

## Investigating the Elements of Black Comedy in the Novel "The Crow Eaters" by Bapsi Sidhwa

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### Abstract:

When we enlist all the post-colonial writers of the subcontinent, then it comes to us that Bapsi Sidhwa is the best Pakistani female novelist. She belongs to Parsi family and has presented the Parsi culture in her novel *The Crow Eaters*. The current research is to analyze the novel as a black comedy. Black comedy is also known as dark comedy. There are dozens of events that clearly show that the novel is a black comedy. Comedy deals with comic events, but when the dark aspects of life or dark side of life are shown in a comic way, then it is known as black comedy. For example when the event of death is shown in a comic way then it is a black comedy. Whole the story of the novel revolves around the hero of the novel Faredoon Janglewalla, Freddy in short, and his mother-in-law Jerbano, who always acts as a problematic figure for him. The novel is about Freddy's efforts to get rid of his mother-in-law and after this about his plans against the insurance company to become a rich man. [2]

**Key Words:** Black Comedy, Parsi Culture, Death, Comedy, Dark Comedy, *The Crow Eaters*

### 1. Introduction:

*The Crow Eaters* is named after derogatory slang referring to the Parsi people, in reference to their supposed propensity for loud and continuous chatter. Parsis, or Zoroastrians, are the socio-religious group to which Sidhwa belongs, a prosperous yet

dwindling community of approximately one hundred thousand based predominantly in Bombay. This novel is a story of a family living in Lahore, Pakistan. Faredoon Janglewalla is the hero or major character of the novel and Putli is his wife. The most problematic figure of the novel is Jerbanoo, mother-in-law of Freddy.

Freddy has two sons Yazdi and Billy and three daughters Hutoxi, Yasmin and Katy. The overall mode of the novel is comic. It is not a social comedy like that of Jane Austen or a satirical comedy of Swift or a comedy of manners, but a genial comedy. The view of the life of Bapsi Sidhwa is expensive, human foibles and stupidities are treated with tolerance and mild irony. With stress on a mass of local detail, the comic aspect of the episode is highlighted. Bapsi Sidhwa neither approves nor disapproves.

Whole the story of the novel revolves around the plane of Freddy to become a rich man in the community and in the end about the domestic life of Freddy and his family. In the end of the novel, Freddy faces the death of his son Yazdi which leaves whole the family in grief. Beside Freddy and his family, Rosy Watson and Tanya are also two major characters, Rosy Watson is the girlfriend of Yazdi while Tanya is the wife of Billy. In this research, the researchers have tried their level best to show all the elements of Black Comedy. This research is analytical as well as descriptive in nature.

## 2. Research Questions:

- How "The Crow Eaters" is a black comedy?
- What are the events which make the novel a black comedy?
- What is the importance of black comedy in literature?

## 3. Objectives:

- To justify The Crow Eaters as a black comedy.
- To analyze different events of the novel which make it a black comedy.
- To discuss the importance of black comedy in literature.

## 4. Methodology:

This research is related to the novel "The Crow Eaters" by Bapsi Sidhwa. This research is analytical as well as descriptive in nature. The researchers have analyzed all the events of the novel which are related to black comedy or dark comedy. For this purpose, data has been collected from various sources and a deep study of the novel has been carried out then an analysis of all those events, which are related to black comedy, has been made in a sequence.

## 5. Literature Review:

Dhawan and Kapadia say "In the context of writers of English fiction in the sub-continent, Bapsi Sidhwa is Unique, because of her raucous humor, irreverence to established traditions, sense of fair play and subtle characterizations. She aptly reflects the culture multiplicity in which she has lived."

A review in Fiction Magazine puts forward, "Sidhwa writes with great energy and enthusiasm, and the reader is swept up in her fast-moving narrative ... wonderful ribald humor", (qtd. in Sidhwa 2005)

"Black humor, also called black comedy, is a writing that juxtaposes morbid and ghastly elements with comical ones that underscore the senselessness or futility of life. Black humor often uses farce and low comedy to make clear that individuals are helpless of fate and character." (brotannica.com)

"Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the best and the most successful English-language Pakistani novelists. She is distinctive among the writers of English language fiction in Sub-continent because of her sharp wit, nice humor, and reliable observations of human behavior." (Alvi, 2012)

"What is most remarkable about her work is her dual perspective which is based on both the Pakistani and the Parsee point of view. She speaks both for the Pakistani's and the marginalized Parsee community. She picks some significant incidents from her own life or from the lives of other people and fleshes them out to create a larger reality of fiction." (Bashkar, 2015)

"In other words, it's ridiculous and gloomy humor used to express the irrationality, paradox, inconsiderateness and cruelty of the modern world. Black Comedy allows us to foresee the faceless-ness of the emptiness and yet be able to laugh rather than be hopelessness." (www.markedbyteachers.com)

## 6. Data Analysis:

Black comedy is a sub-genre of comedy, but in the black comedy, the writers deal with some serious issues of life. Death, suicide, murder, domestic violence, diseases, insanity, fear, drugs abuse, rap, depression, abuse, mutilation, sexual violence, terminal illness, racism, sexism, disability (mental and physical), corruption and crime are some of the major dark sides of life which are discussed by Sidhwa in *The Crow Eaters* very beautifully.

## 6.1 Events Related to Corruption:

In chapter 2, Jerbanoo is on hunger strike but it hard for her to remain hungry for few hours. So in the absence of Freddy, she steals a huge quantity of biscuits, chocolate, and wines to survive. This act of corruption makes the readers laugh.

Chapter 8, 9 and 10 are about the corruption of Freddy against the insurance company. First, he made his behavior good towards Jerbanoo then show soft corner and love for those who live around him. The third step of Freddy was to fill his store with fresh stock in day light. He told his neighbor shopkeepers about his success in the business. Daily a truck comes, and a workman shouts the name of Freddy, he comes down and unloads all the stock in the store. After few days Freddy hires and big warehouse near the station and after this day a truck daily comes in front of his store, but this time they load stock from the store and unload whole the stock in the warehouse. After this he takes all his account books to the auditor for checking, he does so just to make all the account books safe. Now on the day of excursion of his plan, he takes his family to his friend's house for a card game. Jerbanoo remained in the house as he has clashes with his friend's mother-in-law. Making a lame excuse Freddy slips from his friend's house and went to his store sprinkles oil all over and set it on fire. He remained successful in claiming the insurance money after giving many proves. Readers laugh after reading his plan of corruption with the insurance company.

In chapter 21, Freddy presents and brown paper parcel to a Sikh police officer for a favor to discharge the son of Mr. Paymaster

from the cell. Here Freddy says to the Sikh police officer that this brown paper parcel is for your children. This act of corruption of Freddy makes the readers laugh. [2]

In chapter 25, Mr. Adi comes to Freddy for help to solve the case of his brother Poli, who was in prison in England for taking away illegal opium in a briefcase. Freddy makes the Poli a free man after making contact with few influential connection. Beside this, there is the other event of corruption which Freddy made for the future of his daughter Yasmin. Mr. Katrak's son Bobby made an accident in which a bagger died, and the case was registered at the police station. Freddy takes fifty thousand rupees from Mr. Katrak and gives ten thousand rupees to Mr. Gibbons, Inspector-General of Police, and put remaining forty thousand in his special kitty. Freddy's this corruption makes and humorous touch to the novel. [2]

### **6.2 Events Related to Rap, Sexual Violence and Sexism:**

In chapter 21, the Deputy Commissioner of Bihar, Mr. Allen, visited Freddy. Mr. Allen explained to him that he would see off his wife and stay with him for one day. So Freddy made contact with a man named, Alla Ditta, to arrange a splendid party in Hira Mandi with beautiful dancing girls in honor of Mr. Allen. Freddy's this act to please the guest with beautiful dancing girls is a source of a smile for readers. [2]

In chapter 22, an Anglo-Indian girl named Rosy Watson, whom Yazdi loved and want to marry, tells her painful story. She told him that not only her step-mother but even her father beat her. They had confined her to her room without food and water. They

had allowed all sorts of men into the room. This means step-mother and father had made their daughter a prostitute to earn for them.

In chapter 23, Freddy received Mr. Allen and went to Hira Mandi. There two teen girls were presented to them. While dancing one of them came near Mr. Allen and told him in English that she is an Anglo-Indian girl and her name is Rosy. This name shocked Freddy, so he asked her full name, but she avoided the point curtly. Somehow he comes to the point that she is the same Rosy Watson whom Yazdi wanted to marry. At night Freddy was sent to a room, and Rosy too was sent to him. Rosy undressed herself and Freddy made a sexual intercourse with her to the satisfaction of his anger. Next day when he reached home he silently changed the school of Yazdi and admitted him to a new school. [2]

### **6.3 Events Related to Fear:**

In chapter 3, Freddy has a fear that all of his deterioration is due to Jerbanoo. So to get rid of her, he went to a mystic, narrated his problem to get the solution. The mystic ordered him to go and bring a coil of Jerbanoo's hair after snipping himself. The discussion of Freddy with mystic was very funny, and the readers enjoy the fearful life of Freddy. [2]

In chapter 4, on Friday Freddy got a chance to complete his mission to snip the coil of Jerbanoo's hair. He went to his room very carefully and took a pair of scissors from the drawer. He entered in the Jerbanoo's room. Jerbanoo was sleeping, just when Freddy was about to cut the hair, she stood up and slapped Freddy on her face. Freddy had succeeded in terrorizing Jerbanoo. After this event, She blackened her eyes and put two spots of soot on her face to protect herself

from jealous and evil eyes. Now she avoids Freddy during his presence in the home. When Freddy looked at her, she treats him with shifty eyes and crinkled nose. For this behavior, Freddy started calling her 'old woman.' After a month Jerbanoo adopted the role of a proverbial 'little old lady' whose powers had been snatched away. Jerbanoo's fear and Freddy's plans made the reader laugh at the events.??

#### **6.4 Events Related to Insanity and Disability:**

In chapter 36, Mr. Easymoney tells his story of his disability that how he lost his one eye when he was with the army in Sudan. He told that in Sudan drinking water was almost finished. There they saw an oasis and crawled to it. All of them knew that it is not safe to do this, but the shortage of water compelled them to perform this act. When they were drinking water, Arab enemies surrounded them. When they saw that there is no chance of escape Mr. Easymoney spread his blanket and knelt like Muslim say prayers, soldiers also followed him. In the end, enemy spared their lives but took everything from them, and one eye of Sir Easymoney was gouged out in honor of his rank. This event of Mr. Easymoney's disability makes the readers laugh.??

In chapter 29, Yasmin wrote a letter to Freddy that Yazdi has left the college and spending his money and college fee on baggers. Freddy stopped Yazdi's all allowances and fee for three months. One day in the evening Yazdi came back to home and demanded his share from family Property. He wanted to donate all the money on welfare works. Freddy tried his level best to teach him that he can not

remove poverty and panic from the world but Yazdi refused to hear even a single word about the topic. Next day Freddy calculated a large sum as the share of Yazdi and give it to a Trust. In the whole of his life, Yazdi would not be able to touch the money except monthly expenses the bank was instructed to forward wherever he wished. His mother, grandmother, and sisters tried their best to stop him, but Yazdi left home. After this, they never hear about him but his changed address which he sent to the bank for money. Now Freddy left all hopes for the recovery of his son's sanity. This event is narrated by the writer in such a way that readers enjoy the event.??

In chapter 34, just one week or two weeks before marriage Billy and Tanya visited Chowpatti Beach. There Billy saw his brother Yazdi who was laying on a bench. Billy left Tanya to her sister's home and went back to Yazdi. Yazdi knows about his family that they are in Bombay but intensely kept himself away from them. Billy gave money to him and requested him to see them at home. Yazdi promised but never came to see them. Billy told his meeting with Yazdi to his mother and grandmother. They were sad about the condition of Yazdi and did not sleep until late at night.?

#### **7. Conclusion:**

The Crow Eaters is a multi-dimensional novel in which writer has shown the Parsi culture and their life style. Sidhwa has shown all the aspect of Parsi religion in a comic way so that a reader may not get bored. Above data analysis clearly, shows that this novel is a black comedy as all the serious issues of life are described in a comic way. The Crow Eaters is best read as a series of amazing and entertaining

comic episodes, to be enjoyed for their wit and absurdity.

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