Chapter Seven

Imaginary Parsee Homelands: Locating Self and Community in Times of Globalization
Writing about the plight of the Asian immigrants in the New World, Feroza Jussawalla states, “We are like “chiffon saris” -- a sort of cross-breed attempting to adjust to the pressures of a new world, while actually being from another older one” (Jussawalla, 1988: 583). This plight experienced by the postcolonial South Asian immigrant writers gets expression in their literature genred as “ethnic literatures” as it is viewed by the non-ethnic gaze of their hosts. Parsee expatriate writers are grouped with these South Asian immigrants, and specifically of the Indian origin. All of them are mainly concerned with their personal and communal identity, nostalgia of the homeland and the sensitive response to the “new” world in which they inhabit. That these writers have chosen to write in English is the direct impact of the British Imperialism. It is this historical phenomenon that binds all of them i.e. Ved Mehta, Bharati Mukharjee, Bapsi Sidhwa, Rohinton Mistry, Boman Desai, Vikram Seth, Michael Ondatjee, Sara Suleri and many more. They deal in their own ways, with the Partition of the Indian subcontinent and the consequent political histories of the newly created nations and nationalities which they left at various points of time and the reconstruction of even newer identities in the countries to which they have migrated. Living in diaspora means living in voluntary or forced exile and living in exile involves intense identity-crisis and the questions of identification with and alienation from the old and new cultures and homelands. Most diasporic literature is, therefore, replete with identification consciousness and the problems of living in an alien society. Rushdie has said in Imaginary Homelands:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrates or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge -- which gives rise to profound uncertainties -- that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind (Rushdie, 1992: 10).

The concept of and interpretation of “home” becomes vital in all kinds of diasporic writing. The predicament of a diasporic individual is like that of a “Trishanku”, the Indian mythical image that explains the position of the diasporic person, neither here nor there, in a state of limbo. The realization as to how their homes are lost to them
forever has been manifested in the literature of these writers, conspicuous as the “Desh Pardesh syndrome” (Mandal, 2007: 43). The plight of uprooting and fragmentation, homelessness and loss of identity has pervaded the diasporic consciousness that preoccupies most of the Indian writing in English. The disorientation that such diasporic conditions have caused is not only spatial and geographical but it is also ideological and existential dislocation. The Parsee diasporic writers under study here, Mistry, Sidhwa and Desai, have experienced these pangs and trauma which have got expressed in their works through various ways and means, symbols and metaphors. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie perceives the diasporic writers as bestowed upon with a unique double/multiple or insider/outsider perspective (Rushdie, 1992: 19). “Their hybrid predicament can be universalized into art with a globally accepted theme” (Mandal, 2007: 43) as is accomplished by Sidhwa, Mistry and Desai. One finds wandering, shuttling, unsettled and alienated people in the fictional world of these diasporic writers yearning for real or imaginary homelands for a permanent or temporary come-back. So when the diasporic writing attempts to return to the real or the imagined home worlds, once again to quote the oft quoted Rushdie: “it is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (Rushdie, 1992: 11). Rushdie further delves into the intricate creative process of the diasporic writer not being gifted with the total recall; it is the partial nature of these memories that made them so evocative to these writers. These bits and remnants of memory acquired “greater status, greater resonance” because it is this fragmentation that “made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities” (Rushdie, 1992: 12). Drawing an obvious parallel with archeology Rushdie writes:

The broken pots of antiquity, from which the past can sometimes, but always provisionally be reconstructed, are exciting to discover, even if they are pieces of the most quotidian objects (Rushdie, 1992: 12).

In fact, past is lost to everybody and any writer recreates the bits of it but the diasporic writer who has lost touch of his home and language may feel this loss in a more intense way. “It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being ‘elsewhere’” (Rushdie, 1992: 12). The distance, actually, may enable him to articulate properly on a “subject of universal significance and appeal” (Rushdie, 1992: 12). Rushdie does
not believe in discarding these broken mirrors as nostalgia but believes them to be the useful tools “with which to work in the present” (Rushdie, 1992: 12). Such intentions of cultural translation and universalization may not go well with the aesthetic norms but it could be seen as a strength for the diasporic texts -- “that they are incomplete, the fact that they do not claim to offer the ultimate truth, the fact that they deal with the alternatives rather than essentials” (Mandal, 2007: 43). It is these alternative histories and narratives that texts of the diasporic writers offer and the Parsee diasporic writers too conform to this variability and attempt to assert their ethnic identity in different ways.

Parsee novel in English reflects this assertion of Parsee identity. The Parsee writers have more exploited the genre of novel than that of short fiction and poetry. There is a proliferation of Parsee fiction-writers who form a considerable part of the efflorescence of fiction-writing in India in the English language. Not only Mistry, Sidhwa and Desai but almost all the other Parsee novelists like Kanga, Dhondy, Vakil, Mehta, Pestonji and Dinshaw write very well. Quite an amount of literary space has been gained by the self-expression and assertion of these Parsee fiction-writers who have depicted the Parsee milieu and culture excellently. Literature produced by minorities shares its frustrations and aspirations with the rest of Indian community and at the same time burrowing itself into the particular community’s own cultural grotto/ghetto. Keki Daruwalla states:

There are three facets to the Parsi novel -- as a sociological tract, as a memory bank and as a look back on the city or the country one has left behind.

A novel aspires to give a flavour of reality, the mystery of lives as they are being lived. As in films, an entire era with its concerns, anxieties and beliefs comes alive on paper if not celluloid. But this mystery has to be achieved with deft touches (Daruwalla, 2001: 84).

Mistry’s novels look back into the Indian socio-political reality of the 70s when he migrated to Canada and have portrayed the city of Bombay emerging as a hero. The novels of all these writers serve as a memory bank, especially Desai’s Elephants. He has employed splendid literary devices in all his novels to serve various purposes. The innovative idea of the memo-scan renders novelty to his narrative technique to deal with the entire history of the Parsees, from the ancient to the present time. Sidhwa’s
novels have both a socio-political documentary value and at the same time they are a lookback on the city of Lahore and the country of Pakistan which she has left. In fact, all the novels are rooted in memory and nostalgia.

Jasbir Jain analyses the relationship of the immigration to his/her narrative as he/she works through the concepts of self and heritage (Jain, 2004: 230-45). What is found noticeable in these narratives is the impossibility of return to the past and belonging even when the past controls the present. There is no going back in time and place except in memory. How the diasporic writer constructs his/her narrative and self is interesting to study. The differences, rejections or discriminations by the hosts cause alienation and ultimately thwarts the émigrée’s attempts to belong or get attached emotionally. “Instead there is a sense of temporariness, a longing different from the present and a fear of extinction” (Jain, 2004: 232). The need to overcome this fear motivates the diasporic writer’s attempts to define the ‘self’ and assert. Despite these efforts the exiled self is never at home anywhere as the holding back to the past becomes important to him but to reconnect with the rootless present is problematic. Though there are different kinds of alienations, it is possible to forge the dialogical relationship between the self and the other. But for some writers like Naipaul and Mukherjee such possibility does not exist. The desire for home and the return of the impossible, as there is no place like home, is taken as the defining feature of diaspora. So, the entire emphasis of the diasporic discourse rests on the hermeneutics of nostalgia. The absence of nostalgic and the desire for the impossible have been criticized as a kind of treachery to the home countries on the part of the diaspora. Bharathi Mukherjee’s appraisal of assimilation into the host culture for reasons of survival has been disapproved by many critics. According to Swaraj Raj, assimilation as a strategy for survival does not fit notionally in the diaspora theories grounded in the nationalist space (Raj, 2007: 55-56). Theoretically, the diasporas are defined as the deterritorialized other of their nation-states which are looked upon as homogeneous and monolithic. This is also problematic because nation-states are heterogeneous like diasporas. The powerful invective on secular and multicultural India’s decline into religious fundamentalism and intolerance in the fictions of Rushdie and Mistry has been denounced by the critics. Makarand Paranjape writes:
The texts of the new diaspora not only describe the motherland, but also justify why it has to be left behind … The narratives of the new diaspora, then, are elaborate and eloquent leave-takings, often elegiac in tone … construct the motherland as not only an area of darkness, confusion, violence, but a hopeless and doomed country which must be rejected (Paranjpe, 2001: 10-11).

The peril of such self-definition is that it becomes enclosed and self-contained instead of becoming flexible and expanding. Such withholding of self and its definition through difference or ethnic assertion is in contrast to the dialogical definition of self. As Jasbir Jain points out, such withholding self does not permit any long term involvement at a deeper level. The “self” in this case becomes a resistant “self” that prevents natural growth, identification and constructive relationships. Actually, the intertextualities are to be realized and a new self is created. Several diasporic writers have embraced their hyphenated self and preferred to negotiate with their hybrid selves. Parsee diasporic writers like Mistry, Sidhwa, Desai, Dhondy and Kanga have chosen to locate themselves in relation to their community which is also an important facet of the diasporic self in the need to belong. With the addition of more diasporic writers from the younger generations, it has become the need of the time to explore the complexities of dislocations and relocations that contribute in the making of the diasporic self. There may be a ‘self’ in constant need of an ‘other’ and turn into a resistant self or it may evolve into a dialogic self, with constant negotiations between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, between assimilation and resistance. This dialogical self may be “willing to give and belong, willing to transcend the ego” (Jain, 2004: 239) through the continuous endeavour for integration.

The process of belonging for the diasporic people is complex and multifaceted. It is viewed from different perspectives by the Indian diasporic writers. Uma Parameshwaran believes that home is not where one’s feet are but where one’s heart is and that “belonging is a transplantation” (Parameshwaran, 2007: 208-17). For Mistry, as he conveys in his short fiction “Swimming Lessons”, it is the ability to swim with the currents by sharing and engaging in the social concerns of the host community. In “Lend me your Light”, he narrates two different attitudes towards the diasporic existence. The stay-at-home Percy devotes his time in community service in the rural area of India. He is not moved by the bragging of Jamshed, his friend who has migrated to USA always deriding and finding faults with India. The narrator
Kersi, Percy’s brother and also Jamshed’s friend, has also migrated to Canada but still rooted to his diasporic community there. He does not hate India as callously as Jamshed does. Contrary to Jamshed, he tries to enjoy his trips to India and tries to connect to the place and its people. When he returns to Toronto, he introspects while unpacking his bags.

Gradually, I discovered I’d brought back with me my entire burden of riddles and puzzles, unsolved. The whole sorry package was there, not lightened at all. The epiphany would have to wait for another time another trip (Tales, 192).

The narrator is torn between the two worlds. He realizes the actual condition of an immigrant. He thinks, “I, Tiresius¹, throbbing between two lives, humbled by the ambiguities and dichotomies confronting me …” (Tales, 192). The narrator alias Mistry assumes that Jamsed’s way of seeing the worst in everything in India is a kind of psychological defence-mechanism without which life in America is bewildering. “Perhaps the contempt and disdain which he shed was only his way of lightening his own load.” (Tales, 192) In another story “Squatter”, “it is an adjustment which requires a bringing over and relocation of culture, a forward-looking attitude sans nostalgia (Jain, 2004: 240).

Bharati Mukherjee and Neil Bisoondath look at the whole issue of belongingness in terms of complete assimilation. The newcomers must commit themselves to the new identity at the cost of the trauma of self-transformation, but the differences of the subject thrust separateness hindering the complete acceptance. Ashis Gupta is of the opinion that usefulness to a society leads to acceptance (Gupta, 1998: 40-49) but it again raises a host of questions as to what kind of usefulness and whether it really does so. The very useful slaves and workers have the unnoticed existence without any specific identity and have often been maltreated with discrimination. So, there is no such equation even between usefulness and acceptance. Jasbir Jain systematically places the above discussed factors of the belongingness of the diasporic self in relation to the old and the new worlds as emerging from their narratives of the diasporic writers.² Identity -- the formation of the concept of ‘self’, location -- where one is situated and the homeland, memory -- personal well as collective as is part of their history and also the role of imagination are all vital in the whole process of
constituting a diasporic self and the sense of belonging. Jain believes that a sense of belonging comes about effortlessly through a voluntary process and coercion has no place in it (Jain, 2004: 243).

The narrative of belonging is also a narrative of “impossible mourning” (Mishra, 2001) as it deals with the experiences of rejection, loneliness and alienation of the exiled self who very often resorts to self-isolation and self-rejection. Different diasporic writers have tackled this existential predicament in their own ways. Generally, it is tackled by the dependence on history and memory. The immigrant writers handle the past by retelling and re-narrating their lost home and identity in diverse ways and from various perspectives. It is through this process of self-expression that the inner dilemmas and traumas are analyzed if not completely resolved; at least an introspective process of self-dialogue and self-renegotiation takes place resulting in self-assertion. The exiled writer constantly fights and conspires to restore his significance, his leading role, his authority. The diasporic literature is the externalization of the internalized memories of the past ‘self’ constantly aware of dwelling multiple worlds. The diasporic self hence juggles constantly with his multiple spaces and resides at the ‘third space’ which is ‘neither here nor there’. It inhabits the Derridian interstitial spaces, what Bhabha calls the ‘liminal’ ones. The intercultural experiences of the diasporic self constitute it as hyphenated hybrid subject. This is not like organic hybridity resulting from of the fusion or the reconciliation of the two or more cultures, races, colours, genders or any kind of differences but it is “self-reflexive” hybridity which is the “outcome of a conscious negotiation with and contestation between” its constituents. The identity of such hyphenated diasporic self remains fluid and is “continuously reconfigured in ongoing negotiation with the changing political environment” (Raj, 2007: 52). The migration of Parsees to India is one amongst many such cases in history that put the immigrant peoples into a highly contested space of diaspora. Throughout the last millennium the Parsees have been constantly negotiating with the changing political conditions and attempting to develop a sense of belonging for their host country India by integrating into her national identity. The diasporic Parsees have no hope to retrieve their home in Persia and hence their case is different from those who persist to keep connected to their roots even after immigration by means of investing economically and emotionally in the land that they have left behind. The Parsees have continued to
consider India as their adopted home and contributed to her social, political and economic life right from the participation of Malbari and Naoroji to the Mehtas, Tatas, Coopers and Wadias, though their political involvement was visible only towards the end of the freedom struggle. In fact, they have made substantial contribution to various walks of life like Science, Law, Theatre, Literature apart from Industry and Business affirming their versatility. Their efforts to integrate to the Indian identity has been duly recognized by their inclusion in the official listing of the minorities put up by the democratic constitution of the independent Indian nation-state.

Jasbir Jain compares the diasporic character of the Parsees with that of the world-wide spreading of the homeless and countryless Jews, the presence of Muslims in various parts of the world and the slaves from Africa all over the world. Though each has its own particular issues regarding the ability to belong and integrate with the concerned host nationality, the common characteristic is their centuries-long stay in one country or nation and falling into the categories of ‘native’ people sharing the political histories of those countries. They belong because their generations have been born on that land and their “relationship with the ‘other’ even when hostile has been hostility about power, equality and visibility not about not belonging” (Jain, 2004: 244).

According to Stuart Hall, the diaspora experience is defined not by essence or purity but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity and diaspora identities “are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall, 1993: 402). This self-reflexive hybrid identity of the diasporic subject residing at the liminal, in-between third space as discoursed by Bhabha, Rushdie and Said, is full of creative potentialities. But the celebration of this self-reflexive cultural hybridity and ‘third space’ that evades the trauma and suffering of living in exile/diaspora has been critiqued by Ahmed and Parry. The pain and grief that an exile undergoes, though sometimes covert, cannot be ignored as it is part of the process of negotiation. The Mexican-American author Gloria Anzaldua’s *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), a part fiction and part autobiography, is about the emergence of a new consciousness she calls *mestiza consciousness* which has to develop tolerance for differences, contradictions
and ambiguities. The diasporic subject/self faces such ambivalence and lives through the struggle of juggling two or more cultures and by doing so acquires a plural personality. The process does not call for just uniting the separate or severed fragments together or balancing them but it is an endeavour to synthesize the parts in such a way that results in the evolution of a third different element that is greater than the sum of its parts. This specific element is a new *mestiza consciousness*, a source of intense pain but also a source of continual creative energy “that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm” (Anzaldua, 1987: 79). Swaraj Raj considers this work as an exemplar of the performance of the self-reflexive hybrid/hyphenated diasporic subjectivity embodying the pain of not belonging anywhere and at the same time retaining the oppositional frame of reference the diaspora evokes (Raj, 2007: 54-55). One finds this diasporic epistemology illustrated in the fiction of Rushdie and also Parsee diasporic writers -- Mistry, Sidhwa, Desai and others who, as diasporic subjects, have located themselves in the “realm of the hybrid, in the domain of cross-cultural and contaminated social and cultural regimes” (Mishra Vijay, 2000: 71). It is this kind of multiculturalism that Mistry celebrates by developing the metaphor of the unfinished quilt which is a synthesis of fragments of diverse colours and designs. The diasporic subject goes on joining the pieces and reconstitutes the self-reflexive hybrid identity. In *Balance*, Dina is an Indian Parsee who stitches the multiple cloth-pieces, the metaphor for her dialogical relationships with the ‘other’ communities of the Indian multicultural society, i.e. the chamar-turned-tailors, the Muslim tailor etc. The quilt resulting out of her positive attitude towards her life-experiences inspired and encouraged by a Parsee youth Maneck, turns out to be an aesthetic work of art. By leaving the quilt incomplete Mistry implies that the process of constructing such dialogical hybrid identity is an ongoing process. It continues even at the end of the novel when Dina feeds the poor and maimed tailors in the chinaware of their personal use. Jehangir, in *Matters*, struggles to arrange a jigsaw puzzle which also stands for this complex positive process of reconfiguring of the dialogical, self-reflexive, hybrid identity of the Parsee self. The fictional Parsee diasporic protagonists like Feroza Rusi, Homi, Maneck, Noshir, Farida and also Jamshed and Kersi, the narrator of Mistry’s short fiction have been situated in this diasporic third space of self reflexive hybridity. They are like the texture of “chiffon saris”, the cross-breed, as stated by Jussawalla. They constantly negotiate their diasporic self-hood/subjectivity continuously shaping and reshaping their fluid and hyphenated identity.
Bhabha, himself a Parsee theorist, views multiculturalism as impasse that hardens the differences. He, instead, explores a third space of enunciation wherein all cultural statements and systems are constructed. It is a space that is contradictory and ambivalent/multivalent, that destroys “hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures” (Bhabha, 1994: 37). This particular third space of enunciation cannot be represented but being in the space acts as a catalytic force and enables one to process the cultural differences, maybe as polarities/diversities but results as a hybridity. It allows one to emerge as the other of oneself (Bhabha, 1994: 39). Rashna Singh analyses Bhabha’s ideology and states clearly that within a Third Space of enunciation, diacritical space is traversed and a group such as the Parsees can articulate their own ambivalences. Bhabha’s Third Space can be understood not only as a space of enunciation but also as a space for the structuration of identities (Singh, 2008: 29-47).

The Parsees of India has always seen themselves as achievers of hybridity par excellence. They have long said that they are Indians first and Parsees later, though accepting their Indiananness half-heartedly. Bhabha’s elaborate discourse on hybridity may be taken as an extension of his proposition of why he is not so Indian. This unclaimed Indianness helped them gain acceptance from the British and yet they do gain acceptance among the Indians as ‘cultural hybrids’. The Parsees are readily and happily accustomed to this image. As the milk and sugar story of their landing in India goes, they had promised to blend with the host people like sugar blending with milk and sweetening it. And they have remained proudly faithful to their promise. They have become hybrids by adopting Gujarati language, costume, customs and several religious rites and lived in general harmony till the advent of the British. Their dialogical negotiation with their hyphenated diasporic selves/subjectivity continued and soon they established close contacts with the British too quickly mixing and merging, socially adopting their language and culture and gaining their political mileage and patronage too.

Palsetia indicates the importance of such traditional narratives in relating the process of assimilation and acculturation, which the Parsees believed essential to their survival and reception in India (Palsetia, 2001: 6). The early history of the Parsees
reveals a pattern of adaptation to the culture and conventions of their hosts. Bhabha writes:

The people are neither the beginning nor the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the “social” as homogeneous, consensual community, and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population (Bhabha, 1994: 146).

The Parsees are placed on this cutting edge, in crucial negotiation between the Hindu homogeneity of the nationness and the commitment of the Indian Constitution to the social inclusiveness. Luhrmann commenting on the Parsee engagement with this issue of identity, observes as to “how deeply self-critical they are not only of their own Indian-ness, but of their failure to be more Indian” (Luhrmann, 1996: 50). The diasporic Parsee writers have hardly focused on the issue whether the westernization of the Parsees has been a departure from their Indianness but it is their definite lookout as to how the Indian Parsees evolved a historically multi-faceted and transforming identity or a conflux of identities. Colonialism played a major role in the way in which the Parsees were perceived by others and also by themselves in the process of the negotiation of their identity. It is one of the many factors that contributed in catapulting the socio-political status of the Parsees to the elite privileged. There is a danger, Palsetia warns, in viewing colonialism as the main impetus and in seeing change as limited to or deriving from it (Palsetia, 2001: 27-28). There were the differences among the Parsees themselves when a few Parsees became active in the freedom struggle and there was a dilemma between their Indian and British inclinations. Kulke writes about this dichotomy between their Parsee versus Indian identity:

While the majority of the Parsee community was attempting to find an identity outside of the Indian society and the emerging Indian nation, the Parsees active in congress were convinced that the Parsees as an Indian community would have a future only in acting in unison with the other Indian groups. For them, it was perfectly natural to be an Indian first and only secondly a Parsee whereby no contradiction could arise in their eyes between Indian and Parsee identity (Kulke, 1975: 167).
The community’s negotiation with themselves at this critical juncture was very difficult. Sidhwa, in *Man*, narrates the multi-vocality of her community that has assembled actually for the ‘Jashan’ prayer but soon becomes a conference discussing on their future positional move. They know they have to tread carefully keeping an eye on who wins in the political game. Such navigational position is not new for them as they have understood that the survival for their tiny community means running with the hounds and hunting with the hare. There are a number of negotiations of positionality with various suggestions like going to Bombay, the Parsee ghetto in India or to London. To this Dr. Manek Mody offers an ironic twist on the sugar in the milk story asking what they should do when the English king’s vazir stands before them with a glass full of milk, “Tell him we are brown Englishmen; come to sweeten their lives with a dash of color?” (*Man*, 49). This is the kind of crisis the Parsees experience in the latest western diaspora.

After passing through this controversy when India’s much priced independence with her Partition into two nations was imminent, their fears about their social status were only partially realized after independence. The Parsees’ privileged elite status was gradually relegated into the margins. “The Parsees’ merging into an Indian identity with a simultaneous retention of their own Parsee identity was only possible as long as the emerging Indian identity remained relatively detached from Hindu socio-religious traditions and influences of the neo-Hindu renaissance movement” (Kulke, 1975: 169). Dadabhai Naoroji became the powerful advocate of a secular nationalism but the chance of bringing Parsee and Indian identity into accordance with each other was thwarted by the radical influence of neo-Hindu renaissance by Tilak, Lajpat Rai, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, and Dayanand Saraswati. The Hinduization of the national movement and the Congress was an important reason for the withdrawal of the Parsees from the national politics. Most of the Parsees feared the day of Indian independence as only a very few of them had actively worked for it. But their general reaction was that of adaptability and prudence which have shown them the pragmatic way to make the positive arrangement with the new political situation in India. Their reorientation process was unhindered by the National Congress and they were accepted as integral part of the Indian national identity without having to justify or prove their Indianness. The participation of a handful of Parsees in the national movement acted as their saving grace. Kulke writes:
Even if the consciousness of being an elite in a privileged position based on their achievements has been extensively cut down and some Parsees even feel that the community is being pressed to the wall economically and politically, it can still be noted that the community’s existence was not questioned or endangered for a moment by the Indian society and government (Kulke, 1975: 266).

This micro minority community has been provided with the recognized minority-status among others by the Indian Constitution and their Indian identity is quite secured. But the community’s existence has been threatened and endangered from the forces inside the community rather than from outside. A number of factors like late marriages, a taboo on the interfaith marriages, excommunication of the Parsee girl and her family as punishment for intercommunity marriage, increased number of old people, physical and mental problems attendant on inbreeding in this endogamic community etc. cause their diminishing population. Their existential anxiety and awareness about their degeneration add to the woes of their marginal status in the post independence India. Kulke states:

The undermining of the Parsee identity, westernization combined with an impeded access to the Indian society and its value system characterize the community’s marginal existence which still persists to the same extent as before (Kulke, 1975: 266).

In order to exercise the right of having equal status for their community in the independent India’s egalitarian society the Parsees reinterpret their role in India’s most recent history though not very consciously. The Parsee writers, especially the diasporic ones who are privileged with their outsider status, reclaim their past and glorify their contribution to their adopted home country as a part of the process of negotiation for their Indian identity. The feeling of belongingness and group-identity has been strengthened and the insecurity and uncertainty of the community’s political future have been reduced as the Parsees have noticed that the post-colonial India has not been hostile towards them.

They relate intertextually to the narratives of the nation and the national identity not only in socio-cultural, historical and religious terms but also in political terms. Their
image of being Anglophiles has played a significant role in their marginalization. Rashna Singh observes:

Historical circumstances compelled tiny, marginalized communities such as Parsis to adopt a contingent identity that served to ensure both physical survival and cultural integrity. The structuration of Parsis as Anglicized or westernized is also a structuration of them as inauthentic Indians. In contemporary India, especially Mumbai, the cultural capital of the Parsis, where the Shiv Sena dominates politics, the perception of Parsis as westernized or Anglicized is more than a whimsical notion. It is a label of inadequacy, a political condemnation. The conflation of the nation with Hinduism and the valorization of Hindu readings of the nation mean that subsidiary groups such as the Parsis are marginalized to the point of losing their place in the nation altogether. While the Parsis have not experienced the physical threat that Muslim and Sikh communities have felt, the essentialization of the nation as Hindu effectively excludes them (Singh, 2008: 31).

The Parsees’ contribution to India’s politics, industry, banking, journalism, military, law, science, arts, literature and theatre impart the community the pride of doing well in any field in which the Parsees become active. Their elite consciousness, thrust into the dark recesses of their collective psyche during the early postcolonial period, has resurfaced and colours the notion of their identity in the present. This lessens their anxiety about the community’s future. But during the last few decades, the postcolonial Parsee fiction writers like Mistry have attempted through their narratives to bring to the fore this fear of extinction of the community highlighting various reasons leading to it. They “traverse diacritical space by relocating their Parsi characters from the margins of the nation to the centre and, in doing so destabilize the centre” (Singh, 2008: 37). These characters like Gustad, his family and friends, the Parsees living in his neighborhood of the Khodadad building in Journey and also those staying at Firozshah Baag in Mistry’s Tales, Dina in Balance, and the Parsee family of Nariman in Matters are rooted in India. Also Desai’s characters in Elephants participate in the Indian identity to certain extent; so do Sidhwa’s Junglewallas, Ginwallas and the Sethis in the then part of the Indian subcontinent, now Pakistan. They try to keep feeling one with their Indianness and try to reshape it in the context of their colonial past and the postcolonial present. “Theirs is a postcolonialist understanding of identity as performative, unstable and contingent” (Singh, 2008: 37) with the changing conditions of the various historical phases.
Sidhwa, Mistry, Desai and other Parsee postcolonial fiction writers reconstitute Parsee identity as transitory and provisional, about to change and in a state of flux and view myriad possibilities, choices and selves negotiating within that diacritical interstitial space. The politics of recognition plays a crucial role in the establishment of their identity or marking the difference in the context of the multiculturalism of the Indian nation-state as well as the American and Canadian multiculturalisms in their western diaspora. The attempt to identify with the Indian identity during the postcolonial times has been quite fruitful during the Nehruvian era but it has been destabilized within the Indira Gandhi regime when the dominance of Hindu fundamentalism had begun to thwart the secular ideology of the Indian nation-state since the 60s. The multicultural texture of the Indian Constitution has been damaged by the frequent occurrences of narrow parochialism turning the narrative of the nation into a homogeneous monolithic entity. The alienated and marginalized minorities need to reassert themselves since the marking of the difference has become crucial in the given scenario. The Parsee fiction writers try to do the same, but their integration to the Indian identity and their rootedness in their ‘home’-country has emerged so very strong after more than a millennium-long stay that these writers defer to mark such difference in the Derridian sense of différences. This has been the case with Parseeness not only in the postcolonial period but also during the British colonialism. And same is the case with their western diaspora in the context of American and Canadian multiculturalisms. The Parsees feel the pressure to assert their Parseeness when they are lumped with the brown-skinned Indians or the South Asians and victimized by racism, discrimination and alienation despite the progressive policies of multiculturalism based on the egalitarian values of equality and liberty in these nations of the First World. Farida, Rusi, Homi, Nosheer, Manek and Feroza are such ‘factional’ diasporic Parsees. Mistry’s characters are not alienated and westernized Parsee elites like Sidhwa’s Junglewallas, Ginwallas and the Sethis or Desai’s Farida, Mehar Granny, Homi-Rusi and Adi-Pheroza. They are, in fact, the Parsees deeply rooted in their traditions like Gustad-Dilnawaz and Yezad-Roxana. Mistry’s Matters concerns a Parsee family living in contemporary India and specifically contending with issues of Parsee and Zoroastrian identity and survival.

Just as Gustad sees no future for minorities in India and looks forward to a brighter future for his son who might immigrate after his IIT education, Yezad too focuses on
the future that he envisages in Canada, where he has been trying to emigrate. But the future turns out to be no different from the present. Yezad realizes that he will simply exchange one set of problems for another. Instead of beggars in Bombay he might encounter poor people freezing to death on the streets of Toronto; instead of the discrimination of casteism, there will be the injustice and humiliation of racism; instead of the separatists in Kashmir and many other regions of India demanding their separate states there will be the separatists in Quebec. The secessionist human psychology is universal. Keeping diverse states integrated in one nation-state that advocates multiculturalism is a herculean task. The self-paradoxical multicultural policies of the recognition of diversities lead to separatism, though the homogeneity within the nation-states is outrightly discouraged. Yezad ponders over the failure of multiculturalism and self-interrogates, “Why migrate from the frying pan into the fire?” (Matters, 119). He lets go off his fantasy of rosy future in Canada. If “the land of excess and superfluity has unemployment, violent crime, homelessness”, there is not much difference between there and here, he concludes (Matters, 118).

When Yezad’s family is called for an interview at the Canadian High Commission, they try hard to show their eligibility. Yezad wears a dark blue three-piece suit, Roxana a mauve skirt and jacket and Murad is dressed in a bow-tie. Yezad is excited when he finds that the Immigration Officer’s name is Mazobashi. “This was the beauty of Canada”, he thinks, “…that Mazobashi could be as Canadian as any other name, Chenoy, for example” (Matters, 217) and starts dreaming about assimilating in Canadian identity and achieving its citizenship. Later, during the interview, he makes a mistake by telling Mr. Mazobashi that he wants to go to Canada for the same reasons Mr. Mazobashi’s family went. Yezad, already had sensed the possibility of being rejected, realized it very soon when Mr. Mazobashi sneeringly informs Yezad that his family was born in Canada. Carrying on the humiliation he asks, “Aren’t you people feeling hot in your suits and jackets?” When he notices that they are in fact cold due to the efficient air conditioner, he abruptly asks,” What’samatter, too cold for you? And you want to live in Canada?” (Matters, 218). He deliberately asks such questions to answer which Yezad fumbles. When he is not able to answer correctly about hockey facts, Mr. Mazobashi ends the interview by saying, “You Indians … You’re so naïve. You want to go and freeze your butts in a country you understand nothing about; just to make a pile of money” (Matters, 218). This is enough to trigger
Yezad’s national pride and Indianness. He counter-accuses Mazobashi of abusing India and the Indians, even while Canada drains India of its brainpower and spews prejudice and bigotry in return (*Matters*, 219). Feroza, in *Brat*, is also subject to such kind of harassment and humiliation from the officers during the security check after landing in America. The officer suspects that Feroza might be the fiancée of Manek and not his niece as he did not look much older to her. Feroza had to answer a number of uncomfortable cross-queries and she felt very embarrassed and annoyed when her suitcases were ransacked and had to face the possibility of being deported back. She was so very much offended and bewildered that tears just rushed to her eyes but at the nick of the time, Manek came to her rescue. This and a number of other awkward and insulting incidents occur because she looks like one among the lot of South-Asian brown people. The Islamic hegemony of Pakistan and the rigid regionalism of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, India are no better; but Feroza and Yezad feel identified with the Pakistani and the Indian nationhood respectively, when faced with discrimination abroad or from other nationality. Similarly, Homi becomes more aware about his Parseeness and religion when he is pressurised to convert to Christianity by Julie (*Elephants*). Bhabha notes that

Cultural globality is figured in the in between spaces of double-frames: its historical originality marked by a cognitive obscurity; its decentred ‘subject’ signified in the nervous temporality of the transitional, or the emergent provisionality of the ‘present’ (Bhabha, 1994: 216).

For the American Security Officer or the Canadian Immigration Officer, global identity is not figured in the in-between spaces of double frames, but in a fixed frame of American or Canadian nationness signified by the Americanness or by hockey and extreme cold weather of Canada to which the officers lay their claims hindering or denying access to other nationalities. The “munificence of Canada’s multicultural policy” (*Matters*, 215) turns out to be “a gigantic hoax” (219), and so does American multiculturalism when not only Feroza but Rusi, Homi, Noshir and Farida face discrimination a number of times. Multiculturalism, as Bhabha says, is based on diversity, on differences that are discrete rather than inter-textual, hence, assume rigid self-definition. Nariman later tells Yezad that immigration would have been an enormous mistake: “The biggest anyone can make in their life. The loss of home
leaves a hole that never fills” (Matters, 220). It is the same kind of hole and vacuum that Noshir feels and attempts to fill it up but in vain. The same is the objective of Homi, Feroza and Farida who have persisted in their quest of love or a kind of anchoring/sense of belonging that would fill up this hole.

The Parsees’ journey in search of home takes a ‘U’ turn here as Mistry seems to be reminding us through Nariman that for the Parsees, home is indisputably India; and while nation is negotiable, home is not. It is where one is born and groomed. It is also a message to the Parsees to accept their Indianness whole-heartedly cherishing whatever Indianess they have imbibed to call India their home and themselves Indians. Indian multiculturalism also comes across similar problems of inherent self-paradoxes as other countries do. The constitutional measures to inculcate democratic values into the spirit of nationness have not met with much success as the differences of culture, caste, class, religion, region, and gender still persist to cause discrimination at socio-political levels. The solution lies beyond multiculturalism; in those interstitial, diacritical, third spaces of the minds and hearts of the people who have respect for the differences and constantly negotiate their self-hood in those in-between spaces of enunciation. Manek, in Balance, is an example of the one belonging to India. He commits suicide not because he is in diaspora but because he identifies himself with the nation and its problems, i.e. the political chaos of which his friends Avinash is the victim, the gender-bias penetrated at the social levels of which Avinash’s sisters are the victims and the caste-injustice of which the maimed tailors are the victims. The solace which he found in the camaraderie of the four of them -- Dina, himself and the tailors -- is an oasis in this land of despair. Manek is an instance of the negative outcome of such hopeless conditions, While Bapaiji, in Elephants, is a positive instance. She is an iron lady who resolves the quarrel between the Hindus and Muslims of her town Navsari regarding the placing of a garbage dump. She can solve it because she is a Parsee and a respectable lady. The roles that the Parsees played by being cultural hybrids and enunciating the third space of in-betweenness have earned them respectable position in the multicultural social milieu. Dina (Balance) plays a uniting role just as Lenny’s mother and Godmother (Man) play the humanitarian role of serving both/all communities involved in the riots. The textual analysis of the previous chapters have explored numerous such examples of ‘unity in diversity’ or ‘sarvadharma samabhava’ when the Parsees are involved with their illustrious
behaviour respecting the differences. Within these in-between spaces the Parsees have strategized their selfhood and structurized their identity. Selfhood for the Parsees of India has to be strategized for historical as well as cultural reasons. Transplantation to a new country and re-transplantation for their second diaspora in western or any other country require continuous negotiation for their identity. Rashna Singh emphatically states:

For the Parsis; more than for any other ethnic group in India, except perhaps the Jews, nationness had to be negotiated in the intricacies that lay between themselves and the Hindus, or the Muslims, or the British. It is in these interstices that the Parsis strategized their selfhood (Singh, 2008: 34).

As mentioned, the nationness has to be negotiated by Parsees, not their home which is now undoubtedly India. Mistry and Desai again and again come back to Bombay and Sidhwa to Lahore, once a part of the Indian subcontinent. As memory works, it hardly goes back to Iran; only once it happens, in Desai’s Elephants to narrate their glorious past. Mistry’s concern for Bombay makes him celebrate the humanity and compassion of Bombay, the cosmopolitan hybridized city. Even while exposing its horror and squalor, Mistry admires its beauty too. In Matters, a new profile of this city opens itself to Yezad when his boss Mr. Kapur narrates an amazing incident he had witnessed. He tells how he had seen a man running on the platform alongside a leaving train. As the platform was coming to an end, the man raised his arms and people standing on the door of the compartment reached out and grabbed them. Though the passengers had lifted the man off the platform, his feet precariously dangling outside and pedaling the air, he was watched by the horrified onlookers including Mr. Kapur fearing that he would be dragged and killed. Trusting his life to strangers he was safe and sound in their embrace. Mr. Kapur asks an important question to Yezad during the narration --

Whose hands were they, and whose hands were they grasping? Hindu, Muslim, Dalit, Parsi, Christian? No one knew and no one cared. Fellow passengers, that’s all they were. And I stood there on the platform for a long time, Yezad, my eyes filled with tears of joy, because what I saw told me there was still hope for this great city (137).

Mr. Kapur’s story might be viewed as substantiation to multiculturalism seen by some critics as a dead-end or it can be perceived as an enunciative process that dissolves the binaries/multiplicities. One wonders whether Mistry wants to suggest the universal
liberalism/cosmopolitanism or underline the need to have a space by anybody who claims it on the train or in the multicultural nation. It is like looking at the same point from two different angles or perspectives. The assertion of ethnicity and the universal humanitarianism are the two sides of the same coin. When one insists for the space to be shared with the centre, it can be imparted only by such humanitarian approach and in the process one only pushes some to the margins. It is the people of the periphery, says Bhabha, who “return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis” (Bhabha, 1994: 6). The margins of the nation thus reassert and displace the centre. In fact, the borders between the centre and periphery merge and the space of the entire nation as a whole is shared by its diversities on the humanitarian ground. The assertion of ethnicity/difference goes hand in hand with this whole process of transformation from nation’s homogeneous identity to the heterogeneous one that encompasses multilingual, multi-religious, multicultural and multi-regional identities. The Parsee diasporic writers seem to challenge the notion of the Parsees as India’s most westernized or thoroughly colonized lot with the aim of displacing the centre and to disrupt a national narrative that proposes a unitary and singular Hindu Culture for the Indian nation-state that is all-accommodating and yet imposes certain restraints. What Kwame Appiah Anthony says about the African identity in the context of the American multiculturalism is true for any ethnic identity, may it be for the Parsees too. He writes:

If an African identity is to empower us, so it seems to me, what is required is not so much that we throw out falsehood but that we acknowledge first of all that race and history and metaphysics do not enforce an identity: that we can choose, within broad limits set by ecological, political and economical realities what it will mean to be African in the coming years (Anthony, 1992: 176).

Similarly, the choice of being an Indian must be available to the Pareses, both in their Indian as well as the western diasporas. This explains why Mistry, Desai and Sidhwa travel backwards in their past and come back again and again to the locales of Bombay and Lahore of the Indian subcontinent. It is but to reclaim their past and retrieve their Indian identity. Their Parseeness is part and parcel of it, inseparable of their hyphenated Indian/Western diasporic identity. Their ethnicity cannot be separated from their hybridized/hyphenated identities as Indian – Parsees or Indian/Asian American Parsees or Indian/Asian Canadian Parsees. The phenomenon
is not as simple as it seems. This is the case not only with the Parsees but with any people in diaspora. Their strong links to their homelands, here India in case of Parsees, and their keen “homing desire” to assimilate and belong to their present place of abode create counter-pull in their psyche and is reflected in their literature. The diasporic home is both a cage and a heaven – in which the self is both lost and found (Bharucha, 2010: 31).

R. Radhakrishnan suggests that the empirical existence of the multiple hyphenated and hybridized identities of the diaspora counter-positions the notion that there can be some kind of happy integration between the two or many cultural voices on either side of the hyphen. Recognizing the complexities involved in the understanding of the diasporic self/identity, he raises a series of insightful questions (Radhakrishnan, 2003: 119-129). This discourse, though in the context of the Indian – American diasporic identity, is applicable to any hyphenated identity. The intriguing problem is whether the diasporic self could be both ‘one’ and something ‘other’ simultaneously. If one is both Indian and American, for example, there is a question as to which one the real self is and how they co-exist and are blended into one identity. There is also an expectation to know whether there is any hierarchical relationship between the ethnic and the national identity or the hyphen marks a dialogic and non-hierarchic relationship. The answer is sought for the query whether ethnicity is a mere flavour to be relived as nostalgia or that it is a basic immutable form that triumphs over changes, travels and dislocations. But the naturalization of an immigrant into the citizenship of the host country minoritizes his identity, often recognized as ethic minority. There is a further puzzle whether to call this process of the rebirth of the new ethnic self an empowerment or marginalization. If ethnic identity is a strategic response to a shifting sense of time and place, it is significant to know whether the ethnic selfhood is an end in itself or an inevitable “phase to be left behind when the time is right to inaugurate the “post-ethnic”” (Radhakrishnan, 2003: 122). All these interrogations lead to the new research avenues pointing at the more acute and complicated problem of the divided allegiances and the tensions between the old and new homes that the two generations in diaspora experience differently. The integrity of the family and the belongingness to the community, displaced by migration, need to be renegotiated and redefined during the generations-long process of relocation. It is more complex an issue than the mere generation gap as to how the two generations should address each
other within the diaspora. The two generations have different starting points and different givens. This phenomenon of the “historical rupture” (Radhakrishnan, 2003: 123) that takes place between the collective psyche of the two diasporic generations within the same community requires careful and thorough analysis. It is different, for instance, to be Indian for the two generations in diaspora because the second generation does not have the first-hand experience of being born and groomed in India like the first one. It is much more problematic when both the generations have to live with their hyphenated identities to be and to live as Indians without losing the leverage as the nationals of their host country.

“It is vital that the two generations empathize and desire to understand and appreciate patterns of experience not their own” (Radhakrishnan, 2003: 123). Putting up the problem of the diasporic self in either generation, Radhakrishnan very specifically states:

… both the home country and the country of residence could become mere “ghostly” locations, and the result can only be double depoliticization …. The home country is not “real” in its own terms and yet it is real enough to impede Americanization, and the “present home” is materially real and yet not real enough to feel authentic (Radhakrishnan, 2003: 123).

Problematising this further, Radhakrishnan asks whether the “Indian” in Indian and the “Indian” in Indian-American are the same and hence interchangeable. It is important to know as to which of the two is authentic and which is merely strategic and reactive. There are no easy answers to these questions as there is no certain extent to which the old native country functions as framework or scaffolding and regulates or reconstructs the transplanted identities within the diaspora. It is to be probed if the old country itself should be reinvented in the context of the new contemporary location. If that is done, it is again bewildering as to whose interpretation of the native land is dependable, the older or the younger generation’s; insider’s version or the outsider’s diasporan perspective. It is evident from these queries arising from a diasporic/migrant situation that when people move or travel, identities, selves, traditions and perspectives also change and remain fluid for the times to come. The issue turns more intricate for the communities like Parsees who are in multiple diasporas, and much more problematic for the second and the next generations. The Parsee immigrant like Jamshed in “Lend me your Light” and Manek in Brat illustrate
the ‘assimilated’ first generations that inculcate a very faulty response to their home countries. A diasporic self must be cautious enough not to forget the past too easily and shun the community connections. The capitalism of the globalization has created a society that isolates and privatizes its inhabitants nurturing the myth of an equal and ‘free’ individual without any sense of community or a sense of the past. This kind of liberal individualization sans culture and history would then impart an identity-free existence thrusting the individual into anonymity and rootlessness which would further entangle him into alienation, marginalization and crisis of identity. For the future generations the issue can be more cumbersome but cannot be eased out just by disowning or obliterating the past. There is more than enough room for the multiple versions and perspectives of the same reality. In fact, such interpretations are themselves the products of history and not the subjective inventions. The hyphenated diasporic self has to learn, for instance, to find “Indianness” within and at the same time in conjunction with the minority ethnic group in America. The younger generations, too, find their “ethnic Indian” identity not in isolation but in the context of other minorities. The immigrants are referred to as the “transnational” diasporas that create and maintain “simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blauc, 1995: 48-63). Hermans also supported the view that the universal notions of culture and self fail to explain the challenges accompanying the acculturation process within a world where cultures are mixing and moving and the local and the global are merging and creating new “contact zones” between different cultures (Hermans, 2001: 24-28). He proposes that the ontological realities of time like travel, migration and diaspora demand a dynamic, multivocal and a dialogical notion of self to emerge as a result of the persistent negotiation and reorientation of the identities. “The politics of proximity has to negotiate dialectically and critically with the politics of distance” (Radhakrishnan, 2003: 126). Like Amitav Ghosh, Radhakrishnan too believes that places are both real and imagined and that one can know places that are distant as much as one can misunderstand and misinterpret places one inhabits. There are all kinds of possibilities as Arjun Appadurai argues that neither distance nor proximity guarantees truth or alienation (Appadurai, 1990: 1-24). One could live within one’s home-land and not care to discover it or live outside it and acquire a nuanced historical perspective of the home country and vice versa.
To continue with the example of Indian-American identity, the hyphen, as stated earlier, complicates the issue of the recognition of the self. Here, the ‘Indianness’ involves multiplicity and diversity and the ideal identity of being an Indian have to be devised first to be accepted in the diasporan context in America. Ethnicity is often forced to take on the discourse of authenticity to protect and maintain its unique space and history and thus resist anonymity through homogenization. The ethnicity has to enter into a coerced relationship with the dominant host world or national order without which the ethnicity hardly feels any need to authenticate itself. The entire issue of authentication is problematic and questionable as to by whom, why and by what authority the credentials of the ethnicity are checked. The need for authenticity is appreciated in the given circumstances of the first world capitalism where the marketplace and commodities are the norms, but the rhetoric of authenticity always has the perils to degenerate into essentialism. Radhakrishnan situates the problem of authenticity alongside the phenomenon of relationality and the politics of representation. He asks,

How does authenticity speak for itself; as one voice or many related voices, as monolithic identity or as identity hyphenated by difference? When someone speaks as an Asian-American, who exactly is speaking? If we dwell in the hyphen, who represents the hyphen; the Asian or the American, or can the hyphen speak for itself without creating an imbalance between the Asian and the American components? … True, both components have status, but which has the power and the potential to read and interpret the other on its terms? If the Asian is to be Americanized, will the American submit to Asianization? (Radhakrishnan, 2003: 127).

This question, which is there for the first generation diaspora has posed itself with much more complexity for the second generation in diaspora.

The Parsees have spent generations in their Indian diaspora and imbibed Indianness and have developed a sense of belongingness. Their western diaspora in the American and Canadian milieu faces different problems about its identity and future generations when grouped with the people of Indian origin. The future generations of such hyphenated diasporic selves will have many roots and many pasts and their identity would be a matter of rich and complex negotiations. A dialogical approach ought to be employed to understand the formation of hybridized identities and hyphenated
selves, even for the future generations. A dialogical approach that focuses on the multiplicity of subject positions, allows to highlight the multiple, alternating and often paradoxical “voices” of the hybrid self. The Parsee diasporic self and the construction of its hybrid identity need to be understood using a dialogical perspective. Mistry, Sidhwa and Desai have represented the multiple such voices in their fiction through various Parsee characters in diverse diasporas. Bapaiji, Granny, Nariman, Gustad, Yezad, Dina, Manek, Dinshawji, Freddie, Lenny, Pheroza and Adi, Roxana and Dilnawaz, Tanya and Behram, Putli and Aban are the voices of the Indian Parsees who negotiate their Parsee identity in the Indian multicultural context. While Manek, Feroza, Noshir, Homi-Rusi, Jalu-soli and Farida, Kersi and Jamshed are the voices of the Indian/Asian Parsees in the western diaspora negotiating their Indian Parsee identity in the context of the American and Canadian multicultural societies.

The formation of the immigrant identity or the acculturating diasporic self is a dialogical process that is shaped by multiple, sometimes contradictory and asymmetrical force and often shifting cultural voices of colour, class, religion, race, gender, sexuality and nationality. The acculturation process of an immigrant exemplifies the dynamic interplay between multiplicity of voices and at the same time points to the political, cultural and historical embeddedness/rootedness of these voices. This dialogical process, a multivoiced phenomenon, is a process that involves an ongoing contested negotiation of voices from past and present, homeland and host land, self and other. This dialogical approach emphasizes that the asymmetrical power relations are very much the part of the diasporic self. The contesting voices never stop or stay in blissful harmony. Viewed from a dialogical perspective, acculturation and construction of hybridity involves a dynamic play among several competing voices. Acculturation is to be viewed as a process that is interminable with an emphasis on multiplicity, conflicts and contradictions. Explaining the above process of dialogical acculturation Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram disapprove the universal models of acculturation as they “erase the social situations and culturally constructed nature of hybrid identities and fail to recognize the diversity and variability involved as immigrants and their children struggle to come to terms with their multiple voices and worlds” (Bhatia and Ram, 2007: 638). The policy of multiculturalism that calls for the recognition of the diversities is applicable by the dialogical process of acculturation as outlined by Charles Taylor. The emergence of a new dialogical diasporic self, whose
identity is dynamic and not static, is the product of post-colonization and post-modernism.

The humans are self-conscious, self-defining, self-regulating, self-appraising/defending and self-transforming beings interacting with their natural, cultural, political, social and personal environments. They live in this world not only as beings that are constituted by the initial practices, traditions, institutions, norms and acquired meaning, but also as beings that can change or reconstruct the pre-given structures of practices, actions and traditions. Pointing at this “capacity for transformation and reconstitution” as the source of human freedom, Satya P. Gautam states:

Not to try to accomplish this unique human potentiality is a choice that we make for which again we are ourselves responsible. Instead of viewing the social structures of power and domination as naturally given, we need to see them as human creations and capable of reconstitution (Gautam, 2003: 46).

Human beings are always endowed with the freedom to conform to or not to do so before any form of injustice, oppression or subversion and stand by the values at any cost. But the apprehension of exercising such freedom to refuse to conform and face the consequences, overpowers the individual leading to the other option of acting otherwise and end up without using the right to freedom and responsibility. Unless such traditions and practices are reevaluated for and by the newer generations, they turn into the dead burdens of the past. If such traditions and practices, the defining factor of the community’s identity, are considered static and fixed, then it would not be possible that the characteristic dynamism and vitality of the traditions take cognizance of the new unforeseen developments like the postcolonial and postmodern social, political and economic conditions. Satya Gautam reaffirms the fact that the societies/communities that attempt to freeze their cultural traditions as absolute and final become atrophied because they become incapable of acknowledging their immediate contemporary conflicts and problems (Gautam, 2003: 50). For the Parsee community, their rigid endogamic norms in order to maintain their racial purity have taken its toll on the community’s existence itself. A feeling of insecurity and anxiety among the minorities has always been an external threat and the Parsees are so small a
community in permanent minority that they cannot escape this fate anywhere on the
globe. No country is free from such discrimination, be it India or America or Canada.
Being the miniscule minority in their Indian as well as the recent western diaspora,
the ethnic anxieties and identity-crisis make them feel insecure and threatened by the
possible subjugation to or submersion in the dominant Hindu or Christian
culture/religion, a nightmarish prospect which they do not want to ever come true.
Alongside this sense of insecurity and identity-crisis, there are other disturbing ethnic
features namely declining population, late marriages, low birth-rate, high rate of
divorces, physical and mental health problems attendant on inbreeding, discriminating
attitude to the girl-child, urbanization, alienation caused by insularity etc. To regard
their cultural traditions as absolute and ultimate may be convenient to them as they
feel it necessary to contain and conceal the prevailing conflicts, tensions and
dilemmas within their community. This is often the case when the power to bring
about changes in a society is concentrated in the hands of either religious
heads/leaders or those sections or groups which, while claiming to be the advocates
and agents of change, do not want change as it would go against their interests and
privileges.

The Parsee diasporic writers are all sensitive to their community’s hopes and fears,
aspirations and frustrations, struggles for survival and identity-crisis. Their
marginalization in the postcolonial times due to the loss of the elite status and the
centrality they enjoyed during the colonial rule has been one of the reasons for their
migration in the West. The postcolonial and the postmodern conditions in the wake of
globalization have caused the dissolution of their long-cherished identity in the glitter
of the new national identities. To reclaim their lost identity is not possible in reality
and hence the diasporic writers attempt to retrieve it virtually in the imaginary
homelands recreated in their literature. Their latest dislocation has made them
renegotiate their identities in the new lands of their relocation and their never-ending
struggle continues. As chroniclers of the Parsee community, these writers are keenly
aware of their community’s predicament, i.e. ethnic atrophy syndrome which is
culture-specific, notwithstanding the fact that the culture depicted therein is subjected
to a slow and steady extinction. In N. S. Dharan’s words, ‘Parsees’ unmindful
submission to traditional religion combined with conventional behavioural pattern
devoid of ingenuity and social and political will to indulge in positive and
constructive understanding has accelerated the community’s journey towards sure extinction” (Dharan, 2001: 103). The community that has given India some of its best lawyers, musicians, industrialists, bankers and philanthropists is at the crossroads today. Barely 70,000 are left in India, less than 45,000 in Bombay and they are infinitesimal 0.01% of the Indian population. What is worrisome is that the community is increasingly becoming geriatric as more than 31% of Parsees are over 60 years, another 30% never marry even as the divorce rate is significantly high. Nauzer Bharucha quotes in his article in *The Time of India* an important finding by Dr Shernaz Cama, the Delhi-based director of Unesco-funded Parzor Project to preserve Parsee Zoroastrian heritage. She affirms that most Parsees do want to marry and prefer to find partners from within their community, “but being a progressive community with high expectations, they have an attitudinal problem” (Bharucha. 2010: 11). She diagnoses a chronic Parsee problem in the constant search for “perfection in their partner” and she prescribes to be “realistic”. Cama says the Union Government’s new Save-the-Parsees drive must include pre-marital counseling. The incentives and succour are provided to the newly-wed Parsee couples by procuring the housing facility to make them settle down fast and lead a stable family life. The Bombay Parsee Panchayat runs a fertility programme and the couples are encouraged to have two or more children by offering many incentives for their grooming and education. The BPP has many plans to help the Parsee youth but the most contentious issue which remains unsolved is the high-rate of inter-caste marriages, as high as 35 to 40%. It is undesirable by the conservative Parsees and the community is split over the demand by the Reformists to accept as the Parsees the children of Parsee women who marry outside the community and allowing conversion to Zoroastrianism. Even though, the majority of the community is largely opposed to all of this, a miniscule but influential section of the community comprising industrialists, solicitors, doctors and academicians insists on change in order to survive. As the Union Government of India budgets for the Save-the-Parsees drive during mid of March, 2010, Bachi Karkaria, the renowned Parsee journalist argues that only the ignited minds can rekindle the sacred fire. She presents the Parsee predicament with candid precision:

We are in a catch-22 situation. Keep our fiercely protected racial purity, and we lose the numbers essential to viability. Pump up the numbers with conversion or intermarriage and we must dump our distinctive identity. The increasing diaspora is perforce coming to terms with one verity: the Parsis as a
race may have to be sacrificed on altered reality, but their religion, Zoroastrianism, will undoubtedly survive. Because mixed marriages are almost inevitable there, many individuals or even groupings abroad have jettisoned the ‘Parsi’ label, and simply refer to themselves as free-floating ‘Zoroastrians’ (Karkaria, 2010: 11).

The epic tragedy of India’s Parsees is that, a millennium later, they find themselves in the same paranoia trap despite their immense communal wealth and even greater fund of secular good earned by their contribution to the country’s intellectual, economic, social and cultural reserves. They have not been able to arrest their dwindling demography or their cultural isolation for which this exemplary people themselves are to blame because they have become the exact opposite of everything that once made them iconic. They miss many things which this gifted and talented people had achieved with telling success. Karkaria very aptly analyses the reason for this downtrend and says that the locks the community has put on its membership and its places of worship are but symptoms of a deeper malaise – the shutting down of a once-inspiring mind. The once adventurous community now lives in ghettos. Their legendary sense of humour has made them very endearing people who have now lost that ability to laugh at themselves. It may be due to the loss of their self-confidence. It needs to be investigated if their gradual reduction of spirit is the outcome of their increasing alienation, marginalization, deep paranoia and the looming death-threat to the community.

The obvious and immediate solution to the depleting number would be to welcome into the Parsee fold the progeny of those girls who married into the other faith/religion in the same way as usually the children of the men who have gone for interfaith marriage. Karkaria’s suggestion is actually meant for intellectual and open-minded Parsees. “But to suggest this is both heresy and high treason” (Karkaria, 2010: 11). The absurd response of the religious heads to this rational suggestion might be to decide to ostracize the children of the men as well. This makes any one think if they are seriously concerned about their imminent extinction. It is absolutely just to adopt an even-handed approach and attitude. Their attitudinal problem is evident when to question the set norms is branded an act of blasphemy and sedition. Karkaria very emphatically supports the rebellious spirits and thus enhances and celebrates multiculturalism that calls for supporting and recognizing the differences within the
community, she suggests reviving and re-invoking the inquiring minds that took the Parsees to the zenith once. She writes,

But the sparks of hope could come from outside the swaggering power base. In Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad, smaller Parsi-Zoroastrian communities are quietly making adjustments to changed realities, with no loss of identity, only greater unity and happiness. May be they need to secede even further, and show the Bombay Brahmins what’s possible and desirable. Opening windows is the best known cure for the claustrophobia of closed minds (Karkaria, 2010: 11).

And Gustad in Mistry's *Journey* is shown to remove the dark papers from the ventilators at the very end of the novel. It has the symbolic significance which means that the darkness of rigidity and ignorance be removed by letting the light in. Also in Desai’s *Elephants*, Homi instructs to turn the air-conditioning off and allow the fresh air in the hospital where he is lying on his sick-bed. It also indicates that the community is becoming sick by adopting such unhealthy and closed mindset.

Through questioning and revolting one need not reject the tradition altogether but may modify it by adding new elements or discarding the irrelevant elements or beliefs or traditions. The new Parsee identity is emerging through the internal multi-vocal dialogical negotiation within the community. It would, in fact, articulate the space between the old traditions and the improved/reformed ones in the context of not only India but the global scenario. More such interstitial space imparted to the Parsee individual might enhance the Parsee ethnicity and promote their survival drive. The Parsee writers’ diasporic consciousness and sense of displacement evoke this issue of their identity and through the characters of their novels; they are engaged in defining this hybridity in the identity of their community. Straddling multiple cultures, these Parsee novels advocate an embrace of plurality and celebrate hybridity, interactions and intermingling of human beings and ideas and the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of them revealing the diasporic consciousness of the writers. These novels are not just the chroniclers of the ‘Parseeness/Parseepanu’ or the Parsee ethnicity to leave the records of their existence, in case of their extinction in future, but to document their struggle for identity and survival in the context of various internal and external forces of intolerance. One needs to give a more serious consideration to the emergence of the new hybridized identities at the interstitial
spaces at the local as well as the global levels which offer promising opportunities against the received identities. The identities which reconstitute and reorient the communities’ self-images and lived experiences are likely to be more flexible, accommodating, potential to versatility though more complex than they have ever been in the past.

The politics of difference can thrive as a resistance against the homogenizing discourse of globalization or the melting pot phenomena of the nation-states only if there are communities, groups, institutions, cultures and networks of the people of colour, caste, religion, region etc. that “cultivate critical sensibilities and personal accountability – without inhibiting individual expressions, curiosities and idiosyncrasies.” (Halley et al¹, 1997: 518). The phenomenon of multiculturalism, responsible for the production of diasporic writing and itself an aspect of postmodernism, promotes the politics of difference. In this given situation, actually resultant of globalization, identity is no longer integral or unitary or essential; rather it is fragmented, shifting and fluid, shaped by multiple sources and assuming multiple forms. This is how; the postmodern conditions strangely connect the local and the global. The global development through the internationalized economy and culture reflect back by its socio-political influence at the national level. Hence, ethnicity receives a renewed impetus. The slogan ‘think globally and act locally’ applies to a number of new social movements, like feminism and most recently the diasporic one.

It is noticeable that a new significance has been lent to place/region and travel/journey that lead to the re-discovery of territorial identities, local traditions and history by means of memory and imagination. This kind of leaning eventually results into the diasporic literature that creates the imagined communities or nationalities. What is noteworthy about the diasporic writing is that the accountability and responsibilities of the diasporic citizens go across national boundaries. Bhim Dahiya rightly comments:

The earlier modernist notions of centre and margin, home and exile, and familiar and strange are falling apart. The borders defined in terms of Geography, culture and ethnicity are being replaced by configurations of power, community, space and time … In our time, new spaces and identities and relationships have to be created which permit people to move across boundaries, to engage difference and otherness as part of a discourse of justice, social engagement and democratic struggle (Dahiya, 2007: 33).
This inevitable shift indicates that literary writers and critics provide diacritical spaces that offer new opportunities for bringing various social movements together. In doing so, there can be a reconsideration and re-speculation of “democracy as a struggle over values, practices, social relations, and subject positions that enlarge the terms of human capacities and possibilities as a basis for a compassionate social order.” (Halley et al., 1997: 129).

However, it needs to be emphasized that the diasporic literature, despite its prominent ethnic fervour is not anti-global. Any good art would transcend the local and the transient and rise to whatever is universal and valuable in man and life. The theoretical inquiries into politics and ideologies, self and otherness, Euro-centrism and Orientalism, difference and difference are, in fact, not postmodern conceptually but they have been probed by the creative writers as well as the critics from the time of Homer and Plato to our time under the purview of literary criticism inclusive of moral, didactic and most importantly aesthetic inquiries. These earlier concerns should be restored while comprehending any literary work, either just for aesthetic experience or for the critical appreciation of it. To do this, it ought to be admitted that literature, including the diasporic, is art; and not journalism or politics or sociology or psychology or anthropology alone, but a combination of all these, brought under the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth.

NOTES

1. Tiresius is one of the most significant characters in the classical Greek Mythology. He is cursed with bisexuality and blindness but gifted with foresight. Many writers like Sophocles, Euripides, Homer, Tennyson, Swinburne and Eliot have used this legendary persona in their own ways for various purposes and interpretations. Maybe, Mistry wants to convey that the immigrant is like Tiresius, destined to live dual lives but gifted with the vision of an outsider, a spectator.
2. Jasbir Jain states that ‘belonging’ includes

i. recognition and acceptance and a place in the community and culture to which one wishes to belong.

ii. that on part of a newcomer / outsider it also implies a change, a transformation or surrender of some part of the self.

iii. the change called for affects a total reconfiguration of memory, history and cultural values even it does not call for a total abandonment (Jain, 241).

WORKS CITED:


2. “The Postmodern Condition”


