

PROMINENCE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY IN THE NOVEL '*BOMBAY DUCK*'

Dr.G.R. Sapat

(HoD-Dept of English)

Dr. Khatri Mahavidyalaya Tukum, Chandrapur (MS)

Abstract:

The paper examines the challenge posed to Parsi religious ideology by the conversions of Parsi. The paper provides a unique picture of the challenge faced by the Parsis from the influence of Western Individual members with an ethos that transcends their class psychology, bias and interests, but few can be expected to live as self-sacrificing social reformers in the colonial environment. It reflects that amidst the Parsis' continuing progress and socialization under colonialism their religious ideology remained inviolable. The Parsis unite in support of the issue of interfaith or intercommunity marriage.

Farrukh Dhondy as a sincere reporter logically exhibits traditional opposition to such marriages. The central focus is the ability of the Parsi as a community to withstand the challenges posed by the impact of colonialism. The protagonist's quest for identity as whole and Prominence of Socio-Cultural and Religious Ideology is discussed.

The capacities for cultural criticism, Indian literature, which fortunately is still commonly revered in the general culture, must serve a primarily social, even political function as well as religious theme. Farrukh Dhondy reveals in his novel, '*Bombay Duck*' that the man can change himself and exploit his religion or faith for his selfish ends, without caring for his communal identity, which is very important for ensuring the root of any individual in the given social set up. Dhondy is a new generation member of the post-colonial diaspora, of which he himself is a part. But, in his writings, there is a poignant reflection of Parsi diaspora, as members of shrinking community, struggling to come up in tune with the baffling and complex phenomenon of Indian modernity in all sense and term.

The novel deals with diasporic condition of Parsis with several cross-culture allusions, which vouch for the author's perception of looking at the world as '*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*', a Sanskrit phrase, meaning that the whole world is one single family (Rigveda). The novel *Bombay Duck* comprises two parts: The Part One has its locale as London, Edinburgh and Delhi. The protagonist in the first part of the novel is Gerald Blossom, who is a well-known black doctor with his Caribbean origin. He

relinquishes his identity as a Christian, and renames himself as Ali Abdul Rahman. Why he changes his name is quite interesting to know. His intimate friend Ullah persuades him to change his name to Ali Abdul Rahman for better prospects in his profession. Persuaded by him Gerald not only changes his name but also undergoes circumcision in order to live like a true Muslim. This however does not help in his profession. Here, Farrukh Dhondy reveals that the man can change himself and exploit his religion or faith for his selfish ends, without caring for his communal identity, which is very important for ensuring the root of any individual in the given social set up. The second part of the novel presents the locale of London and Bombay. An Indian Parsi, Mr Xerxes Xavaxa (XX for short) from Bombay is shown as having gone to London for his education, and there he obtains a Bachelor's degree in Theology and Ethics from Cambridge University, London. But his degree cannot help him in seeking any job for survival. Having failed to seek any job, he takes up the vocation of a Parsi historian, but in this vocation also he does not succeed much. Then he staggers on his fortune, and decides to fulfill the dreams of others, by way of cross-culture transference. With the development of plots he plans about the theft of an Indian child. From this incident onwards his misfortune begins and he faces tragedy after tragedy.

Awasthi remarks, as follows: The novelist silently bemoans Indians' apathy towards their own cultural treasure, whereas foreigners are discovering India. We are only waiting for them to tell us about our India, but which does not imply that it will be sincere and faithful too. The situation is contrasted with assimilating power of Indian Society and Culture; where is it now? Or the British have taken it away from us as a departing legacy of the Raj that we stopped bothering about ourselves and we need instructions to understand what we are! Or else the fact is that they are only acting and perhaps we too. The Westerners like David find Indian culture quite tantalizing and thrilling yet they never realize the folly of seeing it through their manners. (Intellectual Therapy... 123)

Here, it may be mentioned that The Ramayana in the form of Ramleela is always presented in India, and it is staged on the famous Ramleela Ground in Delhi and in other parts of the country on various occasions, particularly during Dussera festivals (however, it is a matter of time that the electronic media has pushed behind its physically artistic performance these days). The Indians do not have to learn about their culture from foreigners, rather the foreigners have to learn about Indian culture from Indians. It is David Stream's fascination for the Indian culture that prompted him to present *Ramayana* as he liked and perceived it from his point of view. Hence Awasthi's observation as: "whereas foreigners are discovering India. We are only waiting for them to tell us about our India," is unreasonable. If it had been so, Dhondy would not have said, though through a black character. In other words, the novelist defends the cultural values of Parsi, and David's attempts to treat Indian culture for commercial gain by presenting *Ramayana* with unsuitable characters are criticized by him. Dhondy also gets his critical views vented through one of his characters, Tilak, as, 'The masses of India are not animals to be put in a zoo (BD 79),' and also through the black-boy, remarking, 'David, who the fuck is David?' (BD, 79). Here, the hatred in the minds of Tilak or Ali is in fact the concealed hatred of the novelist against Englishmen's psyche of dominance over others across the world.

The world history reminds us how once upon a time the British had ruled maximum number of small nations, by setting up their colonies, and how cruelly they had treated their subjugated masses in India, and perhaps elsewhere. The choice of characters for the epic play *Ramayana* by David was not befitting, for he did not bother about their suitability, or it may also be said that he himself failed to understand the intrinsic value or inner import of such a great epic work like The Ramayana, and perhaps thought that humans of any level can play the characters of The Ramayana, as perceived and written by Goswami Tulsidas, under divine inspiration. The Hindu people belonging to old and moral value based generation held that all those acted in the presentation of Ram Leela or Ramayana in the

form of a play were supposed to observe unbreakable discipline and code of conduct, particularly, those who played as Rama, Sita, Laxman and Hanuman. Introducing the Ramayana in the first part of the novel, Dhondy has eulogized the ethical values of Indian culture. Every Indian man or woman is expected to live like Rama and Sita respectively, at least for an ideal construct of society, as all seers exhort. It also provides perfect guidance for human relationship and sense of abiding by one's duties and responsibilities, based on the principles of satya (truth) and dharma (righteousness).

The novelist vouches it as follows:

The story then is that Kaikeyi, the step mother of Ram and Laxman, saves their father's life by substituting her finger for the broken axle-pin of his chariot in war, and he promises her anything, to which she replies that Ram must be sent into exile and her son Bharatha must inherit the kingdom. The king does not like it but he has to keep his promise and he sends his eldest son and his brother into exile with the sage Vishwamitra (BD 98).

In this way, the part one of the novel happens to be the narrative of cultural history of India, because of description of the Ramayana in the form of a play enacted by unsuitable characters. This part also lets the readers know the self-assessment of the protagonist. The second part of the book highlights Zoroastrianism. In the novel the characters are on their ceaseless journey to find their individual destination, except death. The stories and journeys undertaken by Ali Abdul Rahman and Xerxes Xavaxa (Xavaxa for short) are parallel, complementary and they comment on each other; and they extend each other's purposeful living as well as journeying. The two apparently different characters thus become the types of the same splintered personality, making the novel a haphazard collection of human experiences through multi-racial relationships which in turn involve journeys and which are viewed with irony by both the protagonists, the implied author. In the words of Nilufer Bharucha, 'It is a novel of fitting in, of breaking down of cultural boundaries...' (Indian English Fiction 1980-90: An Assessment 87)

Among all Parsi writers, it would not be wrong to say, it is Farrukh Dhondy who is discussing

several illogical and contrasting features of Zoroastrianism and its subscribers. He has made several comments on certain Parsi customs, rituals and ceremonies which sound irrational or superstitious for their practitioners in the community. From his broad perception, the novelist compares the Parsis to the Jews. He firmly holds that the Parsis are the Jews of India. In the words of the protagonist, thus: 'Often they are compared to Jews. The Parsees are the Jews of

India. One thing wrong with that. There are Jews in India, all sorts...' (BD 168)

1. *Farrukh Dhondy's Bombay Duck (1990, 1999) (BD)*
2. *Awasthi, A.K. "Bombay Duck; Farrukh Dhondy's Intellectual Therapy for Cultural Neurasthenia." Fiction of Ninties. Ed. Veena Noble Das and R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige, 1994. 123.*
3. *Bharrucha, Nilufer. "Indian English Fiction 1980-90: An Assessment." New World Literature Series77. Ed. Nilufer Bharrucha and Vilas Sarang. Delhi: BR Pulishing Corp., 1994.*