

# The Good Parsi



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出版者:Harvard University Press

出版时间:1996-08-01

装帧:Paperback

isbn:9780674356764

During the Raj, one group stands out as having prospered and thrived thousand years ago, the Zoroastrian people adopted the manners, dress and aspirations of their British colonizers, and their Anglophilic activities ranged from cricket to Oxford to tea. The British were fulsome in their praise of the Parsis and rewarded them with high-level financial, mercantile and bureaucratic posts. The Parsis dominated Bombay for more than a century. But Indian independence ushered in their decline. Tanya Luhrmann vividly portrays a crisis of confidence, of self-criticism and perpetual agonizing. The story of the Parsis is a story of long-delayed recognition and the emptiness of the promise that the Parsis might one day be Englishmen. Luhrmann examines the paradoxical nature of the self-criticism of this culture (the Parsis had identified themselves with the "strong", "virile" colonizers but now speak of themselves as effeminate and emasculated, "weak", and all the other epithets formerly used by the British of Indians) to create an image of a fragile and beleaguered identity, fraught with contradictions, that looks uneasily toward the future. This story highlights all the dilemmas and paradoxes. Luhrmann's analysis brings insights into a whole range of communal and individual identity crises and what could be called "identity politics" of this century. In a last chapter the author confronts another elite in crisis: an anthropology in flux, uncertain of its own authority and its relation to the colonizers.

作者介绍:

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