Chapter Three

Culture Consciousness in Princes, Savaksa and Mister Behram

The myths underlying our culture and underlying our common sense have not taught us to feel identical with the universe, but only parts of it, only in it, only confronting it - aliens.

– Alan Watts

The history of Parsi writers in India, during the colonial and post colonial periods and the prominence of Gieve Patel among them, in particular, have been elaborated in the preceding chapter. Though the level of contribution of these writers to Indian Writing in English may vary, certain major themes like issues of identity, migration, problems related to historical misconception, confrontation with racism, religious exclusiveness and threat of extinction, intergeneration conflicts, and difficulties in building new supportive communities prevail in all their writings. Patel, as a playwright, is conscious of his cultural milieu and the modern tribulations, and his plays traverse beyond mere realism and effectively delve into the turbulent Parsi mind of today. He differs significantly from other Parsi writers in energy and spirit; he is original and his voice is a compelling force in the portrayal of the ethnicity of his race. His Parsi background and disconnect to an extent from the majority Indian heritage add to the genuineness of his social commentary as an inside-outsider’s impartial outlook on the contemporary Indian situations.

The present chapter explores the culture consciousness of Patel as reflected in his collection of plays: Mister Behram and Other Plays comprising of Princes, Savaksa and Mister Behram, restricting to the age old Parsi identity on the one hand and locating the culture shift on the other. In the process, serious issues affecting the community like the ban on conversion, late marriages, low birth-rates and the resistance to and consequences of marriages outside the Parsi community are given importance to and brought into focus. A brief insight into the captivating Parsi culture, practice, etiquettes and language as seen
through his plays is highlighted in this chapter using socio-cultural, political and religious perspectives; it would be an attempt to locate the culture diversity during the various periods of time, from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial periods, in the texts analysed.

“Cultural diversity,” as Homi K. Bhabha rightly observes: “is phenomenally the concept of the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs; held in a time-frame of relativism which gives rise to liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity” (50). Patel’s plays are sought to be categorised in terms of this cultural exchange between the Parsi and the Indian communities or vice-versa.

A playwright generally tends to protest against the contemporary society by highlighting the social prejudices existing in it. Patel show-cases in his writings the Parsi cultural heritage and the intergeneration conflicts that the Parsis face as they try themselves to fit into the changing atmosphere, especially in the light of the inequities arising from the minority status they acquired in the host society. The creator’s instinct and the intended emotional attributes are well established through his conceptions of accepting the settled culture in all his three plays which are peopled with his own community and with whom he is much familiar. He has done this deliberately as he is most comfortable with that ethos and knows it most closely; he says, “I write about the Parsis because I feel confident of being able to present them accurately” (Patel 14).

All the three plays of Patel are tragedies of the classical style. His great enterprise to ordain a classical mould to his plays essentially with Parsi identity is rather remarkable. He consciously distances himself from the routine funny and grotesque image ascribed to the Parsis. As he says, “a quarrel in a Parsi play is usually presented as comic but to make this sort of thing constantly into a comedy is to degrade your own emotions” (18). Patel also elaborates in his interview with Karen Smith that he “wanted to show Parsis that
there may be a few truths in all these fables, in all these stereotype characteristics, but that, in fact, Parsi life is as full of violence, brutality and warm human charm as any other . . .” (10) and for this reason he wants his “play should be a corrective” (10) one. Consequently he plots his plays with shattering events and presents them through violent poetry and thus attempts to prove through his plays that the “Parsi mind would evade any tragic vision of its own existence” (10). And the descriptions of the Parsi life and traditions which constitute the core of his plays fall into either collective unconsciousness or racial consciousness.

All of Patel’s plays, in one way or other, connect, to a great extent, the tiny community’s traditions, culture and customs, loyalty, philanthropy and religious faith, and manifest the Parsi experiences, endurances, acceptances, anxieties, adaptability and progressiveness as they live in a dominant situation extolling the inherent spirit of mankind to survive. The Parsi characters and situations have not been obstacles to the wider Indian audiences’ acceptance and appreciation of his plays, “since Parsis share many of the problems and a good deal of the ‘life-quality’ that this sub-continent gives to the people living in it” (8). While there is much to lament on the irretrievably lost racial past, the Parsis do find much to celebrate in the proud heritage that survives.

Patel unveils, with dramatic precision, the Parsi way of life, royal and patriarchal, in the first play Princes (1968). He looks at from a Parsi window the manner in which “human beings react to each other in a situation of wanting to possess something” (119). And he portrays the conflict that explodes between two families over the possession of a sole young 10 year old male child, Noshir who has the semblance of Patel’s elder cousin - his father’s sister’s son - who died young tragically of rheumatic heart disease while his family fell out over his deathbed. It is at this background the play moves. Set in a small coastal village in Gujarat, with large Parsi population, may be Nargol, where Patel’s
grand parents lived, “the play has close observations of the entire ethos of these villages” (8). And he continues to say, “my family being nearest, lots of observations come directly from it” (8). The nostalgia for their royal status based on feudal system assumes priority in the play. He makes use of this story to investigate life in an agriculture-centred Parsi family on the west coast of Gujarat.

_Savaksa_ his second play, first staged in the year 1989, discloses the dominant Panchayat identity concentrating on the fundamental social and political relationships in post independence context as they have operated in the villages of Gujarat for years, and the play is woven around the lives of those Parsis who have been primarily engaged in agriculture. By depicting the collapse of rural customs and Parsi beliefs including uneven marriages, Patel examines the fragile state of traditional authority within the family and the rural community outside. Thus the play moves around the power structure, both within the family and outside it in the public domain; between human beings in their relationships, starting from intimately closer to slightly distant and spreading farther into the spheres of society and politics. The use of power is sought to be achieved through varied means masked in the form of love, affection, bribe, blackmail and every other possible way. The setting of this three-act play is Southern Gujarat in a large village working its way to becoming a small town in the late 1960s and Savaksa, the lead character as its Panchayat President. Traditionally panchayats consisted of often influential and wealthy men, chosen and accepted as wise and respected elders by the local community. With party politics setting in and making way into the rural polity, power will be drifted away from the minority to the majority community. Though power continued to remain in the hands of the wealthy and influential, in many instances Parsis lost eventually because of low numbers. Patel “was not out to write a play of local colour or an ethnic play” (119), yet he was “interested in sharply localising the play and in being
authentic to a certain setting” (119). In the practice, Patel brings out the Parsi existence and how their authority declined in the post-colonial era.

*Mister Behram* set in the late Nineteenth Century articulates the culture shift during the colonial period. In South-Gujarat, many Parsis then had enormous estates; it was an abode to many tribes including the Warlis who used to work in the lands of these Parsi landlords. The play exposes the life of the elite Parsis of the colonial era on the social, religious and psychological levels. It highlights the major arguments that prevail among the Parsis in India whether to accept converts to Zoroastrianism as Parsis and the adoption of children to the Parsi lineage. The complex relationship between Behram, an influential Parsi lawyer and land owner in Southern Gujarat and Nahnu, the bright tribal youth whom he has adopted and made his son-in-law – raises several questions and conflicts. The unique interactive cultural exchange between these two prime characters stands for “the discursive construction of social reality” (Bhaba 47). In re-naming Nahnu as Naval, Behram tries to assimilate Nahnu into the Parsi Zoroastrian fold. Woman marrying outside the ethnic Parsi community is seen as a sacrilege and class consciousness comes to the fore as Nahnu rises from a lower class to a higher level on his adoption and later marrying into the Parsi community. Varied human traits like love and ego of Behram and his desire to humiliate, possess, and subjugate the other are plotted and consciously interwoven in the play. The play thus through the protagonist, Behram functions on three levels. On the first level Behram is characterised as a representative of Parsi community which staunchly believes in Zoroastrianism. Secondly, the inner motive of Patel as a proponent of Zoroastrianism surfaces as he aims at the continuity and extension of the Parsi community through adoption, conversion, and marriage by constructing his lead characters Behram and the adopted heir, Naval. Thirdly, the Parsi fascination towards westernisation has been evidently exhibited through all the characters
in the play. With this socio-cultural-political and religious point of view, his three plays are further examined for the purpose of better apprehension.

Patel elaborates his plays on the transcultural conflicts in which the Parsis are caught. The Parsis locate themselves in two worlds; “the defeated world that they have left behind in Persia under Muslim conquest and persecution and the new world of the Christian era that they live in” (Dodiya 29). This two world syndrome visits again and again in the Parsi life on their migration to India.

*Princes* opens with a Parsi ballad which has a sharp racial consciousness:

Child, child, dress you in white,
Sweeten your mouth,
Darken your eyes,
A stick in your hand
To shoo away dragons,
A suitable frown
To frighten them off,
Give us a smile now,
Give us a smile. (25)

It highlights the Parsi idiosyncrasies, gullibility, superficial behaviours and the characteristics of humour to boost up the child confident enough to face the dragons with a stick in hand. It has been presented in a picturesque way. It reminds one of the Parsi traditions of story-telling dating back to the ancient Iran. The World eBook Library refers to the popular Iranian folkloric form of story-telling, Dastan, which in Persian means fable, fiction, story, or tale:
Dastan-tellers (narrators) tend to tell their tale in coffee houses. They told tales of heroic romance and adventure, stories about gallant princes and their encounters with evil kings, enemy champions, demons, magicians, Jinns, divine creatures, tricky Robin Hood-like persons (called ayyars) and beautiful princesses who might be human or of the Pari (fairy) race. (1)

Patel accordingly introduces the fragrance of Parsi culture in its full bloom in the very opening scene of the play. The birthday of Noshir is celebrated with pomp and gaiety, typical of its culture. One could observe the reflection of Parsi culture without blemishes in the realistic presentation of the daily chores: women dressing the child, singing, laughing, and embracing it, women boasting themselves, gossiping, working in the kitchen whole heartedly, filling the dining table with nourishing food, the party at home, and the children enjoying in the sea shore, etc. – all descriptions in typical Parsi style. Pappa is euphoric when his children assemble at his house on holiday; he tells Mamma, “Roam the seashore! Losing your mind, Hommamai? Two daughters married to city men, so now seashore in the afternoon! So fashionable! And Tehmi in the kitchen! You call your daughter from her home, from Madras, to be in the kitchen? (28). Patel is at his best in the creation of the patriarchal figures like Sorabji (Pappa) and Khushrow.

The title Princes goes with the fact of the Persian origin of the Parsis and the stories about the Persian kings and princes. Noshir, the only male child in the family is the pivot on which the play moves. He is named after the celebrated Persian Prince Noshirwan and treated like a prince. Pappa insists Noshir to wear his cap on like a prince always. Whenever he is with Pappa, Noshir has his cap on his head. In a good-humoured way Patel handles the significance of the cap. When Noshir’s cousins, Piloo and Kumi shout at him to get ready to the sea-shore, he breathlessly bids bye to Pappa saying “they won’t take me” (44) and pockets the cap. Immediately Pappa asks:
PAPPA. Where’s your cap, boy?

NOSHIR. They don’t like it.

PAPPA. (placing it gently on his head again) Never take off your cap, son.

You are a Persian Prince, are you not?

NOSHIR. Yes.

PAPPA. Don’t mind all your cousins. (44)

The paradox is that when they are out of Pappa’s view, Piloo, one of his cousins, snatches the cap off the boy’s head and pockets it. Noshir protests and tries to retrieve it, then gives up and runs along laughing with them. Noshir himself is not enamoured of being called a prince and expresses his dislike for that when Banoo, his father’s new wife, enquires about his life in his maternal grandparents’ house:

NOSHIR. My cousins are back . . .

BANOO. You met them?

NOSHIR. Today. From the class. From the window.

BANOO. Spoke to them?

NOSHIR. Yes.

BANOO. What did they say?

NOSHIR. ‘You are a prince now.’ Like a joke. I’m going to the sea. (64)

The pride of Parsi regality is not a passing fancy and the commitment towards it has gone into the nerve of the elderly Parsis and this could be understood from the behaviour of elders even during difficult times. While Noshir lies in the sick bed, the doctor attending on him relates him to the kings to flame up his spirit:

DOCTOR. Noshirwan! (No reply) Very quiet today. Did you know there was a Persian king called Noshirwan?

BANOO. He won’t speak, he won’t eat. Since yesterday . . .
DOCTOR. (softly to Noshir). Afraid? (Silence) Then speak. (Silence)

Speak. A king always speaks. The more he speaks the bigger he is. (76)

The grandparents often relate the story of the Persian kings to their grandchildren and celebrate them as princes with pride. But the present generation is not much elated over the idea of an imaginary regality, non-existent and inconsistent with reality and as Patel rightly observes when in conversation with Karen Smith, they “see it as anachronism. Right from a very early age their sights are on being modern. Like their aunts from Bombay” (11). There is not only a generation gap but also a cultural shift, which has been the impact of the transcultural entities that the younger generation tends to converge with, in the settled land. The youngsters make a strong attempt to connect to present Indian realities.

Moreover the sudden rise to prosperity and fortunes during the colonial era appears to have sedated the Parsis into a false pride of superiority and complacency; the growth was so sudden and burgeoning which cannot be sustained without constant and strenuous efforts; unfortunately the community did not endeavour to have it. The Parsi youth then were so well built and active that the Hindu ruler asked them to put down their weapons, but now they have become so complacent and lazy due to the expensive lifestyle without the means to maintain it. “It happened in Persia, it happened in Rome and now it is happening to us: when men get rich they lose their drive and the culture crumbles” (Luhrmann137). As they live in the past, they are ineffectual in the present as represented through Khushrow and Dorab and they become out of place with the changing times around them.

Like most defeated Parsi landlords who live in the remote past, Khushrow of Princes contemplates on what the Parsi landlords had in the past and enjoys life doing
nothing. He is shown riding along the district, engaging in parties, and then sleeping through the next day:

Then I ride to my friend’s house – six miles away- another great landlord. More chicken, more drinks. Then we ride and ride. Become six or seven of us, cover the whole district- miles and miles of rich land. Then at someone’s house, oh, jokes! Laugh! Food! Then sleep the whole next day. . . . get up and see? - The sunset! (31)

He tells Noshir, his little nephew that “You will roam the whole district like your uncle, baby. So eat”(31).

In Savaksa, there is a contradictory picture of Savaksa who, being humiliated by Hutoxi, towards the end sits straight again, though defeated, and falls into memory lane recalling the remote past with pride saying that these things happen from time to time in History and “the opium- mad elephants” sometimes turned against their masters and crushed them.“Turned! Yes! Blindly! On their own army! Crushing their own soldiers!” (173). They would not care for anything:

All our fields of rice – they were fiery battlegrounds once. For Moghuls! For Marathas! They were marching on them, crushing up everything (pause) And before the battles . . . before any war . . . the great Moghul emperors . . . made their elephants . . . mad!!By throwing opium in their food! To make their blood . . . hot! Then the elephant would not care! They would not care for anything! Guns, spears! Nothing! They went stamping! . . . hitting all enemies, hitting all enemies!! . . . but sometimes they turned . . . Oh Kermina! My mind is gone. (172-73)
The false pride in Dorab, Savaksa’s son, does not let Savaksa, the Panchayat leader to blame him, at home and in the Panchayat. Dorab brings every little problem to Savaksa, the entirety of the farm, the crop, and the works: thrashing, storing, selling etc., and shows that he is always at work and blames Savaksa that he is busy with the panchayat, the clerks, the ministers and has no time to see what Dorab does.

In *Mister Behram*, the plots around Behram, Naval, Dolly and the British Collector have a touch of past events that went into the Persian royal history and also into the Parsi association with the British marked by a sort of friction, pride and privilege, forward thinking and involvement in reforms and constant identification with the cause of the poor. Behram’s jealousy over court room successes of his own step child, Naval and his inflicting insensitive humiliation on Naval by asking him to wear the Warli tribal vest and G-string – have semblances to the anecdote involving the Persian Emperor Hormus and his General Bahram Chobin, a tribal Parthian clan by descent. Though no logics could be ascribed with a certainty to pin that Patel drew inspiration for the plot from that historical event, the analogy is strong with similarities stronger enough to invite a comparison. General Bahram led a series of victories for the Emperor Hormus. As Williams puts it, “Hormuzd despatched Bahram Chobin. He succeeded in gaining a brilliant victory over them, or rather over one of their vassals, and took much booty; and even, as the story goes, converted the Persian tribute to the Turks into a Turkish tribute to the Persians” (91). General Bahram earned a high reputation among the people and this brewed the Emperor’s jealousy; when Bahram Chobin was defeated by the Roman general Romanus in a subsequent battle on the river Araxes, Hormus in no time disgraced him, and had him removed from the Sasanian office. Hormus also wished to humiliate him and sent him a complete set of women's garments to wear; this is analogous to Behram’s requiring Naval to wear the tribal vest and G-string. As Malcolm puts it:
. . . full of envy and alarm at the great success of Baharam, he learnt with satisfaction that his general had met with a reverse, in a subsequent action with the Roman army. Conceiving this gave him the opportunity he desired, to disgrace and ruin a chief whose reputation was his crime, he sent him a suit of female apparel, a distaff, and a spindle. (121)

Both General Behram and Naval took the orders of their masters; Naval in total obedience, while the General as a ploy to provoke his soldiers to revolt against the crown. In absolute submission, “Naval returns in Warli dress, stands before them (Behram, Watts, Dolly and Rati) quietly” (Patel 225). Quite in contrast, the rough soldier put on:

. . . the dress he received, and presented himself to his army, “Behold,” said he, “the reward with which the monarch I serve has deigned to crown my services.” The burst of indignation was general; the soldiers hailed Baharam their sovereign, and called upon him to lead them against the despicable wretch, who had dared from his luxurious palace to cast so insufferable an insult . . . . (Malcolm 122)

The arrogance of Behram in the utmost humiliation of Naval culminating in Naval’s exit sealed the fate of the hero of *Mister Behram*. Hormuzd was “then guilty of the folly of dismissing this experienced commander, the head of the house of Mihran, with ignominy” (Williams 91). As Parvaneh Pourshariati puts it, “Bahram Chubin’s rebellion could very well have marked the end of the Sasanian dynasty” (129); in fact, the empire met its fall sooner. Thus the envious conduct of their respective insolent masters to clothe General Bahram and Naval with inappropriate apparels resonates with analogies.

Again in *Mister Behram*, Behram most of the time dreams over the “loved and enjoyed” (286) past pride and his wife, Rati, advises Behram, when he lies sick and
paralysed, rather tenderly to come back to the present world and affirms that the world of pride is around him only. She accepts his condition of defeat boldly and when everyone withdraws, she remains with a hope of “utter certainty of communication with him” (289).

As Dodiya reports “During the colonial period, the Parsis were dominant in the administration and excelled in the field of law and science” (67) and this is expressly documented in Patel’s plays. At every opportunity in the plays, the longing for the earlier status and the contempt for the present fall invariably come to the fore. Patel asserts through Kali in Princes that Parsis “are intelligent as a race” (106) occupying higher posts in the society, but pushed to insignificance now. As the family doctor comes to know that Kali occupies a prime post as a director, he is pleased: “Very few of our people go ahead these days. At one time you could see all leading posts full of Parsis. Nothing but Parsis. Yes, you should be happy” (97).

The elation immediately vaporises as their present status is discouraging. They note that Parsi girls in post-colonial India in general are not so well educated that they end up as secretaries due to their westernised looks and good English. And the Parsi boys from the villages, though the parents of many of whom own huge lands in the villages, are content with some work in Bombay and the fate of those lands is left at anybody’s guess. The following conversation between Kali and Piloo stands a good example for their anxiety:

KALI. What do the boys do?

PILOO. Who?

KALI. The boys of the village? Parsi boys.


KALI. But they have land?
PILOO. Their fathers do. Many of them.

KALI. What happens to that? Silence.

PILOO. I don’t know. (Timidly) Ask dad. (84-85)

Parsis’ glorious colonial past and the present post-colonial tensions are also evidenced when Pappa in Princes thinks of the cordial master-servant relation that existed when the Parsis dominated the society during the colonial period, and of the later governmental and political developments that have upstaged Parsi authority. Pappa pours out his predicaments while in his room, Lahnu, his servant massages his legs and listens to him smiling:

PAPPA. (offering other leg). Take this one. (Silence) . . . Just ten miles from the estate. What cajoling to get you here. You don’t like it? Here? Here you don’t starve, so it hurts you, hmm? (Silence) My life I spend for you. For your uncles, your fathers. My life. (Pause) And now it’s ‘tiller’s land, tiller’s land!’ You till my feet first. You till that first. (82)

There prevailed a healthy feudal relationship and mutual respect between the landlords and their bonded labourers once, during Patel’s grandfather’s period but not later during his uncle’s period. “There was respect and there was also a reciprocal, deeper concern and involvement”(14) says Patel. That the relation between the Parsi landlords and their labourers drifted apart is brought out through the characterisation of Khushrow. He has Lahnu, Larakh and Navsu as his bonded labourers to do the household work. He always exercises power over these tribal men, fights with them and contrasts himself with the tribal’s quiet dignity. Patel feels sorry at the tribal’s present fortune because it was the Parsis who bought their lands and made them work in their own lands:

The work they do for the landlords would have been paid half a rupee or a rupee or some measures of rice for a day’s work. The amount is enough to
keep the family move along. During the dry months when there is no work the landlord is obliged to continue support at least to his khedas (bondmen) . . . In return they are entirely at his service all through the year. A good landlord looks after his khedas well; he will be a father to them. (14)

At times Kushhrow becomes furious and gets irritated by his servants as they drink and refuse to do work. On an occasion when one of the labourers, fully drunk, tries to steal his truck he does not even hesitate to take him over to the police. The tribals have borne the brunt of the feudal set-up and they are now in an even worse position. They are at the mercy of and are exploited by political groups; even a few leftist groups seriously want to do something for them but in vain. If the Warlis were assisted and prompted to fight to drive off their landlords, the capitalists would wipe out the whole village and throw the Warli off the land and would start exploiting their lands largely for industry and very little for mechanised farming. Patel says “Khushrow would be anti-Communist or anti-Congress depending on the immediate interest at a given moment”(15-16). Khushrow as a failed political landlord makes a sharp criticism of the hollow political promises on one occasion voicing the political situation in India:

You are fools. No, don’t work for us. Go starving in the fields . . . . You don’t want to work, isn’t it? Then come to me? Go. Fools! One day a Communist comes and dances. One day Congressman comes and dances. Go now, dance. I’m not angry with you . . . . They do everything for you. Yes they will. Not I, not my father. They drive in their jeep and dance with you – for one day. Oh yes, they will give you all acres in the country, it’s all yours. They don’t want anything from you. My father and I, we want everything, isn’t it? So we don’t do you any good. So go and tell them to get your men out of jail. They will push you in with him . . . . (42)
In *Savaksa* Patel makes use of Savaksa as the representative of patriarchal society to explore how Parsis were powerful even in the villages during the colonial period. As a powerful Panchayat leader, he gives assurance to Khorshed, the mother of the two ladies, Perin and Hutoxi, from Bombay that she need not worry about Perin and that he will give her full honour by means of an honoured marriage in the presence of the whole village. For Khorshed, Savaksa is so trustworthy and so benevolent that she says: “. . . a man comes . . . says he will marry . . . invites us to a village . . . mansion! Away from Bombay. We have never come out from Bombay, for so many years. Never enough money . . . (weeps) and now (gestures) this . . . palace!” (129). Patel says with a sarcasm that even if a dirty cobbler bows to Savaksa and begs to meet him, he is so pleased.

SAVAKSA. And why? Why does he want to meet me? Will you think about that?! Because my mind is busy, busy thinking what will improve this village. How will poor people be more happy!

DORAB. Yes. We are always making poor people happy. Come, now stop talking and you look at my accounts. (139)

Patel uses images replete with family aura as an ideology which endorses Savaksa’s own dignified stand. Savaksa, who stands for the archetypal landlord like Khushrow refers to his poor guests from the city as “honourable daughter” and “mother” while referring to himself as “father” or “mother” and his tenants, workers, and other villagers as his “children”; this shows his belief in justifying his own honoured status. He assumes all of these “one big happy family” conception operative though in his mind these ideal family images are closely tied to a romanticized vision of the poor. They are even more “honourable” because of their poverty. “More honourable in poor families. More!” (144).
Behram, in *Mister Behram*, is an embodiment of the powerful Parsis who had a prosperous life during the Raj. He is represented as a very complex character - a cultivated Parsi who stood for the smooth functioning of the Government as well as a challenger of the Raj for the welfare of his own people. On the social level during the colonial period the colonisers needed efficient, clever locals to help them in the implementation of the law and administration to ensure the ceaseless flow of the colonial wealth into the imperial coffers. Among the natives, the Parsis were considered the best to handle the job efficiently because they were considered sophisticated and educated and highly adaptable members of the Indian society. The British warmly extended hands towards a long term friendship which many Parsis whole heartedly accepted and settled in key positions in colonial administration. They started developing a sense of power and elite consciousness and many are swayed away by the enormous power bestowed upon them. At the same time many of them also learnt the tricks of the trade and business and nurtured a sense of pride and self-esteem. This state was highlighted through Behram. His growing reputation as a powerful independent-minded lawyer with sympathy towards his own countrymen became a challenge to the British.

Parsis of the colonial era were economically strong and were fancied to imitate the Western life style, preferences and priorities; they possibly might afford the tastes, the standards and the luxuries introduced by the alien rulers. Patel gives much importance to the western life style though the play is set in southern Gujarat. The action of *Mister Behram* takes place in the rooms of Behram’s “well- appointed house” (212) and of Savaksa in Savaksa’s manorial palace. As Patel says, “this (*Mister Behram*) is a classical play, it makes demands on the audience. It is formal, even when it is talking of the most intense emotions . . . it maintains a distance . . .” (204). Even the home has the western flavour. Rati and Dolly behave so sophisticated that they reflect the western life style in
their approach in every way possible. Even Naval, the Warli is moulded in such a way to imitate the western way of life. He behaves rather politely that Dolly now and then teases him:

DOLLY. You should ask my father.

NAVAL. Don’t tease.

DOLLY. No, truly, ask him, as you do for everything else “May I eat, may I drink, may I shine in the courtroom today? Did you obtain leave for that?

NAVAL. . . . (He taps his own head.) No piece of knowledge here . . . that does not come from him! (215)

Naval’s acceptance of Behram is total and he asks Dolly: “What have I ever known that has not come from him - no line, no gesture, not even a look! . . . say nothing of a lifetime of instruction, wholesome, providential! My innermost guide, my . . . my leader . . . and all done with an almost careless benevolence! (215). His mannerism receives appreciation from all quarters. Behram applauds him saying: “he is wonderful at picking up hints and signals from me. A slight change in voice, a small change of expression, and we read each others’ thoughts” (218). Watts, the English, District Collector too has admiration for Naval;

WATTS. Will I never have a chance to become truly acquainted with your fascinating brilliant family. . . . I did run into your remarkable son-in-law just outside there – riding to the courts with what looked like a whole bevy of worshipping young lawyers around him . . . !

BEHRAM. . . . The boy has everyone’s attention and he deserves it . . . (219)

Watts admires not only Naval but Rati too, of her house keeping and good mannerism, typical of the Parsi sophistication which they enjoyed during the colonial
regime. Patel is so meticulous in giving importance to all such splendid past, recalling the British admiration for the Parsis:

RATI. Do come in and sit down, Mr. Watts. I fear I must leave you gentlemen- There is work to be done in the orchard.

WATTS. Could your trees need care or food other than your mere presence, madam? They must bloom at your slightest touch. Rati smiles and leaves. (219)

The language used in Mister Behram is very characteristic of the English used by the elite upper class Parsi household in the 19th century. Those Parsis who had close connection with the colonizers were adept in the usage of the English language and their behaviour too is different as Dolly says: “It is different there! Everything mother does, even if it is holding a jug, is supreme. It becomes with her . . . a triumph, which he recognises, and responds to. But that is her way. It is a wonderful way, and I cannot acquire it . . .” (230). Behram’s behaviour and Naval’s respect for Behram and Watts’ admiration for Naval are all characteristics of the Parsi sophistication under the British. Naval becomes a culturally refined Parsi and behaves so advanced in his behaviour. Similarly characters like Ratan, Kali and Tehmi of Princes exhibit a sort of sophistication in their talks within the household:

TEHMI. Don’t talk to him like that.

RATAN. Dear! I only . . .

RUMI. It’s alright, really.

TEHMI. Why do you always talk to him like this?

RUMI. I say it’s alright!

RATAN. I am sorry then. I’ve offended you. I am sorry. (37)
Patel also underlines in *Mister Behram* the complex relations that existed between the British and the Parsis during the colonial period. Though they had good regard for each other, the elite Parsis always exhibited a firm conviction to their ideas and did not mind confronting with their friendly British. Patel artfully explains the same through conversations, simple and satirical, among Behram, Naval and Watts. The discussions between Behram and Naval on the issue of restraining the British administration through court from acquiring vast extent of agricultural lands for setting up a cantonment expose that the British courts were not so independent from the administration and stand testimony to the Parsi selfless commitment to the cause of the social good:

BEHRAM. Watts has orders from his government to acquire the land . . . for their new military cantonment!

NAVAL. But we have examined the legalities, father. They are in favour of what the district needs. Any judge would strike down the cantonment move.

BEHRAM. Any judge? . . . They have their way, these English. They certainly won’t leave the judge alone to make his decision. (239-240)

The Parsi legal luminaries are also sure that the Collector, the district head will approach them, but they will not compromise on public good:

BEHRAM. Mr. Watts will come running to us, begging us not to contest the move. . . .

NAVAL. But we shan’t oblige him.

BEHRAM. Of course we won’t. The whole district, all our friends, are behind us. It has become a cause. (240)

As expected Watts visits Naval and Behram and plays his tricks shamelessly; the Collector of the British who divided Bengal to rule, would not hesitate to divide a tiny
family to rule. It is real entertainment to read the conversations over the cantonment issue through which Patel exposes the wickedness and purpose of the British and enhances the values, the grit and the competence of his elite Parsi community:

WATTS. Tell me, tell me all your thoughts, young man.

NAVAL. (smiles, pulls himself together). I will trade them for yours, Mr. Watts.

WATTS. No, I will claim the privilege of my greater age. I shan’t tell you my thoughts, but I’d like to know all of yours. (247)

To an insistent Watts, the unrelenting Naval replies that Watts will find it soon enough, “In the courts” (247). As Naval exits, Watts finds Naval too sharp and hopes to “get more information out of Behram, by a few cleverly placed questions” (248). Behram enters to find Watts snooping and makes a curt remark, “I keep all important papers under lock and key” (248). Behram is more scathing as he continues: “Really. You are shameless, Mr. Watts. Each of your social visits is actually to reconnoitre . . .” (248). When his efforts through persuasion and flattery failed, Watts shifts his track to exhibit his authority, yet only to get a befitting reply from Behram:

WATTS. Oh why should I flatter? Has it not occurred to you that if we lose this case we could even so swoop down on that land by requisition, by ordinance, as something absolutely essential to government?

BEHRAM. A measure you wish to avoid all the same. Since, at least from time to time, your government likes to keep up an appearance of fairness. (248)

The conversations between Behram and Watts are exchanged with satire all the way:

BEHRAM. . . . Naval will trust anyone he has come to like.

WATTS. He has come to like me!
BEHRAM. We all have, Mr. Watts. That, too, is our great weakness. . . .

WATTS. . . . So! You say even you have come to like me, Mr. Behram?

BEHRAM. But not trust you. (Pause) Yes, I do like you after all. I didn’t to start with. I thought you were ignorant and dull. But you are not. (250)

Patel consciously places his elite community one shade higher in brilliance than the clever British. As Karaka speculated, the “Parsis are more vital than either Indians or English men in India” (98) and “their grandeur, magnificence and glory were unsurpassed by any other nation of ancient times” (97). Patel acknowledges Parsi shrewdness through Watts, in praise of Behram: “You are charming. The way you will deprecate the vigour of your own choices, and your free-ranging imagination! And I have seen both at work . . . you have also with equal daring applied fruitfully to challenge us all on so many public occasions!” (222).

However, notwithstanding the conflicts of interests and the clash of self, the British have envisioned the utility of Parsi involvement and the Parsis have as well obliged when the colonisers sought to introduce or carry forward a good deed. Mister Behram reminds one of the rampant prevalence of child marriage and the eventual horrific practice of sati that once haunted the Indian society. Patel asserts that his community had a working relationship with the British authorities in pursuing social reforms. Watts, the British Collector – notwithstanding a subsisting feud over the acquisition of agricultural land for Cantonment, between Behram, the Parsi lawyer and the British administration – requests Behram’s hand to prevent the practice of sati and Behram readily agrees.

WATTS. (settling into to a chair). To ask for your help. As usual. In the matter I shall refer to I am certain you will not refuse.
BEHRAM. My help? It appears I have helped you already by my clumsiness in court. Our pasture lands are certainly in your hands . . .

WATTS. Ah, don’t try to fox me, you! The case is not over yet . . . No, no. This matter is quite something else. (Pause) Indeed, in fact, it is my very first case of sati, my friend . . . . Now, if we do not act at once . . . , there will be pyres blazing all around us! . . .

BEHRAM. What did your report say?

WATTS. The usual. Very young woman, very old man. The child did not wish to die. (Pause) And then, the customary ‘persuasion!’ All kinds of relatives and beings screaming, imploring, threatening, cajoling. Bullying her and comforting her alternately, by turns, a regular caterwauling. Till the poor girl’s mind was benumbed! Hypnotized by noise and emotion. And before she knows it, she is gently led to that heap of wood and placed on top with the corpse! And she is ashes! . . . Will you come with me, Mr. Behram? To prevent any more such conflagrations in our district?. (270-271)

Patel reminds us of the now defunct evil, sati, with a wonderful description of how the widowed child is madly turned into ashes and tells the world of the Parsi contribution in reforming the society. One can’t lose sight of the historic contributions and the involvement of the relentless Parsi reformer Behramji Merwanji Malabari (1853-1912) in eradicating Sati and raising the Age of Consent. He goes to say through Watts that the British were in fact looking to the elite Parsis for their support in handling the Indians and projects a sort of dependence on the part of the British on the Parsis. As Watts seeks his help, Behram is all willing: “As usual, we must not handle this matter by ourselves. We
need the support of others in the district. Come. We shall go find it.” Watts sounds as if he has rather no alternative than to involve Behram: “I truly don’t like having to drag you into each little problem as though I couldn’t handle it myself, but . . . .” (272)

Another subject which Patel points out in his plays is the political resistance of the land owning agriculturists against communist’s hollow promises to the labour inciting unrest against and causing troubles to the landlords during the post-colonial India. Khushrow, the leading male character in Princes is portrayed as a representative of the Parsi landlords who were affected by the laws enforcing land reforms and prohibition on the sale and consumption of liquor. “The Parsi society was utterly feudal; many Parsi landlords were liquor merchants as well; these laws affected them adversely” (8). There was a tremendous feeling of injury done to them by the government but little effort was taken to compensate, convince or console them. Most inhabitants of the west coast Parsi village in which the action of the play takes place have been landowners and liquor merchants for long. Princes starts shortly after Independence, when both land and liquor shops were threatened. The new Congress government focussed on land reforms and prohibition and the Bombay Tenancy and Agriculture Lands Act, 1948 (Bombay Act LXVII of 1948) and the Bombay Prohibition Act, 1949 (Bombay Act XXV of 1949) were enacted by the erstwhile Bombay Province which later got dissolved into Maharashtra and Gujarat since 1st May, 1960. Social reforms caused dramatic adverse social changes in the life of Parsi landlords, who earlier enjoyed lot of leisure, freedom and authority. Patel beautifully explains the false and pretentious life-style of the losing Parsi landlords who belabour much to conserve their non-existent pride than to meaningfully strive to improve their lot. As the family plans for a leisure trip, Tehmi states that she can think of it if her husband “gets leave” and Khushrow, her brother makes fun of her and boasts of the freedom of the landlords, though in reality the land under their feet is slipping away:

Khushrow is struck by the government enactments and the communist onslaughts. He has no remedy in foresight but drags on with flimsy hopes and gives a false promise to his people to hide his fall: “Next year we visit all our estates – all our fields. Not this year. This year there is trouble – Communists! But next year. (Thumping Rumi) Tehmi, you bring your engine driver also. This year I fight Communists! But next year . . .” (30).

Even while Khushrow boasts of a royal life with “a ride to” his friend’s house, “More chicken, more drinks” and “miles and miles of rich land”, reality hurts him and he slowly retracts, “. . . Not now, next year. Now I fight Communists. But next year . . .”(31).

The Tenancy and Agriculture laws brought in restrictions on the retention, acquisition and transfer of agriculture lands by non-agriculturists. There was much anomaly on descriptions and definitions, and discriminations at the point of implementation. As Patel says Parsi landlords were worst affected:

. . . and their children mostly migrated to the cities and in particular, Bombay, where many ended up in jobs comparatively much smaller to their pre-independence status. While economically, that one-time rural community has worked its way upward in the city, very few Parsi feudal landlords who remained in the villages did any useful or creative work. As soon as their over lordship was threatened, most of them sold their lands and retired. (9)
Khushrow of *Princes* and Dorab of *Savaksa* belong to that category of the younger generation Parsis remaining in the villages and getting ruined without any work. Dorab, like the villagers, remains as crude as they are and will be shivering and frightened at the very thought of going to Bombay. Patel gives a concise description of the feeble youth in the words of Savaksa: “You ran back! Shivering! Frightened! . . . Of . . . Your fellow students? Children of Bombay clerks and office people? They don’t even have so much land as we do! How did they frighten you. Their fathers would be like dust before me! Mud!” But you.

There is a historical note that the villagers who remained at home had to bear the brunt of both the governmental assault on landholdings and the labour revolt and were stuck clueless. People who had gone early to the cities became industrialists and succeeded. *Princes* covers these two groups: the one that has left the village and gone to the city and flourished and the other that has continued to stay in the village and remained traditional. Characters like Mamma, Nergish, Shireen, Banoo and Khorshed are portrayed as typical Parsi women; Khushrow represents the rich landowning class of landlords. Rumi, the second son-in-law of the family, portrayed as an engine driver is drawn from an ordinary life and the characters like Ratan, the eldest daughter, her husband Kali, and Tehmi, the second daughter, represent that section of Parsis who have migrated from their native village to big cities to grab job opportunities through their hard work and to lead a better way of living. And Sheroo is portrayed as pauper representing the poor among Parsis, ruined by the landowning class.

In the event of migration within, as they move from rural Gujarat to urban Mumbai, there arises yet another socio-political and economical issue, and a longing for the traditional values lost in migration. The nostalgia of the educated Parsis for the rural environment is brought out in *Princes*, through Ratan, who migrated to and is well settled
in Bombay. She has a longing for the village, where she was brought up. As she enters her parental house, Ratan is delighted: “Let me look around. This I like best - the first moment of coming. The peace. The silence I can hear my own voice. What a change! How I love this house -walls, plants. I am happy, very happy. Where are the children?” (46-47). Later, as she leaves for Bombay, there is a nostalgic replay of the same sentiment:

   RATAN. . . . When I was a girl the servants would call me and I would sit with them around a fire. They had such a smell- like healthy plants. And their language! I never fully understood it-imagine. I was here for twenty years and I did not know their language! But how soothing it was! Just the sound of it would make me feel I knew the whole country!

   (113)

However, this discourse does not end up merely nostalgic but also stands as a proof of the Parsi spirit of adaptability in terms of being transcultural.

Another instance of a similar longing for the values lost in migration is found in *Mister Behram*. Feeling threatened by the rise and recognition of Naval as a lawyer of eminence, Behram seeks to humiliate Naval by asking him to wear the Warli dress - “a G-string and a button less black vest”(225); Naval doesn’t hesitate to come in the humble Warli dress before Behram as well as the District Collector, Watts. Naval turns nostalgic and longs for his early village life and deprecates his otherwise commendable transition from an insignificant tribal to an important man in the court in the city; with self contempt, he describes himself as one “praised for talking nonsense in the courtrooms!” (228) and regrets having moved away from all the trivial happiness he enjoyed as a tribal – with oxen, plough, grass, splashes of dung and urine, to an unhappy stage of talking
nonsense. The nostalgia for traditional values makes Naval regret that he should not have moved away from the incorruptible rural atmosphere:

The plough would skip about me in my little hand, this way, that way, striking the clods . . . . And the oxen! Oh! Oh! They knew! They knew this was only a little boy guiding them and they tried tricks, getting out of line, taking a bit of wayward grass on the side, but I would tug them back into line! Then the oxen would have their revenge, letting out big splashes of dung right in front of me, and my feet . . . would feel comforted treading on warm dung as though it were a soft carpet and strong healthy steam, dung steam, would rise to my nostrils. . . . (228)

Patel thus handles so elegantly the issue of further migrations within and the eventual nostalgia for the traditions lost in migration.

Dolly, an elite Parsi, finds it hard to accept Naval’s nostalgic longings for the apparently trivial and inconvenient past; she doubts whether it was not horrible for him to be reminded of the labour and suffering. Naval says:

In fact . . . I was transported (smiles) when I wore that dress. . . . I felt I was seven years old and once again working in a field with ten or twenty others drenched like me! In pouring rain! I would plead with the older men to be allowed to plough the fields with them, and they would laugh and give me the plough and oxen team, and I would join the line- transforming hard earth clods into raked mud, ready for rice-planting. (227)

As Naval is a Gujarati tribal his mind is so close to rural as well as agricultural landscape which is analogous to Zorastrian’s love for nature and agriculture. Zoroastrianism taught people to extend agriculture and industry by supplying cattle and
other implements and it is the obligation of every Zoroastrian to help in the promotion of agriculture. Agriculture is so important for the Zoroastrians; “There can be no power”, Ardisheer Babigan (Ardashir) the founder of the Sasanian Dynasty remarked, “. . . no army without money; no money without agriculture; and no agriculture without justice” (Malcolm 73). Maganlal states that it is a religious duty that “one should ... irrigate the land, promote the growth of vegetation . . . (88). Patel has therefore rightly dedicated almost three pages to the scenic description of agricultural activities in Mister Behram and makes an enjoyable recollection of the tribal experiences of Naval in minute details.

Patel also excels in describing the chaos in the family of the Parsi landlords caused by the political and social changes. Parsis, who are relegated to live in a world of the past with false pride, wriggle to face the situation and struggle to come to reality when they lose their properties. Khushrow is clueless and even afraid to break the news of loss to his parents; it is a shock to the family as a whole:

KALI. Yes. (Pause) Do they know?

KHUSHROW. Who?

KALI. Pappa? Mamma?

KHUSHROW. About the land? Oh no. No. (Pause)

RATAN (who has joined them). But how could it happen? How? The government Helps agriculture. Free seeds, free cattle. We read about it all the time, Khushrow. How could it happen? What have you done?

KALI. We will talk about it later. We will find a way.

RATAN. Your letter was a shock. A shock. In one stroke it took away all our joy. What have you done, Khushrow?

KHUSHROW. It’s a fact. (99)
The mighty landlord, Khushrow, who would once roar against anyone, on being stripped of his land is reduced to an invalid. Even Khorshed, the mother of his sister’s husband, Navzar, turns so eloquent, fearless and, merciless in her abuses and teases:

KHORSHED. Chopped your land, chopped your house, chopped you up - like a fish! On your own table! Your house is firewood. What is left? Do you know!

KHORSHED. Firewood! I say it! Your worth is firewood! Sorabji your land is not in your hands for a month now! Not a month more! I tell you! . . . (103)

Besides, Patel brings to the fore the generation gap between the father and the son in a Parsi family and each sticking to his own perspective. Dorab gets worried about communist organisers among the workers; Savaksa is however old fashioned and casual about it: “. . . when my horses throw out their dung, the workers’ children run and push their fingers into that dirt! They fight-to eat gram seeds that my horses empty out from their hot stomachs! And my son is frightened of this breed of workers!” (195). Patel says that when Savaksa “shrugs off their rising power, he is actually wrong because he doesn’t foresee it as a force that will have to reckon with, whereas Dorab’s fear is real” (120). Dorab however is naive and unpolished as he tries to quell the revolt by resorting to the police. Savaksa basks under the feudal notion and though he fails to understand in full the brewing threat from workers, yet he is deft and cunning in handling the problem as it emerges. He neutralizes the communist tailor who becomes a potential threat to his supremacy by his use of paternalistic benevolence and diplomacy:
. . . . What do I do, instead? I send for the tailor. I say, ‘You poor man, your wife is sick; your father is mad, see, he is chained inside your house, your children don’t have enough to eat. Here, take two hundred rupees from me every month, for one whole year. If you are working for this party or that party, we won’t tell them anything’. (Pause) Do you know what he did? He cried! His party does not give him so much money. (194)

Patel exposes the old Parsi feudalistic mind as exhibited by Savaksa who would not accept a democratic change and the rightful aspirations of the subaltern.

Patel also suggests that the elders are dominant while the younger generation less competent and therefore helpless and dependent. Savaksa subdues Dorab’s ambition telling him that caring after family property is an important position and ridicules him for not possessing the qualities required of a member of the Panchayat:

SAVAKSA. Caring after such a big property – that does not make you happy. Such an important position! I don’t keep a manager. . . .

DORAB. A manager won’t give you half your earnings. . . .

SAVAKSA. . . . Panchayat! Can you take command? Can you speak at meetings? I have not tried to make you come up? Before the world?

And what do you do then? Stand like a bullock! Start sweating! Wiping your hands! (139)

There is a culture shock when the younger generation turns against the older generation. There evolves a source of conflict in the family and community and this seems true when Dorab becomes ambitious and takes the initiative. When all of Savaksa’s plans are ruined, Dorab takes ascendancy even to humiliate him. The political search for power outside the home retracts into the home and within the family as Dorab aspires to
become the dominant force within the family by superseding his father. As Hutoxi asks for Adeser in exchange of her sister, Perin, and turns abusive, the windows of the house are conspicuously shut on fear of humiliation from outside. Dorab humiliates Savaksa right at that time saying:

Yes, Pappa. Be her ambassador! Bring messages! Bring her commands!

She commands, and Savaksa runs and becomes her dog, she puts letters in his collar! Letters to us! . . . Why did you even listen to such a demand! . . . This is Great Savaksa? Such filth came out of her mouth, and you did not push it back into her throat? . . . . And you want to control panchayats, with this courage? You taunt me for sweating!? Look at your face now!

You are sweating, or no? (178-179)

And as the conversation progresses Dorab even takes the courage to taunt Savaksa with the same words he used to say: “Have the courage!” In the end when Perin jumped out of the latrine window and fell into the dirt, Dorab promptly asks Savaksa, “Who will you have in your Panchayat now, Pappa? You will need me, I think, to fight your workers . . . your tailors . . . all your enemies . . .” (199).

Savaksa’s dismissing so airily of the red flags at the end of the play may be but heralding the declining power and prestige of the Parsi landlords in rural Gujarat. His own splendour, which may go along with the powerful British, comes to an end abruptly “with his head down, looking around him with restless eyes, like a trapped bull” (200) suggesting that the old ideology that had kept the patron-client relationship in hope would no longer work smoothly. Behram too witnesses a culture shock when he realises Naval’s upcoming as a lawyer of eminence and perceives him as a threat to his prominence. The moment Behram realizes that he has got a brilliant child, Nahnu, a Warli tribal, he renames him as Naval, sends him to school and later on to London to study law and to
become a fine lawyer in his own right. In re-naming him Naval, Behram tries to assimilate him into the Parsi Zoroastrian fold. To further validate this adoption, he marries Naval off to his only daughter, Dolly. The status of Naval rises and Behram brims with pride as he says:

Mr. Watts here cannot believe you could be Warli – all trace of it is gone, gone, he says. In mind, body, gait, thought, inflection, you are the brilliant, modern young lawyer who will dazzle all courtrooms. And of course you are. That is our triumph, together, yours and mine. We made you, did we not? (225)

But the all submissive Naval, driven to the end, becomes self assertive and upsets Behram. In the last scene, though Naval was behind Behram begging for his hospitality, Behram humiliated him to the core. As an authoritative master Behram wanted Naval to proclaim that he has given more importance to Behram rather than to his daughter and threatens that only then he will give his daughter back to him. Naval immediately retorts:

It is not in your hands any more to take her away or to give her to me. She is mine...assuredly and always! (Pause) I thank you, father, twice over. Once you gave her to me with willingness. But then I received her from your hands in all my weakness and frailty. I now take her again, this time from your unwilling hands, into the utter certainty of my own. (Pause) Accept this new moment, father, this great lesson . . . . (287)

Behram represents the Parsi mono cultural static patriarchal system whereas Naval stands for the changing dynamic multicultural entity but with it the patriarchy is to continue. Metaphorically, Behram representing Parsi settler attempts to posses the native element implied by the character Naval but in turn is transculturally possessed or nullified by the
native; this is indicative of the loss of the Parsi settlers to the natives in the post-colonial era.

Patel also highlights important issues of the dominant and at times controversial Parsi Punchayet during the British rule which however had shaped “the sense of community and group identity, social norms, responsibilities and obligations that attached to Parsi identity both in the urban setting and in general” (Palsetia 65). The Parsi Punchayet of Bombay that had been derived from the caste panchayat system in India was instrumental in defining and shaping Parsi identity in Bombay and emerged as a quasi-judicial body settling Parsi religious issues indigenous to India. “Its roots among the Parsis stemmed from the cultural assimilation and adaptation the Parsis underwent after their arrival in India” (68). Palsetia asserts:

At the zenith of the Punchayet’s existence, a tacit social ideology emerged that came to represent the full desire of the Parsis to safeguard their identity as a people and community. Ultimately, both the rise of the Punchayet along with its decline owed to the historical process that sought to preserve and safeguard the sense of identity among the Parsis. (65)

The official call for the formation of Punchahyats in Bombay had owed something to the influence of the British on the Island. “The creation of internal governmental structures for the communities in Bombay was part of the establishment of British authority on the Island” (68). With the growth of the religious endowments and institutions of the Parsi community in Bombay, largely under the control and management of the elite composition of the Parsi Punchayat, the community came to exercise as much control over the religious life of the community in India, as it did over the social and political affairs. It settles disputes between parties as well as discusses issues of concern to the entire community. Many issues of social and religious nature such as marriage, adoption,
ex-communication and priestly duties were of concern to them. In the years after its reconstitution it took steps to consolidate its authority, to make Bombay more independent of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Navsari, which was the centre of Parsi priestly authority. The new Punchayat was instrumental in putting in place a series of regulations such as laws against bigamy and infant marriage as well as those regulating the customs and habits of the community. “Many of the parameters reaffirmed the authority the Punchayat had assumed since 1791, and upheld the standards of the community”(79).

Patel’s projection of Behram as a social reformer based on the Parsi Punchayat’s religious amelioration points out the existing anxiety that has been going on among the Parsi community and the adoption of a non-Parsi child as a challenge to the Parsi lineage. He is a man fighting against him and against the norms of the society in instigating social reform. He puts on a brave front against social criticism and yet suffers his own doubts and inner conflicts. Beneath the surface of this play are several tensions and conflicts that deal with not just the colonial backdrop but also the concern for the Parsi ethnicity and Zorastrian religion. Behram takes pride, justifies his reformative action, and exhibits his grit when in dialogue with the British Collector, Watts:

There are rumblings and grumblings, a few friends annoyed, a few relatives alarmed, my wife too! ‘Set him free’, she said, ‘into his own world.’ As though this world (indicates room) were to be bondage! People shook their heads, the priests threatened excommunication! But truly what could they do? There is your advantage of great wealth and position, they make all your decisions right. And I admit I made free use of both when I ignored everyone’s protestations. And secured for myself an excellent son-in-law. (221-22)
Behram’s adoption of Naval raises questions whether the rules regarding adoption and marriage are the same for everyone irrespective of their class, or are they flexible enough to bend when highly successful men, like Behram, manipulate and manoeuvre for their personal interests. Patel as a cosmopolitan, in this context exemplifies the characters of both Behram and Naval through simple words of elegance dwelling on love and charity and especially on the brilliance and the greatness of Behram, the Parsi intellectual. He pours out the heart of a benevolent Parsi to full exhibition as Watts and Behram converse about Nahnu’s adoption and Dooly’s marriage to him:

BEHRAM. What could one do, confronted by so much cleverness! . . .

WATTS. And I suppose had to allow him to marry your daughter!

BEHRAM. Oh sir! Any man of liberal education would have done the same as I. The Children wanted it so. They grew up together. ... And where was the harm? . . . (221)

Watts is highly appreciative of Behram as an icon of Parsi reformation and is amazed at his modern thinking quite distinct from the Indian set up: “Remarkable! I have seen nothing like it in all my work in this country. . . . That you should have adopted a child from your own Warli labour, raised him to become a prodigy, an eminent . . .!” (220-221). And this remarkable behaviour continues to put Watt’s into astonishment: in another conversation with Behram, Watts wonders how an affluent Behram gave her daughter in marriage to a tribal, and finds it hard to imagine the consequential problems to their child in the Indian society, for instance:

. . . . Do you really believe that in this wicked, wicked world you could continue with your foolish reforms, Mr. Behram? Marrying your daughter to a tribal boy! Introducing woman to our courtrooms, and what next! Is it
not stretching the principle of courage to an extreme? (Pause) And also, how will you see such problems through to their consequences? Their child, for instance?! And in a society like this one . . . ! (249)

Behram is in full confidence and he retorts in emphatic positivity:

BEHRAM. In tomorrow’s world he will be the child of a brilliant young man and a bold woman, a citizen of the world! If I had the slightest doubt of this I would have shivered and sweated to give my consent to the marriage.

WATTS. Really, my friend, I wonder at you. (249)

Patel thus sees the consequences and problems of intermarriage for the Parsis as an opportunity for the evolution of a greater opportunity for widening the borders. It is actually what many younger Parsis are indeed adopting.

But noted critic Nilufer Bharucha has a very interesting view to offer on Parsi resistance to conversion into the Parsi fold. She is of the opinion that such a resistance in India today is more for economic reasons than theological:

Historically these promises and self- imposed conditions were a means of protection and self-definition . . . But today the reasons are very different . . . the Parsi Punchayet Trust Funds are indeed very rich in terms of property, bonds, shares and even cash. Given the sky-high property prices in Bombay and other metros in India, conversion, to Zoroastrianism would give the new converts the right to reside in the sprawling housing complexes owned by the Parsi Punchayets and claim their rights also to their other welfare schemes. This is a scenario not many Parsis would welcome with open arms. (44)
Simultaneously Patel never forgets to bring to light the impact of adoption and of the reformation Behram has undertaken and to tell how difficult it is to bear the consequences of that. In the feast at Behram’s house in Act III amidst the noisy celebration one could notice the lawyers talking animatedly:

FIRST LAWYER. If you are so kind to bring your daughter to us to court, we don’t mind bringing our bedding . . .

HEGDE. . . . A toast to your wonderful team

FIRST LAWYER. A toast! A toast to three donkeys

THIRD LAWYER. . . . One low-caste donkey, who should have only a piece of dirty cloth tied between his legs! Yes! But dress him up in lawyer’s clothes! Marry him to your daughter!

SECOND LAWYER. Make a good bedding! (255-56)

A toast turned out to be almost a mockery. When Behram was about to share credit with his son-in-law, there were murmurs from the guests. This episode reveals the level of hate that prevailed in the caste ridden Indian society which does not even relish the rise of a talented ‘low-caste’ man and his merger into another community; *Mister Behram* implicitly extols the reformation Behram undertook with courage and conviction.

Along with the political and religious set up that prevailed in Gujarat, Patel brings out the social panorama of the Gujarati Parsis and makes use of a succession of images in his play, *Savaksa*, to give emphasis to the Parsi way of life in Gujarat. *Savaksa* set in the rooms of Savaksa’s manorial house in a large village in Southern Gujarat moves around “the dusty street that comes in from the railway station and harbours an unkempt bazaar” (126) and the portrayal of Savaksa’s house as a commercial and political establishment than for family living go with the theme of the play. Patel says that he was attracted by
the custom prevalent in Nargol for the bride and the groom to lead a procession through the village with their marriage bed carried behind them. When he heard the story about a very elderly man who married a very young girl and the extraordinary sight of their bed being carried behind them he decided to use that amazing occurrence in his plays. And when once the story got linked up with his own experiences in Sanjan in Bulsar (Valsad) district, he has decided to bring in his experiences of both the city as well as the country and weld them together in one play and that worked well in Savaksa. Patel says in one of his interviews with Meher Pestonj:

I did see these two races. I did see the indigenous race as my idealization of the Warli race and the race that comes from abroad is obviously the Parsi race . . . and then a kind of series of a dramatic- incidents happen which explores both the life of this landlord in the little town and this young girl from Bombay. (119)

Savaksa begins with Savaksa showing Korshed the eczema on his arm highlighting the Parsi existence of living in tolerance in the new atmosphere:

So many colours. Brown, red, blue. First it was wet and red, then it gets dry and becomes brown. Then the dry place becomes wet again. The red hurts very much - see, touch it. Ah! Hurts! The blue place – touch, touch – blue! You cannot know - I feel many things: I want to scratch, I want to cut this out, like meat but it will come up again on another place. So I make it my friend, it won’t go away. (127)

As a doctor Patel’s description of eczema is highly scientific and yet it can be correlated with the Parsi continuation in India despite strenuous circumstances. The acceptance of it
as, “A gift! I can know so many things!” (127) a “wonderful thing” from God, makes it apparent how the Parsis can get along with what make them feel worst.

And when Khorsheedmai pities on Savaksa on looking at his eczema, he quickly retorts showcasing their economic status, not yielding to the poor, which shows that though defeated they could be on their own:

Poor? I am rich! Pity? But why? This house (*gesture to cover his possessions*) and-this skin! Every room is on this skin. This room, feel it here. Ah! Now this room (*tries to locate it on his eczema*) – it is here (*Scratches a part*). These are my orchards. (*caresses*) These are my servants. (127)

The villagers’ social setup and their insecurity due to the growing political power, the agitating tactics of the power politicians who upset the social harmony in Gujarat and the chaos around them are well communicated. As the Parsis are law abiding people they do not like the involvement of any member of their community in any scandal, which may defame the entire community. They are scared of police. The fear for police is conveyed through Kermina:

KERMINA. Pappa, my legs are shaking. Are we calling police?

SAVAKSA. What is this, Kermina?

KERMINA. Dorab is screaming police, police all round the house. (*Pause*) Everybody must be wondering! Our doors are never shut . . .

SAVAKSA. . . . No police is coming (*Pause*) And why should your hands become cold? When some big police inspector comes don’t you give him tea . . . ? What is there to worry about police? (184)
In his plays, the issues of marriage and children take the centre stage; spinsters, childless couple and intermarried couple have strong presence and catchy roles in the plays signifying the community’s worries. The Zoroastrian ideology on “the principle of increase” is waning, and Parsis fail in their “civic and religious duty” as they fail to marry, rear a family, propagate lineage and do the work of renovation.

The male children in the patriarchal Parsi community are less in number and bear much importance. Historically, the Persian conception of royalty was strictly masculine and the Zoroastrian church did not have any female clergy. Noshir, the only male child turns out to be the prince and everything for the family. Shireen, his aunt, has two daughters and has another in her womb; when it comes to a male child in the family, not even her own daughters mattered much for her but Nergish dislikes anyone’s claims and never parts the child; such is the obsession everyone has towards the male child.

SHIREEN.(grabs the child). Look at my little lamp. Look at him. I tell You, I have two daughters of my own – these lumps here – but I love my little boy more than anything. Anything. Look how he smiles.

NERGIS. Give him here.

SHIREEN. (returns child) . . . . (39)

The cries of Khorshed and Mamma (of the Prince) wailing over the death of their grandson, Noshir resonate the desperation of the community over the depleting number of heirs:

KHORSHED. . . . We have fields and fields – without the child they are wasted now. . .
MAMMA. My Ratan, now you give me children before I die. Now you
give me children before I die, Tehmi. Now you shame them for me,
Nergish. . . . (109)

The absence of a child extinguishes the spirit of posterity and makes life meaningless. The community with all riches in abundance struggles for an offspring, while their own servants who struggle for a living are blessed with children in abundance. A threat to the child puts the very living at stake. Patel underscores the plight of the Parsis as a community in the words of his characters. When Noshir is sick, Nergish refuses to take food and is so weak. When her sister persuades her, she rebukes:

RATAN. You must keep your strength, Nergish. Day to day.

NERGIS. Strength for what! I eat and it all goes through. Waste!

(Indicating Lahnu, who has entered) Look at him! Eight children, or
twelve? Now we don’t count. Pappa took care of him or would he be?
And he has twelve. (Pause) I prayed for one child, Ratan. Now I won’t pray. (100)

Khushrow has two daughters and his two married sisters do not have any children. He feels that his sisters with no young ones may get upset on seeing Shireen with the third one on hand and chides Shireen when the family prepares to receive the daughters visiting: “Stop pushing that child! I don’t want your show-off before them” (45). An otherwise quite normal behaviour of a mother holding her child along causes a flutter in the family. Even as Shireen denies any role, Khushrow continues: “But you wake the girl
and push her in front of you. That’s not show-off!” (45). Pappa objects to Khushrow’s rude behaviour with his wife and this rolls on into yet another interesting conversation outlining the mood and temperament of each one in the family. The spinster sister takes
the opportunity to justify her status and then pops up the varied dimensions of the problem:

NERGIS. Don’t marry and no troubles for you.

MAMMA. Don’t marry and sit on your parent’s hands.

NERGIS. You don’t worry me. I sit in the kitchen. I work more than all your servants. I will eat what they eat, but I don’t marry.

KHUSHROW. Who wants to marry you then.

PAPPA. You are no servant, daughter. You don’t sit on our hands. (45-46)

The child’s arrival in a Parsi family is a celebration since it happens very occasionally. In Savaksa one could find the eager parents bent on setting the atmosphere congenial for its proper growth, even before its arrival. When the entire family was troubled over Savaksa’s attempt to marry Perin and especially after a heated argument between Hutoxi and Savaksa, Kermina and Jer started enjoying, imagining about the expectant child of Jer:

KERMINA. When the child comes I will become an aunty. . . . Whenever Jer becomes tired I will look after the baby.

JER. Oh I will never get tired!

KERMINA. You don’t want me to touch your baby? Am I so dirty for you?

JER. All right look after him all the time then. Don’t run to me when you get tired! (172)

Patel poignantly underscores the significance of the growing number of spinsters in Parsi community; Parsi girls are either delaying or avoiding marriage, or unwilling to marry boys of their own kind and have their own progeny, or marrying late and confronting consequential issues of reproduction. Nergish looks after her sister’s child, Noshir with love and pride and is not ready to marry. Patel through an elegant
conversation between Mamma and her spinster daughter, Nergish brings out the parental longing for their children to get married and bear their own children and the aversion of the young Parsi ladies in general to get married:

MAMMA. Leave him to me, Nergish. Have a child of your own.


MAMMA. Get married, Nergish . . . .

MAMMA. Yes. Your sister’s child. But you will be mad about your own.

NERGIS. I am mad about this one. That is enough...

MAMMA. Have a child of your own. See how you feel. Flesh from your body – see eyes, nose, mouth, all riches from you. Then don’t lose it, girl. Oh God, don’t lose it. (25-26)

Patel misses not an opportunity to highlight the concern for marriage and children. As the members leave their patriarchal home after the vacation, this issue crops up again:

TEHMI. Send us a card to say Nergish is to be married. We’ll come. Immediately.

NERGIS. Thank you, no. I wait for this one. (kisses child).

RATAN. She’ll surprise us. Wait and see.

NERGIS. Oh no.

SHIREEN. (to Ratan and Tehmi) And also when you come next time – you – there must be children.

NERGIS. Yes. That’s your test.

SHIREEN. Married for years and no children! . . . (40)

Pappa during a brief chat with Noshir’s school master also laments over his daughters not bearing children. The anguish of the elderly father about his children not having progeny,
losing the estate and his little control over the happenings are brought out in Pappa’s conversation:

My daughters. Why have they no children? My daughters know. They won’t tell. Everything is all right, they say. Everything. My son- he won’t speak to me. I gave him all my estate. He manages, I don’t question that. I know what happens there. I don’t question. *(Pause)* I know that. (43)

Patel presents this issue in a subtle and highly persuasive manner in another instance, and warns that the community will extinct; during an affectionate sisterly talk at tea, Ratan and Nergish discuss the problem of the other - Nergish not marrying and Ratan not bearing children:

RATAN. Come here darling. Listen to me. Why don’t you make us all happy? It will do good, I promise.

NERGIS. Never. Oh God, never.

RATAN. You have not tried.

NERGIS. You have.

RATAN. I am unfortunate. And I would do it again.

NERGIS. Oh! Again!

RATAN. . . . I look at Khushrow’s two girls, how beautifully they grow, and that helps. I keep this close in me, what we feel for each other. Our family. If you don’t marry you will kill your own people. (85-86)

A study of the circumstances thrown in the plays would reflect the real state of affairs in the Parsi community. Everyone in the family persuades Nergish to marry, but she chooses not to marry; her reasons may be many including her wholehearted love for her sister’s son and her dislike towards family squabbles; she declares: “Don’t marry and no troubles for you”(45). The disheartened Khushrow worried over her growing age
retorts: “Who wants to marry you then” (46). But unlike Nergish who chose not to marry, Kermina of Savaksa appears to have been left unmarried for external reasons. She was not persuaded by any and it appears that Savaksa and Dorab find their personal agenda more important to pursue; Kermina doesn’t have a worried mother or sisters to persuade her incessantly over the matter.

Nergish of Princes, and Kermina and Hutoxi of Savaksa remain spinsters and remind one of the large numbers of elderly spinsters in the Parsi community. The plays do not expressly spell out the reasons for it. Patel is of the view that many instances of spinsterhood would be a matter of personal choice: “There will be other instances, of course, where events outside her control will force a woman to remain unmarried, though she may truly want to marry. In India, a third factor; lazy or mean or impoverished parents who do not find her a husband in good time” (12). While Nergish appears to have remained spinster by choice, Patel hasn’t gone into the psychology of why Kermina stays unmarried and he declares, “This is what I like so much about the arts - that by stopping short of sociologese and psychoanalese, one can say much more than one could have otherwise” (121). The high profile Parsi ladies do not generally have an appreciable impression about the suitability of Parsi boys as their life partners; Kermina is shown as one among them. Savaksa points out her rejecting many proposals: “We showed you many men, Kermina. Every year more and more. But you said no.” Kermina retorts: “You showed me funny-looking men.” (147)

Patel brings yet another significant feature, as already discussed in Chapter One, of the strict observance of monogamy and endogamy within the tiny community which leads to constricted choice of potential mates essentially ending up with large presence of consanguineal and affinal marriages. It is highly intriguing for the elite ‘race’ of superior civilization to rationalise a very primitive practice of marriage between vertical or
horizontal relations within the family, and slightly beyond it, cross and parallel cousin marriages as well as intergenerational marriages. It is not surprising therefore that Gieve Patel consciously eludes dialogues on this practice in his plays. However, Patel’s *Savaksa*, and *Mister Behram* are pointers to the existence of such marriages within close and inter-twisting relations. In *Savaksa*, the plot veers around the idea of marriage of Savaksa and Adeser, the father and son duo, respectively with Perin and Hutoxi, the real sisters:

SAVAKSA. But I will marry Perin . . . .

HUTOXI. . . . If you like I will take some exchange! . . .

SAVAKSA. What do you want?

HUTOXI. I want your son, Adeser. I will marry him.

SAVAKSA. Hutoximai. (178)

Savaksa seeking to marry the young Perin and her own elder sister, Hutoxi asking for the hands in marriage of none other than Adeser, the younger son of Savaksa – suggest marriage within perplexing affinal relations. Patel presents a similar situation in Mister Behram as well, wherein Behram and Rati give away their own daughter, Dolly, in marriage to their adopted child Naval, the tribal Nahnu.

Patel also brings out the ill-effects of late marriages in Parsi community, scientifically, through Hutoxi who protests her young sister, Perin’s marriage to the aged Savaksa. Hutoxi seethes in anger:

Your rotting orchard wants to put his seed inside you, doesn’t he? . . . So then remember when the time comes, do call me! . . . I will pull them out for you – all those half-formed babies – one by one! I will pull them out from your body – with all their twisted faces! Do you think such an old
man can give you healthy children!? Let them all come out – three months, six months, five months! Nothing more! (189)

Adeser, Savaksa’s ‘thirty-year-old third child’, who is introduced as weak in the head stands a victim to the Parsi late marriages and the consequent setback which delays the process of growing up from adolescence to adulthood. Beyond these biological reasons, from childhood, Adeser is not at all disciplined by anybody; in fact he is encouraged to “chase dogs, throw stones at all the cats” (128) and then to sleep in the afternoons. Savaksa fails to reprimand or even make a word of counsel for Adeser and countenances the mischievous and uncivilised behaviour of Adeser; rather he defends Adeser and cautions others: “But never, never shout at . . . Never be hard to him” (141). This indulgence soon proves fatal; Adeser’s mischief leads to the death of the old poor woman, Khoshed. Adeser is so naive and stupid that he does not understand the seriousness of the death and the troubles invited by him through the death:

ADESER. (loudly). I just put some water into her mouth . . . I only put . . .

I only put . . .

DORAB. No one is blaming you! Get off . . . idiot! . . .

ADESER. (whispers aghast) She said, ‘Water, water,’ so I put water in her mouth. It came out from her nose! All came out!

DORAB. (kicks him). Who is blaming you? . . . Get away! (150)

Patel suggests loudly that the level of competency of the younger generation takes a dent for biological reasons as well as immature practices on child rearing.

The issue of falling numbers and its threatening impact on the very survival of the community are very disturbing that the Government of India, Ministry of Minority Affairs have introduced Jiyo Parsi, the Central Sector Scheme for Containing Population Decline of Parsis (CSSCPDP) – 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 advocates early marriage and parenthood at the right time and provides medical assistance for fertility treatment; the details of the scheme are available in the websites of Jiyo Parsi and of the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India. Preservation of the heritage and of the numbers has become an issue of concern for the nation and necessity for the Parsis.

The advertisements, the Parzor Foundation floated in furtherance of the advocacy part of the programme, also reflect the conditions prevalent in the community and have similarities to the anxieties and realities brought out in Patel’s works. The poser in one of the advertisements, “Will your boy friend ever be successful as Ratan Tata? Who are you to judge, Nicole Kidman?” – appears to directly answer Kermina of Savaksa who typically reflects the stature and attitude of the strong willed Parsi ladies, and shuns many men proposed to her: “You showed funny – looking men” (147). Another slogan of Jiyo Parsi is “Panni ja isn’t a spell from Harry Potter. It means get married”. This caption goes hand in hand with the umpteen persuasions from Nergish’s (Princes) family to her to get married and is a word of wise counsel to the likes of Kermina (Savaksa). Patel’s Ratan and Tehmi (Princes) are probably the target group in the caption “Our Children are our Future. . . Let us welcome being parents”. Another tag line, “Your grandfather’s 1955 fiat, Your other grandfather’s 1976 Yezdi, Your dad’s 1982 Gold Rolex Oyster, Who is going to inherit all of it?” reverberates the cry of Patel’s Khorshed (Princes): “We have fields and fields – without the child they are wasted now’(109). A lonely boy swaying in a swing besides another empty one under the caption ‘Don’t leave your child to face the world alone’ would resemble Noshir, the lone male child in the Princes. Other taglines encouraging to marry early, 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
and the threat that “The milk is in grave danger of running out of sugar”—all convey the community’s existential issues steadily highlighted in Patel’s writings.

There are other initiatives as well by many other Parsi organisations towards nurturing their race and numbers. The “Gujarat Parsi Punchayet” offers free accommodation for married couple as an effort to induce single Parsis to embark on married life and procreate. While many Parsis welcome and appreciate these institutional efforts to conserve their community, there is a section among this highly egoistic and civilised society, which protests that marriage and reproduction are purely the personal choice of each individual and they cannot be reduced to Pandas to make puppies. Patel ideally reflects all these sentiments through the Parsi characters in his plays.

As in any patriarchal community women have been bestowed with the lineage of tradition and so in the Zorastrian community. Patel has given much of importance to women in the play, _Princes_, as the focus of the play is a child. The Parsi ladies are highly fashionable and conscious of their apparel. Even those belonging to the poorest families are conscious of their appearance. Parsi parents take pride in beautifully dressing their children, making them all the more magnificent. Patel enjoys creating an animated cheerful atmosphere; Piloo and Kumi, children of Khushrow, aged twelve and ten dress rather provincially even while going to the shore and “look fresh, clean and groomed” (44).

The beauty and charm that the Parsis possess is asserted in a respectable way. Noshir attracts everyone with his soft temperament and demeanour. Perin of _Savaksa_ is much young, vulnerable and attractive, blooming and full of life. In _Mister Behram_, Rati is a pretty beautiful lady with all charm. Dolly, her daughter, boasts that when she was in London she used to closely look at all the beautiful women and no one stood near her mom in comparison: “And not one of them, not a single one... had nearly like your
straight, firm back, your mild eyes, your full and gentle face, like a ripe fruit. Mother, don’t you know it, (softly) you are . . . the most beautiful woman in the world!” (236). Patel through Rati praises the beautiful Parsi ladies who are tall, straight, attractive, and graceful. He is bold enough to proclaim to the world that they are the most beautiful women in the world.

In *Princes*, Nergish is portrayed as a domineering character accustomed to all traditional activities. She dedicates her whole life for Noshir, her sister’s son. When everyone in the family departs to Bombay, Nergish continues to remain in the house with Pappa and Mamma. Like Nergish, Kermina of Savaksa, has a strong influence in the family affairs, and handles things with confidence and authority. Shireen in the beginning, as the daughter-in-law of the family is a powerless woman in the patriarchal Parsi setup ignorant of the estate affairs; she does all the work for the family and aspires to get recognition from family members for her hard work, but in vain. Later as a mother and aunt she does everything authoritatively, with courage and determination: helping the doctor during the last hours of the dying Noshir when all were grief stricken, indolent and desperate and as a wife supporting Khushrow when he lost his estate and ultimately like many other Parsis moved towards Bombay with hope and determination.

It is also said that a Parsi mother is overwhelming, powerful, dominant, and more involved with her children rather than her husband. Homamai, referred to as “Mamma” in *Princes* is one such character who is more attached to her son, Khushrow and tries to defend him always whenever Pappa indirectly accuses him of being immature regarding the affairs of the estate. She is more anxious about him as his business fails and asks Ratan, her daughter who is rich and wealthy to help him clear out his debts. As a leading, governing mother she shows her concern for each and every one in the family in a mighty
way. She looks after them so authoritatively and even would not let her daughter-in-law feel displeased:

I like this, Shireen, I like this. This work, work. For everybody when they come. Or else I worry. About my husband, about my daughters, about my Noshir. (Pause). My children are poison in my blood. Good, thick poison. If that man tries to touch my boy I would kill him in the streets. If that man tries to touch my boy I would kill him in the streets. (54)

Her love for Pappa, her concern towards Nergish to get married, her fondness for Noshir, her caution towards Navzar and her aversion for Khorshedmai, whatsoever, every where she is pictured as domineering and powerful.

In *Princes*, Patel presents a picturesque description of the warmth of family life, one of the characteristic features of the Parsi community. The sincere concern that each member of the family has on the other is felt throughout the play. As the whole play is centred on familial relationship, he gives more significance to the conduct of love, concern and anxiety among the members of the family. Karen Smith observes during an interview with Patel: “The women in the play are very strong and are all individually realised” (11). Patel claims in the conversation that it is too much of a coincidence that Tehmi and Ratan have no children, that Nergish is unmarried, that Shireen has only daughters, that Banoo is old and barren and that the one daughter who bears a son dies and “it is because of these factors that the boy child becomes so important, an object of everyone’s avarice”(11). But it focuses on Parsi womanhood, reflects the Parsi demography and much of the play no doubt contains and deals with Parsi elements and is a magnificent reflection of the sad state of affairs of the community.
In *Savaksa* these beautiful, intelligent, modest women are portrayed as strong-willed, and courageous Parsi women who cope up with the parental, societal and cultural pressures in their life and quickly rise to the occasion in times of crisis. Jer, though submissive to the core becomes assertive and unrelenting when it comes to providing an appropriate environment for the child in the family:

>Pappa now you know you will soon get a grandchild. In a few months my baby will come in the world. A grandchild! Can you imagine it! The whole village will be happy that Savaksa has a grandchild! But in what house will it grow up? You tell me, a house where that . . . Hutoximai. . . is made into his aunt? (180)

Hutoxi is portrayed as one who has enough courage to face the worse situation that affected her both at home and in Savaksa’s manorial farm. She refuses to fit into and carry forward her mother’s submissive role, and never fails to deride Savaksa to manipulate things in her favour. She reacts violently to every aspect of the patriarchal system and to Savaksa she appears as one of the Moghul’s “opium-mad elephants” (173) which had turned on its masters. Savaksa, a cunning manipulator himself, is a little bit agitated however when the most disrupting threat comes from her. His personality has dominated the play until the arrival of Hutoxi who has no pretensions and is outrageous. Savaksa was able to handle his sons, the communist tailor and even the labour unrest in the field due to their dependency but not on this “sharp tongued motor mouth”(152).

>HUTOXI. . . Do you think I will let you go? I will rip it all out of you!

(Pause) What sort of people are you moving around with? (silence) And what is all this ‘honourable’! Honourable?! ‘Honourable’ mother?! Five minutes with my mother and they should know she was a beggar. (152)
She literally “burns with a sense of rage” at the patent immorality and injustice of the society towards persons like her and triumphantly deactivates Savaksa. Patel declares that financial independence will liberate women:

HUTOXI. If a woman has even a small room in a city . . . and works in an office and earns just six hundred rupees, then she has no need for you!

(Pause) You can do nothing to her!

SAVAKSA. But what would I want to ‘do’ to her?

HUTOXI. You cannot force her to be kind to you, Sir! (168)

And in Mister Behram, Patel more subtly handles the challenges and resistances to gender equality and sexuality. Patel brings out Behram’s two selves here; one on the surface level as a radical social reformer and on the other deeper level as a conservative aspirant of culture continuity. Behram adopts a tribal shattering the eugenic pride of the community and takes him as his son-in-law fiercely confronting its patriarchal notions and eventual racial complexities; he thus suggests and professes the continuation of Parsi adaptability to changing situations which in turn would facilitate the continuity of the community. Nevertheless, Behram does not concede on the cultural front; he renames Nanu as Naval and through Navjote initiates him into Zoroastrianism; in the literal sense he rather takes Naval into his family and community as son-in-law, than giving out his daughter in marriage outside his community; in the process, he strengthens and extends his culture and seeks to ensure its continuity. Similarly, Patel inducts the duality of his purpose through Behram’s wife, Rati as well. On the cultural front, Rati is a counter self of Behram conserving the culture of a traditional Parsi wife, obedient and subservient. However, when the occasion demands of her, she firms up and asserts that the world that Behram “loved and enjoyed . . . is around” him and exhorts Behram to “Come back to it” (286).
In a highly conservative environment that prevailed then in India, the patriarchal Parsi community is ironically the pioneer in emancipation of women. Dolly went to London to study law; she was introduced to the male dominated courtroom and was permitted to marry at choice. Patel chooses the British mouth to laud these social transformations engineered by the Parsis. Watts would express his disbelief over “a woman in courtrooms” first to Naval:

HUTOXI. If a woman has even a small room in a city . . . and works in an office and earns just six hundred rupees, then she has no need for you!

(Pause) You can do nothing to her!

SAVAKSA. But what would I want to ‘do’ to her?

HUTOXI. You cannot force her to be kind to you, Sir! (168)

Watts repeats his surprise later to Behram also: “Marrying your daughter to a tribal boy! Introducing women to our Court rooms, and what next?” (249)

The General Report On The Census Of India, 1891 holds that in “the case of the Parsis, amongst the women of which race, literacy is far more prevalent than in other Indian communities”(213) and that “education may be said to have really permeated the community, so that both sexes are, comparatively speaking, on an equality in this respect” (241). Patel takes pride in projecting the literacy level and modernity of Parsi women. Behram’s simple straight answer to Watts who exclaimed about Behram’s allowing Naval to marry his daughter, explains the status and the freedom an educated woman in a rich Parsi family enjoys: “Any man of liberal education would have done the same as I. The children wanted it so. They grew up together. My daughter did her share in tutoring him for school, and goodness knows what else they talked about while poring over their books! (221).
At the same time Patel brings out the prevailing paradoxical situation of the social life of the community where women, though considered equal, are in fact not equal in a patriarchal set up. *Mister Behram* exemplifies this psyche; both the women in the play, Rati, Behram’s wife and Dolly, his daughter are ‘silenced’ by the male members of the household, Behram and Naval. He is an unabashed, bold Patriarch and though he sends his daughter to England to acquire an education in law, when financial constraints force him to choose between Dolly and Naval, he chooses to support Naval’s education over Dolly’s. This epitomizes the patriarchal attitude whereby female children are cut-off from the resources to provide for the male children. Behram doesn’t consider the opinion of Dolly worthy, even though she too studied law along with Naval and is brilliant. When Dolly expresses her desire to accompany him to the court, Behram lets her do so just to pacify her, but treats her like a junior clerk rather than as a legal assistant.

BEHRAM. . . . Gather all the papers for this cantonment case we are working on, classify them, put them in files . . .

DOLLY. I don’t want that work.

BEHRAM. All work is good work, Dolly. Anything . . . .

DOLLY. . . . Don’t forget, I studied Law with Naval for some years. . .

BEHRAM. Oh, fine! Naval! Get her a pretty lawyer’s gown. Bundle her into it and take her to court with you! (245)

Though Behram falters in court, he simply ignores Dolly’s suggestions; Dolly says: “And in each time I tried to tell Pappa what was happening, they would check me and jeer at me, to indicate to the entire courtroom that a hindering fool of a woman. . . !” (260). The character Dolly goes parallel with the history of Cornelia Sorabji, the first woman advocate in India who was not allowed to practice. The event record for 1923 by S. B. Bhattacherje reads: “Cornelia Sorabji became the first woman advocate when she was
admitted in the Allahabad High Court Bar. She was the first woman graduate of Bombay University. She was also our country’s first woman law graduate (from England) in 1894. But she was not allowed to practice till this year” (188).

Surprisingly as Dodiya reports, “the Parsi community that prides itself as westernized and liberated community is in fact not so liberalized” (97); Parsi women are respected and play decisive roles in the family and not beyond that, and without in any way challenging the patriarchal set up. Its traditional dictum of double standards one for the man and another for the woman, especially when it comes to inter faith marriage is something significant. Parsi women were first to get access to westernized education without much hurdle on par with their male counterparts. Yet female behaviour is continued to be codified and attempts are made to curtail any form of self assertion. On the cultural level, the traditional and religious reasons can be traced back to the Sassanid Empire whose state religion was Zoroastrianism.

Women of Sassanian society were viewed as role models displaying good behaviour. Women were expected to accept domesticity as daughters, wives and mothers, rather than to seek out public recognition. Although women had to be completely obedient to men, they were also allowed certain legal rights and responsibilities. These included the right to enter into contractual agreements and commercial transactions, access to their inheritance, to meet all debts, and they were held responsible for the violations of the law. (Nashat 34)

Rati, like any woman of Sassanian society is an embodiment of an elite Parsi lady who is always cool, calm and unruffled. It is she who helps Naval shed all his servility; she pushed him outside the kitchen and forced him to school to study among children of the rich and elite. She didn’t want him to waste the struggle he had put into study braving
the hostile atmosphere. One could notice Rati’s role in the evolution of Naval and Naval acknowledges it in absolute terms: “. . . And you said – ‘Naval, place nobody above yourself!’ . . . ‘Naval when your knees shake you must stand very straight and speak very loud and clear. You may even shout’ . . . So I practised doing that, and it helps. I do it now always! In the court rooms! . . .” (239)

But the very same Rati when it comes to choose between Behram and Naval, she as a typical Parsi wife, loyally accepts Behram and refuses Naval. S.A. Kapadia says: “Chastity and implicit obedience from a wife to her husband are considered to be the greatest virtues in a woman, the breach whereof will be punished as a sin” (38). Beyond this spiritual aspect, there is a stricter ancient temporal and legal dimension to the obedience of a Parsi wife:

In Zoroastrianism, obedience to husband is paramount; Parsi wife if disobeyed her husband, was liable to be issued with a ‘certificate of disobedience’ by court which would eventually strip her of all her privileges under marriage. During the Sasanian rule, a husband was entitled to call for divorce without wife’s concern for ‘refusal to obey an order concerning one of her duties.’ (Rose 29)

Rati upholds this tradition and does not condone anything that goes to say that she is disobedient to her husband: “Naval . . . my dear . . . I cannot look upon you any longer with the same eyes . . . Whether you wish it or no, you have become a source of pain . . . to my husband. I am unable, even for a moment, to witness this pain with indifference” (279). And in the farewell scene, when Dolly requests Rati to embrace Naval she gently withdraws though he steps forward. Rati firmly declines to even leave an impression of confrontation with her husband. When Dolly complaints to her about Behram’s behaviour, she patiently listens to all her grievances, and though Rati is always for Dolly,
Rati in a composed way says: “Understand this, Dolly. I have allowed you to say something I will not hear from you again. I shall listen to nothing, from you or anyone else, that I would feel wrong spoken in his presence” (273). Thus it is proved that on the deeper level, Patel is very conservative in preserving and continuing the Parsi tradition.

As food plays an important role in Parsi culture, Patel gives much importance to food and dining in his plays. The delicious Parsi dishes reflect the influence of their old home land. In *Princes* much of the conversations among the members of Sorabji’s family take place in and around the kitchen and dining table. It will be spectacular to see everyone in rich costume, seated together to have a meal and each one serving the other cheerfully:

KHUSHROW. Everyone heard. Now eat, eat, everybody. Every word means less and less appetite. (Loads Kali’s plate.)

KALI. I’m fine, I say! Don’t . . .

MAMMA. Leave him alone, son. He eats. Load the engine driver’s plate.

RUMI. (laughing). I won’t say no . . .

MAMMA. (filling Kali’s plate) . . .

KHUSHROW. (to Shireen) Fill their plates, fill their plates. (29)

No one is allowed to talk and worry about anything unnecessarily. “We will sit and talk. After food” (33) will be the reply of the mother always whenever someone tries to say something.

The Parsis are known to be philanthropic and believed to be honest and humorous. The word “good” for many Parsis has to do with charity and the emphasis on it continues even today. As said in The Good Parsi “you struggle, you rise through hard work to wealth, and then you give the wealth to others who are in need” (105). Patel highlights this philanthropic nature of the Parsis in *Princes* through Kali, Ratan’s
husband, who runs trusts for charities; Kali tells the doctor, “I want very much to help. You know we are trustees, my wife and I, to educational funds. For our people. Two funds, in fact. . . . (106). In one of the earliest European travelogues, *A Voyage to Suratt In the Year, 1689*, Rev. J. Ovington makes a special mention of “The Persies at Suratt” eating in common “at their solemn Festivals” and finds them “kind to their own Cast” and highly charitable:

For they (Parsis) shew a firm Affection to all their own Sentiments in Religion, assist the Poor . . . , very ready to provide for the Sustenance and Comfort of such as want it. Their universal Kindness, either in imploring such as are Needy and able to work or bestowing a . . . bounteous Charity to such as Infirm and Miserable; leave no Man destitute . . . nor suffer a Beggar in all their Tribe. (373-374)

The Parsis are portrayed as elements of mockery as well. Eunice De Souza observes during her conversation with Patel that it is made popular “through the kind of Parsi plays usually seen in the city so much so that almost any line in Parsi Gujarati or Parsi English tends to be regarded as funny, even grotesque” (17). Patel admits that a “quarrel in a Parsi play is usually presented as comic” but opines that to make such squabbles “constantly into comedy is to degrade your own emotions” (18). In *Savaksa*, Patel highlights the gravity of the ill-effects of a ceaseless wild tease in the tragic death of Perin’s father. Parsis are obedient and rarely revolting; when all the workers were on strike, Perin’s father kept working. Later the striking workers teased him to death. Perin quotes her mother as saying that “he was soft-hearted. He should have been proud, because he was faithful to his employer. But instead . . . he died” (144).

Parsis do not believe in idolatry; idol worship is considered as a transgression of Zoroastrian commandment. Zoroastrianism is about the veneration of energies that exist
beyond human perception; it does not accept idolatry in any shape or form and more so condemns as ‘religious adultery’ the worshipping of any god of another faith or keeping of any idol or photograph of such god in the house of a Parsi, and attending any religious ceremony of another faith. Chapter 68 of *The Book of Arda Viraf* condemns a woman to hell because she “despised ‘the good and poor . . . disregarded God, and . . . worshipped idols and . . . has been steadfast in the religion of Akharman and the demons” (190). As Parsis are known for their liberal trait of adaptability, they also tend to be close to other religions and rituals of the settled land, particularly of Gujarat and Bombay. There is a slippery among contemporary Parsis in the observance of strict rules of the religion; the community fights against this and advises strict resistance. One can witness idols and photographs of other religious figures occupying the pride of position in Parsi homes; they visit other religious houses, partake in those ceremonies and also liberally donate towards them. Patel highlights the community’s concern in the plots and hints at the Parsis embracing idolatry and other religious rituals signalling the deterioration in the ideology. His poem “Naryal Purnima” also speaks of this transition happening in Parsi houses during the celebration of the fisherman festival essentially following Hindu rituals. In *Princes*, during one of her visits to her parents, Ratan “brings out a small shrine in a suit case” containing “all varieties of gods and colours” (87); she claims them to be especially blessed by a saint and asks her brother’s daughters to Piloo and Kumi to kiss it. This notion of belief in God and form of worshipping God, is different and totally alien to Parsi beliefs.

Superstitious beliefs, rituals and prayers have also made inroads into the community despite severe resistance. When the doctor’s final attempt to save Noshir failed, there was a strong feeling that they should also try for the “other doctors” and the real doctor allows in two non-descript “doctors” who look like tribal servants in their
appearance. The doctor on attendance sarcastically describes them “That’s marvellous . . . potter, farmer, sometimes even a sweeper, and yet – when need arises – magic powers!” (105). Just then Shireen brings in some screens and the bed is concealed behind partitions; an indistinguishable chanting is heard from behind the screens and when the chanting has ceased, the screens are removed. The doctor examines the condition of Noshir and says that the magicians also couldn’t help. Patel does not want to undermine their irrational belief, yet he hopes that time would heal them off from all procedures and daily sciences will undermine the futility of superstition almost without his trying. Through the doctor Patel says: “Tooth and nail I fought them in the beginning. For years! . . . Slowly, yes, oh yes, very very slowly. But fifty, sixty, seventy years from now- there will be no more witch –magicians. Only my kind!” (105). Traces of superstitious beliefs surface in other plays as well. For instance, in Savaksa, as Hutoxi takes hold of Adeser towards the end of the play, Savaksa fears that Hutoxi could do some magic and take away his son.

SAVAKSA. She has put powders in your food-to bind you! That is how she has trapped you, son! . . . Don’t eat anything from her hands!

HUTOXI. But eat from your father’s hands! Eat from your sister’s hands!

They put tonics in your food, don’t they? To make you strong. Or to keep as their dog? Which is it? (191)

Mister Behram also begins with Naval’s vision of the birth of the black goat: “She gave bleating moans, her legs stretching, trembling . . . And in one splash the little goat came out, a black nodule” (214). This foretells symbolically some struggle which could be identified with Nahnu’s unfolding into Naval and his struggle for existence in the Parsi social set up.
Patel highlights the Parsi way of disposal of the dead. As discussed in Chapter One, Parsis do not cremate or bury their dead bodies for fear of polluting the purity of the elements. They leave the carcass into the holy “Towers of silence” where it will soon be devoured by vultures. It is a cult which is being followed traditionally by the Parsis and Patel speaks of it in *Princes* as well as in *Savaksa*. Noshir, on his sick bed enquires the doctor, “I will be eaten by birds? When I die?” and the doctor consoles: “A dead body is useless. A dead body does not feel” (77). In *Savaksa*, a reference to the throwing of dead bodies on iron stakes is found. When Hutoxi demands Adeser in exchange of her sister Perin, Savaksa sits with Adeser embracing as if protecting him from Hutoxi. Dorab ridicules Savaksa and tells Kermina: “Tomorrow she will send messages for you to ‘Throw Kermina down from the roof. Do it again and again till she is finished. Throw her bleeding body on sharp iron stakes!’ . . .” (180). Patel’s writings thus hover around Parsi ethos and traditions.

Language serves an important medium in reflecting culture. Ronald Wardhaugh, while elaborating on the nature of relationship between language and culture, observes:

The culture of a people finds reflection in the language they employ: because they value certain things and do them in a certain way, they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do . . . . Cultural requirements . . . certainly influence how a language is used and perhaps determine why specific bits and pieces are the way they are.

(230)

Parsis harbour a dilemma between their unstinted affinity towards Gujarati, their adopted mother tongue, and the fascination for the language of their new found likes and patrons, the British. Both the languages are equally important and closer to their hearts and the Parsi writers experience ambiguity over the choice and usage of Gujarati and English.
Mitra Sharafi says: “In deciding how to spell Parsi words in English, I have felt torn between a duty of fidelity to the Gujarati, on the one hand, and to the Anglicized usage of the colonial period, on the other. Colonial Parsi elites lived in a bilingual world that cycled constantly between English and Gujarati.”

Patel makes use of the language with an artistic mix of Gujarati English, interspersed with literal translations chiselled for the purpose of the plays. Patel’s English is an English he has “moulded” to suit his Parsi characters of Nargol. It is often ungrammatical; it is not correct English. Since Gieve’s plays are peopled with Parsi families from the west coast of Gujarat, he wrestled long with the problem of the language. The choice of characters with differing cultural backgrounds belonging to both the colonial and postcolonial era adds to the spectrum. Consequently the English in Princes is not the current everyday English spoken by the Parsis of Mumbai; it is peppered with strange expressions translated from Gujarati. Some of these are quaint as seen in Princes: “I am waste!” (26) or “He is in dung. He rolls there”(26) and some expressions like “big-mouth brother” (27) gather meaning from the context in which they are used.

When Khorshed argues that there are no priests and no prayers heard, at the death bed of Noshir, Mamma immediately shouts at her, and Ratan comes to her rescue pacifying Mamma “Forget them Mamma. It’s all a closed book.” Mamma instantly replies “No closed books with me! Open books, always! . . . ” (109). When both the families parade their war of words, Mamma challenges, “I will open books . . . Open all books now!”(109) and Khorshed loses no time to make her abusive outburst, “Then open her books! . . . Glut her open book . . . I will open you up!” (110). The play is thus interspersed with awful and irate words and cusses much known in the dialect of the Gujarati spoken along the west coast villages of Gujarat. A sort of gutsiness in the
language goes well with the feelings, rightly reflecting the sentiments, aches and agonies and serving in turn a good material for a tragedy.

The verb “to sit” is used in a fascinating manner and often the meaning changes with context in which it is used. When Nergish intervenes to patch up the petty tiff Khushrow has with his wife, she divulges her idea of remaining unmarried: “Don’t marry and no troubles for you” and Mamma immediately disapproves of it: “Don’t marry and sit on your parents’ hand” (45). Nergish quickly retorts: “You don’t worry me. I sit in the kitchen” (46). In the same stretch of the conversation, Khushrow says to Pappa, “You say one thing, then another thing. You give the estate, then sit on my neck” (46). In another duel, Khorshedmai attempts to silence Nergish saying, “Get married, girl. You want a man to sit on your mouth” (34) and Mamma rebukes: “So you bring your son? Who sits on his mouth?” (34). The varied meanings the word “sit” takes is thus beautifully underlined by the corresponding Gujarati dialect. Characters, like Mamma and Khorshedmai, use expressions that are violent in their imagery: they are certainly not polite; for example, expressions or cusses like “buffalo,” “Swine,” “Fiend,” “But when he growls I show my teeth” (49) and so on. And they are gusty; the language and the feelings go together.

The character of Savaksa is the most colourful one in the play and so is his language. “Put courage inside your husband Jermai,” Savaksa says to his daughter-in-law as Dorab “is frightened by colours.” Khorshedmai (Savaksa) is elated over the acceptance of her daughter by Savaksa’s family; the language Patel employs to express Khorsched’s happiness to Savaksa’s daughter-in-law, Jer is equally interesting: “I won’t talk now. My mind is free. I can see from your face that all my worries were wrong! No don’t go away, I am telling you I have cleaned all these thoughts out of my brain” (137).
But the characters in *Mister Behram* are all sophisticated people and for them speech is a way of keeping pains at bay. It is this cultural difference that has naturally led the native Indians to look upon them as strangers or as “the other.” The language used in *Mister Behram* is very characteristic of the English used by the 19th century elite upper class Parsi household. It is moulded in such a way that it acts as a distancing factor; “the characters in the play are highly articulate people. They know what they are going through and I wanted to give them the grace of being able to express it with absolute clarity” (213). There is a kind of excessive articulation in the beginning and towards the end of the play, culminating in silence – particularly in the case of Behram. The law courts in a sense function as a kind of metaphor for this excessive articulation to power; towards the end Behram’s collapse naturally has to end up in silence. Patel metaphorically concludes that the excessive articulation and assertion in aligning with the British to the exclusion of the localites forgetting “the original promise” to serve as sugar with the natives - caused their present plight.

Thus, the cultural aspects have been well linked through the blended language the author uses in his utterances through the characters. The daily routine of a Parsi household, the cuisine and customs as well as colourful Parsi Gujarati idiom, translated into English, also provide ethnic particularity to his plays. Patel says that he identifies with the Parsi ethos at the level of the social and cultural rather than the theological. His *Princes* deals with the cultural aspect of the Parsis whereas *Savaksa* on the social phase of the Parsis, and *Mister Behram* on both the social and religious level. For him, his ethos has been the filter through which he has explored the dramatic possibilities of life. He very strongly refutes the idea that writing about Parsis reduces his plays to the level of ghetto discourse. For him the ethno-religious nature of his drama is a means of reasserting the Parsi space within the wider Indian context.