Zoroastrian Jashan Committee. The message was typed in menacing capitals,

NOTICE

PLEASE NOTE THAT ACCORDING TO THE PARSII, ZOROASTRIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, PERCEPTS, TENETS, DOCTRINES, HOLY SCRIPTURES, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS, ONCE A PARSII-ZOROASTRIAN MARRIES A NON-ZOROASTRIAN, HE OR SHE IS DEEMED TO HAVE RENOUNCED THE FAITH AND CEASES TO BE A PARSII-ZOROASTRIAN. THE LAWS OF PURITY OF THE ZOROASTRIAN FAITH FORBID INTERMARRIAGES, AS MIXING 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 \( (\text{An American Brat} \, 305) \).

Zareen scans them and a terrible fear for her daughter grips her heart. Her sleep becomes restless. One night she gets up at three o’clock in the morning all of a sudden and finds to her dismay that Feroza is not in her bed. Zareen feels sure that David, despite being admirable and appealing, “would deprive her daughter of her faith, her heritage, her family, and her community. She would be branded an adulteress and her children pronounced illegitimate. She would be accused of committing the most heinous sacrileges. Cut off from her culture and her surroundings like a fish in shallow waters, her child would eventually shrivel up” \( (\text{An American Brat} \, 289) \). Her dread for Feroza alters her opinion of David. She must protect her daughter from him by hook or by crook. She uses the tactics of “If you can’t knock him out with sugar, slug him with honey” \( (\text{An American Brat} \, 302) \) to thwart the marriage. She pretends to agree to the marriage but insists on the rituals and ceremonies which she knows will frighten David, a very private and reserved person. The relationship disintegrates and Zareen’s ploy partially triumphs.

Although Zareen goes back to Lahore, she feels that the Zoroastrian rules are absurd and unjust to women. Sidhwa presents the fundamentalism of Parsi community as unjust and unfair to women as the Islamic fundamentalism is to their women. Though, she does assert that Parsi women enjoy much freedom in their social and family life. As a Parsi writer, Bapsi Sidhwa does not take a rebellious stance against the dominating ideology of her community. However, Sidhwa is no conformist. She does not endorse the traditional Parsi code on inter-community marriage. Instead, through Zareen and Feroza’s reactions, she hints at the need for change. Zareen realizes that by denying her daughter freedom of choice in marriage, she and the educated custodians of the Zoroastrian doctrine “were no less rigid and ignorant than the fundos in Pakistan” \( (\text{An American Brat} \, 305) \). Similarly Feroza is heart-broken after David’s departure. However, she does not compromise and remains firm in her resolve not to submit to the dictates of Parsi laws against inter-community marriages. She expresses her convictions towards the end of the novel thus:
There would never be another David, but there would be other men, and who knew, perhaps someday she might like someone enough to marry him. It wouldn’t matter if he was a Parsee or of another faith. She would be more sure of herself, and she wouldn’t let anyone interfere. . . . As for her religion, no one could take it away from her; she carried its fire in her heart (An American Brat 317).

The novelist has handled this contentious issue with great maturity. On the theme of marriage, she maintains a clever balance, implicitly opposing the rigid code but not appearing overtly rebellious. The ambivalent ending conveys a lot. Ostensibly the ending of the novel upholds the orthodox view, as Feroza does not marry the Jewish boy David. However, another view can be taken, that the novel ends with some repudiation of an empty and rigid tradition. Bapsi Sidhwa hints at such repudiation, implicitly, through her mouthpieces Zareen and Feroza. The theme of the marriage is elaborately examined with reference to the Parsis’ attempt to maintain the status quo as regards the sanctity of their religion and continuity of their inherited cultural traditions.

Thus, in the novels of Sidhwa, we find that there is sometimes a clash also between Parsi identity and mainstream Indian identity. This conflict produces a sense of insecurity which leads to further consolidation of identity syndrome in Parsis. Due to this clash Parsis are believed to have a strong sense of group identity and cohesiveness. Alongwith it, there are deep rooted reasons behind this desire for distinctiveness in communities. The first reason of it is that all communities struggle to maintain an identity of their own through ethnic practices and rites related to birth and burial as a means to connect themselves with a rich and glorious past. Their cherishing of this imaginary glorious past gives them a sense of satisfaction and superiority. The second reason for trying to attain a distinct identity may be that a minority community carries within it the unconscious fear of the majority community and this fear of losing themselves in the majority space makes them stick to their cultural rituals and rites with greater force. This fear particularly takes deep roots in a community that is endangered due to decrease in its numbers. This fear of loss of identity is not only inter-cultural but also intra-cultural. While the young members of the community remain in dilemma about past and future, roots and novelty, old and new life styles, the elders remain more conscious about their ethnic and cultural roots. The seniors expect the new generation to follow the traditional cultural and religious paths and preserve their ethnic identity while
the young ones object it on the grounds of out of sync with the times and irrationality and advocate, by and large, cultural adaptability. At the same moment, we find that if Parsis try to maintain their unique culture through the observance of rituals and maintaining the right of entry to their religion closed for other communities, there is perceptible adoption of the beliefs, customs and value system of other cultures existing with them. In An American Brat, if the concern for maintaining the unique identity is one of the major driving force of Parsi community, there is other, though less perceptible, urge which takes concrete from due to the close proximity of living in a multicultural milieu. Bapsi Sidhwa’s novelistic space provides excellent ground for these contesting claims between identity, multiculturalism and generational clashes and as a writer she is not limited by them rather her novels are enriched by all these complexities and contraries.

Bapsi Sidhwa has done a great service to the Parsis by showcasing the different aspects of their life in her novels. The view of life of Bapsi Sidhwa is expansive. Human foibles and follies are treated with tolerance and mild corrective irony. Reacting to the charge of unfair portrayal, Sidhwa makes candid admission about her own community, “The Parsis are no angels by any means. One sees their strengths, weakness and strength of their women” (Interview by Chelva 46). Sidhwa neither glorifies nor vilifies Parsi life. What Bapsi Sidhwa attempts to establish is that the Parsi community is like any other community with its own strengths and weaknesses. She does not exalt the community, but only places Parsi life in perspective. She offers a rich insider’s insight into Parsi life. Sidhwa’s vision is ironic which reveals her moral preoccupations. As a writer firmly rooted in Parsi consciousness, Sidhwa explores both the superficial and the profound dimension of the comic mode, conveying in the process, the diversity and complexity of life. She has not only presented the various aspects of Parsi life but also provided the non-Parsi world with a better understanding of their ways of life, their faith and values. She has, thus, fulfilled M.G. Vassanji’s concept of the essential role of “the writer as a preserver of the collective tradition, a folk-historian and myth-maker” (63).
**WORKS CITED**


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