Chapter Five

Summation

The identity you're craving for is an illusion; your true nature has no identity, you're the universe -you contain all things!

- Aniekee Tochukwu

The researcher has explored to specify how the Parsi writer, Gieve Patel showcases the Parsi community’s strength, challenges, acceptances, endurances and resistances arising out of the cultural diversity in a multicultural society like India and emerges as a culture humanist raising his voice for the community. The probe has been done, delving into the Parsi cultural contours concentrating on their customs, rites, rituals, traditions, loyalties and mannerisms as recorded in a unique way by Patel in his writings. It has been realised by this study that Patel’s intention is to inspire his fellow Indians and others, who are not exposed to the Parsis much, to learn about fellow Zoroastrians. It has a point of beginning to talk about the faith and ethnicity, to righteously assume pride in their religion and their ancestors of the remote and of the recent pasts, and to sensitise and enthuse the dwindling Parsi community to once again find pride and joy in their rich heritage and to continue and rebuild the same. This exercise is carried out to unfold the Parsi identity that demands to be defined through a mention of settler’s attitude and not to impose on the readers any ideas or inferences nor in any way to sit in judgement on the ethical uprightness or otherwise of the Parsi psyche in upholding their identity.

Patel is at his finest in bringing out the cultural milieu by highlighting to a great extent the tiny community’s traditions, culture and customs, religious faith, loyalty, industry and philanthropy, and also its experiences and endurances, adaptability and acceptances, anxieties and aversions, and the resistance and exclusivities as they live in the dominant demographic space, India. The pride and well being of the Parsi community
constantly linger on Patel’s creative instinct and he succeeds in universalizing its triumphs and failures as well. The social commentary rendered by him as a conscious writer and his depiction of the cultural - interact and the modern tribulations bear the authenticity of an inside-outsider’s unbiased perspective on the Indian situation. In spite of the threat of demographic extinction, the Parsi faith in their unique identity and ethnic purity is unflinching and Patel emphasises this uniqueness by focussing on their way of living and cultural heritage in his writings. The creator’s instinct and the emotional attributes have been well established through his conceptions on accepting the settled culture. As an extoller and sympathiser of Parsi community and simultaneously a rational proponent and defender of the community’s regeneration, Patel has devoutly bestowed his creative energy in arguing for the cultural continuity as well.

It is understood that the Parsi community is a progressive one with a glorious past, striving hard to safeguard, sustain and enhance its exclusive culture for the future. Parsis bear an identity distinguished from the majority of other Indians, even after their existence in a dissimilar and dominant society for over 1300 years. They have steadily guarded their ethnic identities and religious practices and rituals through strict rules of endogamy and prohibition on conversions into their Parsi Zoroastrian community; their uniqueness is apparent in their religious practices and rituals. In their attempts to remain exclusive, they have their own brand of fundamentalism forbidding all interfaith marriages. They have been characterised by their distinct appearances, charisma and demeanour; so distinct that it is not difficult to identify a Parsi man or a Parsi woman even in the cosmopolitan Mumbai or elsewhere in India.

All communities have a historical consciousness; even the once timeless primordial race has acquired the right to a complex memory of the past, much of apocryphal nature and carrying imaginative stories of valour, or suffering for a pride. But
the past can be used in different ways to diverse ends. The Parsis use their past pride to define the primary sense of their present, but conveniently hesitate to take head on the current insecurity over survival caused by declining numbers. The Jewry exilic race with similar ancestral traditions like that of the Parsis, has quite contrarily a practical bent and, as Bertram holds, “centred its energies in the past upon the practice of that which had to be done – not upon the affirmation of an idea which was undisputed, nor in the vain endeavour to achieve that which was beyond human reach” (Patel 6). Unlike the similarly displaced Jews who returned or nurture a strong aspiration to return to their ancestral Land of Israel, Parsis do neither yearn for a return to ancestral homeland nor crave for a nationalist state of their own. Persia for Parsis has been a distant ideal paradise farther beyond which they have travelled to a point of no return and as Nilufer Barucha asserts return there has never been central to Parsi consciousness more so, the way back to Iran was also sealed by the consolidation of Islamic rule.

The Parsi community in India retains select exclusivities through “resistance and individuation,” and in its “strategies of survival” has often been identified as an amalgamation of cultures as it crossed frontiers, settled in the Indian subcontinent and came to be influenced by the diversities of India's cultures. It is known for its exclusivity in the preservation of its religious and ethnic identities unperturbed by the oddities posed in a dominant society. Their religion, Zoroastrianism, is so dear to them, that to preserve it, their ancestors abdicated their homeland and migrated; eventually as a diasporic community, Parsis are “a travelling religion” and much less “a travelling nation;” they are not nostalgic about a return to homeland, but are passionate towards their religion. Next to their religion, Parsis are obsessed towards the Persian kings and kingdoms who patronised their religion, and whose fall saw their ancestors out of Persia several hundreds of years ago.
The persecutions and tribulations in the hands of the Arabs of Iran forced the ancestors of the Parsis out from their homeland; they took refuge in Sanjan on the shores of Gujarat and adopted Gujarati as their language and the country as their own. Indian hospitality and tolerance allowed them to live free from fear and to practice their faith without significant strictures. It is observed that in the pre-colonial era, the Parsis were only land owners and small traders mostly confined to the present day Gujarat. On the advent of the Imperial European powers, several Parsi merchants migrated to the British colonies which served as an umbrella of protection for the Parsis from any sort of Muslim aggression. The British had a liking for the Parsis on the presumed “racial” similarity and proximity and found them significantly useful in dealing with the other natives; Parsi intercession with the then rulers and concessions obtained for the British was of help to the British in their commercial activities during the initial days of colonisation.

As the Parsis were among the first Indians to accept English language and education, they became one of the most westernised of Indian communities. Learning in British schools and identifying with the colonial peculiarities, the Parsis met with great economic and social success strengthening further their religious as well as ethnic identity. Urban Parsis emerged as pioneers in education in the nineteenth century India, and as leading figures in banking and commerce, medicine, law and journalism; they were at the forefront of India’s industrial revolution and were also prominent social reformers and very influential in politics. Rural Parsis, on the other hand, remained in villages owning large land holdings. The Parsis were treated with respect by the British and the community could draw special legal concessions and recognitions in the civil laws affecting their personal rights on marriage, inheritance and religious matters. The Parsi-British association was mutually rewarding and it scripted the golden age of the
Parsis. The patronage of the ruling British was a sort of repeat of the days of patronage the Parsi ancestors enjoyed in the Persian Empire.

Historically, this small community happened to be a minority culture group always on the roll undertaking migrations caused by change in rule and in the quest of survival. Far from striving to survive, the immigrants thrived and exalted wielding a lot of power and influence disproportionate to their numbers. Unlike other foreigners who came to India to conquer or commercially exploit, the Parsis co-existed with dignity and merged into India’s history contributing their extraordinary ingenuity in every walk of life. The promises made at the time of refuge in India are today observed more for economical reasons than theological; historically these promises and self-imposed conditions were seen as means of self protection and conservation of identity. Their sense of fair play and their philosophy of life to live and let live, made them look at human relationships with a calm, unbiased and dispassionate eye.

The shift in culture entities happened when Parsis absorbed themselves into the Indian culture which made a considerable impact on the social and cultural norms of the community. The consequent cultural transition that the Parsi community has undergone in the settled land reveals three major dimensions: adaptation, acculturation and resistance. Initially the community tactically agreed to abandon its language and adopted the local language, Gujarati; its women adopted local dress and its men ceased to bear arms as a part of its original covenant and diligently adapted to the common eating habits as prevalent in the neighbouring habitat. Secondly, some local practices which are per se alien to and inconsistent with those of the Parsis permeated into the community overriding the community’s resistance and efforts to get rid of them. Thirdly, the community makes a conscious and concrete refusal to concede when it involves preserving the community’s ethnic and religious identities.
There is no doubt that the Parsis have remained committed to the Zoroastrian scriptural texts with its emphasis on purity and progress and preserved their Zoroastrian culture quite well even several hundreds of years of life in multicultural India and their religious devotion continued to remain strong. The significant qualities of the community are its adaptability to changing circumstances, its industry and diligence and its philanthropy - qualities which have been instilled by its religion and tempered by the changing fortunes. However, the fear of internal disintegration and external absorption created in them a spirit of exclusiveness and a strong desire to preserve the ethnic identities through strict rules of endogamy and prohibition on conversion into their community. There has never been any systemic persecution of Parsis in India, nor has their self-worth been affected, nor their religious rights endangered from external sources surrounding them.

Though quick to adapt, Parsis never hesitate to resist encroachment in any form into their religious and ethnic identity; they firmly maintain that the rules and customs of their community are for them and them alone to determine. The endearing and highly rewarding relationship they had with the British did not come their way in protecting their religious identity in the matter of personal and property laws. The community thwarted attempts by fellow men to invoke civil and personal law of the British rulers and put up a stiff fight to win over exclusive laws to better regulate their community in tune with their ethnic and religious practices; the colonists enacted the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act - 1865 and the Parsi Succession Act No. 21 of 1865 which not only acknowledges Parsi exclusiveness but also facilitates the community to have its culture continuity. Eventually their unique culture helps the Parsis preserve a distinct identity of their own in India. But after independence, despite their rich contributions to the economy, politics and civilization of India, they were marginalised as they did not have the numbers, the most
significant determinant factor in the rule of democracy. Added to this, their close association with the British during the colonial rule also widened the divide and estranged them from the pro-independent sentiments of India.

In the post-colonial India, although the Parsis are a respected minority, they are not influential in terms of political authority; the preferential status they enjoyed in colonial India slipped away from their hands. It deteriorated further with the linguistic re-organisation of states; the favoured city of the Parsis, Bombay, became the capital of Maharashtra and Marathi rose to primacy; Gujarati, the adopted mother tongue of the Parsis was relegated to an inferior rank. Parsis felt threatened and silenced with the rise of the regional linguistic identity. Demographically also the community sinks in the threat of extinction and in the democratic politics of numbers, it is edged away from the centre stage. It is this erosion and the craving for the golden days lost that drove a good number of Parsis into a western diaspora. Like their ancestors who suffered a physical separation from the original homeland (Iran), this diaspora too physically separated from the second homeland (India) and was burdened with the tender sentimental regrets of having abandoned the land of refuge; this in turn made the Parsi writers assert a lot of ethnic identity in their writings. The syndrome of longing for the lost past - “those were the days and those were the men” - revisited the Parsis; restlessness and uncertainty loomed at large and the Parsis retreated into a shell further embracing their exclusivities.

What the Parsis remember most and like to boast about are their achievements and the elite and privileged status they won over during the British regime, their greatness in the farther Persian past, their steadfast loyalty to the religion, their valour and resistance and refusal to succumb to the invading alien culture, and their gratitude to the hosts and the commitment to keep the promises made at the time of immigration. These achievements, both ancient and modern, have come to be seen as the community’s
essential nature and memorialised during their period of towering heights in India under the colonial rule. Much religious heritage on rituals and doctrines has been determinedly forgotten by those who identified their community from the Anglicised eyes as progressive, modern and rational. The reconstructed past now provides an important and valuable sense of pride. But it simultaneously contains a destructive edge, for the construction of memory of the colonial days serves a purpose which is no longer relevant for the Parsis, while the unwinding and effacing of it would more effectively serve their current needs in the independent India. As a writer Patel includes the socio-cultural and religious entities of the Parsi past and the transcultural realities of Parsi present in the Indian context concentrating on the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Parsi panorama.

Gieve Patel stands prominent in the galaxy of illustrious contemporary Parsi novelists and creative writers in Indian Writing in English like Rohinton Mistry, Boman Desai, Firdaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy, Perin Bharucha, Meher Pestonjee, Dina Mehta, Nergis Dalal, Ardashir Vakil, and Keki N. Daruwalla - who have volunteered to protect their race from deterioration. He could be celebrated for his allegiance to genuine and simple down-to-earth attitude towards life. He is relevant among the elite Parsi intellectuals who seek their specific locale in the cultural cosmopolitanism with all their eccentricities, and known for their probing intensity of social commitment. He examines Parsi cultural alienation and disinheritance and projects the vision of contemporary reality in varied hues of realism, as meticulously scientific as a physician. In him the twentieth century literary scene vibrates with vigour and vitality, deeply ingrained with intellectual moorings. As he goes into the depth of human psychology he could very well talk about the sensitive issues in the context of a disturbed political and social atmosphere. His concern for the Parsis, cravings for their well being and his co-existence with the abject in
addition to his self-assurance as a physician and projecting his ideas for the benefit of the future generation to act quickly and correctly to save their race – make him a writer of great repute.

Patel who has been inspired by many great stalwarts – like Ezekiel for poetry, Ebrahim Alkazi of the Theatre Unit for production, Chekov to handle large numbers of people on the stage in the same scene, Henry James for vocal inflection, Racine to cut the action into small scenes and *Book of Job* to get anywhere near the depth of passion – makes use of diverse themes in his writings. As a chronicler of Parsi community, Gieve Patel highlights the predicaments of his community in general and of the rural migrants and the middle class Parsis living in suburban Bombay, in particular. He is very conscious of the locale, time and space. The feeling of being left out of the cultural mainstream is uniquely reflected in the way his characters are placed. He has focussed on the mental makeup of the modern day Parsis, who keep comparing the grim present with the brighter past. The sense of extrication is probably what makes room for recollection and preservation of the past. Patel acknowledges that the best is gone and recognizes the sense of loss, but never loses hope for revival though not nostalgic about regaining the past.

The culture consciousness as reflected in his plays entices the reader closer to the tiny community’s traditions and rituals. All the three plays of Patel are tragedies of the classical style. Patel’s great enterprise to distance them from the routine funny and grotesque Parsi image and to ordain a classical mould to his plays with Parsi identity is praiseworthy. The transcultural conflicts between the two worlds in which the Parsis have been caught – the defeated world that their ancestors left behind in Persia under Muslim conquest in the remote past, and the new world of glory they found in the host country under the British but lost as soon as the British left – have been portrayed very well in his writings.
Patel would assert that though his plays are always seen as plays about a community they aren’t “thereby imprisoned in that ethos” (206), yet his “collective unconscious” in the Jungian sense is in full display. The plays have memorable characters like Noshir, Khushrow, Savaksa, Hutoxi, Rati, Naval and Behram with typical Parsi names to add significance. The uniqueness of Parsi culture marked by Patel’s plurality of thought and eclectic openness to ideas is vivid everywhere. There is no element of exaggeration in any occasion with regard to characterization and imagination; Patel is right in his observation: “The characters often have traits taken from various persons but there are no direct depictions” (Patel 8); various aspects have been chosen from people around and drawn to suit the needs of the play.

Patel’s portrayal of various events that occurred and affected the Parsi diaspora in India is striking. He unveils the Parsi system of life, royal and patriarchal, throughout with dramatic precision in *Princes*. The Parsi culture has been possibly got into the critical domain of redefinition in this play. The very title *Princes*, the naming of the lead character Noshir after the Persian Prince Noshirwan, and the metaphorical link in the wearing of the hat to which the elders give repeated thrust – bear symbols of Parsi nostalgia towards Persian royalty. The precedence given to Noshir, the only male child in the family, by treating him like a prince – goes well with the Parsi reality.

The Persian ancestors were warrior like and so hugely built that Jadi Rana, the then ruler, asked them to put down their weapons at the time of granting asylum, but the present day Parsis have become so complacent, lazy, and physically weak and small due to the expensive lifestyles to which they have developed an addiction without actually having the means to maintain it. Luhrmann rightly observes, “. . . because of our wealth our men became complacent and lazy and felt no need to adjust to changing times, . . . when men get rich they lose their drive and the culture crumbles” (137). They have
become so mixed up with rituals and traditions that they have lost the core religious virtues as seen in the poems like “Vistasp” and “Naryal Purnima.” During the colonial rule they attempted to behave and believe in a manner akin to the secular, westernised, and civilized English; they conducted themselves different and distanced themselves from their fellow countrymen aiming at maximizing their opportunities in the colonial context. This strategy served them well during the colonial era and was successful enough to enhance the community’s social and financial status, but it estranged them from the rest in the changed post colonial circumstances.

Patel’s plots are excellently drawn to effectively replicate the current status of the community as a whole. The sudden spurt of advancement and prosperity enjoyed by the Parsis during the colonial period appear to have lulled the Parsis into a false superiority and complacency and in turn let its culture crumble. The Land Ceiling Act and the Prohibition Act that extensively affected the Parsi landlords and liquor barons adversely and the consequent set back leading to the migration of the children of the rural landlords to the cities, Bombay in particular, deserting agriculture and ending up into “menial jobs” and the remaining few landlords like Khushrow and Dorab, who stuck to the villages seldom doing any useful or creative work – are beautifully drawn. Patel’s presentation of the ineffectual Parsi present through characters like Khushrow, Dorab and Adeser and the narration of how the Parsis, with the changing times, have become out of place living in the past as symbolised through leading male characters like Khushrow, Savaksa, Dorab and Behram – reveal the theatrical skill of Patel. His contemplations on the false pride nurtured by the feudal and elite Parsis are highly eloquent. Khushrow in Princes enjoys life doing nothing except riding along the district, engaging in parties, sleeping through the whole next day and then to make a brag on these idle luxuries and remaining aimless. Dorab, Savaksa’s son, lives on his father’s pride and earnings, yet intolerant towards any
criticism or blame for his incompetency and failures. Behram dreams over the past successes, despite the subsequent abrupt fall, and behaves irrationally requiring to be advised by Rati to come back to the realities of the world.

From his own experiences with and being part of the family of the Parsi landlords, Patel’s perceptions about the communists are portrayed very effectively both in Princes and Savaksa. The communists, as he sees, make hollow promises to labour and cause troubles to landlords; their approach only served to disturb the servant - landlord relations and to worsen further the status of the already exploited labour. The vicious self-serving manoeuvres, moneyed politicians fondly engage in, are displayed through Khushrow, a representative Parsi landlord affected by the Land Ceiling Act, “Khushrow would be anti-Communist or anti-Congress depending on the immediate interest at a given moment” (15-16) declares Patel.

Behram is featured as an icon of the powerful and elite Parsis who have imitated the western culture. He epitomizes the Parsi inclination to adapt, rather imitate, the life style, the tastes, the standards and the luxuries, and the preferences and priorities of the west, both at home and outside. The Parsi-British connect is one of mutual respect and benefit and is highly sophisticated with a blend of egoistic clashes and solidarity for the societal good; the Parsis stood to gain substantially from the British, but are not trivial sycophants subservient to gain advantage from the British. Parsis resisted any form of external influence on its ethnicity or religious traditions. History is that Parsi resistance won for it concessions and legal recognition of its exclusive traditions through special legislations which enabled their culture continuity. Patel’s lead characters Behram and Watts very effectively replicate the historical, multifaceted, and closely engaging relations between the Parsis and the British.
Patel’s introduction of radical propositions in *Mister Behram* shocks the community’s eugenic pride and patriarchal notions. Though the Zoroastrian creed of the Parsi ancestors and the present day Zoroastrian brothers elsewhere and outside the community of Parsis, as seen in the first chapter, are permissive of conversion into the religion, the Parsis have legally and technically evolved as a “caste” within the Zoroastrians resisting any sort of conversion into the community from outside. While so, Patel who has the zeal and stimulus of adaptation, takes the tribal Naval into the Parsi fold upsetting both the racial pride and the patriarchal traditions. The adoption of Nahnu, a “low caste” tribal into the family, his initiation as Naval into the religion and in extension to the Parsi community and a woman, Dolly taking such outsider in marriage with the blessings of the parents and the Parsi Punchayet – are all challenging. Patel makes an apparent argument for efforts towards transculture and gender equality: however, the latent desire is more towards conservation of Parsi culture, its continuity and expansion; adoption and navjote adds to the community’s numbers and marriage outside the community aims at containing the haunting issues of non-marriage and childlessness. *Mister Behram* thus dramatically exhorts the considered views of Sekar on conservation of culture, as retold by Fischer:

> A culture cannot be preserved for any length of time by the mere imposition of religious and social codes of human behaviour. . . . its continuance rest(s) . . . on the will of the people, their determination to ensure its survival . . . must first manifest itself in an anxiety on their part to propagate the race. (72)

Patel is conscious of the significance of the role of priests and the Parsi Punchayet in any reformative action, and he does not fail to reject the partiality that then prevailed among the priests and the powerful Parsi Punchayet members; he alleges that the
community is susceptible to manoeuvres by the powerful and that “great wealth and position . . . make all . . . decisions right” (222). Behram’s declaration that the offspring out of the mixed marriage of Dolly and Naval in future would emerge as “a citizen of the world” (249), heralds that far beyond continuity, the community can foresee another height of growth.

Parsi community’s traditional dictum of double standards one for the man and another for the woman is discernible in Mister Behram. Westernized education for Parsi women is welcomed yet female behaviour is codified and attempts are made to curtail any form of self assertion and this is best made explicit through Dolly, Behram’s daughter. Patel’s discussions on the practice of khedas in Savaksa, on adoption and conversion from among khedas in Mister Behram, and on the strong presence of unmarried and childless women in Princes and Savaksa – highlight the major arguments that prevail among Parsis in India on accepting converts to Zoroastrians as Parsis, and on marriage and renovation of the ethnic group. The modern world demands change and that the adaptation to that change in no way devalues the religion but rather demonstrates the sophisticated tolerance of an elite community.

Patel has meticulously set the plots in all his three plays highlighting the major issues of the Parsis at an appropriate dose without overtly analysing the cause, nor condemning the behaviours nor scripting remedies. The issues related to the community are so easily understood from the mere presence of the characters plotted in his plays. The very important issues dreading the community like the growing number of spinsters, Parsi girls either avoiding marriage, or unwilling to marry and have their own progeny, or marrying late and confronting consequential issues of reproduction, and the absence of children, all posing existential threats to the community – are all so eloquently highlighted without venturing to explore the causes and remedies. Patel’s silence on this
score speaks louder and stretches it wider by leaving it to the reader’s proficiency and imagination. That Nergish remains unmarried, and Ratan and Tehmi issueless are primary causes of concern for their entire family; in fact, they are not simpler issues affecting two desolate families bereft of the divine blessings to the extent of progeny, but are representative of almost every family of the community and in continuum, a dreading issue for the community as a whole.

Marriage and progeny have become very significant issues impacting on the very survival of the community; the severity of the issue can be gauged from the fact that the Government of India, Ministry of Minority Affairs have stepped in to contain the population decline of Parsis and introduced Jiyo Parsi, the Central Sector Scheme for Containing Population Decline of Parsis in India (CSSCPDP) as a joint effort of the Government of India, the Parzor Foundation, the Bombay Parsi Punchayet, and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). The Scheme aims at encouraging the eligible Parsis to marry early and to embrace parenthood at the right time; it facilitates and provides financial assistance for fertility treatment. The Scheme could make inroads and register some success in promoting marriage and reproduction among Parsis. However, the Parsi pride is very primary to Parsi sentiments; it glues them more firmly to egoistic personal choices and liberties. Parsis would not hesitate to remain indifferent to threats and hardships – private as well as common to the community – nor would broker a compromise that may cause a dent in personal freedom or community pride. In spite of the holistic aim of the scheme coming to the help of the community in conserving the Parsi population from possible extinction, a section of the Parsis visualises it as an onslaught on Parsi pride; according to them Parsi ladies are not pandas, who can be treated as baby makers, be it to save the community. Patel’s assertion that “The Parsi
mind would like to evade any tragic vision of its own existence” (10) becomes wholly true here.

Preservation of their heritage and of their numbers is an issue of concern and necessity and Patel’s works reflect the exact conditions prevalent in the community without exception and exaggeration. The taglines floated by the Parzor Foundation in furtherance of and as part of the Jiyo Parsi initiative put the Parsis on notice of the threat that, “The milk is in grave danger of running out of sugar” and advise Parsis to avoid delayed marriage, to “Have a child quickly after marriage . . . ,” and to have more babies, even in contrast to the settled policy of the government on planned family; these taglines convey the existential issues faced by the community and steadily highlighted in Patel’s writings. The Gujarat Parsi Punchayet’s offer of free accommodation for married couple as an effort to induce single Parsis to embark on married life and procreate have been reflected by the Parsi characters of his plays to educate the value and the need of the hour towards nurturing their race and numbers.

All the characters in fact reflect in one way or other the Parsi characteristics in an incomparably powerful way. The charitable concern for the needy has been best perceived through characters like Ratan and Kali. The Parsi reminiscence for everything good, luxurious and respectable has been brought through almost all the characters; Khushrow is luxurious and lazy, Ratan and the doctor remind the past glory, Savaksa represents the influential landlords and Behram the powerful and elite Parsi. Adeser reveals the struggling, inefficient and spoilt younger generation which has turned out to be the victim of Parsi late and inner marriages and the consequent setback in begetting children and reproduction that has become rare and dear enhancing their eccentricities and idiosyncrasies; all these narrations aptly proclaim the Parsi consciousness of Patel.
Minor characters also carry enough fragrance of Parsi elements. In *Princes*, Ratan, the eldest daughter, her husband Kali, and Tehmi, the second daughter, and her husband Rumi – are illustrative post-colonial representations of that sections of Parsis who have migrated from their native villages to big cities for jobs and better ways of living; characters like Pappa, Mamma, Khushrow, Nergish, Khorsedmai, and Banoo of *Princes* and Savaksa, Dorab, Adeser, Kermina, and Jer of *Savaksa* represent those Parsis who remain in their rural lands and retain their individuality and bear the adversities that fell on them in the independent India. The educated Parsis from the village, who move towards the cities, also develop nostalgia for and crave to get back to and be in the village where they were brought up; Ratan of *Princes* and Naval of *Mister Behram* represent the state of such educated rural Parsis. In *Mister Behram* Patel emphasises the nostalgia for traditional values and in particular the religious obligation of every Zoroastrian to help in the promotion of agriculture; Patel makes an emphatic recollection of the rural Parsi past as he elaborates in minute details the experiences of Naval in agricultural operations.

Patel is very authoritative in pointing out the stark variances in the intergenerational attitude of the Parsi landlords towards their bonded labourers. The existence of a cordial master-servant relation between the Parsi landlords and their labour at the time of Parsi dominance during the colonial period is asserted through Pappa in *Princes*; the later governmental and political developments that have upstaged Parsi authority and split apart their relations are beautifully described through Khushrow the fallen landlord. The inter-generational culture shock in the community is emphatically reflected in all his three plays through characters like Pappa and Khushrow, Savaksa and Dorab, and Behram and Naval – all sticking to their own perspectives and the consequent conflict within the family and in extension, in the community.
Patel’s assertion of the Parsi maintenance of the distinct genetic identity traits by their appearance, apparel and demeanour in a subtle and respectable manner is significant. The beauty and charm that the Parsis possess is always proudly projected; Navzar of *Princes* comes following Noshir, his son, on being attracted by his dignity, charisma and intelligence after seven years of his desertion; Perin of *Savaksa* has been projected as extremely young, vulnerable and attractive, blooming and full of life and Rati of *Mister Behram* as a pretty lady with all charms.

Patel offers a very lively presentation of the typical role of Parsi ladies in typical Parsi families. In *Princes* as the focus is on a child, an area where women feel they would be within their rights to put in all they have, the women characters dominate the play. Parsi women are more grasping due to their education, upbringing, place and role in the family. Nergish of *Princes*, Kermina of *Savaksa* and Rati of *Mister Behram* are such characters, who dedicate their whole life for the family – Nergish for her sister’s son Noshir and Kermina for the entire family; Rati is portrayed as a quintessential elite Parsi lady who is always cool, calm and unruffled and an embodiment of Parsi tradition.

Though the Parsi women are modest and submissive in the patriarchal community, they never shy away from exhibiting a strong-will and courage when needed in the interests of the family. This quality is made discernible through characters like Shireen, Jer, Hutoxi and Rati. They try to cope up with the parental, societal and cultural pressures in their life as much as they can but when they find the pride, identity or well being of their family in danger, they shred the fetters and firmly fight against adversities. Shireen, a submissive daughter-in-law of the family in the patriarchal Parsi setup, remaining powerless in the beginning, turns out to be an authoritative, bold and indomitable mother and aunt at the end. The submissive Jer, becomes animated and assertive when it comes to providing an appropriate environment for the child in the family; the poor Hutoxi
courageously faces at ease the adverse situations that affected her both at home and in Savaksa’s manorial farm. Rati gives all the caring for her daughter Dolly and Naval till she is confronted to choose between her husband and the rest; as a typical Parsi wife she stands behind her husband as firm as rock and would not afford to hear anything even slightly derisive of her husband. She has been obedient and used to play to the desire and bidding of Behram, and when the situation so demands, she exhorts him to come to reality and enjoy it. These characters reflect and uphold the Parsi traditions to the hilt.

Considering the crucial link between language and cultural aspects, Patel gives much importance to language in his plays. The characters speak the language and dialect as relevant and special to their place and period; the characters belong to pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial on one level, and the rural and city locales significant to the Parsis on the other. Patel’s English is an English he has “moulded” to suit his Parsi characters of Nargol; it is often ungrammatical and broken. Since Patel’s plays are peopled with Parsi families from the west coast of Gujarat, he wrestled long with the problem of the language. Consequently the English in Princes is not the current everyday English spoken by the Parsis of Mumbai; it is peppered with strange expressions which Patel must have translated from Gujarati. He has used this Gujarati English mostly in Princes and Savaksa. But the language used in Mister Behram is very characteristic of the English used by the 19th century elite upper class Parsi household, who were adept in the usage of the English language.

Gieve Patel like many Parsi playwrights is also not much happy about the tag of “Parsi play” or compartmentalizing it under the ethnic Parsi background. Patel asserts, “My plays have always been seen as plays about a community but not thereby imprisoned in that ethos”(206). He strikes back in an interview:
I don’t think you should label it as a Parsi play, though it is written by a Parsi and filled with Parsi characters . . . I have no interest in flogging the Parsi angle or anything else . . . I think I am too much of a Parsi to have to do anything self-conscious such as creating a ‘Parsi’ character. I write what I am most familiar with, and that’s being a Parsi. (Parsiana 75)

Though Patel repudiates the claim, his plays profusely reflect the quintessential Parsi ethos as well as the Parsi ideology.

The poetic collections make testimonial reflection of the fortunes of older times and simultaneous revelations of the pain and anguish the Parsi community faces after Independence. The analysis of his poems shows that the Parsis, though not directly targeted at by any of the warring fanatic groups, cannot remain passive spectators of the rampant violence and chaos surrounding them and thus choose an active neutral role for themselves, helping the needy and the destitute, without compromising their neutrality. There is a sea-change in the attitude of the Parsi community from the passive neutrality to active neutrality for there is no sense in keeping the migrating body flawless, like a hermit sealed, in a compact box of “incorruptibles”(6) not mingling with “the world passage”(13) as Patel reiterates in, “It makes.”

The culture shift as manifested in his poems are the better documents of his contextual reflexives of the Parsi ethnic continuity and are also reflections of the community’s aborted yearning for the glamorous merging into British identity. Being uprooted from a sophisticated environment, Patel’s early poems are portraits of the encountered alienation and the contemporary reality of India. A number of his poems, as observed from their diction, vociferously deal with the issues of the poor and marginalised and their search for identity.
Poems like, “Grandfather,” “Grandparents at Family Get-Together” and “The Prince Wishes His Father’s Death,” “Three cries” and “On Killing a Tree” are resplendent in the unique voice with which he tells the living story of the Parsis, their cultural traditions, ethnic consciousness, the glorious past and the starkly contrasting realities. “Servants,” “Nargol” and “Catholic Mother” are Patel’s delights and they suggest something impressive with compassion to the poor and suffering and his resistance and repulsion to social injustice. The strong sense of feeling for the needy and the neglected is revealed when he writes of the leprous woman in “Nargol,” of the brown whores of Mumbai in “Tourists at Grand Road” and of servants in “Servants.” The culture shift and the culture difference have been focused in poems like “Evening” and “Naryal Purnima.” “On Killing a Tree” has been frequently anthologized; it is a philosophical poem in some way and its metaphor goes into the heart of the poet, relentlessly revolting against all sorts of passive violence aimed at destroying a culture. The poems like “Old Man’s Death,” “Tourists at Grant Road” and “To a Coming Love” though seem to be of a more general nature, all reflect in one way or other the Parsi experiences.

The Parsi adaptability and resistance, the community’s longing for the past in particular in the post-independent Indian cultural scenario and the subsequent nausea of detachment and alienation, could be seen through the poems of How Do You Withstand Body. “The Ambiguous Fate of Gieve Patel, He being neither Muslim nor Hindu in India” points out ironically to the communal rioting in India. “Forensic Medicine” assails at the inventiveness of misled or pervert human beings in creating newer and newer modes of torture and laments over the rise of the cult of violence and the brutal urge to wound, to torture and to kill in particular. The horrors of communal riots which disrupt harmony in the country also cause unimaginable dissonance for the peace loving Parsi community who are not on either side of the warring groups. Patel’s poems effectively deal with this
particular Parsi dilemma and the tendency to withdraw into the shell over the post-colonial crises. The reasons for Parsi indifference or neutrality could vary from their insignificant numbers, to lack of privity to the disputes, to the absence of the required might or will to intervene, and to the cautious defensive impulse of an outsider to stay away from trouble until troubled. In all his poems of the second collection, How Do You Withstand, Body there is a craving for the glorious past, the loss of which has pushed the Parsis into the painful predicament of the turbulence and the trauma that they undergo now.

The “situational poems” obtain strength from the space Patel creates and from the techniques he adopts to transform ordinary events to heart stirring poems. He boldly takes on sensitive issues like pathetic conditions of women in a patriarchal society, the cold attitude of the affluent towards the poor and downtrodden in an uneven society and other social problems. The social awareness in Gieve Patel is best expressed in poems like “Commerce,” “O My Very Own Cadaver” and “University.” As an outsider and in his desperate effort to live with the disturbances, Patel does not embark on exploring the tormentor’s view point or imposing his own views on anyone. Though Parsis fall a victim as a community alienated from the encircling society the genial optimism takes sway over him and through his poetry he announces a hope for revival.

The idea of being one and to be in part and in continuum with the country reflects Parsi assimilation into the settled land. Patel presents in his own inimitable style the survival instinct in human beings; the man on the point of death with a clear anticipation of life in “What's in and Out (And Round About)” is a strong anecdote presented to his fellow Parsis to imbibe and follow. In “Seasons,” he echoes the Parsi desire “To be able to believe in / Universal love” (1-2) and the oneness of all creations.
Patel never hesitates to bring in the demerits of the blind imitation of the western life style which made some of them completely anglicized and pushed almost into losing their original identity and later their solidarity with the adopted mother tongue, and in all, alienated them from the mainstream of Indian life and played havoc in the psyche of the young ones. There is little sense of Zoroastrian identity within and few among them understood the religion or the rituals in full. Patel carries on this idea in the poem “Vistasp.”

The final transition into accepting the global reality and submitting to the adaptation and acclimatisation are found in the poems of the last volume, Mirrored Mirroring. Most of the poems in this collection express the poet’s desire for acceptance of reality. This contemplates the apparent likelihood for a settler to adapt in the new soil, though the process may be slow and diffident. Almost all the poems in the latter part of Mirrored Mirroring, like “It Makes,” “The Return,” “God or,” and “My Affections,” show in one way or other Parsi adaptability and survival instinct. “My Affections” speaks of the affectations which were heaped on the Parsis for so many years due to their bond to the original land, “thousand strong, / Such odour, such rioting”(2-3) are “now/ At a stroke”(5-6) reduced to a “passing trace”(7) of air; when once this uncomfortable yoke is lifted off and withdrawn from the shoulder, everything becomes “decipherable”(10); the survival instinct urges them to shed the trauma and syndrome of dispossession and accept and work in tandem with reality. The space consciousness of the Parsi community is reflected in the poem, “The Place.” It visualises the issue of accommodation as one not simply borne of availability, suitability or affordability but impacted by extraneous “inward” reasons not amenable to logics. “Squirrels in Washington” concludes with the survival instinct of the settlers’ concept of inter-dependence. Thus Mirrored Mirroring
witnesses Patel’s longing for the Parsis’ final transition into accepting the global reality and submitting to the adaptation and acclimatisation.

Patel in *Mirrored Mirroring*, uses images like “journey,” “water,” “sand” and “air” as life images acknowledging that life is frequented by changes and struggles and that migrants would continue to seek for yet another space to move on. Migration may be voluntary or otherwise, either resultant upon the fear to avert catastrophe or in the search for better pastures, and it could be a mixture of both rise and fall. The poems reflect the Parsi suffering from a great sense of loss – loss of surroundings, loss of the country of origin, loss of stature in the country of adoption, and so on. Paradoxically, often journeying from one place to another, which formed part of the very Parsi existence and oft repeated as a continuous thing without a hope or will to return or regain – causes the strong and irretrievable sense of loss in them. But the predicament to prolong the journey also gives them their identity. The life images get continued in poems like “The Place,” “Of Sea and Mountain,” “Haunting” etc. In “Of Sea and Mountain,” Patel reflects on the community’s boredom and longing for an elusive fulfilment. He seeks the “unbroken” (19) chain of the deep salt waters of the sea to give him depth and clarity in thought and the “immutable” (40) structure of mountain to withstand the endless burden. The sea image representing migration is evoked more effectively in “Haunting” where he says migration began earlier only “In clotted har / bours” (1-2) “by the / tide’s pull” (5-6). He longs for a better future to transcend all kinds of Parsi boundaries and to enter into the arena of global humanists. “Sea” has been viewed as a saviour, a source of migration and a space to live on and the image of “Water to / heal” (27-28) carries a hope of survival.

Images like “body,” “mother,” “woman,” “trees,” “seeds,” “smell,” “sea,” “mountains” and “valleys” are used to strengthen the identities of the Parsis: qualities like resistance, tolerance and other virtues are emphasised through “body,” “mother,” and
“woman” images; traits like behaviour, tradition and individuality are highlighted through “tree” images; “seed within seed” image stands for Parsi persistence and continuance and the image of “smell” for the survival instinct. The present empathetic outlook in society is marked through the animal images like “sit mute” and “mute speech.” All the other images like sea, “mountains and “valleys” are all carefully interwoven with the laborious travel that Parsis underwent and experienced during their migration from Persia to India, suggesting further culture shift.

Thus Patel as a “true poet” gives importance to the Parsi past and does not escape the pressure of the present and has tried his best to relate the immediate present to the farther past aiming at creating an unflatering Parsi future. All his poems trail undoubtedly on this background with real Parsi experiences. In fact all his creativities – paintings, art, poems and plays – are so interlinked as to lay emphasis on the varied experiences, abilities and virtues of the Parsis. Though adverse circumstances struck them, they withstood them and led an unaffected life, absolutely not losing the characteristic qualities of the community. Lacing with the elegiac note, he recognizes that something significant is gone and lost; but on a review of it in the aftermath, he never loses hope and always desires for a better future for his community. Patel is one among the driving forces encouraging the Parsis to face the challenge and concertedly work for their self-assertion and proves himself a prominent defender of culture diversity in the Modernistic Era. He is for the continuity of Parsi ethnicity in the pluralist India and emerges as a proponent of culture diversity.

Patel’s paintings are equally competent as his plays and poetry and unravel his social concern and the Parsi culture consciousness. The few paintings which he has captured with the rare quietude and desolation in Mumbai like “Bicyclist in a field,” “Lighted Platform,” “Peacock at Nariman Point,” “Near the Bus Stop,” “Stroll,” “Ship
Building in Mumbai,” “Off-Lamington Road,” and the sketches like “Crows with debris,” “Crows” tearing at a carcass, and engravings like “Dead Politician” and “Monument” – exhibit people in different postures and their eyes filled with fear, sadness or just plain grief. The works like “Crushed Head” and “Battered Man in Landscape” describe the universal experience of isolation of mankind in an alien land. The paintings play a major role that could enrich the understanding of his poetry as well as his plays. His paintings, all vibrant acrylic on canvas, are inspired by Mumbai, the city he lives in and are packed with the realities of labour, gender inequality, and the grotesque within this new spectrum of possibilities. Patel’s exploration of the human conditions has helped him transmute the selected subject into exquisitely sensitive paintings, drawings, and sculptures. Patel as a committed social activist does not confine himself to the domain of painting and poetry writing but comes out to the stage to address the audience directly through his plays. His paintings, as samples, have been included in the Appendix.

For many decades, there has been a constant discussion and debate on how the Parsis will preserve their Zoroastrian “identity” and on how they will pass the torch to the next generation. Despite the variety of view points on what should be preserved, there was consensus that their religion is more than texts and prayers in books. It is the doctrine and rituals, rich culture and traditions, and identity and heritage of this close-knit community that need to be preserved as their legacy; each trait is equally challenging for future generations to preserve. However, as Bertram B. Benas rightly observes:

The first step to the self-preservation of a people is the consciousness that it is a people worthy of being preserved. The recognition of this consciousness can only be realised by the abandonment of excessive concentration on the present, and the insistence upon the cherishing of hope for the future. But this cherishing of hope for the future can only
come with living force if tradition is linked with the present. Tradition and aspiration become united in the realising of a conscious participation in the continuous process. (8 - 9)

Analysing on these bases, it is understood that the history of the community is replete with a cycle of patronage of the rulers and attendant prosperity and authority, ascension of repressive aliens or change in political masters and eventual persecution, neglect, and downfall, followed by years of hiatus and migration for survival, and all through carrying the memories of the days of fortune and pride. The most striking psyche of the community all along is that it staunchly endeavours to retain its ethnicity close to its heart and invariably hankers after the lost glory though it is fully conscious that it’s a far cry to aspire for a recurrence; yet the community is industrious and never rests on illusions.

The position of Parsis in Indian society is neither socially peripheral nor central, but continually in-between without cultural renegotiation. In the present era of competition and globalization, education and exposure have created a number of geniuses waiting to outdo each other. The unease with their identity in post colonial India and consequent emigration to the West has also been in the focus of discussions. As a writer of great vision and deep insight Gieve Patel succeeds in exposing all these human issues in a scintillating way.

It becomes clearly evident from the foregoing study that Patel’s writings reveal recurrent patterns of the major themes of the Parsi set up, their experiences, endurances, acceptances, anxieties, adaptability and progressiveness and cultural differences. The bird’s-eye view of Patel’s creative works reveals the thematic patterns and the writer’s vision and view of various issues that have been taken up in his works. Patel diligently explores every aspect and situation in his works. He is a realist and portrays life as he
knows it. Whatever he has heard and seen are not confined as memories and experiences of a singular person, but are transformed into immortal characters; the language used goes with the characters like one’s skin and sense and flows out naturally and effectively to reconstruct the modern consciousness with ease and spirit. He does not provide unnecessary details and even avoids passing judgment on his characters; but he always sympathises with his characters in their trials and tribulations in his works. He is not a didactic writer who preaches about anything, but nevertheless he is a good moralist. His is above all a unique individual voice and it is this individualism along with the sense of moral responsibility towards the cause of the community that makes him one of the finest writers of the Parsi English Literature.

Gieve Patel reassures and preserves an absorptive interest about his people and establishes a communicable association with the world around him. His works become a rivulet for his milieu and for those often left out in the society. They are extraordinary documents of contextual reflexives of the Parsi ethnic continuity; in an astonishing tone, Patel exhibits and highlights the void caused by alienation in the multicultural society with an inherent wish to imbibe the true values of life. The ideological commitment clasped with the portrayal of a reasoned picture of humanity’s needs and desires in a true Parsi sense makes him a committed Parsi writer par excellence. The Parsi consciousness in him comes out in its proper locale and voice for the good of the community. He is an amiable creature, an idealist and an optimist for the betterment of his people in the settled land. His natural genius in handling of his thought felt experience, his craftsmanship, and a compelling sensibility enabled him a universal appeal. Gieve Patel has proved that he is a strong living force for his people and has emerged as the voice of the Parsis affirming the words of Homi K.Bhabha:
You are part of a dialogue that may not, at first, be heard or heralded - you may be ignored - but your personhood cannot be denied. In another’s country, that is also your own, your person divides, and in following the forked path you encounter yourself in a double movement . . . once as stranger, and then as friend. (xxv)

Patel has triumphed in perfectly documenting his excellent Parsi consciousness and knowledge. As a physician he has the power of observation, memory and a methodical execution of them in his works with perfection and that permeates into his literature and works of art. The manifestation of his lingering Parsi consciousness makes him a spokesperson of his community. He has expressed the uniqueness of his belief in values, insight into human psychology and a vision of life with great commitment in his works. He is proud of his people, their distinct culture, their monotheistic religious beliefs, rituals, practices and above all their tremendous accomplishments and excellence; at the same time he rightly does not fail to note the lingering passion and longing for past glories. Being a conscious artist, he estimably clarifies the plight of the Parsis and eventually wins over a coveted place in the society by a rare, intermittent writing with vigour and vitality that nurtures Parsi mankind’s new conviction and expectant potentials. He advocates a multicultural society where Parsis can together flourish and replenish the world.

To conclude, it is inferred that Patel and his writings could be categorized in the following statement:

1. Patel is a master genius, the contents of whose creative works are culture centered.
2. His individual sensibilities are to trace out the sensibilities of his community. This forms the kernel of his writings.
3. He has balanced his creative writings well between his Parsi entities and multicultural plurality of Indian community.

4. Through his poems and plays he could transcend all the socio-political religious barriers with ease to claim the global stand of having both cultural and religious diversity.

5. Hence with all his ethnic identities he is for being a global citizen to approve all as his fellow men.

It would be fruitful if researchers could expand the study on Gieve Patel and his works with the following unexplored areas like:

   Patel’s Poems on the basis of personal, national and universal symbols in them.

   Socio-political conflicts in Patel’s works.

   Comparative study of Parsi and Hindu myths and cults.