



Research Paper

## Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Crow Eaters*: The Parsi Enigma of Self and Society

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**Abstract:** Bapsi Sidhwa in her novel "The Crow Eaters" describes her own community's mindset about communal behavior, desirability systems and characteristic. This novel was initially published in Pakistan in the year 1978. It states the social advancement of the Parsi household; the Junglewallas under the British Rule in the initial twentieth era. The novel unties a couple of years prior to partitioning. Throughout the time of separation, the initial stage in the hardback recounts of general rigidity. *The Crow Eaters* is a fictional tale of a Parsi family and the Parsi community's genuine characters. This novel is an exuberant depiction of different personalities and mentalities of an exceptional community. The characters mentioned in the novel are real but the kind of details shared in the novel makes them appear authentic. This novel is bona fide depiction of the community that Bapsi Sidhwa comes from.

This paper is an attempt to explore the Parsi community, self and society.

**Keywords:** Parsi Community, Parsis, Comedy, Immigration, Family and Society.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

*The Crow Eaters* unearth the serendipity of Faredoon Junglewalla, alias Freddy, who left his residence in the later part of the nineteenth century to happily settle in Lahore, a part of Punjab. In the novel, we also come across the endeavor of the Parsis to relocate the pleasant North Indian cities from the Western Coast toward the conclusion of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. It acts as a trademark for Sidhwa's work, leading to a misleading insightfulness; she precisely illustrates former facts interlaced with sardonic narration and parody, which pertinently overhaul the Parsi backdrop.

In order to apprehend the Parsi spirit, she wallops unanticipated code of comedy. The Bhandaras family was a successful business family from Lahore and had happily immigrated in the previous century. Her anecdote outlines both sides; the fictitious as well as the pioneering expertise of the senior citizens of her clique. As a consequence, her interpretation of the abuse of Faredoon and folks doesn't depict as a saga but also gives readers a strong sense of memoir. Bapsi Sidhwa whirls life story into artwork by her apt use of sarcasm. The usages of cynicism also avert the novel from turning into a flattering or trivialize an innate peril when a wordsmith writes about ones coterie and henceforth about its imperfections and attainments. Sidhwa inscribes exceptionally outstanding spark and exuberance that it wipes of the readers in a swift moving portrayal about bawdy mortals.

*The Crow Eaters* profess to be concise and scornful delineation of the successful outcome of the recital conveyed to the young adults of the Parsi group by Faredoon Junglewalla, by the prominent character, who upsurge the riches and communal popularity is unearthed with local circumstances and amiable comedy and wisecracking. *The Crow Eaters* is narrated as a naughty, light-hearted entertainment, in which, Faredoon Junglewalla, aka Freddy describes his life. Hence, the novel is observance of Parsi lifestyle, its procurements as a small community that outlived emigration and flourished without overlooking their racial oneness.

*The Crow Eaters* is an unrestrained assembled chronicle that starts with an outstretched nostalgia. Freddy, who was now in his midlife and a flourished man, shares his life story with his confined listeners like his little ones and the children of his neighbors. He narrates, how at the age of twenty-four, he under took a passage to Punjab along his soulmate Putli and mother-in-law Jerbanoo to rule over his clan and how he rose to a potential, robust and distinguished person in the community with his diligence and skills.

The subject matter of *The Crow Eaters*, in brief, is the battle for predominance. Since the starting, when the battlefield is declared betwixt the standard-bearer, Faredoon and Jerbanoo till the finish, when he himself

eventually admits the triumph of Jerbanoo over by accepting that she will live longer than him, the scuffle is between them to overtake their household. Apparently, Freddy depicts the politics within the family dynamics and tactfully agrees on the rules set in the family and gets the chance to rule his family.

Freddy, a chap of divergence got scheduled in the Zarathust calendar of substantial males and females with adage in the life. The endmost focus in life of Freddy was affluence and strong footing in his community. He fulfills his aspirations at a cost of lot of things and Bapsi Sidhwa has marvelously described the same. Her method of perception is caustic. Sidhwa has made Junglewalla's achievements praiseworthy in her writings. The novel starts with a memo of applaud for Fredoon, Freddy for short, who in the novel has been narrated as an impressive and a sweet-sounding personality. His career has been defined as:

FAREDOON Junglewalla, Freddy for short, was a strikingly handsome, dulcet-voiced adventurer with so few scruples that he not only succeeded in carving a comfortable niche in the world for himself but he also earned the respect and gratitude of his entire community. (The Crow Eaters: 9)

Freddy's spouse Putli is a perfect example of an India wife with great acceptance, intimacy and duty. Her sense of responsibility and understanding towards her children is admirable. There was a lot of anxiety created in the mind of Putli, whenever she accompanied her husband on invitations to the conventional tea ceremonies at the diplomatic gardens of Government house, reason being the synergy held between two cultures at such junctures. She is persuaded by her husband to attend such functions as he took such gatherings as an opportunity for making new contacts and strengthening alliances. Sidhwa has remarkably explained the different value system of Parsi settings that Putli religiously followed.

Freddy compassionately dominated and thoroughly managed his wife Putli with the assistance of three maxims. If his wife, Putli ever wanted to do something that was unbearable to Freddy, he would take forbidding and unflattering decision. Such incidents made Putli respect and abide by his decisions. On the contrary, if she ever performed something that was pointless according to Freddy, he would strongly object it but swiftly make fun with give away his wistful sanctions. But he did give her freedom of expression in other matters.

As stated earlier, The Crow Eaters has a loose-fitted composition. Most of its entertaining liveliness and cheerfulness is acquired from humorous and comical episodes. At all occasions, the novel depicts unity, a clear beginning, middle and a conclusion. Besides other repeated comic characteristics, each component is full of hilarious and inappropriate incidents. The chief instance of a quintessential comic occurrence is the episode of the irksome rooster.

When Freddy along with his family members began their journey to Lahore from their familial village, he against his will, agreed to his wife's wish and took along the chicken that was much loved by Putli. Amongst the domestic fowls that accompanied the family in the ox-drawn wagon besides them were her dearest rooster and an attractive, long-limbed animal with an august red comb and flamboyant huddled tail. One fine day, Freddy was sitting in the company of his mother-in-law Jerbanoo and wife Putli, giving a flimsy vindicate and leaving her alone to get intimate with his wife. While they both were cuddling one another, the rooster fell on them. The rooster started noticing Freddy's peculiar efforts with attentiveness. On another such evenings, the rooster happened to enter their shelter. Slanting his head to one side, he again noticed Freddy's bizarre exertions with great interest. Amalgamating a canny sense of timing with humor, he abruptly leaped on and with least hassle; he placed himself briskly upon Freddy's erotic backside. During this intense moment, nothing could take away Freddy's attention and he was so engrossed in the act that he thought it was the pressure put on him by his wife's fingers. And hence, the rooster has a ride of a lifetime. With a twinkle in the eyes, it stretched its wings to balance itself on the buttocks of Freddy and like an experienced rodeo rider it had its best ride.

It was only after Freddy subsided into a satisfied stupor, nerves uncoil with fatigue, that the cock, raising its tail and neck, squawked, 'coo-ka-roo-coo!'

The rearmost touch of the cock's victorious squawk is called, colloquially, "milking the gag" and removing that last segment of additional mileage from a comic situation. The rooster's cry also adds a component of surprise till the end of the episode. This encroachment of the rooster in Freddy's love life is constantly repeated at several occasions until Freddy at least puts an end to it through precise dishonesty. This gave them a treat of fleshy chicken and coconut curry the next day. Henceforth, Freddy manages a victory over the rooster. It is a streak of comedy, aboriginal and compact.

The focal point is transferred from Freddy to his little ones in the mid of the novel. Freddy's two daughters - Hutoxy and Ruby have been already tied nuptials and the third daughter, Yasmin weds subsequently. Rosy Watson, an Anglo-Indian with a stressful family history, besots one of his sons, Yazdi. Freddy discourages his son from this alliance forward by refreshing his memory about the pledge that the Parsis take to marry only within their own band. In the intervening period of time, Rosy is pushed into whoring and horrendously Freddy himself involves in an act with her. Yazdi is devastated to hear this from Freddy and his perspective about love changes and he refrains himself from the worldly life. All this makes Yazdi follow Mazalak, the first communist mentioned in the Zoroastrain scriptures. He starts believing in his ideology that all worldly good, inclusive of women, is to be shared by all. This makes Yazdi practice the Zoroastrian's thought

process in society. In the mean time, Freddy's eldest son, Soli falls sick leading to his death that turns the astrological predictions of Gopal Krishnan true. This brings a complete change in the personality of Yazdi. He repudiates the world and the worldly affairs. He starts investing his monthly income to extend help to the needy and homeless. Such chain of incidents in the life of Yazdi changes him irrevocably and helps him understand the mysterious and complex ways that gives constant suffering.

The novelist in her novel tries to explain that the sorrows and happiness are interdependent that adds to humor in the life. And hence, each life has to go through the circle of pain, abundance and laughter. Therefore, the attention is drawn towards many characters by Bapsi Sidhwa. The readers initially are engrossed in reading about Freddy, but by the middle of the writing, the attention shifts to the other characters like his children and finally it revolves around Billy who is the youngest son of Freddy and plays a major role.

In the last part of the novel, all the attention is drawn towards Behran Junglewalla, alias Billy, who completely takes over his father's business and is counted amongst the richest men in India. There are also some incidents mentioned in the novel that shows Billy's attempts to find a good wife for him. Hence, he marries Tanya, a daughter of a wealthy man from Bombay. His honeymoon, arguments with his wife and how he wins over Tanya adds to funny situations for readers to read. One such funny incident revolves around when he tries to consummate his marriage.

Post wedding, Billy along with Tanya, leave for Shimla to spend some quality time with her on their honeymoon. He attempts to kiss Tanya. This panics her and she shouts at him. This makes Billy realize that Tanya is an innocent virgin and he will have to wait to come close to her. They happen to get intimate while on trekking to Jacco Hill, a popular money sanctuary. Nature plays an important role in getting them closer. The rain gets them romantic and closer. Sidhwa expresses all such incidents in a very subtle and sophisticated manner. But her statements are to the mark when she refers to her own Parsi community.

Bapsi Sidhwa compiled this novel in order to conserve respect for the Parsi group of people that is on the margin of disappearance. The recital implies comical and cynical forms at the level of awareness of Zoroastrian's merits in the lives of Freddy and his sons – Billy and Yazdi. It is marvelously explained how Freddy leaps up as a businessman and later his endmost victory as a Parsi in obtaining riches and societal esteem. It is interesting to see him sincerely utilizing his riches for the purpose of welfare and compassion. Even though, all his wealth is acquired via illegal insurance schemes by setting his shop on fire and scaring his mother-in-law. Henceforth, creating opportunities for him to play a role of the chief at his house as well as become wealthy.

In the story, Soli's ultimate demise and Yazdi's abandonment, correlates to his ominous actions. His fledgling failure to apprehend the 'laws of happiness and misery,' – that is those who indulge in evil activities shall agonize at a length that those who walked on the path of rightfulness and attain benefits (From Gathas). His collapse to realize the 'laws of happiness and misery' is a razor-sharp difference to his philanthropic and sympathetic nature. Thus, the Zoroastrian's perspectives are the key in the writings in *The Crow Eaters*.

Welfare is the merit that bestows the thrust for Freddy's sustained commercial pursuits. He shares with his listeners once:

And once you have the means, there is no end to the good you can do. I donated toward the construction of an orphanage and a hospital. I installed a water pump with a stone plaque dedicating it to my friend, Mr. Charles P.Allen. (*The Crow Eaters*: 10)

Freddy's humanitarian deeds may not glorify him to the level of an ideal of Zoroastrian's morals, as they are overlay importance on self-advancement. He confessed once:

I've made friends – loved them – for what could be called ulterior motives and yet the friendships so made are amongst my sweetest, longest and most sincere. I cherish them still. (*The Crow Eaters*: 11)

Post ceremony for the well being of his deceased son Soli, Freddie makes the conventional decree of funding. He proclaims that his descent shall build a school in Karachi. Freddy takes a life span to have a sight of the law of God dominating the totality. Freddy's understandings of his restrictions co-occur with self-determination. He acknowledges:

It has taken me a long time to comprehend evil and good – and a lifetime to catch just a glimpse of the path of Asha, God's grand plan for man and the cosmos. Yes the strength of God cosmos to the man of good action, and such a man is gifted progressively with the good mind, the Vahu Mana, God's own mind... Thus spoke Zorathustra! (*The Crow Eaters*: 281)

Basically, the story engages the transferring area of Central India where Freddy's life begins from Lahore to Karachi and Bombay and to London. The recital realistically and imaginatively engages the constant change as an essential to the worldly and psychic obligations of Freddy. Lahore turns out to be the eventual symbol for his self-fulfillment in trading activities as much as a locale for rehearsing the Zoroastrian nobilities in the general public. Here we can see specific traits of disengagement and Diasporas and even inceptive delusion in one of the other novels of Sidhwa, *The Pakistan Bride*. Nevertheless, slowly, like any other emigrant

with a constant persistence, imagination and utter will to succeed, Freddy jumps up as a meteorite. Freddy can be held as a representative of emigrants, given his resourceful nature and anticipation.

At the dawn of his pursuit, he is 'outsider,' competing to attain success and social acceptance. He gradually becomes a complete 'insider' by the end of the story. Freddy's materialistic success does not at any point safeguard tranquility and polyphony. Yazdi was repulsive to his father's materialism and hence renounced life.

Freddy's commercial success is undone by his non-success in family life. According to Zoroastrianism, this leads to self-awakening and hence leads to obsolescence.

In the novel, leeway acts as a sign of magnification, amalgam of life style and conclusive consolidation. Freddy earns ample societal expansion for his irremediable trading skills and zeal with his evidently unselfish actions of welfare. If his stalwart allegiance to the British safeguards his social reputation and safety, his kindness and liberality proportionally win him many companions and enthusiasts. He takes off the sheet from the face of the dead body of his son, which in the conservative Parsi society is a profanity. When the men of his community disapprove of his act, he answers:

They had stood all this while to see my son: let them. What does it matter if they are not Parsis? They are my brothers; and if I can look upon my son's face, so can they. (The Crow Eaters: 179)

Thus, there is a powerful sense of responsibility in Freddy towards his community that gets him recognition as a senior figure in the Parsee community that lives in Lahore.

Even though, according to Zoroastrian's ideology, the loyalty towards the state ruler is mandatory but Freddy's faithfulness to the British is nowhere related to pious personality. It solely is a method to attain self-advancement. His recognition with the colonist is powerful.

Freddy's humanitarian acts assure him social reputation, drawing his attentiveness in religious beliefs, which is the result of the upheaval in his life. Freddie's apprehensions of his own clampdown are a noteworthy step in working towards gaining self-alertness. Self-fulfillment, a morality in the ideology of Zoroastrian is a way of life and is the foundation of Freddy's life. As stated by him one must regard one's obligations. He asserts:

But God has fashioned man as a creature of desires and fulfilling desires brings contentment, the driving force, and essence of life. (The Crow Eaters: 113)

He becomes conscious at later stage of life that only a pleased mind is accessible to scared enlightenment Sidhwa in a very lucrative manner shows his deficiency of unoriginality through her atypical use of English that is realistic and sensitive.

Bapsi Sidhwa elegantly presents the Parsi background on agony and changes by describing the dressing style. Parsis kept their communal congruence by their similar dressing style. Faredoon along with his family members took gratification in their conventional mode of dressing style. Putli and Jerbanoo never made any public appearance.

The upcoming peer group of Parsis, Behran and Tanya gradually toss out the customary dresses. Tanya preferred wearing a sari but her style of dressing in a sari was revealing: "she became daring in her attire and tied her sari in a way that accentuated the perfections of her body. She took to wearing a little make-up and outlined the astonishing loveliness of her lips". (The Crow Eaters: 246)

Though, in regards with his way of dressing, Behram was more conventional. He yearns and asserts Tanya, not to expose her waist splendidly or ease off with other men, as her purpose is misunderstood. But later, Faredoon and his son Behram wanted Tanya to look western and speak English. Though, at residence, he wants his wife to behave humble and homely.

Besides the little footing in the society, they relished as a minority group. Because of their social code for their religion, Parsis expressed immense respect to British rulers. The primary outlook of the believers of Zoroastrianism towards a monarch was that of devotion to the head of state, which got Zoroastrianism at the position state faith that authorized a strong association between the state and the exegesis, based on correlative help. Parsis wanted British supremacy to give them religious independence and defense. The supreme state in Zoroastrian faith is complimentary of a deference of the crowned head. The inception of a good quality monarch is ultimately a devotedly liberal practice of supremacy.

These feelings were widespread in the Parsi environment and Bapsi Sidhwa timely brings it in *The Crow Eaters*. Freddy extracts good from every golden opportunity to display his sincerity towards the British. Post settling in Lahore, he prefers wearing splendid and dazzling attire to pay visits to the Government House and mention his signatures in the visitor's book. He does so to establish his achievements and display his loyalty to the "Queen and Crown". If such a moved looks ridiculous, communal historians will recollect that on moments like regal birthday celebrations, inauguration ceremonies, the Parsi displayed their collective sincerity via public gatherings and Jashens (group prayers). Parsis labeled Britain's Wars necessary for world tranquility, progression of human development and liberation. If such was the customary societal scene, Faredoon's remark to the former Deputy Commissioner, Charles P. Allen's children as "my prince" and "my princess" an malicious

out flowing against the freedom movement under the guidance of Dadabhai Naoroji representing Congress do not pound overemphasis or whimsicality on the part of Freddy but because the author's extreme observant vision into the functioning of the Parsi mind.

Bapsi Sidhwa persistently mocks the passion with which the major Parsi business tycoons, Fareedon Junglewalla, Mr. Toddywalla advocates the British cause. With motive of commerce, the British permitted the Parsis an exceptional position as negotiators and dependable commerce associates. Being a sharp spectator of human undependable nature, Bapsi Sidhwa contemplates this in distinguish ability in quest to various circumstances and outlook in *The Crow Eaters*. An obvious demonstration of this identity calamity is the moribund Fareedon Junglewalla's passionate disapproval of the nationalist movement and persuasion to his family to persist loyalty towards the British Empire.

The anxieties of Fareedon are not the fabrication of a man on his deathbed with imaginations but are building on social facts. With a moribund man's keenness, he talks about the necessary requisite of changing faithfulness. Subsequently, a question put up by his daughter's spouse, Bobby Katrak about the upcoming life of the Parsis post autonomy, Fareedon gives a fateful reply:

Fareedon said softly, 'we will stay where we are...let Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or whosoever rule. What does it matter? The sun will continue to rise... and the sun continues to set – in their arses...!' (*The Crow Eaters*: 283)

Fareedon, while approaching his deathbed, begins to be rational and disconnected. Bapsi Sidhwa combines the important components of horseplay with an observation that chiefly and by for Indian. These perceptions hop from an analytical outlook that considers the world as *Leela* or a play. Every person plays their designated character, neither of them being more rational than the other. The independent beings nonetheless ingenious purposeful solely performs their part in a superior intention, which is eventually enigmatic and perplexing. Fareedon perceives this when he is unable to avert his son's demise and his other son's rejection of the world that he loved deeply.

*The Crow Eaters* hence discusses both the peripheral and the heartfelt aspects of the hysterical style. It is just not delightful mockery but also incorporates a substantial observation of the globe; the perception is comical in the same manner as Shakespeare's in his satires because it conveys diversity, vivacity and viability at all turns of life.

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