

‘We must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare!’



An Indian Parsi temple in Hyderabad. (<http://whotalking.com/flickr/Parsi>, consulted on 02-05-2012)

The changing identity of Parsis in India and abroad.

Research Master Thesis History.

Specialisation: Migration and Global Interdependence.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Main question.

The circular constructions were visible from a large distance in the secluded gardens of Malabar Hill, Mumbai (former Bombay). They looked like big wells with only one entrance at the front. Some birds of prey were circling around the top of the buildings. A rather peculiar sight in the busy Indian city of Mumbai. What was happening inside? These peculiar constructions were 'dakhmas' or so-called 'Towers of Silence'. They were used by the Indian minority group of Parsis for the disposal of their dead, who were to be devoured by birds of prey.¹ For most orthodox Parsis, it is still a holy and logical ritual. According to their Zoroastrian religion, they believe that it is a pure method, as they pollute 'none of God's good creations': i.e. earth, water, air and fire.² By burying the dead, the earth is polluted and by a cremation, fire is defiled. The Parsis came originally from Persia (current Iran) to India more than 1000 years ago. This ritual originated in the rocky terrain of Persia. At that time, arable land was too precious to be used as a graveyard. This system was both practical and hygienic.³

If people happen to know about the Parsis (or Zoroastrianism), they often have heard of this exceptional funeral ritual. But there is far more to this Parsi-community that deserves to be studied. From the moment they arrived on the western Indian coast, they have developed themselves in a remarkable way. In the end, most Parsis settled in the harbour city of Bombay (current Mumbai), although some travelled to Lahore (a city in current Pakistan) and some settled in the countryside of the Indian province Gujarat. Co-religionists of the Parsis remained in Persia. These Iranian Zoroastrians have the above described funeral ritual as well, but they have developed themselves very differently from the Parsis in many other respects. The focus in my research is not on this last group of Iranian Zoroastrians, although I do refer to them.

The Parsis of Gujarat functioned from the beginning of their settlement in India as agriculturalists, artisans, and merchants. From the seventeenth century onwards, they were active as commercial traders and shipbuilders.⁴ In these positions, they also traded with the British, who created with their East India Company a secure and profitable trade during the seventeenth century.⁵ In the nineteenth century, a number of Parsis contributed a great deal to the development of the Indian industry.

¹ Jesse S. Palsetia, *The Parsis of India, Preservation of Identity in Bombay City* (Leiden 2001) 9.

² Rohinton Mistry, *Such a Long Journey* (London 1991) 317.

³ Bapsi Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters* (London 1980) 44.

⁴ Palsetia, *The Parsis of India*, 10.

⁵ Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (Cambridge 2006) 45.

Under British colonial rule, the Parsis were commercially very successful, achieved great status and became the most westernized colonial elite in India.⁶

However, this image completely changed when India acquired Independence on the 15th of August in 1947. By this act of decolonization, the positions of the British as authorities were taken over by Hindus and the status of the Parsis was dramatically downgraded. The nationalization of Indian banks and airlines, many of which were owned by Parsis, reduced for instance the employment opportunities available to Parsis.⁷ By some Indians they were even seen as traitors. As a result, they began to consider their own community with much criticism. In many literary accounts written by Parsis after Independence, phrases occurred like: 'we are not what we were' and 'we have fallen from the top'. But in reality, Parsis were performing not as bad as they think they were. The average Parsi in India is still in the middle class nowadays.⁸ Yet, in spite of this middle-class position, many Parsis left India for western countries such as the UK, the US and Canada after decolonization. This second migration after their arrival in India around 800, made them 'twice migrants'. Because of this 'move to the west', the Parsis had to redefine themselves not only in their homeland India after decolonization, but also in their new countries of residence after migration. Undoubtedly, the Parsis who went overseas, were still influenced by the events their co-religionists were experiencing back in India and the severe self-criticism they were displaying there. Therefore, the main question and starting point for my research is: *Why has the identity of the Parsis in India and the diaspora so dramatically changed after Indian Independence in 1947?*

I want to examine the above-mentioned shift in the identity of the Parsis after Indian Independence. I do this research not only for India, but also for two countries the Parsis have migrated to: the UK and the US. Of course, the British-Indies were divided in India and Pakistan after Independence, and I will pay some attention to the Parsis in Pakistan. However, my focus in the period after Independence is on India and not on Pakistan. I have chosen the UK and the US as 'Parsi migration' countries because in both a considerable number of Parsis live. It is estimated that approximately 3000-5000 Parsis live on the whole North-American continent. Some people think that even 10.000 Parsis (and other Zoroastrians) would live there, if you count all converts and children of mixed marriages.⁹ In the UK, approximately, 6000-7000 Parsis (and other Zoroastrians) live.¹⁰ The second

⁶ Tanya M. Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society* (Harvard University Press 1996) 1; Tanya M. Luhrmann, 'The Good Parsi: the postcolonial 'Feminization' of a colonial elite', *Man* vol.29 no.2 (1994) 338.

⁷ Nilufer E. Barucha, 'The earth is not flat. Minority discourse against fundamentalisms', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* vol.43 no.2.(2007) 185.

⁸ Luhrmann, 'The Good Parsi', 343.

⁹ John R. Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora. Religion and Migration. The Ratanbai Katrak Lectures, The Oriental Faculty, Oxford 1985* (Oxford 2005) 443.

reason for choosing the UK and the US, is that the UK is the former colonizer of India. The Parsis wanted to be as similar as the British as possible during the colonial era. These two areas of research, the UK and the US, seem to be large entities for this research, but because of the small numbers of Parsis who live there, it is inevitable to use larger units of analysis.

The already small number of Parsis declined further in the second half of the twentieth century. In 2006, it was estimated that the whole Zoroastrian community consisted of 130,000 individuals. They live in India, Iran, Pakistan, the UK, the US, Canada and in many other parts of the English speaking world. The number of Parsis, who lived in India was only 69,601 people in 2006. It has been forecasted that the number of Parsis in India will decline to 20,000 people within the next twenty years.¹¹ Thus, the number of Parsis who has been living in India has dramatically declined in the twentieth century (see table 1).

*Table 1. Population figures of Parsis in India*¹²

Year	Number of Parsis
1881	85,397
1891	89,887
1901	93,952
1911	100,096
1921	101,778
1931	111,853
1941	114,890
1951*	111,791
1961	100,772
1971	91,266
1981	71,630
1991	76,382
2006	69,601

**Population from 1951 census onwards excludes the population of areas that became Pakistan.*

¹⁰ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 323.

¹¹ Jaydipsinh Dodiya, *Parsi English Novel* (New Delhi 2006) 2.

¹² Table 1 is based on a combination of the following sources: John R. Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora. Religion and Migration. The Ratanbai Katrak Lectures, The oriental faculty, Oxford 1985* (Oxford 2005) 45; Axelrod, 'Cultural and Historical Factors', 412; Zubin C. Shroff and Marcia C. Castro, 'The potential impact of intermarriage on the population decline of the Parsis of Mumbai, India', *Demographic Research* vol. 25, art. 17 (2011) 550.

This reduction was caused for the greater part by a declining fertility rate. The total fertility rate among the Parsis in Bombay was 4,41 in 1881, and has eventually declined to 0,94 in 1999. Deaths have exceeded births in every year since 1955.¹³ The Parsi community has been ageing. Parsi women have been delaying marriage on a large scale because they have generally attained a higher education level than the average Indian citizen. They wanted to use that education in jobs.¹⁴ Besides that, cultural preferences, for example the fact that young Parsis wanted to live neo-locally after their marriage and not in an extended family, played a role.¹⁵ I elaborate on that subject in paragraph 2.3. However, the population decline of the Parsis in India was also caused by emigration. Since Independence, the migration of Parsis from India to countries such as the UK, the US, Canada and Australia has increased. The number of Parsis in new countries of residence was difficult to count because of the discussion including questions such as: 'who does belong to the Parsi community?', 'when do you cease to be a Parsi?' and 'what features do you have to possess as an ideal Parsi?'

This changing identity of the Parsis in India and the diaspora, which is the main subject of this study is characterized by a number of particular features. It should be noted that the Parsis had to negotiate their identity from the beginning of their settlement in India. However, in the twentieth century this negotiation became a very complex one after many centuries of peaceful maintenance of important features of the culture and religion. In essence, the special character and identity of the Parsi community was composed of three important ingredients: their Persian Zoroastrian ancestry, their Hindu-Indian socio-cultural dimension, and their voluntary acceptance of Western (specifically British) educational and secular value systems.¹⁶ These three factors varied in magnitude among individual Parsis, and this variation was particularly visible in the community disputes between the orthodox and reformist wing of the community. These disagreements dealt with issues of conversion, intermarriage and the funeral ritual at the 'Tower of Silence'. They were caused at heart by the threat of a population decline or even worse: total disappearance of the Parsi community and identity.

The discussion about the question 'who is a Parsi?' is part of the process of a changing identity. The orthodox and reformist side disagreed on this point, too. The orthodox wing wanted to keep the Parsi blood pure by not allowing children of mixed marriages to the Zoroastrian faith, while the children of mixed marriages were welcomed as Parsis by the reformists. In the case of Parsi migrants

¹³ L. Visaria, 'Demographic transition among Parsis 1881-1971', *Economic and Political Weekly* vol.9 no.43 (1974) 1828-1832; S. Unisa et al., 'Demographic transition or demographic trepidation', *Economic and Political Weekly* vol. 43 no. 1 (2008) 61-65.

¹⁴ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 50.

¹⁵ Paul Axelrod, 'Cultural and Historical Factors in the Population Decline,' *Population Studies* Vol. 44 No. 3 (1990) 408.

¹⁶ Rashna Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians. An Unstructured Nation* (New York 1994) 34.

in the new countries of residence, it was striking that while being in a modern, western world, they remained continually focused on India and the Bombay Parsi Panchayet (BBP).¹⁷ This institution is the important community council for the Parsis in Bombay, but it gives nowadays guidance in community matters worldwide.

In the above stated research question about the repositioning of Parsi identities, I focus on two oppositions: 'before and after Indian Independence' and 'Parsis in the homeland India' and 'Parsis in the UK and the US'. Although I give much attention to the opposition 'before and after Indian Independence', the emphasis in this thesis lies on the opposition 'Parsis in the homeland India' vs. 'Parsis in the diasporas of the UK and the US'. The emphasis lies on that opposition because Parsis had to reconstruct their identity both within the former colonial context of India and in the western countries they moved to. Besides, it is self-evident that after an act of decolonization, changes appear, so the 'before and after Independence' is perhaps not the most interesting and original opposition of the two. Furthermore, there might be also differences between the identity of Parsis, who lived in the UK or in the US, but the general opposition 'homeland India' vs 'diaspora UK and US' remains most important in this research.

This thesis on the (relatively) small group of Parsis could be exemplary for the repositioning of the identity of other colonial elites and ethnic minorities from Asia. Parsis could be considered a micro cosmos in the macro cosmos of the South Asian diaspora.¹⁸ In this way, this thesis gives new insights on the subject of the influence of decolonization on a prosperous and westernized colonial group, who is 'in-between' the colonizer and the mainstream colonized people. That is a radically different social stratum of society than the usually studied oppressed colonized groups. In what ways could the identity of such a colonial elite change by the mere fact of decolonization and/or migration thereafter? Although the group of Parsis was not large in numbers, its influence has definitely been considerable in India. In that respect, Parsis themselves liked to quote Mahatma Gandhi who once said about them: *'In numbers Parsis are beneath contempt, but in contribution, beyond compare.'*¹⁹ They have not only contributed to India's development in the industrialist field with prominent figures like Tata, on which I elaborate in chapter 2, but also in the field of politics. The Parsi Dadabhoj Navroji was one of the founders of the Indian National Congress in 1885, which was an

¹⁷ Luhrmann, 'The Good Parsi', 151.

¹⁸ John R. Hinnells, 'South Asian diaspora communities and their religion: A comparative study of Parsi experiences', *South Asia Research* vol.14, no.1 (1994) 63.

¹⁹ Sooni Taraporevala, *Parsis: The Zoroastrians of India: a photographic journey, 1980-2004* (Woodstock 2004) 9.

early presage of Indian Independence in 1947.²⁰ It may sound strange; a Parsi who fought for Independence from the British, as most Parsis followed a pragmatic slogan: 'loyal to the British, friendly to the Indians.'²¹ But a number of Parsis took a more balanced perspective, and they were not wholly uncritical of the British and life in the UK.²²

My hypothesis is that the sudden change in the identity of the Parsis after Indian Independence is reflected in the identity of the Parsis in the diaspora, albeit in a different manner than in the homeland India. The changes in the way they considered themselves and were regarded by the authorities may be one of the reasons for their migration to, among others, the US and the UK after Independence. Under colonial rule, they were highly respected by the British authorities, after Independence the new authorities did not have that same esteem for them. I expect that the self-criticism of the Parsis was less severe in the US and the UK, than in the homeland India. In the US and the UK, they could position themselves apart from the Indian Hindus, whereas in India, the Parsis had to position themselves next to the mainstream Indian Hindus in order to maintain their positions or to get new jobs.

The fact that the Parsis tried to position themselves in the same way as the Indian Hindus after Independence, was a way to prevent to be called traitors by the other Indian people. Another part of my hypothesis is that such a radical repositioning was one of the reasons for the sudden changes in the identity of the Parsis. The Indians were always called weak and bad in the colonial rhetoric, but the Parsis were always respected by the British. This rhetoric could be considered a typical example of British colonial 'divide and rule' politics. Although, in the end, the Parsis were just as 'colonized' as the other Indian people, they were still in British eyes (and in their own eyes) somewhat more civilized than the other natives. So, the British regarded the Parsis as a colonial elite with particular privileges. In the end, the Parsis considered themselves as such, too. When the British-Indies became independent and the British left, the Parsis began to criticize and portray themselves in the same way the British had once portrayed the native Indians under colonial rule. On first sight, this seemed to be a strange distortion of colonial images in the postcolonial period, but in the confusing situation in India, immediately after decolonization, it was perhaps a comprehensible outcome for the Parsis. Their purpose could be that the mainstream Indians would consider the Parsis as belonging to them. More remarks on this line of reasoning are given in the following section on theory.

²⁰ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 337; Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 262. The name of this first political active Parsi is also spelled as 'Dadabhai Naoroji'.

²¹ Taraporevala, *Parsis: The Zoroastrians of India*, 19.

²² Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 324, 337.

1.2. Theoretical framework

The most important theoretical concept in this thesis is 'colonialism'. The relevance of this concept is immediately clear, because this research deals with the effects of decolonization on a former colonial elite: the Parsis. Colonialism consisted of a whole system of colonial values and worldviews, in which the colonized people were always subordinate to the colonial rulers. The colonized people were dehumanized to finally become objects instead of human beings.²³ Colonial views were quite stubborn and also in the case of the Parsis, they keep playing an important role today.

The colonial heritage of the Parsis was especially important in the repositioning of their identities after Independence. At that time, a reversal of colonial values took place. This reversal meant that a colonial elite such as the Parsis took over the colonial rhetoric of the colonial rulers to describe themselves. That meant that they considered themselves in a negative way, similar to the colonial image of a weak, effeminate and passive colonized people. They once used that same rhetoric, imitating the British, to describe the other Indian peoples apart from themselves. In colonial theory, this imitation of the colonizer was called 'mimicry'. Parsis were considered by the British as '*almost the same but not white*'.²⁴ This radical reversal of colonial values only occurred when power relations have changed all of a sudden. Parsis had identified so much with the colonial discourse of the British authorities that in the absence of that authority after Independence, they have applied the negative rhetoric to themselves.²⁵ In other words of the psychological anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann: '*in yearning to be like the white colonizer, the colonized came to accept the white man's version of the colonized subjects and so began to hate themselves*'.²⁶ This point has been more elaborately formulated by the Tunisian philosopher Albert Memmi, who said that the colonized people would tear themselves away from their true selves to accept the power holders' version of the colonized subjects.²⁷

Their 'Britishness' and westernization, developed by the act of mimicry, had brought the Parsis many advantages during the colonial period in the British-Indies. But after Independence, the western habits were not a benefit anymore, but rather a severe downside in the new independent India. The Parsis were from August 1947 onwards the 'other' non-Hindu minority in the enormous majority of Hindus in India. Consequently, they had to adapt themselves to the new circumstances in order to

²³ Albert Memmi, *The colonizer and the colonized* (The Orion Press 1965) 86. More about the cultural movements of colonialism and post colonialism in: John McLeod, *Beginning Post colonialism* (Manchester 2000)

²⁴ Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,' *October vol. 28 Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis* (1984) 130.

²⁵ Luhrmann, 'The Good Parsi', 349.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 350.

²⁷ Extensively discussed by Memmi, *The colonizer*, 121-123.

maintain their positions. On the contrary, the western habits naturally benefited the Parsis outside of India, when they migrated to new countries of residence. So, the factor 'westernization' could be explanatory for the identity change of the Parsis. Another explanatory factor could be the act of decolonization and the subsequent Partition of the British Indies. The Partition separated the Muslims and Hindus and put them straight against each other. Also other Indian minorities like the Sikhs were taking part in the fights around the emerging border between the new countries Pakistan and India. In the partition months, the old British-Indies witnessed a bloodbath on a hitherto unimaginable scale as riots soared across the affected areas in the western Punjab (current Pakistan) and the Eastern Bengal (current Bangladesh, which was formerly East Pakistan).²⁸ It included the largest single migration of history, involving a total of eleven and a half million people, ten and a half crossing the border of the Punjab – Hindus and Sikhs moving eastward, Muslims westwards, and another million crossing the borders of Bengal- Hindus moving west, Muslims moving east.²⁹ This process took place to a lesser extent in 1971 when Bangladesh, which was formerly East-Pakistan, came into being. In such a situation also a small group as the Parsis was forced to take position and to establish an image of themselves in public. What could help the Parsis by building such a public image was their (inherited) wealth and knowledge of business. On the other hand, it could also make mainstream Indian people envious of the Parsis. In this way, they were not positioned next to Indians in a positive light, but above them in a negative light. Yet, this economic status and knowledge of business of the Parsis has somewhat declined over the years in India, but not on such a scale as has often been said by Parsis themselves. Nevertheless, they clearly felt threatened by the rise of a new Indian middle class consisting of Hindus, who were acquiring status and wealth on a high pace. In the new countries of residence on the contrary, their economic status has certainly helped the Parsi migrants to build up a life and earn a living there.

The following theory about social identity and social cognition could explain how the identity of the Parsis has been formed within their own group and how their identity was influenced by people outside their group. Generally, migrants have to adapt themselves continuously to new environments and they have to redefine their personal and social identities in new cultural contexts.³⁰ By 'social identity' as opposed to an 'individual, personal identity', I mean a collective identity of a group. Social cognition means how people think about others, how these people think those others would think about them and how those 'last' others would think about the first ones

²⁸ Priyamvada Gopal, *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration* (Oxford 2009) 69.

²⁹ Niaz Zaman, *A Divided Legacy. The Partition in Selected Novels of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (Manohar 2000) 3.

³⁰ Amado M. Padilla and William Perez, 'Acculturation, Social Identity and Social Cognition: A New Perspective,' *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* vol.25 no.1 (2003) 50.

etc. These thoughts people have about each other are caused by pragmatic goals, such as making friends, attaining jobs and obtaining a decent house to live in.³¹

Parsis (like all other people) have been thinking in a particular way about both people of their own group and non-Parsi people. In other words, they had social cognitions about their own community and the people outside it. When these cognitions dealt with their own group, it was often about the size of their community and their status. Of course, Parsis wanted to keep the same population numbers and status, but they also noticed that their community size has decreased. This population decline could also be an explanatory factor for identity change both in India and the new countries, for people could think differently of their community because of such a threat. On the one hand, they could be more active and pious to maintain the culture and rituals, and on the other hand, they could vehemently react against 'Parsiness' and turn away from it completely. Social cognition also played a role in the interaction of Parsis with people from outside their own group. This interaction could be an explanatory factor for a changing identity, both in India and in the new countries. If the Parsis in the US became more affiliated with other Indian (or Asian) migrants, that would affect their identity. The same goes for India itself with regard to interaction of Parsis with people from outside their own group. If the Parsis were taking over more Hindu rituals, that meant that they had to abandon particular Zoroastrian rituals.

The Parsis could be labelled a 'diaspora'.³² Although, the definition of 'diaspora' has been widening and changing over the years, the Parsis in the new countries had important diasporic characteristics. They were very oriented to their 'second' homeland India and sometimes even to their first homeland Persia (Iran).³³ In addition, they felt a strong connection to co-religionists in their own country of residence and in other countries.³⁴ But also back in India, the Parsis still formed a diasporic community, the virtual ties with the old country of Persia (Iran) were still intact.³⁵

Somewhat connected to the concept of diaspora is the concept of transnationalism. Although, transnationalism is similar to diaspora on many points, it is not exactly the same. Transnational approaches take as a starting point cross-border mobility which brings about identity changes, while

³¹ Padilla and Perez, 'Acculturation,' 41; More on ideas about cognition in: Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman and Peter Stamatov, 'Ethnicity as Cognition', *Theory and Society* no. 33 (2004) 31-64.

³² See for the key features of 'diaspora': William Safran, 'Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return', *Diaspora* no.1 (1991) 83-84; Robin Cohen, *Global diasporas. An introduction* (London 1997) 23.

³³ A strong orientation on the homeland is a characteristic for diasporas: Cohen, *Global diasporas*, 23; James Clifford, 'Diasporas', *Cultural Anthropology* no. 9 (1994) 305.

³⁴ Cohen, *Global diasporas*, 23.

³⁵ John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams, *Parsis in India and the diaspora* (Abingdon 2008) 2.

diasporic approaches focus on aspects of collective identity despite (forced) dispersal.³⁶ Hence, my research about repositioning and changing identities ties in very well with the concept of ‘transnationalism’. Namely, it does not examine the collective identity of the Parsis, who have migrated and those Parsis who have stayed behind in India. Instead, it analyses the changing identities of Parsis both in India and in the new countries after Independence. In other words: it doubts the idea of one single similar Parsi identity. Consequently, the mere factor of migration or staying behind could be an explanatory factor for the changing identities of all Parsis.

In a short, summarized way, the explanatory factors for the changing identity of the Parsis both in India and in the new countries are: the decolonization and partition of the British-Indies, the westernization of the Parsis, their economic status and knowledge of business, their population decline, their interaction with other ethnic groups and the mere fact of their migration or their staying behind in India. These factors naturally play a somewhat different role outside of India than in India itself. Most of these factors are discussed as ‘identity themes’ from chapter three onwards in the discourse analysis and the literary analysis.

Table 2. Explanatory factors for the dramatic identity change of the Parsis after Indian decolonization

India	Outside of India
Westernization; from privileged to marginalized	Westernization; adaptability, the ‘model’ minority
Decolonization, Partition, Creation of Bangladesh	Decolonization, partition and the creation of Bangladesh was often a reason for departure,
Economic status and knowledge of business; a new Indian middle class emerges	Economic status, knowledge of business (connected to the Parsis’ westernization)
Population decline; fear of disappearance.	Population decline; fear of getting too much integrated in the modern western society
Interaction with other Indian ethnic groups	Less or more interaction with other Asian migrant groups
Staying in India	Migration

³⁶ Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist, *Diaspora and Transnationalism. Concepts, theories and methods* (Amsterdam 2010) 21-22.

1.3. Historiography

Most studies about Parsis have been written in an ethnographical style or from a religious perspective. Such books were usually about features of the Zoroastrian religion and about the history of the Parsis. These monographs were often written by Parsis themselves, already from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. A good example of this last type of books was the two volume *History of the Parsis*, written by the Parsi Dosabhai Framjee Karaka.³⁷ In this study, Parsis were described as rational, progressive, worthily prosperous and non-Indian.³⁸ Another important publication, appearing around the turn of the century and fitting in this kind of literature was the magazine *The Parsi: The English Journal of the Parsis and a High Class Illustrated Monthly*. A quote from the magazine, illustrating the almost complete westernization of the Parsis was: *'The Parsis are the one race settled in India ... that could for a moment be called white.'*³⁹ A monograph about Parsis from the beginning of the twentieth century was written by the Englishmen James Hope Moulton: *The Treasure of the Magi: a study of modern Zoroastrianism*.⁴⁰ This study was written from a religious perspective and was not only about Parsis, but also about other Zoroastrians. Another more recent example of such a study was *Zoroastrianism*, written by Paula Hartz.⁴¹

Another type of studies about Zoroastrianism was focusing on their diaspora. The standard study about the diaspora of all Zoroastrians, including Parsis, was written by John R. Hinnells: *The Zoroastrian Diaspora. Religion and Migration. The Ratanbai Katrak Lectures. The Oriental Faculty*.⁴² This study did also discuss the fate of other Zoroastrians than the Parsis, including the Iranian Zoroastrians, who have migrated from Iran to other countries in more recent times than the Parsis did. It clearly dealt with the specific Parsi diaspora in an impressive description of Zoroastrian communities all over the world, but this book did not contain a specific comparison between Parsis in the homeland and the diaspora. Another study of this type, which was about Parsis and the relation with their co-religionists in other countries is: *Parsis in India and the diaspora*, edited by John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams.⁴³

An example of a more recent book, which was written about the Parsis in an ethnographical style was: *The Parsis of India* by Jesse S. Palsetia.⁴⁴ In short, the historiography of this topic consisted of

³⁷ Dosabhai Framjee Karaka, *History of the Parsis vols 1 and 2* (London; Macmillan 1884)

³⁸ Luhrmann, 'The Good Parsi', 338.

³⁹ *The Parsi: The English Journal of the Parsis and a High Class Illustrated Monthly* (Bombay 1906) 132.

⁴⁰ James Hope Moulton, *The Treasure of the Magi: a study of modern Zoroastrianism* (Oxford 1917)

⁴¹ Paula Hartz, *Zoroastrianism* (New York 2009)

⁴² John R. Hinnells: *The Zoroastrian Diaspora. Religion and Migration. The Ratanbai Katrak Lectures, The Oriental Faculty, Oxford 1985* (Oxford 2005)

⁴³ John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams, *Parsis in India and the diaspora* (Routledge, Abingdon 2008)

⁴⁴ Jesse S. Palsetia, *The Parsis of India* (Leiden 2001)

studies about all Zoroastrians including Parsis or studies dealing with only Parsis. These studies were mainly about their history and religion, and not about their identity

A more specific book was written by Tanya M. Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society*.⁴⁵ It was about Parsis in the postcolonial world and it was the only book I have found which touched upon the fate of the Parsis after decolonization and partition. Besides, it was the only book I have found which considered the Parsis as a colonial elite. Traditionally, the focus in this sort of studies was more on the mainstream colonized people, who have suffered a lot under colonialism. Although, this study formed a source of inspiration for my own research, I have taken a different angle to study postcolonial Parsis than Tanya Luhrmann. The aim of this thesis, to give an examination and explanation of the reasons for the identity changes of the Parsis who lived in diaspora and their fellow men, who lived in the homeland India after Independence, was not her goal. She only wanted to prove the reversal of colonial values in the case of the Parsis; the perceived decline of their status and their severe self-criticism after Independence. This thesis gives, in the form of an original contribution to the existing historiography and academic debate on Parsis, an explanation of the reversal of colonial values and other changes in the identity of the Parsis in both India and their new countries of residence.

1.4. Material and method.

In this research, the primary sources consisted of newspaper articles, articles of magazines and literary texts. This combination of articles and literary accounts as primary source material could provide new and fresh insights in the changing identities of the Parsis at home in India and abroad. This combination of sources could especially shed new light on this issue, since the books were realistic and they related to actual issues and events, which were mentioned in the articles. Often, intertextual relations were visible between these two linguistic sources, strengthening the already found evidence in one of the two sources.

From the magazines and newspapers, I have found 152 British and American articles about Parsis. I have searched the Proquest database⁴⁶ using the keyword 'parisi' for the period after Independence from August 1947 until August 1990. Those 43 years is also the general timespan for my entire research. I have chosen August 1990 as an end date for my research because in that year, India introduced economic liberalisation and became an important player on the world market. That ushered a whole new era. Besides, Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian prime minister in 1990, had just been

⁴⁵ Tanya M. Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society* (Harvard University Press 1996)

⁴⁶ <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/index?accountid=12045&selectids=1006051,1006910,1005685,1006359>, consulted in November 2011.

assassinated. His death meant the end of the so-called ‘Congress Party Raj’; the four decades of Indian rule by descendants of Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the first prime-minister of independent India. Nehru, his daughter Indira and her sons Sanjay and Rajiv had governed the country since Independence in more or less the same way.⁴⁷ I have decided to cover also a period before Independence to gain more insight in the differences in the Parsi identity before and after decolonization. The period before Independence runs from August 1914 until August 1947. These two periods, before and after Independence, have the same length. I have not used Indian newspaper articles in this analysis. The most important reason was that I had already interesting relevant sources to cover the Indian situation in the form of literary texts. The second reason was that in the Indian newspaper ‘India News’ I consulted in the Royal Library in The Hague, not one article was found about the Parsis. The Zoroastrians of Iran were only indirectly mentioned once in that Indian newspaper.

For the US, I found for the period before Independence eighteen articles of the New York Times and six articles of The Washington Post. For the period after Independence, I found ten American articles in Time Magazine, 58 articles in the New York Times and sixteen articles in The Washington Post. For the period before Independence, I could not find any articles in Time Magazine. Table 3 shows the number of American articles in a structured way.

Table 3. Number of American newspaper and magazine articles

	New York Times	The Washington Post	Time Magazine
Before Independence	18	6	-
After Independence	58	16	10
Total	76	22	10

For the UK, I found for the period before Independence eleven articles in The Guardian and Manchester Guardian and four articles in The Observer. The Manchester Guardian was a precursor of The Guardian. For the period after Independence, I found 22 British articles in The Guardian and Manchester Guardian and seven articles in The Observer. These numbers are presented in table 4. Besides that I found one source from within the Parsi community: the magazine ‘Dini Avaz’. That was an orthodox Parsi magazine, which had extensive archives available on the Internet. The 8 articles, I

⁴⁷ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History*, 264.

selected from this magazine shed light on the fierce debates within the Parsi community between the orthodox and the reformist wing.

Table 4. Number of British newspaper articles.

	Manchester Guardian/The Guardian	The Observer
Before Independence	11	4
After Independence	22	7
Total	33	11

Furthermore, four novels by the two well-known Parsi writers Bapsi Sidhwa and Rohinton Mistry have been analysed in this research. These authors belonged to a wide range of Parsi writers and poets including: Firdaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy, Boman Desai, Dina Mehta, Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla and B.K. Karanjia.⁴⁸ As said in the introduction in the paragraph on historiography, the Parsis have been an 'industrious' writing people. They have been not only active in the genre of non-fiction, but also in fiction. In the 1980s, the Parsi novel even emerged as a distinct genre. As Indian politics became daily more influenced by Hindu right-wing fundamentalism during this decade, reference to ethnic and religious identities was revitalized in order to counteract such dominance from the majority community. Through their westernization and exposure to English culture, Parsi writers have been able to fuse the special Parsi culture with a well-phrased English prose.⁴⁹ All of them were fully conscious of the fact, that their community was endangered with demise. Therefore, Parsi authors intended to preserve their identity by means of their work for ages to come. In so doing, the Parsi literary text gave insights in the turbulent mind of the Parsis of contemporary times.⁵⁰

The stories, I selected for my research were relevant because of their topics, the places where the stories took place and the characters they described. In some way, these novel features were all referring to a Parsi perspective, in other words: they were 'oozing parsiness'. The books were set in different time periods. *The Crow Eaters* of Bapsi Sidhwa was set around 1900, whereas *Ice-Candy-Man* of the same author was enacted in the period around the decolonization of India and the

⁴⁸ Dodiya, *Parsi English Novel*, 14.

⁴⁹ Barucha, 'The earth is not flat', 185.

⁵⁰ Dodiya, *Parsi English Novel*, 21.

subsequent partition. The book *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag* of Rohinton Mistry was set in the 1950s, and Mistry's other book, *Such a Long Journey* was set in the 1970s, when the second partition of Bangladesh (East-Pakistan) was taking place. So, they gave a varied image of the vicissitudes of the Parsis throughout a great part of the twentieth century. The two books which are analysed first in chapter 4 on the literary analysis, are from Bapsi Sidhwa, a Parsi woman from Pakistan. Because of her Pakistanian and Parsi ancestry, she has been able to shed more light on the events around partition and decolonization than the mainstream Indian writer.⁵¹ The first novel of Sidhwa, I analyse is *The Crow Eaters*, which was about a prosperous Parsi family living in Lahore around 1900.⁵² The title referred to a bad name, mainstream Indian children often yelled at Parsis.⁵³ The partly autobiographical novel *Ice-Candy-Man*⁵⁴ dealt with the horrible event of partition which happened directly after Indian Independence and was written from the original perspective of a child living with her family in Lahore. The novels from Rohinton Mistry, *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag* and *Such a Long Journey*⁵⁵ were set in the postcolonial period of the fifties and seventies. These books were both, though set in a different time period, about a small, close-knit Parsi community, living in the same flat complex, in Mumbai (Bombay). In short, the Mistry books both dealt with ethnic community formation on a small scale.

In my research, I analyse the way, in which the Parsis were portrayed before and after Indian Independence in the newspaper and magazine articles. I assume that this portrayal determined their identity; i.e. the way they were seen by others and how they considered themselves in the diaspora. For the homeland India, I analyse the magazine 'Dini Avaz' and the books before and after Indian Independence. In both sources, the reality was perceived and interpreted in a particular way, for example in a creative or persuading way. However, it always remained a reflection of that reality, it was not reality itself. In order to make sense of this reflection, one has to take into account particular features of the sources. For example, a newspaper article has to contain news, including perhaps sensational and attractive facts. A fictional story must have an intriguing plot and fascinating story lines which tells an original, new story, with references to the reality. A literary text is often struggling with dominant discourses which play a role in reality. Stories give comments on those discourses, sometimes in an ironic and surprising way.

⁵¹ <http://english.emory.edu/Bahri/Sidhwa.html>, consulted at 02-01-2012.

⁵² Bapsi Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters* (London 1980)

⁵³ Sidhwa, *Crow Eaters*, 53.

⁵⁴ Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man* (London 1988) later published in the US as *Cracking India* (Minneapolis 1991)

⁵⁵ Rohinton Mistry, *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag* (Boston 1989) earlier published as *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (Toronto 1987); Rohinton Mistry, *Such a Long Journey* (London 1991)

In order to make sense of the particular features of my source material in a systematic and structural way, I use two specific methods of analysis: literary analysis for the books and discourse analysis for the newspaper and magazine articles.⁵⁶ Discourse analysis is defined by the Dutch scholar Teun A. van Dijk as an analysis of structures and functions of actual forms of language use.⁵⁷ It entails more than the mere study of language as signs or bearers of meaning, which is the subject of another field of study, semiotics. Discourse could be considered in different forms. For instance, discourse could be conceived as a complex, layered construct, which could be studied at different levels of form, expression, words and phrases. Furthermore, discourse could be regarded as merely communication, as interaction between people. Besides, it could be regarded as natural language use. This form of discourse is often central in thinking about discourse and it takes as a starting point that only distinct languages could produce different discourse about exactly the same topic. The form of discourse, which is pre-eminently suitable for historical research is discourse as contextually situated in a specific social situation. Contexts will vary across cultures and such an approach can provide the basis for a cross-cultural study of discourse. For this purpose, intertextual relations with other text and talk in the same and other situations could be taken into account. If this is done for situations in previous times one could speak of a cross-historical approach.⁵⁸ This last method is most relevant for the analysis of the articles in the third chapter.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault did a lot of research into language use and discourse and his definition of discourse is as follows: discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice; a cluster of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society.⁵⁹ Discourse is, according to this elaborate definition, in essence about the constructing of knowledge; how ideas came into being about a particular topic, such as a group of people. In my research, that topic is of course the Parsis, and by means of discourse analysis, I can examine the ways, in which knowledge has been constructed about them.

In the discourse analysis in chapter 3, I analyse the newspaper and magazine articles on the basis of the most occurring themes, I came across after a first reading of the articles. These themes are partly similar to the explanatory factors from the theoretical section. But they do not have an equal function like the explanatory factors. The themes were part of the changing Parsi identity, which is to be explained by this research in general and by the explanatory factors more specifically. These

⁵⁶ Mieke Bal, Jan van Luxemburg en Willem Weststeijn, *Over Literatuur* (Muiderberg 1987)

⁵⁷ Teun A. van Dijk, 'Discourse Analysis: Its Development and Application to the Structure of News', *Journal of Communication* vol.33 no. 2 (1983) 21.

⁵⁸ Teun A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse studies. A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (New York 2011) 4.

⁵⁹ Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation. Cultural Representations and signifying practices* (New York 1997) 6.

identity themes were present to a larger or smaller degree in every single Parsi or Parsi community.

These include:

- **Loss of (economic) status**
- **Trading/Business men**
- **Community disputes**
- **non-Hindu minority**
- **Parsi husband of Indira Gandhi**
- **Political and cultural achievements**
- **Bombay**
- **Westernization, Britishness**
- **Population decline**
- **Religion/community features**
- **Cooking/restaurants**

These themes are also used as a basis for the literary analysis, although they are not all analysed in the novels. I summarized them in four overarching themes. In the first place, I focus on the westernization, British theme, which could come in conflict with the business and economic demands of the modern world, which is also a theme in the articles of the discourse analysis. The second theme for the literary analysis is the Parsis as the 'other', rapidly in numbers declining, non-Hindu minority, both in India and the diaspora. The third overarching theme is the particular religion and community features, which could come in conflict with both the modern, western habits and the values of mainstream Indian and Hindu values. The last theme in the literary analysis is actually a 'subtheme' of the third one. Namely, it deals with magic, because that turned out to be a distinctive feature of the novels.

2. The Parsis of India

2.1. The history of the Parsis in India.

The story about the arrival of the Parsis in India is presented by most writers as a classic diaspora tale. After the Arab conquest of Persia, tens of thousands Persians converted to Islam. Many Zoroastrians went also over to the new faith, because it allowed them to preserve their powerful and influential positions. A small band of devoted Zoroastrians fled to the inaccessible, mountainous region of Khurasan. But it was only a matter of time before they would have to choose between Islam or death. They decided to descend from the mountains to the port of Hormuzd, on the Persian Gulf, from where they left on a sailing boat. It is unknown whether they knew where they were going at the time. The story goes that a violent storm overtook them at sea. They prayed fervently and vowed that if they reached land safely, they would build a fire temple. Their prayers were heard, the storm died down and they landed in Diu, an island on the west coast of India, off the contemporary Indian province of Gujarat. They would have spent 19 years on this island before they set sail again and landed in Sanjan on the west coast of India, either in the year 936 AD or 716 AD. It is still a controversy in the Parsi community which date is the right one.⁶⁰

The story goes that when the newcomers from Persia first asked permission to live among the local ruler, Jadhav Rana, he sent a bowl of milk filled to the brim to signal that there was no space for more people in his kingdom. The Parsis added sugar to the bowl and returned the bowl. The message was that they would dissolve in the milk like the sugar, without displacing the milk and, in fact, sweeten it. So, in a symbolic way, the Parsis would also sweeten their new residential country.⁶¹ The Parsis were allowed to settle in India by the Hindu ruler Jadhav Rana on five conditions. These included: adoption of Gujarati language, their women were to wear sari, their men were to hand over their weapons, they were to venerate the cow and their marriage ceremonies were to be performed at night only. Although, the Parsis did not merge into the Indian mainstream population, loyalty to the current ruler became a lasting characteristic of the Parsi community.⁶² The earliest physical evidence of a Zoroastrian community in India, that of the *kanheri* cave inscriptions, dated from the tenth century.⁶³

The Islamic fighters of Persia followed the Parsis to India. In 1465, Sanjan was ransacked and destroyed by the Muslim Sultanate. The Parsis fought valiantly, side by side with their Hindu

⁶⁰ Taraporevala, *Parsis: The Zoroastrians of India*, 15.

⁶¹ Rashna B. Singh, 'Traversing Diacritical Space: Negotiating and Narrating Parsi Nationness', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 2008 vol. 43 no. 29 (2008) 31.

⁶² Santwana Haldar, *Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey. A critical study* (New Delhi 2006) 101.

⁶³ Palsetia, *The Parsis of India*, 5.

benefactors.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the resistance failed and the Parsis were forced to flee the immediate area where the movement had taken place.⁶⁵

Not all scholars agree with the idea that Islamic persecution was the main cause of the migration of the Parsis from Persia to India. Some have argued that trade was the main impetus for the migration. Susan Stiles Maneck made the most original assertion that both factors, trade and the desire to establish a Zoroastrian community in an area free from Islamic dominance, 'worked hand in hand' in the migration to the Indian western coast.⁶⁶ By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Surat, a town situated in the western Indian province Gujarat had become the largest Parsi settlement. Parsis became intimately involved in the international trade with the Portuguese and the Dutch and in related activities such as banking, brokering and money lending. They had a considerable role in this branch.⁶⁷ However, in the nineteenth century, the Parsis of Bombay became the principal community and its prosperous and influential nature made it the leader of the Parsi community of India as a whole (and nowadays probably of all Parsis worldwide). Already since 1665, the Parsis have lived in Bombay. Because at that moment, the British took over power of the Portuguese and the Portuguese Crown handed over the Island to the East India Company.⁶⁸

The East India Company offered native communities very generous terms for settlement in Bombay. In order to make Bombay a vibrant trading and commercial centre, the British needed Indian traders, merchants and craftsmen to settle in the city in order to develop this frontier harbour further. All persons born in Bombay would become natural subjects of England. All communities migrating to Bombay were guaranteed religious freedom and were permitted to build their houses within the fort walls, alongside the British, where they would be protected from any hostile attacks. The Parsis were the first too seize this unique opportunity and they came as the earliest native Indian group to Bombay. Other trading groups like Armenians, Jains, Bohras and Beni-Israeli Jews came later to Bombay.⁶⁹ With the arrival of more and more Europeans, the Parsis augmented their role as traders and middlemen for many interests.⁷⁰ The willingness of the Parsis to engage in the transshipping and country trade between ports in the eastern part of the British-Indies set them apart from other Indians, and involved them in business with the Europeans.⁷¹ Their relative lack of caste restrictions

⁶⁴ Taraporevala, *Parsis: The Zoroastrians of India*, 16.

⁶⁵ Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi*, 83.

⁶⁶ Shroff and Castro, 'The potential impact of intermarriage on the population decline', 546. The original book of Maneck: Susan Stiles Maneck, *The Death of Ahriman: Culture, Identity and Theological Change among the Parsis of India* (Bombay 1997)

⁶⁷ Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi*, 84.

⁶⁸ Taraporevala, *Parsis: The Zoroastrians of India*, 16

⁶⁹ Ibidem, 17.

⁷⁰ Palsetia, *The Parsis of India*, 11.

⁷¹ Palsetia, *The Parsis of India*, 53.

led to greater flexibility in terms of access to European communities and Western education. Together with their traditional values of integrity and hard work, this set Parsis in a unique position to take advantage of the new horizons British enterprise opened up in India.⁷²

Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy (1783-1859) was an example of a leading Parsi merchant. Besides that, he was a philanthropist, and an influential citizen in Bombay and western India during the first half of the nineteenth century. Jejeebhoy was a leader of the Parsi community and a pioneer in the formation of a collective public culture for the Parsis in early colonial society. Jejeebhoy exemplified the collaborative relationship, that was formed between leading Indians (including Parsis) and the British in Bombay under colonial rule.⁷³

But not only their role as businessmen was important, also the role Parsis played in shipbuilding was essential. In 1736, officers of the East India Company were very impressed by the work of a young Parsi man in the Surat shipyard. They invited him to Bombay, with ten of his carpenters, to set up the Bombay shipyard. Nusserwanji Wadia from Surat settled in Bombay, became very successful and handed down his skills to his sons and grandsons. The Wadia's continued with their shipyard for decades and served an international clientele.⁷⁴

So, in the late eighteenth century, Parsi entrepreneurs began taking opportunities in every direction, attempting new professions and being enormously successful. By 1800, Parsis owned half of Bombay and were even renting out their magnificent houses to the British. Later, when the industrialization of India started, Parsis established the first cotton mills and were instrumental in founding the Indian steel industry.⁷⁵ The Bombay Spinning Mill was built in 1854 by a Parsi and it was the first mill in India which was run by steam energy. This mill marked the beginning of the Indian textile industry. The Parsi Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata (1839-1904) was by far the most prominent of nineteenth-century Indian industrialists. The Tata group of companies, which proceeded from the enterprise of this first Tata, remains today India's largest, commercial multinational. It even owns a factory in the Netherlands, the former 'Koninklijke Hoogovens' in IJmuiden.⁷⁶

Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata was a central figure in the early cotton industry of India and he also founded the Indian steel industry. Besides that, he introduced the first hydroelectric system and established the first major institute for technical education and research, the Indian Institute of

⁷² Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 30.

⁷³ Hinnells and Williams, *Parsis in India and the diaspora*, 83.

⁷⁴ Taraporevala, *Parsis; The Zoroastrians of India*, 17.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 18.

⁷⁶ Luhrmann, 'The Good Parsi', 337; <http://www.tatasteel.nl/contact.html>, consulted at 26-04-2012.

Science (IIS) at Bangalore.⁷⁷ In 1820, Monstuart Elphinstone had already established the Bombay Native Education Society, where Native Indians (including Parsis) could for the first time receive, 'A systematic inculcation of the literature, languages, science and philosophy of Europe.'⁷⁸ Parsis were among the first Indians to seize this educational opportunity. In 1835, Lord Macaulay expressed the goal of the new educational system with the following words: 'To rear a class of people who maybe interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.'⁷⁹ And that was exactly the type of colonized people the Parsis eventually became. They became highly westernized and they eagerly adopted European behaviour such as wearing European clothes, playing European sports like cricket and using knives and forks at the dinner table.⁸⁰ They were also recognized as such by the British rulers. The English governor Sir J.R. Carnac of Bombay said to the Parsis in 1877: '*Then, gentlemen, Parsis, I would ask you to remember that you have what is called the very bluest blood in Asia*'⁸¹.

However, not all Parsis adopted such a lifestyle and the majority who did, often held on to old Zoroastrian customs and rituals at the same time. In addition, one could also find poor non-westernized Parsis in India, who were mainly living in the countryside of Gujarat.⁸²

The Parsi entrepreneurs, who started the early industrial developments, were called *shethias*. In accordance with Zoroastrian doctrine, they dispensed large portions of their fortunes to charities that benefited both the poor community members and the city of Bombay at large. Next to this promotion of welfare, other aims of the *shethias* movement were the development of stable socio-political relationships and the enhancement of individual and family reputations. This Indian business class forged ties with the British colonizer, like Jejeebhoy did already in the first half of the nineteenth century, based on commercial cooperation and service.⁸³

Not only in the economic sphere, but also in other spheres of society the Parsis held important positions, even after Independence. The name of Dadabhoy Navroji (1825-1917), one of the founders of the Indian National Congress, is already mentioned in the introduction. In addition to his revolutionary work for the National Congress, Navroji, who was later called the 'Grand Old Man of India', fought for Indianisation of the Indian Civil Service. Furthermore, he protested vehemently

⁷⁷ Luhrmann, 'The Good Parsi', 337.

⁷⁸ Taraporevala, *Parsis; The Zoroastrians of India*, 18

⁷⁹ Ibidem, 18.

⁸⁰ John R. Hinnells, 'Parsi Zoroastrians in London', in: Roger Ballard (ed.), *Desh Pardesh. The South-Asian presence in UK* (London 1994) 258.

⁸¹ The English Governor of Bombay, Sir J.R. Carnac on 11-08-1877, in: *Journal of the National Indian Association*, no. 82 (1877) 260.

⁸² Singh, 'Traversing Diacritical Space', 36.

⁸³ Hinnells and Williams, *Parsis in India and the diaspora*, 82-83.

against the high British expenditure on military expeditions against Afghanistan, Burma and Egypt. The British undertook these military operations with money from the Indian tax-payers for the glory of the UK. In order to fight even more for Indian rights, Navroji stood in 1892 for elections to the British House of Commons as a liberal from Central Finsbury. Miraculously, he won by three votes and he was the first Indian to beat the British in their own house at their own game. Another Parsi, Pherozechah Mehta, became in 1890 President of the Indian National Congress.⁸⁴ In the military sphere, Parsis were even prominent present after Independence: Aspi Engineer was Air Chief Marshal from 1960 onwards, Jal Cursetji was Naval chief of Staff from 1976 on, and Field Marshal Sam Maneckshaw became Chief of the Army Staff and thus commander of both the Indian air force and the Indian army in the years after Independence. Maneckshaw was honoured for his success in leading the Indian army in the conflict with Pakistan in 1971.⁸⁵

One Parsi was very close to real power since he married the later Indian president. The Parsi Feroze (or Feroze) Gandhi (1912-1960) became engaged with Indira Nehru, who was president of India from 1966 until 1984 with an interlude between 1977 and 1980.⁸⁶ Indira Gandhi had two sons with Feroze Gandhi, Rajiv and Sanjay. Sanjay was to be her successor as a president of India, but he was killed in an airplane crash in June 1980. Rajiv took office from 1984 until 1989, and marked the end of the Nehru/Gandhi dynasty.⁸⁷ These sons were technically Parsis, for they were sons of a Parsi father. However, this controversial fact in a society, where the majority was Hindu, was never openly mentioned, although, Indira and Rajiv did visit the Parsi temple in Delhi on festive occasions.⁸⁸

2.2. The Parsi diaspora in the UK, the US and worldwide.

The Parsi diaspora is part of the greater Zoroastrian diaspora. Approximately 20,000 Parsis from India are living now in the UK, Canada and the US, but they also live in Hong Kong, in China and in East-Africa.⁸⁹ The origin of these Parsi communities was the first migration of Zoroastrians from Persia to India in the eighth or tenth century, mentioned above. This Indian minority community was already a diaspora. The modern Parsi diaspora has taken form in two main phases: the first one took place in the mid-nineteenth century and the second after Independence in the twentieth century. The first, which might be termed the older Parsi diaspora, was formed in China, Sind (one province of what

⁸⁴ Hinnells, *Parsi Zoroastrians in London*, 19.

⁸⁵ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 55.

⁸⁶ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History*, 249, 257.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 258-260.

⁸⁸ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 58.

⁸⁹ Luhrmann, 'The Good Parsi', 336.

eventually became the four Pakistanian provinces), East Africa, Sri Lanka and the UK.⁹⁰ The Parsis mainly moved to these places for trade interests. The second migration of Parsis was also created in the UK (in the 1960s) and in the Anglo-Saxon countries of Canada, USA and Australia. The British diaspora is different in that it is part of both the nineteenth century and the post-1960 migrations.⁹¹ An important remark is that in the literature, often all Zoroastrians (Parsis, Iranian Zoroastrians and East African Zoroastrians), who live in the UK or on the North-American continent, are taken together. My focus remains on the Parsis, and in the following description, I only use 'Zoroastrian' if I mean the whole group who practised this religion or as the statement had primarily to do with the Zoroastrian religion and not with one particular Zoroastrian community.

The British diaspora is the oldest of all Parsi diasporas. The first known Parsi visitor to the UK was Naoroji Rustomjee, who came to London in 1724 to protest successfully against the way in which his family had been treated by officials of the East India Company in Bombay. Opportunities for education in the UK gave the strongest impulse for Parsis towards travelling to the UK. Many Parsis arrived in the UK in the 1860s to gain a university degree. As a wealthy and strongly urbanised community, many Parsis could afford to travel to the UK as tourists. The third group of Parsis, which came to the UK, were businessmen going for trade interests.⁹² The Parsis founded a community association in London in 1861.⁹³ This association was first simply named 'Parsi association'. However, this name did not content anymore in the 1970s, for many Iranian Zoroastrians became member of the association after the Iranian revolution of 1979. In 1979, the redrafted constitution of the renamed 'Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe' (ZTFE) came into being.⁹⁴

Because Parsis have already had a long history in the UK, a substantial number of young Parsis is born in the diaspora. Therefore, many individuals have migrated around the country and to different parts of London, without necessarily keeping in touch with co-religionists.⁹⁵ The UK was not only home to the oldest Zoroastrian community in the Western world, but it also had the largest Zoroastrian population outside the old countries. The migration of the Parsis to the UK had to be understood against the background of the greater (South) Asian migration to the UK, because their history was part of that wider history.⁹⁶ An example of that Asian background was that for groups like the Zoroastrians, religion was of considerable community importance. The reason for that was that many South Asians did not see religion as a simple question of personal and private belief, but rather as a

⁹⁰ Hinnells and Williams, *Parsis in India and the diaspora*, 3.

⁹¹ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian diaspora*, 699.

⁹² Hinnells, 'Parsi Zoroastrians in London', 254, 255; Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 325.

⁹³ Hinnells, 'Parsi Zoroastrians in London', 251.

⁹⁴ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian diaspora*, 357.

⁹⁵ Hinnells, 'South Asian diaspora communities', 64, 66.

⁹⁶ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian diaspora*, 314.

crucial marker of collective or individual identity.⁹⁷ The scientist John R. Hinnells has collected a considerable amount of research data from people of the British Parsi Community in the mid-1980s. This period is part of my research period, so this information I can definitely use as a background to the answers to my main research question.

First, the collected data showed that the majority of the British Zoroastrians (over 50%) were born in Bombay, and 10% was from the rest of India. The next largest group were the East African Parsis. This is a distinctive feature of the British community, for the East Africans were a much smaller group in Canada, Australia or the USA. One in five of the British Zoroastrians arrived in UK prior to the 1960s, two-thirds of them arrived in the 1960s or 1970s, and a few came thereafter.⁹⁸ A lot of Hinnells' data is about the content of the Parsi identity. A high level of awareness and assertion of Zoroastrian identity existed among the Parsis from the UK: 85% of the older respondents and 75 % of the younger ones described themselves as practising Zoroastrians. And even those who did not so, asserted that Zoroastrianism was at least in some way part of their identity. However, according to Hinnells the sense of identity of the British Parsis was complex and shifting between being British, Indian, Pakistani, Iranian, and being the 'real Persians'. Despite the long and generally good history of Anglo-Parsi relations during British colonial rule, British Zoroastrians did not want to be considered necessarily as being British. Nowadays, Parsis considered the British as rather cold, secular, untrustworthy, neglectful of family responsibilities and inclined to be racist.⁹⁹ They had a preference for the identity label 'Persian'. This label strengthened the bond with the ancient heritage. For a substantial proportion of the Parsis, the term 'Asian' was offensive: an alien, meaningless, externally imposed label, ignoring their historic ancestry.¹⁰⁰

Many British Parsis did their best to dissociate themselves from the Indian subcontinent. A quote of a Parsi lady in the UK: *'they (the British) can't tell me I am Indian...I don't look Indian. I've never suffered from being an Indian in Britain, perhaps because I have never seen myself as such.'*¹⁰¹ The British population could not distinguish Parsis from other Asian people who descended from the Indian sub-continent. Hence, they turned to a label which has acquired so many pejorative connotations, that a substantial number of Parsis did not approve of being labelled this way and felt alienated from the British society as a result. In the UK, there was little or no understanding of the Zoroastrian religion of the Parsis among the British population. The Parsis of UK would wish to

⁹⁷ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 322.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, 323.

⁹⁹ Hinnells, 'South Asian diaspora communities', 80, 81.

¹⁰⁰ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 387.

¹⁰¹ Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 229.

maintain their religio-cultural origins in the eyes of the wider society without being considered as Indians.¹⁰²

The spoken language was also an important identity marker for British Parsis. The original language Gujarati, spoken by Parsis in the first centuries of settlement in India has become much less common among Parsis who live in England. It might be only used in family conversation for the older generation. For most other purposes, Parsis speak English. Most people who were not born in UK, said that they thought that they had become more religious after migration than they were before. The people who were most religiously active were retired people, housewives, those who did not go to university, those who continued to think in their mother tongue, those who visited the Zoroastrian house (the community building of the Zoroastrian association) regularly and who returned to the old country more often, those who have migrated recently, people from rural Gujarat (as opposed to cosmopolitan Bombay) people from East Africa and those Parsis who had children. These factors did not exclude each other, for housewives usually did not go to university for example. In the same way, people from rural Gujarat could also have migrated recently. The reverse was also partly true: those who expressed less commitment to the faith were the youth, single people, people who were born in the UK, those with a high level of educational and career success, those who did not attend Zoroastrian house, and who did not want to return to the old country. Yet, a higher percentage of Zoroastrian youth affirmed their religious identity and followed traditional practices than was common among young people in the wider British society.¹⁰³

On the North-American continent, in contrast with the UK, instead of one Zoroastrian association, twenty separate Zoroastrian organisations existed and there was one overarching one, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North-America (FEZANA).¹⁰⁴ This situation had certainly something to do with the vastness of the continent, but also with the diversity of the Parsi community who lived there. There were large Zoroastrian groups in Chicago, New York and California, but there were also a lot of smaller groups scattered over the US.¹⁰⁵ It was not uncommon to make comparisons between the original Parsi migration from Persia to India and the relatively recent new settlement in America. An example of this comparison was said by Moti Balsara in her introductory speech during the Parsi symposium of Toronto in 1975: *'One might say that there is a sort of parallel between our starting a Zoroastrian community on this continent and between the time we first started as a very small community in India.'*¹⁰⁶ Although the focus in my research is on the

¹⁰² Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 225.

¹⁰³ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 387-388.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 425, 426.

¹⁰⁵ Hinnells, 'South Asian diaspora communities', 64.

¹⁰⁶ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 486.

US-part of the North-American continent, in all literature about the Parsis who live there, they are almost always mentioned together with the Parsis who live in Canada. So, it is impossible to not include other non-American Parsis, who also live on the North-American continent, in the following description of the American Parsi diaspora.

The first Parsi contacts with the US came into being through trade between Boston (Salem) and Bombay. The earliest Parsi known to have migrated to the US was Maneckji F. Javeri, who prospected for gold in California in the 1860s. The first Zoroastrian Association of New York (and the first on the whole North-American continent) was started in 1929. In the 1980s, the Zoroastrian population on the North-American continent was entirely of the first generation and the majority were Parsis from India. In contrast to the older Parsi community of UK, very few Zoroastrians settled in the US before the 1960s. In comparison to the age range of the British Zoroastrians and especially in contrast to the Parsis of Bombay, the Parsis of the US constituted a very young population. Birth rates were higher than death rates and so the numbers grew, an exceptional fact for Parsis. By the end of the 1990s, there were approximately 9,000 known members of the Zoroastrian Organisations, and it was estimated that this probably represented only a half of the real numbers of the Parsi population in North America.¹⁰⁷ According to another source from the early 1990s, more than 10.000 Zoroastrians (Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians) would live in North-America.¹⁰⁸ So, in the years after my research period stops, in the 1990s, the numbers of Parsis who lived in the US would have become even larger than the Parsi population numbers in the UK.

In comparative perspective with the British, American Zoroastrians kept more in touch with fellow Zoroastrians in both the old country and on the North-American continent, and they read more Zoroastrian literature. The question of adaptation to American life was crucial in the Parsi community of the United States. Some degree of change was inevitable, because nowhere in the New World was a fully consecrated temple as required for the higher key rituals. A *dakhma* or Tower of Silence was also not present for the traditional funeral ceremonies.¹⁰⁹ The threat of change and consequent loss of identity was seen by many as being far greater in America than elsewhere in other Parsi diasporas. The threat of change was particularly acute through intermarriage. It was widely accepted among American Zoroastrians that intermarriage was inevitable to maintain the community alive.¹¹⁰ I elaborate on this topic in the next paragraph.

¹⁰⁷ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 444-446, 449-450, 513.

¹⁰⁸ Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 199.

¹⁰⁹ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 445, 468.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 473, 474, 475.

In America, more Parsis wanted to assert their Zoroastrianness rather than their Americanness, because the latter was associated with the threat of disappearing in the famous American 'melting-pot culture'.¹¹¹ In addition, they definitely did not want to be considered a Hindu by the American population. Just like the British Parsis, they clearly wanted to dissociate themselves from the mainstream Hindu Indians. In the words of a middle-aged man, who came originally from Bombay: *'Although I am happy to say I am Indian, I definitely don't want to be classified a Hindu. I am a different Indian.'*¹¹² Mainstream Americans did indeed categorize Parsis as part of the 'Indian Hindus', because they simply had never heard of the Zoroastrians and Parsis, just like most British people. It is this fact of non-recognition as a people which made the identity of the Parsis who lived in the west very complex. A quote of a Parsi youngster, who lived in America, was illustrative in this respect: *'They say you don't look Indian and don't speak like an Indian. I don't have Indian friends at school, because I don't like being associated with the negative connotations attached to India.'* Sometimes, Parsis in America suffered from negative connotations and prejudices which were linked to India, but directed to them. A university professor said that his contributions to the scholarly field had been overlooked and occasionally a 'white man' had received credit for his work. Another Parsi clearly summarized his experiences: *'To an American, there is no difference between an Indian and a Parsi. But we are culturally very different from Hindus. I do suffer from this stereotyping, and have to prove myself constantly.'*¹¹³

Similarly to the British situation, many Zoroastrians in the US have become more religious after migration to the new country of residence than they were before. The reason for this was that their distinctive religion was at the heart of their identity and very important for community ties.¹¹⁴ Community ties were not harmonious among all Zoroastrians. Above all, an internal ethnic clash emerged between Iranian Zoroastrians and Parsis, and this clash has been more acute in America than elsewhere. The cultural divide between Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians was based on a difference in language, in the observance of festivals and in fundamental religious assumptions. For example, the value of priesthood differed in both Zoroastrian groups.¹¹⁵ American Zoroastrians had a strong orientation on their homelands. In their case that could be India, Iran or East Africa. Many American Zoroastrians made visits to their old country whenever possible. But this was something all diaspora Zoroastrians had in common. Generally, they still had family and/or friends back in the old

¹¹¹ Hinnells, 'South Asian diaspora communities', 80.

¹¹² Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 202.

¹¹³ Ibidem, 210, 212.

¹¹⁴ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 472

¹¹⁵ Ibidem, 489.

country whom they regularly visited, especially for *navjotes*, which were the initiation rites into the religion, weddings and funerals.¹¹⁶

Considering the Zoroastrian Diaspora (including Parsis) as a worldwide phenomenon, it was clear that there was a lot of international interaction between Zoroastrian diaspora groups. Quite a number of World Congresses and international Youth Congresses have been organised by Zoroastrians. All the trouble Zoroastrians took to establish a general world Zoroastrian body was also a sign of a vast international network among Zoroastrians. Eventually, the World Zoroastrian Organisation was set up in 1980.¹¹⁷ In more recent years, the Internet has been widely used as a means to keep in touch with each other. Research data from a questionnaire taken in the 1980s among Zoroastrians worldwide, showed that in broad terms 60 per cent of all Zoroastrians maintained contact with fellow Zoroastrians in other countries of the worldwide diaspora.¹¹⁸ There was a developing trend in the world-wide Zoroastrian diaspora to feel attached to their first original homeland, Persia (current Iran) instead of the second one: India. Few Parsis would like to go back to India in contemporary times.¹¹⁹ Comprehensible, if the fact that they did not want to be associated with Indian Hindus in both their new countries of residence, the UK and the US, is taken into account.

2.3. The changing meaning of being Parsi: religion and community features

The Parsis have an ancient religion and culture. They have adapted themselves somewhat to the Indian situation in the course of centuries, but they have always remained faithful to their Zoroastrian roots. In the Zoroastrian religion, 'the great cosmic battle between Good and Evil' has a central place. The individual lives of all people are the battlefield and every decision we make, every choice of thought, word and deed, counts. Nowadays, these teachings of the 'Bronze Age' prophet Zoroaster sound not that original. However, in the ancient times in which the prophet lived, his Zoroastrian religion was radically different to anything mankind had ever known. Instead of a religion based on fear, on worshipping and appeasing several Gods, the Zoroastrian religion put a free thinking, rational mind and one omnipotent, eternal God, Ahura Mazda, on centre stage.¹²⁰ The message of this one true god Ahura Mazda was detailed in the Gathas (or Songs of Wisdom), known as the core of the Avesta, the sacred Zoroastrian text. The fire temple, where the sacred fire is worshipped, is the holy place of the Zoroastrians. Zoroastrianism was the predominant religion of

¹¹⁶ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 485.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem, 607, 725.

¹¹⁸ Hinnells, 'South Asian diaspora communities', 75.

¹¹⁹ Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 226.

¹²⁰ Taraporevala, *Parsis; The Zoroastrians of India*, 12.

Persia until the fall of the Sasanian empire in the middle of the seventh century, after which the country steadily became more Islamic.¹²¹



*The holy fire of the Parsis*¹²²

Later religions, such as Judaism and Christianity borrowed freely from the Zoroastrian religion. The following Jewish and Christian theological concepts had Zoroastrian roots: The belief in one supreme god, the concept of heaven and hell and individual judgment, a strict moral code, a belief in the ultimate triumph of good, the messiah to come for the final restoration, the concepts of resurrection, final judgment and life everlasting and words like Satan, Paradise, pastor and 'Amen' at the end of a prayer.¹²³

An important doctrine in Zoroastrianism is the obligation for every Zoroastrian to reserve some of his money for charity. In India, Parsi charity was significant as it had aided the settlement of Parsis across Western India. Besides, by the nineteenth century, when Parsis became richer, charity was extended to support not only the Parsi community, but also the wider community. Parsi charity functioned to create internal community bonds and it was a means to establish good inter-community relations. Individual Parsis not only gained religious merit with their charity actions, but they also created a peaceful and tolerant social environment favourable to protecting the interests of a tiny minority like the Parsis.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Shroff and Castro, 'The potential impact of intermarriage on the population decline', 546; about the sacred Zoroastrian text Avesta: Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrianism: Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour* (Costa Mesa 1992)

¹²² <http://www.solutionastrology.com/festivaldetails.asp?festivalid=133>, consulted at 13-06-2012.

¹²³ Haldar, *Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey*, 105.

¹²⁴ Hinnells and Williams, *Parsis in India and the diaspora*, 86.

The most important rituals in Zoroastrianism were the *navjote*, the initiation ritual into the religion, the wedding, and the funeral ritual in the notorious *dakhma*, Tower of Silence. Around these 'key rituals', major disputes developed between the so-called 'orthodox' wing and 'reformist wing' of the community in the course of the twentieth century. The central question underlying these disputes was constantly: 'Are Parsis (and Zoroastrians) a religious or an ethnic group?' In other words: 'Can you only be a Parsi if you were born into the religion or is conversion possible?' Another related issue was how the ideal Parsi should be, regarding his worldviews and behaviour. The result of this last question would probably be found somewhere between the extremes: 'westernized and British' and 'pious and traditional'.

These issues became more urgent when the population decline among the Parsis developed further in the second half of the twentieth century. In a shrinking community, for example intermarriage becomes nearly inevitable. But the orthodox wing in the Parsi community was severely opposed to intermarriage. The traditional orthodox response was that in mixed marriages there was an increased danger of departing from the tradition and the religion in particular, that there was a higher number of divorces, that the children grew up in a religious vacuum, and that the inevitable consequence of intermarriages was the further diminution of the already small community.¹²⁵ The issues of conversion and intermarriage were interwoven. When a Parsi woman was getting married to a non-Parsi man, her husband could choose to convert to Zoroastrianism and did his *navjote*. Reformist Parsis would allow such a practice, orthodox Parsis certainly would not. Intermarriage was more accepted in the Parsi diasporic communities in the US and the UK than in India itself. That was clearly logical, because of the still smaller population figures in the Parsi diaspora. The need to marry out of the own community was bigger overseas than in the homeland India. The third key ritual, the funeral ritual at the Tower of Silence, was designated by many people, both non-Parsis and Parsis, as barbaric. The Parsi reformists were in favour of an abolishment of the practice, but the Orthodox wing of the Parsi community was of course severely set against it.

The phenomena, described above, were all examples of the Parsi's efforts to preserve identity within a changing historical setting and new environments. This maintenance of Parsi identity features was not something new, but happened continually through time: in the Indian context of the eighth century India as well as in colonial India and in the UK or the US of the nineteenth and twentieth

¹²⁵ Hinnells, 'South Asian diaspora communities', 79.

century.¹²⁶ Changes in the Parsi identity in the colonial period usually went from traditional Zoroastrian to more British, what usually means in this context: westernized. This development in the colonial period must be seen as a two-way process in which Parsis were both recipients of external, often western, values and technologies and purposive actors shaping the economic and cultural life of Bombay. In this light, it was striking that they adopted features of Western culture in a selective way. While Parsis vigorously retained their religion and distinctive form of dress, they embraced Western behaviour and values in several other domains. For example, they embraced English as their most important language, they wanted to live in furnished flats modelled on the British ones and they liked western music, literature and sports like cricket.¹²⁷ Perhaps, a similar two-way process has been still taking place in the diasporic communities of the Parsis nowadays, but that is a presumption to be checked in the next chapters. At any case, it was certain that the labels 'Parsi' and 'Zoroastrian' were interchangeable used by a lot of Parsis. This fact indicated that within the communities, no distinction was made between religious and secular matters.¹²⁸ Consequently, religious and worldly Parsi characteristics overlapped and interacted.

Next to the more visible habits of speaking, living and sporting in a western way, Parsis did adopt other western cultural and social habits. They have placed a high value on the following typically western patterns: They preferred to find their own marriage partners instead of a traditional arranged marriage. Furthermore, they wanted to live neo-locally and to form a nuclear family instead of an extended family. These desires often resulted in a late marriage for Parsis or a postponement of marriage altogether. A related problem was the severe shortage of housing in Bombay. Consequently, the prices for houses in especially the southern part of the city, where most Parsis live, have risen enormously. Hence, there were not enough houses for a reasonable price available for potential Parsi couples.¹²⁹ The demographic decisions of late marriage or non-marriage led to an extremely low fertility rate among Parsis, which was one of the most important reasons for their population decline.¹³⁰ Within the community, Parsis were really concerned about their rapidly declining numbers. Where two or more Parsis encountered each other, this matter was endlessly discussed. The awareness of their numbers becoming continually smaller has led Parsis to adopt, amongst others, a pragmatic, loyal approach of adapting to the governing ethos in the countries where they lived.¹³¹ They did so already when they first arrived at the western coast of India. In

¹²⁶ Palsetia, *The Parsis of India*, 33.

¹²⁷ Axelrod, 'Cultural and Historical Factors', 408.

¹²⁸ Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 236.

¹²⁹ Shroff and Castro, 'The potential impact of intermarriage on the population decline', 552.

¹³⁰ Axelrod, 'Cultural and Historical Factors', 408, 410.

¹³¹ Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 158.

contemporary times, it has been a returning feature of the Parsi community, both in India and the new western countries of residence.

In short, in the last century, things have dramatically changed for the Parsis. In the twentieth century, they had to deal with a lot of related issues; population decline, the question of 'who belongs to the community?', intermarriage, conversion and a combination of a westernized, Asian and Zoroastrian background. Why have many community certainties, which they maintained for more than ten centuries, suddenly became so unsettled? The decolonization and change of power holders was a factor, but not the only one. In the following analysing chapters on newspaper- and magazine articles and novels, I hope to find more satisfying answers.

3. Analysis of newspaper and magazine articles.

3.1. Discourse, news and identities.

In this chapter, I analyse the articles from British newspapers, American newspapers, and the Parsi orthodox magazine 'Dini Avaz' by means of discourse analysis. To do so, the articles are analysed by means of several oppositions. The reason for this approach is that on the one hand, those oppositions are inherent to my research, such as 'before and after Independence' and 'diaspora of the UK and the US vs. the homeland India'. On the other hand, people easily consider the world and other people in several usual opposite categories, definitely with regard to migrants. It is often an issue of acceptance or rejection; either you belong to us or you must leave.¹³² That is certainly the case if non-western migrants are involved, who migrated to western countries such as the Parsi community. In that case, remnants of orientalist and colonial worldviews which resulted in a West-East dichotomy, play a role, as well.¹³³ The other oppositions in this analysis are: 'Ascribed identity and self-definition' and 'the United States vs. the United Kingdom'. Before the analysis of each opposition is discussed, I elaborate on the use and meaning of that particular opposition. At the end of this chapter, special attention is paid to the newspaper the *New York Times*, because this newspaper contained most references to the Parsis. In this first paragraph, the relations between the notion of 'discourse', which was defined in the paragraph 'Material and method' of the introduction, and news production in newspapers and magazines are introduced.

In distinct ways, all articles which are analysed in this study are news-articles. The readers of these articles were informed about various novelties. It is important to keep a number of features of the specific discourse 'news' in mind. To begin with, news is a specific kind of (re) construction of reality according to the norms and values of a given society. News production is part of a complex of professional routines of the makers who have to manage the possible sources; the interaction among journalists and the possible 'formulations' of reality. News production is not a direct representation of events, but rather some form of discourse 'reproduction'. Since reporters are seldom direct witnesses to events, their data consist of mostly other discourses, such as eyewitness reports, press releases, press conferences etc. Therefore, the construction of news is most of all a reconstruction and a combination of available discourses by the journalist. Another important aspect of the

¹³² On this idea is elaborated in: R. Boyd and P.J. Richerson, 'The Evolution of Ethnic Markers', *Cultural Anthropology* no.2 (1987) 65-79.

¹³³ Betty de Hart, 'Not Without My Daughter. On Parental Abduction, Orientalism and Maternal Melodrama', *The European Journal of Women's Studies* (2001) 53.

interpretation of news discourse is the set of expectations the reader has while reading and even before reading the article.¹³⁴

Thus, next to an intertextual cross-historical and cross-cultural approach and the 'construction of knowledge'- approach of Foucault as I explained in the introduction, news reproduction about minorities must be considered. Namely, by examining the ways in which journalists portray minority groups like the Parsis in the dailies of the UK and the US, which are mainly read by native people. Through such an examination, a view can be discovered of the ways in which the news reproduces inequality and relations of domination with regard to minorities and specifically the Parsis.¹³⁵

All three approaches to discourse, as described in this paragraph and in the section of the introduction on material and method, are related to the construction of identities, which constitutes a central part of my main research question. In addition, in the process of identity construction, discursive processes even play a crucial role. Identities are not stable, but in constant flux and they are defined in relation to the social environment. In the social sciences, this process is called social constructionism.¹³⁶ This term is related to the concepts 'social identity' and 'social cognition', which were described above in the theoretical framework. Both social constructionism and social cognition stress that identities are formed by self-definition and through ascribed identity: through what people think about themselves and through what others think of the people involved in the construction. This important dual process is analysed in the articles on Parsis in paragraph 3.3.

3.2. Before and after Independence.

Before turning to the important opposition of 'ascribed identity markers versus self-definition identity markers', I discuss another important opposition in this research: 'before and after Independence'. In order to get a more exact sight on the changes brought about by decolonization for the construction of Parsi identity, the Parsi identity themes which emerged most in the newspapers and magazines before and after the decolonization of India are closely examined in this paragraph. The Parsi identity themes in table 5 on this page are the same as those which were put forward at the end of the introduction. These particular themes or 'Parsi identity markers' are used in all analyses in this chapter. The opposition between the period before and after decolonization could help to provide more insight in the reasons why the Independence of India was such a watershed for the Parsis' identity.

¹³⁴ Van Dijk, 'Discourse Analysis', 28, 29.

¹³⁵ Yasmin Jiwani and John E. Richardson, 'Discourse, Ethnicity and Racism', in: Teun A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse studies. A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (New York 2011) 251.

¹³⁶ Anna de Fina, 'Discourse and identity', in: Teun A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse studies. A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (New York 2011) 264, 266.

Table 5. The appearance of the Parsi identity themes in all newspapers and magazines before and after the Independence of India in 1947.¹³⁷

	Before	%	After	%
Loss of (economic) status	6	9,5	15	6,7
Trading/Business men (Tata)	6	9,5	21	9,4
Community disputes (conversion, intermarriage)	2	3,2	13	5,8
non-Hindu minority	20	31,8	21	9,4
Parsi husband of Indira Gandhi	Nvt		21	9,4
Political and cultural achievements	3	4,8	37	16,5
Bombay	10	15,9	28	12,5
Westernization, Britishness, literacy	9	14,3	24	10,7
Population decline, danger of dying out			9	4,0
Religion/community features	7	11,1	31	13,8
Cooking/restaurants			4	1,8
Total	63	100	224	100

After all, the Parsis kept their special culture more or less intact for at least a millennium since their arrival at the Western coast of India. In table 4, the total number of instances that a certain identity theme was found is not the same as the total number of newspaper and magazine articles, I used. Most articles belonged to more identity themes than just one. As most discourses, the discourse on Parsis was build up around different issues, which had all links to each other. Parsi identity themes often appeared in a combination with each other. That is the reason why the total numbers in the table are far more higher than the total numbers of articles used. In all tables in this chapter, this is the case. It was not about the exact number of articles which could be found about the Parsis, but about the number of specific references which are made to them.

At first sight, it was clear from table 4 that after decolonization more attention was given to Parsis than before August 1947. Of course, more and larger newspapers and magazines were published in the second half of the twentieth century, but I think the Parsis also appeared more in the media because of their peculiar, vulnerable position in India after 1947. In the articles of the period before India acquired Independence, it was striking that the identity marker 'non-Hindu minority' was so omnipresent. Many articles showed already before the actual decolonization their concern for the vulnerable positions of minorities such as the Parsis in the new postcolonial India. This seemed to me

¹³⁷ All tables and figures in this chapter are derived from the basic Excel table from Appendix I.

logical because in the months and years before the formal sovereignty transfer, a lot of arrangements were already made for the situation after August 1947. The fact that the Parsis were nearly always mentioned in these articles as a separate, albeit very small, religious minority, only underlined their special position under colonial rule. The Parsis were often depicted in these articles as one of the 'Depressed classes'¹³⁸ to which also the Sikhs, the Jains and Indian Christians belonged. After Independence, this identity marker of a 'non-Hindu minority' was far less important in the media discourse about Parsis. Probably, because in India, they have adapted to some extent to the new situation, and in the new countries of residence, the US and the UK, their non-Hindu minority identity was not that important anymore. Perhaps, their position as an ethnic, religious minority is still an important component of the identity construction overseas, but that remains to be seen in the paragraph on the opposition 'diaspora vs. homeland India'. In the paragraph on the opposition between the US and the UK, the position of the Parsis as a minority is discussed, as well.

In the postcolonial period, the identity theme 'political and cultural achievements' was predominant in the discourse, whereas this theme was hardly present in the period before decolonization. Has there just been more attention for Parsi authors, musicians, conductors, composers, and politicians after Independence? Or have more Parsis achieved exceptional things in the postcolonial period? In my opinion, the answer to this question is a combination of the two. The attention for the Parsis' faith and the Parsis themselves has generally increased, but some representatives of the Parsi culture have reached extra-ordinary heights in their field of expertise. An example is self-evidently Zubin Mehta, who has been a conductor of both the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.¹³⁹ In an article of the *New York Times* from 1978, the background of his surname was explained:

*'Most of the Parsis in Bombay are businessmen, traders, brokers, or accountants (the name "Mehta" is practically similar to "accountant" in Bombay) Today Mehta reveals his Parsi business skill and enterprise in the efficiency of his rehearsals, in his budget-minded cooperation with orchestra management, and in the pleasure he evinces in handling the business matters that other artists hire agents, managers and lawyers to take care off.'*¹⁴⁰

In this fragment, a combination of identity markers of the discourse on Parsis was discernible too, namely next to 'political and cultural achievements' was also the marker 'business men' present. As said before, many identity markers emerged in a combination in the articles. Furthermore, next to the 'political and cultural achievements' marker, the theme 'religion and community features' was

¹³⁸ *New York Times*, 22-07-1946, 3; *The Manchester Guardian*, 26-01-1923, 7.

¹³⁹ *New York Times*, 11-06-1978, D1.

¹⁴⁰ *New York Times*, 19 -11-1978, SM9.

increasingly important in the discourse about Parsis after 1947. In that period, more attention was constantly paid to the Parsis, and in all those articles, their history, religion and community habits needed to be explained to a greater public. However, the emphasis which was placed on the markers 'westernization, Britishness' and 'Bombay' in the pre-Independence period, was not that clear in the second period. Probably, the reason for this change in discourse was that the –under colonial rule beneficial- association of the Parsis with the UK, the West and the (once) cosmopolitan city of Bombay was not an advantage anymore in contemporary India. On the contrary, it could be an advantage in the diaspora of the new countries; the UK and the United States. The percentage of this 'Westernization'-marker has somewhat declined, but not in a spectacular way, for this marker constitutes still 10,7 per cent of all Parsi references in the articles which appeared after Independence. Westernization has become less important than it used to be, at least in the United States. Because in the US, the Parsis were one of many migrant groups, so they did not have to proof their 'western correctness' anymore. In the UK, I think their knowledge of British habits and their supposedly 'British' English have benefited the Parsis to a considerable extent.

Apart from that, in the colonial period, one could also see a different Parsi face, than that of a Westernized, loyal to the British, native Indian. A number of Parsis were in fact active in the revolutionary movement and already in 1930 a majority of the community in Bombay organized a procession through the city to show their support for Mahatma Gandhi. Even the British newspaper *The Manchester Guardian* sounded a bit surprised about this Parsi commitment at the time: '*The procession is remarkable in that it is the first time that the Parsis as a community have demonstrated their sympathy with Mr. Gandhi.*'¹⁴¹ From this fragment, it became clear that within a discourse, opposing forces are always at work.

The result in table 5, that I really did not expect beforehand, was the meagre presence of the identity marker 'population decline'. I expected in the theoretical framework that this would be an explanatory factor for the identity reconstruction of the Parsis. It perhaps still is, but it did not appear to be so according to the newspaper articles in this dataset. In the period before Independence, this marker was totally absent, and in the subsequent period it was only found in a couple of articles. How is this possible when it has been known among the Parsi community members for decades that the threat of dying out becomes more urgent every day? The reason lay probably in the different situations of India and the diaspora. In India, the Parsi community was numerically in absolute decline, but in the US and the UK, the decline was not that absolute, certainly if the new converts were counted as Parsis as well. In the US, the population numbers of Parsis would even have

¹⁴¹ *The Manchester Guardian*, 30-05-1930, 16.

increased in recent years.¹⁴² It was comprehensible that in the pre-Independence period, the identity marker ‘population decline’ was not present. Because, back then, the Parsis were still a flourishing community without much concern about population figures.

3.3. *Ascribed and self-defined identity.*

Next to this first opposition between before and after Independence, another opposition was especially important for my research; the already mentioned opposition between ‘ascribed identity’ markers and ‘self-definition identity’ markers. Through the use of this opposition, I hope to cover more fully the exact ways, in which the identity repositioning of the Parsis worked out. One might expect that the articles of mostly foreign newspapers and magazines of the UK and the US in this analysis, would only contain markers of ascribed identity. But that does not have to be the case since the Parsis, who were living in the diaspora could have a say in the newspapers too, by means of ‘letters to the editor’, for example. Table 6 shows the same identity themes as used in the above made ‘before’ and ‘after’ opposition. But here, they are divided in ‘ascribed identity’ markers and ‘self-definition identity’ markers.

Table 6. Opposition ‘ascribed identity’ markers and ‘self-definition identity’ markers.

Ascribed identity	Self-definition
The image of business men	(Loss of economic) status
A non-Hindu minority among many Indian minorities	Community disputes about conversion, intermarriage and the funeral ritual.
The husband of Indira Gandhi is a Parsi	Population decline
Political/cultural achievements	Bombay as a community base in India
Religion, community features.	Westernization; Britishness,
Special kind of cooking	

The different identity markers are brought under the heading, where they are most dominant in my opinion. That is not to say, that for example ‘population decline’ has not been playing a role in the part of the identity, which has been ascribed to the Parsis. The same goes for the last marker ‘religion, community features’, which was initially placed under the heading ‘ascribed identity’. Because of the difficulty in making a choice between ‘self-defined’ or ‘ascribed’ identity for this particular marker, I have done the calculations for both instances in table 7 and 8, which led to different results. The first line of the table with the identity themes ‘image of business men’ as

¹⁴² Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 721.

ascribed identity and 'loss of economic status' as self-definition are two sides of the same coin. Of these two markers, one side is positive, the other negative. At the negative side of the coin, 'loss of economic' could be sometimes written between brackets because before Independence, the Parsis heavily defined their identity by social status and esteem. This status had also much to do with their westernization. Their status only diminished after decolonization. In that postcolonial period, Parsis themselves mainly stressed the loss of their former status, whereas outside the community their business skills remained an important point of reference for many people.

The first line of table 6 is clearly an opposition. That has been more often the case in the construction of 'Parsi' discourse as was just shown in the case of 'westernized, loyal to the British, Parsis' vs. 'active revolutionaries'. As said before, people like to think in oppositions in order to make sense of the world, but that does not necessarily mean that people are only fitting in one extreme of the opposition. People's identities are more complex than that. In the case of the Parsis, 'westernized' vs. 'obeying traditional Zoroastrian customs' could easily go together within one person. Other obvious oppositions in the discourse around Parsis were: the community disputes between an orthodox and reformist side, the Parsis as a minority against the overwhelming Hindu majority of India and the already mentioned westernized nature of the Parsis vs. their ancient religion and community features. Other oppositions which were perhaps not that clear at first sight, and were not a direct part of the discourse, are: the community centre Bombay vs. the worldwide diaspora, the Independence of India vs. colonial rule and the migration of many Parsis after decolonization vs. their co-religionists who stayed behind in India.

An example of the positive image of Parsis as businessmen was a quote of an article from the *New York Times* which appeared in 1989 in which J.R.D. Tata was praised for his good business leadership of the Tata company: *'In the 50 years that J.R.D. Tata has led the sprawling industrial giant that bears his name, he has moulded it into India's most diverse and respected industrial empire under the slogan: "growth with ethics".'*¹⁴³ The founder of the company, Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata was a great-uncle of this Tata-descendant. The other more negative side of the coin, loss of economic status, could be read in an article of *The Washington Post*, written in 1968. This article bears the name: *'Proud Parsis are dwindling fast'* and some Parsis were quoted who said that their former vigour and enterprise was fading away: *'The sons of our wealthy are more interested in Jaguars than commerce. Our bob-haired daughters are increasingly sceptical of the traditional rites. In a community that has looked to the West for several hundred years, that is cosmopolitan in the best sense of the word, it is*

¹⁴³ *New York Times*, 27-11-1989, 4.

*difficult to believe in the 33 angels, the 16 flames, the sacred shirt and the sacred belt.*¹⁴⁴ This last quote was actually a combination of ‘loss of economic status’ and ‘loss of traditional community features’. This last one was not a separate identity marker in my set of Parsi identity markers, but had much to do with the themes ‘religion and community features’ and ‘community disputes’ which were often about retaining old customs or adapting to modern society. To return to these two losses, they also interacted with each other. The Parsi community received a large part of its esteem through both its special religion and community features and its western outlook. At the same time, these two identity markers have often excluded each other, particularly in orthodox, conservative Parsi circles. But, this did not have to be the case, for during British colonial rule, Parsis managed to retain their ancient culture and to develop their western business links. In addition to this consideration, a sort of resignation with the community’s faith could be read in this article of *The Washington Times*.

An example of the more positive side of just ‘status’ was a quote from a book review about an autobiographical book written by a Parsi, which appeared in the *New York Times* in 1947: ‘Mr. Karaka (the author) sees all (the events surrounding Independence) and tells most of it, not as a historian or even a journalist, but as a passionate participant in search of his own truth.’¹⁴⁵ Mr. Karaka described in his book his struggle with the issues he was confronted with, when he returned to his old country India. As a young Parsi migrant, totally imbued with the liberalism of the West, he faced his homeland India, which has naturally totally changed in the meantime.

The identity marker ‘the husband of the Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi is a Parsi’, put under the heading ‘ascribed identity’, appears to be a bit strange in this research. Yet, it was widely used in the newspaper articles to describe Feroze Gandhi, the Parsi husband of the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru. This marriage was controversial, for mixed marriages were not a usual practice in India in the 1940s. Therefore, when people thought of Parsis at the time, be it in India or the UK and the US, they would soon make an association with the Parsi Feroze Gandhi. A typical example of this marker was an obituary in the *New York Times*, which appeared after the death of Indira Gandhi in 1984, in which Indira Gandhi herself is quoted: ‘“Nobody wanted that marriage, nobody, (...) the whole of India was against us.”’¹⁴⁶

Perhaps another peculiar identity marker is ‘special cooking’. However, Parsi food or cooking was often mentioned separately from the mainstream Indian kitchen, as a special ‘sub’ kitchen of South-Asia. An example was the ‘Good Food Guide’ which appeared in *The Guardian* in 1984. In this article,

¹⁴⁴ *The Washington Post*, 31-03-1968, 2.

¹⁴⁵ *New York Times*, 13-07-1947, 15.

¹⁴⁶ *New York Times*, 31-10-1984, 9.

an Indian restaurant, 'the Bombay Brasserie' was reviewed: *'The menu distinguished Moghul, tandoori, Punjabi, Goan, and Parsi cooking (..) – Country Captain, chicken and peas in a Parsi-style white stew with cashews and poppy seeds.'*¹⁴⁷ Another typical, more elaborated example of such an article was 'Cooking with the Parsis', which appeared in the *New York Times* in 1978. It told a lot about the ancestry of often used ingredients in the Parsi kitchen and it offered a comprehensible recipe for the typical Parsi food 'dhansak', which was a combination of lentils and rice. According to this article, the hybrid nature of the Parsi kitchen was most special about this kind of cooking: *'Cooking with the Parsis is unique in the sense that it combines Middle-Eastern cooking with Indian spices and herbs providing tastes and flavors very typical of the Indian subcontinent.'*¹⁴⁸

The next question to be asked is, as in the case of the opposition 'before and after Independence': How much do the identity markers actually appear under the headings 'ascribed identity' and 'self-definition' in the whole dataset of newspaper and magazine articles? What is more important in the identity construction of the Parsis: self-definition or the ways they are considered by others? The answer to these questions forms an important part of the answer to my main question. Because, by means of this answer I can say, what explanatory factors were more important in the sudden change in Parsi identity after Independence: Factors within the community such as community disputes, or factors which happened outside the community such as decolonization and the minority position in India and overseas. My expectation is that the ascribed identity markers are more important in the identity construction of the Parsis than the self-definition markers. Since the Parsis were such a small community, they were highly dependent on the majority of the society for their welfare. That would imply that part of the reason for their identity change after 1947 were the enormous transformations in the big non-Parsi world, i.e.: the Partition, decolonization of India, and the reactions of the new host lands, the UK and the US, on the Parsis. But if the identity marker 'religion, community features' is put under the heading 'self-definition', instead of 'ascribed identity' as I did in table 8, the calculations will result in the exact opposite answer: In that case, the self-definition identity markers would be more important.

A preliminary conclusion could be that the 'religion, community features' marker simply very often emerged in the discourse, because it had such an influence on the results of the calculations in table 7 and 8. The great transformations, which took place outside the Parsi community, had consequences for the ways the Parsis were conceived by others, Hindus in India and British or Americans in the diaspora. As said in the introduction, in India they could be viewed as traitors, for they 'collaborated' with the British colonizer.

¹⁴⁷ *The Guardian*, 04-05-1984, 9.

¹⁴⁸ *New York Times*, 08-02-1978, C1.

Table 7. The number of appearances of ascribed identity and self-definition identity markers, with religion, community factors under 'ascribed identity'.

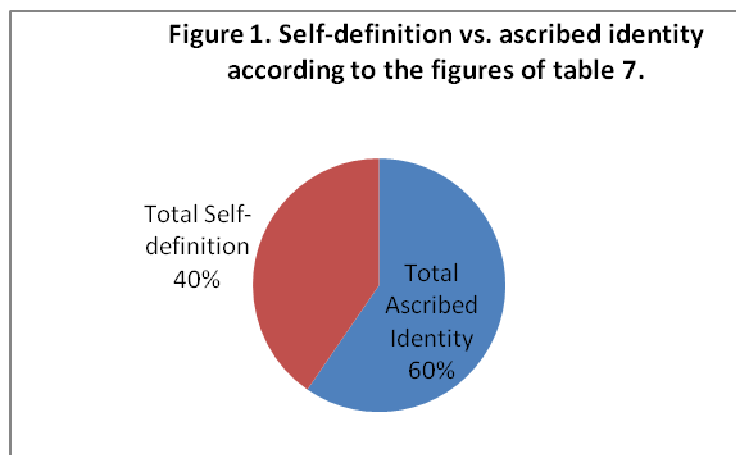
Ascribed identity	N=	% of total
Business men	27	9,4
Non-Hindu minority	41	14,3
Parsi husband	21	7,3
Political/cultural achievements	40	13,9
Cooking	4	1,4
Religion, community features	38	13,2
Total Ascribed Identity	171	59,6
Self-definition		
(Loss of economic) status	21	7,3
Community disputes	15	5,2
Population decline	9	3,1
Bombay	38	13,2
Westernization, Britishness	33	11,5
Total Self-definition	116	40,4
Total both	287	100

Table 8. The number of appearances of ascribed identity and self-definition identity markers, with religion, community factors under 'self-definition'.

Ascribed identity	N=	% of total
Business men	27	9,4
non-Hindu minority	41	14,3
Parsi husband	21	7,3
Political/cultural achievements	40	13,9
Cooking	4	1,4
Total Ascribed Identity	133	46,4
Self-definition		
(Loss of economic) status	21	7,3
Community disputes	15	5,2
Population decline	9	3,1

Bombay	38	13,2
Westernization, education	33	11,5
Religion, community features	38	13,2
Total Self Definition	154	53,7
Total both	287	100

In the diaspora, on the contrary, they could be viewed as the ‘easily’ westernized migrant, who could quickly make a living in a new country of residence. In table 7 and 8, the results of this count are visible. In this table, all figures of the previous opposition ‘before ‘ and ‘after’ are taken together. My first expectation appears to be true: at least in table 7, the ‘ascribed identity’ markers occurred more in all the newspaper and magazine articles in this dataset than the ‘self-definition’ markers. In figure 1, this fact is illustrated.



But if you look at table 8, the totals have been turned upside down. The ascribed identity markers have now approximately 46 per cent of the references and the self-definition markers 54 per cent. If the results are so easily changed by moving only one theme to the other side, does this opposition still have any meaning? Probably only for the obvious ‘self-defined’ and ‘ascribed’ identity markers. Under the heading ‘ascribed identity’, for example, the Parsis being a non-Hindu minority as opposed to a large Hindu majority in India was emphasized. This was also a fact the Parsis themselves were aware of. The identity marker ‘political and cultural achievements’ was often referred to in this opposition under ‘ascribed’, in a similar way as it was under the heading ‘after Independence’ in the ‘before and after Independence’ opposition. Again, Parsis themselves also borrowed a part of their identity from these achievements of their fellow community members. An article of Time Magazine, which appeared in 1966 enumerated a lot of achievements of Parsis, not only in the cultural domain,

but also in the military and business field. A Parsi girl had won the title 'Miss India', while the Parsi Manekshaw had become one of India's military leaders.

*'..the Parsis have traditionally influenced India well out of proportion to their numbers. Prosperous, cosmopolitan, literate, they dominate today the business community of Bombay. Industrialist J.R.D. Tata, whose steel mills constitute India's largest privately owned enterprise, is a Parsi; so are General Sam Hormuzji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw, one of India's top military leaders, and Zubin Mehta, conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. Parsi girls for the last three years have won the title of Miss India.'*¹⁴⁹

As said above, the theme 'religion and community features' was prominently present in this opposition, whether put under 'ascribed' or 'self-defined' identity. In my opinion, this marker was a typical example of one that is both created by the community itself and disseminated by others. In American and British media, these 'religion and community features' were written down by non-Parsis, whereas in the orthodox Parsi magazine 'Dini Avaz' and in the novels, they were described by Parsis themselves. At the 'self-definition' side, the emphasis on Bombay and the westernization of the Parsis was striking. These were features of the discourse that the Parsis themselves really would like other people to know about them. In other words, Parsis would like these markers also to be part of their ascribed identity construction. Bombay used to be a booming, cosmopolitan city, 'the Gate of India' and it was certainly the place where the Parsis reached great heights in business and trade. While postcolonial Mumbai (colonial Bombay) is nowadays maybe not that booming anymore -the new economy of information and communication technology is currently situated in Bangalore in Southern India¹⁵⁰ - the westernization of Parsis could be still an advantage for the Parsis in western countries.

Returning to my first idea on this opposition between ascribed and self-defined identity, which could provide part of the answer to the main question of this research, at the moment I think it will not be that straightforward. After calculating and analysing my division of identity markers between 'ascribed' and 'self-defined', I see that not only the 'religion and community features' marker plays a role in both realms but most of the identity markers do. So, this distinction is important to keep in mind while studying the way identities are constructed. But, in my view, the question must not longer be, either 'self-defined or ascribed identity' themes, but how and where have both of these approaches together played crucial roles in the reconstruction of the identity of the Parsis? That approach is examined in the next paragraphs about the oppositions 'diaspora vs. homeland India' and 'the US vs. the UK'.

¹⁴⁹ *Time Magazine*, 09-11-1966.

¹⁵⁰ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A concise history*, 183.

3.4. *Diaspora versus homeland India after Independence*

The history of the Parsis in the twentieth century is precisely so remarkable because the Parsis had to redefine their identity after decolonization in India, simultaneously in their homeland India and in the diaspora, in this research the US and the UK. Therefore, I separate the identity markers in a 'diaspora' and an 'India' part in this paragraph in order to get a better view at the differences between the identity construction of the Parsis in India and in the new countries of residence. That distinction does not mean that diaspora and the homeland India were not intertwined. In the diaspora, the parameters of Parsi identity have been shaped for the greater part, by the socio-religious distance they have kept from the majority of Hindus and Muslims around them in the homeland India. For a Parsi, distinctive aspects of his or her identity have been regularly reaffirmed by the internal community dynamic. Identity is however, not a static phenomenon, and as such there has occurred a re-shaping of this Parsi self in the diaspora, while the Parsi identity was rooted in India and Persia.¹⁵¹

In this paragraph, I only consult articles from the period after Independence, because from that moment onwards, the 'redefinition' issue becomes really urgent. Before that, Parsis had to negotiate their identity in the British-Indies as well, but they had reached a solid equilibrium in the first half of the twentieth century. In August 1947, however, their worldview and identity were turned totally upside down, all of a sudden, by the rapid transformations brought about by Independence. Because, I mainly use articles from foreign newspapers and a magazine (except for seven articles of the Parsi orthodox magazine 'Dini Avaz'), one would expect that there were only diaspora issues important in the discourse. However, that does not have to be case, since British newspapers were of course interested in the affairs of their former colony, especially in the whereabouts of their former loyal subjects. American newspapers with a 'melting pot' vision of their own country were interested in all 'exotic', new migrant communities. So, these newspapers definitely have made reports about the Parsis of India, not only about those groups who live in their own country.

In the special case of the Parsi orthodox magazine 'Dini Avaz', it was obvious that the writers in this magazine were only concerned about maintaining the pure, unchanged, traditional version of Zoroastrian religion. They searched for all sorts of arguments, such as from the scientific world and from the old Zoroastrian scriptures themselves, to legitimize their claims. These claims were: forbidding intermarriage and conversion, and keep obeying in all circumstances to the old Zoroastrian rituals such as the funeral ritual at the Tower of Silence. In some instances, authors in this magazine even warned against western influences: *'So far as these tend to weaken the ancient*

¹⁵¹ Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 211.

*traditions, beliefs, thoughts and institutions of the Parsees, they evidently injure the soul of our community and endanger its very life.*¹⁵² In the same article a warning against the admittance of non-Parsis to the Zoroastrian faith was given: *“If we have preserved our racial characteristics for 12 centuries whilst living in the midst of other communities enormously greater in number, it is because our instincts have served us aright in tabooing (..) intermixture.”*¹⁵³ The contributions in this magazine were principally directed on the Parsi case in India and were often dealing both directly and indirectly, as in the last example, with population decline in the Parsi community in India. In addition, this sort of orthodox statements has often lead to severe community disputes between reformist and orthodox Parsis.

In table 9, a distinction has been made between the identity markers which belonged in my view more to the Indian situation and those which were more appropriate in the case of the diaspora. It could be argued that the identity markers under the heading ‘diaspora’ also have been playing a role in India itself. That was of course true for the situation before 1947 when the majority of the Parsi population was still living in India. In the second half of the twentieth century, the differences between identity construction in the diaspora and in India became more articulated. The primary reasons for this more obvious articulation were: more Parsi migrants were living in the western countries and the changed situation back in the homeland India. For instance, on the one hand, community disputes could be extremely severe in the new countries of residence, because of the inevitability of intermarriage there, caused by the small size of Parsi communities in diaspora, which made it a difficult task to find a suitable marriage partner.¹⁵⁴

Table 9. Identity markers divided in ‘Diaspora’ and ‘India’.

Diaspora	India
Community disputes	Loss of status
Political and cultural achievements	Trading/business men
Westernization, Britishness	Non-Hindu minority
Cooking	Parsi husband Indira Gandhi
Religious, community features	Bombay
	Population decline.

¹⁵² *Dini Avaz*, 1982, from the website: <http://tenets.zoroastrianism.com>, consulted at 05-04-2012.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁴ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 721.

On the other hand, all communal developments and guidance –also concerning the disagreements between the reformist and orthodox wing- originated (and to some extent still originate) during more than a millennium from India, so India was, is and will be always important in the discourse. The westernization of the Parsis did of course play a role under colonial rule in India. Their Britishness brought the Parsis much esteem, but after Independence in the new India, it became more of a stubborn burden for them. At the start of the twentieth century, Parsis were already accused of being too pro-British, as many of them distanced themselves from the wider Indian population. Something, that was still possible at that time, but after Independence not anymore. With the end of British colonial rule, the identification of the Parsis with India has certainly increased, both politically and culturally. They did appear to stress their Indian identity instead of their Zoroastrian or western nature. Also the westernizing of the Zoroastrian religion in Mumbai (Bombay) has declined, as belief in miracles has become more popular.¹⁵⁵ Hence, the westernization of the Parsis in India was more something of the colonial past than of postcolonial India, although the Parsis never demonstrated to any great extent an intrinsic sense of belonging to the Indian soil.¹⁵⁶ The ‘political and cultural achievements’, which also constituted a crucial identity marker, were happening after Independence predominantly outside of India. Examples of famous Parsis, who achieved exceptional things, were the musicians: Zubin Mehta and Farrokh Bulsara¹⁵⁷ alias Freddy Mercury from Queen.

The two other themes ‘Cooking’ and ‘Religion and community features’ which were put under the heading ‘diaspora’ are of most importance there, because non-Parsis of those countries were increasingly interested in the Zoroastrian religion of the Parsis and all its old rituals and community habits. My expectation is that the diaspora side in this opposition is slightly more important than the India side. According to the literature, the Parsi diaspora will play a leading role in the future of the community and the religion. Especially in the US, the Parsis who lived there, were convinced that a significant part of future Zoroastrian (= including Parsi) history would be in America.¹⁵⁸ The last identity marker, ‘population decline’, put under the heading ‘India’, could naturally also belong to the realm of diaspora, but I think that the danger of dying out was more relevant in India in the postcolonial period. That was obvious from the latest population figures but also from such statements as ‘our future (of the Parsis) will be in America.’ In addition, intermarriage was less accepted in India for Parsis and with a declining population rate, it was still more difficult for Parsis to find a suitable marriage partner in India, which in turn helped to decrease the number of Parsis further. In Bombay for example, intermarriage was a real problem for Parsis, for in this city

¹⁵⁵ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 135-136.

¹⁵⁶ Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 76.

¹⁵⁷ Taraporevala, *Parsis: The Zoroastrians of India*, 20.

¹⁵⁸ Hinnells, *Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 454, 721.

(unofficial) caste prejudice and concern for purity was widespread.¹⁵⁹ All other themes under the heading 'India' could be directly attributed to India, as is the case with 'Bombay', 'Parsi husband Indira Gandhi' and 'non-Hindu' minority. Apart from that, just 'minority' could be a theme for Parsis in the diaspora as well, but it was not as urgent as in India. In addition, 'Loss of status' was at least perceived by Parsis themselves, as most evident in India, since most Parsis, could earn a reasonable living in the diaspora. Lastly, the image of 'business men' came into being in India, with the industrialist businessman Tata as the most famous example.

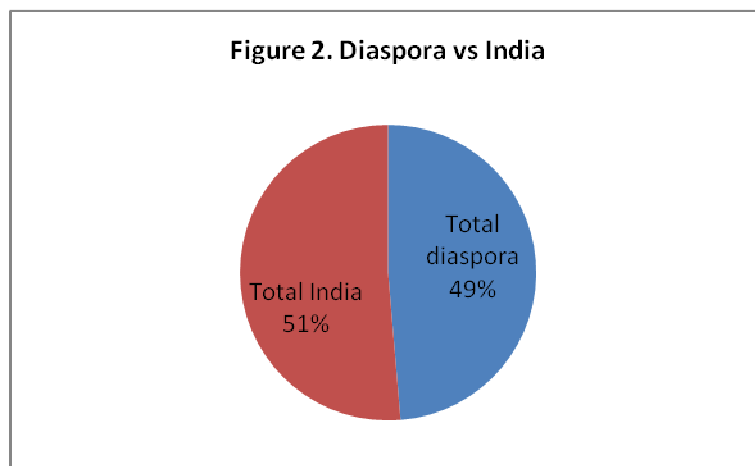
Consequently, the next question, as in the previous analyses of the oppositions is: what has emerged more in this dataset of articles: issues which were important in the diaspora or issues of the homeland India? It appears that my expectation, derived from the literature, is not compatible with the results of the discourse analysis. In table 10 and figure 2 on the next page, the distinction between diaspora and India identity markers is in fact exactly the opposite from my expectation. India was still more important in the postcolonial Parsi discourse than the diaspora. As could be expected from this sample of the period after Independence, the identity markers 'political and cultural achievements' and 'religion/community features' were present in large numbers under the heading 'diaspora'. What did stand out from this opposition in the period after Independence was the large presence of the identity marker 'Westernization, Britishness, literacy' under the heading 'diaspora'. As we saw already in the analysis of the opposition 'before and after Independence', it still remained an important factor in the construction of Parsi identity, even though its importance decreased after Independence.

Table 10. The number of appearance of diaspora and India identity markers.

Diaspora	N	%
Community disputes	13	5,8
Political, and cultural achievements	37	16,5
Westernization, Britishness, literacy	24	10,7
Religion/community features	31	13,8
Cooking/restaurants	4	1,8
Total diaspora	109	48,7
India		
Loss of (economic) status	15	6,7
Trading/Business men (Tata)	21	9,4

¹⁵⁹ Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi*, 184.

non-Hindu minority	21	9,4
Parsi husband of Indira Gandhi	21	9,4
Bombay	28	12,5
Population decline, danger of dying out	9	4,0
Total India	115	51,4
Total	224	100



My explanation of the relatively larger importance of India in the construction of Parsi identity than the diaspora is that, while most Parsis think that their future lies in the diaspora, they have yet still a strong orientation on their homeland India. In table 10, especially the identity marker 'Bombay' stands out under the heading India. Comprehensible, because in India, the Parsis have experienced their most glorious moments in the city of Bombay. Nowadays, the Parsi community council, the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BBP) of Mumbai has still considerable power in the worldwide Zoroastrian community. However, this institution was not authorized to represent the community politically or to make political binding decisions on its behalf. After all, the Parsis were not a homogenous group with uniform political attitudes.¹⁶⁰ Many Parsis were convinced that the new World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO), which had their first meeting in 1980, had to be ruled from India, and that such a world body should be headed by the BBP in Mumbai.¹⁶¹ But the WZO is currently based in London, though three World Zoroastrian Congresses took place in Mumbai, three in Tehran and the seventh one in the American city of Houston in 2000.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 87.

¹⁶¹ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 607, 634.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, 650-651.

Another example of an ambivalent attitude of Parsis towards their heritage was found in the literature on Parsi youth in UK. On the one hand, they expressed less commitment to their faith, but on the other, they were commonly more traditional than their parents, in terms of attitudes to the old country and the place of non-Zoroastrians in the community.¹⁶³ This was again a clear opposition in the Parsi discourse, this time concerning particularly the Parsi youth. At any case, there was a strong interest among Parsi youth in their Indian (and sometimes also Persian) roots, regarding all organized youth congresses, lectures, outings, and travels abroad.¹⁶⁴ This increased activity could also be a sign that the Parsi youth of the UK was reaching a new equilibrium in repositioning their identity, as opposed to their parents. In this new hybrid, Parsi youth identity, there was enough room for different approaches to the common heritage.

3.5. *The United States versus the United Kingdom and the New York Times*

As a last opposition for the discourse analysis in this chapter, the distinction between American and British newspaper articles is discussed. In this discussion, special attention is paid to the New York Times, since most Parsi themes appeared in articles from this newspaper. The periods before and after Indian Independence are taken together in this analysis in order to give an image of, on the one hand, the increase in references in newspaper articles to Parsi themes throughout the colonial and postcolonial period, and on the other, the growing importance of certain Parsi identity markers in the US and the UK in the whole period. From table 11, it is clear that in the United States, a considerable larger amount of newspaper articles contained Parsi-identity markers. In figure 3, this fact is showed more obvious.

Table 11. The number of appearances of Parsi themes in American and British Newspapers.

	Before	After	Total
US	41	166	207
UK	22	42	80

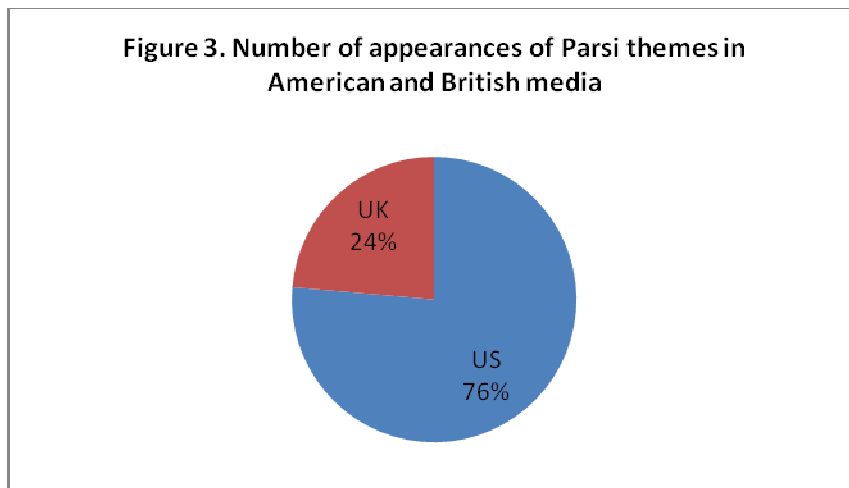
Besides, in both countries the number of Parsi identity markers increased heavily after the decolonization of India. However, in the UK, the number of appearances of Parsi themes after Independence is nearly twice as much, whereas in the United States this number is even four times bigger. What is the reason for this enormous difference? As said in the former paragraph, the former colonizers would have much interest in the vicissitudes of their former colonized, but loyal and

¹⁶³ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 387-388.

¹⁶⁴ Luhrmann, 'The Good Parsi', 351.

westernized Indian group, one would expect. Or on the other hand, it could be argued that the British were so accustomed to the Parsis as an exotic, but cultivated ethnic group, that articles about them would have little news value in the UK. As mentioned in chapter 2, Parsis started to move to the UK at an earlier stage than they started to migrate to the US.

Hence, as stated in the introduction and paragraph 2.2, estimates assume that more Parsis (and other Zoroastrians) live in the UK than in the US. In the UK, approximately 6000-7000 community members would live, whereas between 3000 and 5000 Zoroastrians (including Parsis) would live in the US. But other sources, as mentioned in paragraph 2.2 spoke of 9000 known members of North-American Zoroastrian organisations in the 1990s, or even more than 10.000 Zoroastrians (including Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians) From this reasoning, it follows that the actual number of Parsis living in the US and the UK could not be the reason for the large difference in number of references to the Parsis made in the media of both countries.



Rather, a considerable part of the reason for this distinction in media attention to the case of the Parsis, must lie in their later date of migration to the US and the greater interest of Americans in their 'exotic' heritage and culture. An interesting article in this respect was a report which appeared in 1921 in *The Washington Post* about a Parsi, who was in the United States after a world tour to learn about American working methods and habits in order to transform working methods in Bombay significantly. From the outset, it was obvious in the article that India was the very backward country, which had to look up to the West for guidance. However, in this article, it was not the UK, that had the ideal society, but the US which served as the great example for the Parsi. The Parsi Nusserwanji Sorabji Guzder declared that: *'all the stories told of America, wonderful though they may be, pale into insignificance when America itself is seen with the mortal eye; that 'America'; the*

*youthful, has done more in its short span of one hundred odd years, than all the other nations of the world have done throughout the long, long centuries.*¹⁶⁵

This picture fitted well into other ideas in the literature which Parsis had about the UK. Although, Parsi travellers to the UK around 1900 found much in the country of the colonial ruler that they admired, mainly in the fields of industry and royalty. But there was also much of which they were critical in the UK, such as the dirt and poverty, racial prejudice, and lack of integrity in newspapers, the church, family life and even in parliament.¹⁶⁶ Next to the ideal society, the US was also seen as the ultimate migration country by both American and non-Americans. In the US, a perfect ‘melting pot’ culture could come about, even though this image has changed later to the more complex multicultural ‘salad bowl’.¹⁶⁷

The next question is whether there is much difference between which Parsi identity markers were found most in American articles and which ones in British articles. As can be observed from table 12, large differences occurred between the articles from both Anglo-Saxon countries.

Table 12. The number of appearances of separate Parsi identity markers in American and British articles.

	American articles (N)	%	British articles (N)	%
Loss of (economic) status	16	7,7	3	4,7
Trading/Business men (Tata)	23	11,1	4	6,3
Community disputes (conversion, intermarriage)	8	3,9		
non-Hindu minority	28	13,5	13	20,3
Parsi husband of Indira Gandhi	16	7,7	5	7,8
Political, cultural, military achievements	35	16,9	5	7,8
Bombay	25	12,1	11	17,2
Westernization, Britishness, literacy	17	8,2	15	23,4
Population decline, danger of dying out	8	3,9		
Religion/community features	28	13,5	7	10,9
Cooking/restaurants	3	1,5	1	1,6
Total	207	100	64	100

¹⁶⁵ *The Washington Post*, 14-08-1921, 29.

¹⁶⁶ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 333-334.

¹⁶⁷ More on this subject in: Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream. Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Harvard 2003)

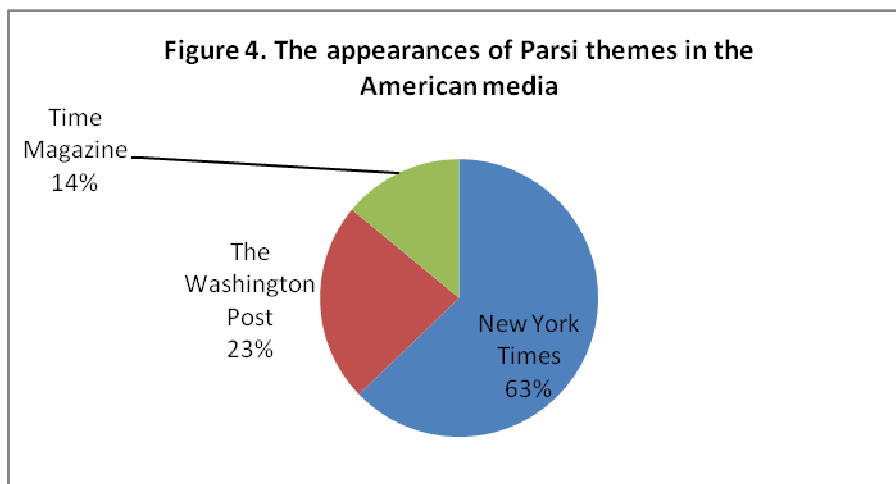
For example, the largest percentage of references to Parsi themes was found on the British side; the identity marker 'westernization, Britishness' emerged most of all in this sample of British and American articles. It was comprehensible, that the (former) colonizer of India referred most often to the Parsis as 'British and Westernized', because that was something recognizable and known from India for the British readers of the newspapers. Apparently, in the US, the Parsis' westernization was not that important as in the UK. In the US, the Parsis were one of a whole range of exotic, religious minorities, which all had their peculiarities. Another identity marker in the British articles, whose percentage was also higher than all identity markers in American articles, was 'non-Hindu minority'. That is imaginable too, for in the years around decolonization, both British people and Indians were concerned about the rights of Indian minorities, such as the Parsis. The British obviously hoped that a strong, united, new Indian nation would develop, but this aim was unfortunately not achieved with regard to the Partition and subsequent unrest in their former colony. Similarly, this identity marker was not that present in the American articles, although, it did play a larger role than the 'westernization' marker.

However, the Parsi theme, which did feature prominently in the American discourse on Parsis was 'political and cultural achievements', with a lot of articles devoted to the conductor Zubin Mehta, seventeen in total. In British articles, the number of references to this theme was far less. The fact, that the reports of these achievements mostly appeared in the US, showed that they were crucial in the identity construction of the Parsis there. It also served as a counterbalance for the perceived loss of status by Parsis in the homeland India and the severe self-criticism that was present in the entire world-wide Parsi community.

But also the 'non-Hindu minority' theme, even though it had a substantial lower percentage than in the British discourse, was together with 'religion and community features' an important element in the American discourse on Parsis. Because of the many different migrant groups in the American context, there was probably more concern for the rights of minorities in the US. The features of the ancient religion and culture of the Parsis had to be explained more often to the American readers than to the British readers, because they were not acquainted with the Parsis as some British already were for a long time. Therefore, the identity marker 'religion and community features' was substantially present. The fact, that was as striking as in the first opposition of this analysis between 'before' and 'after Independence' was the almost absence of the identity marker: 'population decline'. In British articles, it was not present at all, and in American reports, it appeared in merely 3,9 per cent of all references. Part of the reason for this modest presence was the relative unimportance of this subject in the diaspora countries, because of the supposed growth of the Parsi

community there, especially in the US. This population growth was at least actually happening according to the reformists, who also count converts as 'real' Parsis.

Of all the newspapers and magazines in the dataset of this analysis, the *New York Times* contained by far most references to Parsi identity markers. In figure 4, it is visible how the number of appearances of Parsi themes in the *New York Times* is related to the other American media in this study. Why did this particular American newspaper contain so many contributions about Parsis? Which identity markers were predominantly in the discourse on Parsis in the *New York Times*? The *New York Times* is in general described as a liberal newspaper, as opposed to the more conservative other newspaper in this research *The Washington Post*.¹⁶⁸ This difference in political stance provided part of the answer to the question of the many references to Parsis in the *New York Times*. But also the fact that the *New York Times* began to increase its volume and reach after World War II, as many newspapers did¹⁶⁹, would have contributed to the rise of appearances of Parsi themes in the newspaper from the 'Big Apple'. If the newspaper is larger, the chance that Parsis will emerge in it is bigger. *Time Magazine* is a weekly which has six to seven times less released issues a week than the newspapers in this dataset. All newspapers in this study appeared on a daily basis.



As can be seen in figure 4, the *New York Times* had 63 per cent of all references to Parsi themes in both periods, before and after Independence, whereas *The Washington Post* had only 23 per cent and *Time Magazine* only 14 per cent. What were the Parsi identity markers which were most dominant in the *New York Times*? Like the figures for all American articles, in table 13 about the number of appearances of Parsi identity markers in the *New York Times*, the marker 'political, cultural and military achievements' had the highest score.

¹⁶⁸ For example in this article on the BBC-news website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3816021.stm>, consulted at 08-03-2012.

¹⁶⁹ David Randall Davies, *The postwar decline of American newspapers, 1945-1965* (Westport 2006) 93.

Table 13. The number of appearances of Parsi identity markers in the New York Times.

<i>The New York Times</i>	N	%
Loss of (economic) status	10	7,7
Trading/Business men (Tata)	15	11,5
Community disputes (conversion, intermarriage)	5	3,9
non-Hindu minority	19	14,6
Parsi husband of Indira Gandhi	11	8,5
Political, cultural, military achievements	25	19,2
Bombay	15	11,5
Westernization, Britishness, literacy	9	6,9
Population decline, danger of dying out	4	3,1
Religion/community features	15	11,5
Cooking/restaurants	2	1,5
Total	130	100

Another thought about the reasons for this predominance of Parsi achievements in the American discourse was the ‘self-made man’ mentality in the US.¹⁷⁰ The idea of the ‘nation of unlimited possibilities’ was connected to this mentality. Other markers which were also important in all American articles were ‘religion and community features’ and the ‘non-Hindu minority’ which I had already explained in the analysis of the previous table on all American articles. A marker which appeared slightly more often in the *New York Times* than in the already analysed sample on all American media (vs. British media), was the theme ‘trading/business men’. But the difference in appearance of this theme between British and American media was more spectacular: 6,3% vs. 11.1%. In my opinion, this fact was connected to the image of New York (and the US as a whole) as the city of trade, business and an influential stock exchange in the world economy. In the following fragment of an article which appeared in the *New York Times* in 1957, both a ‘self-made man’ mentality and the ‘trading/business’ image came to the fore. It was about the new built city of Jamshedpur in India, which was built and owned by the Tata family:

Jamshedpur is the heart of the industrial empire of the Tata family, a family that built up the largest single collection of enterprises in the country. Tata Industries Private, Ltd now has a financial investment of \$ 310,800,000, 116,500 employees and a reputation of a public-minded outfit in a country where the word

¹⁷⁰ Mary Beth Norton (et.al.), *A People and a Nation. Volume I: A history of the United States: To 1877* (Boston 2008) 112.

*'capitalist' usually has ugly overtones. Also it has an annual output of goods and services valued at \$ 134,000,000 and a network of companies upon which a considerable part of India's future depends.*¹⁷¹

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, the Parsi themes which emerged in the articles of British and American media have been analysed in four different oppositions. These articles were taken together with a number of pieces of one Parsi medium, the orthodox magazine 'Dini Avaz'. The oppositions were 'Before and After Independence', 'Ascribed identity vs. Self-definition', 'Diaspora vs. Homeland India' and the 'the United States vs. the United Kingdom'. In the description of the last opposition of this row, special attention was paid to the American newspaper *New York Times*.

The Parsi identity marker 'non-Hindu minority' was very prominent in three of these oppositions. This prominence indicated the strong importance of the Parsis being a very small minority in India in their identity construction. It emerged by far under the heading 'before' in the opposition 'before and after Independence', which pointed to a general concern about the future of the Parsis as a non-Hindu minority in the new, independent India. In the opposition 'ascribed identity vs. self-definition', the 'non-Hindu minority' was again the strongest identity marker. Though, it was initially placed under the heading 'ascribed identity', this opposition turned out to have not much meaning in general. The reason was the heavy interaction and overlap between ascribed and self-defined identity markers. Basically, most of all identity markers in this discourse analysis can count as both self-defined and ascribed. Therefore, I leave this opposition of 'ascribed vs. self-defined identity' out in the remainder of this concluding paragraph.

In the opposition 'United States vs. United Kingdom', 'non-Hindu minority' was not the strongest identity marker, but the second under the heading: 'the UK'. So, the 'non-Hindu minority' theme especially constituted a strong part of the Parsi identity before Independence. It was mainly present in the British context, for the former colonizer was obviously more concerned about the faith of his former loyal, colonial elite in the new Independent India than the American authorities. However, as a 'normal' ethnic minority, their rights must be respected in the American context.

The Parsi-identity marker 'political and cultural achievements' was omnipresent in the opposition of 'before and after Independence' under the heading 'after Independence'. Besides that, this marker was omnipresent in the oppositions 'diaspora vs. homeland' and 'the US vs. the UK' respectively under the headings 'diaspora' and the 'US'. So, political and cultural achievements formed a crucial part of the Parsi identity construction. Specifically, these achievements were important after

¹⁷¹ *New York Times*, 21-11-1957, 59.

Independence in the diasporic, American context. This fact could be explained as a sort of counterbalance to the supposedly loss of status experienced by the Parsis in India. Furthermore, it was a reflection of the well-known 'self-made-man' mentality in America, the 'country of unlimited possibilities'.

The 'westernization, Britishness, literacy' identity marker is a typical feature of the Parsis, for which they were praised and reviled. This identity marker showed remarkable constancy through time. It was one of the most essential identity markers of the Parsis before the Independence of India, and it remained important after decolonization as well. Likewise, in the opposition 'diaspora vs. homeland', this 'westernization'-theme showed a large percentage of the number of references under the heading 'diaspora'. The number of appearances in the British newspapers as opposed to the American ones stood out. In that opposition between the UK and the US, the 'westernization' identity marker had the highest percentage of the whole sample under the British heading, which this marker did not have in the samples of the other oppositions. Therefore, Westernization formed a continual factor in the identity of the Parsis, both before and after Independence. It was part of their self-definition, especially in the Parsi diaspora of the UK. This fact had much to do with the colonial heritage of the Parsis. To some extent, they were still recognized in the UK as the former loyal ally of the colonial era in the British-Indies, although they were themselves part of the colonized people. Yet, the Parsis did leave a strong impression by the British, which definitely helped them to build up a life in the UK.

This 'westernization' identity marker stood in a clear opposition against the 'religion/community features' marker. Yet, these two phenomena were both prominently present in the discourse, although the second one not as much as the first identity marker. For some orthodox Parsis, it remained difficult to unite 'modern western ideas' with the 'old cultural and religious customs'. However, most other Parsis succeeded in this unification between their own traditions and those of the authorities, from their early settlement at the western Indian coast and the British colonial period until the contemporary period. They did not only succeed in this unifying endeavour in the Indian context but also in the new countries of residence, the UK and the US. Most problems surrounding the supposed opposition: 'westernization' vs. 'religion/community features' occurred within the community between the orthodox and reformist wing. Orthodox Parsis wanted to obey to the strict ancient habits and rules, while that was not always possible in a modern world. However, these community disputes did not figure prominently in the above analysed discourse, because that would indicate division within the already small community. That would not be the right image if the Parsi community would want to survive as a group in the future.

Whereas several sources said that the future of the Parsis would be for the greater part in the diaspora, perhaps mainly in the United States, the sample on the opposition between diaspora and India showed that India was still more important than the diaspora in the identity of the Parsis, according to the newspaper articles. This seemed contradictory, but it was maybe a new way of dealing with the ancient heritage in a modern, yet responsible and respectable way. The Parsi youth of London showed already that less interest in the religion did not necessarily mean no interest at all in the ancient heritage. Like all the oppositions used in this chapter to analyse the Parsi discourse, the prominence of one of the two phenomena did not necessarily exclude the other. The idea of an interacting equilibrium, that in some instances tended more to the one side and in other situations more to the other, was a better image of the actual situation. In this reasoning, none of the features of the Parsi culture, which could be important for its members, had to be excluded.

4. Literary analysis of the books.

4.1. Introduction and summaries of the novels

The Parsi novels in this study were part of the larger corpus of Anglophone Indian novels. This was a rather diverse genre, in which nevertheless certain dominant trends and shared concerns were discernible. The Anglophone Indian novels were preoccupied with both history and nation as these came together to shape 'the idea of a united India'. English as an alien language in India was not connected to any specific region of the subcontinent. Because of that, it also could be easily considered pan-Indian.¹⁷² The reason for this is that English was spoken everywhere in India, it was not confined to a specific region like other Indian languages. The Indian novels, which were written in English contributed to a feeling of Indianness which was substantially the product of an alien arrangement, the British Rule or *Raj* and the accompanying English language.¹⁷³

Nilufer E. Barucha had said in an article about Rohinton Mistry's novels, from which two were analysed in this chapter, that they revealed how Parsis were learning to cope with the reality of post-colonial India and how they were coming to terms with their new lives in the West.¹⁷⁴ Since this particular 'revelation' of Barucha was an exact description of the dual dimension of my research question; i.e. the double redefinition of Parsi identity in India as well as in the new countries of residence, the use of novels as a historical source in this research was even more justified. As said already a couple of times in this research, Parsi writers were well aware of the threat of their small community dying out. Therefore, they hoped to maintain their distinct identity and culture by means of literary texts. That is why Parsi literature had the clear stamp of both 'the last witness' syndrome and of minority discourse.¹⁷⁵ Parsi fiction contained the following qualities at any case: First, the inclusion of Parsi religious rituals and functions, including superstitions, which they had retained so far against all odds. Secondly, the sense of honour as well as insult Parsis had, for being treated as the 'other' non-Hindu minority in contemporary India. And lastly, the hopes and aspirations Parsis had, along with their attempts to retain the glory that they had once received.¹⁷⁶

Bapsi Sidhwa, the author of the two other novels which were analysed in this chapter, had sketched the added value of fiction beyond historical narratives in an interview about her book *Ice-Candy-Man*: 'Historians are often guided by their own and their nation's prejudices. Fiction-writers can paint

¹⁷² Priyamvada Gopal, *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration* (Oxford 2009) 5.

¹⁷³ Writer, *Contemporary Zoroastrians*, 75.

¹⁷⁴ Nilufer E. Barucha, "When old Tracks are Lost": Rohinton Mistry's Fiction as Diasporic Discourse', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* vol.30 no. 57 (1995) 59.

¹⁷⁵ Barucha, 'The earth is not flat', 185.

¹⁷⁶ Haldar, *Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey*, 102-103.

*a fuller canvas and often intuitively arrive at the larger truth. Now, I am Parsi, not Hindu, Muslim or Sikh and I wrote from a Parsi child's perspective, because I felt it could bring some sort of fairness on the issue of Partition which still raises strong emotions involving religious communities.*¹⁷⁷ From this quote it becomes clear that Sidhwa saw the added value of fictional novels as a historical source, instead of more conventional historical sources like parliamentary reports.

In the following chapter, I start with giving summaries of the four novels which are analysed in the literary analysis. Then, in the remainder of this chapter, I concentrate for the analysis on a couple of themes, which were also used in the discourse analysis. The focus is on the ways in which they are emerging in the novels. These include: Firstly, the Westernization and Britishness of the Parsis and their being a former colonial elite. This theme was connected to the above stated quality of Parsi fiction, in particular the attempts of Parsis to retain their former glory. The emphasis of this theme on western modernity could come in conflict with traditional Parsi customs. The second theme is the (non-Hindu) minority discourse and this is connected to the treatment of Parsis as being one of the 'other' groups in the Indian society as opposed to the Hindu majority. The third theme is the various particular religious and communal features of the Parsis. The last theme, the use of magic, is connected to the third theme; the features of the Parsi religion and community.

The first novel of Bapsi Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, centred on the main character of Fareedoon Junglewalla and his family, who were living in Lahore at the start of the twentieth century. At the end of his life, Fareedoon was a wealthy and wise man. However, earlier in his life, things went not that smoothly. He experienced a lot of problems and conflicts with his mother-in-law Jerbanoo and his shop was not profitable. In the end, he sets his own house on fire in order to benefit through insurance. The insurance in India was in its infancy at the time.¹⁷⁸ No one found out what he had really done, he was even awarded a medal for his gallant part in the rescue of his mother-in-law, who was still in the house during the fire.¹⁷⁹ As told in the novel: '*Freddy would grow into a gracious and kindly looking old man, and no one would know how diabolically wily unscrupulous and false he really was*'.¹⁸⁰ In addition, one of Fareedoon's sons is dying during the story, which was predicted by *Janam Patris*, birth leaves, which were used as a type of (magical) horoscope.¹⁸¹ Finding the right marriage partners for his children from within the Parsi community was essential for Fareedoon. When his son Yazdi told his father that he wanted to marry an Anglo-Indian girl, he was not amused. The arranged

¹⁷⁷ Isabella Brushi, 'Making up with Painful History. The Partition of India in Bapsi Sidhwa's work', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* vol.43. no.141 (2008) 143.

¹⁷⁸ Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 72.

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem, 87.

¹⁸⁰ Ibidem, 98.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem, 153.

marriage of his other son Billy with Tanya was indeed satisfactorily for Faredoon. At the end of the story, Faredoon took his mother-in-law Jerbanoo and his wife Putli for a holiday to England for six months. However, this trip turned out to be a disappointment. The fantasies Putli and Jerbanoo had about the land of their rulers, were not true.¹⁸²

The other novel of Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-candy-man*, (of *Cracking India*) centred on the child-perspective of Lenny, who experienced with her Parsi family in Lahore all horrible events surrounding decolonization and the partition of India. The author herself says in an interview about this special perspective:

*'Lenny has a shifting perspective, she is a child of seven or eight, yet her voice is sometimes that of an adolescent or even of an adult, so all these complex aspects of her character come into play. Of course choosing a girl-child narrator was crucial. A child is allowed to be bewildered and not always accurate. Children have not learnt to look at reality through the lenses of prejudice yet; they have not learnt to hate people and hate communities; they are taught that as they grow up. Children are still innocent.'*¹⁸³

Lenny had to cope with 'polio', and she was very devoted to her caregiver or *ayah* Shanta. This was an autobiographical aspect of the book, for Bapsi Sidhwa herself had polio as a child and spent a lot of time with the servants of her family. As most Parsis, she did not have an extended family but a nuclear family, so she was a bit isolated, for she could not go to school because of her disease.¹⁸⁴

Lenny frequently met *Ice-Candy-Man*, to which the title of the book refers, in the park. *Ice-Candy-Man* was selling his popsicles to the people who were lounging on the grass.¹⁸⁵ She heard the adults talking about things going on in the towns: Sly killing, rioting and baton charges by the police, long marches by mobs, Hindu-Muslim trouble and Sikh-Muslim trouble.¹⁸⁶ Then, she began to notice herself that things had changed: *'And I become aware of religious differences. It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves- and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols.'*¹⁸⁷ And later, she began to understand that she did not belong to India anymore: *'I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that. A new nation is born. India has been divided after*

¹⁸² Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 233-235.

¹⁸³ Brushi, 'Making up with Painful History', 145.

¹⁸⁴ http://www.monsoonmag.com/interviews/i3inter_sidhwa.html, consulted at 02-04-2012.

¹⁸⁵ Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, 18

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, 56.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 93.

all.¹⁸⁸ One day, Muslim men came looking for remaining Hindus in Lahore. Ayah was a Hindu and she was still at the house of Lenny's family. Lenny made a slip of the tongue, which resulted in her ayah being kidnapped. They found out that she had become a dancing girl 'in the poisonous atmosphere of the district of the Kotha'¹⁸⁹, which was a sort of red-light-district. Subsequently, Ayah was married to *Ice-Candy-Man*. At the end of the story, *Ice-Candy Man* has been beaten up and Ayah went back to her family in the Indian region Amritsar.

The first book of Rohinton Mistry, *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag*, was a collection of short stories around the residents of the Parsi housing complex of Firozsha Baag. These short stories displayed in various ways identity-forming elements of Parsiness according to Nilufer E. Barucha, which I also mentioned with regard to the double repositioning of the identity of the Parsis in both India and the diaspora. These elements were: the Zoroastrian faith, a shared history of flight from Iran and refuge in India, a colonial elite consciousness and feeling of unease in decolonized India.¹⁹⁰ This last element was important in the first story about Rustomji and his wife Mehroo. Rustomji had to go to the fire temple by bus, and tobacco juice from someone's mouth who was sitting upstairs in the bus, leaked on Rustomji's white *dugli*. A *dugli* was a typical male Parsi suit. Rustomji became really angry with the people in the bus who were laughing at him and they began to fight. Suddenly, all anger was forgotten and he feared for his person against such an overwhelming majority. He dislodged the dentures of his mouth, and said: 'Look such an old man, no teeth even.'¹⁹¹ Rustomji's anger changed all of sudden in acquiescence and a request for compassion in this fragment. His initial reaction could be considered as 'colonial'. How could those natives dare to spill something on his costume? His subsequent request for compassion could be regarded as postcolonial and typical for his minority position as a Parsi against the Hindu majority. Furthermore, the whole situation could be illustrative for the reversal of colonial values which took place in the identity of the Parsis.

The reconstruction of Parsi identity in the new countries of residence was addressed in the story 'Lend me your Light'. This story was centred on the main character Kersi, his brother Percy, and Jamshed, a friend of Percy. Jamshed has migrated to the United States. Kersi was about to migrate to Canada and Percy eventually decided to move to the Indian countryside to help poor villagers. Jamshed and Percy called the immigrants in Bombay '*ghatis*'. *Ghatis* simply meant anyone who left the western *ghats*, or Western Indian plains, in search for a better life in the big city. But the word had various negative connotations, such as uncultured and uncivilized, which made its use an

¹⁸⁸ Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man* 140.

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem, 247, 250.

¹⁹⁰ Barucha, 'When Old Tracks are lost', 59.

¹⁹¹ Mistry, *Swimming Lessons*, 18.

insult.¹⁹² Jamshed and Percy believed that these *ghatis* were inundating Bombay, and they denounced them for the deterioration of the quality of life in the city.¹⁹³ When Kersi had arrived in Toronto, he once went to Little India there. But it was not a pleasant visit for him: '*..on that occasion I fled the place in a very short time, feeling extremely ill at ease and ashamed, wondering why all this did not make me feel homesick or at least a little nostalgic.*'¹⁹⁴ Perhaps, the district of Little India was too 'Indian' for Kersi. His identity as a Parsi was more of a mix between Western habits and Indian and Zoroastrian habits, than only purely Indian ones. Kersi became a member of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario. Yet, however he returned to Bombay in the end. The trip '*was not turning out to be anything I'd hoped it would.*'¹⁹⁵

The last, title story in the collection, 'Swimming Lessons', was an interesting one, because of both negative experiences of Parsi immigrants in the new countries of residence and autobiographical references. Kersi, also the main character of the story 'Lend me your Light', was taking swimming lessons in Canada. On the first day of his swimming lessons, three white Canadian boys emerged from the pool and directed discriminatory comments at Kersi: '*One of them holds his nose. The second begins to hum, under his breath: Paki, Paki, smell like curry. The third says to the first two: pretty soon all the water's going to taste of curry.*'¹⁹⁶ 'Paki' which was short for 'Pakistani' was a racist term that referred to immigrants from the Indian subcontinent. Although Parsis claimed racial and cultural kinship to whites, they were also sometimes facing discrimination when being called 'pakis'.¹⁹⁷ This was tartly the same kind of discrimination Parsis employed themselves when they call immigrants in Bombay 'ghatis'. This reverse of the same kind of rhetoric looked similar to the reverse of colonial values as explained in the theoretical framework. In that instance, however Parsis were agents in the inversion, when they began to call themselves weak and effeminate. In the above example, on the contrary, they were the victims of the discriminating effects of the reverse of colonial values.

The second novel of Rohinton Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, was about Gustad Noble and his family, who were living in the Parsi building complex Khodadad in Bombay. A lot of characters were introduced at the beginning of the story, but the main story line revolved around Gustad Noble and

¹⁹² <http://asuph.wordpress.com/category/marathi/> under the heading 'Just Blogging, (Sept 27, 05) consulted on 01-04-2012.

¹⁹³ Bindu Malieckal, 'Parsis, Emigration, and Immigration in Rohinton Mistry's *Swimming Lessons and other stories from Firozhsa Baag*', *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature* vol.42 no. 4 (2006) 363.

¹⁹⁴ Mistry, *Swimming Lessons*, 182.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, 189.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 238.

¹⁹⁷ Malieckal, 'Parsis, Emigration', 378.

his old friend Jimmy Bilimoria, who used to be a resident in Khodadad too. Bilimoria was getting into trouble when he was called by the Prime minister Indira Gandhi to join the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), a kind of intelligence service. He thought that was a good move but soon it turned out that Indira Gandhi was using the RAW like her own private agency: *'Spying on opposition parties, ministers...anyone. For blackmail. Made me sick. Even spying on her own cabinet.(..) RAW kept dossiers. On her friends and enemies. [...]Her friends become enemies and her enemies become friends...so quickly.'*¹⁹⁸

Bilimoria was put in charge of the guerilla movement Mukti Bahini in East Pakistan by the Prime Minister herself. The historical background of this novel was the separation of East-Pakistan of mainland India and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh. Bilimoria needed money to set up this movement. He made a deal with Indira Gandhi, and then she let him walk into a trap. He had even written down that he would say to potential police investigators, that he imitated Indira Gandhi's voice in a phone call to the bank. The money seemed to have never arrived at Bilimoria's bank account. The money was intercepted by the Prime Minister's office, and rerouted to another private account.¹⁹⁹ Then, Jimmy realized that the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi controlled everything; courts, broadcasting, RAW. As a kind of revenge, he decided to divide ten lakh among his friends in Bombay.²⁰⁰ Therefore, Bilimoria's friend Gustad Noble had to go to a mysterious looking man to collect the money. Meanwhile, Bilimoria was arrested and sent to prison. In the end, Jimmy Bilimoria died of a heart attack.

The character of Bilimoria was similar to the real Parsi Nagarwala, who experienced similar things at Indira Gandhi's secret agency. The Nagarwala incident caused heavy self-criticism in the Parsi community. Through a realistic portrayal of what happened at the time, the author Rohinton Mistry attempted to restore the honour of the Parsi community. So, this author did not only try to maintain Parsi culture through his writing, he also heavily criticized the postcolonial government of Indira Gandhi by means of his fiction.²⁰¹ He did not only do that by giving a lot of attention to the Nagarwala incident, but also by letting characters make critical remarks once in a while about Indira Gandhi's policy. For example, when Gustad's friend Dinshawji was referring back to a time when *'Parsis were the kings of banking (..) Such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalized the banks.'*²⁰² Many Indian banks used to be owned by the

¹⁹⁸ Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, 270.

¹⁹⁹ Ibidem, 278.

²⁰⁰ Ibidem, 279.

²⁰¹ Halder, *Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey*, 14, 16.

²⁰² Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, 38.

Parsis. Nationalization meant a huge transformation for them. And not only banks were nationalized, also private Indian airlines, from which some were established by the influential Parsi Tata, underwent the same fate. This 'nationalization' tendency reduced the employment opportunities for Parsis.²⁰³ And Dinshawji went further: '*Remember when her pappy was Prime Minister and he made her president of Congress Party? At once she began encouraging the demands for a separate Maharastra. How much bloodshed, how much rioting she caused.*'²⁰⁴

A lot of other storylines were enacted in *Such a Long Journey*. Gustad Noble's son Sohrab, for example, did not want to go to the Indian Institute for Technology (IIT) anymore, whereas his father had written to so many Parsi funds in order to have enough money to pay Sohrab's training. These funds included Parsi Punchayet Education Fund, R.D. Setna Trust, Tata Scholarships and Wadia Charities for Higher Studies, and they illustrated the fact that Parsis had a large network of charities that aided both the Parsi and the wider Indian community.²⁰⁵ It also reminded of the religious obligation of every Parsi to reserve a part of his income for charity goals. Another storyline revolved around Miss Kutpitia, the only Parsi in Khodadad who had a telephone. She was a strange woman who performed magic at a large scale. Despite Miss Kutpitia's strangeness, Gustad Noble's wife Dilnavaz often asked her for magical help, for instance to cure her daughter Roshan. Dinshawji, a friend of Gustad Noble was another important character, since he was making most criticisms on Indira Gandhi and her administration in the novel. When Dinshawji passed away, Gustad was very sad. In short, the inhabitants of the Khodadad building in *Such a Long Journey* were representatives of a cross-section of middle-class Parsis, who expressed the anxieties of a minority in multi-racial India, as well as the age-old superstitions and customs, that they still had, and that alienated them from mainstream India in the postcolonial period.²⁰⁶

4.2. *The Westernization and Britishness of the Parsis*

During British colonial rule, the Parsis were the first Indian minority, who learned the English language. The rise of Parsi fiction was a direct consequence of their English language education at such an early stage.²⁰⁷ Off course, other factors were also important in the explanation of the rise of Parsi fiction, but their early English education gave the Parsis a lead before other Indian writers. Is the Britishness and westernization of the Parsis clearly reflected in the novels too? After a first read

²⁰³ Barucha, 'The earth is not flat', 185.

²⁰⁴ Ibidem, 39.

²⁰⁵ Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, 81; Hinnells and Williams, *Parsis in India*, 86.

²⁰⁶ Haldar, *Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey*, 10.

²⁰⁷ Ibidem, 102.

of the novels of Sidhwa and Mistry, I think this theme was not that prominently present. The themes of 'religion and community features' and especially 'magic' emerged more at the forefront at first sight, but I elaborate on that in the paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5. An example of the Westernization theme was found in the first chapter of *The Crow Eaters*. The main character Faredoon Junglewalla referred to his community as '*Next to the nawabs, rajas and princelings, we are the greatest toadies of the British Empire.*'²⁰⁸ Their being 'toady' fitted in the image of the Parsis as being loyal to the authorities of that time, who were British in the period in which this story was enacted. In the whole subsequent story, the western nature of the Parsis only emerged at the very end again, when Faredoon's son Billy was married to Tanya. Tanya and Billy were very modern Parsis in comparison to Billy's father, who was against the marriage of his other son Yazdi with an Anglo-Indian girl. That is the reason why, '*Tanya and Billy were utterly ashamed of traditional habits and considered British customs, however superficially observed, however trivial, exemplary.*'²⁰⁹ The westernization was also touched upon when the natives were contrasted with the Parsis themselves: '*Now take you and me: one leg in India and one in England. We are citizens of the world.*'²¹⁰ What was striking for me in this quote, was the unproblematic, hybrid identity of the Parsis. Apparently, it was not that bad to have both Western habits and 'Eastern' habits for the characters in these fragments.

These were the only three quotes, I could find in the whole story, which attested of the Westernization and Britishness of the Parsis. Why was this theme represented in such a meagre way? I think it was partly a matter of the early period, around 1900, in which the events were enacted and the type of story Sidhwa told. In fact, the story belonged to the genre of the realistic novel, which could have autobiographical references. In the Caribbean autobiography for instance, cultural identity got the status of construction in process. The subject in this genre was a 'not yet in existence' person.²¹¹ I think that was the case for the novel *The Crow Eaters* too. Faredoon Junglewalla built up his complex identity in the course of the story. The author did not find the westernization theme important enough to dedicate much room in her writing to it. Western habits in general were naturally well-known among Sidhwa's western readers' audience. The peculiarities of the Parsi community and religion on the contrary, were more interesting for the audience to read about.

In the other book, written by Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, the Westernized Parsi identity theme did not figure prominently either. But it came to the fore in the description of Lenny's brother Adi, who

²⁰⁸ Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 14.

²⁰⁹ Ibidem, 227.

²¹⁰ Ibidem, 207

²¹¹ Uldrik Speerstra, *Representaties van culturele identiteit in migrantenliteratuur. De Indiase diaspora als case studie* (Leiderdorp 2001) 46, 63.

had *'less pigment (colour) and looks like an English child.'*²¹² For all Parsis, it was an ideal to have children with skin as light as possible. They would very like to have daughters and sons who resembled English children and not Indian little ones. Parsis also used these colour criteria to judge each other²¹³, which was clear from the story 'The ghost of Firozsha Baag' in the collection *Swimming Lessons and other stories from Firozsha Baag*, written by Rohinton Mistry. The maid Jacqueline talked in this story about the importance of race for Parsis: *'For themselves also Parsis like light skin, and when a Parsi baby is born that is the first thing and most important thing. If it is fair they say, O how nice light skin just like parents. But if it is dark skin they say, arré what is this ayah no chokro, ayah's child (maid's child).'*²¹⁴ I come back to Rohinton Mistry's book about Firozsha Baag later.

In the novel *Ice-Candy-Man*, the Westernization identity theme emerged during a community gathering of Parsis living in Lahore, which was held just before the unrest surrounding decolonization and partition broke out. First, one of the Parsis commented on the issue about who would get power after Independence. From this quote, it appeared that Parsis were well aware of their position and how they were looked upon by the Hindus: *'I don't see how we can remain uninvolved. Our neighbours will think we are betraying them and siding with the English.'*²¹⁵

It also seemed that their old tactic of non-political engagement would no longer be accepted by the other Indians. But another Parsi had a different opinion: *'If we must pack off, let's go to London at least. We are the English king's subjects aren't we? So we are English!'*²¹⁶ Not anyone of the community thought of leaving for the UK as a good alternative: *'as long as we conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present no threat to anybody, we will prosper right here.'* In this comment, the loyalty to the authorities the Parsis always had, was heard. This was also mentioned in an English saying, the president of the Parsi community of Lahore used in his speech to the community. It is the last sentence in the following fragment: *'We must tread carefully...We have served the English faithfully, and earned their trust...So we have prospered! But we are the smallest minority in India. Only one hundred and twenty thousand in the whole world. We have to be extra wary, (...) we must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare!'*²¹⁷ I have chosen this saying as a title for the whole thesis because in my view, it symbolised well the difficult position of the Parsis in foreign environments, in the past in India, and in contemporary times in the UK and the US.

²¹² Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, 25.

²¹³ Malieckal, 'Parsis, Emigration', 375.

²¹⁴ Mistry, *Swimming Lessons*, 46.

²¹⁵ Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, 37.

²¹⁶ Ibidem, 40

²¹⁷ Ibidem, 16

However, at the particular moment in time this fragment appeared, just before Independence in August 1947, it remained to be seen whether the Parsis could stick to their old habit of being loyal to the authorities in the new, Independent India. One Parsi banker added some reservations to this general position among Parsis: *'But don't try to prosper immoderately. And, remember: don't ever try to exercise real power.'*²¹⁸ Another last quote of Lenny's mother showed the Western nature of the Parsis of Lahore: *'I've to buy the children's clothes for Christmas and New Year. (Christmas, Easter, Eid, Divali. We celebrate them all)'*²¹⁹ Between brackets the voice of Lenny was heard in this fragment. Just like *The Crow Eaters*, *Ice-Candy-Man* did not contain a lot of western utterances and fragments. The reason was similar to that one I already gave in the case of the meagre presence of the westernization in the other novel of Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*. Furthermore, *Ice-Candy-Man* had a lot more autobiographical features, because so many events in the book were similar to the ones the author experienced herself during her youth.

In the book *Swimming Lessons and other stories from Firozsha Baag*, written by Rohinton Mistry and set in an earlier timespan than *Such a Long Journey*, again not that much examples of the Westernization theme could be mentioned. The stories were enacted in the 1950s, in a period when the British colonial rule was still a fresh memory. As opposed to the mainstream Indians, a lot of Parsis did not mind a return of colonialism, which was clear from the following fragment of the first story of Mistry's book: *'The one change wrought by the passing years was that Johnnie Walker Scotch, freely available under the British, could now be obtained only on the black market and was responsible for Rustomji's continuing grief over the British departure.'*²²⁰ This preference for British liquor was a typical example of the attachment of the Parsis to British goods and habits.

Besides, they were passionate fans of the typical British sport cricket, which came to the fore in the story 'Of white hairs and cricket': *'Daddy also taught the two of us to play cricket. (...) Cricket on Sunday mornings became a regular event for the boys in Firozsha Baag.'*²²¹ However, they also connected other profitable convictions to their being British to some extent. These convictions came to the fore in the already discussed story: 'Lend me your Light', when the main character Kersi simply thought of his chances to go abroad: *'I would have no difficulty being approved, what with my education, and my westernized background, and my fluency in the English language.'*²²² When Kersi had been for a while in Canada, his expectation did not become true. But an often heard opinion about the Parsis appeared in the last, already covered story 'Swimming Lessons' of the collection:

²¹⁸ Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, 40.

²¹⁹ Ibidem, 69.

²²⁰ Mistry, *Swimming Lessons*, 15.

²²¹ Ibidem, 116.

²²² Ibidem, 178.

*'The Parsi community also claims to be the most westernized community in India.'*²²³ From such a fragment, one got the impression that the westernized character of the Parsi community was still crucial in the identity construction of the Parsis, despite the small quantitative presence of such 'westernized' fragments in this book. The preliminary conclusion could be drawn that in the literary analysis, as opposed to the discourse analysis in the previous chapter, it was not a matter of the number of references to particular themes. Rather, the analysis of literary texts was primarily concerned about the ways in which the themes were put forward and the contexts in which they emerged.

In the second novel of Rohinton Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, however, no explicit references to the Westernization theme were made, such as cited above. Because of the criticisms pointed at the prime minister Indira Gandhi, that particular theme, 'the husband of Indira Gandhi is a Parsi' was indeed present, while it was not included in the other three novels. Even, suggestions are made in the direction of an unnatural cause of the death of the husband of Indira Gandhi, Feroze Gandhi: *'Even today, people say Feroze's heart attack was not really a heart attack.'*²²⁴ This quote was also easily read as a sort of pride of the Parsi community for having a community member so close to the Indian prime minister. The idea of an unnatural death for Feroze Gandhi was self-evidently unbearable for the Parsis. But why was the westernization theme completely lacking in this novel? I think it was not functional in the kind of story Rohinton Mistry wanted to write. Basically, it was a description of the ways, the Parsis coped with postcolonial India in general and the negative experiences, Jimmy Bilimoria (resembling the real incident with Parsi Nagarwala) had with Indira Gandhi's office more specifically. In the postcolonial circumstances of India in the 1970s, apparently the westernized nature of the Parsis did not play a significant role anymore.

The fully lacking of the westernization theme in the novel *Such a Long Journey* was in my opinion also caused by the specific genre, the story had features of. That specific genre was the 'historical novel', because it was a fictional description to which historical material was added.²²⁵ For example, this historical material was partly derived from the Nagarwala incident. In a broad sense, the genre 'historical novel' dealt with the ways history formed individuals and the ways this particular formation typified a historical period.²²⁶ This definition was applicable to *Such a Long Journey* too, since Jimmy Bilimoria was clearly disappointed in his faith in the Indian government. Also Gustad Noble had changed through the events surrounding his friend Jimmy Bilimoria. At first, he did not want to see him ever again because of his sudden departure from the Khodadad building many years

²²³ Mistry, *Swimming Lessons*, 230.

²²⁴ Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, 197.

²²⁵ Speerstra, *Representaties van culturele identiteit*, 236

²²⁶ *Ibidem*, 5.

ago. Later, when he found out what really had happened with Jimmy Bilimoria, he became more lenient towards him. In a broader perspective, one could say that the decolonization formed the Parsis, who were still living in India in the 1970s. Their particular reaction to the events in 1947 and accompanying identity formation gave a special meaning to the postcolonial period.

4.3. *Minority discourse.*

The Parsis had and have always to reckon with their status as a minority. In India, they were a small non-Hindu minority and in the new countries of residence, they were categorized as an ethnic minority. How is this minority discourse reflected in the novels? In *The Crow Eaters*, the main character Faredoon Junglewalla took pride in especially the maintenance of the special Parsi identity while being a minority in India for such a long time: *'There are hardly a hundred and twenty thousand Parsees in the world and still we maintain our identity- how? Booted out of Persia at the time of the Arab invasion 1.300 years ago, a handful of our ancestors fled to India with their sacred fires.'*²²⁷ In the other book of Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, the minority theme was expressed in the already above quoted speech of the president of the Lahore community of Parsis. He literally talked about the Parsis as the smallest minority in India. He was (and later his fellow community members) well-aware of the vulnerable position of the Parsis in postcolonial India. The minority position of the Parsis was also reflected in this line of the book in which Lenny met a Sikh woman who had never heard of the Parsis: *'I'm Parsee, ' I say (Lenny's voice) , 'O kee? What's that?' they ask.'*²²⁸

In Mistry's book *Swimming Lessons and other stories from Firozsha Baag*, I could not find specific references to the 'minority' identity theme such as the ones given above. That did not mean that it was not an important identity element for the Parsis in the 1950s and the subsequent period until 1990, but the focus in the book was not particularly on the Parsis' minority status. In the other book of Rohinton Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, only one fragment specifically referred to the minority status of the Parsis. Gustad had pessimistic thoughts about the future of his son Sohrab, since the boy had shown aversion towards the idea of going to the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT): *'What kind of life was Sohrab going to look forward to? No future for minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America- twice as good as the white man to get half as much.'*²²⁹ Shiv Sena was an extreme right-wing political party which had considerably risen in contemporary Mumbai.(Bombay)²³⁰ This development made

²²⁷ Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 13.

²²⁸ Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, 96.

²²⁹ Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, 55.

²³⁰ Barucha, 'When Old Tracks are lost', 62.

Parsis worried about their position in the near future. Marathi was the official language of the Indian province Maharashtra, in which Mumbai was situated.

4.4. Religion and community features

As said at the start of paragraph 4.2., my expectation was that the 'religion and community features' theme together with 'magic' (discussed in the following paragraph) would figure most prominently in the four analysed novels. Also on the basis of the 'last witness' idea that Parsi authors wanted to maintain their identity and culture by means of their fiction, it was a valid hypothesis to expect a lot of information on religion and community features of Parsis in the novels. But it must be added, that also in the case of this identity theme, just like the two others which were already described above, it was mostly a matter of qualitative evidence. Not the number of instances, this identity theme was mentioned, would make it important, but the contexts and ways, in which it emerged. Religion and community features did naturally overlap, yet they are separated to some extent in the following analysis for structural reasons. I start with a couple of quotes which were more focused on communal habits than on religious ones.

In *The Crow Eaters*, the story of the early years of Faredoon Junglewalla in Lahore was told. At that time, only four Parsi families were settled in Lahore. They had a special link with each other: '*An endearing feature of this microscopic merchant community was its compelling sense of duty and obligation towards other Parsis. Like one large close-knit family, they assisted each other, sharing success and rallying to support failure.*'²³¹ Some fifty years later, when Sidhwa's other novel *Ice-Candy Man* was enacted, this solidarity was still there in the Parsi community of Lahore. In the following quote about an operation to cure Lenny's polio, the voice of main character Lenny is heard. By the Sethi household, her parents' house is meant: '*As news of my operation spreads, the small and entire Parsee community of Lahore, in clucking clusters, descends on the Sethi household. I don't wish to see them. I cry for Godmother.*'²³²

Another dominant aspect of the Parsis was their quick ageing. In the story 'Of white hairs and cricket' of Mistry's collection of stories from *Firozsha Baag*, the white (grey) hairs served as a symbol for the ageing Parsi population. A son had to cut the white hairs of his father's head every week: '*Each Sunday the elimination of white hairs took longer than last time.*'²³³ In this quote, a longing to the old days, in which the father did not have grey hair yet, was read. A longing for the past in general was a typical community feature of the Parsis. In particular, a return to the colonial past was desired by

²³¹ Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 22.

²³² Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, 7.

²³³ Mistry, *Swimming Lessons*, 107.

many Parsis. For a lot of them, life became more difficult after the British had left. This element came back in Mistry's other book as well: *'Years ago, when the water supply was generous and the milk from Parsi Dairy Farm was both creamy and affordable. (...) Over six feet high, the black stone wall ran the length of the compound (and protected the own areas of the parsi residents from sight) sheltering Jimmy and Gustad from non-Parsi eyes while they prayed their kustis...'*²³⁴ What could be read from this quote was that years ago, the Parsis owned their own dairy farm and the milk was good and cheap at that time. Furthermore, the own areas of the Parsi residents were really private. The compound of Khodadad-building was well-closed off in order to let Gustad Noble and his friend Jimmy Bilimoria calmly execute their daily Zoroastrian prayers (*kustis*) without to be disturbed by onlookers who walked by.

While talking about prayers, the religious features of the Parsis came in sight. Especially, the peculiar rituals in the Tower of Silence were surrounded by a lot of mystery and controversy. Therefore, this theme was regularly touched upon in the novels. For instance, in both Sidhwa novels, the fact that the British gave the funeral buildings of the Parsis the name 'Tower of Silence' was mentioned. In *The Crow Eaters*, next to this, a lot of clarity was given on the subject: *'Parsees are a tiny community who leave their dead in open-roofed enclosures atop hills to be devoured by vultures. The British romanticized this bizarre graveyard with the title: 'Tower of Silence'. (...) The vultures, taking off at full throttle, are only just able to clear the Tower wall. If they try to get away with anything held between their claws or beaks they invariably crash against the wall.'*²³⁵

In *Ice-Candy-Man*, Lenny's Godmother gave the Parsi name of the Tower of Silence as well: *'We call it Dunganwadi: not Tower of Silence. The English have given it that funny name... Actually it is quite a simple structure: just a big round wall without any roof,' says Godmother. (...) 'The dead body is put inside the Dunganwadi,' explains Godmother. 'The vultures pick it clean and the sun dries the bones. (...) Mind you.. It's only the body that's dead. Instead of polluting the earth by burying it, or wasting fuel by burning it, we feed God's creatures.'*²³⁶ Next to the origin of the name 'Tower of Silence', these two quotes tried both to clarify the ritual and to bring it back to its real proportions instead of the exaggerating views outsiders often gave of it. For example, in the first fragment of *The Crow Eaters*, the reader was reassured that the vultures would never fly over the wall of the tower with any human remnants between their teeth, because they would crash against the wall.

²³⁴ Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, 82.

²³⁵ Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 44.

²³⁶ Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, 113.



*The Tower of Silence at Malabar Hill, South Mumbai.*²³⁷

Despite the logically sounding reasoning behind this ancient ritual, there is self-evidently a lot of controversy about this ‘heavenly funeral’ both inside and outside the community. Within the community, a lot of orthodox Parsis were in favour of maintenance of the ritual, especially in the first half of the twentieth century. An example was the mother-in-law of Faredoon Junglewalla, who said in *The Crow Eaters*: ‘It was his final act of charity! Every Parsi is committed to feeding his last remains to the vultures. You may cheat them but not God!’²³⁸ The usual orthodox defence of the ritual was that it was a pure method, as said already above. Even to modern scholarly, hygienic standards, it remained a pure way of getting rid of dead people. The reformists’ reaction, who favoured cremation, was that the way of the ancients was unsuitable for the modern era. The orthodox ‘vulturists’ countered ‘that reformists had their own ax to grind in legitimizing cremation- they had relatives in foreign lands without access to Towers of Silence.’²³⁹

²³⁷ <http://www.mydestination.com/mumbai/things-to-do/164524/parsi-tower-of-silence>, consulted at 13-06-2012.

²³⁸ Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 46.

²³⁹ Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, 317

Interestingly, the arguments of the reformists were coupled by the orthodox wing to the Parsi diaspora, in which the orthodox Parsi people themselves did not appear to have relatives. The orthodox Parsis were not advocates of migration out of India, for that would mean that they did not have any Tower of Silence nearby. Also people from outside of the community were interfering in this debate. Their voices were particularly heard, when flats were built near Malabar Hill, the place where the Tower of Silence was situated in Bombay. The tenants of these luxury apartments began to complain: *'Your vultures! (...) Control your vultures! Throwing rubbish on our balconies!'*²⁴⁰ Therefore, amongst others, the practice of heavenly funerals is prohibited altogether nowadays.

Another point which brought about a lot of discussion within the Parsi community, was intermarriage. Marriage has always been a difficult undertaking among Parsis, because of their small number and diverging views on the culture and religion. An example of this difficulty, was this fragment of the story 'Exercisers' from Mistry's collection: *'When he had brought her home for the first time, it was for a very short visit. He had warned his parents beforehand, praying that Mother would take the hint and remove the mathoobanoo from her head; the white mulmul square made her look like a backward village Parsi from Navsari, he had recently decided.'*²⁴¹ The last couple of words indicated that the main character of the story had just changed his opinion on his mother's hat. In other words: he was brought up in a rather traditional Parsi atmosphere. Now, he was getting more independent of his parents and he began to have other views on the Parsi customs than them. He used to have no problems with his mother's hat, but at the moment he wanted to bring a girl home, he had.

In *The Crow Eaters*, the choice of a non-Parsi marriage partner of Faredoon's son Yazdi led to a conflict between father and son. Faredoon Junglewalla struck his son in his face when Yazdi told his father that he wanted to marry an Anglo-Indian girl: *'You have the gall to tell me you want to marry an Anglo-Indian. Get out of my sight. Get out!'*²⁴² Later, Faredoon talked with his son about his choice and Yazdi said: *'What does it matter if she is not Parsee? What does it matter who her parents are. She is a human being, isn't she? And a fine person. Better than any Parsee I've met.'*²⁴³ Faredoon reacted on his son's arguments with a motive why Yazdi should not intermarry with the Anglo-Indian girl. I think that such a motive was often brought up by orthodox Parsis to defend their case against intermarriage: *'I believe in some kind of tiny spark that is carried from parent to child, on through generations... a kind of inherited memory of wisdom and righteousness, reaching back to the times of Zarathustra, the Magi, the Mazdiasnians. It is a tenderly nurtured conscience, evolving towards*

²⁴⁰ Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, 316.

²⁴¹ Mistry, *Swimming Lessons*, 204.

²⁴² Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 116.

²⁴³ *Ibidem*, 120.

perfection. (...) Other people have it too: Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, they too have developed pure strains through generations. But what happens if you marry outside our kind? The spark so delicately nurtured, so subtly balanced, meets something totally alien and unmatched. Its precise balance is scrambled. It reverts to the primitive.²⁴⁴ This motive could also put forward to prevent the Parsis from converting outsiders to their religion or admitting children of intermarriages into their faith. On the other hand, considering the population figures of the introduction, Parsis will die out for sure in the near future if they don't admit any outsiders to their religion.

What was the core of that ancient Zoroastrian religion of the Parsis? Gustad Noble pointed in *Such a Long Journey* to the old age of Zoroastrianism: ‘..our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before your Son of God was even born; a thousand years before the Buddha; two hundred years before Moses. And do you know how much Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?’²⁴⁵ In a fragment of the community gathering of the Parsis of Lahore in *Ice-Candy-Man*, the importance of the one god Ahura Mazda in the faith of the Parsis was referred to in these difficult and uncertain times: ‘Ahura Mazda has looked after us for thirteen hundred years, he will look after us for another thirteen hundred!’²⁴⁶ As already explained in paragraph 2.3, Zarathustra (or Zoroaster) is a prophet who preached the monotheistic religion of the one supreme god Ahura Mazda.²⁴⁷ The fire-temple was the holy place of the Parsis. It was described by Rustomji's wife Mehroo in the first story of Mistry's collection ‘Auspicious Occasion’: ‘She loved its smells, its tranquillity, its priests in white performing their elegant, mystical rituals. Best of all, she loved the inner sanctuary, the *sanctum sanctorum*, dark and mysterious, with marble floor and marble walls, which only the officiating priest could enter, to tend the sacred fire burning in the huge, shining silver afargaan on its marble pedestal.’²⁴⁸ This sacred fire was the most essential symbol in the Zoroastrian religion. It was chosen by the prophet Zarathustra as the outward symbol of his faith. The importance of fire was explained in *The Crow Eaters*: ‘It represents the Divine Spark in every man, a spark of the Divine Light. Fire, which has its source in primordial light, symbolizes not only his cosmic creation, but also the spiritual nature of his eternal truth. (...) The cooking fire was never permitted to be extinguished: it was politely preserved in ashes at night and fanned alive each morning.’²⁴⁹

As already discussed in paragraph 2.3, one of the key rituals of Zoroastrianism was the *navjote*, the initiation ritual. This special moment was also described in *The Crow Eaters* with regard to the

²⁴⁴ Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 121.

²⁴⁵ Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, 24.

²⁴⁶ Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, 39.

²⁴⁷ Halder, *Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey*, 103.

²⁴⁸ Mistry, *Swimming Lessons*, 12-13.

²⁴⁹ Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 47.

navjotes of Faredoon's and wife Putli's children: *'Putli's proudest moment came when her children were formally initiated into the Zarathusti faith at their Navjote ceremonies. Then, invested with the outward symbols of the faith –the undershirt, sudreh (shirt) and the kusti (sacred cord)- they were girded to serve the Lord of Life and Wisdom. Freedom of choice is a cardinal doctrine in the teaching of Zarathustra. A child born of Zoroastrian parents is not considered a Zoroastrian until he or she has chosen the faith at the Navjote ceremony.'*²⁵⁰ Once a Parsi was initiated into the faith, he had to obey a couple of not that strict doctrines. In the diaspora that was often more difficult than in India. Therefore, in the last story of Mistry's collection 'Swimming Lessons', the main character Kersi who had moved to Canada, was advised by his father about those Zoroastrian doctrines through his mum's letters: *'..remind him he is a Zoroastrian: manashni, gavashni, kunashni, better write the translation (of these words)also: good thoughts, good words, good deeds- he must have forgotten what it means, and tell him to say prayers and do kusti at least twice a day.'*²⁵¹ This quote was not only interesting because of the inherent social control on the execution of Zoroastrian doctrines by family members, but also because it was focused on a relative who lived abroad. Kersi's parents obviously wanted him to maintain his Parsi rituals even now he was living in another country. Therefore, here was also a particular way of combining the western world and the traditional Parsi culture and religion visible.

4.5. Magic

I have decided to discuss 'Magic' separately from 'religion and community features' because, in my opinion, magic dealt with a very different sort of beliefs and acts than the Zoroastrian religion itself. Furthermore, this sort of magical acts was often connected with similar activities carried out by Hindus. After all, *'India is magic'*.²⁵² For Faredoon, the main character in *The Crow Eaters*, this connection went even further than only magical activities. His faith did not stop by Zoroastrianism alone. Instead, *'..he had faith in scores of Hindu deities and in Muslim and Christian saints. His faith taught heaven and hell but he believed implicitly in reincarnation.'*²⁵³ However, in some instances, the religion and magic were intermingling. In the following fragment from *Such a Long Journey*, the magical activities went just a step further than the religion. It was about the Bonesetter, whose name gave away his curing profession. Gustad once visited him when his hip began to hurt.

'In appearance he was so ordinary, no one could have guessed what extraordinary powers he possessed. He wore a long white duglo (a typical Parsi suit) and a prayer cap, resembling one of those

²⁵⁰ Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 117.

²⁵¹ Mistry, *Swimming Lessons*, 236.

²⁵² Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 150.

²⁵³ *Ibidem*, 152.

*men in charge of serving dinner at a Parsi wedding. (...) But Madhivalla (the real name of the Bonesetter) was revered like a saint for his miraculous cures. He had saved shattered limbs, broken backs, cracked skulls –cases which even specialists and foreign-trained doctors (...) seen nothing worth saving and shaken their heads despairingly.*²⁵⁴

Miss Kutpitia, who also lived in Khodadad building in the novel *Such a Long Journey*, was regularly using magic for all kinds of purposes. Gustad's wife Dilnavaz asked her for help once in a while, for instance, when her daughter Roshan could not recover from a severe illness. In the end, the magic of the following citation was also meant to let Gustad and Dilnavaz' other son Sohrab return home to talk with his father about their disagreements: *'Smoke was coming van Miss Kitputia's flat after she performed the magic with the lizard and Tehmul (another resident of Khodadad building) to cure the children of Gustad and Dilnavaz.*²⁵⁵

In the story 'The paying guests' of Mistry's collection, the woman Khorshedbai performed all kinds of magic to chase the new neighbours out of her house. Every morning, she emerged from her room with a loosely news papered package, cradled in her arms, with smelly contents like egg shells and potato peelings. She has done strange rituals with this package after a dream she had about a court case in which she and her husband had faced eviction from the flat, forced by their new neighbours.²⁵⁶ In the end, it turned out, that Khorshedbai had gone so far as to use the neighbour's baby for her magical acts in the cage of her deceased bird: *'she teasingly dangled two green peppers, long and thin, over the baby's face.*²⁵⁷

In *Ice-Candy-Man*, not so much magical moments were found as in *Such a Long Journey* except for this important one: *'Lenny's mother places a six-inch iron nail, blessed by the Parsee mystic, Mobed Ibera, the disciple of Dastur Kookadaru, under my mattress to ward off fear.*²⁵⁸ Especially in the confusing, dangerous period around Partition and decolonization, it was imaginable for people to turn to magic in order to feel safer. Therefore, it might be more important in this period than this one reference suggested. In the other book of Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, the main character Faredoon Junglewalla also turned to magical arrangements with a mystic in order to cope with the quarrels with his mother-in-law Jerbanoo. Faredoon's thoughts: *'He never doubted that black magic and witchcraft existed, and he was convinced a little ordinary 'magic' would not be amiss under the*

²⁵⁴ Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, 130.

²⁵⁵ Ibidem, 290.

²⁵⁶ Mistry, *Swimming Lessons*, 123, 125.

²⁵⁷ Mistry, *Swimming Lessons*, 142.

²⁵⁸ Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, 213.

calamitous circumstances.²⁵⁹ Because of his faith in other religions than only Zoroastrianism, as explained at the start of this paragraph, Faredoon decided to visit the (Hindu) Brahmin Gopal Krishan who can read Janam Patris: birth leaves. This birth leaf is a sort of horoscope and Faredoon's one was saying, according to the Brahmin that his son Soli was soon dying. That also happened and the Brahmin could nothing do about it.

So, magic constituted an important part of Indian life in general, but it was also very essential for Parsis. In that sense, they had adapted to Indian society to a considerable extent.

4.6. Conclusion

In this literary analysis, I sketched the most important themes in the identity construction before and after Independence according to the four analysed novels. For some Parsis, who have moved to western countries or became more adapted to the Hindu postcolonial circumstances in India, things have enormously changed. For other more orthodox Parsis, a lot of their identity construction and views remained the same, mainly because of their stubborn hold to the pure, ancient Zoroastrian rituals. In general, the Parsis identity was made up of three parts: The first one was their colonial heritage; their developed westernization and Britishness. The second one was their Zoroastrian roots, age-old customs and shared history of flight from Persia. And the last one was their link with Hindu India, especially in the second half of the twentieth century; thus, the contemporary, postcolonial circumstances. For every Parsi, these three elements were represented in his or her identity in different degrees. The Parsi writers were especially writing in order to maintain their special identity and culture, in a rapidly changing world. Next to this, Rohinton Mistry criticized Indira Gandhi and her administration for the strange incident with the Parsi Nagarwala in his book *Such a Long Journey*. In addition, he made criticisms about her policy of nationalization of a lot of businesses, of which the Parsis were owners. Also the suspicious cause of the death of Indira's husband Feroze Gandhi, who was a Parsi, was mentioned in Mistry's book. In this way, Mistry helped his own community in India to cope with the Nagarwala incident and the postcolonial Indian rule under Indira Gandhi.

According to the novels, identity repositioning was more difficult for Parsis in contemporary India than in the diaspora. Since in contemporary India, not only their religious customs alienated them from mainstream society, but also their air of westernization and Britishness. Of course, modernity has also entered India, but the western, British nature of the Parsis reminded the mainstream Indians

²⁵⁹ Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters*, 35.

of their colonial past. On the other hand, a lot of Parsis have adapted to the Indian society by using some Hindu-like magic. In the diaspora, their Zoroastrian roots have made them only an exceptional migrant group. However, their westernization helped them to build up a life in the new country more easily, by amongst others, separating them from other 'normal' Asians. Although, many people did never hear of the Parsis or Zoroastrians in both eastern and western countries, a lighter skin than average Indians aided Parsis to look more 'western'. Besides, another reason for the more difficult identity repositioning in India was, that the community disputes were more severe because all orthodox Parsis were still living there. They would not go overseas very soon, because in foreign countries, a decent fire-temple was often not present and Towers of Silences were never built there. Orthodox Parsis emphasized both the divine light of fire in the temple and the divine spark of pure Parsi blood, in defending their case against intermarriage and conversion. This viewpoint would make it very difficult to prevent the Parsi community from dying out. In the diaspora as opposed to India, the old Zoroastrian customs further weakened because of the absence of a fire-temple and the abundance of western modernity surrounding the Parsis. Even though, passionate efforts were made by relatives from India to remind their family abroad of their Parsiness as was made clear in the last story of Rohinton Mistry's story collection *Swimming Lessons and other stories from Firozsha Baag*.

A practical conclusion can be drawn about the qualitative nature of literary analysis as opposed to the quantitative nature of the discourse analysis. In literary texts, numbers are less important than the context in which something is said or done. If, for example in *Ice-Candy-Man*, the minority theme is only mentioned one time by the president of the Lahore Parsi community in such an important context as a community gathering, than it must be important in the identity construction of the Parsis. Because of both the importance of the person who did this speech and the context in which it happened. The same remark counted for the theme 'minority discourse' which was also not present in great numbers in the books. Besides, the lack of certain identity themes could also be explained by the genre, in which the book was written. In this literary analysis, obvious literary genres were the 'autobiography' in the case of *Ice-Candy-Man*, and the 'historical novel' in the case of *Such a Long Journey*.

For all identity themes, discussed in this chapter, counted that in combination with the discourse analysis of chapter three, a broader picture could be sketched of the changing role of these themes in the identity construction of the Parsis. That broader picture is sketched in the general conclusion of the next chapter. Though in literature, actual reality is often opposed, completely turned around and heavily adapted to fit a captivating story, yet it could give fascinating insights in the important issues of a particular group of people. Certainly, when the writers of these novels themselves indicated that their aim was to let people become acquainted with their community and religion. By

doing this, the Parsi writers hoped that their culture would not directly fall in oblivion, when the Parsi community would disappear in the end.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the sudden identity change of the Parsis of India, after more than a millennium of peaceful maintenance of the Parsi identity in an Indian context, was examined. While in contemporary times, the Parsis have been declining in numbers very rapidly, under British colonial rule, they prospered as a colonial elite and contributed to a great extent to the industrial development of India. The primary sources in this thesis consisted of a combination of media articles and novels. Together these sources could give original insights and a more balanced answer to the question of the abrupt identity change of the Parsis. Besides, British, American and Parsi media, Indian newspaper articles could have been analysed. However, as mentioned in the introduction, a look in an Indian newspaper in the Royal Library did not yield any references to Parsis. This newspaper 'India News' mainly contained articles about the 'unified' Indian nation. The novels which were analysed in this study, appeared to be better equipped as sources for the Indian side of this study. They could be considered 'last witness' accounts of Parsi writers, who wanted to maintain their culture for many years to come, even if the Parsis would die out in the end.

The confusing period surrounding decolonization and partition of the British Indies into Pakistan and India presented a crucial explanatory factor for the heavily changed identity of the Parsis. In essence, this meant a 'double' identity reconstruction for the Parsis, since many community members left India for western countries such as the UK and the US. In other words, the Parsis had to reconstruct their identity not only after decolonization in India, but also after migration to the UK and the US. In this identity reconstruction, they were both active agents and passive recipients of identity features of the country they lived in. Just like every identity construction, the identity of the Parsis was both self-defined and ascribed. These two types of identity reconstruction influenced each other as well as the two parts of the diaspora, India and several countries overseas, in which the Parsis had to redefine their identities. In the new countries of residence, the Parsis took advantage of their economic status, business skills and their westernized, British nature. This westernized nature remained an important factor in the Parsi identity through time.

However, there was indeed a difference between India and the new countries of residence after Independence, regarding the importance of the westernized nature in the Parsi identity. For the Parsis, who stayed behind in India after Independence, westernization as an identity marker was not that important. The reason is that in India, the westernization of the Parsis was opposed to both the mainstream Hindu society and their own Zoroastrian culture. Therefore, a lot of Parsis in India adopted some Hindu-like magical acts to fit more into the mainstream society. In contrast, in the diaspora in the UK and the US, the westernization only contrasted with their own Zoroastrian culture,

which was weakening because of the Parsis' adaptation to the new western context. Parsis were often aware of their leading role as compared to other Indian migrants, because of their western habits and their ability to speak English. In addition, the Parsis did not interact with other Indian migrants in the western countries and even dissociated themselves from them. Also for the Parsis who remained in India, their westernization meant something to be proud of to a certain extent. Although, the Parsis could often not express that pride openly in India, they could at least do so in secret within their own social circles.

The westernized nature of the Parsis brought them many advantages in the Indian past and Western present. However, it was still contrasting with their own old religious customs. Some Parsis have reconciled both parts in their identity, but other orthodox Parsis hold on to the pure, ancient Zoroastrian rituals. This contrast has often led to community disputes between orthodox and reformist Parsis on issues like conversion, intermarriage and the funeral ritual. The feared population decline played an important role in these community disputes. However, the identity theme of population decline did not appear prominently in the sources. In my opinion, the Parsis just did not want to be known by the wider public as a threatened people. Instead, they wanted people to become acquainted with their special culture and religion and a sad description of declining population figures did not belong to such an account.

In recent years, especially after the end of my research period in 1990, the internet has become a major 'community building' device for Parsis. The world wide web made the task of keeping the group together over vast distances easier. On www.zoroastrians.net, for example, one can find the following quote which does refer to the population decline but in a positive way: *'They also say the community is becoming smaller, but Zoroastrians are all over the World Wide Web!'*²⁶⁰ Another website was set up in order to help Zoroastrians to reconnect to other Zoroastrian people, with whom they had lost contact.²⁶¹ Still another website listed all Zoroastrian people living in the world.²⁶² It was striking, that on all these websites all Zoroastrians who lived worldwide were taken together, both Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians. In earlier times, that would have caused problems, but nowadays, as the world wide community has been getting smaller and smaller and the fear of disappearance has become real, the idea 'together, we are standing stronger' seems predominant. That idea was also visible in the foundation of the World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO) in 1980, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North-America (FEZANA) in 1987 and the changed name of the British organization in Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE). A closer look at these

²⁶⁰ www.zoroastrians.net, consulted at 06-05-2012.

²⁶¹ www.themissingparisi.com, consulted at 06-05-2012

²⁶² www.theparsidirectory.com, consulted at 06-05-2012.

organizations and websites and their attendants would have been also interesting for this research. But because the tendency of an 'pan-Zoroastrianism' has only started in the 1980s, it has only developed in earnest after my research period, after 1990.

On the internet, a lot of images of Parsis could be found. These images were mainly of people dressed in traditional clothes who were performing ancient rituals at the fire temple. This picture stood in contrast with the overwhelming presence of the westernization in the Parsi identity. In addition, the collected images of a random internet search showed Parsis with, on average, lighter skin than mainstream Indians. The skin colour is an important issue for Parsis. For example, the skin colour of a newly born Parsi should be as light as possible, to avoid similarity with mainstream Indian, coloured people. In this way, the light skin pointed to their supposedly western, colonial, superiority over the common Indians. Furthermore, this type of contrast between the ancient culture, visible in the internet images, and the westernization, clear from particular habits and concerns about skin colour, was a returning feature in the Parsi identity. This returning feature emphasized the notion that the prominence of one of two seemingly opposite phenomena did not have to exclude the other in the complex Parsi identity. In other words, all these contrasting features were not mutually exclusive. The two extremes in each opposition had only changed in importance through time. For example, as more Parsis moved to western countries, their religious, ancient customs were not that crucial anymore in their identity construction.

Besides an examination of a fascinating ethnic minority and migrant group, this study has highlighted the Parsis as a colonial elite in colonial and postcolonial times. This colonial elite had almost the same status as the colonizer, but they were not entirely equal. In the end, the Parsis remained just as colonized as the other Indians. Yet, the Parsis felt (and to some extent still feel) more special than the mainstream Indians. An example of another colonial elite living nearby was the Anglo-Indian community in India itself, although the Parsis did not regard them as such. In fact, at least according to the Parsis, the Anglo-Indians were below the Parsis in the colonial hierarchy. Colonial elites in other countries, which definitely deserve their own study, are for example, the Krio (Creoles) of Sierra Leone and the Assyrian/Syriac elites from the Middle East.²⁶³ These groups are likely to have experienced similar events to the Parsis after the act of decolonization in their countries of residence. In addition, it would be interesting to examine the extent to which a reversal of colonial values happened in the case of these colonial elites.

²⁶³ Luhrmann, 'The Good Parsi', 350; Naures Atto, *Hostages in the homeland, orphans in the diaspora : identity discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac elites in the European diaspora* (Leiden 2011)

The decolonization of India brought an abrupt end to the special colonial elite status of the Parsis. As a result, the Parsis began to heavily criticize themselves. In addition, they started to portray themselves in the same colonial, denigrating way the English once did with the mainstream Indians. This meant a reversal of the colonial rhetoric, which was mainly visible in India. However, this reversal of colonial values has not completely continued in the second half of the twentieth century, especially not in the diaspora. In fact, in the UK and especially the US, the exceptional cultural and political achievements of Parsis were very important in their identity construction. This was not a sign of heavy self-criticism, but an indication of feeling still more privileged and advanced than mainstream Indians, even in the diaspora.

In a key literary quote of the literary analysis, a Parsi who had recently arrived in a western country did not feel at ease in the little India area of the city in which he was supposed to live. The reason for his awkwardness was that he did not have an ordinary, mainstream Indian identity, but rather a typical Parsi, mixed identity comprised of some Indian, Zoroastrian and Western parts. In my opinion, exactly that could be the shortest conclusion to this thesis: The Parsi identity has been composed of these three identity parts in varying degrees in every single member of the Parsi community, both before and after independence, both in India and in the diaspora. Some identity themes are more ascribed and others are more self-defined, but a clear distinction between ascribed and self-defined identity parts cannot be drawn. This hybrid identity has been gradually developed in India and later in the US and the UK from the nineteenth century onwards. It was radically transformed by the decolonization act itself and the mobility resulting thereof, but the essence of an hybrid Parsi identity remained intact. The loyalty of the Parsis to the current rulers, which they already had by their earliest settlement in India, also belongs to that hybrid identity. The Parsis improved that loyalty in such a way that they increasingly understood how to 'hunt with the hounds and run with the hare.'

Because of the dislocating events surrounding partition and decolonization, followed by the migration of a lot of Parsis, that carefully balanced identity composition completely turned upside down after centuries of relative stableness. Thus, this sudden rupture and loss of colonial status of the Parsis created unrest in India and the Parsi diaspora, forcing the Parsis to simultaneously reconstruct their identity in both India and the new countries. Other exogenous events like Indira Gandhi's administration and the creation of Bangladesh have made the position of Parsis as a small non-Hindu minority in India increasingly difficult in the second half of the twentieth century. Although, from the 1990s onwards, India's economy has modernized on a large scale, opening perhaps new business possibilities for the Parsis and although India remains an important point of reference, many voices within the community think that the future of the Parsis would be in the diaspora, notably in the US. India has become too 'exotic' for the Parsis. Because of its openness,

curiosity for new migrant groups, and non-connection to a colonial past, the Parsis have more room to flourish in the US than in the UK. Although, the westernized nature of the Parsis and their adaptation to western society were reasons for their heavily changed identity, a diasporic American context provides most opportunities for the Parsi community to survive. In such a context, a lot of Parsis did not want to be identified as 'Indian' by others, stressing the fact that they were already too westernized to prosper in India. Thus, in the US, the hybrid identity of the Parsis, composed of Indian-Hindu, Zoroastrian and Western-colonial parts will have enough room to flourish. Just as it had been in the many centuries after the first settlement on the Western Indian coast and in the years of the British colonial rule. That particular Parsi, hybrid identity is still there in contemporary times, and it keeps developing simultaneously in several different, but connected parts of the world.

6. Literature

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Appendix I: Basic tables used for the discourse analysis.

<i>After 1947</i>	New York Times	The Washington Post	Time Magazine	The (Manchester) Guardian	The Observer	Dini Avaz	Total
Loss of (economic) status	7	2	2	2		2	15
Trading/Business men	13	3	3	2			21
Community disputes	3	1	2			7	13
non-Hindu minority	12	3	1	5			21
Parsi husband of Indira Gandhi	11	1	4	4	1		21
Political, cultural achievements	23	5	5	4			37
Of which: Zubin Mehta	11	3	3				17
Bombay	12	3	3	5	3	2	28
Westernization, Britishness,	6	5	2	5	5	1	24
Cricket				2	5		7
Population decline	4	2	2			1	9
Religion/community features	11	7	5	4	1	3	31
Cooking/restaurants	2	1		1			4
Total	115	36	32	34	15	16	248
<i>Before 1947</i>	New York Times	The Washington Post		The (Manchester) Guardian	The Observer	Total	
Loss of (economic) status	3	2		1		6	
Trading/Business men	2	2		1	1	6	
Community disputes	2					2	
non-Hindu minority	7	5		5	3	20	
(Parsi husband of Indira Gandhi)							
Political, cultural achievements	2			1		3	
Bombay	3	4		2	1	10	
Westernization, Britishness,	3	1		5		9	
Population decline							
Religion/community features	4	1		1	1	7	
Cooking/restaurants							
Total	26	15		16	6	63	
	Before	%	After	%			
Loss of (economic) status	6	9,52	15	6,7			
Trading/Business men	6	9,52	21	9,38			

(Tata)							
Community disputes	2	3,17	13	5,8			
non-Hindu minority	20	31,75	21	9,38			
Parsi husband of Indira Gandhi	nvt		21	9,38			
Political, cultural, achievements	3	4,76	37	16,52			
Bombay	10	15,87	28	12,5			
Westernization, Britishness,	9	14,29	24	10,71			
Population decline			9	4,02			
Religion/community features	7	11,11	31	13,84			
Cooking/restaurants			4	1,79			
Total	63	100	224	100			

