Cities often live in our imaginations, their physical and social architecture exercising real power by conjuring up fictions and myths. For a writer, especially an emigrant one, nostalgia props up whenever he pens his thoughts. And Mistry, being a Parsi, is doubly displaced, once from Iran and once from Bombay, India. Therefore Bombay becomes his obsession and if there is one thing that manifests itself in every book written by Mistry, it is his love for Bombay. It is also the city that is home to the Parsi community, and it is safe to suggest that Bombay becomes to Mistry what Dublin was to Joyce, Wessex to Thomas Hardy, Malgudi to R.K.Narayan and Jefferson to Faulkner. The city is always the canvas, the background on which Mistry paints his richly detailed portraits of the people of Bombay and their stories. All his works happen in Bombay. A Bombaywallah, rather to say a Mumbaikar, himself, Mistry effortlessly describes a city which is traditional and modern at the same time.

In an interview with Geoff Hancock, when questioned about his experience of visiting Bombay, Mistry answers, “Bombay had no magic transformation everything continued in the same way. Only slightly more intense move people live on the streets move corruption and bribery and red tape.... It all seemed very bleak, Bleak was the picture I created when I was here. That’s exactly the way it is “, but this ‘bleak’ picture that he sees does not destroy his optimism, “there are still those amazing moments of
hope, those sparks, he says and those moments make the feel that despite all the Misery and sorrow, life is still good and meant to go on.” (Hancock 143-144)

Mistry, ethnically a Parsi, a member of the most westernized minority group in Bombay has been brought up with a special colonial western education. During his salad days as a youth then in Bombay, the Indian indigenous culture was considered “inferior” by Bombay’s middle class adolescents, who considered that everything from the west was superior. As Mistry has disclosed himself, when he was living there he took almost no concern towards the culture and civilization of his homeland. However, after his immigration to Canada, which was motivated by the feeling of not fitting into Indian society, the author felt an emptiness and sequentially Bombay became the place of redemption. Hancock rightly observes in his article “Pity the reporter” that the separation influenced Mistry’s choice of material and like Rushdie does, Mistry still carries his homeland with him; his stories haunt his native rather than his new environment (67). “Writing about Bombay is part of dealing with my unfinished business” Mistry says, (qtd. in Smith 65). His major works are set in the Indian “city by the sea” where he narrates fascinating, intriguing and upsetting stories about the personal lives of different peopple living in Bombay.

Mumbai, which was previously known as Bombay is a major metropolitan city of India. It is the state capital of Maharashtra. Mumbai city is known as the business capital of India, it being the country's principal financial and communications centre. Mumbai lies on the western coast of India. It is a group of seven islands in the Arabian Sea which lies off the northern Konkan coast on the west of Maharashtra state in India. These seven
islands which were once separated by creeks and channels were filled and bridged over the years by the inhabitants. The city has the largest and the busiest port handling India's foreign trade and a major International airport. India's largest Stock Exchange which ranks as the third largest in the world is situated in Mumbai. Here, trading of stocks is carried out in billions of rupees everyday.

The total population of Mumbai is about 10 millions. It is still growing. Mumbai provides umpteen opportunities to realize one's dreams. Hence, people from all over India, belonging to different cultures come here to realize their dreams. Mumbai has become the melting pot of all Indian cultures. This is the reason Mumbai has a truly cosmopolitan population bustling with activity. Its film industry Bollywood also draws a number of youths with tinsel dreams to Mumbai. Being a major financial center, People from all over the world come here for business opportunities. This has made Mumbai a major International city.

Owing to its central position between East and West and to the diversity of races in India, no city in the world can show a greater variety of type than Bombay. The Mahratta race is the dominant element next to the European rulers, but in addition to them are a great and influential section of Parsi merchants, Arab traders from the Gulf, Afghans and Sikhs from northern India, Bengalis, Rajputs, Chinese, Japanese, Malays, negroes, Tibetans, Sinhalese and Siamese. Bombay is the great port and meeting-place of the Eastern world. Out of the large sections of its population, Hindu, Mahommedan, Parsi, Jain and Christian, the Parsis are one of the smallest and yet the most influential.
They number only some 46,000 all told, but most of the great business houses are owned by Parsi millionaires and most of the large charities are founded by them.

Most of the year, Mumbai’s climate is warm and humid. Between November and February, the skies are clear, and the temperature is cooler. From March the temperature becomes warm and humid till mid June, the beginning of monsoon. During monsoon there are torrential rains, sometimes causing the flooding of major roads and streets of Mumbai. The average rainfall which is brought by the south-west monsoon winds in Mumbai is 180 cms. Monsoon ends by the end of September. October is comparatively hot and humid.

Description about Mumbai/Bombay cannot be complete without the mention of Bollywood, the biggest Indian film industry which churns out hundreds of Hindi blockbusters every year. The first railway line in India was started between Bombay (VT) and Thane in 1861. In 1864, modern water supply was started in Bombay (Mumbai) and in 1885, Bombay was lit with gas.

Conditions such as famine in the country side and epidemics in the city have created an unbalanced demographic profile throughout the city's history. The 1990 United Nations population estimate for the urban agglomeration of Bombay was 12.2 million, making it the sixth largest city in the world. The economy in Bombay is rooted in a mixture of light and medium engineering industries, as compared with heavy engineering found in Calcutta. Other manufacturing activities in Bombay include: oil refining and petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, publishing, tobacco, leather, timber, ceramics and jewelry.
Bombay is considered the most congested of any city in India. The 1981 census estimated that 2.8 million people lived in slums or near-slums. In spite of several programmes, the slums in Bombay continue to grow with the rapid increase in population. Slums have encroached on private and public land and overwhelmed all attempts at providing services.

The water supply situation in Bombay is critical, with the level of supply so much below demand that water use is restricted and reaches emergency proportions when the monsoon fails. Bombay is also one of the noisiest cities in the world and suffers from serious air pollution, both from noxious industries and automobile emissions. Despite a substantial public transport system, congestion in the metropolitan area continues. More than 2 million Bombay residents have no sanitary facilities, and most sewage collected in Bombay is discharged untreated or partially treated into creeks or coastal waters. Attempts have been made to relocate industries outside the island city, but industrial pollution remains a serious problem.

Being India's main port and commercial centre, the City of Gold lured the poverty stricken rural population and the expanding middle class equally. The population boom of the '50s and '60s was fuelled by the absence of opportunities in the rest of the country. The language riots, the reorganisation of Indian states and the see-saw politics of the country did not seem to affect the city. The glamour industry's flattering portrayal of Bombay seemed to be the reality. However, by the late '80s the other big Indian cities had choked in their own refuse and Bombay's road ahead seemed to be blighted. How this city, renamed Mumbai in the mid 90's copes with the challenge of controlling its political
fragmentation, disastrous health problems and load of pollution by utilising its wealth of
talent and manpower is a story to be told by future historians

In 1995, the city was renamed Mumbai by the Shiv Sena government of
Maharashtra, in keeping with their policy of renaming colonial institutions after historic
local appellations. There have also been terrorist attacks, sponsored by Islamic
extremists, on public transport buses in past years. In 2006, Mumbai was also the site of a
major terrorist attack in which over two hundred people were killed when several bombs
exploded almost simultaneously on the Mumbai Suburban Railway. Recently the city has
seen a series of politically motivated assaults on the North Indian population by the
members of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, a party headed by Raj Thackeray.

Bombay was an idea, a figure of myth and desire. Today, we know something of
magical power from the novels of Mistry and Salman Rushdie. And the flashy
Bombay cinema, now known everywhere as Bollywood, has found a receptive
audience in the West and the city is suddenly thrust into the worldwide circuit of
marketed images. Everything in that city is self-made, the product of an entirely
autonomous will and sensibility, of wit and guile, and of industriousness and
imagination. The city is a place of clashing ambitions and social strife, but also a
place of order- of reasoned judgement and enlightened consciousness. Therefore,
Bombay managed to balance individual freedom and ambition with a robust sense
of collective responsibility and order. It is the most dynamic and organized of all
Indian cities. Bombay also found the rise of a militant right wing activist party
founded by Balasaheb Thackeray, who named it the Shiv sena (Shivaji’s army) after the 17th-century Maratha ruler, Shivaji.

Not only Mistry but there are so many Indian novelists who write in the backdrop of Bombay. Before presenting Mistry’s Bombay and what it actually means to him, it may be sensible to widen our perception on other Indian novelists who described the conurbation facing the Arabian Sea. In the early 20th century Indian writing in English, Delhi, Varanasi, Calcutta, even an imaginary, smaller town Malgudi used to be highlighted in most of the works of fiction. But no one touched the ‘city by the sea’ and it scarcely appeared in the works of Indian novelists.

Only in the 1980’s Bombay started appearing in the literary works. Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children portrayed Bombay in a picaresque way. Rushdie positions Saleem Sinai’s birth in the city and makes it the magical landscape where the one thousand and one babies with phenomenal characteristics live their amusing and whimsical childhoods. In The Last Labyrinth by Arun Joshi, the love-story between the rich businessman Som Bhaskar and the mysteriously fascinating Anuradha, symbolically alludes to the two extremely different natures of the two Indian cities, Bombay in contrast to Varanasi. Practicality versus devotion becomes the crux of the issue. No final judgement is expressed in the open end of the novel, although the author declares the impossibility for the two extremes to coexist. Anita Desai’s Baumgartner’s Bombay is the most pessimistic and dingiest portrait of the city. G.R. Taneja rightly points out: “She describes Bombay in deep colours, vivid and cruel, and she extracts more meaning out of her recollections” (40).
Rushdie’s Bombay was the stage for a brilliant youth and epitomized life. But for Desai it sanctions the end to a desolate old age and stands for death and destruction. The most extravagant Bombay is portrayed in Shobha De’s novels such as *Socialite Evening, Starry Nights, Sisters, Snapshots, and Second Thoughts*. The novels are crowded with queens of the catwalk, coquettish stars of the cinema, dominant tycoons, top-notch prostitutes, unlikely artists, all segregated into an air-conditioned world, come back to life in. This kingdom of sex, drugs and rock’n’rolls self-made socialites, arrogant and proud of their ethical ambiguities, does reinforce the city's identity in provocative contrast to the identity of Delhi, associated with successful politicians and powerful lawyers. The amazing world gravitating around the cinema industry known as “Bollywood” is ironically investigated in Shashi Tharoor's *Show Business*. The novel, constructed as a richly variegated satire, seeks to establish a modern set of myths according to the taste of the contemporary Indian audience. In Firdaus Kanga’s *Trying to Grow* and in Ardashir Vakil’s *Beach Boy*, two novels with the unmistakably flavour of a memoir, Bombay is described through the jolly and curious eyes of prying children. Each and every discovery is in strict connection with its environment. Despite what the title seems to suggest, Farrukh Dhondy’s *Bombay Duck* is not a novel based in Bombay, or at least, not entirely in Bombay. The city does not play a major role in the economy of the plot; its description is vivid and facetious, sometimes bawdy and lewd, suspended halfway between reality and dream.
Finally, the stories in Vikram Chandra’s *Love and Longing in Bombay* are linked by a single narrator, an elusive civil servant, who recounts an extraordinary sequence of tales to those seated around him in a smoky Bombay bar. The witty style of the author depicts the city as a new focal centre, an eternal point of reference connected both to the past and to the future, always enthralling and exciting for its murders, love affairs, the sinister underworld, and the ghosts that bring it alive. It is curious to note that not even in the most recent novels the name of the city has been updated to the current and official Mumbai.

In a considerable majority of the cases, Bombay therefore appears in the memory of the writers and in a period which is very commonly associated with their childhood. It is a place of recollections, described with affection and regretful yearning, a peaceful and balanced rustic paradise confined in the past. This is the case of Rohinton Mistry too. Yet, whereas for the other novelists the city symbolically represented India in a broader sense, in his case Bombay reveals a restricted and peculiar identity that not only excludes a national identification but it is not representative of the whole Bombay community.

It is well known that a considerable plurality of Parsi community lives now in Bombay, where anyway their constantly reducing number stands out as an alarming voice threatening their future. According to recent data, they are no more than 80 thousand, which makes them a minority among other minorities. Their influence on Indian fiction in English, though, is considerable. There is much evidence to suggest that if now Bombay features more and more often in literature, one of the reasons is the emergence
of these writers. Such an aspect appears still more relevant if we take into account that Parsi writers outnumber the writers of other religious minorities, as far as Indian English fiction is concerned. Apart from Mistry, other significant Parsi authors are Farrukh Dhondy, Ardashir Vakil, Firdaus Kanga, Bapsi Sidhwa and Boman Desai.

Compared to the other Parsi novelists, Mistry seems to portray Bombay Parsis often in his works. This aspect emerges less because of a reluctance to have their own community portrayed by the other Parsi novelists than because of the almost exclusive attention they are apportioned in Mistry’s novels. The award-winning Short Stories appear in Mistry's first book, *Swimming Lessons*, in which he combines the immediacy of daily life in a Bombay apartment building with the perspective some of his characters achieve after immigrating to their new home in Canada. The interrelated stories cover a broad range of subjects and tones: from poignant to surreal, ghostly to hilarious. In his first novel, Mistry chose the ordinary life of a building inhabited by Parsis as the background to the action. In the second novel, the locale is restricted to the apartment of a Parsi widow and also the other side of Bombay, the ugly side of it is portrayed. In his third novel *Family Matters* he pictures the fundamentalists Mumbai and the humanistic Bombay.

Mistry’s inventive prose has captured Bombay’s energy and ingenuity and portrayed it to the world. As one reads his novels, he could recognize the motives and sensibilities of a native, evoking memories of a place he had left behind. It is captivating as it is to see Bombay through his eyes. His characters belong mostly to the middle class
world, and poor. The Bombay he cherishes is a gentle island in a sea of angry tides of ethnic strife churned up by cynical and corrupt politicians. In his satire of the culture and politics of contemporary Bombay, there emerges a deep sadness at the passing of the cosmopolitan city that had provided ample room for eccentric individualism and eclectic identities.

Lament for Bombay’s past became widespread after the communal riots of 1992-93 when the Shiv Sena-led gangs targeted the Muslim residents. Strains in Hindu-Muslim relations were not new to Bombay, but they intensified in December 1992 when a mob led by right-wing Hindu nationalists tore down the 16th-century Babri mosque in north India. Stray incidents escalated into explosive conflagrations. The violence left nearly 800 dead and many more injured, most of whom were Muslims, who accounted for 15 percent of Bombay’s population. The Bombayites were stricken with shock and grief. Gruesome tales of Hindu mobs hunting down Muslims while the police either stood idle or, worse, aiding the attackers were told. More was to come. One day in March 1993, 10 bombs, plastic explosives packed in cars, targeted the Bombay Stock Exchange in the busy commercial district, the Air India building on Nariman Point, one of the most expensive pieces of real estate in the world, and other prominent sites in Bombay. More than 300 people died. The communal violence and bomb blasts left many people wondering if Bombay’s cosmopolitanism had been just a facade. India’s political commentators spoke sadly about the passing away of Bombay’s self-image as a modern, sophisticated city. For a place that prided itself on its cultural diversity and staked its claim to being a capitalist center where the worship of Mammon tramped the worship of
all other gods, the riots and bomb blasts appeared atavistic. Three years later, when the Shiv Sena officially renamed Bombay as Mumbai, the re-christening seemed to formalize the transformation that had already occurred.

The central challenge that modern cities face is how strangers can live together in synchronization. Modernity brings with it a fragmented and deeply fissured social life, rapid transformations, the steady influx of migrants, and fleeting interactions and experiences. Under such conditions of uncertainty, inequality, fluidity, fragmentation, change, and ephemeral relations, it is a question of how people live there together? Bombay’s astonishing multiplicity makes this challenge even greater. For, attracted by the city’s position as the hub of manufacturing, finance, and the film industry, people from all over India make a mad dash towards the island. Different languages like Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, and English are spoken and different faiths like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Jainism and Judaism are practiced and people belong to different castes and classes. Historically, immigrants from villages and towns managed to assimilate into the metropolis by maintaining their native tongues and cultures in their homes and neighborhoods. Bombay consists of discrete neighborhoods marked by community, language, religion, dress, and cuisine.

The recent upsurge of nativism and communalism has damaged Bombay’s image. Yet, the image has been part of our perception of Bombay for decades. These ethnic hatreds were always simmering under the lid of cosmopolitan calmness, and Bombay has fashioned a style of living that allowed for social and cultural differences. These two, that
is, upright cosmopolitanism and mean nativism are juxtaposed; yet beyond these mirror images, there exists a makeshift and everyday art of dealing with diversity and discord. It never evolved, however, into a full-blown philosophy or ideology or gained the visibility of the elegant and elite ideal of cosmopolitanism.

Mistry takes pride in the cosmopolitan nature of Bombay and he introduces Bombay to the western audience thus: “Or like the old program for a concert at Scot’s Kirk by the Max Muller Society of Bombay...On the evening of the concert, Minocher, with a touch of sarcasm, had quipped: Indian audience listens to German musicians inside a church build by skirted men- truly Bombay is cosmopolitan” (Lessons 69). He goes on exploring the famous places in Bombay which he has frequented often and brings them somehow into the picture.

Mistry could be seen writing about the Parsi ‘Baag’ in his fiction. The eleven interlinking stories in Lessons happen in a Parsi ‘Baag’; in Such a Long Journey, Gustad Noble and his family lives in Khodadad Building, a Parsi ‘Baag’; in Family Matters also the protagonist and his family lives in a Parsi ‘Baag’ in Bombay. Only in A Fine Balance, we don’t come across such a ‘Baag’. A ‘baag’ is the conglomeration of apartment buildings usually under the management of the Parsi ‘panchayat,’ and Mistry evokes in his works the close knit Parsi community in these ‘Baags’. AM Lakhani, in his interview with the author, questioned him whether he lived in such a community in India. Mistry gave a negative answer and added: “But I had friends who inhabited these places and I had the opportunity to observe a little bit of it. Western eyes often see this closeknit
community and the neighbourliness as something very positive, something laudable. And at the same time it can be claustrophobic and intrusive—one has no sense of privacy. Everybody knows everyone else’s business”. (32)

Mistry also depicts various places in Bombay in his stories. Chaupatti Beach is the famous shore in the city. This landsite is used as an element of Diaspora in “Swimming Lessons”, the last story in short story collection. When the protagonist wants to take swimming lessons in a swimming pool in Canada he indulges in his memories at the time when he was a child and he paddled in the filthy waters of the Bombay sea. With overpowering nostalgia, the protagonist informs the woman at the swimming-pool registration office: “My house was five minutes walking distance from Chaupatti beach in Bombay. It’s one of the most beautiful beaches in Bombay, or was, before the filth took over.” (Lessons 233). He shows the muck as an excuse for his failure to learn how to swim when he was in Bombay.

...the deep blue sea of Chaupatty beach was grey and murky with garbage, too filthy to swim in. Every so often we would muster our courage and Mummy would take me there to try and teach me. But a few minutes of paddling was all we could endure. Sooner or later something would float up against our legs or thighs or waists, depending on how deep we’d go in, and we’d be revulsed and stride out to the sand. (Lessons 234)
Through this water imagery he also brings in the crude fact that despite being one of the most beautiful beaches in Bombay, Chaupatty is the most polluted one. And he reasons out who all does it and he could even remember the instances: “The sea of Chaupatty was fated to endure the finales of life’s everyday functions. It seemed that the dirtier it became, the more crowds it attracted: street urchins and beggars and beachcombers, looking through the junk that washed up. (Or was it the crowd that made it dirtier...)? (Lessons 234)

Mistry points out how people after their celebrations of festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi and Coconut Day used the sea as a repository for their finales, that is, to immerse the Ganesh idols with all the fineries and to chuck away the coconuts into the sea. He does not spare the Parsis who also pollute the sea by dumping their religious leftovers.

We used the sea too, to deposit the leftovers from Parsi religious ceremonies, things such as flowers, or the ashes of the sacred sandalwood fire, which just could not be dumped with the regular garbage but had to be entrusted to the care of Avan Yazad, the guardian of the sea. And things which were of no use but which no one had the heart to destroy were also given to Avan Yazad. Such as old photographs. (Lessons 235)
Mistry says Bombay - not Mumbai - is at the heart of his new novel: its toxicity, its demented furies, the failures of love and friendship, the political machinations, the social engineering, the conflict between private desire and public realm. And he worries if all the places in Bombay are renamed after some Hindu, the originality will be gone, and he wants to stick to the names which used to be there, and which gives him his favourite nostalgia. Even though Mistry’s works are in the backdrop of Bombay, which is his source of nostalgia, in an interview with Ali Lakhani he says:

...nostalgia is interesting as an emotion, but for a writer to write out of the feeling of nostalgia would be debilitating because it would make the writing too sentimental, I think.

But nostalgia is a very interesting phenomenon to examine. No, I don’t think I am writing out of nostalgia. I think to a certain degree it’s a human failing—too much nostalgia is like too much guilt. Perhaps the two go hand-in-hand in some ways, but to order one’s life or the process of writing around that would not work. I think in Bombay and India, my imagination is engaged by that place still after all these years and I think it is a healthy kind of engagement. (31)

Though Mistry admits that he does not write out of nostalgia, the readers could understand that nostalgia is the dominant factor in his writings, and Mistry, being a doubly displaced writer could not escape that sentiment. In “Swimming Lessons”, the night before he left for Canada, he felt a form of guilt suppressing him.
But as I slept on my last night in Bombay a searing pain in my eyes woke me up...Half-jokingly I saw myself as someone out of a Greek tragedy, guilty of the sin of hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth, and paying the price in burnt-out eyes: I, Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto... (Lessons 180)

Kersi after his separation from the native land for so long, returns to Bombay, with lots of dreams about his homeland. But as the flight lands in the airport, he simply could not take the reality, the sight of the grimy Bombay. He compares Bombay with London, the thought of which makes him feel sick.

...I could see the parched land: brown and weary, and unhappy.

A few hours earlier the aircraft had made its scheduled landing in London, and the view from the air had been lush, everywhere green and hopeful. It enraged me as I contrasted it with what I was now seeing...All that was left was a childish and helpless reaction. “It’s not fair!” I wanted to stamp my foot and shout, “It’s just not fair!”

(Lessons 186)
The same Kersi who could not stand Jamshed’s negative criticisms about Bombay and who defended India, now as a foreign immigrant dislikes his own Bombay. His words in this context reveal his standpoint:

Bombay seemed dirtier than ever. I remembered what Jamshed had written in his letter, and how it had annoyed me, but now I couldn’t help thinking he was right. Hostility and tension seemed to be -perpetually present in buses, shops, trains. (Lessons 187)

When Kersi could not bear the distressing Bombay anymore, he takes a walk in the Flora Fountain. Though the Fountain too depresses him a lot at the first sight, as time passes and the familiar sounds of the market begins, he feels at home and relaxing. He gives a picaresque description of the Fountain:

Roadside stalls were open for business. This would be their busy hour. They were lined up along the edge of the pavement, displaying their merchandise. Here is a profusion of towels and napkins from shocking pink to peacock green; there the clatter and gleam of pots and pans; further down, a refreshment stall selling sizzling samosas and ice-cold sherbet.
The pavement across the road was the domain of the smugglers with their stalls of foreign goods... *(Lessons 189)*

On reading the short stories sent by her son Kersi, his mother takes pride in her son writing about his native, especially the ‘Baag’ where he spent his youth. She feels happy that the stories are the reminiscence of his past and infers that her son is very discontented in the foreign land.

He must be so unhappy there, all his stories are about Bombay, he remembers every little thing, he is thinking about it all the time even though he is ten thousand miles away, my poor son, I think he misses his home and us and everything he left behind, because if he likes it over there why would he not write stories about that, there must be so many new ideas that his new life could give him. *(Lessons 243)*

This is how Mistry fictionalizes his own mother’s subtle intuitions and concerns about him. But Kersi’s father perceives it in a different way. According to him, it takes a writer about ten years time after an experience before he is able to use it in his writing, it takes that long to be absorbed internally and understood, thought out and thought about, over and over again, he haunts it and it haunts him if it is valuable enough, till the writer is comfortable with it to be able and he also makes his wife understand why their son
keeps writing about Bombay: “... according to the theory he is writing of these things because they are far enough in the past for him to deal with it objectively, he is able to achieve what critics call artistic distance, without emotions interfering.” (Lessons 246)

This theory would exactly suit Mistry, who in an interview with AM opines: “I suppose the time will come when I will stop writing about Bombay.” (31)

Bombay is also the setting of Mistry's first novel, Such a Long Journey (1991). Here, however, the social conditions that provided a distant backdrop to the short stories now bear upon a particular Bombay family. The protagonist, Gustad Noble, finds his life untying as his son rejects IIT, which was his father’s dream, his best friend involves him in political intrigue, and his own rationality and morality confront a world in change. Mistry's novel gives no easy answer. Clearly, he is not wholly infatuated by what Rushdie has called “the city of mixed-up, mongrel joy” (The Moor's Last Sigh 376). Occasionally, Mistry celebrates Bombay's cultural diversity, as in this description of a street vendor's wares: “The bhel-puri stall was a sculptured landscape with its golden pyramid of sev, the little snow mountains of mumra, hillocks of puris, and, in among their valleys, in aluminium containers, pools of green and brown and red chutneys” (Journey 124). But the more pervasive image of the city is of goondaism, unyielding bureaucracy, destitution and decay — a landscape of “crumbling plaster, perforated water tanks and broken drain pipes.” (211) which feels like this is an India to escape from, not an India to reform.
Bombay evidently stops just being a city: it gradually gets amalgamated with the recollections, and finally becomes part of the characters. *Such a Long Journey* starts with a view of a middle class man towards Bombay. The usual argument with the *Bhaiya* gives way to the daily anxiety over the limited water supply as Mistry evokes yet another perennial Bombay problem - limited water resources and an ever burgeoning population. As he prays to the Supreme God, in other flats in Khodad Building, the milkman, known commonly to Bombaywallahs as the *Bhaiya* is busy dispensing milk to the women who queue up for this diluted commodity, it being his habit to adulterate it with water. And he also shows how the poor detest the middle class: “God knows what he might do to the milk- as it was, these poor people in slum shacks and *jhopadpattis* in and around Bombay looked at you sometimes as if they wanted to throw you out of your home and move in with their own families” (*Journey A*). Mistry paints a philosophical opening to the Flora Fountain, which recurs in his works, in *Such a Long Journey*:

> With the dead fountain as its still centre, the traffic circle lay like a great motionless wheel, while around it whirled the business of the city on its buzzing, humming, honking, complaining, screeching, rattling, banging, screaming, throbbling, rumbling, grumbling, sighing, never-ending journey through the metropolis. (*Journey 87*)

No other spot is more instrumental in order to get lost in the character’s and author’s inner speculations than the second example - Crawford Market. The way the
market is called to play a part in Such a Long Journey may seem rather fortuitous, had we not dealt so far with the relevance of nostalgia and the weight of the past for the characters, as well as for their creator: the hundred year old clock in Crawford Market’s façade, faithfully keeping the hours (except during power cuts), for butchers and pet-shop owners, merchants and black-marketers, shoppers and beggars, all under one vast roof." (Journey 264)

After dreaming about a feast he had celebrated at home at the time he was a child, Gustad decides to organise his son’s dinner birthday according to the tradition he used to follow at home: a chicken had to be bought and then slaughtered just before cooking. Much against his wife’s protests, Gustad resolves to go to the market and buy the animal alive. Once at the market, the protagonist finds himself prisoner inside a web of emotions as he walks through the stalls. He remembers his father, who used to consider the bargaining and the hunt for the best deal as a challenge, while he feels rather intimidated and ill at ease with the place. He is conscious that his grandmother’s warning about butchers caused his ill disposition when he was a child: “Never argue with a goaswalla,” she would caution. ‘If he loses his temper, then bhup! he will stick you with his knife”’ (Journey 21). Gustad is not able to react against these childhood fears and will always carry the consequences.

The location from where the parcel had to be picked up enables Mistry to bring in yet another Bombay institution the Chor Bazar and also allows Gustad to dwell nostalgically on his earlier visits to that colorful market. There are also references to
Bombayites who Mistry creates with utmost admiration like the famous Madhiwala Bonesetter and Peerbboy Paanwalla who represents Bombay. Gustud's work for his old friend takes place against the ominous backdrop of the Bombay familiar that Mistry would definitely have recalled with nostalgia or irritation in Canada. For Gustad the rains also bring back the old pain in his broken hip, the result of the old accident. This provides Mistry with the opportunity of evoking yet another old Bombay institution, the traditional bone setter Dr. Madhiwala. The skills of Madhiwala and now his descendants are fervently sworn to by generations of Bombayites, Parsi and non-Parsi. In one or two places there is a mention about the dubbawalla, which again is a unique thing in Bombay.

Another Bombay landmark which the reader finds described in *Such a Long Journey* is the House of Cages. The contact address that Ghulam Mohommed gives Gustad is located in the notorious prostitutes’ quarter of Bombay where women are displayed like so many pieces of choice meat, in tiny barred rooms which look like cages, thereby giving Mistry yet another opportunity to write about yet another aspect of Bombay - its Red Light Area which became world-famous with Mira Nair’s film *Salaam Bombay*: “It was the oldest house in the locality. A skeleton staff was always ready to provide service, but after seven the cages filled up with painted women in saris wrapped impossibly low over their bellies...The House of Cages catered for everyone...” (Journey 186-187). The dramatic vision of the film, keen on documenting a social condemnation is in high contrast with how Rohinton Mistry depicts the brothel scenes with an amusing sense of irony and freshness. The task was not so easy to achieve, because treating such a topic in a lighter way may have shed the doubt of an uncertain hold for the problem.
The House of Cages offered a full range of services, from the brisk, no-nonsense handjob even the poorest of day labourers could afford, to the most intricate contortions from a standard *Kama-Sutra* or *The Perfumed Garden*: something to suit the tumescence of every customer and wallet. The locals dreamed about soft scented sheets, air-conditioned rooms, hot and cold drinks, dancing-girls, various exotic liquors, food fit for a king from the brothel’s delectable kitchen, and aphrodisiacs like the notorious *palang-tode* — bed-breaker — *paan*. The House of Cages catered for every one of these luxuries, with the exception of the last. *Paan* had to be purchased from the stall outside.

*(Journey 157)*

To begin with, the novelist visualises the house of pleasure as a lively institution, the remarkable invention of which is the detached branch outside. This is a stall where the local vendor sells *paan*, the betel leaf chewed out of habit by Indians, in the specific case spiced with particular ingredients so to make a sort of made-in-India Viagra. This artifice allows Mistry to relate extraordinary and phenomenal stories which happened in the house without actually crossing the threshold. The vendor, Peerbhoy Paanwalla, is an old man who has been engaged in this business since time immemorial. He is both extremely experienced in preparing the *paan* according to the need of the customer and is obviously a source of anecdotes in the best tradition of storytellers.
Gustad’s friends do not belong to the socio-cultural majority of Bombay. None of his social relations are Muslim or Hindu; most of his friends belong to the Parsi community, the only exception being Malcolm Saldanha. Like Jaakaylee in Mistry’s story “The Ghost from Firozsha Baag,” Malcolm is a Catholic from Goa, another former Portuguese colony. He and his family helped Gustad after his father’s bankruptcy, but in the course of time the two of them have drifted apart. When Gustad and Malcolm meet again after a long time, Gustad seems to find hope in their renewed friendship. The Goan friend Malcolm is introduced into the narrative, this time to facilitate Mistry’s description of the holy shrine of Mount Mary’s, which Gustad visits in his company. So one by one, all the Bombay landmarks are covered by the narrative.

In order to construct a postcolonial Indian identity, the British street names so important to Dinshawji have been altered by the Indian administration in what amounts to a reckoning with British colonial rule in India. Having identified with British culture and values, the formerly formally colonised Parsis lament the departure of the colonisers. Thus Dinshawji, raised and socialised within an anglophile tradition, severely attacks the Shiv Sena’s re-appropriation of street names and takes issue with its psychological consequences. The change of names does not only lead to problems of spatial orientation but also refers to the troublesome implications that the building of the Indian nation-state has for a distinct Parsi identity. For inasmuch as the names of the streets and places change, the place of the community in contemporary India is on the agenda; to the same extent that the old names of places vanish, the Parsis feel displaced. Responding to Gustad’s remark “What’s in a name” (74), Dinshawji argues:
Names are so important. I grew up on Lamington Road.

But it has disappeared, in its place is Dadasaheb Bhadkhamkar Marg. My school was on Carnac Road. Now suddenly it’s on Lokmanya Tilak Marg. I live at Sleater Road. Soon that will also disappear. My whole life I have come to work at Flora Fountain. And one fine day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names? Will I get a second chance to live it all again with these new? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out, just like that? Tell me! (Journey 74)

One factor to be accepted in Mistry’s writings is that he started venturing into creative calling eight years after he left his place of origin. His first collection of stories was published twelve years after his displacement. The time dimension his characters prefer to reflect on, the one they get lost in, is the past. The poignant impact is of vital significance, as this nostalgic portrayal of Bombay, drawn from Dina’s happiest memories at the time when her husband was still alive, exemplifies:

...in those days the city was still beautiful, the footpaths were clean, not yet taken over by pavement-dwellers, and yes, the stars were visible in the sky those days, when Rustom and she walked along the sea, listening to the
endless exchange of the waves, or in the Hanging Gardens, among the whispering trees, planning their wedding and their lives, planning and plotting in full ignorance of destiny’s plans for them. (*Balance* 330)

Appealing or appalling, breathtaking or brutal, Bombay is the ambition city of India, its Big Apple. Every express train that pulls into Victoria Terminus or Bombay Central station brings with it young hopefuls with dreams in their hearts, a suitcase in hand and a one-way ticket in their back pocket. But just as the horizon is turning pink with promise and ambitions are being fulfilled, fate presents Rustom with its bill and the city demands its pound of flesh. The downside is that a lot of modern Indian novels belittle poverty with depictions of wanton starkness. One such novel is *A Fine Balance* where the other side of the city’s poverty and ruggedness is portrayed with a political backdrop of emergency. The poor tailors from the village carry with them a beautiful city by the sea; but what they realize is really heartbreaking.

Omprakash looked through the window to determine where they had stopped. Rough shacks stood beyond the railroad fence, alongside a ditch running with raw sewage. Children were playing a game with sticks and stones. An excited puppy danced around them, trying to join in. Nearby, a shirtless man was milking a cow. They could have been anywhere. The acrid smell of a dung-fire drifted towards the train. (*Balance* 4)
The Emergency cast a dark shadow over the novel. One of the consequences is that for the first time Mistry describes Bombay’s shantytown and slums. Such a description would have never occurred before:

The truck growled into the city after midnight along the airport road. Sleeping shanty towns pullulated on both the sides of the highway, ready to spread onto the asphalt artery. Only the threat of the many-wheeled juggernauts thundering up and down restrained the tattered lives behind the verges. Headlights picked out late-shift workers, tired ghosts tracing a careful path between the traffic and the open sewer. *(Balance 373)*

Bombay seen through the eyes of outsiders may generate dreams, as is surely the case of Ishwar, but it soon destroys them. “People in the city were too cynical, they doubted everything, it was difficult to motivate them” *(Balance 384)* is a very significant comment. Outsiders find it hard to survive in the city and their perspective is dissimilar to those Mistry was keener to deal with. And the dream having been shattered Om feels: “What is the use of such a big city? Noise and crowds, no place to live, water scarce, garbage everywhere. Terrible.” *(Balance 7)*
The most depressing but still a realistic portrayal is the defecating mass along the railroads and the ‘goo guru’s’ skillful teaching to the tailors.

“The left side is for ladies only.” They followed, glad to have a guide; it would have been awkward to have blundered. Women’s voices, mothers coaxing their children, rose from that direction, along with the stench. Further down, men were squatting on the tracks or by the ditch to the side, near the prickly scrub and nettles, their backs to the railroad. The ditch was a continuum of the roadside sewer where the hutment colony pitched its garbage. (Balance 168)

Here we have Mistry detailing the trauma of the millions of Mumbai’s unhomed meaning excavated, and homeless citizens, whose plight has not changed dramatically for the better since the dark days of the Emergency. The tailors have to sleep rough on the streets, carrying their belongings in a trunk, until Dina finally relents and lets them keep it in her flat. She however, refuses to let the tailors live in her flat for fear of her landlord and her own class and ethnic prejudices.

Pavement-dwellers began emerging through the gathering dusk. Cardboard, plastic, newspaper, blankets materialized across the foot-paths. Within minutes, huddled bodies had laid claim to all the concrete. Pedestrians now adapted to
the new topography, picking their way carefully through
the field of arms and legs and faces.
“My father complains at home that it’s become very
crowded and dirty,” said Maneck. “He should come and see
this.” (Balance 307)

While the Bombay in which Mistry's characters live is a dark and troubled place
filled with tragedy and difficult lives, his portrayal of it has been assessed as a lively and
interesting picture of a city whose vivid environment is shown with remarkable clarity.
Some critics, such as Australian feminist writer Germaine Greer, loudly protested A Fine
Balance’s inclusion on the Booker shortlist, dismissing it as “a Canadian book about
India” and insinuating that Mistry's version of Bombay is an overly harsh and unhappy
place.

In Family Matters, the story unfolds against a mid-1990's Bombay that is itself
stewing in corruption. Is the city being destroyed by sectarianism. Mistry uses the
character of Yezad Chenoy’s boss Mr. Kapur to show the humanistic, broad minded,
beautiful Bombay: “These are my beautiful Bombay’s baby pictures. Priceless. Her times
of innocence. (Matters 153)
“You know how I’m always talking about Bombay - how much it means to me, how
much it has given me. You’ve heard my family story.” (Matters 157)
Kapur could see the godliness in the crowd who helps one another in the swarming metro trains and that view makes him philosophize thus:

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 is room for everyone who wants to make a home here.”

Right, thought Yezad, fourteen million people, half of them living in slums, eating and shitting in places not fit for animals. Nice way of sharing the gift of Bombay...

You see, Yezad, 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.” (Matters 158-159)

Mr. Kapur’s tropical Camelot in Family Matters, a place where races and religions lived in peace and amity, may never have existed but an utopia, but the idea of Bombay as a modern city has always been lived in everyday encounters and reconciliations with the unfamiliar and contradictory. Both Kapur as well as Yezad feels nostalgic about the older Bombay. Mistry beautifully picturises the Bombay in the past:
And a lump filled his throat as soon as he laid eyes on the next one. It was still Hughes Road, but pristine, from a simpler time. The photographer must have stood at the other end of Jehangir Mansion, outside Madon Chemists; the intersection of Hughes Road and Sandhurst Bridge was now the focal point. The light suggested early morning. Not a car in sight, the road deserted except for a handcart. Three long figures stood on the footpath, mysterious, like seers or soothsayers prophesying, the explosion of population in Bombay’s future. \(\textit{(Matters 224)}\)

Mistry also brings in the polluted Bombay; “A blast of diesel fumes made him cough. Bloody pollution. This was no city for deep breathing. Not unless he managed to slip into Mr. Kapur’s old photographs. In the old Hughes Road...” \(\textit{(Matters 306)}\)

Mistry also portrays the poorer side of the city where people share their jhopadpattis in two of his novels: “His kholi in Jogeshwari, rented on a twelve-hour basis, had to be vacated at seven a.m., when the other renter arrived from his factory night shift. So he killed time near the shop, aware that he was more fortunate than those who rented eight-hour rooms.” \(\textit{(Matters 138, 139)}\)
“Sighting he leaned against the wall. Midday, and he was exhausted. Even if he finished his rounds early, there was nowhere to go- from nine a.m. to nine p.m. he had rented his room to a mill-worker on night shift.” (Balance 346)

The works of Mistry try to convey the very multiplicity of India, embracing the sights and smells of Bombay and showing us glimpses of the secular and democratic spirit in India’s troubled post-independent era. Despite some gloomy scenes, though he loves Bombay, Mistry did not bother to unwrap and reveal several disturbing truths about his homeland. As he stated in an interview, he does not have a distinct message or consider himself a religious or political writer. If politics or religion comes to his work, they come in a secondary way. It is very important for him, however, to be exact in his description, as the author states: “I don’t want to forget anything about Bombay. The lives, the places, the people.” (Hancock 146-7)

Mistry’s political consciousness and acumen thus begs comparison with another diasporic book on that same troubled and shameful time that Bombay went through - Salman Rushdie’s The Moor’s Last Sigh. Rushdie’s in the face tackling of the complicity of the Shiv Sena in the Hindu-Muslim riots that rocked Bombay in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, in Ayodhya in Northern India, by militant Hindu mobs, while the state administration stood by as mute witness, is papered over in Mistry’s book. Also missing is any elaboration on the suspicion of the involvement of Islamic fundamentalists, in nexus with the underworld, in the Bombay blasts. One could of course say that this is because the focus is on the personal rather than the political, but the political is allowed to intrude in a major way into the text in the manner in which it
impacts on the professional life of one of the central characters - that of Yezad Chinoy. It is through Yezad that the reader comes in contact with his office attendant, Husain, the victim of the Post- Babri Bombay riots and Mr. Kapur, his boss, a victim of the 1947 partitioning of India Hindu- Muslim clashes. *(Matters 169)*

In an interview with Richler published in *National Post* (April 13, 2002) Mistry speaks about his connection with Bombay:

"Bombay is the thread," Mistry said. "For me it is the road not taken, but it's a city with which my relationship has evolved into a love-hate. If a writer is able to carve out a space in the city, to work and breathe, that's okay, but when I'm there I'm at a loss, because I can't find a space to write. I feel the physical pressures.

"When I'm here I look forward to Bombay, when I'm there I get irritated. It's the smell that does it. It comes to you when the plane is within 100 feet of landing, a mix of tropics and decay and life. It's the smell of mortality."(1)

Exile and homesickness produce a sorrowful gulf. Recollections, even the dearest, are influenced in this process. The novelist is aware of the trap he remains prisoner of and in *A Fine Balance* he resentfully chastises:
(...), nobody ever forgot anything, not really, though sometimes they pretended, when it suited them. Memories were permanent. Sorrowful ones remained sad even with the passing of time, yet happy ones could never be re-created — not with the same joy. Remembering bred its peculiar sorrow. It seemed so unfair: that time should render both sadness and happiness into a source of pain.

*(Balance 330)*

Not even fleeing constitutes a valid alternative to sorrow, as he underscores in the final pages of his collection of short stories: “The further they go, the more they will remember. They can take it from *Lessons 247* Bombay, therefore, as well as a whole trunk of recollections, remains severely polluted in *A Fine Balance*. Rohinton Mistry is aware of such a mechanism working inside him and in the final pages of the novel, which often encapsulate the author’s frame of mind, tries to explain Maneck’s unwillingness to renew the ties of the past. The brief passage sounds like an apology: “But he went so far away. When you go so far away, you change. Distance is a difficult thing. We shouldn’t blame him.” *(Balance 603)*

Mistry has become one of the preeminent writers of the postcolonialist writing movement. His novels primarily in his native Bombay, combine a natural, direct style with simple description to present an honest image of India. The fact that this group of Indo-Canadian writers keep going back to India for their fictional material might suggest
that they are moving away from Canada, towards India or the homeland, in the classic, Jewish sense of the diaspora. If one considers Rohinton Mistry, perhaps the most gifted and respected of this group, one notices that his novels are more elegiac than nostalgic in tone. They do not celebrate the homeland but mourn its relentless and innumerable atrocities and tragedies.