

Extending one's knowledge can be a benediction:

A Trace of Bombay at the University of Siegen

Do you know what the Parsi Zoroastrians are? No? Most of the participants of Dr. Cathy Waegner's "Advanced Writing" class didn't know either.

An encyclopedia might tell you that the Parsis are an ethnically locked religious community of Persian descent. Fact! You might also discover that the Parsis emigrated to India in the 8th century to escape religious persecution in Persia. Fact! Nowadays there are about 69,000 Parsis in India. Fact! The number of Parsis worldwide is estimated to be less than 100,000. Fact! A lot of facts, right? But you don't feel as if you know anything about the Parsi people at all? That's the thing about encyclopedias – they are filled with facts, numbers and some historical dates, but they cannot convey that certain feeling for the people behind the numbers. But Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha from the University of Bombay can and did!

Being a Parsi Indian herself, Bharucha told the students about her culture. And, being a writer, she had also brought one of her short stories with her: "The Benediction". And this short story – dealing with specific conflicts of living in the Parsi community – captured the spirit of the people more impressively than numbers ever could. What Professor Bharucha's fascinating accounts did was to enable the students to slip into a people's spirit, which is not calculable and can't be found in any encyclopedia article.

Benjamin Lengfeld