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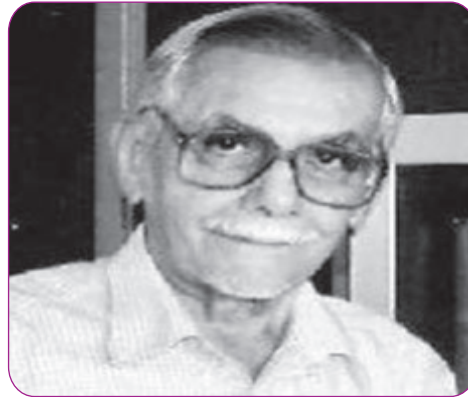
THE PROBLEM OF MIXED MARRIAGE IN A CASTE STRICKEN SOCIETY: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF KARANJIA'S "MORE OF AN INDIAN"

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ABSTRACT:-

B.K. Karanjia's "More of an Indian" deals with the problem of mixed marriage in the microscope Parsee community. This narrative focuses on two perspectives of marriage. One, the idealistic and the other pragmatic, they finally strike a medial position resolving itself on a



note of reconciliation between the two. Marriage, the chief thematic and structural purpose of the narrative acts an idea as well as real life experience. Thematically, the narrative's conflict is dramatized through the problem of marriage between Shirin, a westernized Parsee girl, and Ashok, a Hindu salesman. Karanjia's work

has great relevance to the hard times through which the Parsee community is passing. Kulke, in his study of various aspects of Parsee life.

KEYWORDS: Reconciliation, Consciousness, Conflict, Resolving, Attitude, Unique.

INTRODUCTION :

The Zoroastrian world view constitutes the focal point of Shirin's consciousness as her attitude to Zoroastrian religion is unique and uncommon in the westernized Parsee life. Albeit fashionable, she is true Zoroastrian in her attitude to life and life's challenges. If Prophet Zoroaster's spiritual experience guides her, Ahura Mazda illuminates her thoughts, words, and deeds. The essential purpose of her attitude is an unflinching commitment to Zoroastrian faith which is known for its exclusiveness and rigid code. The structural progression of her consciousness from a religious ambivalence to altruism forms the crux of the narrative.

The religious exclusiveness, typical of the Zoroastrian faith, obstructs Shirin's vision of life, at least initially. She is painfully aware of her ambivalence towards mixed marriage. The young westernized Parsee girls grow up confused not knowing whether to lead a traditional Zoroastrian life or seek emancipation. Shirin's ambivalence is typical of this tendency. As the Parsee life in the twentieth century is in a state of flux, the attitude of the Parsee girls to marriage is also ambivalent and uncertain as it is so vividly reflected in Shirin's dilemma.

Shirin's realization that she has to face a moral crisis plunges her into intense anguish. Her attempt to hide from her conscience is an exercise in futility. There is a creative tug in her consciousness between her love for Ashok on one hand and obligation to the Zoroastrian faith on the other. Though, aware of the strictures in the Parsee community against mixed marriage, she fails to resist the pull of Ashok's love as it offers her emotional fulfillment. This leads her to make a moral choice which is a concern shared by many westernized Parsee girls.

Shirin's veneration for Zoroastrianism is an attitude which she has inherited from her erudite, though tolerant, father. Ashok's disinterest in religion Parsee is in sharp contrast to her commitment to the Zoroastrian faith. If Ashok's integrity provides her unflinching emotional strength, her father's passive gentleness unnerves her.

Thus commences her quest for fulfillment and freedom in life necessarily leading to a confrontation with her father. The narrative effectively portrays the confrontation between the two attitudes of the Parsee community the traditional and the progressive as represented by Kersasp and Shirin.

Shirin's thesis is that true religion sustains and integrates humanity. There is no outright rejection of religion in her mind as she contends that it is a life sustaining institution. She thus seeks a religion which is flexible and which stimulates and satisfies her moral needs. The process of Shirin's self-actualization is dramatized in the narrative through two life-like situations. The resolve of her brother Jamsu, a happy-go-lucky type of person, to marry many German girls, provides impetus to Shirin's efforts.

Ironically, Jamsu discovers his self abroad but not on the Indian soil where his roots actually exist. His optimism that his hitherto sterile life would acquire a new meaning after his marriage provides a new dimension to Shirin's own life, as his new found courage instils confidence in her. The resolution to her ambivalence comes in the form of fruition of her love with Ashok. Shirin's sense of guilt, which is the result of a feeling of betrayal, is acute whereas in Ashok, on the contrary it leads to an enlargement of his consciousness. For the first time in his life, he feels that his life is full.

Shirin's realization that life is greater than religion has profound significance for her as it brings her tormenting dilemma to an end. Ashok, who plays the role of a catalyst in the evolution of her consciousness from one people to the other, is pragmatic and down to earth. At some level, it is his exhortations which propel her in the quest for ultimate self-actualization. The marriage of Shirin and Ashok is a means to achieve a universal religion. In other words, it is Karanja's cherished ideal of cultural integration with the synthesis of divergent religious faiths. Shirin defies the Zoroastrian convention not because of her lack of faith. She firmly believes that any religion is only a means, not an end in itself. For her, religion is a 'life-changing force'.

In Zoroastrianism, marriage is more than a social institution: it brings about peace and domestic happiness. To a Parsee, marriage should mean neither enjoyment nor profit. Man and woman should enter this sacred matrimonial state for increasing each one's potentiality for doing well. The basic virtue which permeates material life is *khaet wadath* or altruism. Zoroastrianism, which does not treat marriage as a contract or a commercial bargain, enjoins the couple to take the path of *Asha*.

Ashok and Shirin are involved in the pursuit of a common ideal to the realization of which they dedicate themselves. They are prepared to make a joint effort to develop a true relationship and are willing to confront the challenges that might arise in the course of their marital life. If Shirin defies the Zoroastrian convention, Ashok antagonizes his materialistic father. Both, however, exercise restraint, and hence succeed in realizing their objective of unity of minds through their marriage. The cosmic drama which is emphasized in the Zoroastrian worldview is enacted on the stage of her mind and the happy resolution is the triumph of the Zoroastrian faith.

Her prayer after marriage bears ample testimony to the fault that universality rather than exclusiveness is the soul and strength of the Zoroastrian faith. The evolution of her consciousness is a centripetal phenomenon, which, in other words, is a fruitful shift from apprehension to an enlarged consciousness. Ashok acts as an able religious and spiritual medium in this process.

In Shirin's case, there is no divorce between life and religion as she envisages a condition in which the two sustain each other. Kersasp's initial exclusiveness proves a major hurdle in her quest for a meaningful alternative to the dogmatism as a result of which she is caught in a dilemma: her philosophy of life is based on the message of Zoroaster. She takes the path of *Asha*, thus prepared mentally to fight darkness and evil present in her, in some fashion. She too, like Gustad in such a long journey, could be included in the category of *Ashavan* or those who take the path of righteousness. Her purity of heart illustrates the influence of the Zoroastrian worldview on her mind. Her realization that religion is only a handmaid to life brings to an end the conflict between the two disputing principles in her mind. Her placing of happiness in life above religion is not an anti-Zoroastrian gesture but a moral imperative.

In her quest, Kersasp, her father, provides the other dimension to the aspect of Zoroastrian worldview. If Shirin represents modernity in the Parsee community; Kersasp stands for the Zoroastrian values in a state of transition. As a recluse from real life, he looks at life through the spectacles of religious literature. Though he is a profound scholar and liberal in the Parsee community, he believes that the very survival of Zoroastrianism is a

miracle. Each Parsee should deem it his sacred duty to preserve the essential purity of his religion. A person's birth in a particular community is not an accident but the win of God. Kersasi, though a modernist tries to revert to the Zoroastrian religion which Zoroaster preached before it was repaganized under the Achaemenians and reformed by the sassanians. He argues in favor of a reinterpretation of the Zoroastrian myths and legends to make them more relevant to the modern life.

Kersasp is not a fundamentalist or dogmatic in his views but a progressive Parsee whose aim is to reform the Parsee religious system. As Kersasp's predilection is for ethical perfection, his nostalgia and religiosity are typical of a true Parsee. He firmly believes that Zoroastrianism as a religious faith is older than the Greeks and Romans as it influenced even the three great semetic religions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Thus Shirin's decision to marry Ashok fills him with some apprehension.

Kersasp too expresses a similar misgiving when his daughter resolves to marry outside of their community. This issue of mixed marriage is taken up by almost all the Parsee novelists in English. Bapsi Sidhwa discusses it in the crow eaters and an American Brat whereas Kanga deals with it in trying to grow. It is an issue which is slowly causing the decline of the Parsee community. Hence the conservative section in the attitude resists as it would ultimately lead to the extinction of their race.

As a true Zoroastrian, Kersasp attaches paramount importance to moral goodness in life. Parsees believe that men of different ranks in life are equal in God's preserve as long as they have purified themselves through humata, hukhta and hvarshta which result due to the influence of spenta mainyu. Karanjia's narrative dispels certain notions and misconceptions about the isolationist community of the Parsees. Many believe, though wrongly, that Parsees are worshippers of fire. Kersasp, while discussing the significance of fire with Ashok, clarifies that fire is the symbol of the divine spark in man. The fragrance of sandalwood and incense that the fire spreads as it burns is the fragrance of man's good deeds. The dust to which fire is reduced is the mortal end of man. Every Parsee is not only a practitioner of Zoroastrian values emphasized by Prophet Zoroaster but also a protagonist.

The conflict in Kersasp's soul is between good and evil between the conservative spirit and the liberal attitude. Shirin's firm resolve to marry Ashok resolves the moral crisis confronting him. Much to his own relief, he realizes that Shirin's marriage is a means of repaying the Hindus who gave asylum to the fugitives in the eight century.

Kersasp's questioning of the exclusiveness typical of the Zoroastrian faith is similar to Bapsi Sidhwa's own attitude. She raises a similar point in an American Brat. Kersasp, on the other hand, realizes the futility of living in the dead past without any sustenance. Thus Kersasp's rejection of the outdated values in the Zoroastrian worldview is an existential necessity.

In any case, the attitude of many Parsees has been changing in the post-independence era. The emancipation of Parsee women is a major determinant in late marriages and mixed marriages in the Parsee community. Shirin is one such 'emancipated' woman who is westernized to considerable extent. But her inner landscape remains unaffected. She can be regarded as the 'new woman' in the Zoroastrian community breaking the shackles of tradition and rigid code of Zoroastrianism. Though Kersasp's religious try guides her in spiritual matters, he in no case, imposes his will on her.

Jamsu's decision to marry a German girl pains him initially but her firmness brings relief to his splintered self ultimately. Thus he painfully realizes that mixed marriage is inevitability in the present context of Parsee life. He thanks Ashok not only for presenting him with a grandchild but also for showing a new direction.

To her, Zoroastrian faith is not a spent force but a living ideal which every Parsee should cherish and practice. Mere ritualism to which undue importance is given in the Parsee community is of no consequence. In Kersasp, there is a fruitful shift from parochialism to liberalism, from religious exclusiveness to reconciliation. As a progressive Parsee, he realizes the futility of mere ritualism and hence he rejects the orthodox code. He is not only aware of the fact that his family is certainly to be ostracized from the Zoroastrian community, but also is consciously indifferent to the 'community affairs' as they advocate compliance.

This is a conservative view point which is not acceptable to the progressive Parsees like Karanjia. In the ultimate analysis, Kersasp emerges as the fictional mouthpiece of the novelist. For what Karanjia advocates is a

creative synthesis, a fusion of the Hindu and the Zoroastrian value systems leading to their fruitful realization of the goal of universal religion. Thus Karanjia seeks, not alienation of the Parsee community from the mainstream of Indian life but only integration into it. Though mixed marriage would eventually lead to the virtual extinction of the race, the community does not have any other variable alternative as there is a dearth of suitable boys and girls in the community, and lunacy, the result of in-breeding being the other issue confronting the microscopic community. However, Parsees have integrated themselves to a great extent into Indian culture and become part of the Indian ethos. More of an Indian in its structural rendering of the 'idea' of marriage in Parsee life in an altering socio-cultural ambience of post-independence India is ultimately symbolic. The narrative realizes the idea of a universal religion by a creative synthesis of the progressive Hindu and Parsee value systems. To his extent, Karanjia seeks a practical fusion of values in a culturally turbulent Indian society.

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