CHAPTER II

2. The Crow Eaters: Culture, Tradition and Constitution of Subaltern Consciousness

*The Crow Eaters* was first published in Pakistan in 1978. It describes the life of the ethno-religious Parsi minorities in the colonial era especially in the last few decades of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. As a novel of the Parsi mentality, it traces the origin, development, and settlement of a Parsi family in Lahore. The novel is a micro-perspective of the general motif of migration embedded in the Parsi consciousness. To read the novel as a novel of migration is to read the history of the Parsis. The Parsis left their homeland Persia, now renamed as Iran, over 12000 years ago to save their religion from being Islamized by the Arabs. They are the followers of Prophet Zarathustra.

The Parsi Zoroastrians after fleeing Madyan in Iran first arrived at the Port of Diu in the 8th century A.D. Their first settlement lasted there for at least nineteen years. Then they set sail towards the South of India and landed at the port of Sanjan in Gujarat, which was at the time ruled over by King Jadav Rana.

The Parsi Dastur (a Priest), who was the head of the fleeing refugees, approached King Jadav Rana. The priest narrated the fate of the Parsis and sought his permission to settle down in Gujarat. The Dastur gave the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism in a public meeting. However, King Jadav Rana was initially hesitant to allow the Parsis to settle down in Gujarat, since he was uncertain about the reactions of his own citizens. He ordered to bring a pot filled with milk to indicate that his country was already filled with people and there was not enough space for the Parsis. Reacting to the king’s gesture, the Dastur dropped a golden ring into the pot and indicated that the Parsis would merge with his people and they would improve their life by their activities.
King Jadav Rana was carried away by the intelligence of the people and he allowed them to settle down in Gujarat. The king asked the Dastur what were their actual requirements. Since, the Parsis were very particular about their religion, the Dastur asked for three things namely freedom of worship, freedom to bring up their children in their tradition and lands for cultivation. King Jadav Rana accepted these demands but imposed five conditions upon them that the Parsis should adopt Gujarati as their language, women should wear sari, men should hand over their weapons, they should respect the cow and the marriage ceremony should be conducted only at night.

The Dastur accepted these pre-conditions and he made one more symbolic gesture to assure the king that his people would be loyal to his kingdom and to the country. He stirred a spoonful of sugar into the milk bowl thereby indicating that the merger would be a happy merger. Emotionally moved by the commitment of the Dastur, King Jadav Rana immediately gave orders that the Parsis could settle down in Sanjan. The Dastur appeared before the king and announced on behalf of his community that they shall be friends to India.

At this juncture, it is relevant to see the inner meanings of the five demands of King Jadav Rana and the impact of these conditions on the lives of the Parsis in India. The Parsis have adopted Gujarati as their mother tongue. They have forgotten their traditional language. The Parsi women in India have adopted sari as their traditional dress. Orthodox Parsi women wear ‘Sidhi’ sari in the Gujarati fashion. In that fashion the sari is dropped over the right shoulder, one end of the sari is tucked at the back, and the other end falls in the front. Regarding the condition about the weapons, the Parsis surrendered all the weapons except two swords and two maces to protect the Holy Fire. Due to the fourth
condition, the traditional Parsis still do not eat beef, though there is no religious taboo against the eating of beef. As per the fifth condition, the king did not want his people to be attracted by the ceremonies of marriage and there would be no problem of conversion. The Parsis still follow this custom and there is no religious conversion even today.

From the historic anecdote, one comes to understand the spirit of adaptability of this minority community to changing situations. This condition of adaptability is the key feature of the novel. The outline of the story gives an opportunity to read the novel as a novel of minority and subaltern tradition. The novel describes the upward movement of Faredoon Junglewalla in his economical status.

Faredoon Junglewalla sets out on a journey to the land of ‘Five Rivers’ from the central part of India. Seeking his fortune in the ‘Septa Sindhu’, he takes his pregnant wife Putli, his mother-in-law, Jerbanoo and his first daughter. After some days, he reaches Lahore and settles himself among the Parsi community. Then, he starts his business. As a Parsi man, he wants to prosper in his business. His sole aim is to become a rich man among his community men. Then he sets fire to his own business spot and gets a large sum of money.

Freddy, as he is shortly known, prospers in his business. He becomes a very important Parsi man in his community. He is respected and given a very significant position in the society. Years pass by and his children are now grown up. As a shock to Freddy’s peaceful life, Soli - his elder son dies. Yazdi, another son renounces worldly life out of the frustration after the failure of his love affair with an Anglo-Indian girl. Hutoxi, his daughter and Billy - his last son are well settled in life. The story then describes the upward movement of Freddy in his private and business life. Freddy becomes old and he
spends his time with his grand children. He tells them his story of prosperity. The novel ends with the note on the impending threat of Partition. Freddy, now as a spokesperson of his community, advises his people not to move out of Lahore. He tells them that the Parsis should remain in Lahore even after Partition. Thus, the story moves through the colonial days and ends up with the suggestion of the closure of the colonial power.

The colonial background gives an additional strength to Faredoon Junglewalla. Freddy’s consciousness is rippled with self-progress and his selfish motive is expressed even in the very first chapter of the novel when he asks his children, “My children, do you know what the sweetest thing in this world is?” (TCE 9). After a while he answers, “the sweetest thing in the world is your need. Yes, think on it. Your own need – the mainspring of your wants, well-being and contentment” (TCE 10).

Then, Freddy begins to differentiate elaborately between needs and wants. The definition that he gives to ‘need’ well augments the Parsi mentality and how a subaltern should thrive towards progress. The definition should be taken not as a voice of an individual but as a voice of a community with its miniscule nature. The subaltern voice should know its own aspirations and the definition given by Freddy expresses how deeply disciplined and mobilized the voice of subalternity finds its echoes in a lucid way. According to Freddy, “need makes a flatterer of a bully and persuades a cruel man to kindness” (TCE 10). It is in the same definition, Freddy further says that need forces one to love one’s enemy as a brother. This is a fine example of the adaptability of the Parsi community to its alien culture.

One should remember that the story of the novel takes place in the colonial period. In the colonial regime, dominance was doubly articulated. On the one hand, the British
were trying to dominate the native people of the country and on the other hand, the indigenous elite were trying to dominate the native subaltern subjects. Freddy’s progress could be considered a kind of dominance. Though he belongs to a minority Parsi community, he, too, tries to exercise dominance by trying to attain power through wealth.

In order to achieve his aspirations, he even tries to get the support of the colonial power. The indigenous middle class people can utilize state power and the government to fulfil its aspirations. This acceptance of colonial power and utilization of it end in the hegemonic urge, which is temporarily embedded in the mentality of the subaltern.

This is how Freddy explains to his grand children how he made use of the colonial power for his business:

Yes, I’ve been all things to all people in my time. There was that bumptious son-of-a-bitch in Peshawar called Colonel Williams. I cooed to him – salaamed so low I got a crick in balls - buttered and marmaladed him until he was eating out of my hand. Within a year I was handling all traffic of goods between Peshawar and Afghanistan! (TCE 10).

This speech of Freddy not only expresses his ability to traffic things from one country to another country but also expresses the beginning of the concept of nationalism in its initial stages. Making use of state power is one form of nationalism, which was slowly emerging in the colonial period among the indigenous elite. For, the indigenous elite were of the opinion that only after building a kind of nationalism, they could exercise their power over the subaltern. It was a historical moment in which the elite were learning to speak the language of command, which they had learnt from the colonial masters.
Freddy’s speech clearly captures the historical conditions of the formations of nationalisms. Nationalism was trying to constitute all members of society into one grand banner. Ranajit Guha in his article “Discipline and Mobilize” talks about representation as an act of indigenous elite in order to exercise hegemony. According to Guha, representation is made through an act of collaboration with British bureaucracy.

The main objective of this chapter is to find out the relationship between culture and the constitution of subaltern consciousness. As the first novel in the Partition serial, Bapsi Sidhwa has made this novel a unique one to represent the Parsi milieu in the pre-Partition days. Sidhwa’s *The Crow Eaters* signifies the constitution of nationhood of Pakistan. The chapter focuses on bringing out the Parsi consciousness as subaltern consciousness.

*The Crow Eaters* as a novel of historical significance gives enough opportunity to read it with some anthropological approach since the novel is about a race and its culture. The colonial situation in the novel itself raises the issue of anthropological history or historical anthropology. In Subaltern Studies, this approach is gaining momentum, especially in literary texts, where there is a strong presence of colonialism.

It is true that human progress is culturally shaped and historically constituted and culture and history are mutually interdependent. They shape and reshape the respective spaces of each other. History is studied through cultural aspect and culture is transformed by historical development. The historical texts give many opportunities to locate both these aspects in order to strengthen the relationship between culture and history.

It is an anthropological impulse to read historical texts to find out their cultural codes and signs of tradition. The texts may provide new problems of culture or some of the old problems of anthropological issues may be read in new ways seeking new
solutions. In this approach, one may try to locate cultural norms and value systems, rituals and beliefs of a particular community. The symbolic representations of these cultural values in the life of the subaltern may be studied. This kind of study may provide chances to make out ideological representations hidden in the historical texts. The analytic field of subaltern consciousness is studied as a privileged history of a community.

When compared to other communities of the colonial India, the Parsis are very meagre in number. Naturally, they are dispossessed and historically they are displaced, if one traces the history of the Parsis from Persia. Bapsi Sidhwa is aware of this historical dispossession and displacement of her own race about which she voices through the characters of the novel. The historical displacement is recalled in the novel when Freddy recollects his personal progress. He recalls, “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, handful of our ancestors fled to India with their sacred fires” (TCE 11).

Therefore, the Parsis who are dispossessed and displaced should be given a contextual framework as the elite and the ruling groups are given a contextual framework. As the elite try to maintain and represent their social order within this contextual framework, so the subaltern should also be given this contextual framework. Realisation of this contextual framework in the light of ethnological reading will bring culture closer to history. Society or community becomes the most important level field to produce culture.

Therefore, culture is both socially constituted and constitutive. Culture is the object in the constituted act and it is the subject in the act of constitution. This
simultaneous presence of culture makes it a continual product of society and it is produced, reproduced, shaped, and reshaped without any break. Leneology should be continued without pollution and the purity of race should be maintained. Inter-caste marriages are to be prohibited in order to maintain purity of the race. Freddy recalls, “To this day we do not allow conversion to our faith – or mixed marriages” (TCE 11).

As Sidhwa is interested in showing the state-making process of the Indian / Pakistan nationalists, it is very apt to read the novel with a critical ethnology. Cultural differentiation inevitably leads to the identification of social and political inequality and Subaltern Studies tries to identify this cultural aspect. K. Sivaramakrishnan in his article “Situating the Subaltern: History and Anthropology in the Subaltern Project” published in Reading Subaltern Studies refers to the contribution of Subaltern Studies to cultural anthropology. He writes, “Their (the subalterns’) accomplishments have been several, but we shall be concerned here primarily with Subaltern Studies’ sustained attempt to combine history and anthropology which energized and drew upon a larger trend in cultural historical studies in different parts of the world” (215).

With this connection, the novel can be read as a representation of four important aspects of cultural study namely the antinomious relationship between culture and political economy; between ideal and material; between consensus and conflict and between community and class. In order to identify these antinomious relationships and the subsequent constitution of subaltern consciousness, one has to use the structural formulations in the novel. Structural formulations are the inner structures of the novel with meanings, which are ideologically constituted by the author either directly or indirectly.
If one tries to make sets of binary oppositions, one gets the pairs of culture X political; ideal X material; consensus X conflict and community X class. Further, these binary oppositions lead one to another classification such as that of the first elements in these pairs can be grouped under one category and one may notice that they have a commonality among them. Culture, ideal, consensus and community form one group and political economy, material, conflicts and class form the other group and all these elements have some linear and interdependent relationships among them.

The structural formulation here is a formulation of opposition. This binary approach leads one to the study of power and to the ways of finding out how power is engaged. Here, the subaltern autonomy gets into a kind of game in which power is not only engaged but also appropriated. Freddy’s upward movement in economical status is mingled with political economy and cultural and traditional conflicts. Though the novel is abundant with ideological structural formulations, the very first chapter of the novel presents them as indicators of what one may get in the succeeding chapters. The antinomious relationships, which are identified in the rest of the novel, are well indicated in the opening chapter itself.

The second paragraph of the novel introduces Faredoon Junglewala as one of the important men of the Parsi community and describes the invocation of the names of great people in the Parsi congregation. The congregation can be described as one of the important cultural activities of the community. Sidhwa describes the scene as, “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” (TCE 9).

When the Parsis migrated to India, it was not only an escape for life but also an escape for maintaining their culture and tradition even in alien places. While maintaining their culture and tradition, the community has served a lot to improve the political economy of the land. The condition of diaspora of the Parsis did not deter them from developing themselves both as individuals and as a community.

What one notices in the life of Freddy, as a member of the Parsi community is, his ability to maintain both his culture and personal economy. In the life of the Parsis, journey towards a new land is not a far off reality of the past but a reality of the present. This is the reason why the novel begins with the description of the journey undertaken by Freddy towards Lahore. The myth of journey is an embedded reality in the consciousness of this subaltern race and Freddy is a microcosm of this reality.

The antinomious relationship between culture and political economy in Freddy can further be explained by the kind of definition given to the difference between ‘need’ and ‘wants’ given by him. His concept of culture is mingled with his awareness of his personal needs. He looks at need as the basis of self-improvement. The definition he gives to need identifies him as a man of self-awareness. He defines need as, “Need makes a flatterer of a bully and persuades a cruel man to kindness. Call it circumstances – call it self-interest – call it what you will, it still remains your need. All the good in the world comes from serving our own ends” (TCE 10).

The first part of the definition explains the understanding of Freddy about the basis of need and the second part links it with one’s own consciousness. He goes into the very
basis of consciousness, which, according to him, is subdued by need. He feels that need shapes one’s consciousness. He gives an egoistic twist to his definition of need “What makes you tolerate someone you’d rather spit in your eye? What subdues that great big, “I”, that monstrous ego in a person? Need, I tell you – will force you to love your enemy as a brother!” (TCE 10).

The second binary opposition can be explained with an example from how the Parsis have worked hard to maintain their own concept of ideal world against all kinds of materialistic concerns. To think about itself as a community, a community always needs its own opposition or to give it a deconstructive explanation, the essence of one’s own existence is in the presence of its opposite notion. As per the ideological approach of the Parsis, their ideal world is always present in their own consciousness. The grand cosmic plan of Ahura Mazda, Lord of Life and Wisdom, is always present in their consciousness.

Freddy refers to this cosmic plan when he talks about the materialistic concerns of his community. He says that the Parsis have maintained their strength in order to move on the spiritual path of “Asha”, the Divine Law, one of the four great powers of Ahura Mazda. He is scared about the plight of his community, that they would have been grouped with the scavenging community of the untouchables, had they not been able to maintain their strength spiritually. He says, “Oh yes, in looking after our interests 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’” (TCE 12).

The antinomious relationship between consensus and conflict is found in the first chapter of the novel. It refers to the cultural lineage maintained by the Parsis in India. The Parsis made a promise to Jadav Rana that they would be loyal to the rulers of this country.
As per this promise, the Parsis have been loyal to the rulers of India whether they are Hindus, Muslims or British.

The Parsis have maintained their loyalty. However, the loyalty shown by them is not a pure and unalloyed loyalty. Their loyalty has its own moments of conflicts. It is the conflict of a subaltern race, when it faces moments of crisis on the face of political change. The Parsis have always been put under two types of dangers - between assimilation and annihilation. In order to keep themselves away from these two dangers, they have followed a middle path but even the middle path has its own moments of crisis.

Most of the time, the Parsis are on their moments of consensus. The term consensus here is used in the sense of political loyalty. As per this kind of consensus, majority of them are loyal to the rulers. When they maintain this kind of loyalty, conflict arises because of their own alienation from the rest of the country. This kind of political loyalty fixes them on their moments of crisis.

Freddy, when explaining the Parsis’ love for peace and prosperity says, “They are the sweet dictates of our delicious need to exist, to live and prosper in peace: Otherwise, where would we Parsis be?” (TCE 12). This fear of alienation and fear of annihilation made the Parsis chose Lahore during Partition. But whether they are in India or in Pakistan, they are definitely a subaltern race. Between Hindu majority and Muslim majority, they chose the latter and settled down in Lahore.

The fourth antinomious relationship between community and class has many representations throughout the novel. But there are some expository passages in the first chapter of the novel. When Freddy started his journey towards Lahore to find out a prosperous state, he was an ordinary member of the community. He was just an
individual, having certain principles of his own community. However, when slowly progressed in his business, he began to represent a class.

This class-consciousness can be linked with his egoistic nature with his own definition of need. He did all kinds of tricks and he had to do all kinds of sundry things to get favours from the authorities. In return, he was able to get help from them and his business prospered. This prosperity misplaced Freddy from his community consciousness to class-consciousness. Once, when he is among a group of women in his home, he confides in them the secrecy of his prosperity. He boastfully refers to his business life in which he got the help of Colonel Williams to traffic things from one place to another place. In short, Freddy has made use of the colonial power to prosper in his business.

These four kinds of antinomious relationships are cited with examples in order to point out the cultural and traditional aspects of the novel along with the formation of subaltern consciousness. Freddy’s consciousness moves along with the linear arrangement of the four structural formulations of the antinomious relationships. The process shows us how subaltern consciousness is created and how it is expressed through these structural formulations. Another important aspect of subalternity is how subaltern ontology is formed through myth and religiosity of the subaltern race. In fact, myth and religiosity become indexical of subaltern ontology.

The Parsis have their own myth and their religiosity is expressed through their culture. However, myth and religiosity are expressed through certain moments in which the subaltern consciousness is revealed as a structural pattern of the race. The Zoroastrian religion, as it is said, is revealed by God to Zoroaster or Zarathustra. There is a great
dispute among the scholars about the period of Zarathustra. They place him more or less a contemporary of Xenophanes, The Buddha, The Mahavir, Confucius and Lao Tse.

Zoroastrianism believes that two rival forces of Good and Evil dominate the universe. It is the responsibility of mankind to choose either of these two forces. ‘Ahura Mazda’ (Ormuzd), the Lord of Light, represents Good and ‘Angra Mainyu’ (Ahirman), the Hostile Spirit, represents Evil. The world is the battlefield for these two forces. An everlasting battle is continued until Evil is destroyed. After the destruction of Evil, there will be a resurrection, a final judgement and an endless era of universal peace. According to this belief, all men have to necessarily take sides and their individual fact is decided accordingly. One who devotes oneself to the service of Ahura Mazda will enter into Paradise. The rest will go either into Purgatory or into Hell.

The basic scriptures of Zoroastrianism are collectively known as ‘The Avestha’. Some sections of the collection were destroyed during the several invasions of Persia. The oldest and the most sacred texts are called ‘The Gathas’- the hymns, which are actually the songs of the Prophet himself. ‘The Gathas’ is one of the fragments of ‘The Avestha’. There are many fragments in it such as ‘The Yasna’- a collection of Psalms; ‘The Vispered’- an appendix; ‘The Vendidad’- a code of conduct and ‘The Yashts’- a series of hymns.

Every Parsi individual is connected to the Zoroastrian sect by well-known and well-knit principles of the sect. Every Parsi, young or old, recites the daily prayer in the ancient Avestan language. By reciting the daily prayer, the Parsi individual becomes an example of how myth and religiosity go into the consciousness of the people of the sect.
The daily prayer emphasizes the fact that a subaltern religion has its own semiotics and it has its own symbolic structures of action.

Subaltern religiosity is constructed in opposition to elite religiosity and it creates a binary opposition between elite and subaltern religiosity. In order to maintain or to continue its own religiosity, a subaltern religiosity makes use of culture as its symbolic structure of action and culture is used to repudiate elite religiosity, which implies that its culture should be continued at any cost.

The subaltern mentality is formed out of an unconscious logical system, which lies beneath the surface of myth, beliefs, values and activities of a subaltern group. The unconscious logical system directs the individuals of a community to form a closely-knit circle in which all members of the community participate and contribute to a general cause. Thereby the community maintains its myth, beliefs, values and activities in systematic ways.

In *The Crow Eaters*, when Freddy settles in Lahore, he chooses to live among the Parsis. He settles among the Toddywallas, the Bankwallas, the Bottliwallas and the Chaiwallas. The Parsi community in Lahore is well connected. Sidhwa describes, “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” (TCE 21).

It is also pointed out that there are no beggars in the Parsi community. If one Parsi becomes rich, he helps other Parsis to prosper. When Sidhwa points out this aspect of Parsi people, she slightly satirizes the poverty of India, “There were no Parsi beggars in a country abounding in beggars” (TCE 21). The Parsis are known for their charitable acts.
Though they are very frugal, they are generous in many ways for a good cause. When a Parsi becomes rich, he hands over a sizable amount to charity. He establishes schools, hospitals and orphanages.

The generosity of the Parsis can be linked with the myth and religiosity of their consciousness. Another aspect of their myth and religiosity lies in the place a woman occupies in the Parsi society. The image of woman is well framed in the collective consciousness of Parsi mentality. A Parsi woman’s external activities are well codified and are carefully watched. She is expected to behave decently in public. She is not expected to appear in public without her ‘mathabana’- a white kerchief wound around the hair to fit like a skull cap. The dress code for a Parsi woman is to be strictly followed. When Sidhwa describes Putli - Freddy’s wife and Jerbanoo - his mother-in-law, we see them in “The holy thread circling their waist was austerely displayed and sacred undergarments, worn beneath short blouses, modestly aproned their sari-wrapped hips” (TCE 23).

The two women are considered with great dignity for their adherence to the religious prescriptions. But this kind of reverence is given only to alienate the entire community as impure race or to relegate them to a marginal position. Their religious position does not allow them to mingle freely with others especially with the Brahmins. The novel describes an incident. When Freddy returns from the house of the mystic man after his consultation, he meets a Brahmin priest on his way, but the priest admonishes him to take care of his steps in order to avoid his touch. The touch of a Parsi man is considered a contamination.
This religious act of negation is a result of the dialogic and dialectical tension, which is present in any religious ideology. This is also an instance of the framework of power, which is embedded both in elite and subaltern consciousness. It has been already pointed out that subaltern consciousness is constituted by certain beliefs and practices. It follows and believes in the practices of other religions. This fractured belief, which is termed in Subaltern Studies as a diffused consciousness, becomes a basic conception in subaltern religiosity.

The novel presents a moment of this diffused consciousness when Freddy wants to do some harm to his mother-in-law, Jerbanoo. In order to drive an evil spirit against her, he consults a mystic. The Fakir is believed to have been in touch with the spirits. He is a scholar in esoteric arts. When Freddy goes into his room, the Fakir is in yogic trance and when he opens his eyes, he calls Freddy a murderer. This address makes Freddy shudder and he tells him the purpose of his visit. He tells the Fakir that his mother-in-law has made some contacts with evil spirits and torments him. The Fakir wants to have a coil of Jerbanoo’s hair. Freddy returns to his house with a determination of snipping the hair from his mother-in-law.

Here, the Parsi faith, which believes in the existence of Good and Evil as two perpetual rivalries of this universe, gets a diffused consciousness. Freddy takes recourse to the practices of other religion. When he attempts to cut off a coil of the hair, he slips into a moment of diffused consciousness. It is said that religiosity is embedded in the discursive constitution of subaltern culture. The narration of a subaltern culture inevitably has instances of this discursive constitution of subaltern culture in each member of the
community irrespective of the status. Freddy and Jerbanoo, the two main characters of the novel, are manifestations of the Parsi culture in its diffused status.

Jerbanoo’s religiosity arises out of fear and self-protection. She thinks that her son-in-law intends to harm her. She also thinks that Freddy is the only enemy in her life. There is a cold war going on between them. In order to avoid the evil spirit and to avoid the bad influence of Freddy, she becomes excessively religious. She recalls the death anniversaries of her relatives and orders for costly masses for each of the deceased relatives. Like a Parsi priest, she prays five times a day. She takes fire from the family fire altar to each room of the house.

It is at this juncture, one has to recall the significance of fire in the Parsi culture. In the discursive constitution of subaltern consciousness, one may notice structures of meaning – the symbolic structures that bear certain semantic framework. Fire is a representation of such structures of meaning in the Parsi culture. When a Parsi visits a Fire Temple, he first washes his hands and face with consecrated water before entering the Fire Temple. Then he faces the east and performs the ‘Kusti’ ritual – Kusti is a sacred girdle made of seventy-two threads of lamb’s wool symbolizing seventy-two chapters of “the Yasna”. Every Zoroastrian wears the Kusti around the waist. Then he removes his shoes outside and covers his head. He bows down before the Fire and recites a brief ‘Asham Vohu’- a four-lined prayer. He is offered some cold ash from the sacred fire, which he places between his eyebrows and at his throat. The placing of ash symbolizes that one day, he too, will be turned into ashes.

There is a mythological belief in the Parsi culture about Fire and its significance in their life. Fire plays a very significant role in the Jashans – a celebration of happy or tragic
event with prayers and a meal and Initiation and Purification ceremonies. The consecration ceremony in the Fire Temple is the most spectacular ceremony. The Parsis believe that there exist three gates of Fire namely the ‘Atash Behram’ - the Fire of Victory; the ‘Atash Adaran’ – the Fire of Mercy; and the ‘Atash Dadgah’ - the household fire. The initiation practice and purification ceremony are performed with the help of fire. The sacred fire also plays a vital role in the death ceremony.

The fifth chapter of *The Crow Eaters* elaborately describes the rituals related to death. Jerbanoo is afraid that she may not have a decent ritual after her death. The ritual of death among the Parsi people is unique and strange. They do not bury or burn the dead body. They leave the dead body to be devoured by the vultures. For this purpose, they have a separate place called the Tower of Silence where the dead bodies are placed for the vultures. The novel describes the Tower of Silence to emphasize the significance of it in the life of the Parsis.

Rituals related to death start even before life leaves the body. The Parsis place the sick people in a separate place. A corner of that room is washed and a clean sheet is spread. The priest lights the sacred fire with sandalwood and incense and chants the prayers to comfort the departing soul. A close relative whispers the four lined ‘Asham Vohu’ in the ear of the dead body before it is bathed and then the corpse is wrapped in old ‘Sudras’ – a sacred shirt worn by Zoroastrians.

A wick lamp is lit at the head of the dead body and the ‘Asham Vohu’ is continued. Then two men take a bath, reciting the ‘Kusti’ prayer, they wear clean white clothes. They have the ‘Paiwand’ – a piece of white cloth or tape to protect from any infection. The corpse is lifted and placed on a stone in the living room, the arms are folded
across the chest, and the legs are stretched full length and tied together at the ankles. With
the face open, the whole body is covered with a white shroud. Three ‘Kashas’ (circles) are
drawn round the corpse in order to avoid infection. Then the ‘Sagdid’ ritual is done by
bringing a dog into the room and it is made to look at the dead body to see whether there
is any life in it. Then the priest recites from “The Avesta”. Two pall-bearers carry the dead
body to the Tower of Silence. Again, the ‘Sagdid’ ritual is done three times. Then the
funeral procession starts.

The naked corpse is left to feed the vultures and the birds of prey. After some
days, dried bones are gathered and lowered into a deep well for decomposition. When the
participants return, they take a purification bath. The room is kept washed and the sacred
fire is kept burning with sandalwood and incense for three days and nights. A wick lamp
is placed for ten to thirty days and a flower vase is placed. Close relatives do not eat meat
for three days.

The Parsis believe that the departed soul hover around the house for three days. On
the fourth day, “Fravashi” – a guardian spirit and “Sraosha Angel” – an angelic power
symbolizing divine intuition - lead the soul to a place called “Chinvat” - a bridge of
Judgement. “Rashnu”, the angelic power holds the scales of justice and weighs the good
and evil deeds of the dead soul. Then, “Mithra”, the Judge, pronounces the judgement.
The righteous soul remains in a place called “Garo Demano” - the House of Ecstatic Song.
Prayers are recited every now and then for several days. Finally, the death anniversary is
commemorated.

This is how the death in the Parsi family is mourned and the rituals have greater
significance both for the living and for the deceased. However, all these rituals of death
and purifications will be denied to Jerbanoo for there is no Tower of Silence in Lahore. She feels that after her death, she will pollute the earth because her body will be either cremated or buried for want of the Tower of Silence. However, Freddy assures her that he will arrange for her dead body to be carried to Karachi and he himself will place her body in the Tower of Silence. From this anecdote, one can assume that the myth related rituals abound in the life of the Parsis.

Subaltern Studies finds out the reason for the existence of such mythic related rituals. It looks at the close relationship between myth and religion and their place in real life. They are not mere devices of repudiating reality but they are the devices of providing structures to comprehend the immediate reality and how to respond to it. The cultural world of subaltern people is based on the mythic structures of the community. There is neither logic nor scientific approach in the formation of these mythic structures.

The mythic structures do not have any scope for deductive or inductive comprehension. They do not provide any rational or irrational reality but provide a non-rational world. They can be found even in the ordinary conversation that takes place among the members of the group. When Jerbanoo talks to Freddy about her death and when he refers to the Tower of Silence, she retards him by saying, “Leave my remains where you wish. At the first peck of the vultures the angels will rush forth to escort me safely across the bridge” (TCE 51).

The world in which these subaltern people live is not an ordinary world; it is a mythic world and the consciousness of the people is constituted by distinct religiosity and mythic universe. The distinctive religiosity of the subaltern classes is to be maintained in the Indian/Pakistan situation where there is a strong presence of social divisions. Subaltern
culture deviates itself from the insufficient classness. When there is a strong presence of community, the presence of classness is not embedded in subaltern consciousness. One may even argue that the subaltern domain is distinguished by subaltern autonomy. In short, class happens in the subaltern domain.

The subaltern domain as exemplified in *The Crow Eaters* is the result of the mixture of the capitalist relation and the historical process of colonial India. With clearly enunciated class categories, the novel presents subaltern mentality because of the colonial rule. The subaltern consciousness, which awakens in the moments of refusal and resistance, should be given an adequate space with independent initiatives. Freddy, the central character, becomes the instrument of capitalist modernization and colonial transformation. The close relationship between colonial rule and the transient structures of class is well defined in the relationship between Freddy and his English sahibs.

While Freddy is gaining this upper hand classness, other subaltern characters like his wife and his mother-in-law feel the inadequacy of classness in them. They feel that they have lost the sense of community and their subaltern consciousness and they try to seek this sense of community through various means.

The more they feel the sense of community, the more they try to form a closely-knit communal consciousness. Moreover, this concept of community is very often based on the notion of insider-outsider dichotomy, which is powerfully related to the territory of the subaltern subjective consciousness. Territoriality is one of the major ingredients of subaltern subjective consciousness. The notions of space and place go together to form the subaltern consciousness. For, a subaltern community tries to live as a closed society having a self-sufficient economy and it shares common religious beliefs.
The cultural concept of the elite people differs very much from the concept of the subaltern. With the subaltern, the cultural consciousness is a combination of time and space. The historical moment in which the marginalized people live determines the territoriality of them. In *The Crow Eaters*, Lahore becomes a ‘chronotope’- a combination of time and space. Within the limitations of time and space, subaltern consciousness becomes a constructed entity.

While Subaltern Studies tries to show the autonomous domain of subaltern consciousness, it also tries to show community consciousness interacting with elite movements. The novel has ample examples where subaltern community consciousness attempts to interact with elite movements. Here, the term elite movement is understood as any activity or way of life of the elite. The attempts made by Freddy to become a successful businessman prove to be the interactions of subaltern consciousness and elite ways of life.

Freddy’s attempt to claim the insurance money after his effort to set his own shop on fire becomes a conscious effort on the part of Freddy. The careful and meticulous arrangements made by Freddy in order to escape from the suspicion of the insurance agent show how cleverly he tries to escape from law. It is at this moment, Freddy tries to connect his conscience with religiosity. He argues, “Providential, yes, providential. You see, my friend, my intent and my conscience are clean …God has seen fit to protect me. I have always been content with my lot” (TCE 97).

Perhaps, Freddy is the first man to claim insurance money in the colonial Lahore. Subaltern cultural consciousness goes into a hegemonic discourse of colonial, political
economy in the moment. It is a historical moment of the interaction and structuring of subaltern entity.

It should be borne in mind that it is impossible to have a pure subaltern consciousness in its constituted cultural milieu. For, the process of forming an autonomous cultural subaltern consciousness is always appropriated by elite projects of nation-state building. As it has been already pointed out, Lahore in *The Crow Eaters* is a small chronotope where the ideological formations of national, racial, religious and communal identities take place. The process of appropriation of self into various fragments of subjectivity also takes place. As a novel set in the pre-Partition days of Lahore, it portrays the changing moments of historical process in which subaltern consciousness mingles with elite ways of life.

The sixteenth chapter of the novel captures this cross-juncture of both subaltern and elite ways. After getting a large amount from the fire accident, Freddy becomes a rich man with enlarged business activities. He moves freely with “Maharajas and Englishmen”. The chapter captures, “Years went by. Freddy expanded his business. He hobnobbed with Maharajas and Englishmen. As opportunity beckoned, he dabbled in a variety of trades …” (TCE 101).

*The Crow Eaters*, with a colonial background, encapsulates the development of capitalism and the voice of it is articulated by racial, gender and religious differences. However, all these differences express an insufficient classness. It is this insufficient classness which drives Freddy to attain at least a partial colonial way, if not completely. It is the same insufficient classness, which persuades him to accept the colonial dominance.
To probe deep into the question of the process of colonization of mind, one needs to understand what type of colonialism was present in the British India. Colonialism in British India had dominance as a powerful state apparatus with two fold manifestations. The British power ruled over the colonial subjects and the indigenous elite, in turn, exercised its power over the subaltern. This ‘power’ had its ubiquitous presence both in the colonial dominance and in the indigenous dominance. The alien dominance and the indigenous dominance had a pyramidal structure having the subaltern on their base.

The colonial dominance had at its disposal most of the institutional and ideological representation of the natives. The indigenous elite were made into ideological victims of this state dominance. Especially, the subaltern and the elite were taught that the colonial ways are the ultimate ways and the idea of liberal and imperialistic project was given as the only way of improvement.

Freddy, when he tries to go up in the social ladder, foresees that he could attain all those colonial concepts of improvement. For him these improvements remained as dreams to be fulfilled in future. Ranajit Guha, when he talks about the process of discipline and mobilization among the colonial subjects in his article “Discipline and Mobilize” in *Subaltern Studies VII*, says, “By contrast, for the indigenous bourgeoisie under colonial rule, state power, sovereign governmental authority, etc., were no more than aspects of an unrealized project, an aspiration yet to be fulfilled, a dream” (69).

The culture, tradition and subaltern consciousness are constituted by a deliberate attempt through a process of mobilization and discipline. The Parsi community in *The Crow Eaters* is shown as a community, which moves through this kind of mobilization and discipline. As a community with a historical consciousness of
displacement, it naturally wants to maintain a closely-knit communal relationship and its minority condition makes the community to adhere to a strict process of discipline and mobilization. All its mythical, cultural and traditional concepts are carefully constituted and maintained. They are propagated through a micro-level understanding of its subaltern condition.

To get into the process of mobilization, one needs popular consent or a set of shared beliefs and code of conducts. This set of shared beliefs and code of conduct go into each activity of the community. Even a trivial incident becomes a significant one like welcoming a member of the community who hails from another city into their society. The Parsi people show a sense of solidarity in welcoming a guest. This sense of solidarity along with the religious and racial repercussions gets greater emphasis in the process of mobilization.

In *The Crow Eaters*, when Mr. Dinshaw Adenwalla visits Lahore, he becomes a welcome guest in almost all the houses of the Parsi people in Lahore. The community almost goes into a festive mood. The Toddywallas, The Bankwallas, The Chaiwallas, The Bottliwallas and The Junglewallas all welcome Mr. Dinshaw Adenwalla.

When Bapsi Sidhwa talks about the hospitality of the Parsis, she describes that it becomes one of the communal rituals to make it as a cultural code. The novel describes thus, “Hospitality was accorded even to those Parsis who merely passed through the city. It did not matter if no one knew the travelers. As long as news spread, and it invariably did, that a Parsi was on a train, some family or other sure to meet him. Bearing gifts of food and drink, they helped pass the time for the duration of the stop” (TCE 55).
The enthusiasm as we notice it in the hearts of the Parsis becomes a cultural code like other mythical codes of their community. When these cultural codes are injected into the minds of a particular community, some sort of ordering takes place in the historical consciousness of the community. There is a direct relationship between myth and historical consciousness. The symbolic construction of the Parsi community as a subaltern race takes place within the relationship between myth and historical consciousness.

The novel presents many examples in which religious idioms are engaged and subverted. The entire narration of the novel becomes a dialogical pattern where one notices both concept and evidence. Both the concepts and the evidences co-exist as mythical codes in all aspects of the Parsi life. For instance, when Freddy’s wife, Putli, passes through her monthly periods, a strict code of conduct is enforced on her and on other members of the family. All these codes of conduct are strictly adhered to with some mythical overtures with a binary concept of purity and pollution.

In a Parsi house, there is a separate room for the benefit of such women. Every woman during those five days remains only in the “other room”. She is not allowed to go out of the room. The Parsis think that women who are in such a condition can defile even the elements such as the sun, the moon and the stars. The very sight of such women brings pollution to the onlooker or to the objects. Bapsi Sidhwa describes the situation thus, “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” (TCE 70).
Putli when she goes into the room enjoys her enforced rest. She even thinks that since this rest is religiously sanctioned, there is no need to have a sense of guilt for her being idle in the room. The following description of the ways in which Putli spends her days proves the point that there are many strict religious codes. Putli can leave her room only to use the bathroom, that too, in a careful manner. She has to proclaim loudly that she is coming out of the room so that others can hide themselves or go out of the way hurriedly. Putli can proceed only when she gets a clearance from others. She cannot simply walk to her destination. She has to cover her face with a shawl so that her face may not defile the prayer table.

Even the eating process should be carefully done. Putli is served her meals in the small room. A separate plate and spoon are reserved for the occasion. They are served by a servant boy and not by other Parsi members. Putli cannot have pickles or other preserves during those days for her touch may spoil them. She cannot even touch flowers, which are considered pure religious symbols. The entire family, if at all any need arises, talks to her through the closed door. However, if they have to talk to her directly in an emergency, they have to take a bath from head to foot and purify themselves.

This incident of preserving purity is shown as an example of how Parsi women are compelled to go through such ordeals during the menstrual days. Parsi women, as second level subalterns, have to pass through this stage periodically. If the Parsi women have their own suppressive ways to pass through the menstrual days, the Parsi community has a symbolic and poetical way of expressing one’s desire to get married. If a young Parsi man or woman wants to get married, and if they feel shy to express this desire directly to the
elders of the family, they secretly mix a pinch of salt to the drinking water. When the elders drink the salty water, they realize that someone in the family wants to get married.

The pot in which the Parsi family stores drinking water is known as ‘a matka’. It is a clay pot and it makes the water cool. In Freddy’s house, the servant daily pours water into the pot. When Freddy, one day, drinks water from the pot, he comes to know that the water tastes salty. Then both Freddy and his wife try to find out who has put salt into the water. Among his children, Yasmin, his daughter and Soli, his son are two eligible young people.

Freddy tries to find out who is responsible for the incident. However, both Yasmin and Soli disclaim it and Freddy tries to give a moral courage to them by recalling his young days and how he put salt into water to express his desire to get married. But even after this, the young people do not come out with the truth. Freddy has his own suspicion about his mother-in-law Jerbanoo. Only at a later stage, he comes to know that it is Yazdi; another son who is younger to both Yasmin and Soli wants to marry Rosy Watson, an Anglo-Indian girl.

An orthodox Parsi believes that the continuation of the purity of the race is possible only when the community maintains the continuity of the spark. The spark is supposed to be there in every member of the Parsi community. Mingling of another contaminated blood with the blood of a Parsi is sacrilegious and detrimental to the continuation of the race. While arguing with his son Yazdi, Freddy says that he cannot go against the popular belief of his community. He argues, “I believe in some kind of a 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 Mazdiasnians. It is a tenderly nurtured conscience evolving towards perfection” (TCE 128).

The mythical tradition of a community is carried on without a break and is accompanied by a stock of practices and rituals. The fixity of the cultural scheme becomes a mode of power and the members of the community do policing and surveillance. Freddy talks about the continuation of the purified memory within the limitations of his religion. He wants to continue the purity of the race at any cost. He thinks that as a true member of his community, he should not allow his son to marry a girl from another community. He thinks that his religious identity should be maintained.

Religion is to be situated within a history, which has a linear and chronological continuation. The essence of any religion is based on its basic tenets. Here, the truth is to be separated from the superstition. The ethnocentric act of will is to be emphasized and to be practised at any cost. The cultural order of things is to be maintained. They are to be marked by a process of selection and omission. There should be an obsessive concern with chronology with a practice of appropriation. The continuation of the Parsi community is based upon the culturally legitimate children of the community.

Subaltern consciousness with its cultural overtures should be reconstructed with the active involvement of both symbolic forms and cultural logic of the community. The myth of the subaltern race is narrated and propagated and in the process, it conveys a sense of togetherness. Accretions and deletions are the two active principles by which a creative cultural process is developed within a determinate context. This determinate context becomes a background for conducting or observing strict cultural codes for any usual event in one’s life like the birth and death of somebody in the community.
The Crow Eaters presents one such context in which the determinate agent is the death of Soli, the elder son of Freddy. Freddy, one day happens to meet Gopal Krishnan, a specialist in the reading of ‘Janam Pathri’ (birth sheets) in which the life history of an individual is supposed to have been written in the ancient days. Gopal Krishnan tells Freddy that his elder son will die soon. Freddy initially does not believe the words of Gopal Krishnan. However, when Soli becomes bedridden with a mysterious fever, he believes Gopal Krishnan. Soli dies after some days.

The death in the Parsi family is to be observed with so many carefully followed rituals. The body of Soli is bathed and covered with an old garment of white cotton. Freddy, reciting the prayers, wraps the traditional ‘Kusti’ around the waist of Soli. Since there is no Tower of Silence in Lahore, the body should be transported to the Fire Temple. Soli’s body is laid on two stone slabs and a corpse-bearer draws three circles round it with a sharp nail. Except the corpse-bearer, no one can enter the circle. The women sit at one side of the body. Most of them wear white saris as a mark of mourning except Jerbanoo who is in widow’s black. The women begin to wail over the death of Soli.

The Parsi priest takes a note of every ritual whether it is properly conducted. The priest’s dog, which has two-eye like spots above its eyes, is brought into the room in order to ward off the evil spirits and to detect the faintest hint of life. The fire altar is brought and placed on a white cloth on the floor. The priest recites from the Avestan scriptures, sitting cross-legged before the dead body. He chants throughout the night and keeps the fire alight and the room is filled with sticks of sandalwoods and frankincense in order to get fragrance.
Next day, the pall-bearers come into the room carrying an iron bier. Placing the bier beside the body, they recite a short prayer. They are in white garments and their hands are gloved in white clothes. Even their foreheads and sides of the faces are covered with white clothes. The loose end of the scarf is wrapped around their necks right up to the chin. They pray for the welfare of the deceased soul. The mourners, one by one, go before the body to have a last look at it and they bow before it. Once again, the dog is brought into the room. The pall-bearers cover a white sheet over the body, and lift it on to the iron bier and then to their shoulders.

The women stay behind and the men alone follow the bier. When Freddy removes the white sheet to have a last look at his son’s face, other Parsis who are present there consider this act of Freddy sacrilegious because once sacred rites are performed over the body, people of other faiths are not permitted to look at it. However, Freddy tries to pacify those Parsis by saying that others are like his brothers and sisters. At last, in the small graveyard, the body of Soli is placed within four marble slabs and buried. When the place is covered with a mound of earth, a pall-bearer claps his hands thrice and the men turn towards the setting sun to pray over their sacred threads.

The ceremony over the departed soul continues for four days and nights. At the end of this ritual, Freddy announces, as a mark of ritual, a customary proclamation of charity. The family will construct a school at Karachi. Then the entire family visits the site at the graveyard on the fifth day.

The elaborate description of rituals related to death shows the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution. It also provides a set of focal signs that are deeply appropriated by the Parsis. The focal signs here are the dog - with four eyes and the white clothes worn by
the mourners and the priest. The focal signs with their symbolic nature try to cast off impure substances and practices. Even at the end of life, the purity of the body should be maintained. The signifiers of low ritual status should be identified and are to be removed from the sight. The look of those who belong to other religion is considered a low ritual signifier. In the novel, the prescriptions and prohibitions are highly coded with symbolic meanings.

The purity of the body is maintained with some prescriptions and prohibitions and the Parsi bodies are highly charged with cultural codes. The priest and the other elders of the community play a vital role in maintaining the cultural codes. The purification mode is continuously integrated into the consciousness of the Parsi people. The symbolic forms define and sustain the people of other religions as the opposites. The priests of the community act as the working modes for prescribing and maintaining the concept of a pure body.

In a cultural codification process, the body constructs a frame of selfhood in individuals and the frame of selfhood becomes a collective experience, too. It also provides a group of signs, which signify the relations of individuals to their contexts. The body becomes an object towards which the constructions of ‘self’ and ‘others’ are directed and they are carried out through the body.

Sauraph Dube in his article, “Myth, Symbols and Community: Satnampanth of Chattisgarh” in Subaltern Studies VII, talks about this mythical symbolization of body in the hierarchy of a caste society. He argues:

These signs constitute the ‘self’ by defining a person’s ritual status within the system of relationship in the caste hierarchy. Moreover, in this system
of ritual ranking there is continuity between the body social and the body personal: the cast, literally as a body, affords and transmits the signs of ritual status embodied by members (146).

The subaltern consciousness of the Parsi community is formed, as it is has been shown, through the cultural, traditional and mythical formulations of ‘self’ within a given context. In *The Crow Eaters*, the construction of the subaltern consciousness takes place in a particular historical moment in which the nationhood is formulated. Bapsi Sidhwa, as a writer of a minority race, formulates the structural pattern of the novel along with the codifications of culture.

As one of the Partition novels of Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters* presents the important aspects of forming an idea of nationality and forming the idea of subaltern consciousness within the issue of nationality. The study of the novel will not be a sufficient one, if mention is not made about the issue of Partition raised in the novel.

The relationship between the Parsi community and the colonial power, which is represented, becomes the ideological background against which Sidhwa writes almost in all of her Partition fiction. The novel captures the Parsi mentality towards the colonial power. It subverts the consciousness into a varied fragmentation by showing, at various levels, the consensus and conflict polarities of the colonial citizens.

The very first chapter presents the visit of Freddy to the Government House. Perhaps it is the very first evidence of loyalty to the colonial power shown by Freddy. The loyalty shown by the Parsi people to the British Empire is arbitrary and situational. When Freddy goes to the Government House, he signs his name in the Visitor’s Register. Freddy “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” (TCE 22).

If the first chapter shows the evidence of consensus with the colonial power, the last chapter shows moments of conflicts where the loyalty of the Parsi community is to be fixed towards any one of the larger community. The looming threat of Partition is suggested at the end of the novel. The Parsis should now decide on which side they should show their loyalty.

In the last moments of his life, Freddy is disturbed about the events in the country. He considers the entire events related to the freedom of the country greater confusions of the period. He blames it on Dadabhoy Navroji, a Parsi, who started the National Congress Movement. When Dadabhoy Navroji had expressed ideas, people like Gandhi, Vallabhai Patel, Bose, Jinnah and Nehru followed him. Freddy thinks that the entire issue of Partition is created by fools. He also feels that the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Bengalis and the Tamils will have their part and the Parsis may not have a place and their future is uncertain.

However, Freddy, following the old credentials of his community and with the wisdom of the past, comes out with hope and suggests that the Parsis of Lahore will never go out of it and they will remain loyal to whoever becomes the ruler of Lahore. Thereby he suggests that the Partition will never affect his community. “Faredoon said, softly, ‘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’” (TEC 283).
Though the theme of Partition is not a main issue of the novel, it culminates in the days where the citizens of Lahore are warned about the impending Partition. There are suggestions of the bloody days of the Partition and the novel takes the readers through various modes of bifurcations, which are natural and inevitable in a religion-centered society. The subalternity of the Parsi community is defined and altered with the ideological representations of these various kinds of religiosity of these people. Hence, *The Crow Eaters* is considered an introductory novel to the series of the Partition fiction of Bapsi Sidhwa.

The Partition of India and the constitution of two separate nations are immanent in the consciousness of people during the colonial days. The concept of Pakistan was very strong in the minds of the people who were in the Muslim dominated areas. They had the vision of a new country and it was a compelling and forcible reality into which the ordinary citizens of India were thrown. Pakistan was pre-existing in the minds of people. The politicians of all ranks injected this idea of Pakistan into their minds. Even in their causal conversations, they had to refer to the future of the country and its impending danger of bifurcation.

One such incident occurs in *The Crow Eaters*, when Freddy consults Gopal Krishnan about his son’s life, Gopal Krishnan makes an indirect reference to the World War and the Partition of India. He says, “Your son suffers from an illness that has no cure. The cure will be discovered after the mighty war and after the upheaval that will turn the earth of the Punjab red with blood” (TCE 175).

The ‘mighty war’ foretells the World War and ‘the upheaval’ refers to the Partition riots, which will turn Lahore into a bloodstained city. The novel ideologically places the
pre-Partition days as a foreground in which the subaltern consciousness of the Parsi community is initiated into a process of nation building. It also presupposes the role of the Parsi people in the freedom struggle. As an “imagined community”, the Parsi people were in a condition to form their individual and collective self. There is always a close proximity between the formation of self and the discourse of narration. Infact, ‘self’ finds its own voice only through the narration.

Sudipta Kaviraj in his article “The Imaginary Institution of India” in *Subaltern Studies VII*, talks about the formation of self in the colonial days. He argues, “Narratives are always told from someone’s point of view, to take control of the frightening diversity and formlessness of the worlds; they literally produce a world in which the self finds a home” (13).

The formulation of ‘self’ in the historical moment of freedom struggle makes the novel a historical novel. The novel is considered a historical novel not because it describes the history of an individual but because it captures the historical moments of a country in which the divisions become more apparent. History is impossible without divisions. These divisions were augmented by the colonial powers. The novel suggests how the end of the colonial rule arrives with the division of India into two countries.

One should remember that the end of colonial rule is the beginning of the formation of the subjectivity of Indian citizens. The formation of the subjectivity of the Indian nationals is combined with the formation of the subaltern consciousness of the subaltern masses of the country. The indication of the subaltern consciousness is shown in the last pages of the novel. Freddy’s advice to remain in Lahore and his talk about the impending danger of Partition are mingled with resistance and refusal. The resistance and refusal are
the main ideological tools with which the main characters of the other novels of Bapsi Sidhwa react against their oppressive condition.

The subaltern consciousness of these characters is in the process of finding out an appropriate domain in which they can show their resistance and refusal. The location of the ideological domain is an important function for these subaltern characters in the works of Bapsi Sidhwa. As a first novel in the series, *The Crow Eaters* provides an adequate space in which the subaltern elements can attain a free play of independent initiatives.

*The Crow Eaters* structurally and thematically leads to the other novels of Bapsi Sidhwa. The last two pages lead to the beginning chapters of the other two novels *The Pakistani Bride* and *Ice-Candy-Man*. These two novels indicate the two divergent ways through which the theme of Partition finds its way into a kind of politico-historical narration. If *Ice-Candy-Man* deals with the theme of the Partition in a larger scale, *The Pakistani Bride* has it as a starting point to narrate the story of an orphaned girl.