

Parsi community from the immigration era to the present: specific examination of funeral ceremonies

Noriko Katsuki

Parsis, the Zoroastrians in India, whose ancestors came from Iran to the west coast of India from approximately the tenth century to the present, are maintaining their community and identity as a unique minority, mainly in and around Mumbai. They are known as rich people because they created enormous wealth during the British Raj.

By contrast, their religious customs have degenerated progressively. That degeneration is most readily apparent in their understanding of Zoroastrian funeral ceremonies. Following the Zoroastrian tenets, an extremely important signification is the return to their legendary homeland Aryana vaejah through the dakhma system, generally called the Tower of silence. However, present Parsis understand it rationally and scientifically. That understanding originated from explaining their funeral ceremonies to Europeans as speedy, economic, and hygienic. Reinterpretation of religious customs independently under the concept of European values has accelerated their globalization, not only geographically, but also in terms of their family customs.

As a matter of course, with a critical feeling, they are trying to build a Zoroastrian identity in their young generation within and beyond India. Nevertheless, their teachings apparently cannot surmount a compliant understanding with present values. Ultimately, their attempt varies greatly from their imagination. This phenomenon is one that they cannot believe in Zoroastrianism as their ancestors did anymore, even though they know the tenets through scriptures.