Chapter II

The Eternal Conflicts between Good and Evil in *The Crow Eaters*

The hardship of speaking for one’s own country to the world as an alien writer involves great task and exceptional wisdom in writing the novels. Bapsi Sidhwa, Pakistani-born novelist now living in the USA has contributed her outstanding skill to the South Asian Literature by producing *The Crow Eaters* (1978) describing the social nobility and Parsi family. *The Crow Eaters* refers to the high pitched garrulous nature of the Parsis.

Bapsi Sidhwa’s *The Crow Eaters* is a true depiction of the desperate nature of the Parsi community. It was defined in the simple technique. The novel was effectively molded into the popular standard. The protagonist of the novel, Faredoon Junglewalla is a representative of Parsi ambition, industry, thrift and unscrupulousness. Desire to walk ahead the throng and keen to climb the rung of the social ladder, Faredoon knows exactly the way to success.

Faredoon Junglewalla embarks on his travels towards the end of the nineteenth century. Twenty-three years old, a strong pioneer, he saw no future for himself in his ancestral village, tucked away in the forests of Central India and he was determined to seek his future in the hallowed pasture of the Punjab of the sixteen lands created by Ahura Mazda and mentioned in 4,000 year old Vended as the ‘septa sindhu’, the Sind and Punjab of today. Loading his belongings, which included a widow mother-in-law eleven years older than himself, a pregnant wife six years younger and his infant daughter Hutoxi on a bullock-cart, he sets off for the north. The Cart had a wooden platform on
wheels and nearly two thirds of the platform is covered with bamboo and canvas structure within which the family sleeps and lived. The rear portion of the cart is stacked with their belongings (12-13).

A tedious two months’ journey brings in many mishaps and disaster. Freddy’s bullock-cart enters the fertile region of the Five Rivers. After spending a few days in the golden city of Amritsar, they move to Lahore. Freddy falls in love with Lahore straightaway and decides to make his home there. There are four families who had already settled in Lahore: The Toddywallas, the Bankwallas, the Bottlewallas, the Chaiwallas. None of them practised the trades suggested by their names. The Toddywallas a large joint-family were proprietors of a prosperous tea stall and Chaiwallas ran a bar. Bottlewallas is a teller in the bank and Mr. Bankwalla is a dance instructor. The novel has portrayed the Parsi culture and tradition. Sidhwa has depicted the characters in the novel purely out of fantasy, yet there are ordinary and real Parsi people rooted deep in their age-old culture and tradition. Sidhwa candidly highlights the reality about population and glorious culture of Parsi community.

There are hardly a hundred and twenty thousand Parsis in the words and still we maintain our identity why? Booted out of Parsia at the time of Arab invasion 1,300 years ago, a handful of our ancestors fled to India with their scared fires. Here they were granted sanctuary by the prince Adam Rona on condition that they did not eat beef, wear rawhides sandal or convert the susceptible masses. Our ancestors were not proud to bow to his will. To this day we do not allow conversation to our faith or mixed marriages. (TCE 11)
On their way to Punjab, the family met with a minor accident. A buffalo attacked Jerbanoo on the outskirts of village and Freddy somehow managed to protect her. Terrified and distraught, Jerbanoo felt sobbing in the arm of Freddy who for the first time felt a wave of tenderness and concern for his mother-in-law, Putli the wife of Freddy felt grateful and pleased with Freddy’s brave effort in rushing forward to help her mother. They thanked God for saving them from the great calamity.

On a pitch-black night the wooden wheel of the cart collapsed on the outskirts of the Rajasthan desert. Jerbanoo was badly frightened, when a jackal suddenly howled into the stillness. She rebuked Freddy for choosing such a dangerous journey. She suggested him to go back to his native place. Finding no positive reply, she sat solidly before Freddy and said angrily:

So now we are to be devouring by wolves! Why? Because your majesty wishes it. We are to spend the night in this forsaken place village at the mercy of the wild beasts! Why? Because our simple village was not good enough for you? But don’t image I’m to dance to your tune all the time. I’ve come for my daughter’s sake and I’m not going to stand this nonsense any longer! You turn right back. (TCE 18)

Freddy finally arrived in Punjab after having faced all these difficulties bravely. Due to his soft-spoken manners, he quickly found their way into Punjab hearts in Lahore by the fact that he was a Parsi who are known for honesty and this fact was also advantageous to him. Sidhwa here explains how the Parsi people have a certain common physical appearance. She explains the special characteristic features of Parsis:
He had a longish, nobly-contoured, firm chin face. His slender nose was slightly bump below the bridge, and large and levy-lidded; his hazel eyes contained a veiled mystic quality that touched people’s hearts. His complexion was light and bright. All this combines with the fact that he was a Parsi whose reputation for honesty by a word made him a man of consequence in the locality. His sales picked up almost at once and he began to live in reasonable comfort. He was even able to save a bit. (TCE 23)

In spite of every increasing success and prosperity in his business, Freddy was not much happy in his domestic life. Jerbanoo, his mother-in-law was proved to be a thorn in his flesh. She was continuously moaning, sighing, muttering and quarreling with him. In order to minimize the problem his wife Putli bore her stoically but Freddy found her vitriolic presence increasingly unbearable. He was also fed up with her excessive passion for food. She used to grab the choicest portion of food when they sat together at the table for lunch or dinner. Sidhwa explains her tendency:

Every time she pounced on the chicken dish. Prying out bite of giblet and liver with her fingers and popping them into her mouth, he winced. The more he flinch, the more she delighted in swiping these delicacies from beneath his very nose and stuffing them into her voracious mouth. She would then sink back contentedly in her chair and pulling all the dishes closer to her plate, proceed gluttonously to help herself to second favourites. (TCE 24)
Jerbanoo is an interesting woman character in the novel. She struggled constantly with her son-in-law who did not hesitate to kill her for getting the insurance amount. Sidhwa has created Jerbanoo character quite tactfully. She is not the women who would relish in being confined only the four walls of the house. But she keeps moving and she knows much about the personal lives of many Parsi families.

Putli is Faredoon Junglewalla’s wife. She is a saintly figure. She adapts to what she considers new-fangled customers, when she and her husband are invited to the formal tea parties, on the gracious lawns of the government houses. Her husband Freddy, for whom it is an opportunity for maintaining public relations, cajoles her to these functions. This typical Parsi woman’s mindset of Putli has a different value system Sidhwa narrates: “Deep-rooted in the tradition of a wife walking three paces behind her husband, their department was painful to Putli as being marched respectful in public” (TCE 17).

Thus, Putli is a character of tradition and she does not like change with time. Sidhwa makes her character life-like. Through Putli, the author describes other characters the writer tries to focus on Parsi orthodox women and their attitudes towards life. Putli daughter Yasmin represents the new generation. Putli is a meek lady and she is a dutiful woman. She never fails in her duty as a wife, she dislikes some activity of Faredoon for example going to the parties, quarrelling with her mother. Secondly she is a good mother to her daughter and a good daughter to her mother. As Novy Kapadia remarks:

Putli the earlier generation Parsi is scandalized by Yasmin preceding husband down the steps and into the carriage and her seeming relationship of equality with her husband. Initially adapting the manners 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 relationship, spreading out to encompass a wide variety of human being of different ages. Bapsi Sidhwa portrays the changing generations in the Junglewalla family. (18)

The trouble is not over yet. His mother-in-law starts taking away goods from his store in his absence. One day when Freddy had a sad feeling that his wife had ganged up with her mother and defended her blindly, she said to defend her mother:

I’ve never see you mean and petty what if she takes a litter something now and then to entertain her friends? After all, don’t forget, we have uprooted her, a litter something? Shouted Freddy interrupt her. You call that a litter something? Why she eats like a horse at meals and then swallows enough sweet chutney, candied fruit and liqueur to give an elephant diarrhea or haven’t you noticed her bloated dimension of late? He spluttered sarcastically. (27)

Bapsi Sidhwa’s study of some archetypal characters of the Parsi community deserves more than praise both as a sociological and as a literary document. Sidhwa vividly presents many facets of Parsi culture. She describes the bizarre graveyard of Parsi community. It is an open roofed enclosure on a hill top, called by Britishers “Tower of Silence”. The dead bodies of Parsis are left in the tower to be eaten by the vultures and other birds. As the novelist describes this peculiar tower:
Parsis are a tiny community who leave their dead on open-roofed enclosures on a top hill - to be devoured by vultures. The British romanticised this bizarre graveyard with title “Tower of Silence”. Just a word or two about the Tower: the marble floor slopes towards the center where there is a deep hollow. This receives the bones and blood. Underground duct from hollow leads to four deep walls outside the Tower. There were full of lime, charcoals and sulphurs and provide an excellent filter. (TCE 45)

Jerbanoo was much worried not only for being uprooted from her native land but also for the reason that there was no “Tower of Silence” in the city of Lahore. She was never ready to be buried like a Muslim or Christian. She was also reluctant to be shoved beneath mound of maggot-ridden earth. She also did not like to be buried in the earth.

The novelist presents her predicament:

When they first came to Lahore, Jerbanoo had been mildly troubled to discover that there was no “Tower of Silence” in the city. Now that her imagined age brought her so tragically close to death, this worry becomes an obsession. What would happen to her remains when she died? Surely they wouldn’t allow her to be buried like a Muslim or a Christian. She told them once and for all, she absolutely refused to be shoved beneath mounds of maggot-ridden earth. (TCE 46)

Kitchen is considered to be a holy place in Parsi culture. Jerbanoo therefore reacts sharply when she catches the servant red handed smoking in the kitchen. She finds that entire room is acrid with tobacco smoke. Jerbanoo slapped the boy and placed him
before Putli hauling him up by his ears to make her witness the crime. Freddy was also called from the store to deal with the culprit. Freddy was shocked by the incident as in a house fragment with sandalwood and incense the smell of tobacco is an abomination.

The novelist comments upon the situation:

The shameful crime hurt everyone deeply and each thrashed the boy in the turn. Later, to soothe his family’s ruffled sentiment, Forenoon suggested a drive in the colourfully varnished Tonga that had replaced his bullock cart. Clip-clopping sedately over the Ravi Bridge, the horse pulled the two-wheeled carriage and its occupants in to the country side. (TCE 50)

The novelist highlights the strong feeling of mutual cooperation existing among the people of Parsis community. She shows that Parsis gather to show hospitality even to those Parsis who merely pass through the city. The fact that they did not know each other is immaterial. They also gave them gifts which helped them pass the time for the duration of stoppage of the train. As Sidhwa writes:

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 was sure to meet him. Bearing gifts of food and drink, they help to pass the time for duration of the stop. (TCE 55)

Like other Parsis, the fast-talking insurance agent, Mr. Adenwalla was also welcomed with open arms and lavishly entertained on Sunday, a day before his departure, Mr. Adenwalla was very busy in collecting insurance proposals. Man after man signed on the dotted line. Women signed with intent faces and laboured pens Lebanon preferred to
give her thump impression. Freddy had also insured everything insurable --- his children, 
his wife and his mother-in-law.

The clouds of misfortune and despair thicken around the Freddies. He meets with 
losses in his business one after the other. Freddy is of the opinion that his mother-in-
law’s malign intent and ill-starred tongue are at the root of all his misfortune. Sinister 
forces act against him undermining all his efforts and Jerbanoo, his mother-in-law is his 
target. Freddy spends several restless nights arguing with his conscience.

Freddy misfortune found at outlet. As always Jerbanoo was the catalyst 
piously before super she had trudge through the house with the 
sandalwood fire wearing her maharani open and austerely tucked behind 
hers ears like an Egyptian head dress. She had not bothered to knot it at the 
back when she sat down to dinner. Glancing at her, Freddy thought she 
looked like an Egyptian mummy. (TCE 60)

Freddy prepares a plan to make up for his losses. The plan is exquisite in its simplicity. 
He goes over the details of this plan carefully, examines all the angles, and in a self-
congratulatory frame of mind marveled at his brain with one store. He is confident that 
his plant would never fail.

Freddy started his plan with a subtle change in his attitude towards Jerbanoo. He 
evined more interest in her illness and her well-being. His polite glances now included 
hem when he addressed his family. He rebuked children and asked than to respect her. 
Putli was taken by surprise to see the change in his conduct. The novelist shows the 
situation in these words:
The next morning he told Putli, “Try and keep the kids quiet in the afternoon. They bother the old lady with their noise.” ‘Why this sudden concern?’ She asked skeptically. “Ah, well she is an old woman after all I feel sorry for her. I imagine she met her relatives, don’t you think?” He spoke with such obvious sincerity that Putli lowered her probing eyes’ Jerbanoo is also at surprise to realize the sudden change in Freddy’s behaviour. She could not bear to hear. Putli’s praises to that abominable man. Then Putli attempts to convince her: He does seem to have changed a bit’, she conceded cagily, ‘but let’s see how long it lasts’. Oh, mother! Give him a change. He has his own way of showing his love for you. Try and overlook him little faults…. Won’t you? (TCE 63)

The novelist shows a peculiar feature of a Parsi’s household. Every Parsi household has its “other room”, specially reserved for women. At this room, the Parsis women were banished for the duration of their unholy state. “Even the sun, moon and stars are defiled by their impure gaze, according to a superstition which has its source in primitive man’s fear of blood” (TCE 70).

The fire breaks out all of sudden in the residential house of Freddy. The burning house was cordoned off. Policeman held the crowd back with a fence of lathisticks. Jerbanoo is trapped inside the burning house. Fireman tried to persuade her to climb down the ladder but she refused as she didn’t want to expose herself in petticoat. A pair of cotton bloomers were running out of time throws her over your shoulders spanks her button and carries her down. (TCE 83)
The fireman attempted to bring down Jerbanoo into basket. One of the cords snap about ten feet from the net, Jerbanoo slipped from the basket losing her balance, hanging on the rope she had the sense to grasp. The crowd worried for her safety screamed women and children who had been evacuated from their homes, sat in the grass in voluble little bunch. Mr. Bankwalla rebukes him for his remark and says:

Do you mean to imply that the fire was deliberate? said Bankwalla sternly.

Are you accusing your friend? Mr. Faredoon Junglewalla, here of purposely setting a torch to her own house? Do you know that his mother-in-law in the house? The poor woman was charred, bruised and half dead.

Do you mean to say he willfully with repose set fire to his housekeeping his own mother-in-law was in these? Do you mean to call my friend a murderer also? For God Sake! Exclaimed Mr. Adenwalla I am not saying of dancing anything but a representative of my company, I am responsible. I have to answer to them. (TCE 26)

A letter issued by the office of the Inspector-General of Police, supported the fact that the fire was caused by an accident and Mr. Faredoon Junglewalla received a sizable cheque. Thus he succeeds in his plan and his business once again comes back in its proper track. Wealth and status is the ultimate aim of succulently rich character of Freddy and he achieves it. In the beginning of the novel, Sidhwa describes him as a strikingly handsome, dulcet-voiced adventurer.

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. (TCE 9)

Though this records a magnificent achievement, the unravelling of events in the
novel shows links to the dubious incident in it. Freddy is representative of his
community’s steadfast policy of survival. The objective to maintain identity and position
in society is shown as public relations, rather than an honest doctrine of gratitude and
fidelity to the British Raj. The fawning is neither laud nor attack in the novel. It is
depicted as the minority community’s means of survival and balancing of personal
inadequacy.

And where, if I may ask, does the sunrise? No, not in the East. For us it
rises-and sets-in the English man’s arise. They are our sovereigns! Where
do you think we’d be if we did not curry favour? Next to the nawabs,
rajas and 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. (TCE 12)

The Parsis, as an alien ethnic minority were quick to realize the limited nature of
their voice in society and rule. They recognized the need to be strictly loyal to the ruling
mass, even if it meant shifting allegiance from time to time. Thus, Freddy’s superficially
humorous remarks his smiley manners towards Charles. P.Allen and his frequent visits to
the government house to pay deference to the British Raj are symbolic of his
community’s attitude of personal prosperity. Moreover it was essential to the Parsis to
follow the religious ways.

When the entire family was gathered around Faredoon before dinner on a particular day, he narrated how his marriage was delayed for his sister’s marriage and thereafter got finalized. He confided that he was feeling to be in love with every woman in the village-married, unmarried, old and young out of superstition, he used to pour a little salt in the drinking water of his sister in order to facilitate his marriage. Freddy says:

My eldest sister approached me. “Freddy, I think I detected a trace of salt in the water this morning!” She said a coy and insulate as a kitten. ‘A trace of salt! My word! They had swallowed ten pounds of salt in twenty days! It oozed from their bodies. I could see the chalky moustache on her upper lip where her sweet had dried. Her children ran around with salt glistening on their sickly faces. And she had detected a trace of salt only that morning. (TCE 112)

Freddy was expert not only in business affairs but also in tactical devices. He had good contacts with police officers also. One day a thickset Sikh police officer came to seek help of Freddy for admission of his son to St. Anthony’s school. Freddy pays him much respect and hospitality, and agreed help him at once. But in meantime he took advantage of the situation and asked the police officer to help a young boy who was caught in a brothel raid. The novelist shows how he once again attempted to kill two birds with one stone:

This is a young pup waiting outside to see me. I’d clean forgotten about him…. He’s a decent boy really - but you know this young blood. He’s in a spot of trouble. Two or three nights back he was caught in a brothel raid. The fool knocked down one of the sepoys. He is my kinsman and
they expect me to do something for him. Think you handle it? ‘Why not? Ask him to see me at the thana tomorrow morning’. Thank you, your honour. I will. But don’t make it look too easy - otherwise young Mr. Paymaster will not learn his lesson. (TCE 118)

Like an ordinary Parsi rooted deep in family’s culture and tradition, Freddy reacts sharply when his son, Yazdi proposes to marry an Anglo-Indian girl --- that is, outside his caste and community. The moment Yazdi disclosed her name, Freddy became fire and he could not control his anger and slapped him on his face with full force. The novelist shows the situation:

Freddy had not been prepared for this situation. His face stiffened visibly. “What kind of name is that? I don’t think I know any Parsi by the name of Watson”. “She’s not Parsi. She is an Anglo-Indian”. Father and son were both as pale as whitewashed walls. ‘Come here’, said Freddy in a strange harsh voice. His face twisted uncontrollably. Yazdi came round the table and stood before his father. Freddy got out of the chair. He gave his son a hard, level look. Yazdi felt his long stringy frame cringe involuntarily but he held his ground. Suddenly, Freddy raised his arm and slapped the back of his hand hard across Yazdi’s face. (TCE 123)

After the day Yazdi disclosed his affair with an Anglo Indian girl namely Rosy Watson and his intention to marry her, he was kept under the tactful surveillance of his family. Finding no contact with him, Rosy was much annoyed with him. Yazdi could not get sufficient means to explain his absence from school on account of his father’s
unfortunate reaction. The author shows the religious conflict from the above lines. The reason he hates Rosy Watson is that she is non Parsi.

Yazdi gripped her frail arms and kissed her flushed, wet mouth. “Look, don’t feel like that. Does he matter? I’ll marry you. I’ll find a way out. I promise. Just have a little faith in me…. Please….. Please..?” (TCE 141-142)

Rosy Watson is another interesting woman character in *The Crow Eaters*. She is an Anglo Indian girl. Yazdi loves her very much. But Yazdi does not know anything about Rosy’s personal life. The moment he comes to know from his father that Rosy is a sex-worker, he withdraws himself totally from her. Sidhwa narrates:

‘And Rosy Watson?’ He asked. “What kind of English does the whore speak?” Yazdi glowered at his father. “How dare you slander a girl you haven’t ever met?” ‘Met? I have not only met her, I have fucked her. She is a common little alley cat. It might interest you to know, Mr. Allen thought her breasts are like fried eggs’. Yazdi blanched. “You haven’t met her….. You are lying! Father lying!” ‘Why don’t you find out from Alla Ditta? Ask him… he might be able to arrange a rendezvous for you at the Hira Mandi as well! (TCE 156-157)

Freddy was the undisputed head of this community. He was recognized not only as a great philanthropist and shrewd businessman but also as a staunch and loyal member of his community. The novelist tells about the Parsis thus:

When Faredoon Junglewalla, pioneer and adventure, trotted into Lahore in the bullock-cart at the turn of the century, there were only thirty Parsis in
the city of over a million Hindu, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Twenty
years later the number of Parsis in Lahore had swelled to almost three
hundred. Poor families had drifted in from Bombay and the area
thereabouts to settle in the rich North Indian province, gratefully partaking
of the bounty that was Lahore. And of course, original son of soil, of
whom Freddy justifiably considered himself a member, had enormously
proliferated. (TCE 150)

Freddy helps Mr. Polly Sodawalla who is languishing in a London jail. He was
cought during his Voyage to England with a suitcase full of illegal opium. Freddy helped
him for the sake of the community as he did not like a Parsi languish in jail for smuggling
of opium. The family of Sodawalla was not well off and hence Freddy financed the entire
rescue operation of the unfortunate smuggler from his personal funds. An Emissary was
dispatched to London with special documents. For this release, influential connections
are entreated and coerced. Faredoon worked incessantly and at the end of the two months.
Mr. Polly Sodawalla was released from London’s jail as a free man.

Freddy did not take even a single penny from Sodawalla but he received fifty
thousand rupee for helping Mr. Karaka, a diamond merchant from Karachi whose son has
dashed an old blind beggar while he was recklessly driving his car. Freddy took fifty
thousand rupees from Mr. Karaka but paid ten thousand rupees to Mr. Gibbons Inspector-
General of Police, only forty thousand for his generosity. Freddy tells the diamond
merchant:

I talked with my friend; you know whom I mean. I pleaded with him that
the boy is like my own son. He says he will try and get him off the hook. I
convinced him, it was not Bobby’s fault, but since he did not report the accident the charges are grave…Anyway, my friend promise to help. He might got to the Karachi himself to arrange for a couple of witness-make a pre-dated report at some police thana or other…but, and here Freddy’s inflection rose to a thinly pitched, incredulous whisper,’ the bastard wants fifty thousand rupees! (TCE 153-154)

Freddy takes very unusual and unnatural steps to estrange his son, Yazdi from his Indo-Anglian beloved, Rosy Watson. He falsely claims to know her and even have fucked her. He further blamed her to be a girl of loose character, who may be arranged at Hira Mandi (a brothel). The boy turned pale out of shock. The novelist writes about this unusual situation.

Yazdi becomes abnormal due to shock. He starts behaving abnormal day by day. one day he returns barefoot from his school as he has given his shoes to a poor boy in his class. He spends his entire pocket-money and also money borrowed from Jasmine and Bill on the poor and unfortunates. Yazdi is admitted to a boarding school in Karachi for a change but of no avail. The people of Parsi community also share the Hindu belief in “black magic”. They believe in the Goddess Kali, the Goddess of death and disease. The novelist shows to the reader how black magic is prevalent all over India. Sidhwa writes:

This is a real throbbing fear of black-magic-and visual evidences of its craft is everywhere. There is Kali, the goddess of the death and distraction and diseases. And on days when she holds sway, mothers keep babies indoors. They warn their children not to step over broken eggs, little mounds of cooked rice, coloured chalk and entrails of animals,
strategically placed on sidewalks by evil adherents of the art. Brain and
trotters are not eaten on such days; or liver, or heart - for it is not only the
vegetarian Hindus who believe in the black art, but all those who are of
India. (TCE 159)

Mr. Bottlewalla who is still unmarried introduced Gopal Krishna, a Brahmin, to Freddy.
Gopal Krishna impressed Freddy quickly with his soft and factual voice and his
fascinating tales. Freddy studies him and finds that the man has no pretension in his get-
up; Mr. Bottlewalla and Freddy go to meet Gopal in his roughly whitewashed room. The
Jana Patria is neatly stacked on the makeshift shelves. In the centre of the room is a worn
table with four cane-backed chairs. Gopal examines Jana Patria and told Freddy:

You will be endowed with exceptional grace and good looks. Tall and fair
skinned, you will enchant all who are privileged to meet you. You will
shine like a star in the thoughts of men. Your community will look you as
their leader. Your wife is the reincarnation of a Devi. She is a saint. You
will be blessed with seven children. Three of them will be boys’. Gopal
looked up at Freddy for confirmation and Freddy nodded.’ That’s right,
seven children. (TCE 163)

Misfortune continues to face upon the Freddy family. His son is affected with
illness and his situation went from bad to worse despite a doctor’s treatment. Desperate
Freddy consults Gopal Krishna who said in a melancholic tone:

Your son will pass from this life in three days’, he said, as a result of
calculations. ‘The writing advises you to be brave. Your loss is not
permanent. He will be reborn in your family in a few years’. Freddy
leaned his head on his arms. After a while he raised red eyed, chastened face and whispered ‘Thank You, Panditji’. (TCE 175)

Exactly on the third day Soli was dead. The body was bathed and dressed in old garments of white cotton. Freddy wrapped it around his son’s waist reciting prayers. As there was no “Tower of Silence” in Lahore, the body was transported to Fire Temple. Putli wept noiselessly and hopelessly. Jerrbanoo and Hutoxi leaned across to embrace and support her and wipe her tears. He reconciles himself like Yazdi’s mental condition.

Freddy’s daughter Jasmine went to Karachi, after her marriage. From there, she wrote a letter to her father that Yazdi had become a college drop out. He squandered his allowance and fees on beggars. He drifted about the city and slept on the park benches and pavements. He had not been seen for the past week. His local guardian had not given him full details as he did not wish to upset him during the wedding ceremony. Freddy was worried about his sons -- one had died and another had abandoned them and gone somewhere. Billy had fallen passionately in love with Tanya. He met her in Bombay in the wedding ceremony. Putli sent a request to Tanya and her mother Rodabai to finalize the marriage. For this she required no dowry. Sidhwa writes:

Behram wanted no dowry. He wanted only the girl. And she would be welcomed though she came with nothing, but the clothes on her back! God had been kind to Putli and she was in the position to smother the girl with jewels, and drown her in silks. She vowed to keep her forever beneath the vigilant care for her loving eyelids. The letter was sealed in a matching blue envelope, addressed, and given to the coachman to deliver. Putli
flung herself face down on her bed in an open-eyed swoon of exhaustion, to await her room. (TCE 208)

The marriage was solemnized finally. Billy was jubilant and Putli expressed thanks with tears. Jerbanoo was proud that her grandson had married a nice girl from a decent family. Jerbanoo and Putli worked sixteen hours a day, visiting jewelry shop, cloth merchant and tailor. Rodabai and each of her seventeen daughters were to be given complete set of clothes. It was a nice wedding ceremony. Even a year after people kept talking about it.

One evening Billy and Tanya decided to stroll all the way to the sea. From Marine they drive to the Cowpat Beach. Billy noticed the thin ragged length of a vagabond occupying the bench, a newspaper over his face. When he went a bit near, he was shocked to see that it was his brother Yazdi. Realizing his hardship, Billy gave him some money. The novelist writes about this coincidence:

He took out his creaky new leather wallet and removed all the notes. He crushed them in to Yazdi’s hands. Yazdi accepted them with thin crooked smile shove them carelessly in to his shirt pocket “Perhaps, I will get hold of a clean shirt and pants and visit you all. (TCE 214)

They talked for half an hour and Billy got up after getting his brother’s promise that he would visit them soon. Putli wept when Billy informed her about Yazdi, they did not sleep until late night waiting for him but Yazdi never came.

Billy was aware of the beauty of his wife. He was setting more and more put off by this unforeseen concomitant of his wife beauty. He often wished he were Mohamadan
and could cover up her in a bursa. Billy became annoyed when the Simla hotel boys’ lingering glance at his wife’s face:

You are right, sir. The accountant made one mistake of twenty rupees in the total’. Billy eyed him reproachfully and with a bleak, ‘don’t you dare look at my wife’ glower, he drew two hundred rupees notes from his wallet. The clerk took the money and sauntered towards a safe to fetch the change. ‘Button up your cardigan!’ said Billy in a fierce whisper. (TCE 239--240)

Tanya gives birth to a daughter first and a boy thereafter. Faredoon realized that Soli was reborn. He trembled for joy and happy tears welled up in his eyes. He now relished that he was in the last phase of his life and left entire management of his business to Billy. Billy earned so much money that he became the richest man of the land. In the meantime, ‘Quit India Movement’ begins and partition of India takes place. Faredoon decided to continue to stay at Lahore and says: “We will stay where we are …let Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or whatever rule. What does it matter? The Sun continues to rise and the Sun continues to set” (263). In a nutshell, the novel is Bapsi Sidhwa’s nice study of archetypical characters, sociological study and a literary document. Ruthlessly truthful and deeply perspective, she told her story with courage, frankness and good humour.

The critic Rajkumar rightly says that The Crow Eaters is a masterpiece which makes us realize the proper role of English in India as not merely that of “a window on the world”, but also as a medium through which we look in and estimate and savour what this subcontinent has to offer (39). Manjula Padmanabhan writes: “Running through the
shifting colours, *The Crow Eaters* has steak of humour so original and succinct that it lifts the entire context of the book from the humdrum of the surreal” (39).

The author stirs little pockets of pure spice without any preamble or any of the cloying cuteness, which normally sounds the subject of sex. *The Crow Eaters* exemplifies Sidhwa’s treatment of human character-as capable of both extraordinary cruelty and all emphasizing kindness. Yazadi failure in the life, it shows that evil in the society. Yazadi want to live like good human being but his life seems to be failure. Faredoon Junglewalla made fraud attempt and become rich in his life. Through him author shows the social evil in this story. Bill succeeds in his life; this portrays good in the novel. All through the novel feminist concern is very much obvious. “Sidhwa is a feminist” (Randhir viii).

Feminism as a movement has played a very vital role in protecting the suppressed status of women in the patriarchal society. In the domain of patriarchal culture, women are a social construct, a site on which masculine meanings are spoken and masculine desires are enacted. As Sushila Singh states in her “Preface:”

> Feminism has been synonymous with the masculine experience with the result that the collective image of humanity has been one-sided and incomplete. Women have not been defined as a subject in her own right but merely as an entity that concern man either in his real life or his fantasy life. (7)

Many contemporary writers have projected the plight of women based on caste, creed, religion and gender and have tried to suggest some pragmatic solution to them. Though the conservative social norms and myths of feminine behavior are challenged all
over the world, a change in attitude of patriarchal society towards women is progressing at a snail’s pace.

Feminism is a highly innovative concept representing a significant departure from the traditional mode of critical evaluation. Feminism is generally seen as a struggle against all patriarchal and sexist oppression, it is a struggle for equality for women, an effort to make women become like men. Alice Jardine defines feminism “as a movement from the point view of women” (20).

Feminism is concerned with the emancipation of women by liberating them from man’s domination. It demands that women should be treated as autonomous individuals and not as passive objects; that equal attention and opportunities should be given to women for education and the employment for their economic independence. What peculiarly signifies the situation of women is that she finds herself living in the world, where she is compelled to assume the status of the “other” society being codified by man.

Legally women have been given equal rights with man, but submissive and gentle nature of women embedded deeply into their psyche did not disturb the male-dominance in the family. In the patriarchal societies if she attempts to change this matrix of domination verses submission in the man-woman relationship, she finds herself in trouble. Earlier in literature, Women writers had to contend with the imposition of limitation to their education and their chances to publish and circulate their work. Today education provides women with the skills that make them better companions, but in the past they were to be educated according to the male notion of ideal women -- one who would support man in his public role while she remained silent and confined to the private world.
Most of the women writers who ventured into the public realm have been subjected to male disapproval. The list of the women who received negative treatment at the hands of male literary establishment includes Margery Kempe in the fourteenth century, Jane Agnes in the sixteen century, Mary Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century, Harriet Martinea and Emily Dickenson in the nineteenth century and Kate Millet in the twentieth century who wrote *Sexual Politics* (1970).

Recent developments in the literary and feminist theory have played a significant role in enabling to reconsider and reinterpret literature in a new light. The new exploration in the field of the feminist criticism provides us with an opportunity to broaden our range of responses to issues of history, psychology and gender which have always engaged creative writers. Fruitful efforts of contemporary feminist critics like Elaine Showalter, Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Ellmairn, Adriene Rich, Toril Moi, Sandra M. Guilbert and Susan Gubar offer refreshingly new readings established within the mainstream of literary tradition.

The term “feminism” signifies the emergence of female power in order to get rid of their excessive and undue dependence on men. It is a worldwide movement to secure equality of women with men and enjoyment of all human rights --- social, political, economic, moral, religious, educational, legal and so on. Feminisms argue that women should be left alone to live on their own strength and means to fight against the unjust system and gain their own subsistence and thereby put an end to their dependent status. According to Simon de Beauvoir, a world, where men and women would be equal is easy to picture. Women reared and trained exactly like men were to work under the deplorable conditions and on lower wages.
Feminists contend that a change in women’s economic status is not enough to transform them. Though this had still remained the basic factor in her evolution the new woman cannot emerge until the moral, social, cultural and other changes are brought about early. Liberty for women was an abstract and empty proposition. They must break away from the limitations of their situation and work for their liberation. This liberation must also be a collective effort and requires, first of all, building particular feminist theory as such. Yet there are various perspectives. Each one attempts to analyze the topic of women’s oppression, its causes and consequences and prescribes strategies for their liberation. However, the feminist theorist has only been to identify their approach as liberal, marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist and existential and postmodern. Each one of these partials answers to the women’s question. What is fascinating is to explore the ways in which women have been oppressed and celebrate the ways in which many women have managed to take charge of their own destiny.

Feminist criticism is thus essentially a new way of reading and thinking about literature. The works have to be placed in their social, cultural perspective to understand them fully. She criticizes Freud and his psycho-analytical approach to literature which imposes sexual politics as a method by which one sex seeks to maintain its power over other sex.

Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) plays an important role in understanding existential feminism. It has helped many feminists to understand the full significance of a woman’s ‘othernesses’. Though radical, psychoanalytic and Marxist, feminists have important things to say about the causes of women oppression. Beauvoir sees that none of that truly demonstrates why women are always ‘the other’. She gives a
classic exposition of women’s situation as “one is born, but rather becomes a women” (295). She argues that the emancipated women should seek professional autonomy and financial independence. She also encourages women to be intellectual and to study writers such as Emily Bronte, Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield who have been able to probe the suffering of women.

For postmodern feminist like Helene Cixous feminist writing is not merely a new style of writing but it is “the very possibility of change; space can that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social, cultural standards” (47-48). The feminist movement till today did not have a common well-accepted positive ideology, ultimate goal and right direction. Ann Curthoy the well-known Australian feminist thinker says aptly:

Many feminists are in the process of expressing their dissatisfaction with the women movement develop in dissatisfaction raise. It is dilute its perspectives, programs and aims. This dissatisfaction can be summed up as a loss of direction which itself is losing sight of our ends, our ultimate goals. We have not a clear notion of our feminist utopia. (20-21)

In fact feminism means the march towards ‘wholeness’ through resistance, resilience, determination and not simply a war against patriarchy. It should aim at seeking authentic selfhood and not simple traditional womanhood. Feminism questions what is usually associated with ‘feminine’. Feminine is identified with passive, timid, servile, docile, emotional and conversational and all that denotes a subordinate and secondary position. Feminism is an assertion of the value of woman as woman and expression of struggle to establish a woman’s identity. The Author illustrates feministic conflict in this
novel. Feminism questions this notion of femininity as well as other dominant, phallocentric ideologies and patriarchal attitudes. Feminist writers have touched upon various aspects of women’s life. Being aware of woman subjugation, they try to break fetters which are instrumental in their victimization. That is why in feminist works emphasis is laid on the emancipation of women. They portray their struggle against oppressive patriarchal domain and their longing for a new social order with changed standards where women can be their truthful selves. Feminist writers instill a positive sense of feminine identity by portraying women who are self-actualizing, whose identity are not dependent on them (Das 15).

Sidhwa delineates women characters as fairly beautiful, intelligent, modest, strong–willed and courageous. Rebellion is not in their nature. They try to cope with the parental, social, cultural pressures in their life as much as they find their very life or identity in danger; they throw off all shackles and fight with full foil the foul attempts of their adversary. Their tactics vary with the nature and strength of their opponent. The Author depicts the psychological conflict in this novel.

*The Crow Eaters* depicts the social mobility of a Parsi family, a characteristic typical of the community and their rise from a single merchant store in Lahore to a chain of stores, in several North Indian cities and a license for handling goods between Peshawar and Afghanistan. The novel also traces the Parsis’ trend of migration from the west coast to the more salubrious regions of North India during the turn of the century. Bapsi Sidhwa, who belongs to the third generation of Parsi settlers in various cities of North India, is brought up with tales of the entrepreneurial skills of her forefathers; hence
adding a certain authenticity to her rendering of Faredoon Junglewalla’s exploit in the business fraternity.

Parsis are sure to uphold a group identity by flaunting the traditions of their community and dressing immaculately according to custom. Thus Freddy is particular to be…”rig out in the starched white coat wrap that fastened with bows at the neck and the waist, crisp white phyjamas and turban” (TCE 15).

The paranoia attached to the feelings of their minority status, motivates the Parsis to excel in their entrepreneurial capacities. It often results in eccentric ways of dealing with their identity crisis, which includes an exclusive display of loyalty towards the British and a group desire to identify themselves all too closely with them. But the English refused to consider the Parsis as their own kind, though they were equally westernized in their social behaviour and education; similarly the Parsis in their occupation to proximate with British which would guarantee a special status, carve themselves a niche in the crowd of communities and resulting in a mental estrangement from India. Sidhwa portrays most Parsis in the novel as cultural hybrid, living in close intimacy with the cultures, traditions, languages and ethical codes and political loyalties of two distinct groups of people, which never completely amalgamate and intersperse. The following chapter discusses the eternal conflicts between good and evil in *The Pakistani Bride*. 