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Parsi Life in Dina Mehta's *Mila in Love*

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Abstract:

Dina Mehta is one of the Parsi novelists in Indian English literature. She published her thirteen short stories under the title *The Other Woman and Other Stories*. Her plays include *Brides are not for Burning*, *The Myth Makers*, *When One Plus One Makes Nine*, *Friday Father* and *Getting away With Murder*. There are only two novels named *And Some Take a Lover* and *Mila in Love* to her credit. *Mila in love* is a second novel by Dina Mehta. It was published in 2003. The novel is narrated in the first person. Mila alias Sharmila is the central character who talks about her experiences along with her relations with some characters. She talks about her joys, sorrows and love. Apart from the theme of love she also focuses on the Parsi life.

Keywords: Parsi, Navjote, Fire Temple, Zorostrianism.

Dina Mehta is one of the Parsi novelists in Indian English literature. She published her thirteen short stories under the title *The Other Woman and Other Stories*. Her plays include *Brides are not for Burning*, *The Myth Makers*, *When One Plus One Makes Nine*, *Friday Father* and *Getting away With Murder*. There are only two novels named *And Some Take a Lover* and *Mila in Love* to her credit. While talking about Dina Mehta's writing, Alka Saxena asserts,

“Dina Mehta is a name to reckon with in contemporary women's writing and not only in the Indian subcontinent but even in the west. She has emerged as a promising novelist gifted with hairstyle uniquely her own, among contemporary Parsi writers. Ethnicity has come up as an issue of great interest all over the world”.(Saxena,235)

Mila in love is a second novel by Dina Mehta. It was published in 2003. The novel is narrated in the first person. Mila alias Sharmila is the central character who talks about her experiences along with her relations with some characters. She talks about her joys, sorrows and love. Apart from the theme of love she also focuses on the Parsi life. The colours of Parsi life are represented by two characters named Ray, the lover of Mila and Baimai, the friend of Mila. Characters try to show their association with their religion as they are expected to follow it. Parsis' are the people who follow the religion named Zoroastrianism. They follow different practices in their religion. While talking about Parsi religion, Farhan Mehr says, “In the west, the religion is most commonly called Zoroastrianism; and Zoroaster is the Greek rendering of Zarathushtra.”(Mehr, 2)

Parsi people follow their Parsi values. Baimai is the character who believes in the values which are maintained by Parsi religion. The narrator has described it in the sentence when she says, "Isn't it kinder to a child to demarcation for her the good she must do from the bad she must not, in the simple Zoroastrian manner"(Mila in Love,16).Baimai strongly puts her views to Mila by saying that whenever there is the fighting for good thing, Ahura Mazda is on their side. The angels come to protect them. The same thing is reflected when Nanima is discussing with Rayhaan, a Punjabi Parsi fellow. When she asks him about caste, he replies that he has no caste. His mother was Parsi. Then, he refers the scriptures. Those scriptures teach that one should believe in 'good thoughts good words and good deeds'(132). It means that it is important for them



to have only good thoughts. They have to be interested only to use good words. They should not forget at last to do good things. Ray is not the strict follower of his religion, but somehow he is ready to follow the path of his religion. Nanima, Roma's mother, is not interested in his caste, but she wants to know his horoscope and his profession. It is known that Parsi people follow Zoroastrianism and its principles. To do good deeds, Parsis' indulge them in charity.

Navjote ceremony is done for a Zoroastrian child. It is a formal activity. This ceremony place a crucial role in the life of a child. It is done for a child to initiate into the religion. Rayhaan, as it is known, is not a strict follower of the religion. He remembers Navjot ceremony as carried out in his house. He is of the view that Navjote ceremony is only a surprising childhood memory for him. Here, he collects the music of band. The house was filled with light. He also recollects the Parsi food which was served in that ceremony. Though the detailed description of this Navjote ceremony is not given, it is important to notice its place in Parsi religion.

The fact is known to everybody that Jadhav Rana, the king has given a condition to Parsi people to adopt Gujrati language if they want to settle in Sanjan. They accepted it and settled in Sanjan. Shivani and Ray discuss over many issues. Ray tells her that Amrish is of the view that 'He will produce books tailor-made for western consumption' (32). Then, Shivani asks him to write the books in Punjabi or Gujarati. But, he replies that he has not learnt Punjabi, but he has learnt some Gujarati. He further says that Parsis use Gujrati to speak, but his mother was 'thoroughly anglicized' (32). It is seen that in many Parsi novels the characters show their interest to follow western culture. And as a part of it, they use English as their medium of communication. It is exemplified by Dina Mehta herself. It is important to note that every

religion has to preserve their language. Rayaam is the character who does not learn Gujarati language from his mother as she was anglicized.

The attitude of Parsi people has been reflected in the novel entitled *Mila in Love*. Rayaam is discussing with the father of Mila over the Buddha's philosophy. Mila's father is of the view that India is the abode of many religions and life styles. But, Ray discards his view by saying that all the glory of India has been gone. Gita interrupts them by taking the reference of Mahatma Gandhi. After listening the comment on Gandhi, Ray asks her that why Indians cannot forget Gandhi for the sake of God. Now, Gita refers Gandhi, the great soldier of liberty. She also says that he was 'the great seer of human destiny, martyr of the word's sorrow'(39). Dr. Bakshi also comes to help her. He says that Britain has unveiled Gandhiji's statue in London. It is done in the capitals of Mexico, Italy, Norway and Guyana. He further says that Gandhiji's work is adored there. By comprehending these views, Rayhaan asks to put up some more statues, turn him into stones or write about him in history books. He appeals them to stop using Gandhi for buying and selling of votes. Don't drag him into hypocritical speeches. The teachers should not hand over Mahatma Gandhi to us. It is worth to mention here that Rayhaan is not fond of this Indian leader. Dina Mehta has used the same attitude in her novel named *And Some Take a Lover*. There is Roshni Wadia's aunt who calls Gandhi 'scoundrel'. It means that Parsi people don't show their affection to the father of nation 'Mahatma Gandhi'. Rayhaan also shows his dislikes for the nightingale of India, Sarojini Naidu. He states that she is a great woman, but she is hurt with her message by overstating it. By observing these things, there is no doubt to say that Parsi people do not keep their good views about the great leaders of India.

Fire temples are known as the sacred places of Parsi religion. The reference of fire is seen when Amrish and Ray discuss over the issue of whisky. Amrish says to him, "You, a writer and a



Zoroastrian by courtesy, must go freighted with fire, not liquor, in the region of your heart" (Mila in Love,72).It is known that the Parsi people are the worshippers of fire. In the chapter no. 25th, there is a character named Nellie D'Souza, a Christian girl, refers the time of Baimai's marriage ceremony. She says, 'Ah, there go the bride and the groom on their way to the fire temple" (240). This sentence implies that the fire temples have a crucial place in their ceremonies as well. To talk about this, Jaydipsighn Dodiya aptly comments,

“The Zoroastrians are fire worshippers and believe in metaphysical dualism and practice of good thought,word and deed.For over 1300 years, they have kept in text their individuality and study independent of habit and Customs and a mode of living , which is more westernized than other Indian communities are.”(Dodiya,8)

Parsi people do not allow to get married with outsiders in their community.. There are the marriages among cousins as exemplified by Baimai, the friend of Mila and Minocher, the cousin of Baima.Minocher’s mother and Baimai's mother are sisters. Such marriages are allowed in Parsi community. But, there is no place for outsider in their religion. Baimai's mother does not allow Burjor to get married with Nellie D'souza, a Christian girl. Burjor is ten years senior to her. Baimai narrates this incident to Mila. Baimai's mother has wept for days. The blame is on Baimai, because the family members say that only she is responsible to introduce Nellie to Burjor. Her mother is unhappy by learning the fact that Burjor wants to marry a Christian girl who is out of his community. She is so pious. She has been annihilated by shame. She thinks that the fire is polluted in the house. Her prayers are nullified. Baimal's mother represents the Parsi traditional woman who wants to follow the principles of her religion. She doesn't want to perish the traditions and customs laid down by their religion. Baimai stands as a modern girl by saying,

'I am Parsi, but also an Indian'(225). Parsi people follow different rituals in their religion and they make them different from other religion. R.S.Pathak rightly highlight by saying,

“The Parsi novelists have reflected through their works the dilemma of the minority community and its identity crisis. Understandably an anglicized community would find it extremely difficult to identify with other Indian communities.”(Pathak,95)

The writer has tried to describe the Parsi wedding ceremony of Baimai and Minocher, the critic. Baimai has brought the household things to transform her house into paradise. The sumptuous food is served at Parsi wedding. There is a narrow strip of red carpet past rose of chairs. The bridal couple sits by side on brocaded chairs. Many rituals are performed on this occasion. The priests say their prayers in loud voice. The bridal pair and the priests are pelted with rice. The face of the bride is hidden in the white skirt of the priest's Muslim gown. Minocher is in the shiny top of his pagri. The ceremony was arranged in the garden. It has a festive look. It is dressed in myriad electric bulbs. After the marriage ceremony, the Parsis serve their guests. The announcements were in the loud voice in Parsi Gujarati to take their dinner. The Parsi food has been served on plantain leaves. Really, it was a distinct marriage ceremony.

In this way, the novel *Mila in Love* throws light on the different aspects of Parsi religion. The followers of Parsi religion have given importance to thought, words and deeds. Navjote ceremony occupies a great place to initiate a child into Parsi religion. Though there is Gujarati language for them, they adopt English to express themselves as illustrated by Rayhaan. They do not have any affinity for M.K.Gandhi. They give a great value to Fire Temples. They dislike outside marriages in their temples. They also keep their rituals to perform at the time of marriage ceremony. These things prove that the novel has got the Parsi flavor. Dina Mehta, as a Parsi writer, has pointed out the different colours of Parsi religion.



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