



REVIEW OF RESEARCH



PARSI'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Abstract:

Like all other fields Parsis have contributed immensely to Indian literature in English and happen to be among the founders of it. The earliest example of Parsi writing is *Shah-Nama* by Firdausi. It covers the development from Zoroaster upto the late Sassanians. The tradition of Parsi writing in English began with Behram Malbari's well known poetry collection *The Indian Muse in English Garb* published in 1877. In the early twentieth century Cornelia Sorabji published three volumes of interesting Short stories : *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901), *Sun Babies*, (1904) and *Between the Twilights* (1908). Another early Parsi novelist was D.F. Karaka published during 1940s and 1950s. Nargis Dalal published four novels in the 1960s and 1970s. Perin Bharucha published only in novel *The Fire Worshipers* in 1968. Among the contemporary writers in English the well known names are: Bapsi Sidhwa, Firdaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy, Boman Desai, Dina Mehta, Meher Pestonjee, Ardashir Vakil Kersy Katrak, Gieve Patel, Adil Jussawala, Farishta Murzaban and Rohinton Mistry. We have a Parsi world and its interaction with urban middle class life in their works. Like any other minority ethnic group they have their own problem of adaptation, identity and survival. Sooni Taraporewala rightly sums up their sensibility:



Parsis are a people who uprooted themselves and moved to a different world to save their religion. We migrated to India one thousand years ago. The Parsi experience is about dilemmas that most minority communities face; questions about religion and race, survival and extinction, assimilation and identity, tradition and the modern world." (Qtd. in Dodiya, 1)

KEY WORDS: Indian English writer, Parsi writing, Indian Muse, ethnic group .

INTRODUCTION:

A brief account of the contribution of individual Parsi writers would serve well to illustrate the contribution of the community.

Bapsi Sidhwa : She is the undoubtedly the best known Parkistani novelist writing in English. She has so far produced four novels : *The Crow Eaters*, *The Pakistani Bride*, *Ice-Candy Man* *An American Brat*. If *The Crow Eaters* deals with Parsi's ethos and practices, *The Pakistani Bride* echoes a feminist concern in Pakistan, *Ice-Candy Man* is focused on Indo-Pak partition theme, where as *An American Brat* is diasporic based on the theme of migration and expatriate experiences. Currently she lives and works in America.

Firdaus Kanga: Firdaus was born in Mumbai in 1960. He was handicapped by brittle-bone or osteoporosis which confined him to wheelchair. He is an Anglophile and homosexual and has found England more congenial for himself and his creativity. Consequently he settled over there. He wrote two autobiographical novels : *Trying to Grow* (1990) and *Heaven on Wheels* (1991). *Trying to Grow* centres on themes of disability and sexuality. It was turned into the award winning film *Sixth Happiness* in which he played the lead role. *Heaven on Wheels* describes four though England and combines elements of autobiography travelogue. (Naik, 222)

Boman Desai: Desai was born in 1950 in India but has migrated to the U.S.A. He did creative writing course at Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago where he was honoured for his story "Under the Moon". His first novel *The Memory of Elephants* came out in 1988. It is a culturally rooted fantasy that covers three generations from grandmother to the protagonist Home, a Parsi scientist and records the history of Parsi-migration and the collective memory of the community. Indira Bhatt writes:

The novelist unfolds the Parsis' arrival in Sanjan, giving details of how they were welcomed by Jadhav Rana, the Maharaja of Sanjan, with the jug of milk into which their Dastur dropped at first a coin indicating repayment of Rana's hospitality and then a pinch of sugar indicating sweet merger of the Parsis with the people of the land. This is symbolic of the Parsis's efforts to merge with the people of the land and to help them to be prosperous. Boman Desai has clearly presented the two aspects of the Parsi-characteristics. They are peace-loving people as also some of them are industrialists and have brought this land reputation in industry. Boman Desai's choice of the names of two families in the novel - the Seervais and the Camas is symbolic of this. It is interesting to know that the Parsis had to accept the life-style of Gujarat and the Gujarati language. Their positive effort to adopt Gujarati traditions and become an integral and prosperous part of Gujarat, India, is also fully explained. (Dodiya Qtd. in Parsi English Novel, 16)

His second novel *Asylum, USA* (2000) is a comic extravaganza based the life of a Parsi student in Chicago who in order to get a green card moves from one American woman to another to marry her. But he finds all of them trouble of one or another kind.

Dina Mehta : She is an important Indian English Parsi novelist. Her novel *And Some Take a Lover* focuses on a proposed inter-faith marriage between a Parsi girl, Miss Roshni Wadia and the austere Gandhian boy, Sudhir. She has also written short stories and plays. Her play *Brides Are not for Burning* has been very popular among playgoers.

Farruk Dhondy : He was born in 1944 brought up in Poona and he worked as a school teacher in London for quite some time and then switched over to full time writership. His short story collections include his award winning children's books *East End at Your Feet* (1976) and *Come to Mecca and Other Stories* (1978) besides *The Siege of Babylon* (1978), *Poona Company* (1980), and *Trip Trop* (1982). He is also known as a playwright with following publications : *Mama Dragon* (1980), *Trojans* (1983), *Kipling Sahib* (1982), his television plays *Maids in the Mad Show* and *King of the Ghetto* (a T.V. serial) based on miserable living conditions of Bangladeshi immigrants in London. His debut novel *Bombay Duck* was published in 1990.

Saros Dara Cowasjee : He is a versatile Indian English writer and is well recognised as a critic and Mulk Raj Anand scholar. He did his Ph.D. from the University of Leeds U.K under G. Wilson Knight and worked as teaching faculty in different universities. He authored and edited a number of books but the most satisfying to him is his novel *Goodbye to Elsa* one of the fast selling books.

The central theme of the novel is Tristan's search for love, and his loneliness when in the presence of others, associated with his divided Anglo-Indianness. His other works of fiction are *Stories and Sketches* (1970), *Nude Therapy* (1978), and second novel, *Suffer Little Children* (1982), a sequel to *Goodbye to Elsa*, is set fully in Saskatchewan. Apart from Tristan, his Anglo-Indian hero, all other characters are Canadian. Tristan, in this novel, falls in love with Maura at a nude-therapy session and comes to believe that in an era

of women's liberation her year-old daughter is a Messiah whom he attempts to kidnap after being rejected by the mother. The unexpected directions his novels take reflect a sense of life as comically absurd.

Keki N. Daruwalla : Daruwalla is one of the most prominent living Indian poets in English. He is a retired police officer with poetic flair. His first poetry collection *Under Orion* was published in 1970. Others include *Apparition in April* (1971), *Crossing of Rivers* (1980), *The Keeper of Dead* (1982) for which he won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1984, *His Landscape* (1987) which earned him commonwealth prize, *A Summer of Tigers* (1995) and *Night River* (2000). His latest poetry collection *The Map-Maker* was published in 2002. Daruwalla is more a poet of Indian sensibility than that of Parsi. Though there are some references to Parsi symbols and images, he offers a panoramic view of rural and urban Indian in his poetry.

Gieve Patel : He is another Parsi poet of repute who has contributed immensely to the development of modern Indian English poetry. His poetry includes *Poems* (1966) and *How Do You Withstand Body* (1976). He also wrote two unpublished plays. He is regarded as the poet of the body because human body is a recurrent theme in his poetry. He laments the isolation of the Parsi in his poem "The Ambiguous Fate of Gieve Patel, He being neither Muslim nor Hindu in India." In short Parsi writers are conscious of the fact that their community is diminishing. Through their works they intend to preserve their ethnicity for posterity so they show an acute sense of ethnicity. Firdaus Kanga in his *Trying to Grow*, Farrukh Dhondy in *Bombay Duck*, Bapsi Sidhwa in *The Crow Eaters*, Mistry in *Such a Long Journey and Family Matters* reflect on Parsi community in diverse hues. Their works exhibit consciousness of their community in a way that the community emerges as a protagonist relating human protagonists to the background.

Besides them there are some other Parsi writers in English and Gujarati. They have also enriched Gujarati literature and theatre.

Parsee novel in English, i.e. novel portraying Parsee life, is a potent index of the Zoroastrian ethos. It voices the ambivalence, the nostalgia and the dilemma of the endangered Parsee community. In Parsee novel in English, the 'operative sensibility' is Zoroastrian. The Parsee novelists have forged a dialect, which has a distinct ethnic character. The tempo of Parsee life is fused into their English expression just as the tempo of Jewish life has gone into the best work of Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud. The triumph of the Parsee novelists in the use of English language is largely due to westernization and exposure to English culture. Their prose is interspersed with Persian words and Gujarati expressions. Besides being innovative, the Parsee novelists describe in detail, the esoteric rituals, and the Zoroastrian customs such as Navjote. Thus, Parsee novel in English gives us a peep into the turbulent Parsee mind of today. (Kumar, 17-28)

This is the reason why most of Parsi writers assert their ethnic identity in their creative writing more than any other ethnic groups. The way the community is disappearing, no one knows how long the Parsis will survive. Nevertheless, their literature dealing with their community, its religion, its customs and traditions, its likes and dislikes, and their role in the development of the country to which they originally do not belong certainly records their ethnicity for the posterity.

CONCLUSION:

The tradition of Parsi writing in English began with Behram Malbaris well known poetry collection *The Indian Muse in English Garb* published in 1877. Indian English writer, Parsi writing, Indian Muse, ethnic group Gieve Patel: He is another Parsi poet of repute who has contributed immensely to the development of modern Indian English poetry. In short Parsi writers are conscious of the fact that their community is diminishing. Through their works they intend to preserve their ethnicity for posterity so they show an acute sense of ethnicity. *Parsee novel in English, i.e. novel portraying Parsee life, is a potent index of the Zoroastrian ethos.*

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