Chapter Two

The Politics of Identity / Difference and Cultural Hybridity in Parsees
Introduction to Identity – Politics:

The new post-colonial nation-states have been grappling with the problems of ethnicity, religion and representation; and trying to bring under control the post-modern capitalist societies seeking to balance the demands of their new citizens for justice, equality, the opportunities and the privileges to be different. In this scenario, multiculturalism serves well to meet the new demands involving several dimensions of this recent experience. Identity, and with it self-respect and dignity are clearly some of them; a sense of belonging to a community, to a religion, to a nation is another; a sense of locality, of a commitment to a place is third; and fourth is a sense of history arising out of a link to the collective memory of the past traced through kinship and family tradition. Multiculturalism, in its principle and praxis, requires from mankind receptivity to difference, openness to change, passion for equality and ability to recognize the familiar selves in the strangeness of others (Watson, 2002: 110).

The revolutionary changes in the means of transport and communication and expansionist capitalism have accelerated globalization and brought the far-situated societies closer and bound into a system of interdependence. As different societies come together, there is a deepening of diversity between and within them, and it is the need of the time to find ways of coping with its challenges that come up at both the domestic and the international levels. Globalization also challenges the traditional identities, whether they are ethnic, cultural, religious or national. And as these come under pressure, personal identity too cannot remain stable. It is going to be affected eventually with many kinds of changes taking place all around, and also in the institutions in terms of which human beings generally define themselves. The perplexed individuals, placed in the novel multicultural circumstances, face the agonizing question as to how to organize their lives and define and construct their identities. There is a need to rethink and redefine the traditional assumptions, categories and even questions if the challenges of the present age are to be comprehended and responded. The changing nature of different kinds of identity and the political principles that guide human relations within and between societies are to be explored. The problems require to be approached in the spirit of human solidarity.
For that it is required to energize and consolidate “our shared humanity” or what Parekh calls “our human identity” (Parekh, 2008: 2). Identity-politics has so far been defined and conducted in terms of particular collective identities, such as those based on gender, ethnicity, religion and nationality. While this is important, it is as crucial to affirm the universal human identity, locate particular identities within its framework, and engage in what Parekh calls a “new politics of identity”.

In taking this view, Parekh differs from both; the particularists, who think and live within the limited horizon of whatever particular identity or identities they consider central and the cosmopolitans and abstract universalists for whom these are all closets and the only goal worth striving for is an unmediated unity of the individual and the human kind as a whole. Both of these are the impossible extreme poles and the reality lies somewhere else in between. Hegel is closer to the truth when he argues that the two identities are dialectically related, and that one does not reach the universal in a single leap, but climbs up to it through a series of mediating stages. As Hegel states, each is incomplete and needs the other as its necessary complement. So, Human beings are the bearers of both the universal and particular identities. As the bearers of particular identities, they are related to some individuals by varying degrees of special ties. While some of these ties and the identities associated with them are relatively marginal, others are central. They give depth and meaning to their lives as well as a sense of rootedness and belonging. Bhargava also endorses this view that only those beliefs and desires that a person strongly values and finds worthy are crucial to his or her identity (Bhargava, 2002: 81-82). He calls these the “identity-constituting beliefs and desires”.

A valued framework provides a person with a springboard from which to aspire to do or be something. This aspiration to be moved by something regarded as valuable is central to the notion of commitment. Hence, there is an inseparable link between commitment and identity. Indeed, the identity of a person is defined by the commitments to the acquired values and identifications with the prescribed socio-political set-up. It is the horizon within which a person is capable of taking a stand. Bhargava, here, comes closer to Taylor and underlines two points which are worth noting. First, the world of meaning can only be held in common with others. A human individual recognizes his identity in socially defined terms. Since these desires and
beliefs emerge through interaction with others, it might be legitimate to assert that the
identity of a person is largely a matter of social construction. Second, beliefs and
desires have two modes of existence; they exist as mental representations of which
individuals are conscious but also manifest directly in action. In fact, it is even rarely
represented in one’s consciousness. All one possesses is a practical sense of these
beliefs and desires and this sense is enough to guide one’s behaviour. Furthermore,
some beliefs and desires are embedded not exclusively in the behaviour of an
individual but rather in an interlocking behavioural system of several individuals at
once. When this happens, the result is a social practice. Many of our identity-
constituting beliefs and desires exist directly embedded in such social practices and
therefore, are undoubtedly collective. Community is a network of such practices in
which identity-constituting beliefs and purposes are embedded. It follows that the
identity of a person is directly embedded in particular communities and its knowledge
is not fully present in the person’s consciousness. The link between the identity of a
person and his or her community lies deep and is not entirely explicit. This explains
why issues of identity sometimes appear not to matter at all, and at other times,
nothing matters more than them; the very existence of a person hinges on such issues.

The Concept of Identity:

Parekh very well makes this issue of identity clear when he specifically categorizes
the two types of identities and their roles in human existence. He writes:

Our common human identity and particular identities, and the concomitant
morality of impartiality and partiality, are the inescapable and central facts of
our life, and need to be integrated in a coherent framework. The human
identity remains abstract unless it is anchored in and enriched by our particular
identities. The latter, in turn, are embedded in, indeed made possible by, and
nurtured and limited by our shared humanity. We are not homogeneous
instantiations or specimens of the human species. We attain glimpses of our
universal identity not by abstracting our various differences, but rather by
comprehending imaginatively distant millions in their uniqueness, and thus as
beings who are at once both similar and different, or rather similar by virtue of
being different. Global interdependence requires us to act in the spirit of
human solidarity and activate our human identity…. We should respect these
identities but redefine and restructure them in the light of, and bring them into
harmony with, the universal human identity. (8)
Analyzing the concept of identity he argues that it involves identifying oneself as a particular kind of person and, when appropriate, with others of that kind. He suggests that the individual identity has actually three dimensions; the personal; the social; and the human. The first identifies an individual as a unique person performing multiple roles as mother/father, son/daughter, spouse, friend etc. The second dimension of the individual identity is the one in which a person is a member of the particular group or structure of relationship. The third represents a person as a member of the universal human community. These three dimensions are intertwined and inseparable, each presupposes and makes sense only in relation to the others, and forms part of what he calls individual identity or the overall identity of a human being.

Exploring the interconnections of these three types of identities, Parekh states that they flow into each other. The individuals begin their lives shaped by countless formal and informal social influences and construct their personal identities reflectively and also reflexively. They carry them into their various social identities, roles and relationships, and define, interpret and value them appropriately. The social identities, in turn, flow into their personal identity and shape it in different degrees. When one identifies with one’s social roles and relationships, they become part of one’s self. One’s sense of self or personal identity expands to encompass them and one cannot define oneself independently of them. Our human identity has a similar logic. As one defines oneself and others as human beings, one sees oneself not merely as unique person and bearer of particular social identity, but also as particular kind of being who shares a common humanity with others and is subject to their claims. Parekh further says that one’s identity as an individual includes one’s values and commitments as well as those individuals and communities with whom or which one identifies. Identity is therefore best understood in relation to the world one builds and calls one’s own, and is located not in any particular feature or relationship but in the quality and content of that world. The world that is thus created is relatively stable but changing and impermanent. It might expand and shrink, take in new individuals or relationships. Hence, one’s identity is in a constant flux. “Individual identity has an inescapable historical dimension, and is best accounted for in the form of a story, a narrative, of how one came to construct one’s world in this way” (Tully, 2000: 471). Since one’s identity involves others, it has its centre which also is thus inextricably tied up with the stories of significant others, and cannot be told in isolation from
theirs. Identity has a complex and overlapping logic and critical self-reflection plays a significant role in its construction. But one need not be self-conscious or constantly worried about it. The lives of the people are defined by the way the personal, social and human dimensions of their identity are constructed, reconstructed and harmonized. It all depends as much on the individuals as on the society and the world.

**The Politics of Collective Identity:**

The individuals do not see themselves as abstract entities devoid of attributes. The different ways of life, reflect their circumstances and express their distinctive identities. Having multiple identities, invoking specific identities in different spheres of life, and reacting to the perceived identities of others, all seem to be socio-culturally embedded. Both the self-perception of one’s multiple identities and perception of and reaction to the identities of others are learned as part of one’s socialization. The community to which one belongs largely acts as the anchor of self-identity. Despite the forces of modernization, the exposure to liberal philosophy, the formal recognition of the atomized conception of the individual and the adoption of the universal impersonal categories of modern law, an individual’s identity remains primarily meaningful only in group terms. Collective identities have proven far more durable in the face of economic and political change than was envisaged by social scientists, though they have their dangers too, along with their strengths (Tazi, 2004: 146). The paradigm case for this particular conception of collective culture has been the nation, the ideal of what Benedict Anderson defines as an imagined political community, inherently limited and sovereign. It is ‘imagined’ because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members meet them or even hear of them; yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communities (Anderson, 1991: 6). It is imagined as a ‘community’ because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship (Anderson, 1991: 7). In this framework, the question of identity has been restricted to the dimension of belonging. Belonging to such a community -- a culture in common -- has been regarded as the fundamental condition for self-expression and self-fulfilment. According to David Miller, such an identity “helps to locate us in the world, tell(ing) us who we are, where we have come from.
what we have done (Miller, 1995: 175). If this suggests the meaning and appeal of collective identities for those who belong, the rationale for the collective unit with which they identify should also be recognized.

Every society is distinguished by a dominant body of beliefs and practices concerning the ways in which its members should lead their individual and collective lives. It privileges some forms of life, social relationships and groups, and disapproves of and imposes different kinds of formal and informal sanctions on others. Dominant and conventional discourses on identity may be characterized as being essentialist. They make the assumption that the identity and distinctiveness of a group is the expression of some inner essence or property. From such a perspective, identity is a “natural” and “eternal” quality emanating from within a self-same and self-contained individual or collective entity. More recent and critical accounts, however, have tended to adopt an anti-essentialist position, and emphasized the socially constructed status of all identities. “Identities are seen to be instituted in particular social and historical context, to be strategic fictions, having to react to changing circumstances, and therefore subject to continuous change and reconfiguration” (Bennet, Grossberg and Morris, 2005: 73).

What is also made clear is that identities cannot be self-sufficient; they are, in fact, instituted through the play of differences, constituted in and through their multiple relations to other identities. An identity, then, has no clear positive meaning but derives its distinction from what it is not, from what it excludes and from its position in a field of differences. This logic of distinction may also work in more problematical ways, where differentiation becomes polarization, with one identity positioned in radical opposition to another, to what is regarded as the fundamental alterity to its other. This is the case, for example, in the revitalized idea of civilizational difference, with its speculations about the escalating “clash of civilizations” (Huntington, 1996). This is the dark side of identity as it, in its strategies of differentiation, depends on the creation of frontiers and borders in order to distance and protect itself from the imagined threat of other cultures. The resonant post-September 11, image of a world polarized between “civilization” (the West) and “barbarism” (the rest) spoke directly of such anxieties. It can be said, then, that there is often fear in the soul of identity. In all such cases of wars and strifes, one is
required to define one’s identity not only in terms of what one is not, but also what one is against.

‘Difference’ emerged as a keyword in cultural politics in the late 1960s. It became a central principle in the political imagination and thinking of a wide range of so-called new social movements that have proliferated in the 20th century. In these contexts the word “difference” -- literally, the quality of being unlike or dissimilar -- loses its descriptive innocence and becomes a highly charged concept (Bennet et al, 2005: 84). It becomes an expression of dissent or critique of the oppressive social homogeneity imposed by the hegemonic sections of society/State. It is the basic condition of possibility of various oppositional forms of identity-politics and works to expose and challenge the hegemony, for instance, of the advanced First World countries of the West. Even within this world, it is the ‘white male’ that dominates. The discourse on difference has been a major concern and object of the strong debate among the theorists. The term has gained much specialized, complicated and political connotations. The binary oppositions are the extreme forms of exclusive differences like white/black, man/woman, self/other etc. In such dichotomies the same and the different are often placed in a hierarchical relationship, as the different is purely negatively defined as that which is not the same, or as that which is deviant from the norm or the normal. The idea that binary oppositions describe systems of domination has been the focus and the starting point of much further criticism and debate, both in the field of theory, especially poststructuralist critical theory, and in conceptions of political practice which have come to be associated with post-modernism. In theory, Jacques Derrida criticized the unambiguous fixity of meaning that is implied in binary opposition by introducing the term ‘differ`ance’, which signifies that which both precedes and exceeds binary oppositions and hence unsettles or destabilizes and defers meaning. This notion of unsettling binary oppositions has played a crucial role in enabling the articulation of modes of ‘politics of difference’. It has challenged the essentialist notions of identity as the affirmation of fixed difference.

The question of identity -- both individual and collective -- has become increasingly salient over the last decade as a consequence of the social and cultural transformations associated with globalization. In the eyes of certain observers, the proliferation of transnational cultural flows, of people, of commodities, of media and information has
seemed to work to destabilize settled and established essentialized identities. It has been felt that the national frame, in which people have constructed their identities and made sense of their lives, has been significantly challenged. There has been the sense that societies are increasingly becoming culturally fragmented, while at the same time being increasingly exposed to the homogenizing effects of global markets. It seems as if older certainties and points of references are being eroded, to be replaced by neo-consumer values and the ready-made identity options. Globalization is consequently seen as heralding an “identity-crisis”. And the response of those who feel that their identities are thus being undermined has often been to hold on to and to reassert their familiar, ‘traditional’ cultures and identities. A new mobilization of ethnic, cultural and religious identities is seen all around the world. For some others, however, global change has seemed to be about something quite different: about the loosening of old identities that had become restrictive and limiting and about opening up of new possibilities, involving more complex and variable identifications. From such a perspective, the theorists have argued about the emergence of new kinds of post-modern subjects and identities. The situation has become such that the subject/self assumes different identities at different times, not unified and coherent always. Within the ‘self’ are contradictory multiple identities, pulling in different directions; so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about and negotiated. The ascribed identities are seen to be giving way to new possibilities of identification involving choice and negotiation. In these new possibilities of identifications, there is the accommodation of pluralism and diversity in place of unity and change and transformation in place of continuity. The negotiable nature of identity is acknowledged and accepted. For some, identity is considered as a kind of performance and this disillusioning process is not regarded at all as problematic. But it does involve deeper and much more complex socio-political implications. Globalization has expanded the repertoire of identity but more significantly, it has been working to change the basis of our relation to identity.

The dominant culture in any society or State privileges some forms of life; social relationships and groups and disapproves of and imposes different kinds of formal and informal sanctions on ‘other’. In their search for recognition, the subjugated collective identities challenge and seek to redefine the prevailing norms that marginalize them. They complain reasonably that the dominant culture denigrates their identity, requires
them forcefully to conform to their alien norms, oppresses and humiliates them, discriminates against them and inflicts varying degrees of psychic and other injuries on them. In the context of the Indian society, the exclusion of dalits from the mainstream socio-political domain is another such illustration. They have been facing the humiliation, injustice, inequality, cultural domination and exploitation from the upper-castes for centuries. The caste-system, divisions within Hinduism, and the processes of inclusion-exclusion are governed not only by religion but are also deeply influenced by the forces of economic and educational development. The closed mobility of the caste-hierarchy, a social construct, has made the matters worse. There have been strifes and conflicts in the caste-ridden Indian society consisting of multiple diversities regarding language, religion and culture. Today, the cultural nationalistic ideology is confronted with several competing inclusionary cultural discourses supported by the principles of democracy, the imperatives of the civil society and the forces of globalization and liberalization of economy, culture and society. The inclusionary ideology anchored in the democratic process and institutions has the utmost potential for the building of India as a nation in the midst of multiple competing ideologies. The character of the Indian multiculturalism can be sought in the context of the Indian society’s historical experience that has involved conflicts and clashes and has been undergoing constant negotiations.

In another example, women argue that the prevailing patriarchal culture views them as sexual objects, inferiorizes them, expects them to live by norms that are set by the men to favour themselves, devalues them and denies them the opportunity to express themselves freely and fully. They have been facing gender-discrimination universally and being excluded from various public spheres which are dominated by men. They have been denied opportunities in the matters of education, employment prospects and also in other socio-cultural, political and economic fields. Homosexuals complain that the prevailing sexual norms devalue their forms of sexual fulfilment, treat these as a kind of physical or mental sickness and force them to lead the shadowy and self-alienated lives. Black people argue that the dominant racist culture reduces them to their colour, views them as inferior or not fully human and expects them to pursue goals and lead lives that conform to norms set by white people. The working classes, indigenous peoples, lower-caste in India, religious minorities and others express similar views. The group involved demand not only equal civil, political, economic
and other rights but also equal respect and public legitimacy or ‘recognition’ for their marginalized identities. Their struggle requires them to organize themselves and pursue their objectives collectively. Since their objectives include not just rights and interests but also respect, dignity and the recognition of their identities and their organizations, their demands are based on a shared sense of collective identity.

Parekh very well discusses the politics of collective identity as a mixed blessing (Parekh, 2008: 33). He states that the marginalized and inferiorized groups are sometimes criticized for invoking the abstract and quasi-absolutist language of identity rather than pursuing their objectives in a more familiar and manageable universalist language of equal rights and interests. The language of identity also shifts the focus of discourse. Elaborating on this point, he takes up the women’s demand for equality as an illustration. It implies that women not only have interests and needs for which they should speak for themselves and in their “own voice”. Others might be able to speak for them but when they articulate their own views on their place in society and also on what kind of society they want, it establishes them as a distinct and self-determining social subject capable of playing an active role in shaping the society and its culture. Their distinct identity gives them a different point of reference, perspective and a sphere/space of their own. It also provides a common ground where they can meet as women to share their experience, articulate their common concerns, arrive at a view of the kind of society they want and the best way to promote it, and in these and other ways raise their level of self-consciousness. Their gender identity also enables them to ask how women in the past viewed themselves; get connected with their struggles and experiences; and construct an inspiring historical narrative based on that link. The collective self-consciousness and the sense of solidarity that it generates impart women’s identity a historical and cultural depth and reinforce their sense of self/subject-hood. This has rendered women intellectually visible, and capable to express their own points of view. They have made it both possible and necessary by making their voice heard and their presence felt. In so doing the feminist discourse has also deepened the understanding not only of women and men but of human life in general, enabling to see the aspects of it that otherwise would have been oversighted.
What is true of women is also true of black people, homosexuals, other marginalized communities, indigenous peoples, lower-castes/dalits in India, religious minorities, the proletariats and other such groups. In each case, the discourse of identity expresses and facilitates the emergence of a new social subject with a distinct viewpoint/perspective. Those involved meet on common ground, forge ties of solidarity, and feel empowered by articulating their intellectual and political concerns. They command public attention and do not become absorbed into a wider agenda. Those who were hitherto confined to the margins of society and defined in negative terms now give themselves a positive identity defying the discrimination/exclusion and demanding inclusion and positive discrimination. “They display new energy and passion, challenge the narrow universalism of the hegemonic culture, and enrich it with new perspectives and sensibilities” (Parekh, 2008: 34).

Apart from the advantages, the collective identity also has its perils. The first danger is that it tends to essentialize the identity, imposing a uniform view on all its members and dismissing the non-conformists and dissenters as victims of false ideology or misguidance. It reflects the controversial attitude and negates its own principle of the protest against the tyranny of the oppressive norms. The second peril is the possibility of accentuating the differences between the binary oppositions as the attempts to emphasize the commonalities are discouraged and also discouraged even the favourable voice of the ‘other’. No outsider is allowed to transgress the boundary. For example, men cannot articulate in the name or on behalf of women. Such support is generally disowned by the feminists who think that only women can understand their problems and know what they really think, feel and want. This is, indeed, unreasonable as the support from the ‘other’ should be rejoiced as a step in the positive direction. Instead, there is a tendency to exaggerate the minor differences and create conflicts where there is none. The result is the politics of conflict and hostility. It raises a crucial, worrisome question as to how the differences would be resolved between the closed groups and common affairs would be conducted in the society with sharp divisions. The third risk is that of internalizing and naturalizing a historically acquired identity. The ascribed identity with the derogatory qualities of the suppressed collectivity makes the basis of the superiority of the other that is ascribed with the positive qualities. To accept uncritically such identity built by this
dual process means to remain enclosed within and perpetuate their history of subordination.

This is true of all kinds of collective identities like blacks, women, gay people, dalits, aborigines, indigenous peoples and others. These groups have long been subjected to marginalization and inferiorization and their current sense of identity carries deep traces of their past and present domination. They need to interrogate it, trace its roots, expose the politics of which it is a consequence, and decide freely how they wish to define themselves. Unless they do so, the politics of collective identity generates yet another self-contradiction. The more the groups involved assert their historically inherited identity in the name of authenticity and freedom, the more they express and perpetuate their heteronomy/different identity. Though the politics of collective identity establishes solidarity among the marginalized groups, empowers them, imparts focus and moral energy to their cause, and opens up the possibility of pluralizing the dominant culture, it has the above discussed tendency to become narrow and authoritarian. After identifying the major dangers, Parekh examines each in turn to show how to retain what is valuable in the politics of identity while avoiding or dealing with its limitations (Parekh, 2008: 37-41).

To tackle the first danger, the reasons for the essentialization of the collective identity have to be analysed. There are the three most common reasons; namely, concentration on one identity to the exclusion of others, an objectivist view of identity and the political pressure for organizational unity. If, the essentialization of the identities is to be resisted, then their plurality and interaction are to be appreciated. The second reason why a collective identity is essentialized has to do with the view that identity is inherent in one’s social being, and a matter of discovery. This is a not completely true because a collective identity has both the objective as well as the subjective sides. Indeed, it has its basis in one’s experiences, history and place in the social structure and these are objectively given or ascribed and not a matter of personal choice, like an untouchable in a Hindu society, a woman in a patriarchal society or a worker in a capitalist society. The social identity is not given passively but is a product of interpretation and evaluation and that it has an inescapable personal or subjective dimension too. The third reason for essentialization is the political struggle for the recognition of identity and promotion of interests associated with it, generating a
pressure for the unity of views and purpose and encourages its essentialization. Members of the marginalized groups do run the risk of being politically played off against each other, and their dissenting minorities utilized as a tool to discredit the groups’ views of their identities and demands. The answer to it, however, does not lie in imposing a false unity. When the members of a group genuinely disagree about the nature and implications of their identity, about what it means to be a black, a gay, a woman or a Muslim or a low-caste, their differences in matters of such importance are strongly felt and cannot long be suppressed and ignored. More importantly, such suppression defeats the emancipatory goal of the movement, and denies individuals the freedom to define their shared identity as they think proper. It is vitally important that individual speaking and acting on behalf of others should respect their disagreement and dissent and aim at no more than a broad and inherently fluid consensus. Whenever possible, the group should be democratically constituted, so that those speaking in its name have the appropriate authority and reflect the consensus. Members of an identity group can arrive at a broad consensus as a result of their shared experiences and concerns. If these are absent, the group has nothing in common and lacks a shared collective identity.

The second drawback of the politics of collective identity is its tendency to create a sharp distinction and even opposition between closed identities. This tendency has several sources of which three are common; namely, essentialization of identity, failure to appreciate overlapping identities, and the oppositional view of identity. The first source has already been discussed as to how to deal with it. The second is mistaken because human beings have not only plural but overlapping identities. Blacks and whites differ racially, but might belong to a common religion, class or political community. Separate at one level, they are related at another. Given the commonalities at various levels, relations between groups rule out sharp distinctions and polarization. The third source of the oppositional view of identity is based on the belief that identity involves knowing not only what one is ‘not’ but also what one is ‘against’. It is argued that identity remains indeterminate, blurred and lacking in focus, unless it is separated sharply from and contrasted with its opposite. This is also often thought to be strategically necessary to avoid being co-opted by the dominant groups with a vested interest in stressing commonalities. Black people, women and dalits, for instance, are urged to draw a clear line between them on the one hand, and
white people, men and upper-castes on the other, and to resist the appeal to their shared humanity or whatever else they are supposed to have in common. They should, it is argued, insist on speaking for themselves and ‘reject’ white, male and upper-caste participation in their movements, however sincere and well-meaning it appears to be, because it is bound to introduce alien sensibilities, disturb their collective consciousness, dilute or deflect their struggles, or subsume them under a different agenda. This view is deeply flawed, although it is attractive to the marginalized groups for both epistemological and political reasons. The allegedly opposed identities are in fact interdependent and products of the common system of social relations. Blacks make no sense without whites, nor women without men. The same social system that identifies some as white also identifies others as black and creates an opposition between them. And the same culture that classifies some qualities as manly classifies others as feminine, and draws a neat boundary between them. The basic opposition is not between whites and blacks or between men and women, but rather between them on the one hand and the wider social and cultural structure on the other, which they both have a common emancipatory interest in changing.

The opposed identities are also interdependent at another level. Since identities seek social recognition and acceptance, they necessarily make demands on others. Women cannot liberate themselves from patriarchy by some kind of unilateral declaration of independence; men too must change their views and attitudes. Blacks cannot challenge racism and negative stereotypes on their own; whites must also co-operate by being willing to reconsider their views of themselves and of blacks. The lower castes/dalits cannot fight the oppression and injustice on their own; but need the understanding and compassionate neutrality from the upper-castes. Gay people cannot enjoy equal respect for their sexual identity unless others are persuaded that it is a legitimate form of sexual expression. Marginalized identities therefore need to defend their claims before others. To do so they have to argue for themselves with the appeal to some commonly shared values and principles. But they must be wary of not allowing any of these commonalities to be politically misused against them. In fact, they must win over those they can to strengthen their stand. Thus, they can help themselves to create a culture that takes a more considerate and accommodative view of their identities. Such an approach would support in boosting a democratically strategic protest and would definitely gain wider support. For these and related
reasons, the politics of identity needs to go beyond conflicts, confrontation and polarization, and find ways of forging wider cultural and political alliances.

The third limitation of the politics of collective identity is related to its tendency to naturalize or accept uncritically a historically inherited view of it. To take the example of the lower-castes/dalits in India, they define and distinguish themselves from the Brahmins or the upper-castes in terms of certain psychological and moral characteristics acquired since the Vedic period when the ancient Indian society had been segregated into four ‘varnas’, the hierarchical strata as per the nature of the professions of the individuals. The dalits persist with this view of identity out of inertia, lack of imagination, failure to see its historical origins, intellectual indolence or a misguided sense of ancestral loyalty, and perpetuate the legacy of the past system of domination. They need to interrogate such a reactive view of their identity and decide freely how they wish to define themselves. The same is true of other collective, subordinated identities like the blacks, women etc. This involves replacing the positivist view of politics, a vehicle for asserting a pre-existing identity, with a critical, transformative and reflective politics in which marginalized groups challenge their inherited identity and create the conditions conducive to self-determination. In the former view, an allegedly pre-political identity dictates one’s politics while in the latter, it is constituted in the course of political struggle and is a collective achievement. In identity-based politics, again the marginalized collectivities like dalits, for instance, accept uncritically the historically inherited view of their identity, use it to explore dalit studies, dalit literature, dalit curriculum and dalit perspectives on education, and demand the rights and opportunities needed to express their dalit identity. While appreciating its historical and political value, an identity-creating politics proceeds differently. It asks why human beings are defined in terms of their castes or gender or colour or class or religion, and why and how particular identities were constructed historically. By these and other related interrogations, the critical politics of collective identity does two things: it deconstructs, traces the origins of, and challenges the prevailing manner of thinking about the relevant identity; and it also seeks to change the social structure that generates this way of thinking and depends on it for its self-reproduction. The socio-political and cultural struggle this generates, aims to create a democratic society in which individuals freely decide the basis and content of their constantly reconfigured collective identities.
The demand by the marginalized and inferiorized groups for equal respect and treatment for their identities implies uniform or identical treatment in matters where their identities are not relevant and differential treatment or positive discrimination where they are. They need the support to come up with the advantaged and privileged identities. The demand for public recognition of identity is not a recent innovation. Many earlier societies respected the cultural, ethnic and religious differences of their minorities and treated them according to their own customs and practices, which they were expected to carry with them as an integral part of their collective identity. Nation and nation-state also influence the politics of identity by generally supporting the dominant identity and thus reinforcing the homogenization. In fact, nation itself is a contested space where the sub-national identities interrogate the idea of nation. Nationalism from the nineteenth century onwards was basically about the recognition of the identity of subjugated national groups. The current movement for recognition is new because, among other things, it encompasses a wider variety of groups, articulates its demands in the language of rights and justice, and occurs in a culture that is often inhospitable to group-based claims. When the groups are treated unjustly and when their members are humiliated, oppressed, denied equal respect or subjected to unequal treatment because of their shared characteristics, these forms of injustice cannot be explained and tackled in individualist terms. They, therefore, call for appropriate forms of collective actions, including both a collective struggle and collective remedies.

Justice concerns not only the State but also the civil society at large and each of its members. Self-esteem and a sense of identity are socially constituted and depend on confirmation by others. Members of the dominant group, in both their formal and informal encounters, treat target groups with disdain; humiliate them, avoid them, make offensive remarks about them, damage their self-respect and in general make their lives a nightmare. There are thus multiple agents of injustice, including not only the State but also the social practices that institutionalize/naturalize humiliation and contempt of different groups and their members. The state can certainly help by institutionalizing the equal dignity and rights of its citizens and taking public cognizance of their identities, but its role is limited. It cannot do much about demeaning social practices and individual attitudes and actions. That requires changes
in the moral culture and ethos of society, and the attitude and behaviour of its members. This is very much true in the social and cultural context of India that is ridden with the complexities of caste-hierarchy and the evil of untouchability for centuries. Despite the provision of the protection of individual self-esteem and the core democratic values like equality, justice and liberty in the Indian Constitution to set the people free from the possible humiliation, the dalits/low castes have been still suffering the torturous and oppressive treatment from the upper-castes even after nearly seven decades of independence. Gopal Guru has attempted to make theoretical sense of the phenomenon of humiliation and has initiated a discourse on humiliation in the Indian context. Though Dalit Literature has been an important medium of articulation and expression of recurrent concern on humiliation, it has not yet been able to unfold the many nuanced aspects of humiliation and hence there is a need to theorize it. According to Gopal Guru, “such literature tends to focus more on the phenomenon that has happened or has been practised. There is hardly any literature that could suggest caste of mind that is repository of humiliation and archaeology of untouchability, as the minefield of humiliation” (Guru, 2009: xi). The discipline of sociology does offer very detailed accounts of the humiliating practices of untouchability but seldom delves deep into the psychological depth that causes those particular practices. In the West, it is the racism, like untouchability in India that is the base and content of humiliation. The study of humiliation, through its interdisciplinary thrust, seeks to incorporate within itself the concepts from history, anthropology, social science, psychology, political theory, legal studies and moral philosophy. The concepts of justice, equality, dignity, recognition, nationalism, multiculturalism etc. can be expanded in relation to the discourse on humiliation.

Since individuals and humiliating social practices can cause injustice, how people treat and speak about others becomes a matter of justice. This partly explains the emergence of political correctness, or what is better called political decency, in recent years. It represents a protest against stigmatization, intended or unintended humiliation, subtle and crude ways of keeping others in their place, triggering their painful personal and collective memories, and perpetuating inequalities of power and esteem. The basic concern underlying political correctness is valid. All speech is action, and reflects and reproduces a particular way of structuring social relations. There are just and unjust ways of talking about others and laughing at their foibles
and idiosyncrasies. Since language is a powerful tool of regulating and determining human behaviour, a just society may rightly subject it to formal and informal check. So, the State, although critically important, cannot be the sole focus of attention. The social awareness is equally important to dissociate humiliation from the very structures of the society. Parekh attempts to deal with such institutionalized humiliation and points at such societies which are based on slavery, racial segregation, hierarchical strata, untouchability and caste system (Parekh, 2009: 23-39). Drawing on the philosophical line of Hegel, Kant, Rousseau and Taylor, the East and the West have endeavoured to reorganize the ethical and moral make-up of their modern societies within which the vital normative need of self-recognition and self-respect of the human beings would be realized.

**Multicultural Societies:**

Cultural diversity is much conspicuous global reality of modern life. Culture refers to a historically inherited system of meaning and significance in terms of which a group of people comprehend and organize their personal and collective lives. It manifests in its beliefs and practices which collectively constitute the group’s identity. “To say that almost every modern society is culturally diverse or multicultural is to say that its members subscribe to and live by different, though overlapping systems of meaning and significance” (Parekh, 2008: 80). Cultural diversity in modern society arise from the presence of the ethnic, religious, cultural and other communities, with their more or less distinct bodies of beliefs and practices. Immigration is also a significant source of diversity. The immigrants bring their values and ways of life with them and create diversity in the multicultural social milieu they take refuge in. Members of diasporas return to their lands of origin in large numbers, either in their old age, or because these countries have now become more prosperous than when they left them, or because the countries of their origin are now free of the political problems that had brought about their original departure. When they return, they all bring with them the ideas and practices acquired abroad. Since the sources of cultural diversity are likely to last till the foreseeable future and since new forms of diversity appear replacing the old ones, it is more or less a permanent characteristic of modern life. The indigenous peoples, the territorially concentrated minorities, the sub-national groups, the religious
communities and the immigrants represent different forms of diversity and require different responses.

A brief comparative analysis of the multicultural situations/circumstances of India, Canada and America would be imperative to create a backdrop against which the literary texts under study can be better viewed. As stated by Kushal Deb, the ongoing debates in Canada on minority rights and multiculturalism can be analyzed at three levels which are actually interlinked and furnish the context for the debate. At first level is the issue of the status of Quebec, a province with a dominant French-speaking population. It demands the status of distinct society with self-governing rights. Secondly, there are problems regarding the aboriginal groups who can be further categorized as Indians/the ‘First Nations’, the Inuits/Eskimos and the Metis (descendants of Europeans and aboriginal women). The issue of the ethnic immigrants from the various Asian and European nations constitutes the third level of analysis.

Comparatively, the situation is different in India as far as the relations between the majority community, i.e. the Hindus and the minorities, particularly the largest minority community, i.e. the Muslims are concerned. The debates on minority rights and multiculturalism usually revolve round their relationship, though the minority communities, dispersed all over the country, have not made any territorial claims. The right to maintain their specific cultural and religious distinctiveness and heritage has already been granted to them under the Indian Constitution. There has been dissatisfaction among the majority community of the Hindus that the minorities have got extra support from the Constitution and the secular democratic forces of the country have been accused of pseudo-secularism. There has been a raging controversy concerning the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code to replace the Personal Laws of the communities. The uniformity of civil laws within the nation has been insisted so as to help removing the discriminating practices against women. There had been tensions between the Hindus and the Sikhs in the 80s. The recent attacks on the Christian missionary organizations and the revival of debates regarding conversions by right-wing organizations like Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad have also brought into focus the strained relations between the Hindus and the Christians in India. The controversial fall of the Babri Masjid in 1992 has widened the divide between the Hindus and Muslims in India then onwards.
Like the aboriginal groups of Canada, India too has a large tribal population and considerable amount of disparity has been noticed about their induction into the developmental process of the nation. The tribals have suffered land alienation, displacement and exploitation. These issues have been hardly taken into account in recent debates on multiculturalism and minority rights in India. The issue of rights of the immigrants that exists at the third level of analysis is not relevant in India, a developing country. In fact, there is an out-migration from India to the developed nations like Canada, USA and UK. The various immigrant ethnic communities in Canada demanded that the government should take care of them and their cultural interests too. Reacting to these pressures, the federal government of Canada and some of the provincial ones too officially adopted the policy of multiculturalism in the early 70s. It has been widely criticized as a political ideology for pacifying the immigrants and diluting the demands of the French-Canadians and the aboriginals.

As against these, the multicultural circumstances in America are quite different. Though there are no provincial claims like the Quebecois, there are the marginalized Native Americans and other indigenous people. There are also racial conflicts among the white, brown and black settler/immigrant communities from the various parts of the world. The strategy of assimilation, i.e. Americanization, explained with the analogy of ‘melting pot’ is still relevant. But India’s diversity puts America’s claims of being diverse in shade. In India, as against the United States, many linguistic and cultural groups are identified with a territory that the group dominates or once dominated. There is no such equivalent situation in United States. In India, many languages are recognized as official; in the United States only one. Any major groups in India – religious or caste – are not identified with any specific territory but are national in scope, scattered in number in many Indian states. As such, India and Pakistan, the twin nations were born by the Partition of the Indian subcontinent on the religious lines. Then there was the creation of Bangladesh and trouble in Punjab for separate Khalistan. After the division of Maharashtra and Gujarat, three more states have been formed and the demands of the few more not yet met. India needs to be wary of these secessionist tendencies of her internal forces. But there is much greater political recognition of these varied diversities in India than in the United States. There are official national holidays for various religions and there is a national system
of reservations in the sectors of education and employment for the lower castes and tribes. There is nothing equivalent in Canada or in Australia. The issue of a ‘composite’ culture raises much more important and different questions in India than in USA, Europe or Canada. India will have to find her own way to reconciliation and recognition of the diversities in her multicultural society.

Convergence of Identities and Hybridity:

Immigrants are the archetypal strangers to whom the society does not feel the same degree of commitment as it does to its own minorities, and who highlight the dilemmas and tensions of a multicultural society more than the indigenous minorities do (Parekh, 2008: 81).

There have been certain common misconceptions about immigration. It is wrong to think that the society had been culturally homogeneous before immigration began and could be made so again by ending it. As generally, the flow of migration is from the Third World to the First World countries, the immigrants belong to different religious, ethnic and other groups. They should neither be viewed with prejudice as non-whites, nor be homogenized and nor their different aspirations, cultural resources and ways of relating to the wider society be ignored and looked down upon. They should not be exoticized as ‘ethnics’ just because they look different, speak differently; come from unfamiliar countries and their moral and cultural lives are different. The immigrant ways of life often differ from those of the receiving society in important respects but these differences should not blind the people to their commonalities and human dignity. Moreover, the contemporary immigration differs from those of earlier times in many respects and should not be expected to follow the same patterns of assimilation and integration which cause the cultural pulls and the resultant stress from the culture shock. Earlier immigrants before the twentieth century and even during the world war period often came as refugees fleeing persecution and political trouble in their countries, and felt profoundly obliged to the host society for providing them a shelter and a new lease of life. They came with their families, and this helped to support their new life and served as an anchor. They were keen to assimilate, had virtually abandoned their homelands, and neither wished to nor could retain close ties with them because of poorly developed modes of transport and communication. This kind of migration was in a way forced by the political circumstances and their
assimilation to the receiving socio-cultural and political environment was partially voluntary out of obligation and gratefulness and partially forced. By contrast, the contemporary immigrants have often been recruited for their labour and skills, so their relationship to the receiving society is largely professional and contractual and is devoid of an element of gratitude. Many of them belong to the former colonies and arrive with mixed emotions. They are keen to retain their ties with their homelands, which modern technology facilitates. The current cultural and political climate is also more amicable and hospitable to their desire to maintain their identity than was the case earlier. So, the migration as well as the assimilation is mostly voluntary and hardly coercive. Having such immigrant collectivities within the multicultural set-ups, the western societies like the US, Canada, Australia, UK, and New Zealand thus face a historically novel situation, and need to cope with it.

The methods of coping with such cultural conflicts are reflected in the various acculturation strategies adopted by the individuals at either side to respond to the stress-inducing new cultural contexts. These methods of acculturation have been classified into four types by the researchers like Berry and his colleagues (Berry and Sam, 1997: 297). This four-fold classification includes ‘assimilation’, integration’, ‘separation’ and ‘marginalization’. Berry and Sam suggest that the ‘assimilation’ strategy occurs when the individual decides not to maintain his or her cultural identity by seeking to mix and interact with the dominant group regularly. When the immigrant individual or a person from a minority group places more value on holding on to their original culture and seeks no contact with the dominant group, then they are pursuing a ‘separation’ strategy. It is an ‘integration’ strategy when individuals express an interest in maintaining strong ties in their daily life both with their own as well as the dominant groups. The fourth strategy is ‘marginalization’ in which individuals lose their cultural, social and psychological contacts with both traditional ethnic culture and the larger society (Berry, 1998: 119). Another set of models prescribed by La Framboise et al include assimilation, acculturation, alteration and multiculturalism.1

An influential body of the assimilationists argues that a society cannot be cohesive and stable unless its immigrants assimilate into the prevailing culture and become like the rest. They argue on the metaphysical and ontological basis that human beings feel
at ease with those of their kind and find it extremely difficult, next to impossible, to identify with those that they recognize as strangers. But for the immigrants, if they want to be accepted, there is no choice but to assimilate into the national culture of the host country, and change their inherited or ascribed identity for the one derived from their new country undergoing a kind of cultural rebirth. Contrarily, if they remain loyal to their culture, retain close connections with their country of origin, and in these and other ways remain different, the assimilationists maintain that they should not complain if the rest of the society refuses to identify with them and treats them as being unequal. Both the choices are not cost-free, and the immigrants must decide for themselves which one is better for them. In any acculturation strategy, the onus is ultimately on the immigrants. The assimilatoinist approach is not without merit, but it wrongly asks for a greater degree and range of unity than is possible or necessary.

Assimilation has actually no limits, as the direct or indirect coercive tendency springs from the intolerance of differences and even the smallest of these can arouse anxiety, hostility and conflicts. The belief that human beings prefer and identify only with those of ‘their own kind’ is controversial. If that were so, inter-cultural and inter-religious friendships, neighborhoods and matrimonial alliances as well as the reasonable success of the policies of multiculturalism in the societies of Canada, Australia and the US would be inexplicable. In fact, two human beings are never fully alike. They share some beliefs, values, tastes and attitudes but differ in others and learn over time to live with their differences in a complimentary manner. It is a very complex and not a simple and smooth process as the assimilationist imagines. There are many moral, social and psychological constraints. The assimilating person is never quite sure when one has become assimilated fully and whether one is accepted. He constantly becomes conscious of his social acceptance. One is therefore constantly anxious to prove to oneself and others that one has assimilated and is generally loud and earnest to show that one has endeavoured to imitate the most. Such anxiety makes one’s strangeness even more visible. “One is constantly at the mercy of ‘others’, who alone are in a ‘position to certify’ whether or not, and how much, one has assimilated, and remains constantly insecure, subordinate and heteronymous” (Parekh, 2008: 84).

Since the assimilationists’ expectations are unjust, illiberal and unpliable, many multiethnic societies have in recent years proposed integration as an alternative model of acculturation. It appears to be a perfectly reasonable and sensible goal, as
immigrants should be encouraged to become an integral part of the receiving society, and should have the same rights, opportunities and obligations as the rest. But looking deeper into it, the idea of integration is practically not as just as it seems. It involves a particular way of accommodating outsiders into the prevailing social structure, and is sometimes either indistinguishable or only negligibly different from assimilation. Like assimilationists, the integrationists too see integration as a one-way process and the most unjust and unreasonable point here is that again the onus to integrate is placed on the immigrants, and so is the blame for their failure to do so. But this is a misleading concept of the process of integration. Integration, though frustrated as much by segregation as by rejection, is actually a two-way process, requiring both immigrants and the wider society to adjust to each other and requiring the host society to be more hospitable and welcoming. Otherwise the immigrants would not gain any advantages of integration from their side and be left in a cultural limbo, uprooted from their own community without acquiring a reasonably strong foothold in the new one, despite their sincere efforts at several levels: political, economic, social, moral and cultural. The immigrants might not integrate at all the levels always but at some of these levels and not at others. They might, for example, integrate economically and politically and play their full part as productive workers and active citizens; but prefer to be linked socially to their communities in matters like matrimony retaining strong commitment to their country of origin. They would like to confine their close friendships and social ties to their own community, or limit their cultural interests to their own traditions. Integrationists see such partial or limited integration as a sign of separateness, a refusal to integrate completely, and devise all kinds of policies to discourage this behaviour. From their point of view; integration is a highly valued national goal and defines the quality of one’s membership of a nation. If the former is partial and limited, then so is the latter. Partially integrated immigrants remain suspected of their loyalties which might be divided between two countries, and are viewed by some as legitimate targets for unequal or discriminatory treatment. Some integrationists do not share such an extreme view of integration as it takes closer to forced assimilation in which the purpose of the strategy of integration is marred. They appreciate that immigrants might wish to, and indeed have a right to, retain parts of their cultural identity, and that integration could and should be limited mainly to society’s common institutions. Some members of society might consider them enough, whereas others might argue that society cannot be cohesive unless integration
is extended also to the moral, social and cultural areas of life, and that allowing immigrants to integrate partially is to privilege them over other members of society (Parekh, 2008: 85-86). Even if an agreement could be reached on the areas of life that are essential to integration, the problem persists. The immigrant’s self-interrogation about his identity or collective identity still continues. The hybridity resulting from such cross-cultural exchange is what problematizes the issue of identity-crisis.

The term ‘hybridity’ has been most recently associated with the work of Homi. K. Bhabha whose analysis of colonizer/colonized relations stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the ‘Third Space of enunciation’ (Bhabha, 1994a: 37). Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical ‘purity’ of cultures untenable. For him, the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the ‘exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate:

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or post-colonial provenance (origin). For a willingness to descend into that alien territory… may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity* (Bhabha, 1994a: 38).

It is this ‘in-between’ space that carries the burden and meaning of culture, and this is what makes the notion of hybridity so important.

Hybridity has frequently been used in postcolonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural ‘exchange’. This use of the term has been widely criticized, since it usually implies negating and neglecting the imbalance and inequality of the power-relations it refers. By stressing the transformative cultural, linguistic and political impact on both the colonized and the colonizer, it has been regarded as replicating the assimilationist policies by masking or ‘whitewashing’ cultural differences. The idea of hybridity also underlies other attempts to stress the mutuality of cultures in the colonial and post-colonial process in expressions of synchronicity, cultural synergy and
transculturation. The criticism of the term stems from the perception that the theories that stress mutuality necessarily downplay oppositionality, and increase continuing postcolonial dependence. There is, however, nothing in the idea of hybridity as such that suggests that mutuality negates the hierarchical nature of the imperial process or that it involves the idea of an equal exchange. This is, however, the way in which some proponents of decolonization and anti-colonialism have interpreted its current usage in colonial discourse theory. It has also been subject to critique as part of a general dissatisfaction with colonial discourse theory on the part of critics such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Benita Parry and Aijaz Ahmad. These critiques stress the textualist and idealist basis of such analysis and point to the fact that they neglect specific local differences. The assertion of a shared post-colonial condition such as hybridity has been seen as part of the tendency of discourse analysis to de-historicize and de-locate cultures from their temporal, spatial, geographical and linguistic context, and to lead to an abstract, globalized concept of the textual that obscures the specificities of particular cultural situations (Ashcroft et al, 2000: 119-20).

Postcolonial studies have been pre-occupied with issues of hybridity, creolisation, mestizaje, in-betweenness, diasporas and liminality with the mobility and cross-overs of ideas and identities generated by colonialism. Robert Young explains that a hybrid is technically a cross between two different species and that therefore the term ‘hybridization’ evokes both the botanical or horticultural notion of inter-species grafting and the ‘vocabulary of the Victorian extreme right’ which regarded different races as different species (Young, 1995: 10). However, in post-colonial theory, hybridity is meant to evoke all those ways in which this vocabulary was challenged and undermined. One of the most striking contradictions about colonialism is that it needs both, to ‘civilize’ its ‘others’ and to fix them into the perpetual ‘otherness’. The colonial empires both fear and engender biological as well as intellectual hybridities. Macaulay’s famous words; ‘a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect’ (Anderson, 1991: 91) has the underlying premise that Indians can mimic but never exactly reproduce English values and that their recognition of the perpetual gap between themselves and the ‘real thing’ will ensure their subjection. This is also the case with the hegemonic host-culture vs. the immigrant’s culture or for that matter, any binary opposition having the hierarchical power-relations, i.e. man/woman, Black/White etc. It is Homi Bhabha’s
usage of the concept of hybridity that has been the most influential and controversial one within recent postcolonial studies. Bhabha goes back to Fanon to suggest that liminality and hybridity are necessary attributes of ‘the’ colonial condition. For Fanon, psychic trauma results when the colonized subject realizes that he can never attain the whiteness he has been taught to desire, or shed the blackness he has learnt to devalue. Bhabha amplifies this to suggest that colonial identities are always a matter of flux and agony. In an essay about Fanon’s importance for our time, Bhabha writes:

> It is not the Colonialist Self or the Colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness -- the White man’s artifice inscribed on the Black man’s body. It is in relation to this impossible object that emerges the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes (Bhabha, 1994b: 117).

For Bhabha, however, this image evokes an ambivalence that can be read not just by marking the trauma of the colonial subject but also characterizing the workings of colonial authority as well as the dynamics of resistance. Colonial authority, he suggests, undermines itself by not being able to replicate its own self perfectly. This gap, for Bhabha, marks a failure of colonial discourse and is a site for resistance:

> …resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or the exclusion of the ‘content’ of another culture, as difference once perceived… (but) the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference (Bhabha, 1985: 153).

Bhabha’s writings are indeed useful in insisting that neither colonizer nor colonized is independent of the other. Colonial identities -- on both sides of the divide -- are unstable, agonized and in a constant flux. This undercuts both colonialist and nationalist claims to a unified self, and also warns against interpreting cultural difference in absolute or reductive terms. However, despite the accent on hybridity and liminality, Bhabha generalizes and universalizes the colonial encounter. Thus, ironically, the split, ambivalent, hybrid colonial subject projected in his work is, in fact, curiously universal and homogeneous -- that is to say, he could exist anywhere in the world. Hybridity seems to be a characteristic of his inner life and not of his positioning. He is internally split and agonistic, but undifferentiated by gender, class or location. As Ella Shohat suggests, one needs to ‘discriminate between the diverse
modalities of hybridity; for example, forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political co-optation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence’ (Shohat, 1993: 110). Arif Dirlik also makes the point that currently, hybridity seems to be understood as uniformly between the post-colonial and the First World and never between the post-colonial intellectual and another and he suggests that conditions of in-betweenness and hybridity cannot be understood without reference to the ideological and institutional structures in which they are housed (Dirlik, 1994: 342).

One such reason for the current imbalance may be that the experience of migration or of exile has become, in the Western academy, emblematic of the fissured identities and hybridities generated by colonial dislocations. The themes of alienation, national longing and transnationalism mark the experiences of diasporas. It is true that the migration of peoples is perhaps the definitive characteristic of the twentieth century, and in crucial ways diasporic identities have come to represent much of the experience of ‘postcoloniality’. But while there are themes in common across different kinds of diasporic experiences and exiles, there are also enormous differences between them. The experiences and traumas generated by the single largest population shift in history -- the division of India and Pakistan -- are quite different from another enormous movement that of immigrants from once colonized nations to the countries of the First World, Europe or America. The experiences of diasporas are marked by class, race, religion, gender, nationality and also by the histories that shape each group that moves. The space from where these diasporas speak is ideologically or politically or emotionally a fractured space. These different kinds of dislocations cannot result in similarly split subjectivities: each demands dense contextualization of the kind provided by Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall (1993, 1996).

The point, then, 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 postcolonialism. Here, in the case of diasporic experiences, instead of interrogating how immigrants can be assimilated or integrated, it should be asked how they can be equal citizens and be bound to the rest by the ties
Common belonging refers to a broadly shared feeling among the citizens that they belong together, share common interest, are bound to each other by a common system of rights and obligations, depend on each other for their well-being, and wish to live together in peace. It is a two way process. Immigrants cannot belong to a society unless it is prepared to welcome them and conversely it cannot make them its own unless they wish to belong to it. Common belonging requires a broad consensus on what is expected of each party, and can only be achieved if each discharges its part of moral covenant. This does not mean that immigrants should sever their ties with their country of origin, or may not enjoy dual nationality or even dual citizenship, just as a marriage does not require the spouses to disown their parental ties. Such an expectation is unfair, unreasonable and unnecessary. In fact, they are expected to fulfil, as Radhakrishnan suggests (1996: 211), the dual accountability to both the countries, the country of origin and that of settlement. What can be hoped from the immigrants is that they should look at their country of settlement as their home, whatever other homes they might also happen to have. It should have an intrinsic value for them and not just be a place to make money or to escape persecution; and immigrants should provide reasonable evidence of their commitment to it. Such a commitment shows respect for the prevailing way of life and would earn them respect in turn. It establishes their good faith, qualifies them for full membership, and entitles them to make such demands for rights and opportunities on the rest of society as their process of settlement requires. When the immigrants begin to settle, the prevailing definition of national identity needs to be taken into account if they are to feel at home in and identify with the country. This is never a smooth process, but actually involves a lot of inexplicable complexities, especially on the part of the immigrants who take the generations to neutralize or merge with the host milieu.

The history of the US provides a good example of this. For decades after its foundation, Americans were expected to be White, Protestant and of British decent. Other European immigrants, including the French and the Dutch who were associated with the founding of the country, were seen as insiders-outsiders, citizens having a second class status and expected over time to assimilate into the Anglo-Protestant culture. Subsequent European immigrants, indigenous peoples, black slaves, Asian immigrants, Jews and others faced even greater problems. Over time, and after a
considerable struggle, American society became more open and compliant and had no rigidly grouped social or cultural structure into which its immigrants had to fit, as still remains the case in many European societies. The American identity too shed its narrow racial and cultural specifications and requirements and became available to all its citizens. An American can now be white, black, brown or yellow; Protestant, Catholic or Hindu or of any religion; native-born or a recent arrival and does not have to speak with a standard accent. Black, Asian and newly naturalized immigrants of any nationality have no hesitation in identifying themselves as Americans, and neither their fellow citizens nor outsiders are the least puzzled by such claims. This dissociation of national from ethnic, religious and other identities is a phenomenon of remarkable historical achievement and has credited the US with one of its greatest contributions to the theory and practice of multicultural societies. As immigrants come to be accepted as part of a country’s natural identity, the country looks at its past and constructs its historical narrative from a multicultural perspective (Parekh, 2008: 96).

As a result, the political community begins to appreciate its multi-ethnic/cultural composition, and realizes that its current diversity is not a recent or an unfamiliar development, but an ongoing feature of its history, and comes to terms with it. For their part, immigrants also view this phenomenon objectively and appreciate that the country has known many like them in the past, and they are one among many alike in the present and that they too will one day become a valued part of it. This causes complementary and positive transformations in the understanding of their identity. The receiving society consequently recognizes its new members, expands its self-definition or sense of identity to accommodate them, and its citizens no longer think of themselves as a majority in opposition to an immigrant minority. The immigrants too realize that they are gradually becoming a part of society; not a minority, but equal citizens like the rest. Hence the line between the power relations starts getting blurred. Their own sense of identity is not relinquished, the traditional American conception of melting pot or the cultural ‘rebirth’ implied in; but becomes more or less a valued component existing in the interstices or the Third Space of liminality/in-betweenness of their new identity that they share with the rest of their fellow citizens. “Common belonging with immigrants is ultimately about the expansion and convergence of the identities of the two parities that are central to it, and is secure
when both the language and the consciousness of majority and minority are transcended” (Parekh, 2008: 98). The convergence might be of more than two or multiple identities creating the ‘mestiza’ consciousness.

In Parekh’s view the political imagination of any historical community has its limits. It is, therefore, necessary for every living culture to have a theoretical and moral space for a critical but sympathetic dialogue with other ways of life equally respected. Different cultures can thereby complement each other, widen each other’s horizon of thought and familiarize each other to new forms of human life with enhanced sense of fulfilment. Drawing from Taylor’s premise, Parekh too believes in creating identity ‘dialogically’. A good multicultural society, as envisaged by him, accepts the reality and desirability of cultural diversity and structures its political life accordingly. It is dialogically constituted and generates a body of collectively acceptable principles, institutions and policies. By dialogical constitution of the political framework of a multicultural society, he means a robust form of social, economic and political democracy to ensure that its constituent communities receive both just recognition and a just share of economic and political power (Parekh, 2006: 343).

The solution is not as easy as it seems. Various reasons have already been discussed as to why the discourse on multiculturalism has become so salient an issue within the socio-political domain in the post-colonial and post-modern era. Multiculturalism ultimately calls for a large-hearted humanitarianism, the much sought after underlying ‘common culture’. It would be apt to conclude with the quote by Joseph de Maistre:

In the courses of my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians; I ever know, thanks to Montesquien, that one can be a Persian; but ‘man’ I have never met (Maistre, 1797: 102).

**Parsees, a Miniscule Diasporic Community of India:**

Dr. Bharucha believes that the Parsees are the single largest group of ethno-religious/minority discourse practitioners among the Indian English writers (Bharucha, 1996: 357). The term ‘minority’, which had been given the connotation of ‘religious minority’, seems to be out of date in India. Recently, sensitive persons
from the intelligentsia with a literary and academic bent have been proclaiming, irrespective of their caste, creed, class or religion, an alienation from the prevailing ‘culture’ of the eighties and the nineties – a ‘culture’ which seemed obsessed on bringing out the narrow, parochial or even worse the ‘non-acceptance of anything-other-than-what-I-have-to-proclaim’ tendencies of some of the so-called ‘leaders’ in various parts of India. Many of the newly emerging groups and even some regions such as the North-East, have felt alienated. This was a major departure from the secular ‘unity in diversity’ and ‘sarva-dharma-sambhava’ philosophy on which was based the Constitution of India. The sensitive individuals have felt not merely alienated but betrayed. Their anxiety is not only for themselves, but even more for their progeny who would grow up in an intolerant land. Those who could, would migrate to “greener pastures” abroad and those who could not, would seek solace as inward-looking recluse in their own self-created ghettos, where they would interact and intermingle with only those who felt themselves ‘like-minded’ and would prefer to ignore or be ignored by ‘others’. There is this ‘ethnic anxiety’, experienced by the minorities in India, has been felt by the Parsees too. It has been reflected in Parsee literature too. Several critics, while analyzing the works of Parsee writes have shown how a lot of Parsee Literature offers resistance to the dominant, hegemonising forces within India. Above all, the Parsee Literature has been seen as minority discourse and what it means to be a Parsee Zoroastrian in the post-modern India.

A historical perspective is essential to understand the dilemmas, identity-crisis and problems of this microscopic Parsee community in India as aptly reflected in Parsee Literature. The Parsees are the descendants of the Iranians who had sought refuge in India in the eighth century A.D. when Iran was conquered by the Arab invaders. The Arabs demanded that the defeated Iranians who practised the ancient monotheistic Zoroastrian religion, convert to Islam. Consequently, many Zoroastrians fled from Iran to escape the religious persecution and sought refuge in India carrying with them the urns containing their sacred fires, the symbol of their faith. Several history books dealing with the exodus of the Parsee Zoroastrians to India have stated that after fleeing from Madyan in Iran they first arrived at the port of Diu in the eighth century A.D. After their stay for about 19 years, they set sail towards the south and landed at the port of Sanjan in Gujarat, then under the rule of the liberal monarch, King Jadav Rana. The Dastoor, the priest who was heading these refugees approached the King,
narrated their tales of woe and sought permission to settle down in Sanjan. At a public assembly, the Dastoor gave details of the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism in sixteen Sanskrit ‘shlokas’. It is learnt that initially Jadhav Rana was hesitant about giving shelter to the refugees from Persia, as he was uncertain about the reactions of his own citizens. The King’s first response was a sorrowful inability to accommodate the Zoroastrians on a permanent basis at Sanjan due to inadequacy of space.

At this crucial juncture, the Dastoor requested that an urn filled with milk to the brim be brought to the assembly. When it was brought, he took off his ruby-studded gold ring and dropped it into the urn. By this symbolic gesture, The Dastoor suggested that they were small in number like that tiny ring and could be easily accommodated. He also conveyed that just as the contents of the urn had not spilt over but become richer by the insertion of the precious ring; similarly, the Parsee-Zoroastrians would bring further prosperity to that area if granted shelter. Moved by the reasoning of this pious priest, King Jadhav Rana asked the Dastoor to narrate their actual requirements. The Dastoor replied that they desired freedom of worship, freedom to bring up children in their own traditions and land for cultivation so that they would become self-sufficient. Jadhav Rana agreed to these demands but imposed five pre-conditions for allowing Zoroastrians to settle in Sanjan. They were meant for nothing but forced assimilation of these refugees into the Hindu Gujarati host people preventing proslytization at the same time. These conditions were about accepting the Gujarati language and costume; venerating the cow; shunning their weapons and celebrating weddings at night time. These requirements actually drew the community closer together and estranged them from the Indian people. They were threatened by the deprivation of their language and hence their freedom of speech and cultural identity.

After accepting these stipulations, the learned Dastoor made one more symbolic gesture to assure the king of their loyalty and diligence. He stirred a spoonful of sugar in a brass bowl full of milk and expressed the noble sentiment of maintaining the amicable attitude to the host people. Like that insignificant amount of sugar in the milk of the King’s human kindness, they would blend with the host community keeping their relationship sweetened. Emotionally overwhelmed by such sincere commitment, King Jadhav Rana granted asylum to the refugees in Sanjan. The High Priest pledged these words on behalf of his community:
The words of the Dastoor remained the basic credo of article of faith for Parsee Zoroastrians throughout their stay in India. It also reflects the characteristic sprit of adaptability of this minority community which enabled it to thrive in a multi-religious and multi-cultural country and contribute to it significantly. However, Nilufer Bharucha says that conditions and restrictions like adopting the local languages, costumes, customs, the taboo on the inter-faith marriages with the local population and never proselytizing led to the feeling of alienation within the community. She writes:

These unequal conditions provided fertile breeding ground for feelings of ambivalence and alienation from the host country. This ambivalence and alienation became exacerbated during the colonial period; when the Parsees were among the first to embrace English language education and become the most Westernized Indian community. Most Parsees thus felt bereft at the end of the Empire and the resultant loss of the special elite status they had enjoyed during the colonial period. Several migrated to the West in the 1950s and 60s (Bharucha, 1996: 358).

**Representation of Parsees in Indian English Fiction:**

Apart from the pre-colonial Parsee texts in Gujarati and Persian, ‘Garbo’ and ‘Kissa-e-Sanjan’, the Parsee voice in Indian English Literature was heard for the first time in documented creative expression especially of a bi-lingual poet in Gujarati and English, a journalist, a travel writer and above all a social reformer, Behramji Malbari during the British colonial rule. Among the other colonial writers of the Parsee diaspora in India are Cornelia Sorabji, the social activist and novelist, Fredoon Kabarji and A. F. Khabardar, the poets. All the three wrote in English. There are also Jamshetji N Petit and Jehangir B Marazban who wrote poetry in Gujarati. Cornelia Sorabji, like Malbari, was also a crusadingParsee but less radical than him. Sorabji is the first Parsee writer, even the first female Indian Parsee writer to have written out of a double diaspora, in India and in Britain. Bharucha compliments Sorabji when she states: “The fact that imperialism itself had been seen by Fanon and Said as a projection of extreme makes Sorabji’s mission even more important” (Bharucha,
Her Christian religion and British education and residence had further alienated her from India and this is reflected in her works. Like Sorabji, Kabarji too was in double diaspora. He too identified with Britain but was basically an Indian to the core. His admiration for England would not make him defend the British blindly.

“The colonial presence which had been a buffer between the Parsees and their Indian hosts was removed and the Parsees retreated into prudent silence” (Bharucha, 2003: 40-41). In the wake of decolonization, many Parsees immigrated to U.K, U.S.A and Canada and hence into their western diaspora. With the end of the Empire and the exodus to the West, the Parsee muse was still at the low ebb for decades to come. The silence was broken and the Parsee voice was once again raised in the major way in the 1980s, also a decade which marks the debut of the second generation of postcolonial Indian English writers led by Salman Rushdie. The literature written by the Parsee writers Bapsi Sidhwa, Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy, Dina Mehta and Boman Desai form the substantial part of the prolific resurgence of the Indian English Writing. In addition to these fiction writers, there are also Parsee playwrights and poets -- Gieve Patel, Keki Daruwala and Cyrus Mistry who have produced ethnocentric discourse. These Parsee writers are generally grouped as postcolonial writers who earnestly attempt to highlight the glories of their culture, restore lost values and give their own version of their social history. Their works have been analyzed from the points of view of the postcolonial theories. But while labelling them as the postcolonial writers, it should be noted that apart from conforming to the features of the postcolonial discourse, these writers are also engaged in creating their own ethno-religions spaces as the Parsee Zoroastrians. The differences of ethnicity, religion and gender also form the vital content of the postcolonial texts and not only the power-relations or suppression from or resistance to the colonial hegemonies. The texts of these Parsee writers can be studied highlighting their Parseeness or ‘Parseepanu’ as is called in Gujarati, though they are postcolonial at the same time. Dina Mehta and Bapsi Sidhwa are Parsees like Mistry, Desai, Dhondy and Kanga but their discourses have been mediated by their gender and this is the case with any female postcolonial writer.

However, as is evident in Parsee fiction, both, the Parsees who sought ‘greener pastures’ in the West and those who stayed on in India, have experienced identity-
crisis and confusion. In the West, the doubly displaced Parsees face the dilemma of being branded as just another community of sub-continental Asians, an identity they seek to eschew. In India, as reflected in the works of Rohinton Mistry, Dina Mehta, Firdaus Kanga, Boman Desai and Bapsi Sidhwa, this minority community has to cope with the hegemonic forces of the dominant community. The struggle to create their own space in the West as in India; the identity-struggle of what it means to be a Parsee Zoroastrian based on their memory of their historical narrative; and all the major problems, aspirations, hopes, ambitions and prejudices of the community are reflected in Parsee fiction which has flourished in the post-colonial era. All the concerns of the modern day Parsees namely declining population, brain-drain, late marriages, inter-faith marriages, funeral rites, attitude to the girl-child, urbanization, alienation, modernist vs traditionalist attitude to religion and the existence or non-existence of ethnic anxieties are aptly delineated, analyzed and investigated in the fiction of these Parsee writers. The community is not socially and economically disadvantaged or oppressed but in fact, the privileged and the prosperous one. Their forward-looking attitude and their rich contribution to India, their adopted country, has denied them a minority syndrome that is generally characterized by low rate of success and achievements. But these conditions and factors like prosperity, extreme individualism and urbanization alienate them. Statistics show that the Parsees are the most urbanized community in India. 94% of the Parsee population is urbanized as compared to 17% of Hindus. Also late marriages, low birth-rate and patriarchal laws about not accepting the children of Parsee woman married outside the community into the fold are taking their toll on this infinitesimal Parsee community in India. The population of the Indian Parsee has declined from about 1, 14,890 in 1941 to about 80,000 in 1997 and around 70,000 in the first decade of the 21st century. The statistics dictate the eventual annihilation of this race. If attitudes do not change, it seems unlikely that the Parsees will see another millennium change. Under these circumstances, the Parsee fiction would prove to be the record of the history of the Parsees for the ages to come. It probes into the creative thought process of the Parsee authors and offers insights about this minority community, extremely prosperous but their thin demography makes them paradoxically struggling for existence. Some Parsee writers, such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga, Farokh Dhondy, Boman Desai, Reshard gool and Saros Cawasjee are the expatriates who have settled in the western countries like UK, USA and Canada and belong to the
Parsee diaspora abroad. Most of them, struggling for their identity, write for the western readers. There is a point of view that some of these diasporic writers sell India’s exoticism to the West. Hence, the perceptions based on their expatriate experiences, comments on the dilemmas and problems of the community and their analysis will differ from their stay-at-‘home’ counterparts.

Looking from the newer points of view in the identity theories, this study would address problems like the conflicts between the cosmopolitan/multicultural visions of life and the insular/provincial ways of life, traditional Indian and Western multiculturalisms, the minority sensibility and its relationship with the mainstream life of the majority, its creative function in the recovery of the historical past and the redefinition of identity and the changing nature of identities in the Indian society in the various time-spans of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Also it focuses on the recent phase of their identity-construction abroad. The dissertation will primarily use the thematic analysis of the novels under study as its base. The novels under study are: The Crow Eaters, Ice-Candy-Man and An American Brat by Bapsi Sidhwa; Such a Long Journey, A Fine Balance and Family Matters by Rohinton Mistry and The Memory of Elephants, Asylum, USA and A Woman Madly in Love by Boman Desai. The concepts from the Social Sciences and Political Science such as multiculturalism, minority identity-politics and nationhood would be used as the methodological tools/aids to make the analysis more focused. The central focus would be to explore how these contemporary expatriate Parsee novelists use their fictional narratives to analyse the problems of self-definition/identity in the Indian society in the post-80s period; as well as the struggle for their recognition in the multicultural world abroad. Multiculturalism imparts a useful context to study this problem because it has both the Indian and the Western dimensions. It cuts across both tradition and modernity. The dissertation would provide an interesting study enabling us to grasp the complex undercurrents of the expatriate experiences as well as the changing nature and identity of the Indian society, especially with reference to the Parsee minority community.
NOTES:

1. The following strategies have been classified by La Framboise et al –
   i. The idea implicit in assimilation is that of the creation of a new culture by abandoning the past cultures.
   ii. Acculturation implies the idea of encouraging cultural diversity, but within the context of a strong commitment to national goals and institutions, thus expressing the idea belonging to two cultures at the same time.
   iii. Alteration again highlights the sense of presence in two cultures, with the idea that the individual is capable of alternating behavior according to the needs of a given situation.
   iv. Multiculturalism has been more often used to create a sense of the equal importance of all cultures, and so, the equality of all people, no matter what their cultural origins.

2. The five pre-conditions put forth by Jadav Rana before the refugee Parsees:
   i. To adopt the Gujarati language. The Parsees have adopted this language faithfully, have forgotten their traditional dialects and in any modern day census, reports indicate Gujarati as their mother tongue.
   ii. The women would wear the ‘sari’. The Parsee women have adopted the ‘sari’ as the dress of the community. They wear it in a Gujarati style.
   iii. Men should handover their weapons. All weapons were surrendered except two swords and two maces to protect the Holy Fire.
   iv. Venerate the cow. Due to this condition, the traditional Parsees still do not eat beef, though there are no religious taboos against the eating of beef.
   v. The marriage ceremonies shall be performed at night only. This condition was imposed so that the local population was not attracted by such a ceremony and hence the danger of conversion was minimized. The Parsees in the sub-continent still follow this tradition and do not even allow outsiders in the fire-temples, which is a further guarantee that they will not proselytize.
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