CHAPTER 10

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Though, Kanga, Vakil and Dhondy (Britain), Rohinton Mistry (Canada) and Boman Desai (America) are expatriate writers. They continue to write about Indian life with their essentially Indian sensibility. At the same time, their works have a distinctive ethnic character to give them an identity of their own. In his first novel, *Trying to Grow*, Kanga does not depict expatriate sensibility. The novel is set in India; the action revolves round Brit, a thoroughly westernized invalid Parsee boy in Bombay whose quest for identity is, at the same time, a passionate struggle to grow, emotionally and psychologically, though there is virtually no growth at the physical level. Similarly, Mistry, now settled in Canada, writes about ‘politics’ in high places in *Such a Long Journey*, the victim of which is an innocent Parsee. This novel is typically Indian in theme and setting. The ‘local colour’ in the narrative adds to the genuineness of Mistry’s account. Here memory acts chiefly as a device in evoking nostalgia. Vakil, an expatriate, depicts the adventures of a young boy from the Parsee elite class of Bombay. Dhondy, on the other hand, raises vital questions concerning the cultural disintegration of his motherland. For this purpose, he employs the *Ramayana*, a Hindu epic. *Bombay Duck* is significant for two reasons: one, it is a telling comment on the cultural vacuum which prevails in India today. Secondly, it portrays vividly, the predicament of ‘black birds’ in a white land. Xerxes, an Indian, is a victim – figure who represents the Asian immigrants in England. Dhondy’s account of expatriate experience is authentic. Similarly, like Vassanjui, he lays emphasis on racism which is implicit in life in the white man’s land. Thus Xerxes is an immigrant through whom the alienation and angst of the expatriate speaks.
Westernization, on the other hand is an upward movement in the social, economic and political hierarchy. Although characters like Shirin in *More of an Indian*, Roshni in *And Some Take a Lover* and Brit in *Trying to Grow* are adequately westernized (what with their lives being enacted on the Bombay scene, Lahore, London or Chicago), they are first and foremost Parsees. Despite active acculturation, they always, and everywhere call)’, practise and propagate the values of good thoughts, good words and goods deeds in their purity and purpose.

In the novels of Sidhwa, Kanga, Karanjia and Mistry, Parsee life is depicted as in a state of flux. Here tile conflict is not within the Parsee community but between the socially, economically and culturally mobile and enterprising Parsee community and the rest of the world. It provides sustenance in a Parsee’s quest for greater achievement in expatriate experience and westernized life in India alike. It attaches due importance to social prestige, prosperity and success in this world. Loyalty to the ruler of the State is a value which the Parsees meticulously practice.

All the Parsee protagonists in the works under study, whether they be westernized or expatriate, derive motivation and sustenance their religion. In Bapsi Sidhwa’s *The Crow Eaters*, Freddie’s quest for prosperity and social prestige is very much a tendency promoted by his religion. Thus even Diaspora acts as a creative means for this end, it is a complex and painful process but it promotes adaptability. Hence Freddie’s journey from Central India to Lahore involves mobility in life. With his enterprising out-look and dynamic approach, he emerges ultimately as the patriarch of the Parsee community in Lahore. At the same time, he remains a devout Parsee since his commitment to the values of charity and benevolence is unflinching. He also practises the essential value of loyalty to the ruler. Till the end of his eventual life, Freddie remains a fierce supporter of the British. Thus Freddie
accomplishes what he advocates – both material success and spiritual progress in life.

*Ice-Candy-Man*, at least to some degree, illustrates the principal value in the Zoroastrian worldview—charity. In the narrative, Godmother and Lennie’s mother are engaged in the relentless task of rehabilitation of ‘fallen’ women life Ayah during the Partition. Thus though they are minor characters and are of peripheral interest in the narrative, they nevertheless take the path of *Asha* as highlighted in the religion ethics. Similarly loyalty to the British was a value practised by the Parsee community during the freedom struggle. Colonel Bharucha, the spokesman of the microscopic community of the Parsees in Lahore, states their position in categorical and unambiguous terms.

In *An American Brat*, parseereligion operates explicitly. The heightened consciousness of Feroza is the outcome of expatriation. Since only the New World ensures happiness coupled with freedom, she opts for it. Though there is a change in the external mode, her inner self remains typically Zoroastrian. Thus her survival in the new habitat is due to her success in preserving her emnic identity. Both Freddie and Feroza are typical migrants who practice the values of charity and adaptability. While Freddie makes charity the cornerstone of his existence in Lahore, Feroze takes the idea of adaptability to the point of consummation. Thus for both, the chosen land (Lahore or America) provides adequate social space to grow and attain prosperity and success whereas parsi continues to provide enough emotional and religious space.

In Farrukh Dhondy’s *Bombay Duck*, the religion operates, however covertly, as the focal point. Xerxes, the protagonist, like Dhondy himself, is a non-confonnist who rejects institutionalism and ritualism. He attaches due importance to the ‘content’of the doctrines. Though he scoffs at the shallow notions and outdated ideas in Zoroastrianism, Xerxes subscribes to the
central doctrine of the Parsee, viz., *humata, hukhta* and *hvarshta*. By taking the path of *Druj*, he accomplishes precisely what Parsee condemns. Towards the end of the narrative, he is reborn, symbolically though, for there is a tangible shift in his consciousness.

Boman Desai’s *The Memory of Elephants* is an expatriate novel with a conspicuous difference. While in other emigre Parsee novels, the protagonists struggle in the alien land to adjust, psychologically and emotionally, and to attain an identity of their own. Homi, the central character in this narrative, discovers his roots through a creative encounter with the racial past of the Parsee. Thus his return to India is not a gesture of submission; on the contrary, it is a Parsee’s realisation of his own dilemma which is invariably part of the racial past. Thus Homi’s tryst with the unconscious is an intellectual adventure.

Homi is a true Parsee in his outlook. His quest for roots abroad is an exercise in futility. The glittering existence in the New World fails to sustain him since his interior landscape remains unaltered. He, an expatriate, singularly though, attaches considerable importance to *humata, hukhta* and *hvarshta*. He like Feroza in *An American Brat* is engaged in the revival of ethnicity. His very rejection of the suggestion of conversation of Christianity bears adequate testimony to his unshaken commitment to the Zarastrian faith. His return to India and Rusi’s gleeful acceptance of the westernized life are the two contrary states in expatriate experience. In the evolution of his consciousness, the racial past plays the role of a catalyst. His acceptance of the racial past of the Parsecs as a reality thus resolves his existential dilemma.

Karnjia’s *More of an Indian* and Kanga’s *Trying to Grow* illustrate the concern of westernization which is the outcome of the exposure of the Parsee community to English culture and education. Shirin, the central consciousness in *More of an Indian* represents the modernist section in the
Parsee community. Her attitude to her own religion is singular in the westernized Parsee life. Her thesis that a true religion is a spring of motivation and sustenance resolves her moral dilemma. Her quest, thus, is for a religion which is life-sustaining and hence, creative. Her stance is typical of the modern Parsee community. Her realisation that the parsee religion is only a handmaid to life brings to an end the conflict between the two warring principles in her mind.

Kersasp, her father, though westernized, rejects ritualism in his own religion and thus becomes a quester in his own way. His ultimate rejection of the dead and outdated values is a moral need. Likewise, Shirin his daughter is an emancipated woman since she achieves the singular fusion of westernization and Zorastrian value system.

In Firdaus Kanga’s *Trying to Grow*, Parsee life is depicted as under the influence of westernization. Although not deeply religious, the Kotwals attach much importance to the idea of adaptability in the Indian society. Kanga’s critical stance is the result of expatriation. His prolonged stay in the west makes him an outsider to his own faith as a Parsee. Similarly Vakil’s *Beach Boy* deals with the westernized life of a Parsee family in Bombay. Cyrus Ready money is a happy-go-lucky type of person who attaches little or no importance to religion. However, he too, like a true Parsee, realises the significance of charity after his father’s sudden death. This novel deals with the cultural aspect of the Parsees. Adaptability is Cyrus’ forte and his juvenile existence is characterized by a passionate attempt to grow.

Gustad, the protagonist in *Such a Long Journey*, is a devout Parsee who attaches paramount importance to good thoughts, good words and good deeds. His bleak existence in Khodadad Building in Bombay is characterized by charity and benevolence deeply religious and an ardent follower of the preachings of prophet Zoraster. Gustad is a true Parsee whose journey symbolises the conflict between Good and Evil. He takes the
The path of Asha as enjoined by Parsee religion. The ultimate survival of Gustad is the celebration of the Parsee faith. In the ultimate analysis, Gustad emerges as a sad symbol. His triumph, however humble it may be, is the victory of Good over Evil.

Thus explicitly, the conflict in the narrative is between Gustad, an individual and a corrupt system which destroys the happiness of the ordinary people implicitly the archetypal, conflict rages in the mind of the protagonist. He, who is myopic at the beginning of his journey, attains full vision towards the end. His journey, which is invested with symbolic significance, is a manifestation of the cosmic phenomenon- the conflict between Good and Evil.

In Dina Mehta’s And Some Take a Lover, the Parsee religion operates overtly. Sudhir’s brave and heroic death gives a new lease of life to Roshni. She who takes the path of Druj returns to the path of Asha. She resolves to lead a virtuous life, to practise humata, hukhta and hvarshta like a true Parsee. Though adequately westernized, she returns to the Parsis faith since it alone ensures emotional space for her.

These novels dramatize the happy and adaptive lives of the Parsees wherever they are – in London, Canada, New York or Bombay. Most of these novels end in happy ‘resolution’. “Conflict” is always in redefining the external mode and means of adapting oneself in a ‘land of willing exile’ without failing to practise the Parsee values. In this conflict between the traditional modes and displaced attitudes, the achievement of the Parsee protagonists in emigre Parsee novels namely Feroza, Homi, Rusi as well as Shirin, Freddie and Gustad in the westernized Parsee context close at home, lies in realising ultimately for themselves and for others, a happy and dynamic life ahead.