Chapter Six

Beyond Dislocations: Continuities and Commonalities in the Novels of Sidhwa, Mistry and Desai
Diasporic Studies:

Diasporic studies are the recent development during the last three decades with the advent of globalization and transnationalism. As the borders of nations have begun to be more fluid, the movement of people across the nations has roused interest among the scholars to study the ‘Literature of Diaspora’ form a fresh perspective. The word ‘Diaspora’ has become more popular perhaps from the 1980s onwards. The diasporic studies involve issues like identity, culture and power; multiculturalism and transnationalism; history and memory. As the key-issue of identity is multi-faceted, the diasporic studies too have been necessarily multidimensional and multidisciplinary. The diasporas exist at a multitude of levels and because identity is recognized and asserted within a particular context, the diasporic identity is found in fragments or fractured as “reflections in broken mirrors” (Bharucha, 1995: 32-35). Identity is constructed at multiple levels and hence its construction is a continuous process. Sushma Varma and Radhika Seshan write:

Diasporic existence is global at one level, for it transcends national boundaries. At another it recreates a local community and a local identity, which is simultaneously a part of the host country, the home country and a global community (Varma and Seshan, 2003: 2).

The term ‘Diaspora’, apart from the Jewish overtones it had in the beginning of dispersal from the homeland, and then the search for and the attempt to re-establish that homeland has come to mean any deterritorialized, dislocated population seeking to reterritorialize/relocate itself. How diasporic communities are viewed in their host communities is a very important issue. The concept of multiculturalism has been of great influence on the socio-political policies of the new postcolonial nation-states to create a sense of equal consideration to all cultures and the equality of all peoples. A very significant aspect of such multicultural societies is that of “double consciousness” as first put forth by W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963). He talked about the two perceptions the people had for themselves -- one based on their own community and the other on the perception of how others used to view or regard them. The negotiations between these two perceptions implicit in this double consciousness are the concerns of diasporic studies too. Literature has emerged as a
The writers of diaspora have reflected the problematics of this double consciousness in their works. Though the diasporic studies have tried to focus on the expressions of nationalism and also attempted to analyze critically various themes related to the problem, it is still like touching upon the tip of the iceberg of such a complicated issue. Since the late 1980s the Indian social scientists have done certain amount of research in some related areas like the nature of immigration, the status of the immigrants, the process of acculturation-assimilation as well as integration, the involvement of the diasporic communities in the political processes of the host and home communities, the nature of such participation etc.

Originally, the word ‘Diaspora’ referred to a forcible dispersal of people, though in the modern context it means the voluntary one. Those who have dispersed carry with them the memory of and the longing for their homeland. They try to sustain these both through the conservation of certain cultural practices, while struggling through the process of acculturation. Certain sets of cultural symbols “assert the unity of that community and visibly maintain it as different from the ‘other’. Exclusivity and exclusion here create identity” (Varma and Seshan, 2003: 8). However, the essential cultures that diasporic communities preserve are different from those in their homelands, though theoretically the same. Varma and Seshan analyze this issue in these words:

Is it the memory of the culture that has been transplanted? If it is, then it raises the question of the importance of memory and nostalgia. Equally important is the question, whose memory? As younger generations grow up in the new homeland, they learn about the original culture through the eyes of the older generation. For them, the culture is a reflection of someone else’s memory, something with which they have no direct contact (Varma and Seshan, 2003: 8).

This would then raise a host of questions about the nature of the relations and linkages of the diasporic communities to their homeland and the nature of their identity asserted at their hostland vis-à-vis their homeland. Hence the examination of the issues like “what culture means to the diasporic communities -- a way of asserting a difference, a mechanism for use in power politics, an aesthetic value system or merely a fascination for the exotic” (Varma and Seshan, 2003: 8). Apart from this, a whole
lot of the issues of discrimination, racial bias and the homogeneity within the community too have to be analyzed. The younger generations are expected to conform to the original value-system of their culture. It increases their problems as they have to maintain a difference between home/homeland and hostland. Identity here is further fractured as difference is also maintained by the use of different languages in the two worlds. Many more issues crop up when one studies diaspora. As ‘diaspora’ is a global phenomenon, one would have to examine the nature of the identity of a particular diaspora in different countries comparatively. Also the nature of rights enjoyed in the hostland or sought to be enjoyed by the diasporic communities in terms of community-life, class and gender constitute a larger historical framework for research. The historical perspective must be necessarily taken care of. A historical approach is bound to be taken up as the study of the nature of colonialism as a universal system is a prime requisite to study the diaspora in the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial worlds.

**The Parsee Diasporic Writers:**

The diasporic community under study, the Parsee community, is to be studied from the above stated points of view. It is a diasporic community in India since the eighth century after their forced migration from Persia to India to escape their religious persecution by the Arabs. The community is now passing through the second phase of displacement and settlement or in other words, its second dislocation and relocation. Parsee diasporic writers have reflected the complexity of their existential experiences in the literature they have created. Mistry belongs to the Indian diaspora in Canada and Sidhwa and Desai belong to that in USA. The construction of the identity of their community in their first hostland India, now considered their ‘homeland’, and then Canada and USA through their fictional works is the issue of concern here.

There are several other writers of diaspora from various countries who are twice removed. What makes the Parsee diasporic writes like Mistry, Sidhwa, Desai, Dhondy, Kanga etc. so strikingly different from others is their belonging to the Parsee community which has adopted India as their home. According to Jasbir Jain, it is their
“nature of be-longing” that makes them believe their host country a home country. Jain points out:

At some point of time the Diaspora ceases to be a Diaspora: it becomes part of the new nation. Traditional ways of belonging may be perceived as language, lifestyle, shared concerns. But that does not take care of the past which happens to be different in many ways and cannot be altered. Thus it needs to find a place in the new community, to be absorbed and be accepted for itself (Jain, 2003: 10).

The politics of belonging needs to reformulate the idea of citizenship in the context of the diaspora. The true sense of belonging is the result of the equal treatment and acceptance from the receiving society/culture. Parsees could achieve respect and dignity, despite constantly negotiating power relations with the host and other communities.

Sidhwa, Mistry and Desai’s works raise a number of other questions related to the ‘homeland’ and memory. It is not merely this nostalgia or the memory of their ‘home’ or their close affinity to the specific space back home, i.e. Lahore in Sidhwa’s case and Mumbai in Mistry’s and Desai’s that preoccupy them. It is more than all these, the representation of their selves, “a projection of the individual character, a gesture of expanding the memory to include both the specific and the universal” (Jain, 2003: 11). ‘The space back home’ gives them that desired stability and anchor required for the traveling self of an immigrant diasporic writer to feel secure and rooted. Even though the history of the community’s colonial and postcolonial past is unraveled in each novel under study, it is the “universality of the new present” in all the novels that matters and the “specific expands to embrace the outside world out there” (Jain, 2003: 12). Though the diasporic studies have quite often been integrated to the postcolonial studies, this conjunction needs to be re-examined in the cases of these writers. Their literature has not always necessarily been that of resistance against the subversion but it can be freshly viewed as the one of representation -- how the self is reflected, viewed and remembered against the backdrop of the past. The placement of works of these writers simultaneously in the past of Parsee history and the postcoloniality of the Indian subcontinent as well as in the present diasporic reality imparts the reader a scope to explore the multiple meanings of their fiction and unfolds a new direction to the diasporic studies.
Commenting on the situational pressures and imperatives of an expatriate writer Rajul Bhargava defines his position. He takes the instance of Mistry’s short story “Swimming Lessons” which is a kind of explanation of what happens when an expatriate tries to make a place for himself in the host culture and how he learns to handle his parent culture. Bhargava writes: “The expatriate writer occupies a marginal or a borderline position, he sits on the periphery of the past, causing the future to take shape” (Bhargava, 2003: 92). He has to walk on a tight rope and to quote Mistry’s title, maintain ‘a fine balance’ between his home and host country, between his past and present. If he recedes into the past, his works would have the limited value of only a memoir or an autobiography, highly personalized. And if on the other hand, the writer opts to adopt the new culture, he might be at the risk of losing the empathetic support at home. This sustenance from home is very vital to keep his creativity alive as to receive or earn such anchoring in the host country is beyond imagination. In “Swimming Lessons”, Mistry himself states this point about being well-received both at home and abroad, through his narration, though from slightly different angle:

…if he continues to write about such things he will become popular because I am sure they are interested there in reading about life through the eyes of an immigrant, it provides a different viewpoint; the only danger is if he changes and becomes so much like them that he will write like one of them and lose the important difference (Tales, 1987: 248).

The western world finds the creative works of the diaspora, whether literature or any other art for that matter, more easily accessible than the stay-at-home writers or artists. This provides the reason for resentment to the stay-at-homers against the diaspora as to how and what they know about their country staying outside it; and hence, it is believed, there is a misrepresentation. But actually, their being outside the home country gives them a vantage point to view not only the past and the present but the locale and the culture too. Nilufer Bharucha acknowledges this special perspective and comments:

Distance, temporal and geographical, often lends these works an important insider-outsider perspective on India -- a perceptive or value within as well as outside India. These aspects of the creative expressions of the Indian Diaspora have to be negotiated by Indians as their dispersed selves find greater and
greater visibility globally and now official recognition within India itself (Bharucha, 2003: 14).

The diasporic writers, being immigrants, can claim two countries, two worlds but they actually claim neither because the immigrant mind is bifidel and dichotomous by nature; neither completely affiliated to the old root culture, nor fully aligned to the new adopted one. They create their own world based on their memory and nostalgia combined with imagination. The diasporic writers negotiate and articulate such experience inhabiting in this self-created world which Amin Malak calls the “third world”. It is evidently a lonely and painful world that demands compromise and surrender, “but also a world where it is equally possible to test one’s capacity to endure, to survive and to triumph” (Malak, 1992: 52).

Parsee Identity in Indian Diaspora:

The case of the Parsee diasporic writers is slightly different from the other diasporic Indian writers. They have to “grapple with not just one diasporic displacement but multiple displacements” (Bharucha, 2003: 14). Their immigration abroad is not their first diasporic experience. The Parsees had first become diasporic when they escaped the Islamic persecution by their Arab conquerors, left Iran/Persia and sought refuge in India. After their settlement too, they have seen the ups and downs of Islamic incursions into Gujarat during the Mughal rule and the gradual acceptance during the reign of the tolerant emperor Akbar. After their landing at Sanjan, they had spread at various places of South Gujarat and later during the British colonial rule they came out of the agricultural spaces to the urban areas of commerce and industry. Most of them were concentrated in Bombay and prospered under the British patronage. They again moved back into ethnic enclosures during the holocaust of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. They have always felt uneasy about their being the ‘settlers’ or ‘refugees’ or ‘diaspora’ in India. This anxiety of being the ‘other’ in the Hindu dominated country is aggravated by their feeling insecure as a demographically tiny minority community in the postcolonial India. Despite their privileged and elite social status earned by their diligence, integrity and sincerity and enjoying a relatively comfortable life in the Indian subcontinent, they do experience the fear, insecurity and anxiety about their existence and racial purity. Not just the Parsees but other
minorities also often experience uneasiness today in the so-called secular India, especially during the 80s and 90s. This uneasiness has led them to move to the West, first to the UK, then to Canada and the USA and more recently to Australia and New Zealand. In these new lands, the Parsee Zoroastrians have carried their ethnic selves, adding a new phase to the ongoing process of the construction of their identity. Nilufer Bharucha takes pride in this extraordinary quality of her community. She writes:

> These ethnic enclosures notwithstanding the Parsis are an assimilative people who have over the centuries perfected the difficult art of being both global and local at one and the same time -- something the rest of the world is beginning to talk about only very recently (Bharucha, 1995: 15).

The fluctuations which they have received in the formation of their identity in their ‘home’ country India, during their pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial existence, have played a significant role in shaping up the psyche of these Parsee diasporic writers. It is very much evident in their approach and attitude reflected through their works. The writers have displayed the apparently contradictory features of ethnicity and transculturalism with exemplary ease. With this unique spirit of integration the Parsees have reversed the negative concept of homelessness to having now the multiple homes; Persia being the first one, India the second one and the third one they are looking for, is abroad. They are now part of the Indian diaspora or the South Asian diaspora or called the people of Indian origin. The diasporic Indian is, as Bhikhu Parekh describes:

> Like a banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world (Parekh, 1993: 106).

Despite this positive approach of the concept of the multiplicity of homes, the proclamations of the diasporic situation do not ease up. The gap between the ‘home’ i.e. the culture of origin and the ‘world’ i.e. the culture of adoption is difficult to be bridged. In Jasbir Jain’s words, “the boundaries have an uncanny habit of persisting in thousand different ways, and are very often conflictual (Jain, 2001: 13).
Homi Bhabha goes a step further by re-casting this idea of conflict into a theory of hybridity. He converts the diasporic scattering into a gathering, “gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees, gathering on the edge of ‘foreign’ cultures, gathering at the frontiers; gathering in the ghettos or cafes of city centres” (Bhabha, 1994: 139-40). Thus he shifts the focus from nationhood to culture, a cultural hybridity that cannot be constrained in either binary or hierarchical entities. Such cultural interaction does take place and it cannot be undervalued. It is very much necessary to enhance this discourse on cultural interaction that the diasporic literature underscores. Due to the bicultural pulls, a ‘new culture’ is born. This is a very significant phenomenon and the polities involved in the creation of this ‘hybrid’ culture or ‘mestizaje’ provide an important ground for the cultural/social/political discourse to emerge. It is equally important to understand the dynamics of reception at both the ends for the reception is also rooted in cultural contexts. Hence, there comes into consideration a vital offshoot of this discourse, i.e. the politics of identity.

The diasporic writing cannot be wished away as it is a major part of global literature; in fact, ‘global’ literature as it is the representation of local experiences reaching out to be global. It presents the expatriate’s fractured or divided or decentred self; his hyphenated or hybrid identity existing at that in-between, liminal space and the expatriate’s vision taking place with the intensity of nostalgia and the play of memory. Given this existential reality of the intervening space and the complexity it involves, it needs to be focused as another subjectivity/centre instead of pushing it away into marginality. Jasbir Jain says that “reviewing and critiquing diasporic writing is part of this process, for it should relate and reflect and not transform and absorb” (Jain, 2001: 15). Occupying a significant position between cultures and countries, the expatriate or diasporic writing generates its own theory and constructs a new identity that negotiates boundaries and confines; and relates to different temporal and spatial metaphors, for instance, journey, the jigsaw puzzle and the mosaic design of a quilt. The expatriate/diasporic writers live on the peripheries of two societies, cultures and also times, i.e. past and present. When a new cultural theory is being created by the writers living on the margins, a key question that arises as to how one defines the margins. Jain considers a number of questions that this theory gives rise to. She asks,
Do the margins expand themselves and does the centre shift? Or is it that peripheral areas further divide themselves and the centre remains the same, indifferent to what is happening around it? Does theory emanate from the intervention of marginal voices, or is it that their voices are controlled and homogenized by the centre? (Jain, 2001: 11).

Thus, the diasporic writing has developed its own theoretical position, privileging a double vision and has thrown up a host of queries. The expatriate as he moves from one culture to another may need to locate him / herself afresh in relation to the centre. Gurbhagat Singh looks at the different ways Edward Said and Homi Bhabha approach this problem (Singh G., 2001: 21-28). While Said takes note of the traumatic nature of the expatriate’s reality and the “crossing over” from one culture to another which may be a liberating experience, Bhabha is more concerned with the instability which at some point defines the expatriate self. It is the “disunitive hybrid moment’ which is important to Singh, and which upsets the conventional relationship between the centre and the periphery.

Among the increasing lot of the Indian diasporic writers, the case of the Parsee diasporic writers is different and more problematic. Other Indian expatriate writers form part of the word-wide postcolonial phenomenon of ‘Empire writing back’ and displaying the features of post-modernism in their literature. While the Parsee expatriate writers, especially the fiction writers do represent the above stated group but the complexity of their case lies in the fact that they are more ethno-centric and actually in diverse diasporas. The Parsees have been in diaspora even during the pre-colonial and colonial India. In fact they have been in Indian diaspora since 9th century and during the entire millennium, they have been in multiple diasporas. They, indeed, have had ‘such a long journey’ not only from Iran to the western coast of India but also from India it continues to their present diaspora abroad. The descendants of the Zoroaster fled Iran around 850 A.C. to avoid their forcible religious proselytization to Islam by the Arab conquerors. Flight from Persia was the only option left to them if they were to save their religious identities. Small groups of these people with urns containing their sacred fires, the symbol of their faith, took the sea-route in search of shelter. The proximity of India to the southern Persian ports and the centuries old trade ties between the two countries made it a natural choice of refuge. “Borne on the wings of their fires” (Bharucha, 2003: 25), they made the first landing at Diu in
Gujarat. In Gujarat, the Iranians got their new identity as ‘Parsees’, probably after the language they spoke at that time -- Farsi. In Persian, the letters ‘P’ and ‘F’ are interchangeable. The name could also have come from Pars, the southern Iranian province. After around two decades the Parsees moved from Diu to another coastal town of Gujarat called Sanjan, where they made a pact with the then local ruler Jadav Rana who permitted them to settle there provided they agreed on the five conditions put forth by him. These conditions have already been stated earlier during the textual and introductory discussions. The Parsee priest’s pleasant and intelligent gesture in response to this offer impressed the king and they were welcomed. Since then, the Parsees’ loyalty to these conditions has stood them in good stead during all the political and historical change-overs of the rulers of India. The ambivalent paradoxical feeling of “simultaneous identification with and alienation from India can be traced back to this rather oppressive agreement” (Bharucha, 2003: 26) which was a kind of demand for the forced assimilation from the dominant host people of India at that time. This assimilation could have taken place in due course of time even without such prior conditions but it would have been voluntary and might not have caused the alienation they feel and also might not have been the cause of the threats posed to their existence.

The second of the five conditions caused the language loss for the Parsees. It must have harmed and hurt their identity in a major way. They had to adopt Gujarati, the local language and relinquish their native Persian language. In an ironic twist of fate, however, the Parsees regained access to Persian with the arrival of the Mughals in India. These central Asian invaders were descendants of the Islamic Arabs who had overrun the Persian Empire and forced the ancestors of the Parsees into exile. The Mughals introduced the Persian language and culture to their Indian Empire. Persian became the official language of India and remained so till the end of Mughal rule, i.e. the mid nineteenth century, when it was formally replaced by English, the language of her new colonizers. The Parsees might have the access to their own language but with a mixed feeling as the speakers of their language had been their invaders and persecutors and now their rulers. They must have experienced the alienation from their then rulers and fear of renewed religious oppression, though they were quite secure in their host country. Fear and anxiety have been their constant companions throughout the historical take-overs of different reigns in India.
The third condition was that the women would exchange their Persian robes for the Indian female costume ‘saree’ worn in a Gujarati style. It was another blow on their cultural identity but they had honoured this condition strictly even during the Mughal Empire. It has almost become part of their identity. Language and costume are the important features that have made Parsees a part of Gujarati and eventually Indian identity. It was only with the increasing contacts of the British colonizers that their manners and costumes were coloured by the western culture. The acceptance of the western attire among Parsee men and women, however, was rather gradual and restricted to the metropolitan centres like Bombay and the ‘England-returned’ upper classes. It is very well illustrated in Sidhwa’s *Eaters* where Faredoon’s wife Putli, belonging to the generation of the early twentieth century, hesitates to adopt the British culture in her attire and demeanour as against the younger generation of her daughters and daughters-in-law who have adopted it in their life-style. Tanya and her elite Easymoney family in Bombay are highly westernized. Boman Desai has also shown this rural/urban Hinduised/westernized divide among the two generations of Parsees in *Elephants*. Homi’s grandma Bapaiji stands for a rural Parsee, faithful to the promises made to Jadav Rana. In contrast, there is her daughter-in-law Pheroza who is groomed in Bombay, wears western clothes. Like most of the urbanized Parsee families in Bombay, her father was keen that the women-folk in the family take the lessons in Piano, a western instrument and not the Indian one like Sitar. The idea of heaven for such westernized families was Scotland and England. Sidhwa, with her candid humour shows how this idea of heaven is nothing but a mirage when the Junglewallas visit England. They are totally disillusioned when they stay at Charles Allen’s home. Enjoying his hospitality they see the Englishman, whom they hold in high esteem, as one who goes through the drudgery of a middle-class family and none but as ordinary as an average middle-class Indian.

Like most diasporic writers, the Parsee too are “obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been lost” (Rushdie, 1992: 10-11). In their case the vital part of their cultural heritage is lost and the reflection of their identity they receive in these broken mirrors is, indeed, fragmentary. It is important to note that with the advent of the Mughals to India and the aforementioned restoration of Persian language to the Parsees, they made several attempts to retrieve at least some of the
vast heritage of historical manuscripts and scriptural material and could salvage at least some of the scriptures but the huge chunks remained irrevocably lost. Most minority ethnic groups often follow the policy of least conflict or what the sociologists call the “principle of reconciliation” which maximizes material and social gains and minimizes survival risk. Under the British patronage, the Parsees enjoyed the special privileges and an elite status in colonial India, but at the cost of further alienation from their Indian hosts.

Then there is the Partition diaspora where the division of the subcontinent in 1947 into the new nations of India and Pakistan, found the Parsees on either side of the newly created border. The Parsees had taken the neutral stand at this critical juncture because they did not want to antagonize either their Hindu or Muslim hosts. In this Partition diaspora, they had to tread very carefully. Their dilemma regarding the position to be adopted is very well reflected in Sidhwa’s *Man* and also in the ending of *Eaters*. The speeches of Faredoon and Dr. Bharucha articulate this Parsee anxiety. But there was no need to be anxious as they had taken a neutral stand amongst the multicultural communities of India. In *Man*, the young lame Parsee girl Lenny is cast as a protagonist with various authorial intensions. She represents her community with her neutral stance. They are shown to help both the Hindus and the Muslims who have been victimized in the holocaust. The rescue-work done by Lenny’s mother and Godmother makes a strong point of their neutrality. The safe survival of this Parsee family through the Partition riots itself speaks volumes of the goodwill the community had earned among their Hindu and Muslim brothers. They are in a psychological diaspora in the postcolonial India as well as Pakistan as reflected in Sidhwa’s *Brat* and Mistry’s *Journey* and *Balance*. In *Eaters*, Faredoon, like most other Parsees, had accepted his ‘Indianness’ wholeheartedly and sided with the British. But he did not know that the constitution of the free India would recognize and protect the rights of the minorities; and their anxiety would be out of place if they are the proud citizens of free India. In postcolonial India and Pakistan, the Parsees have to contend with the loss of their elite status they had enjoyed in colonial India. Their nostalgia about their hold on banking which got crumbled after the nationalization of banks during Mrs. Gandhi’s rules, about their contribution to the trade and industry of the country and also about their beloved Bombay shaped and nurtured by the Parsees but now changing for worse – all this is very painful for them. These and the other colonial
memories are very well dealt with by Mistry in his novels. In *Journey*, Dinshawji is uncomfortable about the changed names of the roads and suburbs of Bombay. It is not easy for him to detach himself from the colonial names he had been so habituated since his childhood. The dissociation of their identity from the colonial reality was very painful for the Parsees. Like Dinshawji, the Parsees looked for their lost identity they had built so painstakingly and witnessed their gradual marginalization helplessly as the decolonization was taking place at its own pace. The Parsee identity is again in its reshaping. Their downgraded and marginal status in the decolonized Partitioned subcontinent has made several Parsees migrate abroad in the 50s and the 60s, seeking comfort and ease in their new diaspora, the western diaspora. The imposition of Hindu hegemony in the 90s, culminating in the demolition of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya and its far reaching repercussions in various parts of India including Bombay even after a decade has generated deep anxiety among the minorities including the Parsees. Mistry’s Parsee protagonists in *Journey, Matters* and *Tales* display certain nervousness about their future in India. They have lost their faith in the Congress leaders of free India and also have no hopes in the Hindu dominated/BJP ruled India with its agenda on Hindutva.

The Parsees have been in diaspora for a very long time, almost over 1300 years. Nilufer Bharucha has enunciated that “unlike the other writers of the Indian Diaspora Parsis are in diverse Diasporas that often run concurrently” (Bharucha, 2003: 28). These diasporas could be presented in various phases as shown below:

1. After their migration from Iran, the first phase of their diaspora was under the Hindus of Gujarat. They could escape Islamic persecution but forced to assimilate Gujarati Hindu culture in exchange of shelter.
2. The second phase of their diaspora under the Mughal rule was double edged as there was some regain of language and culture along with the renewed fear of religious oppression.
3. The third phase of their diaspora under the British colonial rule was again double pronged as with the acquisition of the elite status they were alienated from the other communities of India.
4. During the diasporic phase resultant of the Partition of the subcontinent, the Parsees were divided across the newly formed borders.
5. The postcolonial phase of their Indian diaspora brought with it the loss of their elite social and economic status as well as the post-Ayodhya anxiety regarding Hindu fundamentalism in the 90s.

6. In their latest western diaspora, the Parsees struggle to reconstruct their identity though they face the discrimination and alienation there too.

These “diverse diasporas” are reflected in Parsee writing which displays the characteristic features of diasporic discourse as noted by William Safran (Safran, 1991: 83-99). These classic features are the dispersion from the homeland, nurturing of the motherland myth, sense of loss, nostalgia, insecurity, anxiety and problems of identification with the host country leading to a sense of alienation and a hope of return. However, these writings, the pre-colonial Parsee texts in Gujarati and Persian -- the Garbo and Kissah-e-Sanjan (1600 AC) -- as well as the colonial and post-colonial discourse in English, lack some of the other diasporic features detailed by Safran, i.e. the belief in the restoration of the homeland or the acute desire to return to homeland and the definition of self in terms of this lost homeland. Quite a few dream of a return en mass to Iran, the land of their forefathers. This is an idea contemplated but never taken seriously except in the fiction like Some Take a Lover by Dina Mehta as Iran with revival of fundamentalism is an impossible destination. Nilufer Bharucha notes:

The way back to Iran was effectively sealed off by the consolidation of Islamic rule there and return to Iran has never been a central part of the Parsi consciousness. Instead there are, as noted by Kulke (1978), some other parameters of identity construction -- the Zoroastrian faith, a shared history of flight from Iran and refuge in India, an elite consciousness and feeling of unease in the adopted homeland. It is through such centre-staging of religion and construction of a distinct Parsi identity that the community has managed to retain a separate presence in India for over 1,300 years (Bharucha, 2003: 31).

The Parsees have produced very little literature during the pre-colonial period. The reason may be the loss of their ancient Persian literature and culture or also it may be due to the natural process of acculturation as part of the diasporic phenomenon in which the displaced community takes its own time to come to terms with its new surroundings, the attitude of the host community and create a comfortable place for
itself. The creativity blossoms generally in the congenial and safe environment. They first need the concrete base of their own identity to fall back on. This Parsee silence also could be explained as self-guarding mechanism, very pragmatic on the part of this tiny community, not to offend their hosts in any way. What could have been another cause of their deep literary silence during the pre-colonial period was the conquest of Gujarat, their adopted land, by the Mughal sultans between the 13th and the 14th century. The regaining of their Persian language might have made them comfortable but it would be too much to think what Jameela Begum does. She states, “The Zoroastrians felt better accommodated within this cultural and social change. Their tongue was restored to them and their cultural identity was knit together again” (Begum, 2007: 146). It was never the same again for the Parsees. They had left their cultural identity far behind and this accommodative phase was just a step in rebuilding it. In fact, the hold of their land of refuge by the Mughals, the Muslim religious group, the descendants of their persecutors in the past and ironically their patrons in the present, might have created a deep sense of unease and fear of their hostility among the Parsees.

The Parsee identification with the colonial ruling has been taken note of in detail by Parsee as well as non-Parsee historians, sociologists and anthropologists. They had felt confident enough under the British patronage and the favourable space was given to them by the colonialists to express in a creative mode. This had happened neither during the Hindu dominance nor during the Muslim rule. There is no denying that the Parsees were one of the most westernized, elite communities in British India and that they identified to a considerable extent with the colonizers. Their psychological intensions and the socio-political realities behind such identification need to be examined and comprehended. Given the conditions of the coerced assimilation imposed by Jadav Rana; the Parsees had got no opportunity in India to concretize their identity/difference through their ‘otherness’. So, while in Hindu-dominated Gujarat they had identified with the Hindus, though forcibly and had very reluctantly lived under the Muslim regime, they once more identified with the dominant group in British India. But this time they did so in order to assert their difference from their Hindu hosts and thus to feel superior to them by taking pride in the so-called alignment with the rulers. It was not that the Parsees, in enjoying the preferences from the British, had completely severed their ties from their first host, the Hindus. But
their allegiance to the British was the cause of Hindu ire and this critical situation caused the crisis of Parsee identity. Further, the Parsees were not the only elite group in colonial India that identified with the ruling class, nor were the British the only colonizing culture; there were the French and Portuguese colonies too. Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin White Masks*, had articulated the trauma and dilemma of the colonized, especially the elite groups: “For the black men there is only one destiny. And it is white” (Fanon, 1986: 10). But the black man can never really be white and that eventual “othering” leads to what Homi Bhabha calls the “ambivalence” found in the discourse of the colonized. The Parsee story too is about the long-delayed agonized recognition of the emptiness of promise that they might one day be Englishmen (Luhrmann, 1986). It is from the psychological complexities of the elite minds that the paradoxical rise of the Nationalist movements takes place. Such movements are initiated, taken forward and are made to reach the point of success by the colonial elites.

So, if there was identification with the Raj, there was also a strong spirit of patriotism and in some cases, even the revolutionary radicalism among the Parsees. These ‘patriotic’ Parsees had invited the wrath of the British for being ‘ungrateful’ and ‘disloyal’ to their patrons who had favoured and supported them so far. The spur of patriotism among a few Parsees like Naoroji, Mehta, Tata, Sidhwa, and Madam Cama was even resented by many of their community mates too. This resentment was covert and not documented nor pronounced, though the Parsees used to organize public ‘jashans’ in order to honour the British victory in wars. This is very well noted by Sidhwa in *Man* when Dr. Bharucha delivers his speech about the Parsee stand during the prospective postcolonial India and when the news of Partition was received with apprehension and dismay. Also Faredoon’s advice to his progeny at the end of *Eaters* and his disagreement with those Parsees who had participated in the National movement show the attitude of most other Parsees who had refrained from being ‘patriotic’ fearing the British wrath. Most of them preferred to keep a low profile to hide their anxiety. The Parsees, who had been reputed for their loyalty to their rulers, were torn by the conflict between their biloyalty – to the dominant host people and the then rulers. Behramji Malbari, who called himself a “Parsee Hindu”, identified very strongly with the ‘Indian’ side of his self. Despite the preferences and support he got from the Britishers for the blossoming of his career, he never advocated the
acceptance of European ideals. Being a social reformist, he had advocated certain reforms for the Indian women. Any kind of social reform, even advocated by the Hindu reformists, was viewed as imposition of an alien disposition of the British on the native peoples. Even though Malbari had a comprehensive understanding of the issues of race, class and gender from the insider-outsider position, he was criticized by the dominant Hindu group who rejected his vision and branded him as a heretic and an infidel. Compared to other Indian reformists, Malbari’s Parseeness and the image that the Parsees were close to the colonizers made the matters even worse. Such rejection from the host community as well as the lack of whole-hearted acceptance from the British led to the severe identity-crisis for the Parsees. Their paradoxically ambivalent attitude, like that of an immigrant caught in a bi-cultural pull, had caused them a traumatic dilemma and a limbo-like situation. Malbari countered the Hindu anger by his articles in The Indian Spectator (Sept 28, 1884): “If my Hindu friends take this line of argument – that I am “only a Parsi”, I will be forced to reply that I am as good a Hindu as any of them, that India is as much my country as theirs, and that if they do not give me a *locus standi* in this case, I will take my stand on the higher ground of humanity….” Malbari’s stand was supported by many influential nationalists and reformists like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Govind Ranade.

Despite the pro-Indian and pro-nationalist attitudes of several Parsees during the colonial period it was noticeable that the aristocratic Parsee families had become highly anglicized by the end of the nineteenth century. Their homes were furnished in the Victorian style and the young Parsee girls were raised under the supervision of the English governesses and the Parsee children were given piano and violin lessons. The Parsee historian D.F.Karaka approvingly writes of how the Parsee youth preferred the western dances and music to the native ones (Karaka, 1884: 329). Mistry himself used to perform when he was in Bombay. In his *Matters*, he has shown that a Parsee girl named Daisy staying single in the neighborhood of the Chenoys was a violinist. Also Desai, in his *Elephants*, has narrated Homi’s granny, groomed in a highly westernized and English speaking urban culture of the Parsee household in Bombay, taking the piano lessons, and not an Indian instrument Sitar’s. When Bapaiji, Homi’s paternal grandma, a Gujarati speaking rural Parsee from Navsari, used to visit Bombay, the two Grannies seldom used to get along well. Desai shows how the two families of the
Camas and the Seervais were divided in two hostile camps over the use of Gujarati vs. English while at home. Each granny had her own reason for retaining or rejecting a language. There was a considerable debate among the Parsees about the danger of over-identification with the British, a very real danger of being attracted to Christianity and abandoning their Zoroastrian faith. Very aptly, it is Bapaiji, a representative of the rural Parsees who value their roots and their historical past, that takes Homi through his memo-scan machine to their ancient past of Arab invasions contrasting it to Homi’s expatriate present in America where the Parsees grapple for their neo-identity and try to get hold of their roots to define themselves, but are not sure if it should be based on their Persian past or the Indian diasporic past or maybe more appropriately both. In this context, it would be apt to consider what Stuart Hall has called the positioning and construction of identities within the discourses of history and culture.

Nilufer Bharucha cites Fanon’s theory in the Parsee context. In the Wretched of the Earth, Fanon has termed the colonial strategy: “Colonialisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it” (Fanon, 1963: 170). With reference to the above premise Bharucha comments that “the Parsees’ Persian past is once removed and what the colonizer’s Orientalist project, detailed by Edward Said in Orientalism (1978) and Culture and Imperialism (1994), distorted was not so much the Iranian past as their adopted Indian past” (Bharucha, 2003: 34). Facing the acute crisis of identity during the colonial era the Parsee creativity went dormant pondering over the future of their community which had so closely identified with the British. Also at the time of Partition, the horrific carnage made them feel extremely insecure. They were to gauge their position in the new scenario of the independent India. It was not very disappointing in the initial decades but their struggle got expression in the later decades of the twentieth century.

The upsurge of the second generation of the postcolonial writers is marked by the assertion of Parsee voice breaking their long literary silence. There may be a number of reasons for this assertive voice. One reason may be the increasing marginalization and relegation of the ethno-religions minorities in the BJP led India with its agenda on
‘Hindutva’. In the decolonized India, the prominent position enjoyed by the Parsees has retreated to the back seat, more so in the post-Ayodhya India. Actually, during the whole of the second half of the 20th century, they have been trying to readjust themselves in their new much intimidated and subdued role. Another motivation for breaking their ‘prudent silence’ (Bharucha, 2003: 41) may be to leave behind the records of their existence of their about-to-be extinct community for the time to come. Both kinds of anxieties have accelerated their efforts of reorientation and reconstruction of their identity. The Parsees’ disenchantment with their Indian destiny had begun along with the Partition of the subcontinent and intensified by the serious threats posed to the much cherished secularism of the country by the fundamental outfits and political maneuverings. The Parsees were indeed losing their lofty and exalted position they once enjoyed. This shift from the colonial security and patronage to the postcolonial insecurity and anxiety is overtly represented by the Parsee writers who have brought out their works after the 80s. The post-independence Parsee writing in English is ethno-centric, culture-specific and community-oriented. They feel an exigent need to write about the community. Mistry’s atavistic urge takes turn in Matters and avows forcefully the predicament of his community in the wake of the Ayodhya issue. The changing social systems and the increasing violent communal clashes triggered off by the fundamental forces depress them and make them feel that their existence is under threat. Above all, the race is facing its extinction that makes them worry about their future. Those who have stayed in India try to assimilate to the Indian mainstream with their reduced low social profile; and others who have moved to the West in order to seek more security in the greener pastures also undergo the same process of assimilation and reconstitution of their identity in the country they have chosen to settle. In either case, the Parsees have to grapple with the loss of their specific identity in the Indian or the Western milieu and the Parsee identity suffers the brunts of the time and place and hence is bruised and damaged.

A recently raised Parsee voice, especially from the western diasporic writers, has been trying to retain the community’s identity for however long they survive even through their literature. It is also the expression of the problems they face as a diasporic community there. “In the land of the white races, they hold no unique position and are lumped together with the other brown races -- the Asians. This is an identity the Parsees were trying to avoid in India and it creates confusion and delays assimilation.
into the new western context” (Bharucha, 2003: 43). Yezad and his family had to face the humiliation by the immigration officer from Canada during the interview. Yezad had the bitter experience of abuse and hurt that disillusioned him about the so-called policies of the Canadian multiculturalism. Their pro-western attitude and light tan of the skin do not help much against the racial discrimination and they still feel alienated there. It is like history repeats for them. Their pro-British attitude also had not made them acceptable to the British or consider as one among them but treat them as their subjects. It is very crucial and also a high time for the Parsees to assert themselves as none other but Parsees. That explains the ethno-religious assertion of their community in the works of the Parsee diasporic writers. Boman Desai’s protagonists -- Homi, Noshir and Farida -- face the discrimination and the resultant alienation. Also in Brat, Sidhwa’s protagonist Feroza faces the racial harassment right on landing at the New York airport and has to undergo rigorous security check and is detained for quite a while in a humiliating condition. She loses her American love David Press due to the exoticity of her Parseeness. Though David is a Jew, from a diasporic community like hers, they are estranged as David fails to accommodate the difference. Feroza had prepared to accept the difference and evolve an understanding. But due to the lack of efforts required from the other side, the result is the estrangement. After the break-up Feroza is shown to take resort to the essence of her Parseeness, the Zoroastrian faith. Similarly, Homi is rejected by his American sweetheart Julie who is not able to accept a ‘heathen’ as her husband. Homi, for the first time, becomes conscious of his Parseeness. He had never taken his identity so seriously before coming to America.

Hence, Mistry, Sidhwa, Desai and other Parsee diasporic writers need to be read not just as the postcolonial subcontinental writers or as the South Asian Canadian or American or British writers in their hyphenated identities but they need to be read as the Parsee writers too. This essential Parseeness that these writers have opted to display in their works has added the piquancy of difference to their discourse. Their choice to maintain this ‘important difference’, as Mistry believes, may be due to their survival anxiety. They might choose otherwise but the prominent Parseeness displayed in these texts makes us believe that they are written with this survival instinct and to “preserve the record of how they lived.” These texts make the grand stand of last witness assert the Parsee voice through the narration of their glorious Persian past, their Indian connection and also with the more recent western
experience. Their quintessential Parsee diasporic discourse also deals with the increasing tension between the Parsee minority and the dominant sections of the Indian and the western societies and also their relations with other minorities. Bhabha has called such writing, “The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective” (Bhabha, 1994: 2). Despite the overt detailing of racial and religious characteristics in these texts, most of the protagonists like Faredoon, Lenny, Feroza, Gustad, Dina, Maneck, Nariman, Homi and Rusi, Noshir and Farida are not the “prisoners of their ethnicities or religion. Most of them try to move beyond these constructs, to wider spaces free of intra-group domination, as well as hegemonic pressures from dominant groups in postcolonial India and Pakistan” (Bharucha, 2003: 46). The western diasporic protagonists Feroza, Homi, Rusi, Noshir and Farida are very much like their authors and many other Parsees settled abroad. They have been able to take the insider-outsider view of both the East and the West. The Parsees have experienced of living in both kinds of diasporas, a forced one in India and a voluntary one in the western countries. As diasporic people, they have faced severe identity-crisis and the problems of identification with and alienation from the old and new cultures and home lands. Most of these texts focus on the Parsee experience alone. Viewed in the light of postcolonial criticism and current ethnic studies, these texts may be taken as part of “identitarian politics” (Gandhi, 1998: 126). These texts endeavour to secure a distinct space for the Parsee community within the hegemonic cultures. So, these diasporic writers “have perfected the art of existing on boundaries partaking of different cultures and yet retaining the ultimate ethnoreligious retreat. While ethnocentric, these texts are not ethnic enclosures” in Bharucha’s words (Bharucha, 2003: 46). While taking the insider-outsider view of both worlds, the Oriental and the Occidental, it may happen that the viewer is at home in neither and feels ‘unhomed’ in the most essential sense of the term, like the protagonist of the Mistry’s story “Swimming Lessons”. (Tales, 1987: 249) Like Mistry himself, he prefers to view inside and learn to swim, to survive against the currents. However, as Bhabha has pointed out, to be ‘unhomed’ is not to be homeless. As the realization of being unhomed first occurs, the world shrinks and then it expands enormously. The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalence of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence. The Parsees have experienced exactly this phenomenon happening in their case as Mistry has shown to happen it symbolically through the fall of the ‘wall’ in Journey. The wall cordoning/enclosing
the Parsee residency stands for ethno-religiosity at first when it stinks due to neglect and abuse. The artist lends it a secular colour and even that is felled at the end. The Parsee ethnicity breaks the shell of its enclosure, opening the limits to the sky. Hence, the Parsee fiction by the second generation of the post-colonial Parsee writers displays how these writers “deal with their Parsiness and the manner in which their discourse attempts to cobble together a composite Parsi identity from the scattered shards strewn through diverse countries and times” (Bharucha, 1995: 33).

The New Parsee Face:

The long journey of the construction and reconstruction of the Parsee identity is still going on, maybe to be destined to become a unique block in the mosaic of the multicultural globe, having multiple displacements as their multiple homes. The title of Mistry’s first novel Such a Long Journey sums up the experiences of this diasporic community that has wandered a long way. The multiple spaces that the diasporic Parsee writers inhabit simultaneously through their works – Parsee, Indian, Pakistani, Canadian, American or British – at various points of time in history i.e. pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial, put up significant complex issues about belonging, identity, ethnicity, migrancy, diaspora, nation and multiculturalism. It could be any or all of the following reasons that might have led these writers to chronicle their different dislocations and relocations and focus on their essential Parseeness: their being a geriatric and dying race, survival anxiety, fear of losing their so-called ‘racial purity’ in order to evade their eventual annihilation, cultural hybridity, insecurity for being subjugated as minority, the complexities involved in the issues of belonging and ethnicity for a diasporic community, emergence from their identity-crisis and project a concrete face of their community highlighting their positive traits before the world as to what they think of themselves and not what others do about them. These writers write neither as Indians nor as Westerners but both as Indians and Westerners and above all, the first and the foremost, as Parsees. They interrogate given notions of their ‘selves’ and their community related to locale, language, culture and nation and suggest novel ways of belonging and reconstructing their identity, of course hybridized, “in the new borderless space” (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 12). Global capitalism and the advanced travel and communication technologies have the world
transformed into a borderless space, no matter one remains at home or moves. The ties of locale and nation, the old identity-markers, have loosened and the new borderland inhabitants have attempted to create new subject positions and express new perspectives to view their communities. “Thanks to the border theory, *mestiza je*, the borderland is a new favoured vantage point and the marginal and the border dweller uniquely situated to critique foundational histories and identities in the in-between discourse of post-colonialism” (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 11). These texts can be read as “having been written in those in-between spaces, the Derridian interstices, through which they cross the border between ethnicity and transnationality” (Bharucha, 2003: 59).

With this newly acquired position, the diasporic postcolonial writers do not deny or sever their previous/old subjectivities/identities. In fact, the new one is constructed with the merging of all their beings that exist prior to the articulation of their new selves. For instance, Sidhwa, in *Eaters*, has narrated through the story of Faredoon, the story of the re-settlement of Indian Parsees in Lahore for trade and business. She herself was born in Lahore, the then Punjab region of the undivided Indian subcontinent. Her *Man* is very autobiographical in which she shows how the identity of those people staying at the other side changed from “Indian” to “Pakistani”. The formation of the border made one nation into two overnight. This newly created identity with the newly created border and the nation along with do matter a lot for the concerned people. The trauma of migrancy can be viewed as an essential postmodern dilemma of the anxiety of self-definition. It is not easy to relinquish these identities with the newly formulated theory of borderless existence. As a writer Sidhwa cherishes her identity of being a Parsee, Punjabi and Pakistani simultaneously. The other writers under study, Mistry and Desai are proud to be the Bombayites and love to be the Parsee Gujaratis of Indian origin. The new self is all inclusive. In fact, the previous selves constitute the components of the new one.

Though Sidhwa is settled in the United States, she keeps on returning to her roots off and on. So is the case with Mistry in relation to Canada and Desai in relation to the USA. Both of them keep returning to Bombay. Sidhwa divides her time between Lahore and the USA. After twenty years of stay in America she does not feel at home in the American society. In an interview to Bachi Karkaria, she says:
I’m a Parsee first, then a Pakistani, specifically a Punjabi. I’m woman simply by gender. I don’t feel American at all. My consolidated 3P identity has enriched my writing (Karkaria, 2005: 4).

Maybe that is the reason why her first three novels are about life in the subcontinent and in her fourth and the last novel Brat the story moves back and forth between Pakistan and America. In fact, all her novels are a fictional expansion of the varied experiences of life and society her creative self had had at different displacements at different times. All the three writers embody the displaced subjects of the postmodernity. Unlike the forced migrations of the past, the migrations in the present, particularly of the professional intelligentsia are largely voluntary, though in both the types the migrants do experience the destabilization of location and hence the loss of home or exile. In the postmodern context, this condition has been viewed as “a privileged position and the migrant, the quintessential outsider, credited with a double vision” (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 12). Here, the multiple displacements guarantee multiple visions. Despite the alienation felt due to the acute feeling of homelessness, the migrant is at the same time aware of his/her privileged situation lending him/her the vantage point of dual/multiple perspectives. Roy and Pillai talk about the concept of “migrant sublime”, very much akin to the postmodern sublime, is linked to uncertainty, pain and danger and to what is unspeakable or suppressed. At the heart of this concept too, there is the “paradox of representation” (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 13). Himself being a westernized Parsee, groomed in Bombay till his youth, his arrival in Canada made Mistry sharply aware of his outsider status. In an interview with Narmeen Shaikh, Mistry articulates his sense of non-belongingness:

Going to Canada, faced with the reality of earning a living and realizing that although I had, up to that point in my life, read books and listened to music that came from the West, there was a lot more involved in living in the West. I felt very comfortable with the books and the music, but actually living in the West made that same music seem much less relevant. It suddenly brought home to me very clearly the fact that I was imitating something that was not mine, that made no sense in terms of my own life, my own reality.

Like Sidhwa, Mistry too feels stranger in the foreign culture, and so is the case with Desai. What makes the case of the Parsee immigrant writers more complex than the other immigrant writers is that they, being Parsees, had never been complete insiders
even in the Indian subcontinent despite living peacefully with the other ethnicities in India for centuries. The situation of being outsiders in both the countries and insiders only as members of their community imparts their discourse of migrancy and hybridity as the in-between subjects the advantage of not just double but multiple visions and viewpoints. The objectivity they gain being on the multiple margins or peripheries complicates their contemporary narration of migration and at the same time enhances their versatility.

Mistry argues that the Parsee diasporic identity can be better and more truthfully expressed in English than in any other language or dialect. The essential characteristic of the diasporic subject is to create and recreate continuously and that can be captured and narrated neutrally in no other language but English, fluid and global, like the diasporic experience itself. Mistry believes that the multiplicity of diasporic identities of Parsees in the Indian subcontinent and the Parsee identity as part of the Indian diaspora in multiple nations abroad as well as the dialogical relationship between these multiplicities can be very well “articulated by a language such as English – syncretic, hybrid and global” (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 16). Though the diasporic writers have to select English, “least equipped to translate Asian reality” (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 16), they would go for writing about the country from which they have emigrated because they are culturally not equipped to deconstruct the society which they inhabit. Maybe it is possible to do so after the long stay in that country for generations as it has been the case for Parsees in India, almost their second home. In short, in order to be published and read, the task of these expatriate writers is predetermined, that is to construct an image of the ‘exotic other’ from the Orient. Even when Mistry and Sidhwa write about the postcolonial history of India and Pakistan respectively; it is ‘othered perspective’ as it is different from the general ‘truth’ presented in the histories of these countries. Sidhwa presents the iconoclastic narration of the Indian leaders of freedom struggle in Man and Mistry exposes the shrewd political strategies of the Indira Gandhi regime in Journey and Balance. Like Rushdie, Mistry and Sidhwa treat history as a discourse that can be challenged, which needs to be interrogated, interpreted and problematized as any other narrative discourse. For them
history is the medium through which the writer has to journey in order to retrieve individual memories, memories that are as overlapping and anguishing as histories themselves. It is the migrant desire for identity that fuels the needs for his traversal of history eschewing destination (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 18).

The expatriate’s writing thus becomes a subversive attempt from the margin to expose the ideological underpinnings inherent in the selection and presentation of events as history. Through the assertion of the community and its perspective to the history of the nation-state, it is the community’s sojourn from the margin to main, from periphery to the centre. In the cases of Mistry and Sidhwa “one sees how re-evaluation and re-deployment of past events are in fact postcolonial strategies to foreground other(ed) histories” (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 19). Desai, too, has foregrounded the history of Parsees, through his innovative narrative technique of memo-scan in Elephants, right from their Persian diaspora in India to their recent western diaspora. It would be apt to cite A. K. Singh’s statement here:

… the novel as a crucible of narrativization attains a new meaning, intent and perspective by hierarchical displacement of its narrative – by bringing the backdrop of the novel to the fore. The validity of such ‘critical violence’ can be conceded, for the real purport of a creative work can be deciphered by penetrating into narratives on the margins (Singh, A. K., 1994: 201).

The displacement and reconstruction are inevitable for these writers to rethink and renarrate their community, culture and country. The absorbing narratives have the country and the community as their protagonists, even though the writers have been at a considerable geographical distance from the country and the community they write about. The human characters become the carriers for conveying the ethnic, communal and national consciousness.

Yet, the perturbing feeling of ‘outsiderness’ cannot be altered. The unsettling inequality of power-equations permeates the works of an immigrant writer with “a powerful air of powerlessness” (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 20). Hence ethnic identity, though might be considered a depreciative construct, a form of bias for the western theorists, has actually an extraordinary strength which makes the works of these writers potentially subversive social critiques of secure and homogeneous identities within the imagined communities of the nation-state. The western hegemonic
tendency is to interpret ‘other’ people, cultures and histories in its own terms and values but the ethnic identity cannot be subordinated or subdued to the indices of the so-called secularism. In fact, the greater the opposition, threat and insecurity faced by the ethnic identity, the stronger it grows. The Parsee community, highly westernized, almost anglophile during the colonial rule has rediscovered its ethnic identity in the face of hegemonic forces in postcolonial India, Pakistan and also in the countries of their multiple diasporas abroad. Majority of the recent Parsee fiction is ethnocentric. Such ethnocentrism, expanding into the borderless existence, is the result of deeply ingrained uncertainties and insecurities bred by the centuries’ long co-existence with the other dominant ethnic communities i.e. Hindus in India; Muslims first in Persia, then during the Mughal rule in India; also Muslims in Pakistan and Christians abroad. When one group’s identity confronts another, often dominant group’s identity, the politics and history of the ethnic conflicts are engendered. The Indian subcontinent has a long-existing multicultural society where diverse ethnic groups have co-existed but often with uneasy calm, at times erupting into violent clashes. Group identities in such multicultural social milieu are generally shaped by how the dominated or the dominant group bears itself in relation to other groups.

Race and Religion – Two Identity Markers:

The conditions put before the community by Jadav Rana in exchange of the shelter make the Parsees a genetically closed ethnic group. Like the other diasporic ethnic groups, theirs is also a “truncated ethnicity” which excludes nationality and state. As stated earlier, they suffered the loss of their language. “So, out of the usual indices of ethnicity -- race, religion, language, nationality and state, the Parsees really possess only two. These two identity markers are race and religion. The label ‘Parsee Zoroastrian’ refers to race and religion respectively” (Bharucha, 2000: 85). Despite their coerced acculturation in the pre-colonial Indian milieu and later during the Muslim rule, the Parsees had never compromised with these two fundamental features of their identity. They have preferred to remain endogamic for their racial purity and have been very proud of their age-old religion, i.e. Zoroastrianism. Till date, they have retained this with the changing times. Freddy alias Faredoon, in Eaters represents the colonial Parsee who had not hesitated to identify with the aggressor’s
group, in fact, felt special and privileged. Freddy is not even ashamed to call himself a “toddy of the British Empire” So are all the other Parsees. But this makes them, neither keep aside their self-esteem, nor convert their religion. The loss of self-respect and the consequential self-rejection was the commonly found colonial psychosis among the colonized as noticed by the sociologists, psychologists and the postcolonial theorists. But Parsees had not fallen pray to it. Their closed ethnicity saved them from self-hatred or self-rejection. Their Anglicization was limited only to certain extent of acculturation in their manners, life-style, costumes and language. In their customs, cuisine, rituals and festivals they held their religion and culture in high esteem and never compromised. Though the fear of proslytization was always lurking, they have very gracefully kept themselves at a safe distance. In Mistry’s Journey, Gustad visits the church at Mt. Marry with his close Christian friend Malcolm but he is never carried away by his talks on Christianity. He establishes that Zoroastrianism is the oldest religion, even older than the Christianity because the three Magi who visited the baby Jesus were the Persian Zoroastrian Kings. Gustad’s respect for his own religion is unshaken. Despite his shameless sycophancy of the British, Freddy is secure in the self-esteem begotten by his identity as a Parsee Zoroastrian. “He might have allied himself with the Raj, but no quarter was to be given when it came to ethnic identity” (Bharucha, 2000: 86). This self-regard comes from the conscious sense of their glorious historical past about their powerful Persian Empire and pride in their ancient religion. With their experiences of their diverse diasporas their memory of the bygone days has become more acute and they have been more possessive about it. Desai’s Elephants addresses itself most directly to the question of Parsee identity and their diasporas and focuses on the collective psyche of the Parsees through a novel and purely imaginative narrative method with the aid of memo-scan, a mechanical gadget to scan the Parsee racial memory.

There is also the factor of their socio-economic importance in colonial India. Freddy is the part and parcel of those Parsees who had mastered the knack of European trade and business and had risen to economic prosperity and social eminence. During this period and by the latter half of 19th century, most of the Parsees who were concentrated mainly on the southern belt of Gujarat after seeking refuge in Sanjan, had shifted to Bombay, the centre of British trade and commerce. And a few, like Freddy, had spread all over the British Indian subcontinent at the places like Karachi.
and Lahore and some more enterprising ones had even moved to other British colonies like Hong Kong, Singapore and Aden. In *Elephants*, Jalu and Sohrab settle down at Shanghai. The fair-complexioned Parsees could assimilate easily in the colour-conscious subcontinent. They had an edge over the locals in seeking favours with the British and they had made the most of it as Freddy did. “However, just as the Parsees, in spite of all their toadying to the British, were extremely assertive of their religion and race, and the British too, in spite of their patronage to the Parsees resisted their assimilation into the ranks of the ruling Whites” (Bharucha, 2000: 87). It is this dichotomy and ambivalence that typifies the Parsee existence in India. The rootlessness and alienation that characterize most diasporic experience was already a part of the Parsee community even before Indian independence and the formation of India as a nation-state. The process of assimilation to a foreign white culture while positioned in a country that did not belong to them aggravated their alienation as it was from the either side, the rulers as well as their co-communities. This growing alienation was halted by a strong spirit of nationalism and an urge to make their presence felt in the Indian history. This in-between position also led the community to address issues that directed attention to their ethnicity and culture specificities within the context of political and social changes in India. Despite the resistance on the part of the British Raj to impart acceptance to the Parsees’ wish to be their likes, Freddy like most Parsees, enjoyed the high goodwill, among the colonists as well as the colonized by just “being a Parsee” with their reputation for integrity and propriety. Sidhwa has narrated the Parsee ethos with precision in *Eaters*. As a first Parsee Pakistani novel, it had met with much objection from the Pakistani Parsees during its publication because Sidhwa has exposed a shrewd and cunning Parsee, a blot on the Parsee honesty through the character of Freddy who prospers by cheating and fraud and yet enjoys the facile reputation of a philanthropist and a good Parsee.

The sociologist Kulke has delineated Parseeness, or ‘Parseepanu’ in Gujarati, as consisting of a “we-consciousness” that encompasses religion, ethnicity, history and an elite status. But their identity is characterized by certain paradoxes. Though Freddy prospers in the new city of Lahore by developing the friendly terms with the colonial rulers and gains the coveted aristocratic social stratum, he was shocked to discover that one of his sons, Yazdi, wanted to marry an Anglo-Saxon class-mate Rosy Watson. He could not digest the prospects of mingling their ‘pure’ Persian blood with
her ‘mongrel’ blood. The over-protection of their own distinct ethno-religious identity led them to this horror of the ‘unclean’ *parjaat* (outsider) that paradoxically co-existed with their fascination for all things English. The same has happened in *Brat* too. Feroza’s parents, Cyrus and Zareen Ginwalla, send her to America to cure her from her ‘backwardness’. But when she becomes too modern to marry an American, it is not acceptable to them. In Desai’s novels the action takes place in the late 90s and the beginning of the first decade of the twenty-first century when Rusi, Noshir and Farida marry the Americans without any fuss or objection from their parents. The open-minded and liberal approach of the modern Americanized Parsees loosens the grip of the strong-hold of their ethno-religiosity and brings them in the group of the Reformists versus the Orthodox. And there are some exceptional buddies who maintain dual identities, American at workplace and Parsees/Indians at home. In *Brat*, Maneck, who despite being so much Americanized insisted to marry a docile Parsee girl Aban for whom the word ‘divorce’ itself brings bad omen. Similar is the case of Rohit, Farida’s friend Rohini’s husband. The dilemma of the diasporic Parsees is very well brought out through the dilemma of Zareen, Feroza’s mother who likes Feroza’s choice of her husband but cannot support her due to the strong cultural pull. Similar, though slightly different, is the case of Homi who is not ready to convert to Christianity as insisted by his American fiancée Julie in *Elephants*. But he would like to marry her and merge with the foreigners with his own distinct identity as a Parsee with pride and even does not mind mixed breeding. Desai’s novels show the reformist trend of the modern Parsees to survive with their further hybridized but at the same time distinct identity. The Parsees have always resisted complete integration either with their Hindu hosts or the British colonials or their western hosts and have preferred to maintain their ethno-religious identity. Their reluctance to complete assimilation has led to the resistance from the side of the hosts too. Their insistence to be recognized as ‘pure Parsee race’ has been the root cause of their alienation and identity-crisis so far. The politics of difference/identity works either way. Like the ‘wall’ in *Journey*, it includes as well as excludes. The Parsee identity, hence, is a paradox in itself.

Xavaska, the Parsee protagonist in Dhondy’s *Bombay Duck* presents an over-simplified version of Parsee history and Zoroastrianism and this description is followed by a sceptic comment:
There is evidence to show that the first settlers had no woman with them and must have inter-married with the natives, the Hindus, so the first claim of the Parsees to be racially pure is suspect (*Bombay Duck*, 1991: 190-91).

This voice articulates the modern Parsee psyche that doubts the original story of racial purity, maybe an excuse to restrict the inter-faith marriages. The Parsee tendency of boastful eloquence about Zoroastrians is apparently the display of their superiority complex. In fact, it is an obvious reaction to camouflage the hidden inferiority and insecurity that put their confidence at ebb. The conscious awareness of their minority status and the covert anxiety of facing rejection or cultural assault from the host culture have built substantial pressure on Parsee psyche. Madhumalti Adhikari has rightly stated:

> Religion is often manipulated to become an ‘ego defensive’ system. Religion didacticism is not practised unless the fear of self-obliteration attains gigantic dimensions (Adhikari, 1997: 43).

In *Elephants*, Homi, who faces rejection and prospects of conversion from the American society, attempts to revive his elite status by impressing the host with the eminence of Zoroastrianism. Homi had hardly become conscious of his religious identity so far. But when it was under pressure from the ‘other’ religion, he suddenly became aware of it and became possessive about it. While on the other hand, Rusi, who also faces rejection and discrimination initially, reacts differently from Homi. He decides to marry an American girl Jan having quite a pliant understanding between the two. In quite a different case, Farida, in *Woman*, is very keen to construct her own identity in America irrespective of her Parseeness and her elite status as a Cooper in Bombay. She does not like that she has got her job due to the Parsee link of her prospective employer Percy Faber. She would like to shun her ‘Parsee card’ and prove herself in the New World depending only on her own guts and substance, never mind, if she has to start from the scratch. She too faces covert racial discrimination in the undue hitches that delay the completion of her Masters in Creative Writing and also not getting any American publisher to get her fiction published. She continues to put up a stand for justice and gets her works approved by a British publisher. The postmodern Parsee psyche, represented by Farida, gradually overcomes the old diffidence, inferiority and also curbs the paradoxical, ego-defensive superiority complex to certain extent. They are now building up a new confidence to reconstruct their identity. In fact,
whenever they have tried to depend upon this defense-mechanism of glorifying their identity on the religious ground and their glorious past, they have landed in a crisis. Zareen, Feroza’s mother in *Brat*, despite her forwardness and so-called fundas of woman’s emancipation, tries to brag about her Parsee traditions of wedding ceremony before Feroza’s Jewish boyfriend David who feels hurt and retorts, “I belong to an old tradition too” (*Brat*, 298). She resorts to such bragging just to demotivate and dispirit David and she does succeed in her strategy but she destroys her beloved daughter’s happiness when she backs the rigid bigotry of the community proclaiming: “The Zoroastrian faith forbids inter-marriage since mixing physical and spiritual genes is considered a cardinal crime against nature” (*Brat*, 306). Feroza represents the young liberals who are rebels. She is not like her previous generation’s Nariman (*Matters*) who succumbs to the tradition as per his parents’ wish and leaves his Christian beloved Lucy Braganza suffering for lifetime. In fact, she is very much like Yazdi (*Eaters*) who deserts his home in protest when Freddy, his father, does not give in. Such conflicts not only destabilize the psyche of the community but also produce rebels like Rita in *The Sisters* by Dina Mehta, Dolly in *Trying to Grow* by Kanga and Xavaska in *Bombay Duck* by Dhondy. All these non-conformist members of the Parsee community should be accommodated and their differences be accepted respectfully as part of the community. The community wants to reorient its identity; maybe in the context of the Indian or Canadian or American or British multiculturalism, and get its due recognition. When the community needs to be accepted and accommodated within the larger multicultural framework of any country, the internal differences too need to be considered with due regard. The novelists, through the delineation of the rebellious younger generation in their fiction, suggests that it is now high time for the reorientation of the community’s identity and the reconsideration of the community’s non-conformist membership.

As against Xavaska, Freddy is sure enough of his secure social position and asserts in an uncompromising tone representing his community’s imperative and aggressive urge for exclusivity. :

There are hardly a hundred and twenty thousand Parsis in the world -- and still we maintain our identity -- why? ... Our ancestors weren’t too proud to bow to his (Jadav Rana) will. To this day we don’t allow conversion to our faith -- or mixed marriages (*Eaters*, 11).
The recent Parsee diasporic novelists have felt this inevitable need to unfold the Parsee psyche that demands to be defined through the narration of Parsee religio-ethnicity. It is this acute psychological need to get recognized and respected that accounts for their ethno-religious, socio-political, even patriotic and literary assertions. They understand the significance of the need to articulate and also that their voice is heeded before it dies out. Mistry successfully attempts to present not only the alienation but also the assimilation of the Parsees into the mainstream of the Indian secular social milieu. The most significant metaphor in the novel highlighting the unity and continuity of the Indian ethos is the wall painted with different religions’ prophets, Gods and Goddesses. The wall, standing for the Indian multiculturalism, both includes and excludes. It is due to this multiculturalization of the Indian ethos that the Parsee ethos are not obliterated and stands included and yet apart. The same is the case of the individual’s membership in the community in the multicultural context. The membership, voluntary and not mandatory, should stand related to that particular community and yet independent. Therefore, the rebels or the non-conformists should have the choice to exit. They should not be forced to exit. From this point of view, the Parsee personal law of excommunicating the Parsee girls for inter-caste marriages needs to be amended.

**Patriarchy in Parsee Community:**

So far, the religious orthodoxy and the desire for ethnic exclusivity, the Parsee identity-markers, have functioned as an “ego-defensive mechanism” to re-establish their superiority, otherwise likely to be ignored and erased. But it has its own aftermath. The fictional Parsee characters are rarely shown to practise the eternal values dictated by Zoroastrianism. They are mostly used to control the rebellious youngsters like Nariman by his father and later Murad by his liberal turned bigot father Yezad (*Matters*), Yazdi by his father Freddy (*Eaters*) and Feroza by her parents (*Brat*). Gustad is the only saving grace who practises the reverential doctrines of religion and accepts his estranged son Sohrab back open-mindedly and wholeheartedly though initially very angry and hurt. It is the bitter truth that Prophet Zarathustra’s value-based religion has been exploited by many of his followers. This religious conservatism/dogmatism can be looked at from two points of view; to the
elders it is to assert their superiority and authority and to the youngsters it is a means of oppression and exploitation. Many Parsee characters reflect the negative fundamentalist image of Parsee identity. Freddy becomes successful by cheating and tricking. Later, he tries to be a ‘religious’ man who treats his son Yazdi very hard and loses him due to his stern and unrelenting approach. Yazdi becomes a recluse. Similarly, in Matters, Yezad who is quite liberal and open-minded initially, turns a bigot and reacts rigidly to his son Murad’s flirtatious conduct to a Maharashtrian girl Anjali. The unhelpful, unforgiving and uncompromising attitude of the community leaves Feroza heart-broken and Xavafa a pervert leading a disgraceful life. “The religious inflexibility has exercised a negative impact on the Parsi psyche. It is destructive and not constructive; it is alienating and not cementing” (Adhikari, 1997: 48).

Just as the Parsee religious dogmatism becomes an instrument to exercise patriarchy over the children within the family, thus groomed Parsee psyche develops curious paradoxical attitude to the females. It aggravates the gender-differences and the unaccommodating attitude further complicates their collective psyche and hence further identity-crisis. The characteristic paradox is that though the westernized education for the females is welcome and highly appreciated, the mental freedom that follows it is strictly curtailed. Despite Feroza’s education abroad and liberal life-style, her choice of a husband is objected and her individuality is crushed. Freddy supports the advancement of women and despite his ‘encouragement’ for the western manners and demeanour, his wife Putli (a suggestive name meaning ‘statue’) prefers to walk three steps behind her husband like a traditional Indian wife. Behram or Billy, Freddy’s third son, is fascinated by the convent-educated and glib Tanya and very much impressed by her western brought-up; but after marriage he prescribes her to be his “loving and obedient slave” (Eaters, 231). The commandments that he prescribes for her make her self-effacement complete. Spirited Tanya is gradually ‘tamed’. Dolly, in Trying to Grow, is an emancipated girl like Feroza. She has to relinquish the Parsee fold as no boy from her community can reach out to her marital expectations. It has been noticed very often that the suppression of young women is generally carried out through the senior women like mother Zareen and grandma Khutlibai or even Farida’s mother who objected to her going abroad. They believe themselves to be the well-wishers of the girls. It is the devious strategy of any patriarchy, an off-
shoot of the politics of difference/identity and hence multiculturalism. Deviations from the set patterns of behaviour in the case of women are to be accommodated in the given patriarchy with equal regard and respect. Just as the concept of “group-differentiated rights” under the broader policy of multiculturalism enhances the prospects of the rights of recognition for the Parsees as minority community, it also does the same for the individual minorities within the community. They should not be suppressed or marginalized but imparted due respect and recognition. For instance, the Parsee girls who go for mixed marriages or exogamy should not be forced to exile or be the outcaste. There should be a provision in the community’s personal law to accept the exogamic women and their progeny into the Parsee fold instead of ostracizing them. They should have the choice to exit. But then the entire issue of self-governing rights for minorities is debatable among the sociologists and also among the feminists when the women’s rights are concerned.

Partha Chatterjee (1994) justifies the self-governing rights for minority groups as long as they practise internal democracy and argues that the reforms ought to emerge from within a community without the state having any role to play. In contrast, Bhargava (1999) and Bilgrami (1999) argue for the point that the internal reforms ought to emerge from within the minority community but with active support from the state. Many feminist scholars are doubtful about the operations of the state, especially the judiciary, and are not very hopeful about getting gender justice. Kumkum Sangari’s argument in this discourse is very insightful. She points out that religious communities are not only unegalitarian and class-differentiated but especially undemocratic regarding women. She is skeptical of the idea of reform from within because she thinks that self-governing communities would turn out to be the self-legislationg patriarchies and continue to shift power to the priests, pundits, mullahs, religious heads or other chosen interpreters. She states that the state and the civil society can be separated only analytically as there are ideological, political and administrative linkages between the two; and at the structural level too, the family and community emulate the model of the state structures that are patriarchal reducing women to subservience. As other levels too, there are underlying duplications of local and community patriarchies. She strongly feels that any attempt to either reform personal laws or to make new common laws with a feminist agenda will come up against both the state and religious community’s patriarchal arrangements. For
women, community jurisdiction is as problematic as the state and the patriarchy of neither should be acceptable. The dichotomy between the state and the community has invariably marginalized the goal of women’s equality. Recommending a way to deal with this whole politics of diversity arising out of the complex triangular interrelationship among the state, religious communities and multiple patriarchies, she states that the new common laws would have to move in three directions: encourage religious diversity, establish inalienable rights for all women, as well as find ways and means to tackle with the diversities of patriarchies. Bhargava too firmly believes that the right to exit from the personal laws must be given to women. Though he states this with reference to the Muslim women, it should be applicable to the women of all communities.

Sidhwa has taken up this issue of inter-faith marriages in Parsee community in Brat and interrogates the rigid norms advocated by the ‘dustoors’ (religious heads) from the time of their advent in India to excommunicate the girls and not the boys who marry outside the Parsee fold. Through her mouthpiece Zareen, Feroza’s mother, Sidhwa delineates the mind-set of a reformist who understands the dilemma and the trauma that the Parsee girl undergoes in the post-modern cosmopolitan situation, within which the chances of such inter-religions marriages have increased. It is high time for the Parsee religious priests to tilt the balance towards the reformists both from the feminist perspective as well as from the point of view of the survival of their race. Generally, the personal laws of all communities, majorities as well as minorities, are disadvantageous to women and are embedded in patriarchy. As the community receives priority in a multicultural nation-state, cultural practices are deliberately preserved but only at the expense of subordinating women. Women are denied agency and control over their own selves. Though the theories of multiculturalism are not hostile to the concerns of gender equality, the feminist concerns cannot be accommodated within a framework that aims to preserve cultures and their practices. Some feminist scholars maintain that to promote the ideal of equal citizenship, it is necessary to respect and support only those cultural practices that would materialize that goal.

However, multiculturalism is reluctant to use any such discretion. It is the drawback of multiculturalism that though it applies the concept of difference to question the
hegemony of the dominant perspective and practices, it does not interrogate the power relations that are at work within the diversity/community that exists. In this case, the communities have a moral responsibility to initiate the process of internal democratization as it follows from their own argument on which their own claims for special rights are based. Bhargava rightly enunciates that the communities must also allow space for the expression of internal differences if they expect rights to project their difference (Bhargava, 1991: 165-71). The Parsees have among themselves the two groups called the Reformists or the Liberals and the Orthodox or the Conservatives. The Liberals recommend the reforms in the existing cultural practices like endogamy and the death-rites as per the changing times. The differences between these groups are very strong and the Orthodox group is unrelenting. Though multiculturalism doesn’t, at least in principle, seek to arrest changes that members of the community may themselves desire in their culture, the multiculturalists maintain that change in operating practices must come from within the culture. Any transformation in existing practices must be negotiated by the members within the culture and must not be imposed upon from outside. As the state generally embodies the majority culture, it is the community that is vested with the authority to determine whether the change in the existing practices is necessary and desirable. The right to self-governance has the hazard that it may be misused to curb the individual choice but the logical application of the multicultural policy ought to prevent it.

In *Brat*, the case of Perin Bharucha is narrated by the elders before the youngsters to set an example of the punishment for deviation. Perin, a Parsee girl who dared marry a Muslim boy, was denied even the respectable Parsee death-rites. Her body was sent to the Muslim burial ground by the community ‘leaders’ and ‘spokespersons’. Throughout their lives such Parsee girls receive torturous and traumatic treatment as outcastes from their community and neither do they get peace even in their death. Mahajan discusses this issue in detail and comments:

> Communities oppress, not by denying individuals the right to exit, but by imposing a very heavy cost for differing from the accepted way of life. For people who value their community identity and see themselves as a part of that collectivity, ex-communication or forced exit from the community is often the hardest punishment. It is this that they challenge even when they deviate from a community’s accepted codes (Mahajan, 2002: 145).
Hence, it is very important to see that the value of the community identity must not clash with the options and choices of the members. Because the group/community membership is vital to the identity of the self, the individual member should have the alternative of differing while belonging to the community. So, there can be a voluntary exclusion/exclusivity/difference which need not be followed by compulsory exclusion from group membership/identity. So far, multiculturalism has not paved the way to provide for such space and allow the continuance of such inclusion. In the existing framework where the identity and community membership are linked to a particular way of life and to protect such way of life is of utmost priority and rights are given for such protection, it is not possible to realize this goal. The inherent paradoxes of the Parsee community become much more difficult to be tackled with the multicultural standpoint, equally paradoxical, negating its own rudiments. Hence it is the self-controversiality that complicates the issue.

**The ‘Indianness’ of the Parsees:**

Another paradox that unsettles the Parsees about establishing their identity is the acceptance of their “Indianness” during the colonial times. Their proximity to the rulers had already alienated them from the multicultural population of the subcontinent. Their reluctance to join the freedom-struggle and then joining it half-heartedly puts a question-mark on their patriotism and their loyalty to their host country. Their principle to be loyal to the rulers compelled them to shift from their earlier loyalty to their Hindu hosts. They could not be fully loyal even to the British who also did not accept them whole-heartedly. Hence, identity-crisis and already double alienation is tripled and might be manifold in future. With the imminent Partition they were on the threshold of their diaspora of the postcolonial period. Sidhwa’s *Eaters* ends at this transitional juncture. Freddy, on his death-bed, is perturbed by the trend of political events in India and irritated by the talk of rebellion, self-rule and independence from the British – and most of all by the role of a few Parsees, especially Dadabhoy Naoroji of Bombay and Rustom Sidhwa of Karachi. His angry outburst is not only his but of many other Parsees:

… I tell you we are betrayed by our own kind, by our own blood! The fools will break up the country. The Hindus will have one part, Muslims the other.
Sikhs, Bengalis, Tamils and God knows who else will have their share; and they won’t want you! (Eaters, 283).

The atmosphere gets charged with apprehension. His kith and kin gathered there were tensed by his proclamation of his son-in-law, Bobby Katrak’s anxious question, “But where will we go? What will happen to us?” Freddy replies complacently and confidently, “We sill stay where we are…let Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or whoever rule.” Yet the assertion is either too premature or a form of bravado. Freddy had no premonition about their destabilized position in the decolonized subcontinent. He had not the slightest inkling of their about-to-come postcolonial marginalization.

Though Freddy’s declaration seems very vehement; it is, in fact, representative of the Parsee compromise. Mistry has actually conveyed through the sensitive persona of Dinshawji how their esteemed and distinguished social status was reduced to an ineffectual state and the Parsees were painfully aware of the slow but sure and deliberate erasure of their identity attached to the colonization of the country. With the decolonizing process, the names of the roads too change and with that the old associations. The obliteration of the self is disturbing for Dinshawji and the self-effacement symbolic:

‘No, Gustad.’ Dinshawji was very serious. ‘You are wrong. Names are so important. I grew up on Lamington Road. But it has disappeared…My whole life I have come to work to 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 names? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out, just like that? (Journey, 74).

David Williams points out that while Dinshawji laments the violence done to his own identity, he simultaneously ignores the violence of the British name-giver to the already existing Maratha identity. Actually, it ironically pinpoints to the expected understanding of the violence done to the ‘other’s’ identity from the experience of violence done to one’s own (Williams, 1995: 217). There is an indirect indication here that the Parsees are themselves responsible for their present marginality. Had they not lost their identification with their original host people during the Raj period, they would not have faced this crisis.
The identity confusion of the Parsees is double-pronged. Sidhwa has focused on how the Indian multicultural identity has impacted the collective psyche of the Parsee community. They used to live in harmony with the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians earning their respect, even during the colonial rule (Eaters, 16). She has also shown how the colonial identity impinged upon their Parseeness, building their reputations as colonial stooges, and they strived to achieve the neutrality when the colonial rule was on the verge to end. This matter of multiple identities is explored in much detail in Sidhwa’s Man, the sole objective of it seems to proclaim Parsee neutrality. The issue engages the readers to some extent in the end of Eaters too. After Partition, there was a cataclysmic exchange of the Hindu/Sikh and Muslim population but the Parsees remained where they were in India and Pakistan. Because of their neutral attitude they were not targeted by the mobs nor forced to flee across the new frontiers that divided the subcontinent. Their non-committal attitude has been characteristically expressed by Faredoon at the close of Eaters. Parsees have always believed in the allegiance to the state and loyalty to the land they inhabit. So, they have stayed where they are and adopted a discreet, politically naive profile, directing all their efforts towards achieving success in their personal lives. Col. Bharucha in Man, supports Freddy and announces prior to the Partition that they would abide by the rules of their land, no matter who would be in power, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian. There were considerations to move to Bombay or even England where they assume they might be more comfortable. Col. Bharucha replies: “As long as we conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present no threat to anybody, we will prosper right here” (Man, 40). It was finally resolved that they would not meddle much in the political matters, keep equidistance from the three major communities contending for power, and in the event of Partition they would live where they were. It is to convey this neutrality that Sidhwa chooses a Parsee handicapped girl Lenny, the triply marginalized protagonist, as the narrator of Man, the first and only Partition-novel from a Parsee perspective. “The maimed Parsee girl-child could also be symbolic of the damaged Parsee identity which was again under threat during the division of the subcontinent. With the creation of the new Muslim state of Pakistan, Lenny’s world shrinks; it loses its Hindus and Sikhs. Thus the Parsee identity in Pakistan becomes a reductive entity, a victim of yet another diaspora” (Bharucha, 1995: 34).
*Man* is a unique novel in the sense that it presents the ‘factional’ (fiction based on fact) account of Partition from three perspectives -- Parsee, Pakistani and feminine. *Man* takes up the narrative from the point that *Eaters* had left off. The Parsees had no alternative but to take a neutral stand because they can never have their own homeland separate from the territories of the majority, i.e. Hindus/Muslims. *Man* is the narrative of the Parsees who played the roles of the neutral selfless saviours procuring succour for either community during the traumatic time. The Parsee saga is set against the backdrop of the cracking up of the Indian subcontinent by the departing Britishers and it was the painful transition from which the Parsees could not detach themselves completely. Both the communities, Hindus and Muslims, were in trouble and the Parsees helped them on the humane ground. Sidhwa underscores the point that during this time of the bloody dismemberment, the Parsees were, of course, neutral; but not just the passive onlookers. They, in fact, played an active neutral role by joining the rescue team for both the communities, and proved their loyalty to the people with whom they had long inhabited in their adopted homeland. The Parsee identity-confusion is now compounded by the question of which of the two new nations was to receive their allegiance. But they preferred to maintain their dignified neutrality and stay where they were. It was an important astute decision on their part in the given circumstances. By the end of 1930s, they had sagaciously adopted this neutrality principle. Their unswerving loyalty to the British was balanced by the Nationalist Parsees like Dadabhoy Naoroji, Phirozshah Mehta, Rustom Sidhwa and Bhikaiji Cama who persuaded their co-religionists, most of them like Freddy, unimpressed by this ‘Parsee patriotic fervour’. The Parsee nationalist leaders tried hard to convince their fellow Parsees to throw in their lot with the nascent Indian nation. A forceful attempt of persuasion was made by Dadabhoy Naoroji in his Presidential Address of 1893 to the Indian National Congress. He said, “Whether I am a Hindu, a Mohommaden, a Parsi, a Christian, or of any other creed, I am above all an Indian. Our country is India, our nationality is Indian.” (Bharucha, 2000: 90) More pragmatic and specific than this classic piece of rhetoric on the modern nationalism and secularism, on the rise at that time, was the appeal by Phirozsha Mehta-

To ask the Parsees to isolate themselves and their interests from those of the other natives of this country is to preach something not only... selfish, but a great deal more short-sighted and unwise. In our case it would be almost a suicidal policy (Bharucha, 2000: 90).
Despite their impression of being anglophile, keeping “one leg in India and one leg in England” (Eaters, 219) and relishing the citizenship of the world, and Parsees cannot help but express their attachment to India, as “India is magic. It always was” (154). It is morally imperative for them, knowingly or unknowingly, not to deny the Indian part of their identity. Even the Parsees like Freddy who showed haughty indifference to keep away from their Indian identity were still vulnerable to her magical charm. He did believe in the Brahmin astrologer who foretold the death of his beloved son Soli. His second son Yazdi was also influenced by the Indian belief in renunciation and asceticism. Both of these things, astrology and renunciation are forbidden by the Prophet Zoroaster who had preached a this-worldly religion. During their millennium long stay in India, they have imbibed the Indian ethos to certain extent. Denying their absorption into Indianness and asserting the braggadocio of their Englishness they indulge in nothing but self-deception. This was not the case of the Parsees alone but also of the many Indians swept by the wave of westernization during the colonial rule. 

Man is a novel that incorporates many postmodern features like fantasy, allegory, rootlessness, alienation etc. It can be taken as an allegory that details the political betrayal and symbolic rape of a hapless colony, the Indian Earth as personified in Ayah, by a departing colonial power. During the Partition riots, the Ice-Candy-Man usurps the chance to ravish the Ayah whom he covets but is jealous as she loves the Masseur. Lenny’s Parsee family and their Muslim servants hide the Ayah, symbolic of Mother India. Sidhwa here indicates that there were some good Muslims also who were not party to the heinous acts of the rioters just as Mistry shows that there were the good Hindus too like the tailors who rescued the Muslim tailor’s family that had given them shelter in Balance. Innocent Lenny unintentionally betrays Ayah by revealing her whereabouts to the Ice-Candy-Man. The Ayah is abducted and raped. Lenny regrets her betrayal to her motherly Ayah. This betrayal can also be taken as the betrayal of the Parsees to their nation of refuge that treated them as good as their motherland. Their alignment to the British is viewed as the shifting of their loyalty from their Hindu hosts. The ghastly splitting of the Indian Earth is seen by the eyes of the triple marginalized subaltern girl Lenny, none but Sidhwa herself. She narrates with the authority and strength of the marginalized. Her Pakistani Parsee view of the cracking of Indian subcontinent has been legitimized by the powerlessness of her
Peripheral position. Nilufer Bharucha opines that through Lenny, Sidhwa offers resistance to the Eurocentric and androcentric Master narratives (Bharucha, 2000: 91).

**Parsees, the Cultural Hybrids:**

Nilufer Bharucha refers to Robert Park who has defined the “marginal man” as a “cultural hybrid”. But in the cases of Sidhwa’s protagonists, Freddy, Lenny and Feroza and also Desai’s immigrant protagonists, Homi, Noshir and Farida coming into contact with other dominant cultures does not necessarily mean being subordinated, threatened or overshadowed by that culture or that the existence in “an incomplete state” is the only option (Park, 1928: 892). In fact, Parsees, the cultural hybrids, had never completely interpenetrated and fused into the surrogate culture of India. Right from their coerced acculturation due to the conditions proposed by Jadi Rana, the Parsees of India have always seen themselves as attainers of hybridity. According to Feroza Jussawalla,

Homi Bhabha’s long discourse on hybridity, *The Location of Culture*, can be seen as his own extended rationalization of why he, himself a Parsee, is not “so Indian”. Parsees have long said, “We are not Indians, we are Parsees.” They have said this to the British as part of their gaining acceptance from the British despite the occasional celebration of Dadabhoy Navroji’s nationalism. And yet the Parsees gained acceptance into India on the pretext of Hybridity which for two or three centuries they genuinely maintained….. None of Edward Said’s metropolitan intellectuals has shown the readiness to hybridity as the Parsees have over the centuries (Jussawalla, 1996: 82).

The Parsee identity, time and again threatened by the dominant other, has not only acquired the cultural hybridity but retained their ethnicity too. Hence, they have the double strength even in their marginality, though apparently controversial. Their discretion to maintain the cultural hybridity to certain extent and to preserve the cocoon of their ethnicity and insularity has ensured them the social as well as the religious security. This unique integrating quality, combined with their quest for excellence, has sustained this infinitesimal community so far and may sustain in future with increased eligibility for global citizenship when now the Parsee identity is on the threshold of the western diaspora. It is their search for excellence that made them rise to the elite status from the marginal one in the 19th century India and
strengthened their social, political and economic position. “All that the Parsees wanted from the ruling British authorities was religious autonomy and protection. They got both” (Kapadia, 1988: 111). But then in the post-independence phase these same qualities led to their estrangement and remarginalization which was a serious blow on the so far “unfragmented, undisturbed and untrammeled” (Adhikari, 1997: 44) status-conscious Parsee psyche. In Mistry’s short story “Auspicious Occasions” from Tales, Rustomji, the chief protagonist, is confronted with the other Indian identities who tease this ‘bawaji’ by calling names. Also in Matters, the hooligans threaten the ‘bawaji’ Yezad who acts protective to his wife Roxana when she is eve-teased at the midnight hour on the bus-stop of a Bombay suburb. Also, Rusi is teased as ‘bawaji’ by his classmate when he is involved in a brawl. In Journey, Darius and Roshan nurse a kind of inferiority complex fearing their classmates would “make fun of the Parsi ‘Bawaji’ newspapers” (83). Desai begins Elephants with Homi introducing himself as a bawaji and to this Bapaiji, his paternal grandma, retorted ironically, “… You are a bawaji …but you do not know what it means to be a bawaji. You should be ashamed” (1). This is actually a reprimand to every postmodern Parsee who should be ashamed of being ignorant of his ‘identity’ of the golden old days of the great Zoroastrians. Desai wants to revoke it in Elephants and he does it in order to revive his roots. The stereotype of the Parsees in the Indian imaginary is that of the amusing but harmless ‘bawa’ whose eccentricities the larger majority is willing to indulge with typical Indian ‘tolerance’. It is also symbolic of the social decline of the ‘bawaji’, affectionate but pejorative term for a male Parsee, who in the British Raj was a ‘sahib’ but now has become a figure of fun and who is not aggressive but weak enough to be subdued. It is this distance between the Parsee’s elite consciousness and their downgraded position in the postcolonial India that the migrant Parsee is trying to escape. This end-of-empire unease in the Indian diaspora is a reason for the westward movement by many Parsees from the 50s, onwards. In the postcolonial India, though Parsees have been allotted equal citizenship, they feel that the treatment they receive from the majority society is that of the second class citizens. Mistry has taken a serious note of it as Gustad, Dinshawji, in Journey and Yezad in Matters express their despair about it. Although equal citizenship is essential in nurturing a common sense of belonging, it is not enough. Citizenship is about the status and rights, while belonging is about being accepted and feeling part of the national spirit. Such deep feeling of being citizens and yet outsiders is difficult to manage for a community and
it harms the loyalty and commitment to the citizenship and patriotic fervour of its members. The wider society very often treats them in a dismissive and demeaning ways and as a result, these groups or minorities stay away from the common, collective life and ghettoize themselves for the fear of rejection and ridicule or out of deep sense of alienation as the Parsees do.

These novels bring to us a world that is insulated from the outside world and where the interaction with the other communities is bare minimum. The younger generation is very eager to know the other people of the real world as they think that the Bombay Parsee families suffer from the ‘frog in a well’ syndrome never realizing the world outside but gloomily learning to swim around in the decaying water. Mistry advocates “Swimming Lessons” (Tales) for the Parsees who must learn to survive in the deep sea waters of the outside world abroad too. The atmosphere at the Ferozsha Baag (Tales) or Khodadad Building (Journey) is of a cocoon, a sophisticated ghetto where no non-Parsee is admitted except a servant or a vendor. Most theories of multiculturalism advocate group-differentiated rights for identified minority communities in order to correct the majoritarian cultural biases of the nation-state and create space for the minority cultures in the public domain. Nevertheless, it is ineffective in checking the discrimination that these communities suffer due to the actions of the other groups in the society. The examples of such discrimination we get in the novels are galore. The only Muslim family in the Parsee colony where Yezad used to stay felt being discriminated and left the building. The Muslim boy had to put up with the regular abuses and taunts from the other playmates (Matters). The bullying and roguish behaviour of the Shiv Sena men to Yezad and Roxana at the midnight time doubles their feeling of insecurity (Matters). The narration of the Muslim riots (Matters) in the wake of the fall of Babri Mosque and the Sikh riots as the aftermath of the assassination of the then PM Indira Gandhi (Balance) are the other glaring examples from the Indian socio-political reality. The Shiv Sena activists’ maltreatment and ousting of the South Indian residents from Bombay accusing them of stealing their jobs is another such example. Just as they face the minority discrimination in India, they face the racial discrimination abroad. As narrated in Woman, Farida, a Parsee regarded as South Asian, receives the covert treatment of discrimination and racism when her fictional works are not getting approved for publications even after a number of trials. The treatment Feroza receives at the New
York airport shatters her self-honour (*Brat*). Similarly, Yezad is humiliatingly interrogated at the Canadian consulate by the officer who boasts of the Canadian policy of multiculturalism. Such hostile treatment to the immigrants throws back a bitter question if the policies of multiculturalism in these nations, i.e. Canada and America as cited here and also of other nations have been successful or not. In India, too the case is no different. Apart from the other differences, the caste-differences, a specific feature of the Indian multiculturalism, too induce the clashes (*Balance*).

When the majority groups target the specific minorities out of certain prejudices or social stigmas it is required that rights of individuals as citizens can be evoked as a minimum condition of fairness. Unless the state takes the responsibility of protecting the basic rights of all its citizens and punishing those who violate them, discrimination of this kind is bound to persist. But most often, the homogenizing nation-state embodies the majority culture. Consequently, the state has to be pressured to uphold the universal rights of citizenship as a condition for equal treatment of all cultures and communities. The policies of multiculturalism have been legislated and discoursed by the sociologists and political scientists in an intellectual debate but there are loose ends when put into practice. The Indian state is secular in that it accords equal respect to all religions, and ought not to discriminate on the basis of religion. So, Indian secularism is one of the many dimensions of cultural pluralism/multiculturalism. There is a wide gap between the constitutional understanding and the practice of secularism in the independent India. It has been often dismissed as “pseudo secularism” as it is nothing but the Hindu majority rule and subordination of other minorities. It has been erroneously substituted for multiculturalism or cultural pluralism. The irony is that it is not practised in India even by those who endorse it and there are lots of “praxiological aberrations” (Oommen, 2007: 230) that diminish the quality of the Indian multiculturalism.

The Parsees’ age-old political strategies of siding with the rulers so as to avoid tensions and conflicts with the various groups and powers and also that of sycophancy as a sweet “delicious need to exist” (*Eaters*, 12) would not work in the democratic nation-state of the postcolonial India and Pakistan. Hence there is again an identity-crisis and quest for security amongst the community as a whole. Sidhwa’s *Brat* and Mistry’s novels tell this tale of the new ways of life and the Parsee identity-quest in
the postcolonial nation-states. The Parsees, who feared decolonization, did not have to suffer in the immediate aftermath of the end of the Empire. “In India the pioneering Parsi nationalists had created a fund of goodwill which the post-colonial Parsis could draw upon. In Pakistan, Parsi neutrality in the Partition riots stood them in good stead” (Bharucha, 2000: 94). At both the nations, Parsees became respected microscopic community. Sidhwa, Dhondy, Mistry, Kanga and Desai make a conscious assertion of their identity and carry on the endeavour to reconstitute it mirroring the psyche of the community through their fictional works. This exploration in the world of fiction is denoted by a physical and metaphorical journey in the multiple quests for identity through excellence and thence to recognition, superiority and security. The physical journeys that take place in these novels have the metaphorical connotations. Gustad’s journey to and from Delhi (Journey), Manek’s journey to and from Dubai (Balance), Faredoon’s travel to Lahore for settlement (Eaters), Feroza’s journey to and from America (Brat) and the same kind of physical journeys of Desai’s protagonists in the cases of Noshir, Farida, Homi and Rusi symbolize the Parsee emigree’s quest for self-definition. All these journeys collectively contribute to the continuation of the legendary journey that the Parsees had initiated from Persia centuries back in search of their home and identity. But the metaphorical journey of the ongoing quest of the Parsee psyche finally ends either with disillusionment or an education of the Parsee consciousness as illustrated in all these novels which could undoubtedly be genred as ‘bildungsroman’.

In Brat, Sidhwa focuses on the postcolonial and the western diasporas of the Parsees. She takes into account how the rising Islamisation of the politics of Pakistan had an obvious impact on the Parsees, especially women who had to follow the conservative dress-code and the gender-related laws. It is only when first Feroza and then Zareen are exposed to the American melting pot and the liberal concepts of individualism and feminism that they feel uncomfortable with not only the Islamic orthodoxy but also with the so-called “forward” Parseeness. When Feroza is going through the sojourn of self-education and getting disillusioned with non-liberal social and political ideologies back home which she hitherto cherished, she falls in love with David, an American Jew. There arrives Feroza’s mother Zareen to dissuade Feroza from the ‘forbidden’ marriage. In fact, she also has been influenced by the American air of freedom and begins to like Feroza’s young man wishing that David was a Parsee. She also began to
question the gender bias in her religion which “allowed a Parsee man who married a “non” to retain his faith when a Parsee woman couldn’t” (Brat, 287). Even she began to doubt the Parsee ban on conversions as the maneuvering move by the priests -- “How could a religion whose Prophet urged his followers to spread the Truth of his message in the holy Gathas -- the songs of Zarathushtra -- prohibit conversion?” (Brat, 287) Sidhwa has touched the very core of the troubled psyche of the postmodern diasporic Parsee with her characteristic humour and comic situations which “but thinly disguise the underlying dilemma of the diasporic Parsees, at home neither in the East nor in the West and whose understanding and acceptance of both are vitiated by the missing fragments of their own past” (Bharucha, 1995: 34).

Nilufer Bharucha has rightly analyzed in her essay on the ethno-religious discourse of Sidhwa that Feroza symbolizes the postcolonial Parsee woman who has to battle against not only the religious fundamentalism of the postcolonial Pakistan but also to resist the hegemonic pressures of the West and most importantly to confront the orthodox patriarchy from within her own ethnic group. However, the more this ethnic identity is jeopardized, the stronger it becomes and eventually remains intact, as Feroza realized that no one could take away her Parseeness from her, neither the mullahs nor the dastoors nor could it be melted by the overpowering Americanism. Sidhwa’s ethno-religious discourse is thus what Bhabha has called “the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective” (Bhabha, 1994: 2). As mentioned earlier, the expatriate Parsee protagonists of Sidhwa and Desai -- Feroza, Homi, Noshir and Farida -- are not the prisoners of their ethnicity, though they attempt to take recourse into it. Also, Mistry’s protagonists -- Gustad, Dina and Nariman -- go beyond their ethnicity but with a difference that they are not diasporic and that they fight and resist the dominations of the postcolonial multicultural India. Whether diasporic or not, they have mastered the art of being on the boundaries, partaking of different cultures within the sub-continent as well as abroad and yet “retaining that ultimate retreat -- the House of Mumbi” (Bharucha, 2000: 100).
Dialogism and the Politics of Difference:

The articulations of differences do give rise to various discourses of otherness i.e. feminism, postcolonialism and subalternity as differences of gender, class, ethnicity, religion and caste negotiate with the same for space and recognition. Mistry does critique the ‘Unity in Diversity’ model that homogenizes the diversities. He highlights ‘Diversity in Unity’ model of the Indian nation-state in which the politics of difference makes the dominant caste, class and ethnic majority ignore/discriminate overtly or covertly against the subaltern and the minorities that include women, ethno-religious minorities and the backward classes. In Balance, Mistry makes a strong political statement by bringing together four marginalized characters, a Parsee woman Dina, her Parsee paying guest Maneck and the two tailors Ishwar and Om from the untouchable Chamar caste to explore the marginal space of gender, ethnicity and caste. “Mistry rejects exclusive definitions of identity and substitutes them with inclusive ones forged through the coming together of the marginalized. A Fine Balance is the novel that systematically sets out to destabilize hegemonies based on caste, gender and class” (Roy and Pillai, 21). He has done it metaphorically in Journey by the felling of the symbolic wall, both inclusive and exclusive. He has shown it literally happening in the lives of the characters of Balance. Mistry reveals that the unity of the national fabric is of the badly patched-up kind and also suggests that the imagined community of the nation-state merges all forms of differences in its homogenizing drive towards unity. The myth of the secular and multicultural nation-state camouflages the widespread differences and disparities of various fragments sewn together to ‘unite’ the nation-state. Mistry’s fiction does offer counter-readings against the drawbacks and the inner contentions of Indian multiculturalism. Such counter-responses impart alternative views on the whole stock of marginalized attitudes – cultural, social, political and even literary. Mistry’s fiction, especially Balance takes the reader into the Indian model of multiculturalism drawing to the alternative route as to how diverse ethnicities might relate to one another into a dialogical kind of relationship. The patchwork quilt that Mistry’s protagonist, Dina Shroff stitches up in Balance serves as a perfect metaphor for the multiethnic and multicultural Indian nation-state. The metaphor of the mnemonic patchwork quilt is actually a telling comment on the nature of Indian multiculturalism and the ways in
which various differences stand for each other. The quilt which actually has its various patches connected to different happenings in the life of Dina, offers an analogy of the multi-layered and multi-dimensional history of India in which diverse groups have been accommodated into the nation without being required to give up their unique cultural differences. Every diversity is integrated into the nation-state without relinquishing its ‘important difference’, but maintaining the same for its particular identity. Anjali Roy and Meena Pillai take note of this dialogical attitude in order to tackle with the politics of difference:

Viewing this patchwork quilt of the nation as marked by the inequalities of class, language, ethnicity and gender, Mistry underlines the fact that while recognition by dominant groups continues to govern the multicultural fabric, this model of multiethnicity permits difference to be without having to merge with the same (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 24).

Through his foursome protagonists, Mistry wants to portray satirically the alienation of the still colonized Parsee ‘self’ in the decolonized Indian nation-state and the continuous oppressive structures of caste, class and gender domination within the boundary of the ‘secular’ Indian democracy. Though Mistry’s depiction of the Indian reality is not comprehensive, he is at his best in depicting the Parsee slice of life.

The Parsees had adopted, within the medieval India, the alternative of partial assimilation of selective adaptation of language and dress from Gujarati host culture while retaining Parsee rituals and religious practices. The Parsee ethos as captured by Mistry in his fiction are modified and altered with time. The liberal borrowing and absorbing of the aspects from the local Gujarati culture during the pre-colonial time and from the alien western culture during the colonial time has contributed in the making of Parsee ‘self’ as delineated by not only Mistry but Sidhwa, Desai and other Parsee writers too. But Mistry mainly focuses on the phase of the postcolonial Indian Parsee identity in the making during the last three decades of the 20th century while Sidhwa and Desai have focused on the colonial, postcolonial and the latest phase, i.e. western diaspora of the Parsees and the making of the Parsee identity during those phases. The ubiquitous uneasiness has always characterized the Parsee ‘self’ whether in Indian or western diaspora. What makes Mistry different from the other two is his empathetic attitude that brings him closer to the ideology of the dialogical
multiculturalism as advocated by Taylor and Parekh. Roy and Pillai have taken due notice of this quality in Mistry:

The failure of the nation-state to accommodate competing narratives of identity and nation compels us to investigate the process of imagining through which communities come into being. Against the nation-state, which has long dominated the division of space and formation of group identities, Mistry juxtaposes both a primordial definition of community as well as a new one. Ultimately, the answer seems to lie in compassion that marks Mistry’s own vision. “Compassionate realism” is the quality that Oprah Winfry detects in Mistry’s fiction (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 24).

It is the dignity of the human spirit maintained in an inhuman or dehumanized state that Mistry celebrates. Drawn from the middle or the lower middle class to the upper class, the wide range of Mistry’s characters have the touch of humane compassion, may it be the principled Gustad or the witty Dinshawji or the spirited Dina or the strong mettled Om and Ishvar or it may be the kind and sweet-tempered Roxana. This touch is rarely found in the characters of the other two writers, though it is not completely lacking. It is found to quite an extent in Lenny and her philanthropic mother and the Godmother, also in the rebellious Feroza and to some extent in the self-righteous Bapiaji, the introspective Homi and in assertive Farida. Such spirit of compassion which these Parsee characters exude gets manifested in the depiction and the delineation of the everyday lives of the ordinary Parsee individuals who are caught in the intricacies of the filial and social obligations.

These writers, at the same time, acquaint the readers with the unique aspects of the Parsee identity. Apart from the elaborate narration of their specific formal birth, wedding and funeral rites and rituals like ‘Navjot’ for the initiation into the Parsee faith and ‘token money’ and ‘Mada-Sara’ prior to the wedding; the practices of everyday life including their attire, cuisine, etiquette etc. are regarded as essential to the formation of Parsee ethos. Mistry takes us to ‘Dungarwadi’ (Tower of Silence in Bombay) and the practices of ‘gomez’, ‘suckaar’, ‘char chassam’ dog, ‘sezdoe’ and the entry of ‘nassasalers’ are vividly described. The aroma of the delicious Parsee recipes ‘Sali boti’, ‘dhandar patio’, ‘patra ni machhi’ and ‘dhansak massala’ would make any foodlover’s mouth water. The devotees’ call to ‘Khodai’ and ‘Parvar-deeygar’ are heard. In ‘Dugli’, ‘Phyto’ and ‘sapat’ or ‘maatha banoo’ the Parsees are
seen entering the ‘Atash-Behram’ (‘Agyari’ or fire-temple). At home too, the ‘sudra’ and ‘kusti’ prayers are the part of their daily routine bringing forth the humility of a devout Parsee. The ethnicity that emerges in the process is hybrid -- syncretic of the authentic as per the Zoroastrian codes with the Gujarati flavour -- and also modern as influenced by the western mores during their colonial Indian diaspora and postcolonial diasporas both in India and abroad.

The fiction of the Parsee writers, especially Mistry and Sidhwa draws attention to the fact that the old memories and histories prove stronger than the new myths that undergo in the making of the postcolonial nation-states. Desai’s *Elephants*, celebrating Parsee history and memory also conforms to this fact when Homi realizes the significance of his Parsee religious identity in the wake of Julie’s proposal for conversion to Christianity. Desai’s latter novels are different from the rest in the lot as Noshir and Farida have never considered their Parsee identity as an important part of their global identity/citizenship that they strive to attain. The postmodern nation-state appears to be struggling between the two conflicting drives -- the homogenizing threat of the globalization and by the surprising return of the ethnicity based on religion, language, caste and older imaginings that subverts the notions of political citizenship and civic society. The return of ethnicity has become a global phenomenon and plays a vital role in the composite body of multiculturalism that has become official policy in various countries of the world. Fuelled by migration, it has a crucial relationship with nationhood, postcoloniality, multiculturalism and globalization. It is the dislocation of a particular ethnicity and its relocation that complicates the issue of identity. So, it is the location and the dislocation of the cultures that matters and its relocation involves a whole ensemble of issues like alienation, acculturation and identity.

The co-existence of the diverse ethnicities and their interrelations at the national as well as the global level has driven the sociologists and the political scientists to ponder for the need to have the dialogical existence within various multiculturalisms. Mistry has shown its implementation in the context of postcolonial Indian multiculturalism in his fiction. Sidhwa and Desai have dealt with both the colonial and postcolonial Indian as well as American multiculturalisms. Both Mistry and Sidhwa have focused on the assertion of ethnicity in their latest novels *Matters* and
Brat; but Desai has moved on from the memory of elephants to the recent Parsee diaspora struggling to settle down in U.S.A in Asylum and Woman. Like Feroza, the other protagonists Homi, Rusi, Noshir, and Farida are in search of love and acceptance. Their journey in quest of the much-priced belongingness is not complete. Only the hope of dialogical global existence within the multicultural set-up can heal the hurts they have received by rejections, humiliations and discriminations. It is possible only when their ethnicity is respected and recognized and then only the unease that clouds their identity can be gradually dispersed.

Sneja Gunew has borrowed the concept of ‘situated knowledge’ from Donna Haraway and argued for the need for situated multiculturalisms. Haraway defines “situated knowledge” as “marked knowledges, they are re-marking, re-orientating of the great maps that globalized the heterogeneous body of the world in the history of masculinist capitalism and colonialism” (Gunew, 2002: 2). These Parsee writers re-mark the great maps of both India and the world through their “particularized Parsee location” (Roy and Pillai, 2007: 25). They impart voice and a being to their Parsee community, which even in India is relatively less known and much less so in Canada and USA. Unlike Sidhwa and Desai, Mistry has opted to write only about their diaspora in India, the world he knows most intimately, the world of the Parsees in Bombay within which he grew up. He writes much less about Canada except in a few short stories in Tales. Sidhwa has balanced the two worlds she writes about, i.e. USA and Pakistan; Desai writes more about USA. To write about the Parsees of Bombay in Canada or USA, for that matter, is to challenge the received frameworks that determine the canons of Canadian/American literature especially in terms of the mainstream-other hierarchical dichotomy. M. F. Salat argues: “if Rudy Wiebe can write about his community and Margaret Laurence can write about hers and yet be accepted as mainstream canons, so too Mistry if he writes about his community” (Salat, 1994: 73) and Sidhwa and Desai too even if they choose to write about the multiple diasporas of their community. This is how an ‘ethnic’ writer of any nationality should be accommodated within the given mainstream as part of it. For the term “ethnic” used to describe one kind of writing is as irrelevant as is the term “regional” to describe another kind of writing. Any work of fiction is necessarily located somewhere and has characters from some or the other community. In that sense, all literature is regional and ethnic. These writers, therefore, are no more or no less ethnic than any other mainstream writer and yet if they are
categorized as such, it is because the mainstream is of the colour white; and “ethnic” as Nariman in Mistry’s short-story “Squatter” rather forthrightly says, “is a polite way of saying bloody foreigner” (Tales, 160). The segregation that these writers actually face is also seen as being faced by their expatriate characters -- Feroza, Homi, Rusi, Noshir and Farida. Even Mistry’s characters face the same with the Indian mainstream society. But the conspicuous fact is that the so-called ethnic writers are now being found acceptable because of the multicultural approach of the postcolonial nation-states, may it be India, Canada, USA or UK. The politics of the mainstream has weakened and the differences/diversities are being recognized with respect. It is now a good time for writers of “different backgrounds” who bring “different ideas” (Cohen, 153-178) and more importantly, because as Joseph Skvorecky says,” If a writer manages to write well about some aspect of life, people will read him” (Skvorecky, 17-32). These writes manage to write well about some aspects of life with particular reference to their community in their fiction and people do read them. The Parsees, journeying in the quest of their identity through various diasporas, India and abroad, have a ray of hope here. The expatriate Parsee characters having the autobiographical streaks of these writers would get the regard for what they are, provided they prove worthy of that recognition. Just as the sweet Parsee people have been represented as ‘benign others’ and recognized for their integrity, diligence and valuable contribution to the various walks of life of the multicultural Indian subcontinent, they would also earn their due respect in their western diaspora too within the respective multicultural milieu, whether it is USA, UK or Canada.

The mental turmoil of all the protagonists of these writers -- non-Parsees like Om and Ishwar, Ayah, the Ice-Candy-Man; Parsees in the Indian Subcontinent like Gustad Dina, Maneck, Yezad, Nariman, Freddy, Lenny, Adi, Bapaiji and the expatriate Parsees like Feroza, Homi, Rusi, Noshir and Farida -- typifies the predicament of the modern and postmodern multicultural societies. The expatriate characters represent the young Parsees who strive hard to strike a balance between tradition and modernity, past and present, dependence or conformity and independence or non-conformity and so forth. Like Feroza, “while flying and falling alternately, they are trying to soar to the state of being self-contained from where there is no falling” (Singh R. P., 2005: 84). However, even then they do not really know how to make a fresh start, how to live faithfully with their past and present. This is the “dilemma of
most Parsees, whose diverse diasporas throw back at them fragmented, fractured images -- whose broken mirrors reflect their once glorious past, their reduced present and their insecure future” (Bharucha, 1995: 35). The guts with which the Parsee protagonists in the novel under study fight against all odds and pave their way ahead are what these Parsee diasporic writers want to display to their community and also give the covert hint to adopt the desired attitude at this critical juncture of identity crisis. The Italian-Canadian writer Frank Paci says: “We should approach the past with great anticipation and with great foreboding – but approach it we must” (Paci, 232). As an immigrant ‘ethnic’ writer in Canada, Paci quite rightly underlines the requirement to re-embark upon the inherited past and relate it with the present for adequate self-perception and self-assertion. These Parsee writers just do that and they do it right because the repossession/revisiting of the ethnic/cultural inheritance is much more crucial for the immigrant/ethnic writers to recover an identity for their othered culture and through it a holistic and rooted identity for themselves. The multiple dislocations and displacements in the case of Parsees have generated multiple cultural hybridities/mestiza and hence the fissured identities. Alienation, “homing desire” (Brah, 2002: 192-93; Raj, 2007: 56) and transnationalism, that mark any diasporic experience, have been their constant companions through the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial times. As a micro-minority in India, they have been persistently struggling to reach a compromise between them and their rulers/hegemonic forces. They were the part of ‘others’ negotiating their existence against either the dominant Gujarati culture in a pre-colonial times or the British colonialism or the Hindu/Muslim hegemonies in the divided twin nations of India and Pakistan in the postcolonial times or the ‘melting pot’ of the western societies. In such a case of binary opposition, liberation, according to the nationalists and the anti-colonialists, hinges upon the rediscovery or the rehabilitation of the cultural identity which has been wrecked or damaged by the hegemonic forces may it be Gujarati Hindu or Muslim or colonial or western coercion. The Parsees had fled their religious persecution but ironically, their refuge in India was not a completely safe haven for them. Despite eschewing proslytization, they have never resided in absolute security as from the day one they have abided by the conditions of forced assimilation into the dominant Gujarati culture and have been looking back to their roots. Fanon also talks of the beautiful and splendid past that helps for the rehabilitation of the present.
Stuart Hall identifies this quest as a search for ‘a sort of collective “one true self”… which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common’ (Hall, 2003: 234). Such a search has been essential for anti-colonial struggles and postcolonial identities as well. But Parsees’ has been a queer case as they were not anti-colonial and could not identify with the rest of the decolonized subjects of the Indian subcontinent in retrieving their pre-colonial identity as Dinshawji is shown to experience this in Journey. But Hall suggests that it is possible to think about cultural identity in a related but different way, one which is ‘much less familiar and more unsettling.’ The colonized peoples cannot simply turn back to the idea of collective pre-colonial culture and a past ‘which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity’ (Hall, 2003: 236). Hall is careful not to dismiss such a turning back as a romantic nativism, as other postcolonial critics generally do. Although there are no pure and fixed origins to which the cultures and peoples can return,

It is no more phantasm either. It is something -- not a mere trick of the imagination. It has its histories -- and histories have their real material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses as a simple, factual ‘past’, since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother, is always -- already ‘after the break’ (Hall, 2003: 237).

This break is effected by the colonial and non-colonial histories of domination. These histories, in the Parsee case, are those of the Arab Muslims, the Gujarati Hindus, the British Raj, the postcolonial Hindu/Muslim fundamentalism and the racism/discrimination they face in the western societies. They had the power to make the Parsees see and experience themselves as ‘other’, a kind of internal awareness which “cannot simply be erased or shrugged off as a kind of false consciousness” (Loomba, 1998: 182). Hall refuses to choose between ‘difference’ and ‘hybridity’ and tries to keep alive a sense of difference which is not pure “otherness”. He asks to consider what Fanon’s call for return to the past might entail. He interrogates if it was indeed a ‘retelling of the past’ that requires an ‘imaginative rediscovery’ (Hall, 2003: 235) or recognition of both what existed and what is continually created. Difference/Alterity or a binary opposition between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ is the phenomenon that enforces and empowers the creations of the narratives of resistance
by the subjects who are themselves complex and hybrid products of diverse histories. Loomba then clearly concludes that

the point is not to simply pit the themes of migrancy, exile and hybridity against rootedness, nation and authenticity, but to locate and evaluate their ideological, political and emotional valencies, as well as their intersections in the multiple histories of colonialism and postcoloniality (Loomba, 1998: 183).

Conclusion:

In the ongoing process of globalization, the capitalist market forces have diluted the sense of belongingness and triggered the migration that has accelerated the multicultural interactions at the global level. More and more countries are adopting multiculturalism as a policy. The assertion of ethnicity by these writers is to be pondered over and analyzed in the wake of the newly created postcolonial multicultural nation-states and the transnational spaces that are not the devised constructs but are part of the relentless process of the constantly changing socio-political reality. By focusing on the particularities and distinctness as the paradigms of ethnicity, these expatriate Parsee writers, in fact, celebrate hybridity and multiculturalism by virtue of which their fiction transcends the category of being ethno-centric and be the part of world literature. It is the new world that the immigrants are engaged in construction. Such writers attempt to transfuse two or multiple incommensurable cultural spaces into a third/another more complex intercultural space. The mainstream literature has so far overlooked this new territory from which new literary genres emerge. Here, the immigrant is no longer the disparate solitary person but just one more citizen in this inexorable process of social construction called a ‘New World’. After the Fourth World Literatures of the indigenous people of various countries of the world, now this New World of the immigrants would form the Fifth World. All the writers with the hyphenated identities belong to this Fifth World: “that of the economically and politically displaced immigrants of the twentieth century, transposed into alien contexts from where they redefine and newly construct alternative identities and communities” (Tapping, 1992: 36). Culture itself is an institutionalized power and is inextricably interconnected with the other systems of power. Changes in all the major areas of life are required for the
cultural self-esteem to develop. “No multicultural society can be stable and vibrant unless it ensures that its constituent communities receive just recognition and a just share of economic and political power. It requires a robust form of social, economic and political democracy to underpin its commitment to multiculturalism” (Parekh, 2006: 343).

WORKS CITED:


Avatar Brah states, “The concept of diaspora places the discourse of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins.”


Swaraj Raj clarifies the phrase ‘homing desire’ and explains that the “homing desire” is not the same as the desire for a ‘homeland’. The homing desire is the desire to create the home where one is, that is in the host culture, through tangential affiliations. In fact, just because they display a very strong desire to enact a return to the place of their origin, the old paradigmatic diasporas cannot be treated as models for contemporary diasporas; and given the contemporary socio-economic realities, the old diasporas can only be treated as points of departure.”


Skvorecky, Josef. “Interview by Sam Solecki”, Hutheon and Richmond.


Craig Tapping notes that the term ‘Fifth World’ was first used by Kateryna Arthur of Murdoch University in her paper “Fifth World” at 1990 conference on the history of Ukrenian settlement in Australia, Melbourne. She writes that her aim in using ‘Fifth World’ to describe the late twentieth century immigrant communities is to “create a stronger communal identity for a vast world-scattered migrant population of disempowered people who have lost their cultural, linguistic and political base.” Arthur rejects the word ‘immigrant’ and ‘migrant’ because they “define people as not belonging where they are.”


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