CHAPTER - 5
OSCILLATING PLURAL NATIONALISM OF WRITERS
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This chapter of the thesis describes Oscillating Plural nationalism of writers after 1960s.

During that time of 1960 – on, while there is a proof of artistic come back to more seasoned types of expression and fundamentalist redefinition of morals, scholars all the more naturally, every era, grasped social equity and reformist causes: for ladies' rights "Ladies' development" for gay and lesbian balance "Homo sexuality" against imperialism, against expanding destitution, youngsters' writing – and venture that the thrived as of now, running from babble verse to issue – focused books for youthful grown-ups tended to some of these same issues of Race, Gender, Alcohol, Drug misuse, Social personality, Science composing, Social history, Life composing, Environmental and Echo basic request and different types of "Inventive non - area" additionally as often as possible joined revelation with challenge. Scrutinizes of social pomposity in one decade (Foreign wars, bigotry) transformed into studies of different differences in the following (separation by sex, sex, ethnicity, and financial matters). Margaret Atwood grasped the new patriotism of the 1960's and 1970's (with the Centennian festivity in 1967), yet after 30 years tempered her perception in bending. Robertson DAVIES' Jungian novel communicated one pervasive comprehension of myth and brain research. Robert Kroetfich's lyrics and stories deconstructed such traditions and rerouted the epic in regular vernaculars experience. Dialect and artistic shape again got to be subject for investigation and hypothetical discourse, as in the work of Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye and in addition regions for question, as men Nicole Brossard's Critiques of French syntax impacted Semitist essayist in English or when, in much 21st century grating customary vulgarities got to be standardizing discourse. The writers union of Canada framed in 1973 mirroring essayists' numbers and trying to manage the difficulties they confront.

In 1917 Canadian literature made its first appearance in The Cambridge History of English Literature as a modest twenty-page chapter entitled “English-Canadian Literature” by Toronto academic Pelham Edgar, along with a
series of other chapters on literatures of the Empire like “Anglo-Irish Literature,”
“Anglo-Indian Literature,” “The Literature of Australia and New Zealand,” and
“South African Poetry.” Almost exactly ninety years later, this substantial Cambridge
History of Canadian Literature, co-edited by two women scholars, with its thirty-one
chapters written by a distinguished company of Canadian and international
contributors, offers convincing evidence for the establishment of Canadian literature
as an important scholarly field and for its current standing. Between then and now
there have been numerous literary histories, encyclopedias, and anthologies in English
and French, produced in a continual process of inventory-taking on the state of the
nation and its literature.

Interestingly, these have been concentrated in particular periods of
national crisis or celebration, notably in the post-war 1920s, in the decade of cultural
nationalism centered on the Centennial of the Canadian Confederation in 1967, and
most recently since the mid-1990s with its radical reassessments of the nation and its
literary heritage. This Cambridge History of Canadian Literature is situated in the
context of newly defined discourses of nationhood, national culture, and literary
production which are both specific to Canada and related to larger theoretical
questions which have widened the parameters of nation, history, and literature.

Indeed, to write the history of any national literature in the era of globalization
is problematical, where tensions persist between “national” and “global, diasporic,
transnational,” where national identities have become pluralized, and where the
contemporary emphasis on diversity stimulates – and indeed necessitates – the
revisionist reading of that literature from its beginnings so that we may understand the
relation between the present and the past in different and more inclusive ways. One
striking feature of Canada’s literary history is that it has always been a fractured
discourse, notoriously difficult to define along chronological or national lines. Even
the concept of literary history needs to be re-examined in a New World context where
the first encounters between Europeans and Indigenous peoples highlight the
differences between written records and other semiotic systems not covered by
writing. The problem of multiple beginnings and conflicting allegiances continues
with Canada’s fraught bilingual and bicultural traditions which are written into the
history of its European colonization and which continue to feature in its postcolonial
politics. Since the 1970s the country’s official multiculturalism has in many ways
bypassed traditional English and French dichotomies, and most recently developments in response to globalization have raised social and cultural issues which are crucially different from both biculturalism and multiculturalism.

This History acknowledges the conceptual challenges posed by changing meanings of “Canadian” as an identity category and by periodic reformulations of Canada as an imagined community: such instabilities and shifts are represented within our narrative. What this volume offers is a nuanced reassessment of contemporary literary production in English and French, together with a reconfiguring of the literature and national myths of earlier periods, drawing attention to ethnic, cultural and regional diversities that were sometimes submerged in previous paradigms. Of course, this History measures its differences against earlier literary histories, among which our major predecessor is Carl F. Klinck’s monumental A Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, first published as a single volume in 1965. A three-volume version appeared in 1976, followed by a fourth volume, edited by W.H.New in 1990. This pioneering work was the first multi-authored comprehensive history of Canadian literature in English, and in that Centennial period a parallel volume on Canadian literature in French was also planned. That did not eventuate, though Pierre de Grandpré’s Histoire de la littérature française du Québec appeared 1967 and Klinck’s volume was published in French translation in 1970. The publication of Grandpré’s four-volume history of writing in French well before Klinck’s multi-volume version is a reminder that Quebec has collected the evidence of its “patrimoine” muchmore systematically than the English Canadians, a phenomenon which persists into the present with the now seven-volume Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires du Québec, which has no exact equivalent in English.

Klinck and Northrop Frye in his famous “Conclusion” to Klinck’s History were very aware of the double nature of Canada’s literary traditions: “Every statement made [about English-Canadian literature] … implies a parallel or contrast with French-Canadian literature.” They envisaged a consistently comparative study of both literatures, whereas our approach is designed to highlight major connections and differences between the two linguistic traditions. Anglophone and francophone materials are treated comparatively in appropriate locations throughout (for instance, in the chapter on nineteenth century histories and historical novels), while on the other hand the distinctive history of francophone writing is recognized with a final section
devoted exclusively to writing in French from across Canada. Two of these chapters, written by scholars from Quebec and Franco-Ontario, were translated into English for this volume.

Klinck saw the production of literary history as a cultural project of national significance designed to give Canadians “a studied knowledge of ourselves” (p.xi). His emphases were – inevitably for that period – Eurocentric and territorial, though his definition of literature was a very catholic one. He includes essays on folk tales and folk songs, travel books, autobiography and children’s books (incidentally these four are among only six essays written or co-authored, by women out of a total of forty) as well as essays on historical writings, philosophy, religion, and the natural sciences. Indeed his approach was remarkably pragmatic for its time, and his authors make passing reference to oral storytelling traditions of “[t]he Indians and Eskimos” (p. 163) and to the new post-1940s phenomenon of novels where “the backgrounds … are Continental” (p. 709), the first recognition of the multiethnic dimension in Canadian literature. Such coverage implies an incipient recognition of the cultural pluralism which has become Canada’s signature in following decades.

In 1971 Canada was the first country in the world to introduce an official multiculturalism policy, and subsequent changes in the social and ideological contexts within which images of Canadianness were reconstructed may be charted through creative writing, the media, new literary histories and revisions of those histories which were published in quick succession. The academic industry surrounding Canadian literature grew rapidly during the 1980s at home and abroad, encouraged by government sponsorship of Canadian Studies internationally as a branch of foreign policy, and for the First time ever, two Canadian literary histories were published in London:

W. J. Keith’s Canadian Literature in English (1985) and W. H. New’s A History of Canadian Literature (1989). Both have been republished in Canada since 2000, with supplementary chapters. The 1990s bore witness to symptoms of crisis as literary and cultural critics struggled to reconceptualize narratives of the nation. That revisionist emphasis has merely gained impetus in the twenty-first century. The traditional Anglo-French paradigm of Canadian literary heritage might now be considered as one of Canada’s national myths, given the light thrown on the nation’s origins by new critical perspectives and recent archival research. Far from being a
double-stranded narrative of two “founding nations.” Canadian literary history now begins to look more like a multi-plot novel with different beginnings and different narrative imperatives, as formerly marginalized voices and suppressed histories are assuming their proper place within a restructured and increasingly diversified literary tradition.

This volume seeks to maintain a balance between the conventional chronological design and canonical genre treatment characteristic of traditional literary histories, and a revisionist approach which interrogates and blurs those category divisions. Our aim is to demonstrate continuities and interconnections across decades and even centuries, with chapters on history and myth, nineteenth-century nature-writing and contemporary environmental writing and publishing history in Canada, while figures like Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje cannot easily be accommodated under historical or generic headings, and chapters like “Canada and the Great War” illustrate the ways in which certain traumatic events resonate way beyond their particular historical moment.

We also include non-canonical genres, like comic books, as evidence of the continuing presence of popular culture and its resonance. In particular we recognize the significant new directions which Canadian literature has taken over the past twenty-five years or so. Over half the volume is devoted to literary production since the 1960s, paying detailed attention not only to major international literary figures but also signaling the emergence of new cultural and literary paradigms with the advent of Aboriginal and multicultural writing in the two major languages. Braided together, all these narratives bear witness to a multiplicity of traditions which contribute to the ever-increasing complexities within Canadian literature.

Writing as diverse as this also comes with typographical challenges. In general, we use the English version of names that have accents in French but none in English (for instance Québec / Quebec, Montréal / Montreal), except, of course, when they are part of a quotation in French or part of a publisher’s name or a book title. This means that in our coverage of writing in French, it has sometimes been necessary to use the two versions side by side. “Native” and “Indigenous” are spelled with capital letters when they refer to “Aboriginal.” On the advice of the authors contributing the chapters in this area and of other scholars, this volume uses these terms interchangeably, although arguments exist that favor one over the other.
Because their printed versions are approximations of oral languages, the names of Aboriginal tribes can be spelled in a variety of ways. We have opted for consistent spelling, but we are aware of the compromise involved in this decision.

Different scholars tended to social, social, political, options in Canadian Society, some of which were enduring, others getting from later changes in populace, innovation, dialect and correspondence. Numerous scholars looked for a harmony between feedback of social practice (prejudice, latent rejection, prohibitive enactment) and festivity of social potential. A few Metis (among them Thomas King, Thomas Highway) differently scrutinizing the private educational system, challenging obliviousness and mishandle and discovering parody in both conventional stories and contemporary life. The writer Robert Brinthurts deciphered incredible exemplary Haida oral tales, Al Purdy made verse out of the rhythms of customary discourse. George Eliot's Clarke and Wayde Compton pointed out Black writing in Canada and expanding quantities of scholars (counting Rohinton Mistry, Michael Ondaatje and Waydon Choy) drew on their Asian legacy both to ponder adjustments to contrast and to sensationalize the difficulties and prizes of a broke or shared history. Actually scores of finished authors developed amid the most recent many years of the twentieth century and the early years of the 21st, vouching for the proceeding with energy of the scholarly group.

Chelva Kanaganayakam, "Midnight's Grandchildren," Counterrealism in Indo-Anglian Fiction (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2002) 171. The literary upsurge initiated in the eighties has not yet abated. With Rushdie initiating the process, writers have added new dimensions to Indian writing. They have adopted a range of modes, diverse voices as well as techniques of postmodernist fiction to give expression to the complexities of contemporary experience. Numerous writers including Shashi Tharoor and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have acknowledged their debt to Rushdie in shaping their work. There are, of course, those like Rohinton Mistry and Vikram Seth who work along the conventions of classic realism, whose work is not influenced by Rushdie's self-conscious magic-realist texts. Nonetheless, it remains a fact that Rushdie did forge new directions for writers and had a far-reaching influence. Chelva Kanaganayakam is convinced about Rushdie's formidable sway enough to make the assertion that despite all the exceptions that exist, the writers of the present-day are in fact "midnight's grandchildren".
It is true that Mistry maintains silence about his last diaspora. Chelva Kanaganayakam tries to resolve the issue of typology by saying that “Mistry is Indian, Canadian, diasporic, and much more... much of his writings in the last two decades have been about India and not Canada, although he has lived in Canada from 1975....the overall quality of diasporic discourse is meagre in his corpus” (30). Roy and Pillai also acknowledge Mistry’s much acclaimed vivid sense of place. The texts written by him, it seems, grow out of the cogency of memory and from an unforgettable and indelible perception of marginality. Based on such observations and arguments one can say that Mistry’s texts are more diasporic because of the writer’s location than because of their being stories of migrants and their identity related dilemmas. His texts are an incisive and deep study of the political, cultural and economic antecedents in national histories that bring margins and the marginalized into existence.

[They] offer contrapuntal reading of Indian multiculturalism, readings that give scope for alternative views of a whole ensemble of marginalized attitudes – cultural, political, social and literary. The alienation of the ‘yetcolonized’ in the decolonized state of India and continued existence of oppressive structures of caste, class, race and gender domination within the boundaries of the secular Indian democracy is what Mistry strives to portray. (Roy and Pillai 16)

As already suggested, the fictional works of ethnic minority writers form one of the 'sidestreams' of Indian literature, where their main contesters are the vernacular literatures, and the mainstream Indo-Anglian literature, both of which have different thematic and structural priorities. The mainstream writers Indo-Anglian fiction developed a kind of counterrealist aesthetics often departing from conventional realism. Most of them were struck with certain formative areas of colonial experience, and they have presented their own social, textual and political questions. This issue is seriously pursued by Chelva Kanaganayakam in her book, Counterrealism and Indo-Anglian Fiction (2002).

However, the ethnic minority fictional writers have to strike their difference mainly from the counterrealistic aesthetics of contemporary mainstream Indo-Anglian novelists, (who are rightly called 'Midnights Grandchildren', referring the influence they gathered from the path-breaking literary extravaganza of Salman Rushdie, Midnight's Children.), by returning to the mimetic tradition of representation. They
did not apply experimental techniques to the extent of confusing their intention of representing their community through their works; and for them artifice is not essentially the organizing principle of their works.

But this is not to say that they narratives are completely without experiments. Their works reflect that the worldview and interests of the ethnic groups are consistently ignored or rebuffed by the majoritarian literature. In some cases, they also have to resist representations of their community by writers from outside making them reduced to certain fixed attribute or stereotypes. This is true about the other cultural artefacts like films and drama as well. There are a number of films in Indian languages like Malayalam and Hindi that bring out portrayals of the lives of ethnic minorities, like Anglo-Indians, Jews, Parsis and other different sub sections of Indian society. Most of these films are produced or directed by the mainstream filmmakers and their works almost always help reinstating, and invoking certain stereotypical pictures of the respective communities. The ethnic minorities have thus a necessity to escape from these tiresome stereotypes by initiating an authentic representational praxis that would be possible through their own cultural artefacts like novels. The ethnographic works in India probably serve as agents of the community's desire for revivalism. Therefore their works are mostly the respective community's renewed visitations to the repositories of cultural memory to record the survival story of the community. Each work selected for study in this dissertation is a case of one individual member of the community probing the past of his/her community. The revivalist tendencies or the recollection of the past found at the thematic level of the ethnic minority texts are however, attempts to mythologize the beginning and some of the important instances from the history of the communities, in order to resist the "reactionary revivalism" (Parry 86) that searches for Hindu identity in Vedic and other texts, initiated by the majority. While the reactionary revivalism of the majority "lead to a loss of commitment to our contemporary plural/secular identity" (Parry 86) in India, the minor literatures by way of their visitations to the past found in 'minor texts' endeavour to preserve and strengthen the plural/secular image of the country. In order to achieve this end, the ethnic minority writers employ an egalitarian approach and what could be called a 'polyvocal polity' in their aesthetics, and the strengthening of this politics, however, has been a concern for almost all minority writers here.
SPEAKING OF THE PERIOD from 1920 to 1960, Margaret Atwood stated in her introduction to the New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse (1982) that “this, for me, is the age that only the usual Canadian cautiousness and dislike of hyperbole prevents me from calling golden.” The years between 1920 and 1960 were indeed a period of prodigious activity and contention in English-Canadian poetry, and the contentiousness was as productive a force as was the energetic publishing of poems, collections, manifestos, and little magazines. These were also, of course, years that were overshadowed by two world wars; and those global events were felt most powerfully in the poetic activity of the period: in a wave of postwar modernist poetic practice in the 1920s, in a slowing of poetic production in the 1930s, when the Depression and then another looming war delayed the appearance of a number of poetic voices, and in a reinforcement of a sense of political urgency in the works that did appear during this time.

Modernism Revisited

Until recently, this period in the history of Canadian poetry had followed a strongly defined, well-established narrative. This familiar story has now been both challenged and refined. Typically, the narrative of poetic activity in Canada between the years of 1920 and 1960 had been a tale of triumphant modernism: of a sweep of postwar cosmopolitanism that left earlier poetics in the dustbin of literary history, followed by a quiet, otherwise-preoccupied period of the 1930s, and culminating in a dramatic conflict between competing poetic forces of aestheticism and political consciousness during the 1940s and 1950s.

ACCORDING TO NORTHROP FRYE, English-Canadian literature is marked by a five-century-long oscillation between the romantic tendency, on the one hand, moving in the direction of myth and metaphor and their formulaic units, and the realistic tradition, on the other hand, moving in the opposite direction, displacing or adjusting such improbable formulas so as to produce verisimilitude (Frye 1976, 36–37). English-Canadian cultural production can thus be situated at opposite extremes. In the period between 1918 and 1967, a large part is grounded in the themes and motifs of the folktale, in the structures of the mythopoetic or marvelous, and in the implausible, erotic, and often violent world of romance. Simultaneously, a large part of cultural production, derivative of a society fascinated by history as well as by social observation, has long been anchored in documentary or expository material for
which English-Canadian film, poetry, life writing, and historical and historiographical fiction are well known.

Among the best-known writers resorting to mythical and romantic formulas, and claiming entitlement to the freedom to “lie” — that is, to make full use of the imaginative faculty — is the American Nathaniel Hawthorne. In the introductory chapter to The Scarlet Letter: A Romance (1850), entitled “The Custom-house,” Hawthorne provided the framework for an artistic manifesto on the prerogatives of the “romance writer” to create a “neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairyland, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other” (66).

M. G. Vassanji was born in Kenya and raised in Tanzania. He attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Pennsylvania, where he specialized in nuclear physics, before moving to Canada as a postdoctoral fellow in 1978. From 1980 to 1989 he was a research associate at the University of Toronto. During this period he developed a keen interest in medieval Indian literature and history, co-founded and edited a literary magazine (The Toronto South Asian Review, later renamed The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad), and began writing fiction. In 1989, with the publication of his first novel, The Gunny Sack, he was invited to spend a season at the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa. In 1996 he was a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla, India.

M.G. Vassanji is one of Canada's most acclaimed writers. He has published six novels, two collections of short stories, a memoir of his travels in India, and a biography of Mordecai Richler. His work has appeared in various countries and several languages. Vassanji has been nominated for the Giller Prize for best work of fiction in Canada three times, winning twice. He has also been awarded the Commonwealth Regional Prize (Africa), and the Governor-General's Prize for nonfiction. His work has also been shortlisted for the Rogers Prize, the Governor-General's Prize in Canada for fiction, as well as the Crossword Prize in India. His most recent book, set in Tanzania will be published in Canada in 2012. He is a member of the Order of Canada and has been awarded several honorary doctorates.

M G Vassanji was born in Kenya and raised in Tanzania. Before coming to Canada in 1978, he attended MIT and the University of Pennsylvania, where he
specialized in theoretical nuclear physics. From 1978-1980 he was a postdoctoral fellow at the Atomic Energy of Canada, and from 1980 to 1989 he was a research associate at the University of Toronto. During this period he developed a keen interest in medieval Indian literature and history, co-founded and edited a literary magazine (The Toronto South Asian Review, later renamed The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad), and began writing stories and a novel. In 1989, with the publication of his first novel, The Gunny Sack, he was invited to spend a season at the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa. That year ended his active career in nuclear physics. His contributions there he considers modest, in algebraic models and high spin states. The fact that he was never tenured he considers a blessing for it freed him to pursue his literary career. In 1996, Vassanji was made a fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla, where he visited again in 2010 as visiting professor.

If pressed, Vassanji considers himself African Asian Canadian; attempts to pigeonhole him along communal (religious) or other lines, however, he considers narrow-minded, malicious, and oppresive.

Vassanji is the author of seven novels, two collections of short stories, a travel memoir about India, and a biography of Mordecai Richler. His work has appeared in various countries and several languages. He is winner of the Giller Prize (1994, 2003) for best novel in Canada; the Governor General's Prize (2009) for best work of nonfiction; the Harbourfront Festival Prize; the Commonwealth First Book Prize (Africa, 1990); and the Bressani Prize. The Assassin's Song was also shortlisted for India's Crossword Prize. He is a member of the Order of Canada and has been awarded several honorary doctorates.

His wife, Nurjehan, was born in Tanzania. They have two sons, Anil, and Kabir. He lives in Toronto, and visits East Africa and India often.

The Gunny Sack

First published by the African Writers Series (AWS), whose first series editor was Chinua Achebe. Achebe was brought to meet us at my school in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, by our headmaster Peter Palangyo, who also became an AWS writer, with his novel Dying in the Sun. And so publication by AWS was particularly gratifying and seemed only fitting. AWS is now more or less defunct. The book, when brought out by Penguin India, received a rather generous response from Khushwant Singh. A
misprint in that edition stated that I was born in 1905, which brought an enthusiastic note from a fan congratulating me on keeping at it at my octogenarian age. The Gunny Sack was published by Doubleday Canada in 2005 and can be obtained from them.

**Uhuru Street**

This is the name of the street in Dar es Salaam where I grew up; now it seems narrower and brims with people and traffic, SUVs jamming the sidewalks I used to play on. Two-storey building are being (hazardously I think) extended vertically up to six and eight storeys.

**No New Land**

Set in Toronto’s Don Mills, about an immigrant family from Dar es Salaam. Even the elevator is against you.

**The Book of Secrets**

If The Gunny Sack was a novelistic organization of memories, oral histories, and myths, The Book of Secrets is the story of a written record (a diary or journal). To get an authentic sense of period for The Gunny Sack I had to consult the journals and biographies of British colonial administrators and explorers, who were, for all their faults, wonderful recorders. Book of Secrets is the story of the fate of one such journal written by a colonial administrator at the outset of the First World War as it arrived in East Africa.

As it is believed that the writer’s individual talent should be rooted in the tradition of a particular society and culture but the fact remains that the real strength of the modern literary imagination lies in its evocation of the individual’s predicament in terms of alienation, immigration, expatriation, exile, and his quest for identity. Thus the feeling of culturally and even linguistically estrangement as the individual feels about himself is reflected in the immigrant writers. The questions of his social, emotional, ethnic or cultural identity assumes mystic proportions in the works. When such writers try to identity differences within a culture two things happen. Firstly the difference serves to invigorate a culture, keeping it alive and secondly the difference simply preserves a static distribution of social power. The first opens opportunities for change; the second operates as catalyst for keeping cultures a part in the name of tradition, but with the effect of validating one tradition over another. Such dilemma of
identity finds its articulation in many contemporary novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vasanji.

Moyez Ghulamhussein Vasanji, a Canada based novelist born in Nairobi, Kenya in 1950, was raised up in Dar- es-Salaam, Tanzania and left for further studies in United States. He completed his doctorate studies in Nuclear Physics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T). He later settled with his family in Toronto. At first he served as an expert in Nuclear Physics and from 1990 he engaged himself as a full time writer. He has won the prestigious Giller Prize twice for his two novels The Book of Secrets (1994) and The In-Between World of Vikram Lall (2003). Vasanji has also bagged the 1989 Commonwealth Prize for the Best First Book The Gunny Sack (1989.) has one more work No New Land (1991) to his credit. A memoir and two collections of short stories as well as a biography of the late novelist, Mordechai Richler. Vasanji is Gujarati and English speaking writer. He writes about the frustrating experience of the East – Asian Africans, who were forced to migrate to the USA and Canada due to the anti-Asian movement of Idi Amin in Uganda. In all the novels Vasanji describes the immigrant experience of some Gujarati speaking people whose ancestors went away from India to East Africa and who themselves have been uprooted from there and presently settled in Canada.

In No New Land Vasanji is presenting a fictional account of the cycle of migration actually experienced by his own family. Nurdin Lalani, his wife Zera, daughter Fatima, and son Hanif, are forced to leave Dar-es-Salaam in the wake of the Idi Amin Crackdown on the Ugandans of the Asian origin which had its repercussions in the neighboring states of Kenya and Tanzania. By the lure of the safety and heavenly peace the Lalani are drawn to Toronto. They are turned away from London following an immigration check at Heathrow airport. They tried their level best to adjust the new environment in Canada but it was not as simple as they thought earlier. This ordeal is borne in the heart of Nurdin, the head and protagonist of the novel. Initially he applies for scores of jobs but each time he was rejected on the base of lack of Canadian experience. He has wide experience of business of shoes at Dar as it was his family business. But in Canada he was rejected on the plea of being over experienced. In this way the dreams of the new Land are shattered.

Nurdin is haunted by his old – old values. Failure to find a decent job adds to his misery. He is even shocked to know that he is being implicated for assaulting a
girl. At the end he manages to come out clean of this stigma. Ultimately Nurdin has to reconcile as a marginal man whom fate has decreed to live in two worlds. These worlds are not different but having antagonistic cultures.

This novel specifically is about the ethnic/ immigrant minority group of tenants at Sixty-nine Rosecliffe Park Drive in Don Hills. Their lives present the ironies the pathos and the hardships of having to live between two worlds neither of which promises hope of stability and happiness. As the narrator comments, You try different accents, practice idoms, buy shoes to raise your height, Deodorize yourself silly. (NNL 1992: 2)

One can find persistent memory of home on double level. One is when, Haji Lalani, Nurdin’s father and Missionary fondly recall as they sit on a bench in Dar and gaze at the Indian Ocean. And the other is the recurrent sense of futility captured in the epigraph, a quote from The City by C.P. Cavefy:

There’s no new land, my friend, no New Sea, for the city will follow you, In the same Streets you’ll wonder endlessly. (NNL 1992: 2)

The novel is concerned with the past as well as the present. The flashbacks dealing with life in Dar, the patterns of repetition of similar situations make this novel realistic. Haji Lalani being slapped for looking intently at a German woman in Dar and his Son Nurdin Lalani later being accused of raping a woman in Toronto fuses the past and the present. Similarly Nurdin’s brother Akbar’s attraction for Sushila and got punished by his father is juxtaposed with Nurdin being tempted by Sushila in Toronto. The narrator aptly comments:

We are but creatures of our origins and however stalwartly we march, paving new roads, seeking new worlds, the ghosts from our pasts stand not far behind are not easily shaken off. (NNL 1992: 59-60)

Haji Lalani’s religious fanaticism, and blind adherence to an iron – discipline instilled by the colonizers which terrify the children and compelling them to leave home or to internalize a sense of guilt represents the past. Nurdin is tormented by his repressed guilt his marginalization in Toronto is in part a consequence of his past. Missionary’s Ishmael figure from Dar and a repository of communal wisdom took to exercise Nurdin’s past, heal his bruised feelings and give him hope for the future.

After the charge of rape was withdrawn and Nurdin’s – innocence was proved he thought more of his family and his job. He did not feel embarrassed now. He was
a metamorphosed through this experience and became resolute to face the odds bravely. He became aware of his own potential. Now the CN Tower goads him on to the new path of his life – in the new culture and country. Now he does not want to return to the old idea of home he is now aware of the new realities which he has to accept and change according to the need of time.

As compared to Nurdin Fatima Lalani his daughter has no qualms about her native place in Tanzania. She is ambitious of creating a commercial career in Canada. She wishes to be rich as quickly as possible. She waits eagerly for the admission letter on a Canadian, university so that she can determine her future life. Her parents are not deeply interested as they were not ready to get their daughter influenced by the corrupt western culture. As presented in the novel the mother in not ready to lose her son. ‘Their daughter they had perhaps lost already, but she would never lose Hanif No, not him’ (NNL 1992: 82)

The reason is people of the Asian origin in Canada do not want to lose their true identity, which is a mixture of Gujarati, Indian and Tanzanian. Vassanji here remarks aptly.

We are but creatures of our Origins, and however stalwartly we march forward, paving new roads, seeking new worlds, the ghost from our pasts stand not for behind and are not easily shaken off. (NNL 1992: 179-180)

The emotional attachment of the Tanzanian based Indian is another aspect revealed in this novel. The incident of two elderly men in Dar-es-Salam, at the Oyster Bay grazing at the Indian Ocean thinks

The expanse in front of them and what lay across it the land of their birth which they had left a long time ago, to which even the longing to return had been muted, although memories still persisted. (NNL 1992: 128)

Vassanji excellently merges history in his novel. In Uganda General Idi Amin overthrew an elected government. He claimed that Allah told him in a dream that the Asians in Africa were exploiters who did not want to integrate with the Africans, and, therefore, they had to go. Perforce, they left Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, and wound up in Canada and the United states. In this novel Haji Lalani founded Tanzania as a new country for his off springs but shortly after his death his son was forced to leave Tanzania in search of a new land. Firstly they wished to go to London from where they were turned down. So they reached Canada. Here all the immigrants’ dreamt of
foreign goods and the high standards of living and got attracted towards the brightly shining city Toronto. But on reaching and really experiencing the dreams are all shattered into pieces. At the end they realized that Canada is similar as any new land which is populated by the people of French, English, African West Indian and Asian origins.

Vassanji is concerned with Indian living in East Africa and their further migration to Canada in this novel. He is also concerned with how those migrations affect the lives of his immigrants. Same way he presents the vivid differences in the climatic changes the immigrants feel. In Canada the winter is very severe and harsh for the African – Asians. There is a big atmospheric difference in Dar it is 40° C in summer and in Toronto it 20° C in winter. It takes time to get adapted to the new climatic differences. Still the Tanzanians admire the first snowfall they witness in Canada.

And when it’s showing there in the nigh, softly, silently, whitely, you wonder if it’s not a childish Christmas card you are dreaming. (NNL 1992: 33)

The embarrassing incident of Esmail, a Tanzanian immigrant from Dar, who got violent beating by three white Canadian boys reminds of racial discrimination prevailing among the natives and the immigrants. Nanji who witnessed the whole incident silently thought of insecurity in spite of their struggle to get adapted to the new land. But their helplessness is such that they are to stay still there. The change in the food habits is another grave problem they face. Tanzanian Muslims are not supposed to eat pork. One day Nurdin unknowingly took a bite from Romesh his fellow worker’s lunch. Through the general attitude of the Muslim immigrants in Canada Vassanji comments.

Slowly the bestial traits – cruelty and promiscuity in one word godlessness – overcome you. And you became, morally, like them. The Canadian (NNL 1992: 170-171)

Nurdin Lalani, the protagonist, also encounters grave conflicts between him and the Canadian society. His difficulty ‘Negotiating (...) individual and collecting responses to dislocation and change’ (NNL 1992: 128)

Lalani who is confronted to the altogether different culture that of Asian and African has to define his hybrid identity Vassanji has used the character of Lalani to analyze the issue of the individual versus society. In the context of immigration, even
it can be said that the novelist has split his books into two, one the old ethnic world and the other the experience of the community and especially Nurdin and his family in Canada.

Fatima, the seventeen year old daughter of Nurdin is brought up in Canada. She considers herself as second generation Canadian immigrant. She is the crucial character she wants to become rich and successful and wants to grasp all the opportunities the new land offers her. She is the character who is not caught between the two worlds.

Zera, the wife of Nurdin is another typical character though she is not caught between the two worlds, she rejects the mindset and influences of the host country and retains entirely the mindset and values of the homeland (Tanzania). She never chooses to acculturate into the foreign culture but she enjoys her traditional and religious private world at home and among other conservative members of the Shamsis of Toronto.

The one who stands in between the two worlds is Nurdin Lalani. His life is cradling in between Dar es Salaam and Toronto. Dar is the places where his ethnicity and traditions are anchored. And Dar is the place where he married Zera in a traditional, religious Shamsi way whereas Toronto and its neighborhood of Don Mills is the Place, of modernity and cosmopolitanism. Canada as a place of multiculturalism as its state policy is full of challenges. Many issues such as racial discrimination and other forms of prejudices hinder the immigrants and ultimately work against their optimism.

Migration to the western world is always considered as a step towards success and prosperity in life. This seems the main theme of Vassanji in No New Land. Nurdin Lalani is the example who has to suffer humiliation as he searches for a job. He is repeatedly asked for Canadian Experience. Even racism plays its role in acquiring the job. Because of this and many other social challenges the protagonist steadily descends into depression. His inner conflicts increase He started to question. And doubt himself and his personalities ‘When does a man beings to rot?’ (NNL 1992:134) He continues with menial jobs to survive and to keep up his family. In this struggle he is edged to the edges of society, feeling useless, depressed alienated and humiliated.
At the end of the novel Lalani himself became a victim of a false racist accusation that highlights the hostile atmosphere he has experienced in the new land. He is accused of having attempted to rape a Portuguese – Canadian woman. Though Lalani has not even touched the girl he is immediately got arrested and even suspected of other crimes that were prevailing in the city. His colleagues, natives of the country, shows that their image of the post colonial immigrants is one based on stereotypes:

I’m not going to serve this rapist! She said, turning away. I thought in this country a man was innocent until proved guilty, said Romesh, to no one in particular. Where he comes from, both his hands would have been chopped off announced Mrs. Broadbent. (NNL 1992: 180)

It is clearly and importantly suggested through this incident that the acts of racism are not targeted against Lalani as an individual rather it is to the immigrant as a figure, a community of post-colonial immigrants. There is a high amount of stereotypes and prejudices of all sorts that are aimed in the Canadian Society, against a racially different and visible minority represented by the likes of Lalani. So while immigrant, Culture, Isolated and minimized the individual who embodies it becomes marginalized.

Shamsi Community plays very vital role in Lalani as an individual. Community plays double role one side it is very useful to its members by providing help lines and social structures. But on the other side it is hindering the necessary process of negotiation with the host culture. It is even stated that

In the novel the community almost suffocates the individual and Nurdin never really appears in front of us. (NNL 1992:152)

Lalani is constantly influenced by a modern and secular lifestyle and this affects his personality and behavior as a man of Shamsi and African upbringing. His external challenges get internalized and this marks the degeneration of his character. He even feels that he cannot reconcile with his religious beliefs he gets caught in the inner psychological turmoil. This was doubled by his wife’s hostile attitude and Nurdin’s strict and conservative upbringing.

Change in Nurdin is visible after he got a stable job at the hospital with the help of a cosmopolitan and liberal immigrant friend Romesh. A Muslim by faith tries pork in a Hot Dog not willingly but that of his friend’s insist, this is the first get of many to come signifying a changing Nurdin. He is haunted by the thoughts of the
piece of pig inside his body as per the saying Eat pig and become pig. This signifies that the protagonist who had retained the values and mind of his home country was now slowly, unwillingly changing in the new environment He started consuming beer, visiting sex peep show shops and ultimately starts an affair outside his marriage with another woman. Here one can recall the emotion of the protagonist when they flew over Egypt ‘Felt a certain foreboding; felt vaguely that he was making a crossing, that there would be no return’ (NNL 1992: 35)

Paradoxically although all the immigrants’ characters depicted in this novel face many hardships in Canada and have deep memories of Dar they never thought of going back to East Africa. Only one character the baker Esmail the victim of racism, moves back to the old city and finds its peace there. The Shamsis form a microcosm of their Tanzanian community at the Don Mills – Rosediffé Park Complex. Maintaining their ethnic identity these small group of immigrants continue to live like in their former countries and form their own heaven, separated from the outside world. Here in this part of Canada the Shamsis as a Community attempt to cling to their old style of living, to their old world, and have thus

Recreated their community life in, Toronto; the mosques, the neighborhoods, the clubs and the associations (NNL 1992:135)

In The Gunny Sack M.G. Vassanji tracks the lineage of small Cutchi speaking Shamsi Community.

The title suggests is a delightful pot pourri of several narratives and characters of mixed antecedents. According to the Indian literary discourse for traditional Diaspora:

The gunny sack means with memorabilia like a first fu soil of their homeland and their religious texts like the Ramcharitmanas or Hanuman Chalisa as a Mirror (Singh 2007: 152)

The gunny sack when opened bought out traces of the old land and also there realization that new land is no new but fraught with problems, pressure and perils of existences. It also involves journey from one point to the other from point of origin to that of destination.

The novel is the repository of the collective consciousness of several Asian African such as Dhanji Govindji , Ji Bai, Kulsum and others. Initially Vassanji thanks to the Ontario Arts Council and Multiculturalism Directorate (Canada) for assistance
in publishing the novel. In the second place the non – English words, mostly in Swahili and Cutchi – Gujarati, are intended to be integral to the text. Thirdly, the keynote of the novel is struck by W.B. Yeast’s line form Vacillation ‘Let all things pass away’

The author very intelligently chooses the word sea to describe the novel as this novel though it maintains the tradition of the European realistic novel it relates to the Indian epic tradition of the Mahabharata and the Kathasaritsagar. Here Kathasar Sagar means sea / ocean of stories by mingling of several streams of narrative. Vassanji’s novel conforms to that description as it mingles the Indian – Gujarati strains with the Zanzibari – Kenyan – Tanzanian elements of African origin. Then this cocktail was further added with Toronto mixture a major centre of immigrant cultures in Canada. The novel offers a skilful blend of tragedy and comedy that everything comes to the reader unexpectedly.

The novel is a collective memory of a small overseas East – African Community in Canada, the Shamsi. The Shamsis are originally the Gujarati followers of Shamas Pir. He promised his disciples that a savior from the west will come to save them.

Now it seemed to some that he had come, not a pir, but a Pierre, Trudeau of Canada, promising a cold El dorado in the north. He will take us, they said, as he took the Ugandans, leave it to Pierre True-do (GS 1989: 248-49)

This collective memory of the central Shamsi family is held together by Ji Bai. She comes here as a teenager from a remote village in Gujarat to become the matriarch of a wide – spread clan in East Africa. Memory, Ji Bai said, is this gunny sack. (GS 1989: 5)

She carried her gunny sack wherever she went. And after her death the flow of narratives pour out of the mementos preserved in the sack. Ji-Bai is the narrator – protagonist and the chief inspiration of Salim Juma. He calls him endearingly Shehrbanoo – Shehru for short. This novel also describes the logic behind the long list of names among the descendants of Dhanji Govindji. He came to the land of Zanzibar across the Arabian Sea aspiring for wealth and success. Vassanji writes of him.

Dhanji Govindji. How much lies burned in a name…. Dhan, wealth2, Govind, the Cowherd. Butter thief goPie – seducer, dark Krishna. A name as Banya in its
aspiration for wealth as Hindu; yet gloriously, unabashedly, Muslim. For the esoteric sect of the Shamsis there was no difference (GS 1989: 73)

Sona, the scholarly brother of Kala (Salim Juma) discovers among other things in Ji Bai’s sack, three pad–locked books in Devangari, of which the Gujarati script is only one example. Thus emerges the spicy mass of memory.

African experience confined to the East – African coastal regions like Zanzibar, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya is also included in a large slice in the novel. Along with the real life locations looms the dark and mysterious presence of the vast continent. In Africa the British and the Germans are shown fighting for possessing the land. The native people are the useless once get trampled upon, but they are persistent and keep growing and proliferating. Salim Juma who is a school going boy at Dar-es-Salam perceives the subtle changes that come in the sleeping continent. Even the curriculum changes From Charles Dickens and John Buchanan to Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. From a young boy’s point of view the definition of Independence is the replacement of flag i.e. the replacement of red, white and blue Union Jack by green black and gold flag of Tanzania.

The game of Antakshri that the women play in leisure, reverberates in the Muslim prayers, the Hindu bhajans of Mad Mitha, etc are the portrayal of the transplanted Indian Gujarati identity. The Hindu concept of Karma, soul and its in carnations, its rebirth and cycle of sins and merits etc are the memories of the Gujarati – Muslims of Tanzania. Ji-bai the daughter in law of Dhanji Govindji and the daughter of Gujarat, left her native as young bride to follow the footsteps of her husband. She has the gunny sack of her colourful memories to preserve for posterity the record of what she and her descendants go through in Africa. Salim Jumas Mother Kulsum, observes the Indian traditions when she gives birth to her first child a daughter named Begum, who was nicknamed Victoria.

Kulsum had gone without meat for the nine months, and not until every girl in the girls, school had been fed pilau and sweets, not until kulsum had gone to the mosque, placing coconut and shilling….. on very step as she descended and came home did she touch meat. (GS 1989: 185)

Hindu and Muslim traditions harmonized in an alien land. Kulsum even feels constrained to label the gods and goddesses orthodox and unorthodox. Ji-Bai learns her art of healing from her sister-in-law on the eve of Hindu Diwali and yet the
prayers are all Ayats from the Quran. Along with such religious tolerance inter-racial matrimony is also advocated in the novel. Vassanji narrates: ‘When people of two races combine, beautiful children are born with the virtues of both races’ (GS 1989: 204)

The glimpse of the Indian connection is described in the wedding of a daughter and specially the farewell and last ceremony. The Indian consciousness is also ruminated by Salim Juma during his National service at Camp Uhuru.

I should have come with a small bag, a rucksack. Instead I came with ladoos, Jelebis, Chevdo, Toilet paper, A Woollen suit (GS 1989: 208)

Another incident where Salim Juma while doing his stint at the National Service was welcomed at the Indian Mukhi’s house in a village. He comments on this episode,

One takes the sweetness of Indian girls for granted – the playful even mocking, innocence that evokes tender feelings inside you and you forget how possessive you feel towards them. (GS 1989: 9)

Such examples of Indianess can be multiplied the transaction of US Dollar is referred to as Ibrahim Bhai just because it bears the picture of President Abraham Lincoln. A Son studying in USA writes to his mother a letter in Gujarati. The thugs in a godown in Nairobi resemble the Bombay film villains. The most typical of India the advice given by the parents to the daughter during the farewell;

Don’t let me down Ji Bai Do anything to bring shame upon yourself. Never walk out alone. Don’t speak of your home outside the four walls. Always cover your family’s shame. Don’t come back without your husband’s permission. (GS 1989: 52)

Along with the Indian consciousness important element of the novel is the immigrant experience in East Africa and Canada.

Governments may come and go but the immigrants only concern is the security of their families, their trade and savings. (GS 1989: 172)

One by one the new generation of young boys and girls leave for foreign lands in search of better prospects. When Yasmin, a cousin of Salim Juma departs for London someone said,

Okay. She’s gone, Good buy, Dar, Good morning, London, She’ll be there in the morning (GS 1989: 40)
It was the fate of most of the young generation of the Asians in East Africa. Finally the rise of Idi Amin in Uganda and the reign of terror among the people of Asian origin they went away from East Africa to England, to the USA to Canada. This is how the expansion of the Gunny sack a veritable cocktail is crated. Among the many immortal lessons of the novel the lesson that narrates that there are no heroes in history and politics is the most remarkable one.

The small stores of East Africa deal in identity management the clothes sold in these stores denote the tradition.

There are three Indian stores and one Arab. The largest is two stores in one, selling cloth on one side, general produces on the other. The cloth store appears dark from the brilliant, sunny outside. Inside rolls and rolls of cloth standing upright or lying on sholves; Khagas of all colors hang, neatly, partly folded, from wooden beams and pipes hanging from the ceiling; khaki and black shorts clipped to a board in two row a for display, frocks hanging from a rack, a clump of baby knickers and bras hand – sewn and brought in from the city. P.T. Samji says the Coca Cola board outside. (Sharrad 2004: 25)

Here the global economy market is represented in comparison and contrast of the usage and identity. The stock mixes Africa, India and America presenting the hybrid style and language of Swahili society across their emergent nations. Due to the political unrest the Shamsi Community eventually splits into Hindu and Muslims. Indian traders attempt to keep themselves part of the national fabric but the piece of cloth which gave symbolic unity to the independent Tanzania itself becomes a sign of separate communities in its flag which is Black, Green and Gold in Color.

Almost all the post colonial migrant to the First world are subjected in the new world to a set of racialized discourses of nation and essentially termed as Africans or Asian or Paki. Living in these physical and cultural ghettos they feel rootless or detached. Such detachment can be seen in the characters in The Gunny Sack. They are living on the fringes of the host society and dreaming of home, replete with intimate memories and feelings of emotional affiliations. The narrator sums up the lives of the Indian traders suggesting the amount of trading of immigrant peoples, loyalty to a land or a government, always loudly professed is a trait one can normally look for in vain. Their selfish motif of self – survival, self-survival, separations, depressions,
losses are never written or narrated in any nationalistic politics but are recorded in the creative genius of the immigrant writers;

Rosemary Marangoly George considers The Gunny Sack as work of immigrant genre having the characteristics of disregarding national schemes, the use of multigenerational cast of characters, a typical narrative tendency, full of repetitions and echoes and above all

A curiously detached reading of the experience of homelessness which is compensated for by an excessive use of the metaphor of luggage, both spiritual and material (George 1996: 35)

Migrancy and writing goes hand in hand particularly with the one – way journey and yet the journey must and somewhere. The narrator who is a weary traveler wants to be free from prison called house of the past and from the maze of the narratives. The Scheherazade must be made to sleep, forever. So at the end of the novel it is narrated.

She lies on the floor, crumpled, her throat cut guts spilled, blood on the floor… Thus the disposition of the past to be remembered and acknowledged in only party understood, without the baggage of Paraphernalia (GS 1989: 268)

The past now begins to haunt Kala Juma as a shadow. The letters of Aminas, the ex – lover and the daughter feels him with a feeling of reunion. Therefore Kala Juma Makes a poetical charge addressed to the daughter who has become now a mother.

The running must stop now, Amina. The cycle of escape and rebirth, uprooting and regeneration must cease in me. Let this be the last runaway returned with one last quixotic dream. (GS 1989: 286)

Here “return” signifies two things one’s a fictional gesture of negotiating multiple identities and also desires of oneself refracted through the divides of place and time. See and also suggests the arrival at “home” located on the fringes of the first world host society.

Simon Lewis here aptly remarks

The characters of Vassanji’s or those of the Zanzibari writer Abdulrazak Gumah’s fiction are people doomed to live either as alienated natives in East Africa or Marginalized aliens in the first world cities and that they are peculiarly vested with “a
nont–identity which renders their various flights ever away form but never towards homes. (1999: 15)

In the novels of M.G. Vassanji protagonists of Indian origin are uprooted from their moorings and are expatriated to alien countries. Both novels are tragedies of bicultural experiences in their gruesome aspects.

The flashbacks dealing with life in Dar evince that the novel is as much concerned with the past as the present. Patterns of repetition, Such as Haji Lalani being slapped for looking intently at a German woman in Dar and his son later being accused of raping a woman in Toronto coalesce the past and the present, the private and the public, Similarly, the incident of Nurdin’s puritanical father whipping Akbar for writing a letter to Sushila juxtaposed with Nurdin being tempted by Sushila in Toronto (who, coincidentally lives in the same neighborhood as the girl who accuses Nurdin of molesting her) suggest a deliberate undermining of the realism of the novel. The synchronic structure, as Kanaganayakam (1991: 57) observes succinctly, steers the Novel away from the present to the past, to areas of experience that lie beyond the immediate referential context.

Thus one can say No New Land is a seminal postcolonial novel that foregrounds the voice of the margins without apology or rancor. Problematiz ing our perception of nation and identity, it compels a reassessment of the standards that govern our vision of what constitutes the canon.

M.G. Vassanji’s remarkable novel The Gunny Sack about immigrant experience belongs perhaps, more with V.S. Naipau’s A House for Mr. Biswas and The Satanic Verses of Salman Rushdie than with the latter’s Midnight’s Children.

**CRITICAL WORLD OF ROHINTON MISTRY**

The Parsis have always been on the forefront ever since, but the attempt of charting the cultural space was never so desperate in their writing. Works of Bapsi Sidhwa, Farrukh Dhondy, Firdaus Kanga, Rohinton Mistry, Boman Desai, Dina Mehta are some of the major Parsi novelists, exhibit ethno-religious traits. Especially in the wake of the Partition of the sub-continent, the Parsis and their affiliations with the colonizers and anglophile inclination – distanced themselves from the mainstream Indian Society.
The decline in demographical figures made them apprehensive and the rising communal disharmony has intensified their community consciousness more than ever before. According to A. K. Singh:

Their works exhibit consciousness of their community in such a way that the community emerges as a protagonist from their works through on the surface these works deal with their human protagonists. (1997: 66)

Born in India, Rohinton Mistry immigrated to Canada in 1975, after obtaining an undergraduate degree in mathematics and economics St. Xavier’s college Mumbai, in 1973. While attending the University of Toronto he won Hart House literary Prizes for stories which were published in the hart house Review, and Canadian Fiction Magazine’s annual contributors’ Prize for 1985. Two years later, penguin Books Canada Published his collection of 11 short stories, Tales From Firozsha Baug (1987)

His second novel, Such A Long Journey (1991), won the Governor’s General’s Award, The Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book and the W.H. Smith / Books in Canada First Novel Award. It was short listed for the Prestigious Booker Prize and for the Trillium Award. It has been translated into German, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Japanese, and has been made into the 1998 film Such A Long Journey.

Such A Long Journey creates a vivid picture of Indian family life in general and that of a close knit Parsi family in particular and tells a story rich in subject matter and characterization set in the years around early seventies Mumbai. The novel mainly deals with its protagonist, Gustad Novel’s modest dreams and aspirations. The novelist has dovetailed various narratives with the central narrative of Gustad who co-inhabits in a small flat in Khodadad Building with other members of his community. As the novel unfolds, Gustad learns a few of the severe lessons of life and is compelled to kneel down to some inexplicable forces more powerful than he has to modify his dreams and expectations to survive. The Khodadad Building, which enshrines several Parsi families, is a world in itself.

Such A Long Journey examines the life of a handful of Parsi Indian. In India, Hindus predominate, although society is officially secular. Parsis are a tiny, secretive religious minority. The inhabitants of Khodadad Building in north of Bombay are all Parsis. The most pious of them is Gustad Noble. At 6 am, Gustad begins his prayers in the Courtyard of the apartment complex. It presents the dealing with the dailies’ of
the protagonist’s world. It unfailingly captures the fading glory of the Parsis in
general and of the Nobel’s in particular, reflecting the religio-cultural concern of the
author. Mistry has carefully delineated a picture of a middleclass Parsi gentleman
absorbed in his daily Kusti:

He recited the appropriate sections and unknotted the kusti from around his
waist. When he had unwound all nine feet of its slim, sacred, hand – woven length, he
cracked it, whip-like: Once, twice, thrice. And thus was Ahriman, the evil one, driven
away – with that expert flip of the wrists, possessed only by those who performed
their kusti regularly (SLJ 1991: 4)

Beside the rituals like kusti and the recitals of Yatha Ahu Varyo and Ashem
Vahoo, Mistry takes his readers on a journey of the Tower of Silence and fire temples,
places otherwise closed for the non-Parsi. The ethnocentric nature of his work
discerns the assertion of difference and fragmentation of identity, creating its own
space within the national and diasporic context. The author’s own expatriate position
makes him aware of the elements of alienation. He is an existential outsider on one
hand and on the other, is on the periphery even in India as Nilufer Bharucha puts it,

So his discourse challenges and resists the totalization of the dominant culture
within India itself (1998: 25)

Mistry has portrayed the feelings and apprehensions of a minority community
through some of the historical events. The life style of Parsis living in Khodadad
Building is the microcosm of the Parsis in India. He has exploited history to probe
into broader concerns of Parsis in India. He has exploited history to probe into
broader concerns of Parsis and of national identity with fate and war as two major
themes of the novel and has taken much pain to reflect on these themes at personal,
social and national levels.

On the other levels, the wall and the blackout papers on the windowpanes
indicate closed world of the Nobels. Significantly, the wall, which protects the
residents of Khodadad Building form the outsiders, limits their world within a three
hundred feet wall of enclosed area and the blackened windows, remainders of the
wars, restrict ‘The ingress of all forms of light, earthly and celestial’ (SLJ 1991: 11)
As Dilnawaz complains, ‘In this house, the morning never seems to come’ (SLJ 1991:
11)
Mistry, it seems, uses this chromo type of time and space to problematic and redefine the deliberately cultivated insularity of the Parsi community. Incidentally, Gustad, with the help of the Pavement artist, changed the wall into a wall of all religions signifying Indian Secularism as described by one of the characters, ‘A good mixture like this is a perfect example for our secular country, that’s the way it should be.’ (SLJ 1991:214)

Although their joy was short lived as the Municipal Corporation destroys the wall in order to widen the road the history of community and that of a certain period of a country pulsates throughout the novel. At one level Gustad’s fate resembles the fate of a nation. India Like Gustad – confronted with many wars and the after math is under trauma, and she limps awkwardly, with her limbs fractured by Chinese invasions during the sixties. On the other level, the writer’s concerns for his community are depicted through various characters. Mistry, like his other counterpart elsewhere, deals with the past and present of his community. The novel recounts the journey of the Parsis who came to this land all the way from Iran in the 7th Century A.D. Gustad, proud of his ancient roots, counters Malcom’s argument that Christianity came to India over nineteen hundred years ago…… but our prophet Zarathustra lived more that 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 Zoroastrians influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam? (SLJ 1991: 24)

Various characters belonging to the Parsi, community highlights peculiar traits of their community. The author tries to consider the possibilities of bringing in some sort of changes with the course of time:

It was not all jokes and singing in the canteen, though. Sometimes the hour went in passionate argument about matters that concerned the community, such as the Tower of Silence controversy. (SLJ 1991: 72)

And the reformer’s proposal to introduce the cremation would always result in flared up tempers. More often than not, together with their traditions, their fears and anxieties are the focal points to characters of the novel. For instance: ‘Wait till Marathas take over, then we will have real Gundaraj.’ (SLJ 1991:73) Gustad voices his concerns about rising communal forces:
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 men to get half as much. How could he make Sohrab understand this? (SLJ 1991: 55)

The Prime minister, Indira Gandhi is seen as detrimental to their interest. To them, she and her father have done injustice to Feroz Gandhi member of their community. Their acrimony against her is not altogether invalid as Mrs. Gandhi, during the controversial period of their rule, first nationalized the banks, which destroyed Parsis’ sovereignty over the banking system, and she tricked and entrapped one of their community members named Nagarwala in a scandal. Dinshawji thinks that Parsis are impaired:

What days those were year. What fun we used to have .... Parsis were the kings of banking in those days. Such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalized the banks. (SLJ 1991: 38)

He also holds her responsible for the disharmony in Maharashtra. Dinshawji views it as a loss of social identity and personal history, particularly when the issue of changing of the names of various places and streets were concerned. According to David Williams the lament of Dinshawji suggests:

In loss of the old name is precisely the loss of the old logo centric security, that metaphysical reassurance via language... ultimately, he experiences the re-writing of the map of his neighborhood as an interruption in his self-presence. (1995: 217)

To have a life by any other name would mean an acquiescence to cultural alienation, otherness and marginalization.

Dilnavaz says to Dinshawji that Nehru never liked Feroz Gandhi from the beginning. Dinshwaji, who also agrees to her remarks, says: ‘That was tragic Even today, people say Feroz’s heart attack was not really a heart attack.’ (SLJ 1991: 197)

Thus, the characters like Dilnavaz and Dinshwaji suspect that natural death of Feroz Gandhi the member of their community. This is now Parsi men and women express their feeling of insecurity in Such A Long Journey.

Major Bilimoria’s reappearance on the scene of action disturbs the already precarious of Nagarwala case, he makes an important political statement Nagarwala
received nearly sixty lake rupees from a bank manager in Delhi allegedly on the strength of a phone – call from the Prime Minister which, it was said, he imitated. Nagarwala was found dead after a few months. Nobody knew where the money went. Since this event involved members of Parsi Community, the Parsis were considerably perturbed and the death of Nagrwala itself raised many eyebrows. Here is a view of a Parsi about the incident:

The Nagarwala incident, because it involved a Parsi, jolted the self – image of the community no less. Having long ago lost their literature to the vandalism of Alexander, the accursed, and their dance, music, art, poetry and even their language to the process of adapting to a new home in India the Parsis have developed a particularized culture called from a mixture of ancient myth and legend overlaid by a life sustaining sense of recent achievement. Gratified to have earned an honorable place in the country of their adoption through their contribution to every field of Endeavour and proud of having retained a strong ethical tradition the Parsis were deeply anguished by the ambivalent role Nagarwala had played in the sordid story. (Daruwala 1992: 29)

This incident shows that the Parsis do not like the involvement of any member of their community in any scandal, which may bring defame to entire community in general and to the individual in particular.

However, the book is not entirely about an ordinary man and his family. The Parsi world and national issues are interrelated throughout the novel. The wars that the country had to fight during the first few decades after its independence have perturbed the author. There are numerous references to the wars or the events related to wars against the neighboring countries, which serve as historical backdrop. Events like the 1948 Pak invasion on Kashmir, Indo-China war in 1962, Indo-Pak war during 1965 and 1971 and the birth of Bangladesh are weaved in the texture of the novel. For instance Gustad thinks of the year 1962 as:

Such a humiliating defeat, every where people taking of nothing but the way Chinese had advanced, as though the Indian army consisted of tin soldiers or the Government’s in competency for sending brave Indian soldiers with outdated weapons and summer clothing to die in the Himalayas at Chinese hands (SLJ 1991: 9-10)
Dr. Paymaster refers to Lal Bahadur Shastri’s proficiency in Indo-Pak war of 1965 as: ‘The twenty – one day war with Pakistan in which he fared better than Nehru had in the war with China’ (SLJ 1991: 114) Even Mistry narrates the episode of Shastri’s death through his character, Dr. Paymaster

While the crowds cheered, Shastri boarded a plane for Tashkent where Kosygin had offered to negotiate a peace between India and Pakistan. The night the Tashkent Declaration was signed, Shastri died on Soviet soil, less than eighteen months after he become Prime Minister. Some said he had been killed by the Pakistanis, and others suspected a Russian plot. Some even claimed it was the new Prime Minister’s supporters who poisoned Shastri, so that her father’s dynastic – democratic dream could finally come true. (SLJ 1991: 114)

Now the question arises who is actually responsible for his death? Mistry leaves it to readers to decide. At this stage the receiver of narrative comes in picture. The novel also brings out different idiosyncrasies and ethnocentricities of Parsi Community.

The wars have adversely affected the lives of middle – class in the country and the Parsis as well. The fate of the family is yoked to take of the community and country. Especially the year of war with China was like a nightmare for both the nation and for Gustad. Gustad met with an accident in an attempt to rescue his son. While he was confined to bed ‘The rioting curfew, lathi – charge and burning of buses made his days dreadful’ (SLJ 1991: 311)

The life of the protagonist is interspersed with social and political upheavals. During the rule of Indira Gandhi, Gustad’s fortunes kept on fluctuating. The windowpanes with black out papers still taped on them make the room like the lives of its dwellers, dark and gloomy. The widening gap between Gustad and his son Sohrab, Darius’s friendship with Rabdi’s daughter and Roshan’s increasing illness added to the agony. Major Bilimoria, Gustad’s best companion, who once entertained children with his fascinating tales of the crossing of Banihal Pass, the battle of Baramullah or the siege of Srinagar disappeared suddenly and later he turned out to be an agent of RAW. ‘Entrapped in an intricate and apparently in extricable share of difficulties’ (SLJ 1991: 215)

As the narrative advances, the news of the arrest of Major Bilimoria and the story of his corruption spread. Bilimoria’s story fictionalizes the Nagarwala
conspiracy case of 1971. He, like his real counterpart, finds himself behind the bars, allegedly for misappropriation of money and dies later in imprisonment in obscure circumstances. Mistry, in this sense, reconstructs story waiting to be told on the margins of historiographical account, although it has been relegated to the periphery or excluded deliberately to please the center of power, and centralizes it in his narrative. (Myles 1994: 199)

On the other end of the spectrum, the country is disenchanted once again, with the rumors of Mrs. Gandhi’s connection with money scandal. Sohrab voices the angst of modern time and youth, ‘our wonderful Prime Minister uses RAW like a private police force to do all her dirty work.’ (SLJ 1991: 93) He firmly believes that, ‘Only RAW could have done that she made a real mockery of democracy’ (SLJ 1991: 93)

Much to Gustad’s annoyance, he further points out at her son’s misappropriation of money made out of Maruti business to Swiss Bank.

He suggests two alternatives, Only two choices: communism and military dictatorship, if you want to get rid of these Congress Party crooks. Forget democracy for a few years, not meant for a starving country. (SLJ 1991: 68)

Mistry’s version of history presents two different dimensions. Gustad and Dinshawji belong to an older generation who still has a little faith left in them for the ruling party to improve country’s future. Sohrab and his friend, representing the younger generation, are quick to scrutinize the foulness of politicians with their youthful vigor. In between them is either Dr. Paymaster with his adept views about contemporary politics, or Dilnawaz and Miss Kuptitia, totally ignorant of the political changes. Dr. Paymaster believed that politics, economics, religious problems, domestic strife, all could be dealt with methodically: ‘Observe the symptoms, make the diagnosis, prescribe medicine, and offer the prognosis’ (SLJ 1991: 163)

Mistry has undoubtedly woven together threads of history and social life, for history of a nation is sure to infiltrate into social and personal level and affect the lives of people. In this context Ashley Myles says:

That it serves as a window of human possibility with particular reference to forgotten microscopic community (Myles 1994: 78-79)

Through the characters like Gustad, Dinshawji, Bilimoria, Peerbhoy, Dilnavaz and Miss Kuptitia and a happy combination of Standard English and ‘Parsi Language’
Mistry has incorporated ancient myths with living condition of the Parsi as a community, this has made the novel a social document.

The novel gains its effective strength from interplay of fact and fiction, which place the novel in the category of faction. Pre – occupation with history is an integral aspect of the writer’s intention. The novel as Anita Myles has described.

...... Views and reviews a vast canvas of Indian Life. It discusses minutely and realistically the ups and downs of an average Indian and also touches certain explosive chapters of the India Politics and the three wars that took place between 1962 and 1971. (1994: 174)

The novel emerges as a parallel history of modern India. It is a history of modern India. It is a history from a writer’s point of view that ties to dis / uncover suppressed or neglected chapters of Indian history. Mistry in this context, renarrates the history of his community and country as it has been in the post – Independence era.

It seems that novelist constructs his/story of his community in the novel, which centralizes the Parsi community as a protagonist through its characters. And the country assumes centrality in the narratives of the various characters because the security and prosperity of the community depend on the country’s fate. (Singh 1994: 201)

This re-narration of history in a way depicts consciousness of anxieties and aspirations, perils and problems of existence of individual communal and national issues. Mistry has, in this sense, successfully exploited some historical point of post – Independence era and endeavored to re-think them and re-narrate about his community and country through the various narratives woven in the novel.

A Fine Balance spans a period of about 10 years of free India. The design of the story is quite simple. Between its opening chapter Prologue 1975 and the concluding one, Epilogue 1984 its 614 pages reveal social as well as historical developments of a country. Set in Indira Gandhi’s India and written with compassion humor, and insight, it is a vivid richly textured and powerful novel written by one of the most gifted writers of our time. The novel has sixteen chapters spanning the lives of three main characters over a period of ten years. Though the name of the city in which the novel is set is mentioned nowhere the readers have neither difficulty nor doubt in identifying the “city by the sea” as Mumbai. With the city at the centre
Mistry weaves a subtle and compelling narrative about four unlikely characters that come together soon after the government declares a state of Internal Emergency they are aspiring for different pursuits, their fates bring them together to sail under one flag.

A Fine Balance of the title of the novel is struck by opening the book with the stoppage of the suburban train service because of suicide by an unidentified character and closing the book with a similar stoppage of train service due to a suicide by one of the main young aspiring characters whose dreams of India are shattered so badly that he decides to commit suicide.

The novel is also the story of the heroic struggle of Dina Dalal a beautiful widow in her forties, Ishwar and Omprakash Darji and Maneck Kohlah, a young student. They are painfully constructing new lives, which become entwined in circumstances no one could have foreseen. Their struggle is to survive a world of segregation, oppression and corruption in which honest work is denied and punished by a totalitarian system. Ishwar and Omprakash, the uncle and nephew who have come to city by the sea (metropolis) primarily to escape the castist oppression imposed on them by the village landlord in their village by River, find work at Dina Dalal’s house as tailors. As the novel advances, circumstances conspire to deny them their modest aspirations. They all discover that there are other forces at play larger than their individual self. Each faces irrevocable damages. However, despite Maneck’s disappointments and death, the concluding pages confirm the author’s faith in life.

Mistry’s metaphorical unfinished quilt is the central message of the story. Unlike Rushdie’s metaphor of perforated sheet in Midnight’s Children or that of the Persian rug in Maugham’s Of Human Bondage, the unfinished quilt does not historicize or philosophize but it stands as an eyewitness of collective human efforts. Dina collects the little pieces of clothes to make quilt. The other three join in at a later stage. Every little piece of cloth is linked with memory at some or the other event like her quilt, the tailor’s chronicle gradually gathers shape. Ishwar, for whom regret is luxury which

He could not afford enjoys locating the oldest piece of fabric, moving chronologically, patch by patch, reconstructing the chain of their mishapes and triumphs, till they reached the uncompleted corner (AFB 1995: 385)
Like the fabric piece of the quilt, Mistry has narrated and re-narrated stories of country, culture and communities around a certain point of time and space. Meenakshi Mukherjee believes that all narratives are to be read in the context of specific time and place.

While the narratives emerge out of a culture, they also contribute towards the construction of definition of this culture. Stories and communities are thus bound together in a symbiotic relationship (July-Aug: 155)

To her this ability to create community is not only:

An attribute of the epic and the oral tale, but in a less concrete and more ambivalent way one of the major powers of the narrative fiction today (Ibid : 155)

A Fine Balance is made up of three major narratives strands – the stories of Dina, Ishwar and Om and Manek. The first, third and fifth chapters narrate the past lives of the major characters. The rest of the chapters describe the present. Between The Prologue 1975 and The Epilogue 1984 the novel reveals social and historical developments of a country. The novel progresses through the seemingly separate stories of these major characters after starting on a note of co-incidence. Rohinton Mistry’s narrative moves smoothly between the present and the past that formed the character’s lives and India’s contrasting the illusory hopes of independence with the bitter corruption of a society where justice is sold. Mistry’s work characteristically exposes a contradiction or cluster of tensions embedded within the culture itself as the result of interplay between promises and commitments of the past and reality of the present. In his work, cultural patterns find internalization and adaptation within the stories of the individuals.

In this sense, A Fine Balance offers a synthesis of culture and history. The author’s own sensitivity to history has compelled him to portray the major intellectual, cultural or political problems of his time. History gets into the novel rather unobtrusively, meandering between different social and cultural consciousness.

Here Mistry deals with the emergency in its own way. Mistry’s insider outsider status enables the readers to view the situation from different angles and has added a political – historical dimension to the novel. The point of view in this novel is that of an omniscient narrator, but there is no explicit intrusion by the author in the narration. However, several characters in the novel can be seen to reveal the author’s set of values, as is evident in their observations and comments. Mistry is skeptical
about the declaration of the emergency and centralizes the exclusions of the historiographers. The chronology of the narration makes it obvious. Even, the partition of the subcontinent seems remote, only occasional references are made about it. The author is more concerned with, murder, suicide, Nasality – terrorist killing, police custody death…. The authorial feelings are conveyed distinctly in the epigraph;

Holding this book in your hand, sinking back in your soft armchair, you will say to yourself: Perhaps it will amuse me. And after you have read this story of great misfortunes, you will no doubt dine well, blaming the author for your own insensitivity, accusing him of wild exaggeration and flights of fancy. But rest assured; this tragedy is not a fiction. All is true (AFB 1995: epigraph)

Mistry attempts to give a voice to marginalized sections and raises relevant questions. The fictitious accounts of the predicament of the protagonists can be true what happened to Maneck Kohlah, Om or Ishwar could happen to any Indian. A whole arena of Marginalized groups – the Parsis, the Chamaars, the Muslims, the Madari caste, the beggars – share the same novelistic space and produce history by establishing a community or group identity. For them, as one of the characters in the novel utters, ‘Nothing changes. Years pass, and nothing changes.’

Jonathan Culler, in this context, observes that the creation of a nation involves the positing of a history; to be a member of this group is precisely to take certain stories as in some sense your stories, your past. He further says,

Narrative discourse, particularly its structures of address points an imagined community which is much like a nation; in that it consists of people who have no idea of each other actual existence but who are constituted as “we” by the discursive structures of the text (1994: 6)

Mistry, by picking up a cue from Benedict Anderson, who asserts, Regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail…. The nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (1996: 7)

Tries to problematize the totalizing concept of nation as well as history and presents subversive accounts to highlight cultural differences. He steers his narrative in desired direction by presenting more than one versions of the same event. For instance, for a common man the emergency is nothing but ‘One more government
Tamasha’ (AFB 1995: 5) ‘No consideration for people like us. Murder, suicide ….. Everything ends up delaying the trains’ (AFB 1995: 9)

Those holding some influential post are happy as:

With the Emergency, everything is upside down. Black can be white, day turned into night. With the right influence and a little cash, sending people to jail is very easy. There’s even a new law called MISA to simplify the whole procedure (AFB 1995: 299)

For Dina it is only ‘government problems – games played by people in power’ It does not affect the ordinary people in more than one way. The upper class people were fascinated by the Emergency. For then, it is Magic wand, capable of curing all diseases and decay Mrs. Gupta is in favor of it:

The prime minister’s declaration yesterday of Internal Emergency had incarcerated most of the parliamentary opposition, along with thousands of trade unionists, students and social workers (AFB 1995: 73)

Dina’s arguments that the court found her (Indira) guilty of cheating in the election does not recede her enthusiasm.

No, no, no! She exclaims that is all rubbish, it will be appealed. Now all those troublemakers who accused her falsely have been put in jail. No more strikes and morchas and silly disturbances. (AFB 1995: 73)

The students are euphoric too, for a different reason. They felt that by following Jaya Prakash Narayana, they could bring radical reforms and would

Invigorate all of society, transform it, form a corrupt, moribund creature into a healthy organism that would, with its heritage of a rich and ancient civilization, and the wisdom of the Vedas and Upanishads, awaken the worked and lead the way towards enlightenment for all humanity (AFB 1995: 243)

But students, like Avinash, are aware of the other side of the coin; he educates Maneck;

Three weeks ago the High court found the Prime Minister guilty of cheating in the last elections which meant she had to step down, but she began stalling. So the opposite Parties, student Organizations, trade unions – they started Mass demonstrations across the country all calling for her resignation. Then, to hold on to power, she claimed that the country’s security was threatened by internal disturbances, and declared a state of emergency (AFB 1995: 245)
All the three protagonists are under constant threat of oppression. Various overlapping episodes display the author’s sympathy for the subdued and his rancor against the oppressive authority. He tactfully portrays the victimization of the four major characters – Dina Dalal, Ishwar, Om Prakash and Manek Kohlah, at the time of emergency. The stories seem separate but enable the author to narrate inter actions between different class backgrounds. Dina’s struggle and endurance represents a woman’s plight in the society. Though Maneck and Dina are Parsis, the community does not occupy the centre like the preceding work of Mistry. Nusswan exemplifies both, a male dominance and a false pride of the community. Do you know how fortunate you are in our community? He snaps,

‘Among the unenlightened, widows are thrown away like garbage. If you were a Hindu, in the old days, you would have had to be a good little sati and leap onto your husband’s funeral pyre, be roasted with him’ (AFB 1995: 52)

Rohinton Mistry has drawn the character of Dina Dalal quite artistically. She is not a woman lie Dilnavaz or her daughter Roshan in Such A Long Journey. She is the woman who needs absolute freedom after her father’s death. She has to accept her brother Nusswan as her guardian but not at the cost of her individual freedom. She does not choose any boy out of several boys, suggested by her brothers. On the contrary to this, she marries Rustom, the Man of her choice. She has to face hard times when her husband dies in an accident. Even then she does not wish to lose her prized independence. So she does not come to her brother’s house but continues to stay in her husband’s flat independently. She supports herself by obtaining some orders for tailoring clothes. For several years, she struggles a lot. She becomes helpless when the eviction of her flat takes place and has no other place to go to. She comes to her brother Nusswan’s house. At his stage the feminist may argue that by creating the event of Dina Dalal’s coming back to her brother’s House, Mistry here does some injustice to her. It shows that it is difficult for a woman to live independently without any sort of male – protection. Even Beggar master’s a minor character from subplot, protection helped her to live safely for a few more years. But here the fact is that Dina Dalal, like other three protagonists, is disturbed considerably because of the prevailing political situation that is emergency that is why she loses her freedom.
On the other hand Nusswan’s character is portrayed satirically. He is an autocratic figure who thinks that nothing should be undertaken against his wish. He is not at all happy when Dina falls in love with Rustom Dalal and marries him. He fails to understand why his sister so acutely longs for absolute freedom. He manifests in himself all the smugness and hypocrisy of a cunning businessman.

Ishwar and Om belong to the Chamaar caste. The narrative presents a documentary on the Chamaar’s ways of life. Chamaar (“Tanner” from the Sanskrit Charmakara) is a prominent occupational caste in India, Pakistan and Nepal. Chamaar is a Dalit sub-caste mainly found in the northern states, such as Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Delhi etc. The traditional occupation of this caste was processing, manufacturing and trading in leather and leather goods, but agriculture is another important occupation in which they engage either as owners or as tenants. Traditionally, their social status was low in the Indian caste system because of their association with tanning and thus is still considered as untouchables in some parts of India. These historical details are clearly visible in the novel The Fine Balance. Trivial details like how they skin the carcass, eat meat, and tan the hide are dealt with great interest, and touching subtlety. For instance,

And as he mastered the skills….Dukhi’s own skin became impregnated with the odor that was part of his father’s smell (AFB 1995: 98)

Dukhi Mochi learns to survive with humiliation and forbearance as his constant companions he tries to break the timeless chain of caste by sending his sons to Ashraf to be apprenticed as tailors, and pays clearly for that. The dejected chamaar bemoans: but what about the major important thing? Government passes new laws, says no more untouchability, yet everything is the same. The upper caste bastards still treat us worse than criminals …

More than twenty years have passed since independent. How much longer? I want to be able to during from the village well, worship in the temple, walk where I like” (AFB 1995: 142-30)

But much to their agonies, nothing really changes for them. The plight of Ishwar and Om is the same as that of Dukhi and Narayan.

Mistry’s protagonists have little control over circumstances: in other words history happens to them. For instance The Hindu – Muslim not, on the eve of India’s Independence, drags Ishwar and Narayan into confrontation with a crowd while they
try to protect Ashraf’s family Om and Ishwar are taken to a labor – camp site a later stage and again Om is an unfortunate victim of forced sterilization drive. His realistic mode of portraying brings to the fore the sordid living conditions of the lower cast people in rural India.

Mistry creates kaleidoscopic image of modern India by portraying individual prototypes Dukhi, Roopa, Radha, Narayana, Ashraf, Ishwar, Om represent the world of subalterns. His characters are both oppressors and oppressed. For instance, when a Bhangi ventured towards the hut of Narayan, Rupa though she herself a Chamaar, rebukes him using the same language as her upper cast oppressors, ‘Where do you think you are going? … I will bathe your filthy skin with the boiling water’ (AFB 1995: 133) She chides her son.

We are not going to deal with such low-caste people. How can you even think of measuring someone who carts the shift from people’s house? (AFB 1995: 133)

A Fine Balance attempts to achieve balance between the personal and the general. The text ventures to locate the dives of its characters in a historical context by juxtaposing the personal in relation to the general.

Comparisons have also even made between A Fine Balance and Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children also set in Bombay during the state of emergency, but the two have little in common. Famous for his magic realism, Midnight’s Children set amongst the Muslim middle classes, while A Fine Balance is very firmly in touch with reality and with the dispossessed a very deliberate decision on Mistry’s part. He has said,

I don’t think these people have been represented enough in fiction. Most fiction is about the middle class

He is also dismissive of any talk of happy ending.

Given the parameters of my characters’ live, given which they are, how can you expect them to have any more happiness than they have found? I think that the ending is a hopeful one: The human spark is not extinguished. They continue to find outstanding victory in their case: Perhaps there’s a lesson to be learnt here. The expectations that those of us who have grown up in privileged circumstances have of a happy ending is so far beyond the reach of the thousands and thousands of Ishwar’s and Om’s in India today, people who keep going relentlessly in spite of the olds as to be beyond imaging .(website)
Like Such a Long Journey, in his novel A Fine Balance, also Rohinton Mistry has portrayed a galaxy of characters efficiently and elegantly. By portraying a cross section of Indian society especially those who are called riff-raff, the writer draws the real picture of India. Mistry’s text, like history can be alleged to be incomplete in it, it presents the reality partially and incoherently, leaving many gaps. Guy Lawson rightly parts,

Mistry and Dickens are interested in those to whom history happen those with little control over their circumstances (1998: 22)

Bharucha opines that Mistry’s subalterns do not really speak but their silences are represented through the mediation of Mistry’s narrative. It depicts the plight of common citizens of India. Like the pavement artist of Such A Long Journey Mr. Valmik subscribes to the Hindu belief of destiny.

The author’s geographical distance from the country of his birth does not come in way of the narrativization of the contemporary reality. His visit to India in 1988 re-vitalized him. Mistry had returned to Mumbai, in the words of his brother: 'To refamiliarize himself with the sights, sounds, smells that would hence forth people in his works' (1991: 11)

Mistry might have flipped through old newspapers and journals and devouring whatever information he got about the state of the country to adumbrate his / story. No wonder his protagonist, Maneck goes through the same exercise to fill the gap of eight years. Both of his novels (Such A Long Journey and A Fine Balance) stem out from the darker contours of Indian democracy. The earlier work focuses more on the political scams while the later deals with people. The author becomes vocal at times and deprecates or mocks the highest authority;

At the best of times, democracy is a seesaw between complete chaos and tolerable confusion you see, a democratic omelet is not possible from eggs bearing democratic labels but laid by the tyrannical hen (AFB 1995: 372)

Rohinton Mistry uses same devices as irony, humor; intertextuality to make his narratives effective. For instance, irony or sharp criticism of society is injected into the novel, especially in the conclusion his humor is participative not sneering. Mistry’s metaphorical unfinished quilt is the central message of the story. This is a novel given many too occupational metaphors, so the pattern is not just sheet pattern, but also a pattern of interweaving intermarries and narrative threads. As the quilt is
made of patches the reality particularly Indian social reality is made of various patches of different shapes and shades. All those patches put together go into the making of the whole. It becomes suitable metaphor to describe reality in fictional terms.

Mistry’s language is typically the language of a Parsi gentleman. Through he has been living at Toronto in Canada since 1975, his English is very much Indian. Mistry’s version of history has different dimensions. He focuses on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. A.K. Singh opines:

The prime aim of the literature is to initiate dialogue where it does not exist, particularly between the people and the communities that share certain geo-social - eco – political and cultural space (1996: 109)

The concluding pages of A Fine Balance bear a clear sign of its author’s contempt the taxi – driver voices its creator:

Same way all her problems started with her own mischief making. Just like in Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Assam, Tamil Nadu. In Punjab, she was leaping one group to make trouble for state government …. She gave her blessings to the guns and bombs, and then these wicked, violent instruments began hitting her own government. How do you say in English – all her chickens come home for roasting. Isn’t it? (AFB 1995: 582)

The verbosity of the Taxi – driver speaks of thousands of Indians unspoken thoughts. Undoubtedly the narrative voice in Mistry’s fictional discourse presents an account in the life at the country between 1945 and 1984. His version at history has different dimensions. He focuses on those moment or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences.

Family Matters (2002) is Rohinton Mistry’s eagerly anticipated third novel, following the success of his highly acclaimed A Fine Balance (1995), which won several major literary awards internationally. He in his latest novel confines himself only to the Parsi community that he knows so well and can therefore portray authentically; this novel has received accolades from critics Linda L. Richards Remarks:
His most recent novel, "Family Matters," is brilliant. It manages to be warm and familiar, while for North American readers, at any rate – fragrantly exotic. (2003: Interview)

The novel is set in the city of Mumbai, where Mistry was born and grew up, and tells the story of a middle class Parsi family living through domestic crises. Through one family, Mistry conveys everything from the dilemmas among India’s Parsis, Persian – descended Zoroastrians, to the wider concerns of corruption and communalism. Mistry writes in simple language using a lot of dialogue. Though the novel is very bulky size, it is the most compassionate book of Mistry. He has portrayed the life of a middle class Parsi family of Bombay the focus of the novel has shifted from the 1970s and the years of the Emergency to the more recent times. The Shiv Sena is still around the novel. But the time of the novel is the Post Babri Masjid Bombay.

The novel focuses on the Parsis and it is located in Bombay, in Chateau Felicity, a flat inhabited by a 79 – year old Parkinson’s stricken Nariman Vakeel who is the decaying patriarch and a widower with a small, discordant family consisting of his two middle aged step children; Coomy and Jal. When Nariman’s sickness is compounded by broken ankle Coomy’s harshness reaches its summit. She plots to turn him round the clock care over to Roxana, her sweet – tempered sister and Nariman’s real daughter and that’s where the problem starts.

Roxana, who lives a contented life with Yezad and her two children (Murad and Jehangir) in a small flat at Pleasant Villa, takes up the care of Nariman like a dutiful daughter, but the inclusion of a new member in an already stuffed house soon becomes evidently painful, both physically and emotionally for Roxana’s family. As loathing for Nariman’s sickness increases and finances of the already strained household go bust, inundated by the ever increasing financial worries Yezad pushes himself into a scheme of deception involving Vikram Kapur.

The first few pages tell of Nariman’s subjection to increasing decay in physical health and stinging insults (revolving around his cost of medicine, lack of space and privacy, the daily routine of bedpans and urinals, sponge baths and bedsores) from his stepdaughter.

Very soon, the focus shifts to Roxana’s household. With Nariman’s inclusion, however, deterioration and decay creep into it. As Yezad comes to centre stage for the
following part of the book the author explores the problems faced by an average middle class family financial problems dare him and Jehangir towards greed and money.

The subplot of the book, which involves Yezad hatching a plan to dethrone his employer, is a huge slap on the faces of the corrupt Shiv Sainiks. This subplot acts as the turning point in the main story. The book contains many details of the Parsis’ practices, rituals, intolerances, and the concerns of native Parsis.

In the epilogue, the youngest of all characters, Jehangir, becomes the narrator, describing the metamorphosis that religion, age, death, and wealth bring to his family.

As the story begins, Coomy who is very bitter and domineering is preparing to have a party for Nariman’s 79th birthday. Roxana and her family are coming over. Coomy is worried by Nariman’s practice of going alone for a walk in the evening. He is beginning to show early signs of Parkinson’s disease and she is afraid he will hurt himself despite his tremors, Nariman likes to go walking. He falls into a hole dug by the telephone company and breaks his ankle, Jal and Coomy cannot cope with the stress and indignity of nursing him. Mistry depicts the theme of suffering through the character of Nariman. He suffers from osteoporosis and hypertension; He does not find peace in Chateau Felicity. Pathetically enough while he is sent to the Pleasant Villa, he still does not find peace.

One can say that Nariman is the embodiment of Parsi community. In his young age he suffered from mentally as his parents were against his will to marry a non Parsi girl, Lucy. On the contrary, he has to marry a Parsi widow. But he could not forget his lady love in his old age and this led him to a miserable life until his death.

One can also interpret the life of Nariman Vakeel as the rise and fall of Parsi Community. Parsi came to India from Persia because of the fear of Arab invaders. But though they are treated well in India, they are vanishing day by day because of late marriages, low birth rate, high rate of death and such other reasons. The death of Nariman Vakeel symbolically indicates the fall of the Parsi community.

According to the Parsis, India is a corrupt country. Mistry exposes the corrupt condition of India in the following line; 'Corruption is in the air we breathe. This nation specializes in turning honest People into crooks.' (FM 2002: 30) Coomy points out the dangers lurking indoors and outdoors. Here she talks about the burning down at an old Parsi couple by rioting Hindu mobs, under the mistaken impression that
feeing Muslims had been given shelter in that building. She also points out that Bombay burnt for months after the razing of the mosque in Ayodhya.

How often does a mosque in Ayodhya turn people onto savages in Bombay? Once in a blue moon (FM 2002: 5)

Coomy also talks about the danger that not just Parsi but also the senior citizens of Bombay are experiencing and also killed for the monetary gains Jal says:

Just last week in Firozsha Baug an old lady was beaten and robbed inside her own flat. Poor thing is barely clinging to life at Parsi General (FM 2002: 5)

A part from A Fine Balance, this novel does not deal with the political issues and if at all, it interludes through one of the central characters – Yezad Chinoy’s professional life. Nilufer Barucha writes in this regard:

It is through Yezad that the reader comes in contact with his office attendant Husain the victim of the Past Babri Bombay riots and Mr. Kapur his boss, a victim of the 1947 (Partitioning of India) Hindu – Muslim clashes. (2003: 169)

Husain, a peon of Bombay sporting Goods Emporium is a tragic victim at the Babri – Masjid riot. His wife and children were killed in the riot. Shiv Sena involved in looting and burning the poor and innocent people. Husain describes the incidents in the following words:

In those riots the police were behaving like gangsters. In Muslim Mohallas, they were burning; neighbors came out to throw water and the police? Firing bullets like target practice. These guardians of the law were murdering everybody and my poor wife and children……. I couldn’t even recognize them. Mr. Kapur Sympathizes with Hussain and remarks: “Hahn, Hussain, it was shameful. More than three years have passed, and still no justice Shiv Sena polluted the Police. And now Shiv Sena has become the government. (FM 2002: 149)

In an interview with Books Rag RohintonMistry answered a raised question about the canvas of A Fine Balanceand Family Matters. The novelist answered:

Family Matters I think has an internal canvas which is as complex as the external canvas of A Fine Balance; that is the only similarity I can perhaps point out. But there are concerns, primarily political ones, which both the books share. If you write about Bombay in the mid-90’s especially if you give our characters a political consciousness, it is inevitable that they will sit and talk about which is happening in the city, what is opening in the newspaper (Books Rag Website)
Mr. Kapur recounts to his staff his response to a familiar scene of commuters in Bombay trying to find a foothold on overcrowded trains. Kapur’s intention is to demonstrate the cosmopolitanism and underlying humanity of a Bombay that despite all its fanaticism and corruption, provides a heaven to all those who drift into the city, regardless of cast, ethnicity, or religious affiliation Kapur’s, serves more than a symbolic function:

I never travel by train; I see how crowded they are when I drive past the tracks. But from the platform that day I saw something new. A train was leaving, completely packed and the men running alongside gave up. All except one. I kept my eyes on him because the platform was coming to an end........” (FM 2002: 153)

The complex aspects of this daily occurrence become evident later when Kapur attempts to board a train and fails miserably, discovering that travelers are less inclined to help someone who obviously belongs to an affluent class.

Mistry is well aware of the danger of relying too heavily on a social and political realism. He is more concerned about the lives of individual and families, their personal tragedies and social lives than the public world of Shiv Sena fanaticism. However Mistry seeks to create a family realism and a portrait of Community inside larger India. The social and political context is just an instrument of individual change.

Rohinton Mistry describes various features of Bombay in Family Matters. He narrates;

You see how we two are sitting here, sharing? That’s how people have lived in Bombay. That’s why Bombay has survived floods, disease, plague, water shortage, bursting drains and sewers, all the population pressures. In her heart there is room for everyone who wants to make a home here.( FM 2002: 152)

Appreciating Bombay, Mr. Kapur says:

We had to run and we came here but Bombay treated us well. My father started over, with zero, and became prosperous. Only city in the world where this is possible (FM 2002: 145)

Mistry’s love for his old city, Bombay, shines through loud and clear in the words of Mr. Kapur:

Bombay endures because it gives and it receives within this warp and weft is woven the special texture of its social fabric, the spirit of tolerance, acceptance,
generosity. Anywhere else in the world, in those so-called civilized places like England and America, such terrible conditions would lead to revolution. (FM 2002:152)

These words of high praise for Bombay however, come with a warning against the radical political party, Shiv Sena, trying to gain control of the dynamic city. Mistry has portrayed Bombay city as a protagonist in Family Matters and Such A Long Journey. In his book, Mistry warns against fatalism: ‘In a culture where destiny is embraced as the paramount force, we are all puppets’ (FM 2002: 154)

Family Matters has a variety of themes and one of the interesting themes is that the child is the father of man. Here the child concerned is the son of Roxana and Yezad, Jehangir and father is his patriarchal grandfather, Nariman. In the novel, it is Jehangir through whom we come to know about the problems that the family faces. Mistry has used the metaphor of the jigsaw puzzle through which the boy tries to solve the quarrels and power politics that shake his family but he finds it is very hard to cohere together in happiness and harmony like the pieces in the jigsaw puzzles.

Some critics believe that Yezad’s character is autobiographical, Mistry also experiences ‘alienation’ like all emigrant Indians. Through the character of Yezad, Mistry expresses his wish to come back to India. At the same time Yezad’s wish for emigrating is symbolical of his quest for prosperity, which also indicates the thirst of Parsi community to achieve economic status for ensuring security in life.

Roxana is devout and sweet-natural wife of Yezad Chenoy and mother of two children Jehangir and Murad. While the stepchildren live with and take care of Nariman in an apartment in the spacious Chateau Felicity building which he has bequeathed to them, Roxana lives with her husband and two sons in a newer apartment, Pleasant Villa, bought by her father.

This is a fact that Coomy is envious and bitter, never stops pointing out. Perhaps it’s because the sprawling seven room palatial apartment is rapidly degenerating, almost parallel to Nariman’s health, while their two-roomed small flat is relatively modern and newly purchased.

Roxana’s husband, Yezad, works at Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium at Marine Lines and has, in the past, eloquently written for permission to emigrate his family to Canada.
Depositing him on a couch in the living room of Chenoys which becomes his home for the next few months, changes the lives of everyone, they struggle, they grow and they learn and they endure. With painstaking detail, Mistry draws the conflict within each character demonstrating the guilt, compassion, family obligation versus desire for independence and the building of human relationships.

The necessities of Nariman’s care strain Roxana’s relationship with her husband, a warm, witty man saddled with a vicious temper and smoldering disappointments. The Chenoy’s problems multiply. Nariman grows more feeble and bedridden.

Having failed in his attempt to immigrate to Canada, Yezad is struck in a retail job that’s beneath him, his college degree worthless in a world where only computer skills are in demand. Contemptuous of Bombay’s corruption, he finds himself tempted in that direction when his family forgoes meat to pay for his father – in laws medicines.

Yezad is desperate to do something to proceed for his better future and to get rid of poverty. He first tries to convince his boss, Mr. Kapur, to get involved in politics and let him run the store alone. He even hires a couple of actors who pretends to be gangster of the Hindu fundamentalist party Shiv Sena. They threatened Mr. Kapur and barged his office. And also taught him now life in Bombay and gone to worse.

But Kapur merely flies into a rage, and when some real Shiv Sena operatives show up soon afterward with the rather modest demand that he should ratite his ‘Bombay Sports Goods Emporium’ to the ‘Mumbai Sports Goods Emporium’ because Mumbai is being the city’s new nationally correct name. Kapur against goes ballistic and is murdered. His vicious, Icy widow then fires Yezad, and he never finds another Job.

Yezad’s resentment of Nariman occasionally gives way to sadism, as when he refuses to give the old man the bottle he needs to urinate, forbidding his sons to help either. At first Nariman’s son-in-law Yezad resents his children’s proximity to their ailing grandfather;

First they should learn about fun and happiness, and enjoy their youth. Lots of time to learn about sickness and dying (FM 2002: 278)
Yezad is not a bad man, which makes his cruelty all the more painful. But as the novel explores the developing bond between Jehangir and Nariman, Yezad comes to see the truth of Roxana’s belief that this proximity is a good thing:

You should like those are RSS fanatics, trying to blame a saint. Instead of getting upset about the bottle, be glad our children can learn about old age, about caring – it will prepare them for life; make them better human beings (FM 2002: 278)

By living with his father in law in cramped quarters for several months, Yezad grows from a moody and resentfully uninvolved husband to a sweet and caring son to Nariman. He comments on the beauty of helping the elderly find comfort in their deaths:

Strange trip, this journey toward death no way of knowing how much longer for the chief .... a year two years? But Roxana was right, helping your elders through it – that was the only way to learn about it and the trick was to remember it when your own time came .......... (FM 2002: 347)

Mistry’s descriptions of Nariman’s flattering mind and body are sobering, not least for the impact his failing health has on those around him, Commy and Jal

Were bewildered and indignant, that a human creature of blood and bone, so efficient in good health, could suddenly become so messy..... Sometimes they took it personally, as though their stepfather had reduced himself to this state to harass them” (FM 2002: 68)

Roxana, on the other hand, quotes Gandhi’s message: ‘That there was nothing nobler than the service of the weak, the old, the unfortunate’ (FM 2002: 72)

Mistry has an amazing way of setting up ordinary lives scarred by tragedy, then illuminating them with moments of merciful beauty. He writes simply, but by accumulating the small details. Of his characters existence, he creates a visceral feel for their loves, humiliations and little victories. A scene where Yezad overcome with sympathy, decides to trim his father – in – law’s nails and shave his face becomes a quite redemption. In the short term, having to take in Nariman threatens to tear Roxana’s family apart. But in the long term, living up to their responsibilities transforms not only their morals but their fortunes. Yezad rediscovers his lost religion, becoming a regular worshipper at the fire-temple. The story moves to a close on a surge of pious sentiment Yezad is now a Parsi fundamentalist and bigot, prepared to act against Murad, if he tries to date a non-Parsi exactly as Nariman’s family acted
against him. Earlier on, Mistry seemed strangely to muffle the conflict between religions as Nariman experienced it, enemy of joy killer of impulse, and as Yezad rediscovered it, as bringer of peace and prosperity. Yezad’s return to religion is presented in terms of timelessness, peace and comfort, he perceives his Zoroastrianism as ‘encoded in blood and bone.’ (FM 2002: 297)

Yet the novel makes the readers all too aware of the destructive aspects of religious belief as well. The Parsis, followers of an ancient Persian religion, were in Colonial days an influential and highly respected minority in India. Family Matters addresses the dwindling of their cultural dominance despite the efforts of people like Nariman’s father who refuse to let their children intermarry.

Just like many other Parsi novelist Rohinton Mistry has touched this reality of Parsi community: ‘No Inter Faith Marriages’ when economical tragedy is prevented, Jal decides to set right the sabotaged ceiling and invites his stepfather back home. He did so because he is unable to restore the financial difficulty. But unfortunately the ray of his life, Coomy dies and now he completely soaked in repentance. He invites with him. The Chenoys sell their apartment Eventually Nariman dies. When he was on his deathbed, he was surrounded by his family and also daisy arrived to fulfill a promise she made years before that she would play the violin for him as he lies dying.

The Jobless, disappointed Yezad turns into a Parsi fanatic, pouring over sacred texts round the clock and praying at the fire temple, cursing his sons as they become more secular westernized and eager to cuddle with non-Parsi girls. Roxana grits her teeth, pours her love out on everyone and keeps peace in the family. Jal, now benign, clueless Uncle fiddles with his hearing aid and watches from the sidelines.

Not all of the characters in the Novel are Parsis, but there’s a sense that those who can enjoy a qualified exemption from the full chaos of Bombay. Yezad’s employer is an ecumenical Hindu, a born and bred Bombayvala who sees himself as inoculated against attacks of outrage, but in his attempts to surrender to the spirit of his city he experiences only intimidation and thuggery. A salesman at the Book Mart next door has a sideline as a scribe, reading and writing letters for the illiterate. The full misery of India breaks over him like a wave, with all its paradoxical accompanying dignity. One man, who has just heard of his brothers’ death killed for a relationship across cast lines – refuses to have the reading fee waived since it would
cheapen the death to hear it for fee. The book’s minor characters are often doctrinaire in their diagnoses.

Little white lies are as pernicious as big black dies. When they mix together, a great grayness of ambiguity descends; society is cast adrift in an amoral sea…… (FM 2002: 348)

A family that belongs to a racial religion is certainly some sort of special case. There is plenty of anthropological information in family matters about Zoroastrians – rituals of sandalwood and brazier quire beliefs about the cosmic significance of the cat, the cock and the spider. The most engaging pages are those where elderly Parsis, resigned to the decline of the sect which ‘built this beautiful city’ and ‘made it prosper’, discuss fantastical remedies for the low birthrate. Since educated people have smaller families, one proposes cash incentives for Paris to study less. Etc are vividly described Mistry has once again shown that Parsi life with all its idiosyncrasies and peculiarities is full of stories with universal appeal as it is rich in human texture. The author understands and portrays his human texture in colour and style. Family Matters was as well received internationally as its predecessors, nominated once again for the Man Booker. It also won the Kiriyaman Pacific Rim Book Prize.

Many critics compare Rohinton Mistry’s writing to 19th century novelists from Dickens to Tolstoy. But Mistry himself answered to his query he said:

I enjoy that kind of writing and that period as much as anything else. People often mention Dickens and Tolstoy in connection with my work but it is not as though I have undertaken any special study of their work. The only Dickens I had read till I took night classes in Toronto was in high school; I think we read Oliver Twist and an excerpt from A Christmas Carol. At university, I remember reading hard times, Great Expectations, David Copperfield and I think that it, really, I have not undertaken any special study, nor am I particularly drawn to these authors. Infact, if I were to choose my favorites, what I enjoy most, they would probably include some American writes, like Cheever, saul Bellow Bemard Malamud, and Updike of course I do enjoy Chekhov and Turgenev - these 19th century writers but I do not have any special attachment to that period but I’m not an expert in all this so if the critics thing my writing is Dickensian or Tolstoyan. I will thank them and say I am flattered. (Linda 2003: Interview)
It can be said that Family Matters is a good novel. The dialogues are great the relationships are totally perfect. There is more or less a happy ending after lots of troubles. The Epilogue which is presented by Jehangir, now fourteen that flashed five years forward to show how the people were all doing. There is also a lot to be learned about the culture of the Parsi and the religion of Zoroastrianism from this great book.

The spirit of postcolonialism adds another dimension when come under the influence of a foreign culture or in a state of diaspora. Writers like Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, Anita Desai, Ruth Jhabvala have opened up possibilities of a new language and new way of seeing the world, as an alternative to the monolithic construct of colonial perspective, these writers are engaged in promoting multicultural, cross-cultural hybridity which acted as the source of literary and cultural redefinition. In the process the national boundaries disappear and a composite culture with an essential touch of national/ethical difference emerged in their writings. But the postcolonial writers and critique, who are in a state of diaspora directly or indirectly participate in the discourse operated by imperial power. The failure to be a postcolonial writer ultimately gives birth to the complexities in narrative structure. When Salman Rushdie upholds the elevated status of Indian writing in English at the cost of regional literatures, the same mechanism is at work. Most of the South Asian diasporic writers look at their country of origin from the first world’s point of view and try to recolonize the third world in this age of globalization. ‘The First World within the Third world’ is a part 15 of the recolonization and the diasporic writers are the willing partners in the enterprise of the so called cosmopolitanism and globalization.

Salman Rushdie has successfully created the First Worlddist point of view into the Third World structure in his Satanic Verses: “Rushdie had misjudged his audiences and willingly offered himself up for Western appreciation – they conceded that Rushdie had provided a fruitful internal critique that could eventually lead to reform through debate and critical scrutiny of Islam” (Needham 92). The same applies to another major writer of diaspora Rohinton Mistry. His two novels Such A Long Journey and A Fine Balance “are elegiac, not nostalgic in tone” (Paranjape 167). Either of the novels are not celebrating the homeland but regret and mourn at its millions of tragedies and imbalances:
Mistry’s winning the Governor-General’s medal and other honors in Canadian society for his works on India suggests not just the rewards of writing novels which are critical of homelands, but do not threaten the country. It also indicates Mistry’s effort to say farewell to India and to accelerate his development as a Canadian citizen (169).

In the present conditions many of the writers in postcolonial societies are not 'writing back' but 'writing home' thus they are becoming diasporic. Therefore, a theory based on the notions of colonizer/colonized, centre/margin, metropolis/periphery have become irrelevant. Now the emphasis is being given to the social, political and cultural conditions operating at 'home' in order to fully understand their texts.

An expatriate shares the experience of exile. Life in an alien country is deliberately chosen by an expatriate and the possibility of return to the motherland can not be entirely given up and it seems that, “a clear cut distinction between an expatriate and an immigrant can not be made as no clean break from one's culture has ever been possible or real. A total delink is only a myth. In the final analysis, the supposed distinction between exile, expatriation, emigration and immigration may be acceptable in analytical terminology, but they are rarely absolute in the experience of them” (Vijayasree 221). Dispossession, sense of loss and relocation are shared experiences of exile, expatriation, emigration, and immigration.

Besides, an expatriate consciousness is also reflected through a constant shuffling of physical and emotional residence. It is a “psychological state of being between two worlds without belonging completely to either one or the other, operating in a space permeated by perpetually shifting alternatives” (222). An expatriate has to go through many upheavals, as the condition of diaspora put before him so many challenges or dilemmas. The diasporic condition requires transference at all levels including the moral and the emotional. Rushdie refers to the diaspora as 'translated' men, a fact which affects the relationship of the diaspora with the history, homeland and self. In Imaginary Homelands, he writes:

To be an Indian writer in this society is to face everyday, problems of definition. What does it mean to be 'Indian' outside India? How can culture be preserved without being ossified? How should we discuss the need for change within ourselves and our community without seeing to play into the hand of our racial
enemies?... These questions are all a single essential question: How are we to live in the world?. (17-18).

Transplantation in a new environment compels the diasporans to define their identity in the new perspective. Thus, self-definition occupies a vital role in an expatriate condition and the issue of identity is at the heart of the expatriate consciousness. Thus, an expatriate has to face three possible alternatives one is to retain one's own indigenous cultural identity and remain indifferent to the 'other'.

Second is to seek total assimilation and shun all ties with one's original identity and third is to create a balance between the new and the old world. In expatriate writing identity crisis hence becomes an important aesthetic concern and construct. The multiple and shifting identities of the expatriate writers is very well reflected through "search for home, renewal of family ties, evocation of imaginary homelands, interrogation of contemporary notions of nation and nationalism and a dialectic of cultural difference and multiculturalism" (Vijayasree 225). Construction of home plays a vital role in expatriate imagination as it keeps on haunting his body, mind and soul. In this body of writing the dominant motif is the search for home as the sense of lost home produces restlessness.

Colonialism and patriarchy are seen as power structures that exploit. In Canada, colonial exploitation is seen as a kind of exploitation of both Nature and women. Colonial power structures have gone deep into the collective unconsciousness of Canada and have become metaphor for feminine and nature exploitation for women writers in that country. This gives rise to Eco-feminism.

Eco-feminism or ecological feminism is a term coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne. It is a philosophy and movement born from the union of feminist and ecological thinking and the belief that the social mentality that leads to the domination and oppression of women is directly connected to the social mentality that leads to the abuse of the natural environment. Joyce Nelson says, —Eco-feminism bridges the gap between ecology and feminism: strands of analysis which have existed side by side over past decades without necessarily intertwining. By making explicit the connection between a misogynist society and a society which has exploited 'mother earth' to the point of environmental crisis, Eco-feminism has helped to highlight the deep splits in patriarchal paradigm.
Eco-feminist theory links the oppression of women with the oppression of nature. More specifically, —ecological feminism is the position that there are important connections—historical, symbolic, and theoretical— between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding which is crucial to both feminism and environmental ethics. (warren, p.235)

Eco-feminism is dealt in Margaret Atwood’s novel Surfacing (1972). Margaret Atwood is a leading novelist of Canada. She is best known for her feminist novels around the world. Surfacing is one of the best novels of Atwood which projects the story of an invisibly visible character without name in form of narrator of the story. The title of the novel is very significant because it reveals the efforts of an individual’s self exploration which undergoes many phases of physical troubles and mental traumas. All the efforts of an individual in the novel for self exploration clearly come up on the surface in midst of the nature from deep conflict between self and society and gives a new power of re-thinking and insight to the nameless heroine of the novel for further process of life.

The protagonist grows up in a masculine world where it was worse for a girl to ask questions than for a boy. If a boy asked a question the other boys would make derisive sucking noises with their mouths but if a girl asked one the other girls would say —Think you’re so great in the washroom afterwards.

Thus growing up in a culture saturated with male bias, women remain reconciled to their own inferiority. Margaret Atwood draws attention to the fact that —the world is masculine on the whole; those who fashioned it ruled it, and still dominate it today, are men. (Beauvoir, p.557)

In Surfacing the narrator of the story remains nameless throughout the novel. Commenting on the namelessness of the heroine Nancy A. Walker says that the narrator —lacks a clearly defined _self_ that can be named . Being nameless the protagonist says to her friend Anna, —I no longer have a name. I tried for all those years to be civilized but I’m not and I’m through pretending. (Atwood, p.162)

It can be said that by depriving her protagonist of a name, Margaret Atwood has been able to suggest that Surfacing is not a story of a particular woman but of the millions of women all over the world who may identify themselves with her. The protagonist loves her art teacher who uses all his skill to seduce her. He gave a wedding ring and almost succeeds in creating the image of himself as her husband.
When she is pregnant, he uses all tricks International Journal of Scientific and to abort the child. For him it is — simple like getting a wart removed. (Atwood, p.138)

The protagonist discovers that after marriage women’s exploitation, oppression and victimization gets sharpened. According to her marriage is nothing but a surrendering of values and distortion of the identity of a woman. Thus the protagonist’s journey into the interior provides her, — a means for tapping emotions that would otherwise remain inexpressible, and reveals aspects of her personality hitherto hidden. (Stewart, p.156) In an interview Margaret Atwood says, — It seemed to me that getting married would be a kind of death. (Valerie, p.16) According to Margaret Atwood, marriage should follow love. A marriage which is not based on mutual love is meaningless. The narrator says she was fool to enter into the bond of marriage. But in reality she never got married. Her lover was a — middle aged, — second hand and — selfish man. He has refused to marry her because he is married. The narrator feels shattered when he shows the photographs of his wife and children, — they had names, he said I should be mature. (Atwood, p.143)

She is betrayed by selfish lover but says, — for him I could have been anyone but for me he was unique, the first, that’s where I learned. I worshipped him...I kept scraps of his handwriting like saints’ relics... (Atwood, p.142) The narrator cannot forget the misery abortion has caused her. She says: — I couldn’t accept it, that mutilation, ruin I’d made. (Atwood, p.137)

The unnatural act of her abortion and the continual struggle for her to feel comfortable with words and language illustrate the extent to which society or man oppressed and consumed the surface. Both empowering and dominating nature of her ex lover shows, — The unborn child was my husband’s, he imposed it on me, all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator. He measured everything he would let me eat, he was feeding it on me, he wanted a replica of himself. (Atwood, p.28)

Margaret Atwood is emphasizing the fact that men exploit the bodies of women for their needs. They have controlled the process of childbirth which nature has assigned only to women. Men want women to remain powerless victim. She refuses Joe’s marriage proposal, — The finality; and he’d got the order wrong, he’d never asked whether I loved him, which was supposed to come first. I would have been prepared for that. (Atwood, p.80)
Joe does not realize the need for it because men except women to be absolutely passive and also because they think marriage is a woman’s destiny. The relationship between the protagonist and Joe, offers an interesting insight into male-female dichotomy. The protagonist’s acceptance of the partnership is almost fatalistic. She realizes that for Joe sexual need is primary and he wants to dominate and control her. She perceives a killer and victimizer in him.

We can notice the split between the narrator’s feminine self that is peace and harmony in married life and her feminist self which suggests Anna to walk out of marriage instead of suffering. Her imaginary divorce caused her tremendous pain and suffering. Remembering her parent’s reaction on her divorce she says:

—They never forgave me, they didn’t understand and divorce, I don’t think they even understood the marriage, which wasn’t surprising since I didn’t understand it myself. What upset them was the way I did it, so suddenly, and then running off and leaving my husband and child, my attractive full-colour magazine illustrations, suitable for framing. (Atwood, p.23)

Margaret Atwood’s —Surfacing takes woman as an existential condition, the condition of being powerless and manipulatable. (Jaidev, p.54) Since power is centralized in the hands of man, they feel nothing wrong in destroying her dignity or creativity. According to them, a woman has no right to have a baby without a husband. When the pregnancy of the protagonist concluded not in childbirth but in abortion she feels emptied, amputated.

Margaret Atwood displays a superb, penetrating awareness of the traumatic experiences of abortion in the life of sensitive woman. Sushila Singh, an exponent of feminism in India thinks that, —the trauma of abortion has never been dealt with such an extraordinary understanding before in fiction . The protagonist undergoes emotional and artistic death at the hands of her teacher. It is a —planted death in her . As Malashri Lal says, —...the pain of aborting life uninges the minds to a degree that it creates an alternate _truth_ to the event.

The protagonist suffers from a guilt complex and in the end of the story, she decides to conceive a baby and resolved that, —this time I won’t let them. (Atwood, p.187) The narrator wants to prove that the process of childbirth is women’s power not men’s and a woman can deliver the baby the natural way. She says:
—This time I will do it myself.... The baby will slip out easily as an egg, a kitten and I’ll lick it off and bite the cord, the blood retiring to the ground where it belongs; the moon will be full, pulling. In the morning I will be able to see it: it will be covered with shining fur, a God. (Atwood, p.156)

After her abortion, the protagonist comes to develop deep sympathy for the flora and fauna of the Quebec Island. She finds that the beauty of Nature is being destroyed by the Americans. The relationship between nature and Americans is relationship of exploitation and the entire landscape has been mutilated, raped:

—Further in the trees they didn’t cut before, the flood are marooned, broken and gray white tipped on their sides, their giant contorted roots bleached and skinless; on the sodden trunks are colonies of plants, feeding on disintegration; laurel, sundew the insect eater, its toe nail-sized leaves sticky with red hairs. Out of the leaf nests the flowers rise, pure white, flesh of gnats and midges petals now, metamorphosis. (Atwood, p.161)

Within Surfacing, power and domination directly oppress both the feminine world and the natural world. From the human driven need to control the dam to the destruction of older trees. The protagonist looks with disgust on the disrespect of her companions and others towards the natural world. When she sees a dead heron, obviously killed by a human and on display to reveal the killer’s ego, she is sickened and becomes more sickened when David wants to film it because it looks suitable for a film titles —Random Samples. She opposes to eating animals, saying she had no right to it and even suggests that killing a fish is worse than starting a war because there are always reason for killing a living creatures.

Eco-feminists argue that two very defined, contradictory, and dualistic worlds exist in the patriarchal society the feminine and the masculine; on the one hand, the feminine principle represents Mother Nature, the body, irrationality, emotion and mysticism. On the other hand, the masculine principle represents rationality logic, separation from nature, the head, intellectualism, language and concrete reality. The protagonist tries to re-unite these two dualities:

—The trouble is all in the knob at the top of our bodies. I’m not against the head or the body either: only the neck that creates the illusion that they are separate.... If the head extended directly into the shoulders like a worm’s or a frog’s without that constriction, that lie, they wouldn’t be able to look down at their bodies and move
them around as if they were robots or puppets; they would have to realize that if the head is detached from the body both of them will die. (Atwood, p.75)

The surface struggles with the notion that the head (a masculine element) should be remotely separated from the body (a feminine element). In order for each to prosper to the fullest extent, they must work together. The narrator, in the last few pages, sees the natural world as her equal, refuses to fall into the same patriarchal trap that initially destroyed her, and reclaims her ability to trust. Though she does not return to society, she does so as a changed person. She realizes, —that human beings are not radically separate from nature: that the fulfilment of our humanity is profoundly linked with learning to appreciate the nature within us and without (Atwood, p.43) standing there, with, —the trees [surrounding her]...asking and giving nothing , she has embraced the eco-feminist ideal.

Narrator’s journey ends off discovering about herself. She discovers about herself and her relation with the world. She explores the power-politics in interpersonal relationship and relates the women’s crisis of identity not only to the patriarchal structures of power and domination but also to the women’s passivity and complicity in the power structures that subject and subjugate them.

Despite her fear of the consequences, her search for her missing father and her search for self increasingly offers her the power to resist the oppression inherent in their relationship and to reassess her own need. Margaret Atwood seems to be questioning the existing power politics, the traditional notions of male superiority, and the mutilation of women by men. She is trying to assert that women can refuse victimization and can gain transcendence from the male defined world and can hope to breathe freely in a world defined by them. Emma Parker says:

—Her rejection of, and return to [nature] society is reflected by what she eats. When she rejects culture and retreats into the wilderness to become a —natural woman, she gives up eating processed food. Such food is contaminated in the same way that society is contaminated by patriarchal ideology. Both are unnatural constructed man made and both threaten to poison her. Instead, the narrator eats only the raw food that nature provides.

Surfacing represents the feminine consciousness and shows a woman’s struggle to free herself. Her association with the people and Nature raises her consciousness of victimization of woman. When her feminist consciousness reaches
its climax, the protagonist makes ready the ground for revolt against exploitation
oppression. As Carol Christ says, narrator awakens, —from a male-defined world, to
the greater terror and risk, and also the great potential healing and joy, of a world
defined by the heroine’s own feeling and judgment.

In order to attain her identity she feels, she must avoid every association with
—metal killer society and go back into the remotest forest. In course of this
impassioned, desperate search she takes her plunge literally in the ancient lake,
mentally in the memory of her parents and mystically in the vision of their continued
existence in Nature. She also tries to attain some unknown but ancient wisdom, which
might have been behind the rock paintings. At the end she reverses the mirror in order
—not to see myself but to see , and alone resumes her journey which finally brings
her through extreme hardship to the symbolic plunge and to resurface—this time with
the defiance never to be a victim any more. The protagonist moves from struggling
with the oppression and domination of the male world to associating with various
feminine principles and motifs to eventually embracing and returning to the natural
world as an equal, unassuming member. Margaret Atwood shows men’s misuse and
women’s use of nature in Surfacing. Women’s association with fertility and men’s
with environment abuse specifically as a metaphor of the violation of women by men.
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