CHAPTER V

Farrukh Dhondy-Problems of Multiculturalism and Identity
Farrukh Dhondy stands out very prominently as a towering personality among the writers of the new generation. These writers of fictional discourses soon have their writings edging on the ethnocentric.

R. S. Pathak in an introduction to Modern Indian Novel in English states:

*Rushdie’s novel which became an international literary success, created a real generation of its own in the form of a crop of young Indian novelists eagerly following in Rushdie’s footsteps. Among these novelists the most talented one are: Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry and Firdus Kanga……..Among themselves there emerge two clear cut groups of novelists: those who treat literature as a thought-about effort, and those who regard literature as amateur self-expression. Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Allan sealy, Rohinton Mistry, Firdus Kamya & Farrukh Dhondy belongs to first group.*

(Pathak 13-17)

V:i Life & Career:

Farrukh Dhondy was born in Poona (India) during the year 1944, in a Parsi family. His father was in the Indian Army and retired as a colonel. As he was posted to various parts of India, Dhondy moved all around during his childhood & early years. Farrukh Dhondy along with his two other siblings were brought about by his mother. However, she
was constantly moving about with her husband on his army postings, and in consequence, Farrukh Dhondy was left to stay with his grandfather in Pune. He spent his school and college days in Pune and obtained a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Pune in 1964. He was later awarded a scholarship to read English at Cambridge and he moved to Leicester University for his Master’s degree. He has been living in England since 1964.

Dhondy preferred to take up teaching as his profession and from 1968 to 1969, he lectured at Leicester College for Higher education, and from 1970 to 1978, he taught at the secondary level in Archbishop Michael Ramsay’s school. Later, from 1984 to 1997, Dhondy worked as Commissioning Editor, Multicultural programming, Channel 4 T.V. UK over a period of thirteen years. In this capacity, Dhondy became responsible for hundreds of hours of T.V. in all genres- entertainment, comedy, drama, film, education & factuals. From 1997 to 2002, Dhondy worked as a freelance journalist and writer. He contributed articles to Indian newspaper & magazines like *The Pioneer, Asian Age, India Today, and The Times of India* and so on. In 2002, he joined a film company in India, Kaleidoscope International, and made a film on India’s 1857 Mutiny.

Dhondy lives in a village in Oxfordshire with his Irish-English wife and has five children.

**V:ii Works:**

Farrukh Dhondy’s writings are a reflection of his varied experiences both at homes and in the host country. Born in a Parsi Family, Dhondy lived his formative years in Pune (India). Reminiscing his college life and its influences upon him, he states:
Not an elite college, but one with a lot of lafangas and taporis, so I became a lafanga and tapori myself, but it had academic standards and we had teachers and Professors whom I still respect. worked hard …… …… A reaction of poverty and superstition turned me into an anti-religious rationalist.


Farrukh Dhondy’s literary composition is also reflective of his altitude towards life and experiences. All this comes alive and vibrates through his novels, short stories, journalism and screenplays.

His literary output is worth pondering to realize what a profile writer he is.

His works are –

1. East End at Your Feet (1976)
2. Siege of Babylon (1977)
3. Come to Mecca (1978)
5. Trip Trap (1984)

Apart from the above-mentioned Dhondy’s personality and views seek an outlet through the myriad articles he has published in newspapers and journals.
V:iii Awards:

Farrukh Dhondy has a number of prestigious awards to his credit, which makes him shine luminous in the literary galaxy. He adapted source of his own short stories for the BBC series on TV. *Come to Mecca*, one of which *Romance* won the ‘First Samuel Beckett Award’. *Bombay Duck* (1990) was short listed for the Whitbread First Novel Award.

V:iv Themes:

Farrukh Dhondy, through his literary works, aims at redefining myths and humour. His themes from the subcontinent manifest profound changes affecting the social life and set up of modern life. His passion for history comes alive through his writings.

*Bombay Duck* broadly deals with the aspect of culture. There is a lot of rethinking and redefining on the same done. *Run*, which is published in a collection for children is a moving narrative. The protagonist is a fourteen years old boy called Rashid. The key postcolonial themes are touched by Rashid from an inclusive compassionate perspective. There are various themes incorporated in this novel; some of which are: Social discrimination, belonging to and the difficulties associated with it, illegal immigration, hassles with the authorities, homosexual pedophilia, drug peddling, prostitution, meager earnings and the difficulties of survival, identity crisis, tracking down a lost grandfathers in prison, a white Jewish dancer mother – abandonment by and later reunion with her, a missing Bangladeshi father, the identity and status of a mixed-race person.
**V:iv:i  BOMBAY DUCK:**

*Bombay Duck* (1990) is a diasporic novel with cross cultural references. The entire focus is on culture, which stimulates cultural rethinking. The focus is also on the great cultural divide between the East and the West. Old myths are explored and new ones conjured and brought into existence through the characters of Ali Abdul Rahman and Mr. Xarex Xavexa. A strange world is revealed with the seething subculture of actors/actresses, shopkeepers, politicians and agriculturalists, gunrunners and bearded boy. The cultural references catered are in keeping with the British and the Indian contexts.

**V:iv:ii  Critical acclaims for Bombay Duck:**

*Bombay Duck* has been critically acclaimed from various quarters. Neil Berry, the reviewer of The Times Literary Supplement, welcomed it as:

* A serio-comic extravaganza, written with patent relish, a plot of uninhabited Zaniness.

(Dhondy Cover Page)

Candice Rodd, reviewing it for *The Independent* on Sunday comments:

*It is a brave novelist who sails full tilt at the deep cultural waters between the Indian subcontinent and the west. Unabashed, Farrukh Dhondy offers not one, but two dense and energetic narratives which address, among much else, the painfully current issue of religions fundamentalism*
never less lively in an intelligent ambitions novel.

(Dhondy Cover Page)

V:iv:iii  Culture:

_Bombay Duck_ is a cultural text and it reflects the beliefs and traditions of various religions like Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and the Islam. In the first part of the book, Farrukh Dhondy refers to _The Ramayana_. Explaining it, he also comments upon Zoroastrianism. It is a commentary on culturalization. It also deals with the basic human weaknesses like the pragmatic approach, selfishness, craftiness, corruption and communal disharmony.

Society, largely depends upon culture and is recognised by it. Culture comprises of manners, customs, traditions, religions, languages, norms of behaviour such as law, morality and the system of beliefs.

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia defines culture as:

*Culture refers to human activity and the symbolic structure that gives such activity significant importance.*

(http://en.wikipedia.org)

The UNESCO (2002) describes culture as:

*Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that it encompasses, in addition to art and*
Dhondy express concern over the loss of culture in the Indian context. When he comes to culture, he takes humanitarian point of view. He tries to highlight the fact that shows how man has become insensitive to the real purpose of culture and institutions have been given importance. *Bombay Duck* presents this concern through the character of Anjali. Anjali is Hindu but alien to the ethos of Indian culture. She represents culturally deprived human being.

For Dhondy, any human activity of certain culture should focus on the upliftment of masses. He aims at the regeneration of cultures to serve its true purpose.

**Zoroastrianism of Parsi Life:**

Zoroastrianism forms a part of the thematic concern in *Bombay Duck*. The ethnic and linguistic traces of the Parsi continental and subcontinental culture are found in the book. The Parsi ethnicity comes into focus through the character of Xarex Xavexa.

On trying to trace the origin of Xarex Xavexa, we realize that he is a descendent of the Parsis, who fled away from Iran to save themselves and their religion from the Muslim atrocities. In this flight, they reached the banks of South Gujarat (India) and pitched their tents there.

The protagonist Xarex Xavexa, in the second part of the novel is an Indian Parsi. He migrates to England for his education and obtains a Bachelor’s degree in religion and ethics, from the University of Cambridge. However, all his serious and sincere attempts fail him to get a suitable job. This no doubt disillusions here. He later tries to establish himself as a Parsi historian. He narrates:
Zoroastrian is the oldest religion in the world and the first monotheistic civilization that we know of. The quarter of a million Zoroastrians whose remains are, as it were, cast on an island of their own making. They are the Parsis of India. This small, valiant, tightly knit race of racist settlers, peasants, industrialists, workers, fire worshippers, bigots who throw their dead to the vultures on the towers of silence, who do not admit of their community any converts, who bring their children up to believe in their messianic place in history.

(Dhondy 168)

The reasons for the Parsi migration has been further stated in the following words:

The Zoroastrianism fled to India in AD 760. The Arab explosion in the Middle East following on the rise of Islam, forced them by sword and fire to abjure their religion in Iran. Small band of ………….. coast to Gujerat and some went by hot and go to the same place.

(Dhondy 190)

Dhondy also touches upon the significant symbolic gestures related to giving confidence to Jadi Rana to prove the good intentions of the Parsis and their assimilation in the Indian Society.
Viv: Air of Suspicion:

Dhondy breaks all religious and traditional barriers and questions myths and legends prevalent among the Parsis. The author has demystified the notion of purity of race and the holy fire. For the Zoroastrians the ‘fire’ is the emblem of purity. Racial purity (ethnicity) is yet something that they boast about and take pride in. It is this very notion of racial purity, stretched beyond limits, that has led to the decline the Parsi population in this country and the world as well.

Dhondy gives vent to his suspicion in the following lines. He states:

_Bullshit. Of course. There is evidence to show that the first settlers had no women with them and must have intermarried with the natives, the Hindus, so the first claim of the Parsis to be racially pure is suspect._

_We worship fire and claim to have brought the original flame of Zoroastrianism from Iran to the shores of India and kept it alight. And through the countries, every fire-temple is blessed with a fragment of that continuous flame. A lovely idea, but obliviously nonsense. Priests fall asleep on the job and fires die and tinder is replaced by safety matches._

_Humata, Hukta, Huvereshta. Pure in thought, word and deed._

(Dhondy 190-91)

Xarex sounds subversive and controversial with his statements on Zoroastrianism through whom Dhondy tries to establish his identity by
making an attempt to communicate his ingenious use of his own religion, which provides him with opportunities of survival. Dhondy touches the matter of conversion to Zoroastrianism. Parsi community at present time has been divided over this issue. Xarex takes a stance of radical Parsee and provokes conversions to Zoroastrian faith. Religion is a matter of belief. At present time undue importance is assigned to rituals and institutions. Even the West also fails to understand Xereks’ reformatory zeal. The West regards Xarex as an authority on fundamentalism. Keeping aside rituals Dhondy tries to attach himself to the central dogma of Parsi Zoroastrianism.

Dhondy very realistically exposes the problems of the Parsi community. The strength and weaknesses, virtues and vices of the Parsi community is presented very authentically and Dhondy goes to prove that the Parsis are a fine blend of the above-mentioned aspects.

He goes further and compares the Parsis to the Jews. Stating that the Parsis are the Jews of India, Dhondy says:

*Often they are compared to Jews. “The Parsis are the Jews of India.”*  
(Dhondy 168)

Without being ambiguous, Dhondy very explicitly focuses on the problems that the community faces.

**V:iv:vi Autobiographical Views:**

There are a number of personal touches in the novel. Xarex Xavexa acts as Farrukh Dhondy’s narrative consciousness who reveals Dhondy’s unconcealed and frank dislike for the present form of Zoroastrianism.
Eminent critic Nilifer Bharucha strongly suspects that the Parsi character, Xarex Xavexa, in *Bombay Duck* to be highly autobiographical.

In her article “The Parsi Voice in Recent Indian Fiction: An Assertion of Ethnic Identity”, she makes it clear. According to her:

*The Parsi character (XX) is rather autobiographical and could be Dhondy himself.*

(Bharucha 84)

Dhondy comes about very alive and more visible than ever before in an interview with Gowri Ramanarayan. He clarifies that he is a Parsi but not a Zoroastrian. He is not a devout Zoroastrian but this does not mean that he favours anarchy. On being asked regarding the above stand, Dhondy explicitly states:

*My science background and experience of superstition has expelled all thoughts of religion, astrology and h******* out of my mind. And you are right. Being a Parsi excludes you from the prejudices of Hindu and Muslims. However, being a Zoroastrian means you are by definition confused about your religion. When the Muslim conquerors persecuted the Zoroastrians in Iran in 760 AD, they must have fled in all directions—Afghanistan, Turky, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

Only in India, we survived with racial identity intact, because we did not marry out of our community. (I did, my children have European mother) No question about being*
Indian, but being a Parsi excludes you from the prejudices and the guilt complexes of the Hindus and the Muslims.

This also throws light on the insider-outsider status of Dhondy. As an insider of Parsi community, he tries to present Parsi Zoroastrianism. He takes stand of a detached outsider when he expresses his utter disgust with contemporary India and talks of Zoroastrianism in its reformatory tone. As we read the novel, we begin to trace autobiographical elements. We begin to presume that the identity and thoughts of Xarex Xavexa extends to the personality of Dhondy himself.

Dhondy rejects an idea of ethnic purity and goes ahead and marries outside his community. Quite similar is the character of Xarex Xavexa, a scholar and historian of the Parsi religion and ethnicity who neglects the principles of Zoroastrianism of HUMATA, HUKTA, HUVERESHTA (Good thoughts, good words and good deeds). He stumbles upon his fortune and he is involved in a number of illicit activities.

Xarex Xavexa is involved in child theft or baby trade. He is also an expert at forgery and very often tampers with his visa and other documents. He goes ahead and tries to obtain fake birth certificates of the babies he has stolen or picked up from various places.

Cressida, the wife of Jams, throws light on the above-mentioned in the following lines:

When we are out she says, “I haven’t forgotten my threat about the police. And if you think you’ve got documentary proof. My dad can also
get a birth certificate and besides it’s a country
doctor’s certificate, British, so who will they
believe?”

(Dhondy 175)

Dhondy is critical towards scholars and experts who lament over the fast decline of the population of the community. He does not find a need to lament and finds a Parsi everywhere. Asserting this Dhondy writes in an article, which appeared in The Times of India entitled “There is a Parsi in My Novel”. He writes:

The modern novels which feature Parsis are quite the opposite. They are melancholic about the race and its past and prospects and seem to accept Zaehner’s metaphor. Rohinton and Cyrus Mistry, for instance, whose novels, from Canada and Mumbai respectively, are dirges of Parsi decay, openly declares the end.

(The Sunday Times of India, Oct. 15th, 2006)

V:iiv:vii Racial Discrimination:

The aspect of racial discrimination is found in the novel. Dhondy digs hard at this element in his work. Before pinpointing racism in the novel and attacking it, the need to know more about the term ‘racism or racialism’ and comprehending it in a better light becomes necessary.

Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus defines race as:

A group of people of common ancestry,
distinguished from others by physical
characteristics, such as hair type, colour of skin, structure, etc.

(Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus)

Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus defines racism as:

*The belief that races have distinctive cultural characteristic determined by hereditary factors and that this endows some race with an intrinsic superiority.*

(Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus)

The entire world has witnessed racism as the most insidious form of discrimination.

Dhondy has also penned a number of stage plays for the Black Theatre. He goes ahead and explains reasons for his literary output to the Black theatre. His literary works here is an output of his involvement and experiences with Black students during his nine years of schooling. Dhondy observed them at close quarters and was deeply involved in their lives. He observed the deep-rooted pains of discrimination, his literary bent of mind and insight made him fictionalize all his experiences, and the entire world witnessed it through his drama for the Black theatre.

Dhondy was also an active participant in various political movements. During his stay at Cambridge University, he became a political activist working with the Indian Workers’ Association, the Black Panthers Movement and Race Today.

Dhondy very successfully presents the feelings of marginalization based on race at several places in his book *Bombay Duck*. Racial feelings and insults are brought in to the course of the narration when Gerald
Bloom takes his daughter Martha to school. Here he meets a White teacher. Bloom introduces himself to the staffer collecting tickets and money for the dinner eaten. However, he is completely ignored by the White woman. She holds out her hand for the money and the card. Gerald looks for the money in his pocket but finds none. He looks out to the two other Black women standing there but finding no help, Gerald looks back at her. He observes her from top to bottom, from head to toe. To this, the White woman says:

_Eh, don’t fuck me with your eyes, black boy._

(Dhondy 17)

Bloom greatly humiliated by this racist remark, realizes the intense hatred and the attitude of the Whites towards the Blacks.

Gerald Bloom in a self-searching mood says:

_In an infant school! Blood and fire. Give us the teaching of his majesty, me no want devil philosophy._

(Dhondy 17)

This self-introspecting mood and utterance of Gerald takes a metaphorical stand, which represents the whole of the Black community, racially exploited, marginalized and suppressed by the Whites. These suppressed lots earnestly cry in a heart-rending manner to be identified and called as ‘human beings’.

Continuing his attack on Racism and the racist movement lurking, Dhondy expresses his disgust through the utterances of Tilak, who says:
This is a Racist exhibition. The masses of India are not Animals to be put in zoo.

(Dhondy 79)

In a unique manner, Dhondy treats man’s sensibility to culture. Expecting equality between all human beings and their cultures, he focuses on them, with the dreams of establishment of a new culture.

V:iv:viii Cross-cultural references, Cultural Rethinking and Religious Fundamentalism:

There are number of cross-cultural references in the *Bombay Duck*. There is a lot of mention regarding Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism. Focus is on the all-existing culture tries to stimulate a sort of cultural rethinking.

Dhondy explores some old myths and conjures new ones into existence through the stories of Ali Abdul Rahman in the first part and Mr. Xarex Xavexa in the second part of the novel.

Gerald Bloom, the protagonist in the first part of the novel, is a renowned actor of Caribbean origin. He renounces his Christian identity and assumes the name of Ali Abdul Rahman. He earns fame and fortune. His greatest moment of exhilaration comes when David Stream chooses him to play the role of Lord Ram, in his dream project, a stage adaption of the epic, *The Ramayana*.

David Stream is an international impresario and guru of cross-cultural hype. He decides to stage *The Ramayana* from western point of view. Ali is chosen to play the role of Lord Ram, Anjali, who is originally from India, presently staying in Paris acts as Sita. Kajin, a Chinese gentle man, is chosen for the role of Luxman. These three characters represent different cross-cultural backgrounds with its fusion.
After a number of rehearsals, the David Stream company leaves for New Delhi. They are there to perform at various places. They are scheduled to perform six shows in Bombay and three shows in Culcutta and Madras respectively. The first show turns out to be a grand success but the second show fails to impress the crowd. The racial and communal frenzy upsets the performance. The failure is because The Ramayana was not presented in the manner it should have been. Gerald Bloom miserably fails to understand the implication of The Ramayana.

I think David is doing exact reverse for the Ramayana. It stunned me when I first heard of it. The real Eastern myth, the whole soul of Hinduism and everything comes west.

(Dhondy 71)

Because of this uproarious situation, the players find it extremely difficult to return to their hotels. However, Tilak successfully arranges for taxies to transport the players back. On their way back to hotel, Ali and Anjali are severely attacked by a band of ruthless demonstrators. Anjali is hit with a heavy iron rod and she breathes her last on the spot. Ali manages to survive. Totally depressed and dejected, David Stream returns to London.

Bombay Duck re-narrates The Ramayana with its inter-textual dimensions. An attempt is made by David Stream to revive The Ramayana and conjure a new meaning to it. However, his idea does not work. The Ramayana fails and he is severely protested by the people of India for whom it is holiest scripture. For them it is blasphemy. For the Hindus, Lord Ram is a role model for men. He is a perfection personified. For Indian women, Sita represents feminine virtues-Purity, simplicity,
devotion, chastity, loyalty, tolerance and so on. *The Ramayana* depicts an ideal family relationship in the Indian context. Lord Ram’s sense of sacrifice is unique. Dhondy narrates the story as:

*The story that is that Kaikeyi, the step mother of Ram and Laxman, saves their father’s life by substituting her finger for the broken axle of his chariot in war, and he promises her everything…*  
(Dhondy 98)

*The Ramayana* with its unique story has played a major role in making the Indian epic interesting and inspiring and it remains so even to this day, even among the west.

Religion is a fundamental set of beliefs and practices, which is generally agreed upon by a group of people. These set of beliefs concern the cause, nature and purpose of the universe. It also involves devotional and ritual observances. They also often contain a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

Every community believes in certain common set of beliefs and therefore no religion accepts the mimic view expressed for its holy symbols. Therefore, Gerald Blooms attempt to revive *The Ramayana* from western point of view leads to strong protest. Idea of protest brings in to mind religious fundamentalism.

*The term religious fundamentalism is usually used to refer to extremism, fanaticism, and literal thinking in connection with a religious faith.*

(www.insanbilimleri.com/en)
Farrukh Dhondy meditates thematically upon the thought that religious fundamentalism must be protested as it presents an extreme view. This same religious fundamentalism is denounced in *Bombay Duck* as it leads to a lot of arson, looting, violence, killing of the innocent people and demonstrates inhuman behaviour.

Commenting on the issue of religious fundamentalism A. N. Diwedi in an article “Farrukh Dhondy’s *Bombay Duck*: A Critical Study” states:

*Dhondy has raised the thorny issue of religious fundamentalism in the Indian context. He seems to be all for harmony and peace in the Indian sub-continent, and does not favour a dogfight between the Muslims and the Hindus, or between the Sikhs and the Hindus, or between the Christians and the Muslims. An unwanted fight is bound to bring about national disintegration and fragmentation. To avoid this, we the Indians have to shun extremes in religious matters and to follow the path of truth and ahimsa (non-violence) as visualized by our national leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Bose and Patel. This is what after taking into account the mixed lot of actors in the first part (wherein the three communities-Hindu, Muslims, and Christian-figure) as well as the cross-section of the people in the second part.*

(Dwivedi 192)
Cross-Cultural Transference:

*Bombay Duck* is primarily a cultural text. Various cultures are referred to here. Hinduism is portrayed through *The Ramayana*, Islam through Ali and Parsi Zoroastrianism through Mr. Xarex Xavexa. *Bombay Duck* is a telling commentary on culturalization and the basic human weaknesses.

There is a lot of focus on different kinds of cultural transferences and its consequences. Even the title *Bombay Duck* refers to a kind of fish. Here the dried fish may have transformed itself into a duck in a different linguistic or cultural context.

Diaspora:

Farrukh Dhondy spent his early years in India and experienced its sights and sounds. Today, he is well settled in the U. K., but his functional aesthetics is India. Having spent his early years in India, he is well acquainted with the different cultures of India. He also refers to the consequences of cultural transferences.

The fish, *Bombay Duck* in the novel may have transformed itself into a duck in different linguistic or cultural context. However, it keeps up its link with the native place—that is Bombay.

In fact, this fish may not be found near Bombay actually, but from oceans thousands of miles away from the Bombay coast; the truth is that this fish always carries the brand name of the city. This takes a metaphorical stance and it signifies the fact that a migrant will always be linked from other’s point of view.

Ali and Anjali visit the East end for a meal in Brick lane and Ali orders for Bombay Duck from the order menu.

Ali states:
So, when the guy comes I just say I’ll have Bombay Duck and the man say, “How many?” just one, captain, how many you think I want? Anjali starts to laugh and she asks for this and that in Urdu or whatever and the guy smiles but he goes and gets it………… ‘Your Bombay Duck’, and he pops in on the table. ‘I said duck, man, not shriveled in soles……… Anjali was looking amused with her tongue literally in her check.

We Indians call that duck. Bombay Duck.

(Dhondy 70)

A Diasporic person performs a dual role. He is a refuge in the host land and at the same time plays the role of a cultural ambassador of his home culture. Anjali and Ali hail from different cultures and Anjali explains cultural connotations to Ali.

Dhondy’s diasporic experience is typical. His characters (Xarex Xavexa) are uprooted men in history. Xarex is uprooted as a Parsi; he is an exile trying to put down roots somewhere. Dhondy’s Diasporic characters are neither rooted in mother land and host land.

The title of the novel is a little mysterious. However, the mystery pertaining to the title is clear in the second part of the novel. The novel draws our attention to ‘Bombay Dak’ or ‘Bombay Mail’ and not the supposed ‘Bombay Duck’. Another aspect worth noting is that a plenty of dried fish of Bombay was supplied by the dak train from Bombay to other parts of India. Regarding this, the novelist writes:
Bombay Duck is not a duck at all. In fact it should be spelt Bombay Dak. What it is, is dried fish (known in Bombay as Bombil) and when the British introduced the railway system to western India under their raj, it started going in wagonloads to the interior from Bombay. The crates stunk of dried fish, like stale penises. They were marked ‘Bombay Dak’ literally ‘Bombay Mail’. At the time, the railway was run by whiteys. The English may call a spade a spede, but they don’t call ‘stinking fist’ by the name. The referred to it euphemistically as ‘Bombay Dak’, the ‘Bombay Mail’.

(Dhondy 241)

Talking about the lack of infrastructure and weak will of the country, Dhondy says that it is the above, which force the Indian intellectuals to migrate to developed countries (West).

He narrates:

………. has given him some boss power to pull together all the guys that leave India for wages in the US and call them back and develop a decent technology for India and on the basis of number crunching machines.

(Dhondy 69-70)

A Diasporic writer is always concerned about the problems prevailing in his native land. The hurdles that hamper the growth of the
motherland are again something that trouble the Diasporic writer. Dhondy is no doubt well settled in the milieu of the multicultural society, but he cannot forget India. Vices like terrorism, corruption and the brain drain of India is something that trouble Dhondy. He exposes the problems of India, goes ahead, and points out the bleak reality of the existing relationship between the political system and corruption.

This is portrayed vividly through the character of Anjali’s father, who is both an influential politician but also corrupt.

*A corrupt Indian politician and businessman.*

(Dhondy 44)

Further Dhondy says that India is exploiting her resources against terrorism. He narrates:

*Voilence in the Punjab has claimed another twenty-six lives. Sikh terrorist, riding motorcycles machine-gunned twenty-six villagers in the Amritsar district for no other reason that they were Hindus. Seventeen men, six women and three children lay dead after the rampage of carnage through the village.*

.........the police, he said, had discovered arms from Afghanistan he reinforced the armament levels available to the Khalistani terrorists.

(Dhondy 107)
The aftermath of the communal violence and religious fundamentalism is something that deeply troubles Dhondy. He dreams of a society free from all the above vices.

Dhondy being a Diasporic writer clearly understands the ‘ghetto mentality’ of the immigrant communities and he does not hesitate to comment on it. The long established belief and way of thought is something that the Diasporic communities cling to desperately and they refuse to be assimilated with the mainstream society. Dhondy rightly feels that this aspect leads to racial feelings, which further goes on to a state of disintegration.

Being a resident of the Briton/London community, he closely observes the society and points out that London might be the melting pot of varied cultures.

Ashish Joshi notes Dhondy’s observations as:

I have personally observed the first generation Indians. They are deeply conscious of white man and his ilk, and indulge in little social intercourse except with members of their own kind. Their children, having grown up in England, do not share their parents’ views, but it has hardly helped in easing the tension of mutual distrust between the two communities.


However, Dhondy handles expatriate experience not in a traditional manner where expatriate seeks his/her roots in his motherland. He handles it very distinctively and in an unorthodox manner. His expatriate
protagonist, Xarex Xavexa is rooted nowhere; neither in homeland nor in host land; naturally being uprooted, find roots neither in India nor in the London. Although he travels around the globe, he is no where to seek his roots.

**V:iv:xi  Answer to Poverty:**

Poverty grinds a person severely. Grinding poverty is manifestly unjust, cruel, inescapable and inexplicable. The feudal system of making wealth is cruel.

Dhondy’s characters are the victims of the ravages of unemployment and cynical domination of the corporate society. The characters of *Bombay Duck* Mr. Xarex Xavexa, Anjali and Ali face economic setbacks frequently and there is a constant endeavour on their part to overcome and escape the grave grinding poverty. Making money is always at the back of their minds and all their actions are directed towards this. They even go up to the extent of commercializing religion. However, according to Dhondy any attempt made to commercial religion is a selfish motive. He severely attacks and condemns any attempt (to treat Indian culture as a commodity) to commodify Indian culture for commercial purpose. Here Dhondy challenges David Bloom and his capacity.

The Black boy in the novel remarks:

*David, who the fuck is David? Some trendy white director think he can capture Indian culture.*

(Dhondy 80)

Anjali and Ali are ready to go up to any extent to earn their bread and butter. The spell of materialism tempts them.
Dhondy finds capitalism as a source of enlightened attitude to living, some virtues being the emancipation of women etc. The Marxist view of life and society is also projected. India in the grip of the grinding poverty is presented, along with ways to overcome it.

Dhondy voices his feelings in an interview with Gowri Ramnarayan. He states:

*For the first time I believe that the vast masses have joined the process of governing and through they have chosen mostly reactionary, corrupt leaders from their own caste or community, the democratic process has liberated the people from centuries of invisibility. India is awakening to atma vishwas, I see a self-confidence in the lower orders, who I was brought up to believe to be inefficient and incapable of action.*


V:iv:xii  Multiculturalism:

*Bombay Duck* is set in a multicultural milieu for its background. The scenes are set in different parts of the world, which includes-London, Edinburgh, and Delhi and so on-all which represent different cultures. Dhondy also portrays a galaxy of characters like Gerald Bloom, David Stream, Anjali Pathak, Mr. Xarex Xavexa, Maureen Martha, Tilak, Sara, Sonya, Ullah, PennyEileen, Kamala, Boman, Naomi and Firdus. All these characters represent different profession, castes, creed and races. Abdul Ali represents the Black race. Martha’s teachers represent the White race and so on.
In this way, Dhondy presents a complex world of relationships with divergent worldview of different characters. All these characters face common problems, which encompass the whole of humanity.

Dhondy believes in explicating the complexities of human problems rather than providing simple solutions to it. Dhondy does not subscribe to the traditional pattern or notion of a well-made plot dependent on the omniscient author who is able to fit conflicting and contradicting strand in to one homogeneous plot because of holistic vision or philosophy.

Dhondy considers London as a melting pot of all religions. He criticizes the ‘ghetto mentality’. For him the best way to internalize multiculturalism is to assimilate in to the mainstream of the society.

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**V:v  **RUN:**

Run (2002) is the recent novel written by Farrukh Dhondy and it is published in a collection for children. The novel is a moving narrative and could well arrest the attention of a reader, irrespective of his age.

The novel is narrated in the first person by Rashid Rashid. The narrative being divided into ten concise chapters thematically touches the key post colonial issues, all from an inclusive compassionate perspective. The novel is set in the multicultural milieu and mediates on myriad problems. The issues that Farrukh Dhondy touches are related to multicultural society and include racial differences and discrimination, the difficulty of belonging, the illegal side of migration, drug peddling, prostitution, poverty and the like. The status of a person belonging to mixed race is also dealt upon.

The various experiences that Rashid undergoes in his adolescent period are beautifully portrayed. His separation and re-union with his
Jewish mother and the absence of his Bangladeshi father are the elements that Farrukh Dhondy soulfully touches.

As the title suggests, Rashid is always on the run. It the words of the novelist: run to be away from cops; run in the search of mother; run in the search of grand father; run in the search of identity; run for survival.

**V:v:i  Critical Reviews on the novel:**

Michael Rosen gives grand acclaim for *Run*. He states:

*A rouge’s take that mixes Ali G with Henry Fielding…………this book is as eventful as Humphrey Clinker, as low-life as Oliver Twist and as rapidly sequenced as Candide. At first glance, Run might appear to belong in the same niche as, say, Robert Swindells’ Stone Cold, Melvin Burgess’ Junk or Bengamin Zephaniah’s Refugee Boy, but on closer examination, it moves into new territory for children’s fiction. Unlike these books, there is neither decline and fall, nor fall and redemption. This is skidding along the bottom; to survive you do what you have to do. It’s bumpy, it’s funny but, hey, that’s what the lower depths are like.*


Michael Thorn writes as:

………..*an engaging, highly readable novel.*

(Literary Review, http://booksing.blogspot.com)
V:v:ii  Rashid and Run:

Rashid Rashid, the protagonist and the narrator of the novel is a fourteen year old boy. He is the offspring of a Jewish dancer mother Robinovitch and an absconding Bangladeshi father. The narration is done in a straight forward manner. He resides with his mother in London. She remains away from home for days on end and especially during the nights. At such times Rashid is put with his Bangladeshi grand father who is illegal immigrant.

During the absence of his mother Rashid has to face grand father’s death. He is forced to move out of his flat for survival. Being a product of mixed race Rashid is not able to prove his identity or produce of his identity papers. He resides in different care units; however, he escapes from there. This keeps him always on run. He is on the run also in the search of identity, to keep away from cops against the charges of assault and so on.

Rashid is the product of careless parenthood and this is directly is the cause of his frequent tortures regarding his identity. The situations that he has to put up with plays havoc with him, and he looks older than his age. He becomes an aimless wanderer and during his movement from place to place meets mad mullah, Das, Alice, Harvie and McCleod. However, unfortunately something happens to the every character he meets and this put him on the run again. The title Run takes a metaphorical stance where Rashid is projected as ‘rootless’ and in ‘the search of roots’. He is seen running exactly in an opposite direction where he should run during his adolescent days. He neither belongs to his home nor his school and in the process fails to get the emotional care and nourishment.

The novel ends on a happy note with Rashid tracking down his mother and grand father. However, what Farrukh Dhondy is interested is
in the problems that are currently going on in the world. This is how his thematic concern and this also opens up scope for inter-cultural dialogue.

**V:v:iii  Multiculturalism and its Problems:**

There are quite a few personal touches in the novel. The novel opens on an autobiographical note of Rashid. He says:

*I one Rashid Rashid, am dead. Dead yet alive.  
Well, I must be alive if I'm writing this because dead men tell no tales and it’s straight up.*

(Dhondy 07)

Events are set in the multicultural milieu of London and around. Along with Rashid’s run, the readers are also taken to a number of places. This brings us in contact with the concept of multiculturalism and the problems arising out of it.

The concept of multiculturalism or the multicultural has been adopted with the emergence of cultural diversity. This is also accompanied by tolerance acceptance in greater or lesser degree. Further, the term can also be applied to describe the demographic conditions of cultural and ethnic diversity. This also brings about the co-existence of diverse cultures, which includes racial, religious and cultural groups that manifests customary behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking and communicative styles.

Rashid shares mixed race parenthood. He is the son of an absent Bangladeshi father and a Jewish mother. Describing his mother’s name, he states:
Well her name is Esther, she called herself Esther Robinovitch, but nobody else called her that. They called Gypsy.

(Dhondy 13)

It is good to be different. This could be the motto of our times. What are the hallmarks of a progressive antiracist outlook? The answer is undoubtedly the celebration of difference, respect for pluralism and a vowel of identity politics. Belief in the aspect of pluralism and the multicultural society is so much part and parcel of our selves, and so much more woven into the fabric of our lives that we rarely stand back to question some of its assumptions.

Proponents of multiculturalism usually put forward argument in its favour. Their claim is that multiculturalism is the only means of ensuring a tolerant and democratic policy in a world in which are present deep seated conflicts between cultures embodying different values. This argument is often linked to the claim that the attempt to establish universal norm inevitably leads to racism and tyranny.

V:v:iv  Racism, the Bleak Side of Human History:

The West boasts of multiculturalism and rather takes pride in it. However, the truth is that multiculturalism is a hoax under which several evils are hid. Run explores the racial elements and racism practiced under the guise of multiculturalism.

The term ‘Race’ refers to the concept of division. People are divided on to groups and communities on the basis of various sets of characteristics beliefs based on common ancestry. The most widely used human racism is based on visible traits and aspects of self identification. The existence of multiple races has led to racism.
According to *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*,

*Racism is a belief or ideology that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially to distinguish it as being either superior or inferior to another race or races.*

(*Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*)

The Western people have always considered themselves superior in race to the rest of the world. The truth is that they have retained this superiority complex even to this day. They look upon the root of the world as ‘Black’ or ‘Coloured’. The discrimination that they practice is unspeakable and unthinkable.

Dhondy attacks the attitude of the western people towards the Asians, who consider the ‘coloured’ as savage or brute. Challenging this assumption through the character of Das (Dr. Branco), Dhondy states Das’ words:

*I’m not ashamed of being Asian or nothing. I’m proud of it.*

(Dhondy 76)

The racial discrimination found in the later part of the novel is truly disturbing. Rashid is seen with McCleod as he is in search of a job. McCleod offers him a job of looking after the sheep. This work is given to Rashid as McCleod considers Rashid who is Black, inferior to animals.

Rashid narrates what McCleod says:
He said other farmers had lost sheep. This stuff made me nervous.

Suppose the mad dogs came through the window of the cabin at night while I was in bed and attacked me?

“What would they want with a black boy”, he laughed.

“They are after food, mon. They eat sheep’s guts, not black boys.”

(Dhondy 211)

On the very second day of Rashid’s stay, McCleod unhesitatingly asks him for his identity proof. Further, he has a comment reserved also for the same. McCleod believes that in Asia, people die out of hunger.

He says:

You’re a black fellow, aren’t you? You told me yourself, Bangladesh……………… well, there’s people starving out there.”

(Dhondy 213)

This discrimination between the Blacks and the Whites is something that history has witnessed from time immemorial. The Blacks lived in deplorable conditions and faced great oppression. It was always the Whites who enjoyed the status of superiority and power. Dhondy takes all this in to account while attacking the Whites and their attitude.

V:v:v Poverty and Struggle for Survival:
The feudal structures of the society and its role in making wealth are something that Dhondy attacks severely. He considers this as sheer cruelty. Dhondy’s characters are victims of this feudal system and they suffer all the evils such as the ravages of unemployment and the cynical domination of the corporate society.

The same struggle is evident in Run. Rashid’s mother struggles to make both ends meet. Other characters including Das, Alice and Rashid’s grandfather are all immigrants from different countries. They suffer from severe poverty and the evils of immigration.

Materialism is important than anything else. Even emotions do not count and sentiments seem to be out of question. Dhondy’s capitalistic ideas are projected through his characters.

In the early state of the narration, Rashid talks about and refers to Robinson Crusoe and Tuesday, who have been prominent examples of early capitalism. The entire thing about it takes a metaphorical stance when Rashid and the other characters exhibit their intense love and greed for him.

For Dhondy capitalism is a source of enlighten attitude; like emancipation of women. Rashid’s mother Esther and Alice enjoy total emancipation and celebrate their womanhood by living life according to their terms.

Poverty is another vice that plays havoc with man’s progress and also creates hurdles in the path of development. It is also one of the chief causes towards the struggle for survival. From a very young age of fourteen, we find Rashid in the grip of grinding poverty.

Poverty is also one of the contributing reasons towards illegal immigration. Rashid’s grandfather is also a product of illegal migration. However in London, he at least gets the minimum required quantity of
food, required for human survival. Rashid’s mother who is a dancer and Alice do not hesitate to practice prostitution for the sake of money.

V:v:vi  The Problem of illegal Immigration:

Multicultural London suffers from the problems of illegal immigration. There is reference to illegal immigration across national and international borders. This violates the immigration laws of the host country. An illegal immigration is a foreigner in the new country who cross international political borders; either by land, sea or air.

Rashid’s grandfather is an illegal immigrant. He enters the new land with a false name. He came in with the books and passport of some other Bangladeshi. Even at the last stage of his life, on his death bed, he does not disclose the truth of his identity. He prefers to die rather than disclose the secrets of his illegal migrancy.

V:v:vii  Religious Fundamentalism:

Religious fundamentalism interwined with many different motives and it can also be a serious source of tolerance and conflict. A band of Muslim youngsters led by Abu, help Rashid in the funeral rites of his grandfather. They represent the illegal immigrants. In the later part of the novel they are charged for the crime of terrorism and detained by the police. They shift to the Rashid’s flat and practice terrorism.

For them:

Rashid has been spoilt by Britain.

(Dhondy 26)

Religion has taken a diverse turn and the whole world has witnessed religion as the breeding ground of terrorism. People are
blackmailed in the name of religion. For Abu and his men excessive materialism of the West is destructive and an evil force.

**Conclusion:**

Farrukh Dhondy, an expatriate writer offers an expatriate’s desperate quest for roots. His nostalgia and alienation are typical of an exile. Dhondy’s approach in handling a Diasporic experience in Britain is maverick, fidgety but capable. His protagonists are a nowhere men whose roots exist neither at home nor in the West.

He extensively deals with institution, religion and social behaviour. He speaks of reformatory zeal and advocates a society where an individual matters more than the institution. Dhondy is Parsi. He asserts Parsi ethnic identity but not blindly. He doubts certain dogmas present in the Zoroastrian world view. He does not hesitate to breaks religious and traditional barriers and expresses doubt about myths and legends prevalent among the Parsis. He scoffs at the shallow philosophies and out dated notions in the Zoroastrianism. To be precisely clear, he rejects notion of purity of the race and the holy fire that has led fastest decline of the population and not as a devout Parsi but like radical one he touches the sensitive issue of conversion to Zoroastrianism that has led a division among the Parsis at present times. He does not smell an atmosphere of insecurity or danger to the existence of Parsis in India. He contradicts Parsi intellectuals lamenting on the Parsi demographic decline. The thought of redefining myth and culture cultivates path for socialism.

Dhondy does not stop at the Parsi world but element of culture, multiculturalism, racism, problems arising out of mixed-culture and multiculturalism, illegal immigration, religious fundamentalism and East-West dividing line are equally important for him. His attack against western commercialization of Indian culture is subversive. It must not be
forgotten that his operative sensibility is India. His heart aches to find Indian culture in a state of chaos. When he expresses his utter disgust for contemporary scenario of spiritual hollowness in India, he takes a stand of an outsider.

Being a Diasporic writer he understands but criticizes ‘ghetto mentality’ of the immigrant community. For him best way to face Diasporic situation is to assimilate in the main stream of the society.
References:


