Chapter Four

Culture shift in Gieve Patel's Poetry

No true poet can escape traditions, for all our yesterdays are involved in the poet’s deeper consciousness; and no true poet can escape the pressure of the present, for he is in it and of it, and the best he can do is to relate the immediate present to the living past and also – if possible and if his vision is unfaltering and clear – to a future that is already in a process of becoming.


The ethnic consciousness of Patel as distinctly evidenced in his plays – packed with Parsi characters, customs, way of life, social conduct and the language – has been discussed in the preceding chapter whereas the culture shift witnessed in the Parsi community in the post independent India as manifested in his poems is dealt with in this chapter, tracing from his links with Nargol and Bombay. Patel’s merit as an extoller and sympathiser of Parsi community and his desire as a rational proponent and defender of the community’s regeneration as evidenced in his poems are examined in this chapter.

Patel believes in the uniqueness of the integrity, strength and superiority of his people, but makes a passionate and realistic analysis of the state of affairs of the sagging community. The socio-political changes happening outside the community, have impacted the fortunes of the community, often adversely; apart from such external causes, the exclusivity of the community and the continued obsession for being so, have as well affected it demographically if not commercially. His poems are the documents of his contextual reflexives of the Parsi ethnic continuity and are also the reflections of the community’s failed yearning for the unlikely merger into the British identity espousing the reminiscence of the old times. He exposes in a distinguished way the difficulties a common man encounters each day and the varied state of affairs he has observed within
his community and outside, and also treads onto the pains and anguishes of the community. Hence, his poems are reviewed through the transcultural approach.

Patel travels in his poems as a Parsi across the themes related to both the Parsi predicament and the Indian reality with a spirited acumen and a rational perception. He sees through the Parsi prism the society at large and the issues that are common to the diverse communities within. All the poems selected are thematically analysed on the basis of their composition which is largely influenced by the happenings of Patel’s early years in the west-coast village of Nargol, the pain and anguish the Parsi community faces and the eventual racial consciousness, culture difference and the culture shift, including the socio-political shift, resistance, detachment, longing, adaptability and the final transition to and the acceptance of the global reality. The poems of the first volume, Poems, deal with the happenings of his early years in Nargol, the second volume, How Do You Withstand Body, with the unpleasant experiences the community faces in the settled country particularly in the post-independent Indian cultural scenario, and the last volume Mirrored Mirroring with the Parsi adaptability, the survival and the final evolution to adapt themselves to face the global reality with a rational perception. In short, his poems thematically deal mainly with the agonizing experiences of man in an indifferent society, and carry meditative comments on the experiences of the Parsi past and the angry reactions to human neglect and the sufferings the Parsis witness in their neighbourhood and close environment.

Patel fits well into K.R.S. Iyengar’s noted description of “a true poet;” he gives due importance in his poems to the Parsi past, does not escape from the pressure of their present for he is “in it” and “of it,” and tries his best to relate the “immediate present” to the “living past” with the aim of giving an un faltering Parsi future. All his poems trail undoubtedly on this background with the real Parsi experiences. In fact all his creations –
paintings, art, poems and plays – are so interlinked as to give an emphasis to the varied experiences, abilities and virtues of the Parsis.

Poems like “Grandfather,” “Grandparents at Family Get-Together” and “The Prince Wishes His Father’s Death”- all talk about the Parsi cultural traditions and have a very definite Parsi content in them. There is a sense of longing in them. The social order and hierarchy which still prevail in the form of patriarchy among the Parsi landlords and Patel’s feelings of guilt about his community’s embracing feudal social hostility could be glimpsed in them. “Grandfather” is set in the rural feudal background and focuses on the grandfather’s fury at the grandson’s support for the poor peasant’s cause. Patel’s lifelong fascination towards the people of Warli tribe began in his grandfather’s estate at Nargol. Warli tribals worked on the estate and whenever Patel, as a young man in his twenties, tried to interact with them, he would be discouraged, because they were from a lower stratum of the society. In “Grandfather”, Patel attempts to sort out as he is puzzled as to why his otherwise kindly grandfather should discourage him from mingling with the “others”? His own interest in the peasantry with the egalitarian aspiration set for the modern generation is in direct contrast to that of his grandfather’s feudal mentality of the older Parsi generation. The poem describes the callousness of the one and the experiences of the other, both deeming themselves equally right and sticking to their stand; the grandfather peeved at his dissent and confronts him:

But for what, tell me, do you look
In them,
They’ve quite exhausted my wonder
Difficult, ungrateful,
Double-faced, unreliable:
I have dealt with the peasantry
Over three quarters of a century
And I fail to follow your thinking. (1-8)

The poet wonders at the qualities he has found in the simple peasants: noble virtues of hospitality, capacity for hard work, endurance to long-suffering and genial acceptance of life. He finds the virtuous qualities of the peasants as directly opposite to the grandfather’s contemptuous attitude towards them: “difficult,” “ungrateful,” “double faced,” “unreliable.” In general, as the title suggests, the “Grandfather” stands for his forefathers’ conservative orthodox attitude. According to Karaka:

Parsis descended originally from an enterprising, courageous, industrious, and self-sacrificing people, who at one time were masters of a great empire, they did not absolutely lose those characteristic qualities of their race, although adverse circumstances forced upon them a life of inactivity for more than 1000 years. (243)

The earlier Parsis like that of Patel’s grandfather carry this notion of feudal supremacy detached from the changing realities and differ from their own grandchildren who tend to be modern.

In “Grandparents at Family Get-Together,” Patel talks again about the glorious Parsi past and the longing for it, through the grandparents. It is an accurate depiction of Parsi’s exact state of affairs in the post-colonial scenario – stuck to the past pride and fading away into misery:

I watch them in their hallowed
Corner- hallowed, but corner
Just the same- seemingly regal
Because deaf and blind,
Old Pharaoh and his old wife
Rehearse immobility
For the mummying time. (1-7)

The present Parsi plight is represented through the culturally loaded term “immobility” reflecting Parsis’ stagnant present in India. The regal status that they once enjoyed had now turned to be “seemingly regal.” The end of the Parsi past is signified through the grandparents who like the old Pharaohs, having lost all their powers, sit in their hallowed corner “seemingly regal,” deaf and blind with their old wives, unaffected by what is happening around and waiting to be mummified. The idea of waiting for “mummying time” sounds to be at variance with the Parsi tradition of disposing of the dead to the vultures in the Dakhmas. However, as seen earlier, the Persian kings had a tradition of embalming like the Egyptian Pharoes, as, “The preservation of royal bodies was probably linked to the concept of the king's royal khvarenah (divine mystical splendour), thought of as abiding at his tomb to the benefit of his successors and the people at large” (Boyce 52). The grandparents are thus waiting for the elevated “glory” of khvarenah, to acquire and serve as the mystical divine force to their family like what their kings were believed to be.

The generation gap is wide and evident in Parsi families. Patel cites the simple and normal happenings in Parsi gatherings where jokes, enquiries and pleasantries are routinely exchanged, to bring home the fact that there is no meaningful engagement between the old and the young at present. “Some jokes shouted kindly / into the solid ears,” (9-10) may have reached their unyielding ears, but the elders do not understand nor desire to share, “matters of present importance” except, “simple stories of success / Or failure” (15-16). They do not advise or reach out to their children and even if they so attempt, “the noise drowns their lips”(36). The youngsters, on the other hand, do dance and celebrate at a distance unmindful of the grandparents’ presence or one may ritually
hold their hands and make enquiries to hear their subdued “bodily complaint”(42) and “unconvinced advice”(43). This is ironical that it becomes a ritual. But Patel is not ready to shirk “these meetings” for he says it explains “me my life”(18). He watches “the embers of family pain”(19) tossing hand to hand as though to music, “dropping” now and then yet resuming with merriment despite the fact that the grandparents are at “a stone game” (26) and are “strangely mute”(28), watching “all their own, / Deaf and blind”(26-27). The last couplet very emphatically points out the passion for the community’s essential nature and the inevitable disappointment over it. “Return doubting we’ve done our bit, / Uncertain where we’ve missed”(44-45).

“The Prince Wishes His Father’s Death” also dwells on the idea that the elderly father is dominant either because of his varied experiences, abilities and virtues or because of the son’s inabilities and weaknesses. The father overshadows and outshines his son and invites his protests in murmurs:

Where you sit, deeply dear
But forever over me,
As from the beginning,
Impacting me,
Into my mother. (1-5)

This is analogous to the state of Dorab, the son of Savaksa, the patriarchal Panchayat President in the play Savaksa, highlighting the generation gap between the father and the son of Parsi community. The father wields the clout and rules the village while the son struggles for his space and has to beckon it from the father.

Likewise, “Three Cries” in Mirrored Mirroring depicts the theme of reminiscence lamenting over what was lost. Patel makes use of the simple intergenerational sentiments, transitions and variances within a family as a metaphor for the Parsi community’s days of
pride, downslide and present predicaments. Patel goes first into the past and recalls the
days he was with his father – may be the Persian racial father or the endearing crown of
the good old past and regrets for being exiled and becoming a “stranger to fingers;” this
may also be an analogy between the glorious colonial patronage in the later past, and the
eventual neglect or fall in the present post-colonial era. Secondly, Patel speaks of the
“restlessness” of the present generation and of the aspiration of the next for the “damned”
glory and finally of the temperament of others growing indifferent to the Parsis. Thus it
becomes an enigmatic poem dealing with the plight of the Parsis and the Parsi sensitivity
acquired through agonising experiences.

The Zoroastrian religion of the Parsi ancestors, as discussed earlier, was handheld
by the Persian Empires and nurtured under the shadow of the crown, and it met with its
downfall as the political authority was lost to the Arabs; the defeat and the eventual
persecutions created a deep incurable wound and from the pain of which the mighty
Zoroastrians were not able to come out. The patronage of the Persian Kings and the
centuries of honour are memories deeply writ on the minds of the Parsis. The community
experienced a repeat of the mighty political patronage and flourished again in the hands
of the British during the colonial era; the memories and gratitude pop up eloquently:

   Within the clasp of your hands,
   In the warm grip of your fingers,
   I might have flourished, heaving
   Forward, a sturdy bunch of flowers
   Rough and colourful. (5-9)

As the British left, the community became “stranger to fingers” longing for those glorious
days lost; the ache began on the loss and it gets continued; restlessness becomes a routine
from then on. Nights have transformed into, “nights of search,” and “nights of wild
belief” (18). Patel identifies himself with the rest of the community by particularising the
general painful Parsi experience as of his own, watching his people, like the
monstrous multi-headed dog, Cerberus, which guards the gates of the underworld,
without any sleep staring into the dark:

Nights of search, nights of wild belief
Hold me afloat, as I stare Cerberus-like
Into dark globes, sifting
Imagined corpuscles of light.
The gift of restlessness
Is my valued possession. (18-23)

It is a general statement about the various experiences of people – the father
figure, the ancestral figure, and all who got settled in various places – and the racial
memory with which the Parsis migrate continually. Patel identifies himself with the
community as one being reduced to a “battered knight” (24) and “a champion of
intangibles” (25) with “restlessness” being rendered as “valued possession” (22). Patel
symbolises the next generation Parsis with the “daughter” and terms it as an “insomniac”
who has lost “the blessings of sleep” and dubs their longing for the lost glory as a longing
“for companionship” to a decorative but “damned knighthood.” Patel’s anxiety over the
community’s desperation figures out conspicuously as he describes himself “a stranger to
fingers” whose “valued possession” is the “gift of restlessness.” This is a very common
phenomenon arising out of the community’s association with the British and it
reverberates with the remark of Dadachanji made in 1941 which Luhrmann finds still
characteristic:

Today . . . [Parsis] are facing another crisis, and it is largely of their own
making. This comes from the almost wholesale imitation of the manners of
the West . . . The relatively much higher standard of life which the Parsis have adopted for themselves . . . has brought many social and moral evils in its train and has proved disastrous for the well being of the community . . . (135)

In the third part of the poem, Patel complains at the temperament of others developing a negative perception on the Parsis. “They spot” (32) him as an “evil brother” (31). He grumbles when they place a finger at him and seek to whimsically blame his community: “That’s the one, they say. Watch him / He will speak and do thus, thus, thus” (36-37). The pathetic cry comes out when he is being singled out:

He signals to his brother,
He speaks a shaded language,
there is
Laughter shivering on his tongue. (40-43)

The image of the brother turning his back upon him might symbolically go with “the other communities” which “began to awake and come marching on along lines similar to those the Parsis had traversed, (while) the Parsis gradually failed to keep pace with the others in their cultural advancement, social solidarity, closer organisation and individual efficiency” (Luhrmann136). The image of “finger” suggests the poet’s longing for an identity and patronage as well. In this world of darkness, having deserted by the colonisers and neglected by other communities and having now become a mocking stock, there must be somebody to lead the Parsis on and to protect and to guide. Patel’s longing for a better safe haven for the Parsis to lead a life as peaceful as it was during the pre-colonial period in Sanjan or as majestic as it was during the colonial period with the warm grip of the father’s “fingers” (6) when they flourished like colourful “flowers” (8) - turns out to be the final cry of “Three Cries.”
“On Killing a Tree” is a poem that metaphorically talks about the age old full grown Parsi tradition which cannot be easily wiped off. Though the poem is a record of the thoughts and feelings that arose from Patel’s real experience of the shock he felt on seeing a huge peepal tree lying uprooted in his college campus after a stormy night; it is suggestive enough to comprehend the Parsi community’s rootedness in the Indian soil and their struggle against being rooted out. There is a literal elaboration of the nature, the sturdiness and the longevity of the tree and the tardy difficult process of cutting it down. He begins the poem in a simple note:

It takes much time to kill a tree,
Not a simple jab of the knife
Will do it. It has grown
Slowly consuming the earth,
Rising out of it, feeding
Upon its crust, absorbing
Years of sunlight, air, water,
And out of its leperous hide
Sprouting leaves. (1-9)

And goes on to create the feeling of undergoing the actual physical process of a seed rooting into the soil and growing out of it.

The tree which has grown slowly consuming the earth and risen out of its crust over a period of time absorbing air, water and sunshine cannot be killed easily. It takes much time to do it. A severe hacking of the branches or chopping of the tall stem down near to the earth may not yet kill the tree as new shoots will appear with the help of its roots and the tree will grow again to its former size overcoming the hacking and chopping.
The bleeding bark will heal
And from close to the ground
Will rise curled green twigs
Miniature boughs
. . . will expand again
To former size. (13-18)

On the metaphorical level the growth of the tree tempering the balance of nature and the violent uprooting can be equated with the evolution of culture and to the relentless violence aimed at destroying the culture. It takes much time for a culture to evolve in the same way as it takes much time for a tree to grow; both attain a level of maturity on stronger inputs seasoned by challenges. A simple “jab of the knife” is not sufficient to do away with a tree, nor do smaller issues harm the culture. Despite the jab, the tree will go on to exhibit from, “. . . out of its leprous hide / sprouting leaves;” “leprous” reminds one of the nauseating body, but “sprouting leaves” promptly presents a picture of its continuity amidst damage. The usage of a more violent word “killing” to describe the cutting of a tree can be equated with the poet’s intense emotional repulsion towards causing harm to Parsi culture and his passionate desire to save it. It very much goes with Jeff Lewis’ idea on transculturalism:

Transculturalism is interested in dissonance, tension, and instability as it is with the stabilizing effects of social conjunction, communalism, and organization; and in the destabilizing effects of non-meaning or meaning atrophy. It is interested in the disintegration of groups, cultures, and power. (9)

The tree therefore could easily be taken as an image of Parsi tradition and the poem as a celebration of the community’s physical will to live despite the pain caused in
life braving the constricting multifarious cultures. It is not so easy to root out a full blown culture as it is very difficult to uproot the tree while the strength of the tree lies in its roots. The root has to be pulled out of the anchoring earth:

It is to be roped, tied,
And pulled out – snapped out
Or pulled out entirely,
Out from the earth- cave; (23-26)

Words like “pulled,” “roped,” “tied,” “scorching,” “browning,” “hardening,” “twisting” and “withering” cogently describe the process to uproot and undo. “The source, white and wet / The most sensitive, hidden / For years inside the earth,” (27-29) serves as a perfect metaphor pointing out the sap of life, both to the tree and to the Parsi tradition which would survive in spite of the tribulations meted out from within and outside, tending to kill the tree and the community’s long protected traditions.

With all the misfortunes coming in succession, the poet fears the worst - “Killing of the Tree” – to happen and he extols in his best self as he describes it in all simpler words denoting the occurrence of the most shattering disaster, “And then it is done” (35). Though he is vexed of the challenges to his community and says “And then it is done,” the poet merely expresses his fear and wishes it never to happen; it is a mixture of despair and hope, more of signalling a warning to avert the happening of a disaster and not of spelling out, nor wishing a doom; it sounds a hapless wailing with a desire and is a miniature reflection of the larger but exact state of affairs of the Parsi community as a whole. The tree stands for tradition, the root for its strength and stability, and its growth for culture which is dynamic. Patel during his interaction with students in a school at Chennai in January, 2008, tells that the poem “On Killing a Tree,” “just came out without much effort. Most of it just fell into place naturally. And though it’s about the beautiful
tree that I missed seeing in its usual place, in some ways the poem suggests, I think, that a
tree is not very different from a human life” (1). Patel’s claim that it “came out without
much effort” does not undermine the strength and significance of the poem; it is probably
a fall out of the “collective unconscious” that eased its delivery. The evocative and
expressive words and phrases, images and symbols are highly provoked by the poet’s
quiet sufferings due to the disturbing experience of living in a non-acclimatised world
without a root of its own.

Poems like, “City Landscape” and “Public Works” display his concerns for the
earlier Parsis who have made the city of Bombay grow and prosper and their present
sordid state of affairs. As discussed in the first chapter, the Parsis shaped the city of
Bombay and also shifted their centre of activities from rural Gujarat to the city at the
advent of the British. They benefited a lot due to their hard-work; their fortune and
influence grew multi-fold and Parsi names cropped up all over Bombay attached to
streets, blocks of housing, public gardens etc. When the first Parsis:

. . . arrived in Bombay in the mid-seventeenth century, Bombay was little
more than a collection of fishing villages . . . surrounded by swamps . . .
Within the next hundred and fifty years Parsis would shape the familiar
physical outline of Bombay and would become some of its principal
inhabitants. (Palsetia35)

For Patel the streets of Bombay are the quintessential space of the society, not just
thorough fares connecting one place to another. They are dwelling places brimmed with
life, activities and business as well of religious experiences and social confrontations
where the individual faces differences of gender, caste or of any other sort. The opening
quote from “City Landscape” reminds us that, for Patel, coexistence with the miserable
and endurance with the difficulties are inescapable features of the Parsi life:
I pick my way
Step by ginger step between
Muck, rags, dogs,
Women bathing squealing
Children in sewer water,
Unexpected chickens
And miles of dusty yellow
Gravel . . . . (1-8)

He goes on recreating the barrage of images that assault the individual walking down the city of Bombay, marked by the distinctive presence of the sea and the skyscrapers, along with the hutments.

In “Public Works” he imagines the city that was built on seven islands and literally rising out of the water, and doomed to destruction by the very medium which gave birth to it. Violence is conveyed through the images of chaos wherein he creates a fantasy of “polished chrome” crashing down in rust heaps and fires all over the city making it unpleasant and damp at present, “And fire places all over the city / Choking in wetness; electric grills / Losing their orange glow, kerosene stoves”(13). The ‘city’ shrouded with smudge, is suggestive of the modern industrialised city with its dirty and paltry life. Patel bemoans the fact that the modern atomistic approach of man to everything, has split up his soul and body and reduced the latter to something lumped together like clods of clay.

Then Patel turns his gaze into the migrants, those who left behind the villages to enter into the urban life. Poems like “Servants” and “Dilwadi” express the Parsi experiences of successive migration since their leaving from Persia as well as the anguish and affliction of the working class, who are the real victims of the society. In “Servants”
he dramatises the single moment of migrants entering the city by portraying how they came off peasant stock from Gujarat to the city of Bombay - a migration within the settled land, having lost their roots and personal relationships in the process of migration, sit mute without the aura of life – like animals:

... They sit like animals.

I mean no offence.

I have seen Animals resting in their stall,

The oil flame reflected in their eyes,

Large beads that though protruding

Actually rest

Behind the regular grind

Of the jaws. (21-28)

Patel traces the plight of the rural Parsis who entered the city and suffered the settler’s problems. He regrets that he has to make such a comparison yet insists that they never had an opportunity to meet with a variety of experiences in their spare time and therefore they have been lowered to the condition of animals:

They come of peasant stock,

Truant from an insufficient plot.

Lights are shut off after dinner

But the city-blur enters,

Picks modulations on the skin;

The dark around them

Is brown, links body to body. (1-7)
The poem laments the reality of the labourers who are reduced into limited de-humanised individuals, echoing their experiences of successive migration since their leaving from Persia, yet it traces the holistic essential elements of humaneness writ large and deep in their actions:

They sit without thought,
Mouth slightly open, recovering
From the day, and the eyes
Globe into the dim
But are not informed because
Never have travelled beyond this
Silence. (15-21)

“The eyes / globe into the dim” point out the desperate and deplorable situation of the migrated rural Parsi in the modern urban world. The servant suffering from the odds of modernity represents a common man of a dead order and tradition, who is impassive, dumb and helpless in life, and looking for a new unknown ray of light which could not be found anywhere, yet carrying on unperturbed continuously. The same could be seen in *Savaksa* where Patel talks about the poor and the dirty sleeping in cold and mud and when the morning comes they live on with a half cup of tea and a piece of bread dipping again and again gently, “Tasting it well. Dip again, gently, not sucking up all the tea in the bread”(134) and swallowing at one gulp the tea left after eating the bread.

In “Dilwadi,” Patel describes how Dilwadi, Maharastra, blooms into a conditional, makeshift town. The mindset of the villagers towards industries in the village, is brought out with an uncompromising emotion. The villagers resist for four months as they are not prepared to vacate their mud houses. After some hesitation the course of evacuation activates though they cannot carry their loving trees and other immobile things with them.
Soon they carry their movable possessions such as goats, vessels, drums, bicycles etc. and settle at a new place:

Complete resistance for four months.
The sheds empty in a bare landscape.
At the edges, hesitation -
Groups of people, a cart, cattle;
Once, officials. Then again
An empty fortnight.
The people seem not to approve; drawn back
To the everlasting village they won’t vacate,
Their settled trees
The etched cart ruts between crowded huts. (1-10)

Yet, Patel says that, the villagers “will accommodate change,” keeping in mind the Parsi adaptability and describes the transformation of the reluctant villagers, who resolve their ambivalence to relocate themselves. Self-satisfied and detaching themselves from the Project which engulfs seven villages, the villagers started evacuating the village:

Yet they will accommodate change,
The sheds stand complacent.
The shedding Project engulfing
Seven villages; and evacuation
Will start. One morning two families, then
Some more. Cattle, bedspreads, bundles of straw,
Goats, vessels, dung, drums, bicycles. (11-17)

In the end the poet says Dilwadi, blossoms:
The barracks begin a distant dance,
Twenty architectures appear. It would seem
Each cubicle individually sends roots;
Then shoots up, sprouts, bows
Turns, curves its side
And take a circle. The contractors sigh.
From unpromising seed
Dilwadi blooms into a makeshift town. (25 -32)

It also goes with the Parsis who have made the city of Bombay grow and prosper. Patel also proves that the Parsi migration is a continuous social milieu and that migration continues to be a threat especially for the poor among the community.

Furthermore, Patel talks about the constraints that the poor amid the Parsi community in the post-independent India face in poems like, “Catholic Mother (Your Child at Hospital)” and “Nargol.” The feelings expressed in his Poems over the sufferings of patients or victims of natural calamities are entirely humane and not those of a detached specialist. The ethnic consciousness in Patel comes out whenever he is disturbed. The poem “Catholic Mother (Your Child at Hospital)” is a thought provoking poem which apparently talks about the doctor’s awareness of illness and mortality and the realisation that his compassion is useless as far as the body’s destruction through illness or accident is concerned. On the deeper level the pain that the mother undergoes could be associated with the plight of the Parsis. Though it is titled as “Catholic Mother” it would well match with his ethnic mother:

I can see that your people
Have more right to you now than I,
Aunts and uncles will be closer,
But before I let you leave, pious
Woman,
Yours weeping soft,
Unrebellious,
From what perverseness
Do I appose for you
Your simple original trust
Against the present horror? (1-11)

The more emotional words and phrases in his utterances, such as “pious woman” “weeping soft” and “simple, original trust” are naturally used in contrast to “perverseness” and “horror” to show the Parsi’s predicament in the present scenario. The sweat of the Parsis in creating the then Bombay was lost. They were “weeping soft” and “Unrebellious” and Patel says that the awkwardness was because of them being too soft and submissive and that is certainly against the “simple original trust” and he regrets for the present horror. The pain and the isolation realised by the poet is represented through the repeated usage of “you” and “your.” Patel equates the mother’s pain which has drawn her into a world of “Private” with that of the community’s pain into a withdrawal from the society. The last three lines emphasise the “original trust” made at the time of their arrival in India and the significance it carries even at the moment.

Similarly, “Nargol” reflects the social tensions and feelings of guilt for being a rich man’s son. The title goes with the coastal village Nargol with a predominant Parsi settlement. The large villas, cottages, and bungalows stand as a proof of the affluence that prevailed in the Parsi past. Now everything is in a state of neglect. Broken windows, walls ruined by the elements of nature, and creepers grown all over the walls and doors - tell a sorry tale of despair about their owners. “Nargol” is a monologue and Patel is the
persona who talks about the deprived and the dispossessed due to the social changes. Patel dramatises the resentment of the people to the poor and the oppressed through the metaphor of the poet’s ambivalent attitude to a beggar woman who is associated with his visits to the village. She represents the poor Parsis. He sways from the humane inclination towards “giving,” to the equating of “giving” to “giving in” and then hardens on to declining to “give her” so that she “gives up” her begging. When the poor woman pesters him in the street:

My fingernail rasping a coin.
She’ll have her money but
Cannot be allowed to bully -
Let her follow, let her drone,
Sooner or later she’ll give up,
Stop in the centre of a lane,
Let herself recede.
I reach the sea.
Yes, that was essential.
Discipline. (18 - 27)

“Let herself recede” emphasises Patel’s wish to stick to the Parsi pride and the line that follows, “I reach the sea,” reminds us of the Parsi migration from Persia reaching the shores of India. The beggar woman spares him in the street only to reappear in the privacy of his home when he was reading; he cannot read, but pretends reading and then sends the woman away.

. . . I pretend a page,
Then look up – I’m reading now I say,
I’ll give you later – switch down,
Initially the poet despises the sight and thought of the beggar; he sends her away, trotting out excuses like: “I have no money”(17), “Meet me later ”(18) and “I’ll give you later”(44). Later when the woman is not to be found, his strolls are not disturbed, the sea is reached with ease and reading simplified: “This time you did not come / To trouble me”(73-74). He is preoccupied with her absence; a new awareness dawns upon him when the absence of the leper woman becomes more powerful and abstinent than in her relentless strange pestering presence or perseverance. He ponders over the nature of his responses to a mere abstract, defenceless, non-entity and this turns him to have fallen into Parsi memory:

Walking to the sea I carry
A village, a city, the country,
For the moment
On my back. (69-72)

The poem retells the private experience between two individuals and pushes it to the fore with an enlarged perspective of the universal humanistic conditions. The beggar woman is the symbol of the deprived and the dispossessed that are on the trail of the wealthy in general. On the deeper level the beggar woman represents how the Parsi community struggled for survival as they lose their individuality during their migration in the past.

The poems like “Old Man’s Death,” “Tourists at Grant Road” and “To a Coming Love,” though seem to be of a more general nature, all in fact reflect in one way or other the Parsi experiences. “Old Man’s Death” is a sympathetic poem about the abandoned elderly waiting, out of the remnant of their time, in the community’s extensive charities established with the donations of the wealthy merchants and the industrialists of the
nineteenth century. Though the rooms were large, “over furnished with kitchenware, tables and trunks which every woman would have brought with her from her earlier home” (Luhrmann33). There may be a very small comfort:

   In knowing yourself finally
   Useless – when even grandchildren
   Have grown beyond your love,
   And your would-be widow
   Has out hobbled you and
   Won’t be around to break with
   One or two of her last thick tears,
   And not caring much for
   Your fellowmen, the doctors
   Won’t get your body – (2-11)

It is a sad reality when he says that there may be little comfort “In knowing yourself finally / Useless” (2-3) but there is a brilliant sarcastic touch that suggests that the death of such a person will come as a surprise to a lifelong friend who cannot mourn at, “the quick and easy changes” that went ahead after the funeral with the unusual representation through a photograph and the subsequent modulations that pass by according to the Parsi rituals:

   A sprinkling of water,
   The disappearance of an odour,
   A turn of bed-sheets, leaving
   A bed, a chair,
   Perhaps a whole room,
   With clarity in them. (17-21)
The death of an old man in a Parsi family could be taken as an imagery reflecting the Parsi community fading into insignificance in the outgrown Indian society. The description of the terminal nullity leaves it to the imagination of the reader about the vibrancies and achievements of the old man and of the community in his or its days of glory. The poet takes into account the disappearance of the contributions of the old man and the generation gap beyond the four walls. The glory of the Parsi past disappears like an “odour” as the social and political situations change like a “turn of bed-sheets” and Patel finds the situation irreversible.

The culture shift and the cultural difference have been focused in poems like “Evening” and “Naryal Purnima.” “Evening” is a short poem expressing the social turbulence or instability which the impoverished Parsis face in their migration:

Our English host was gracious  
We were soon at ease;  
Or almost:  
The servants  
were watching. (1-5)

Patel lingers over the past when the Parsis were at ease as the guests of the majestic English. The socio-political shift, much strengthened by the British could be seen as Patel addresses the British as “our English host.” It is ironic that the elite Parsis felt at ease to be associated with the colonising British, though the British as well were settlers like the Parsis.

“Naryal Purnima” also talks about the neglect and the plight of the poor and the uncaring nature of the rich. Like many of his poems, the setting is his locale in Bombay. It is also a political poem calling for a kind of national introspection and furthermore it transcends beyond the Parsi culture, pervading through varied human cultures. It is
Patel’s most popular poem which draws the attention of many critics for its various images representing the ambiguous implication. The title suggests the Hindu festival held at full-moon from August to September by the fishing folk on the coastal side. During the festival on Naryal Purnima, the rain-god, Varuna and the sea-god, Samudhra are pleased with the offering of the coconuts to mark the end of the monsoon. This full moon day also called “Coconut Day” is considered to be auspicious across the country for a new beginning; Avanai Avittam, Upakarma Sankalp, Raksha Bandhan and a host of other similar religious festivals fall on this day. And the same day is observed as the Zorastrian New year’s day, by Peteti, the minority Parsi community in Gujarat. Patel refers to this day in the poem as, “a new month’s grace of extra water” (12).

The poem has been set in a carnival mood. Parsis also take part in the celebrations and rituals. Patel, as an onlooker on the shores, critically analyses the religious background of the Indian Parsis. The close scrutiny of the composition of the poem can be done on two different perspectives; primarily on Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of culture difference and culture diversity and secondly on Mikhail Bhaktin’s folk humour theory called carnivalesque phenomenon. The poem begins with: “They say the seas change mood today” (1) suggesting the beginning of the festival, “Naryal Purnima” but the speaker in first person reports it. “They” refers to the fishing folk who are engaged in the festival. The first person may be considered as a witness in the multilayered personalities covering from modern man of scientific temperament to the poet himself who belongs to the other culture with the Parsi identity. The difference between cultures within and without is ironically well brought out in these lines:

They say the seas change mood today
Pronounce an official and to the rains-
And this year they did – the generous
Curtain shrank upward
For once according to the calendar
To ignore our need: a month
Of deluge and then these brilliant
Beautiful days of draught. (1-8)

How can the draught days be beautiful? To the fisher men the rain should end for their prospective fishing, but on the other hand, the absence of rain is likely to cause drought on land:

Naryal Purnima should be a few days’ halt
Before the second rains begin; the rice
Sprouted, transplanted, yet doomed to die
Without a new month’s grace of extra water. (9-12)
The culture difference that has been focussed in these lines is humorously politicised further. The dichotomy of the modern and the tradition or the Parsis’ impression on local festival and cultural authenticity of the native people is drawn closely to Bhabha’s concept of culture difference that, “focuses on the problem of ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the name of cultural supremacy which is itself produced in the moment of differentiation” (51). Bhabha calls it an enunciative process.

The image of “these brilliant / Beautiful days of draught” (7-8) in the first stanza is reversed with the image of “the first rain bore fruit” (13) which is in the reported discourse of “I am told.” The seasonal change and the direct observation of the scene lead to reflections on himself and the ambiguous place of the westernised Parsis in India. The promise of the earlier years of Independence is captured through the metaphor of a tree growing. But modern India is a sad contrast to the India of expectations especially for the Parsis; Gandhian thought and Nehru’s vision of modernisation are mere illusions for
them. “Only a faded haze remains / Over academic portraits in public buildings” (18-19).

The speaker, on the one hand, distances himself from the native’s space and time and on the other locates himself in the web of the nation as Nirad Chaudhuri explains: “A well-meaning spider weaving us / Into a maze” (22-23). Thus the enunciation of culture difference leads to culture diversity due to the political influence.

Patel has kept himself aloof during the celebration of the Hindu festival on Marine Drive. He juxtaposes “beautiful” with “draught” to point out the inconsistencies and ironies of life. “Sprouted, transplanted, yet doomed to die” (11) may refer to the Parsis’ continuous struggle to retain their identity though that may be their ultimate defeat. “Though defeated” Patel wants the Parsis to animate their spirit and fire their blood as Karaka wished. The poet then returns to the celebration of the Hindu festival on the Marine Drive and one could notice him watching the urchins whose minds are profanely focused on the wave-pitched gifts. Hence the witness and the witnessed are emphasised as the second part begins; the witness remains within as an outsider, though nurtures a concern for the inequalities:

. . . I sit,
Non-conformist, facing the sea, my back set
To the rich and the less rich as they come
Scrubbed and bathed, carrying a dirty little satchel
With the nut for gods . . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Their minds profanely focused
On the wave-pitched gifts.
Do I sympathize merely with the underdog?
Is it one more halt in the search for ‘identity’? (30-34, 38-41)
The Parsi outsider’s report on the folk festival takes the turn when Patel reviews the Parsi culture shift — swaying between the “Quite English” and “local.”

Our interiors never could remain
Quite English. The local gods hidden in
Cupboards from rational Parsi eyes
Would suddenly turn up on walls
Garlanded alongside the King and the Queen.
And the rulers who had such praise for our manners
Disappeared one day. So look instead for something else:
Even accept and belong. (42-49)

This is something that leads to culture diversity. The whole stanza explains how Parsi settlers have undergone changes that include, “even accept and belong.” Though Patel seemingly resists against this carnival setting where, “the ear-splitting pipes penetrate the soul” (51) and asserts that “the petty glare may be counterpart”(52), as a poet he loves one and the other. But he also says that there is “effort involved” (55). The men:

. . . are too greasy, their speech
Is too nasal, their wives either plain
Or overdone; they choose for their dresses

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
In tinsel; their mind is provincial,
Their children are dull. (57-59, 61- 62)

And there is a relief to turn from these suppliants to the urchins. The repetition of “their” in expressions such as “their speech,” “their wives,” “their dresses,” “their flowers,”
“their mind” and “their children” shows a strong sense of his estrangement. The outsider-inside stand is obviously revealed in the “the search of identity.”

Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnivalesque notion, on the other hand, sets away the culture difference in an ironical humour-mode which has been sharply brought out by Patel in the last stanza. “A number of folklorists began to use Bakhtin’s philosophy of carnival . . . , finding it useful in understanding the structures of carnival and power relationships in diverse traditions” (Elliot129). The last stanza is picturesque in detailing the festivity of coconut day. The people who are celebrating it ritually offer coconuts to the sea and the half naked urchins wait for “coconuts to strike the sea:”

. . . The men
Look flustered, imperiously order them
Away; the women squawk in their sharp
Brittle clothes. (85-88)

And it turns humorous when the poet says:

. . . But the drifters stay:
As coconuts are tossed and touch water
My present identities dive, snatch libations
From under god’s nose.
The rains may truly fail this year.
Our prayers may go unheard. (88-93)

It is rather ironical but it fairly examines the different needs of the people: the celebrants proffering coconuts for the sea to take, and the urchins just waiting for the coconut to touch the sea or wishing the sea to return it; fishing folks’ prayer to stop raining and the poet’s subjective note of “our prayers may go unheard” suggesting the reverse imagery of
raining. Thus, the poem “Naryal Purnima” is carnivalesque in nature. Andrew Robinson, political theorist, in his essay on Mikhail Bakhtin, says:

Carnival is a kind of syncretic, ritualised pageantry which displays a particular perspective. It is a brief moment in which life escapes its official furrows and enacts utopian freedom. . . . Its defining feature is festivity – life lived as festive. . . . It eliminated barriers among people created by hierarchies . . . . In carnival everything is rendered ever-changing, playful and undefined. Hierarchies are overturned through inversions, debasements and profanations, performed by normally silenced voices and energies. . . . The authoritative voice of the dominant discourse loses its privilege. Humour is counterposed to the seriousness of officialdom in such a way as to subvert it. (2-3)

The poem redefines the boundary between Parsis’ outlook on carnivalesque “Naryal Purnima” and the native’s authentic celebration of it.

Patel never hesitates to bring in the demerits of the blind imitation of the western life style. It made some of them completely anglicized, and pushed them almost into losing their original identity with the adopted mother tongue, and in all alienating themselves from the mainstream of Indian life. Hence there was little sense of Zoroastrian identity within and a few among them understood the religion or the rituals in full. Patel carries on this idea in the poem “Vistasp;” the very name Vistasp, reminiscent of the Iranian king Vishtasp, is his five year old cousin who was praying before the lamp - “petromax.” “Petromax” here is evocative of the God of fire whose glory has been ravished by science and transformed it into a Modern God. In fact it is a rebuke on the regal Parsis, who, as they became more and more rational and progressive, devalued the
ritual of their religion and sought to rational ethics which is entirely compatible with science.

As said in the note, Patel at the time of writing the poem was a young boy of eighteen and Vistasp was a small baby of five, praying before Petromax; Patel, “... crept up from behind, / Caught him at his shoulders, / Heaved him up above my (his) head” (2-4). As Patel puts Vistasp down and turned him around, he saw his shocked, speechless face as though Patel has flung into the air Vistasp’s very God. Patel regrets for his act as a thing of “impulse” which if “given thought” he “wouldn’t do,” and says he is “no god-destroyer” and is not against prayer. To Zoroastrians, as seen in the first chapter, the worship of fire is the highest and purest symbol of Divinity. However, “praying before the lamp” was a mindless routine for the child in Vistasp who is attracted more to play than to prayer; to Patel’s dismay, Vistasp seeks repeat of the play:

Would my silly act have made him
A thinker?

Later he came to me, shy and merry:

“This evening when I am praying,”

he said

“do it again.”(21-26)

A very minor event which otherwise deserves to be shrugged off as trivial, becomes an authentic illustration of the fact that religious fervour is into a declining stage among the younger Parsi generation. The elder generation as that of Patel is annoyed that the younger generation makes convenient derivatives of religious symbols without understanding the underlying essential spiritual contents of the rituals; Patel suggests a farther deterioration that leave apart understanding rituals, in fact to the present
generation, prayer which is a more important life-line in the observance of the faith, has become a mindless routine and faith has taken the backstage.

The outsider-inside stand in the search of identity gets continued in the poems of *How Do You Withstand Body* where the nausea of detachment as a Parsi could be seen. It also talks about all sorts of violence induced by socio-political, cultural, religious, and economic sources that emerged in the post-independent period of India and explains how the Parsi community challenges them for their survival. The Indian independence had a very harsh impact on the Parsi community. According to Karen Smith: “The exit of the British saw the end of the Parsi elites and patronage the community enjoyed from the mighty rulers. The new form of government, democracy, deriving its authority from numbers eventually saw the miniscule community politically insignificant”(64). As such, the Parsis lost their patronage, primacy and authority and were suddenly rendered powerless and sidelined from the mainstream by the system.

On the social front in the neighbourhood outside the Parsi community, as the colonisers left, the new found fruit of independence, empowerment of citizens - led to a spurt of violence and perennial disquiet, arising in particular from communal hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims; the Parsis reduced to be mere bystanders.(64)

In “The Ambiguous Fate of Gieve Patel, He being neither Muslim nor Hindu in India,” he ironically refers to the communal rioting in India. The significant but deplorable aspect of modern life - the rise of the cult of violence and the brutal urge to wound, to torture and to kill – did not escape the attention of Patel. He sensibly records this animal desire in the human society very sensitively. Images of violence abound in his poems in a direct, unemotional, yet forceful tone at times too strange for the refined tastes of the reader. As Bruce King says: “Patel’s excellent poems derive much of their strength
from the way he is both strongly aware of the local conditions of life yet defends himself from involvement” (116).

The struggle was between the Hindus and the Muslims, and as a Parsi, he is an onlooker. As said earlier in the first chapter, the traditional story of the Parsis’ arrival from Iran to India says that the Parsis dropped a lump of sugar in the milk saying that they would blend in easily and make the Indian culture sweeter. But their present plight is that, though being a part of the society they belong to, they stand aloof and detached from the happenings around them. Patel helplessly looks on with contempt at the rage engulfing each side seeking the blood of the other; the detachment does not please Patel:

To be no part of this hate is deprivation

Never could I claim a circumcised butcher

Mangled a child out of my arms, never rave

At the milk-bibing, grass-guzzling hypocrite

Who pulled off my mother's voluminous

Robes and sliced away at her dugs.

Planets focus their fires

Into a worm of destruction

Edging along the continent. Bodies

Turn ashen and shrivel. I

Only burn my tail. (1-11)

He alienates himself from the settled land while the communal holocaust or civil riots happen in India; and also retains his Parsi identity to witness all. He takes up a particular violent incident and describes in lurid tones successful enough to kindle a strong hatred for violence of man on man. Parsis are neither responsible for, nor are they the immediate sufferers of the atrocities; a ‘Muslim butcher’ did not mangle a child out of
their hands, nor did a ‘vegetarian Hindu’ inflict any savaging wound on a Parsi mother. No Parsi was primarily involved or bodily affected by these communal hate and violence between the Hindus and the Muslims. Through “Edging along the continent” Patel attempts to hint at how the Parsis had been marginalised and pushed to migrate; he relates their suffering as arising from being witness to the holocaust experienced by the two major warring communities. The riots, in fact, inflicted no direct harm to the Parsis as a community. Yet Patel feels it a neglect and an estrangement from the society to which he belongs, “I / Only burn my tail” (10-11) while in turn, the world is on fire.

Another significant feature Patel drives home is that in every maddening riot or reckless terror, or any violent act of law or of an outlaw, the pitiable hapless victim happens to be the feeble and defenseless children and women. The pain, the warring groups suffer or inflict disregard of the need for it, is their making or choice. But the innocent victims are casually maimed for no cause and the assailants go scot free. Indeed, in the past couple of decades when his plays were written in between the 1960s and 1980s tensions between the landlords and the labourers have increased a lot. Patel emphatically flashes his anguish over violence through Behram in his play, Mister Behram also:

The riots, always the riots. How would you feel walking into a riot zone, etcetera. The knifings, the blood, the terrified children . . . I could go with the police parties, the collector and all our district stalwarts, again and again, to speak to people, to try to quell the periodic trouble. Dying, destruction, mine or others . . . . (216)

Patel here transcends his racial differences - “mine or others” - and considers death and destruction as common troubles unjustly forced on the society, irrespective of one being a Parsi or another Indian. It is particularly noticeable that it is not the tormented body on the surface which seems to concern him most, but it is the tormented soul which has
magnified the theme of perpetual sufferings. It is believed that the “Zoroastrian piety and spirituality begins and ends with the body” (Luhrmann 102). It is quite natural therefore that Patel rebukes in protest when he sees around him violence against body. According to him destruction is aimed at the human body from every conceivable direction. Vulture-like, the torturer is always on the look-out for his victim. This is what Michel Foucault explores in his *History of Madness*; he talks about the “medical dualism” in which “a spiritualist or a materialist psychiatry” is possible; to him “either madness is the organic disturbance of a material principle or it is the spiritual troubling of an immaterial soul” (212). Patel’s concern for the body insists on a “discernible unity of body and soul” (213) in Foucauldian context. As a minority, Parsis have to keep themselves neutral to all the horrors of the communal riots which create disharmony; but this is irksome and unimaginable for the peace loving Parsi community.

The title poem “How Do You Withstand, Body” outlines the theme of the collection *How Do You Withstand, Body*. In this poem as Ayappa Paniker says:

Patel contemplating his body as victim . . . . The body is trapped, cannot escape: not even the changing landscapes of an exile bring any relief. And not being committed to lyricism. Patel can always start with the body and end with the mind. His experience as a doctor has trained him for this progression. (59)

It introduces the image of the helpless body which acts as a synecdoche to the human beings who are subjected to wanton destruction, pain and suffering by fate and by human tormentors. The successive onslaughts of “fate” are captured in the images of a relentless, unabated, one-sided aggression upon the defenceless body - “Guns,” “instruments of torture,” “tattooing the body with holes, fists and blows” contribute their good-for-nothing nature to smite the pitiable “five by one body.” He begins the poem with a feeling
of awe at the amount of pain that the human body with resignation and submissiveness accepts from its tormentors:

How do you withstand, body,
Destruction, repeatedly
Aimed at you? Minutes,
Seconds, like gun reports,
Tattoo you with holes . . . (1-5)

The image of violence is reiterated in order to focus on human pain, clash and ominous shadow of physical death, absurdity and above all on human crime against human. Towards the end the poet comprehends all the pains saying that the body is but a helpless “slut” whose destiny is to submit to the oppressors. It is not about the “poor slut” only, who is “tattooed with holes,” but about everybody. The “slut” is only a vehicle for his tenor. Ironically he says, even when it is demolished, the body offers only love and service to those who exploit it. Patel’s woman, by virtue of her gender, may be a metaphorical representation of the inevitable submissive nature of Parsis. Images like “mother,” “woman” go very well with the unconscious racial mother;

. . . It’s your fate,
Poor slut: To walk compliantly
Before heroes! Offering
in your demolition
a besotted kind of love.(12-16)

The inherent submissive nature of Parsis is pathetically brought out in the last three lines where the body as a poor slut withstands but not withdraws from violence. “Dumb, discoloured / Battered patches; meat mouths / For monsters’ kisses” (17-19).
The poet lures us into the hidden idea that human body offers, even in its
demolition, a besotted kind of love. Poems like “Audience,” “How do you withstand,
body,” “The Ambiguous Fate of Gieve Patel, He being neither Muslim nor Hindu in
India,” “Say Torture” and “Body Fears” and many more point to this. Through these
poems he has attempted to understand the contemporary situations and the periodic and
continuous assault on the human body. “Forensic Medicine” points out the inventiveness
of human beings in creating newer and newer modes of torturing fellow beings; written in
an explicitly crude manner, it enumerates the different ways an assailant can attack a
human body and like “How Do You Withstand, Body,” it is also a strange portrayal of the
lurid brutalities that a human body is subjected to.

In “Soot Crowns the Stubble” he says everywhere human body is dispersed and
the vultures act as agents of dispersal and documents that he cannot sit mute:

Do I not waste years
Denying arms and legs permission
To be elsewhere; insisting
Birds alone are agents
Of dispersal, each vulture
Sheltering in its gizzard
The eye or the limb of what
was one corpse? (1-8)

Patel while talking about the human casualties in violent outbursts unceremoniously
confirms the Parsi belief that the vultures are the agents of dispersal and each vulture
shelters in its digestive tract some parts or the other of the corpses, which ironically
reverses the concept of body. As explained in the first chapter, to the Parsis, Earth, Fire,
and Water are sacred elements, and both cremation and burial are sacrilegious as that
would corrupt the purity of the elements. For the deceased Parsi to reach heaven, vultures
serve as intermediaries between the earth and the sky. The dead body is placed on
a Tower of Silence where vultures, by consuming the body, liberate the soul.

Patel records the act of violence and of the madness generated by the act in plainer
terms, but does not probe into the causes nor condemns the doer, nor comes out with
moral lessons or solutions. Perhaps documenting violence around him with crudity will
serve to effectively induce the reader to draw the desired lessons. Conceivably the entire
second volume of How Do You Withstand, Body may be a reflection of the absence of
love in human beings resulting in suffering and dire consequences. It might be the
reflection of Parsi community’s being, the subject of brutality and violence inflicted on
them forcing their exit and the sufferings of body, they underwent as they migrated to and
within India. In Foucauldian sense, as John Protevi sums up: “the body is an object of
knowledge in the discursive practices revealed in archaeology; it is the target of power in
the non-discursive practices revealed in genealogy; and it is a matter of concern for the
techniques of the self of Greek and Roman ethical subjects” (51). Protevi adds that the
body is at “the centre stage as Foucault traces the shifting forms of the historical a priori
governing medical perception. Hence the relations of life and death, of living body and
corpse, of surface and depth of lesions and processes, of anatomy and physiology, are the
central concerns” 51).

Indeed in almost every poem, Patel expresses an intimate acquaintance with the
human body and marvels at the pain which it endures. In Patel one could see how an
individual lives, what he sees daily and what his values are as the fabric of his verse.
“University” was written after the Bangladesh revolt, when news of students being shot in
some political demonstration at Dacca appeared. Taking cue from the temporal event in
which the students and teachers of Dacca University, irrespective of their social status and
attitudes, were shot down en masse, the poem inducts the philosophical note that death levels the difference people profess in their lives. It resonates with the words of the Persian poet, Sadi as retold by Jivanji Jamshedji Modi: “When the pious soul thinks of departing, it is all the same, whether one dies on a throne or on bare ground”(42). Horrible was the massacre, but Patel asks:

And why should I moan?
Yesterday's chicken meal saw
No less significant a slaughter.
Can domestic fowl calculate
Right done them from wrong? (29-33)

The savage in Dacca was accomplished in a flash and the killers moved away unscathed. Perhaps Patel might have been reminded of the Parsi exodus and the sufferings they underwent. Violence and murder of human beings have become so routine and incessant that the victims have become too meek to afford a murmur of revolt; with a scathing irony, Patel equates the massacre of men to the “slaughter” of chicken and in a state of distress he says that the victims have been reduced as insignificant as “chickens”. He laments over the state of Parsis as voiceless “domestic fowl” and in a daze asks: “What / Was butchered?”(33-34). He is worried that even a protest seems to be a folly as mankind is split between the torturer and the tortured, the killer and the killed. It has set into a rule of nature that some are preordained to be killed by others. The students have become lifeless dolls, evacuated into ill-timed vaults:

. . . Students,
Dolls emptied into untimely graves,
May your odour rise and trip up
Our brains. Tell us
To change our thought. (37-41)

The poem ends with a desperate humane prayer longing for a change of thought. He invokes the “odour” of the murdered students to infuse into them the change of thought and the valour to resist violence.

Yet there is always in Patel a ray of hope. In “What's In and Out (And Round About)” the poet describes a victim of a riot, who comes to hospital, bewildered with a slit belly, but firmly holding, seeking to retrieve from the savagery caused. The description of the man, on the point of death however with a clear hope of life, is inimitable. The firmness in the man lends a ray of hope and highlights the survival instinct. Patel through the victim sends a message to his community: to imbibe a sense of survival even at the face of extinction. In “Continuum,” the poet makes it clear why he is obsessed with the human body. The violence committed on any human body causes him inner suffering and therefore no violence, whether caused by nature’s calamities or human madness, goes unobserved. “I am continuum with the century’s skin / I am horribly bruised each time it is struck” (5-6). As an outsider, in his desperate effort to live with it, he does not begin to estimate the tormentor’s view point. The idea of being one and in continuum with the country reflects the striking feature found in Parsi diaspora which no longer harbours any longing towards returning to their original home land.

The social awareness in Gieve Patel is best expressed in poems like “Commerce” and “O My Very Own Cadaver.” His inquisitiveness about Nargol and the strongly formed cultural traditions influenced by Gujarat surroundings with a very definite remarkable reminiscence render the poet’s anxiety over the sickening human neglect and the sufferings of fellow men. Thus a human dimension to his revolt is introduced. The poet’s encounter as a Parsi with the common man and the prosaic note to the human relationship in the constricted environment of modern urban life where everything is
reduced to commercial propositions and all the more the Parsis as “other” – are so elegantly pointed out in “Commerce” thus:

I anticipate defeat, feel cheated from the start,
These, as usual, will be external gestures.
As always, what is unexpressed will roll
Darkly behind his eyes and click shut.
Yet I listen again.
Unmistakable the difference.
It is he searching me out

I would seek to escape the challenge he poses.
Simple enough his look. (6-12, 15-16)

In “O My Very Own Cadaver” he talks about the social problems which affect him as a Parsi and says:

I see my body float on waters
That rush down the street,
Like a leaf that humps its way
Over pebbles. To be so reduced
To flatness like translucent
Cellophane doll, insubstantial,
Dented by passing feet, but
Tough as plastics! (1-8)

With a beautiful undertone he says that his body seems “insubstantial,” but it has become “tough as plastics” and with ease he could meet any “bizarre fate.” Patel holds the status
of the Parsis in the post-colonial set up that has been reduced to flatness and turned insubstantial, and desires the Parsis to transform themselves “tough as plastics” and face hurdles as light as “a leaf.”

In “Seasons,” he wishes “To be able to believe in / Universal love” (1-2) and the oneness of all creations, but the difficulty of enduring and overcoming the wounds caused to the psyche makes such universal love very difficult. We remain imprisoned within ourselves.

Poems like “Mirrored Mirroring,” “It Makes,” “The Return,” and “My Affections” in the poetic collection, Mirrored Mirroring – show in one way or other how adaptability emerges happily through accepting things as they are. Obviously it is a hard and slow process for a settler to adapt himself in the new soil. The title poem mirrors the inherent diversities and the multiplicity of God’s creations and finds that these complexities are God’s making in His effort to understand Himself and feels that they are caught in the web of God’s apparent “Error” of having created too many. Patel sees the numerous human beings as mere replication of animals of varied kind, who behave irrationally and stare at each other blankly and impassively:

In God’s Effort
To Understand Himself?
Mirrored and
Mirroring, what Error
For Him to have spawned
The Multitudinous
Critters! They stare at each other
Blankly, animal
To animal. (2-11)
The primordial instinct in mankind is brought alive through the animal images. Patel locates mankind and its nature amidst the world of animals. Some are like the donkeys, gentle but evasive and non-expressive, some like a tiger whose interest lies not in anything other than its prey only as meat, and self-centred exploiting fellow beings, and some like the elephants evaluate others with clarity through their diamond sharp eyes deeply embedded in wrinkles, but sit cool and evade themselves from being evaluated by others. And with scorn he enquires, “What could God make / Of those measured glances” (34-35). Among these men of varied qualities, Patel searches, “Into the centre / Of each Eye” (12-13) for the mute messages they convey. The very phrase “mute speech” (14) reflects the pristine form of the Parsis in the tainted world and sounds similar to the experience as found in “Servants” expressed through “sit mute.” The poem is suggestive of the study of the history of human minds in the context of survival; particularly this can be applied to Parsis’ continuous struggle to adapt themselves in various cultural settings, inclusive both of the British and of the Indians. Patel reflects this idea also in one of his paintings “Ship Building in Mumbai,” with four figures, including a dog standing in the foreground not having any obvious discussion or interaction but not alienated from each other.

“Parsis are rational, progressive, worthily prosperous and intensely loyal. And they are all these things because they are not Hindu or Muslim – not really Indian – but Persian” (Luhrmann 97). They learned Hindu habits to live among the Hindus, but that was only a surface accretion which enabled them to survive. Karaka declares that:

The Parsis pride themselves on being the progeny of a mighty race of people who occupied Persia centuries before the Christian era. They declare, and can produce some evidence in support of the statement, that their grandeur, magnificence, and glory were unsurpassed by any other
nation of ancient times; that their kings were at once the most powerful of monarchs and the wisest and most beneficent of rulers; that their armies were renowned for courage and military prowess. (I:2)

The traditional renown of their prowess and skill “is claimed by modern Parsi as animating his spirit and firing his blood even although now immersed in the peaceful pursuits of trade and commerce” (I:5). Patel craves for this robust Parsi spirit, their manners and aspirations which they had in their Persian past and also of the magnificence and glory which they espoused from the British. However, for Parsis the longing for regaining a lost past continues to remain flimsy and vague while the threats of survival, amidst present empathetic outlook in society, are real and formidable. The significant consequence of this is the insistent, reiterated complaint that they are not what they were and that agony made him painfully question himself as a Parsi fumbling around in search of elusive solutions:

Like a mongrel, I stalk,
I stalk, a certain look -
And when I find it
(O, that look)
Furiously
I will wag my tail,
Shake my butt,
Rump my rump,
Arch my back in every which way dimension, and
Yaaooooul, yaaooooul,
It seems I’ve found
Someone to like! (39-50)
In the colonial past majority of the Parsis identified themselves with the British and largely endorsed representations of colonial superiority and in the post-colonial present they are confronted with the loss of that identity and patronage, and there is a sickening need to adapt to the transition as the political reality dubs the legacy as double-edged.

The survival instinct of the Parsis could be seen in poems like “Never Did,” “Simpleton” and “The Return.” Patel studied in St. Xavier’s High School, a Christian missionary school and though he does not recollect any specific instances of abuse by Christian priests administering the school, he could not accept the behaviour of a few teachers, the corporal punishments, the catechism and the religious environment prevalent there. The environment in the education institutions was disturbing for minority Parsis and the Parsi children had to suffer humiliation; the fact that their apparel and outward appearance markedly differed from the larger society could also be a striking reason. He begins the poem “Never Did,” saying that he:

Never liked to go to school!
Montessori
was monstrous; brightly coloured
pits and blocks were
tormenting
They wouldn’t fit!
A nasty defeat. (1-7)

At seven, he says he was “tried” before classmates. When the Nature Study teacher asked for a sample of fibres neatly pasted, he, with the whole unwieldy coconut gummed to the entire centre page, was led through the school with the offending book in his hands as a punishment “a triumphal procession” (24). There were no tears but despair in cascades,
“niagra / into a seven-year abyss” (30-31). The entire call for progress of class to class education was something like “howling and screaming / trailing” (36-37).

O ugly unreasonable project book,
heavy with bearded monster
crucifix-like held
in St. Joan’s hands,(32-35)

The survival of the bean seed sprouting in “controlled moisture” (51) in the lab finally growing “hysterical” (52) seems to narrate the students’ plight. Words like, “neglected experiment / stowed away on a shelf for clearing” (56-57) are words of despair. Yet there is a longing for fitness through “visibly screaming” (65) and “exploring dead glass surfaces” (62), in the process of change. One could visualise Patel’s difficulty in getting along with the fellow students adjusting, adapting, and finally beating the trauma of difficulty and Patel’s view is suggested through the process of “seed within seed”(67) imagery implying that the process would continue forever. It is probably the bio-cultural attitude to live for survival or to survive for living.

Patel’s bitter experience in the school in Bombay was the experience of any Parsi child and it has made so deep a cut in his mind that he visualises and replicates the same with the experience of Dorab of Savaksa and Naval of Mister Behram. Dorab, the son of Savaksa, a rich Parsi landlord of Southern Gujarat, was sent to Bombay for studies but he couldn’t manage and ran away from college. In Mister Behram too, there occurs a similar experience to Naval, the Warli tribal adopted into the family of the influential Parsi landowner and lawyer, Behram. Behram’s wife Rati, while in a consoling conversation with Naval narrates:
. . . Remember, I pushed you out of the kitchen! I forced you into your school-room, to study with fifty boys who laughed at you and treated you badly. Fifty children whose fathers were landlords, doctors, officials. Who did not want to study in the same room with you. (Pause) But you studied with them! Naval, you studied with them! We shan’t waste that struggle now, shall we? (253)

“Simpleton” details the sordid tales whispered into St. Francis’s ear. It is a memorable poem in which Patel talks about the realization of how “others” always try to colonise a settler’s body and mind. He mockingly says that St. Francis’s ears have become inflamed listening to the “universe whispers” which is only a, “stream of steady toneless filth /close, clear unending volleys of lies” (31-32) Patel describes these unethical defiling efforts as:

- a catechism, detailing
- how to enslave a person’s body to your own,
- rapt instructions on how to enslave another’s mind to your own;
- and how to enmesh a clear soul
- in your sordid toils.(34-39)

He uses several divine personalities and images from Christianity like St. Teresa, St. Francis, St. Joan, catechism, crucifixion, etc. which he got accustomed to in his school days. Historically Parsis migrated into India to escape from religious conversion; there is also a communal memory about how cleverly the Parsis averted an extensive conversion attempt by the Portuguese Christian colonisers and how the Parsis duped them with a false assurance and ran away from Thane to Kalyan and to return only after it became a British colony. Patel finds that continued murmurs can corrupt the hearer’s ears and fears
that catechism instructions may enmesh a clear soul. Words like “enslave,” “rapt,” “enmesh” show his hatred due to dispossession and he concludes the poem with a demand saying, “Make way / for some air / to breathe”(40-42). And no doubt there is a note of humanist tendency to transcend all religious identities.

Slowly the obsession in him changes and there evolves the culture shift and reconciliation. The two opening poems in Mirrored Mirroring recall the years when God was immaterial to him in the new environment. He could not reconcile with the happenings in the world of the creator. The poem “The Difficulty” admits the awkwardness, possibly for a settler like Patel, in pronouncing the word God. In the beginning he says, it is difficult even to say, God:

One is so out of practice
And embarrassed.
Like lisping in public
about candy.
At fifty. (5-9)

The same attitude continues in “Simple.” He is sometimes off hand and informal and says he shall not be humble before God: “I half suspect / He wouldn’t wish me to be so” (3-4).

Patel takes an iconoclast stand to explore the relationship between man and God and not God and man. He questions the ritualistic approach to preaching God in all religions including his Parsi religion; and thus he turns to be a global man believing in religious diversity. The entire attitude towards God changes in the course of having undergone numerous tribulations. He also clarifies that the years he denied Him were not out of, “arrogance or / excessive / self-regard” (7-9); but due to his being “into the dirt” (13) and then becomes conscious of the fact that he is able to, “turn to Him again” (16) as he has been, “given cleaner air to breathe” (19) and may look up to see what’s around. All
these show the awkwardness possibly for a settler to reconcile with religious and cultural variances in the new soil.

Poems like “My Affections,” “Squirrels in Washington” and “The Place” reflect the adaptability instinct visible among the people of the community. The Parsis have survived against many odds and have done wonderfully well in the land that adopted them. They have indeed been the “sugar” that for centuries has sweetened the flavour of the Indian ethos. He tries to live with the odour of, “Bombay Central’s / In-residence population” (15-16) in the poem “From Bombay Central.” It is a complex odour – a disgusting amalgam of filth and Patel says that smell does not offend him. The poem can be viewed on two levels. On the superficial level, it talks about the realistic settling of an urbanised crowded, multi-cultural Railway Station that represents the city as a whole with all its sordidness:

. . . Of diesel oil, hot steel, cool rails,

Light and shadow, human sweat,

Metallic distillations, dung, urine,

Newspaper ink, Parle’s Gluco Biscuit (23-26)

and on the deeper level, the following lines connote the comfort with which the poet reflects on the Parsi adaptability in the settled land:

I sink back into my hard wooden

Third-class seat, buffered by

This odour, as by a divine cushion,

And do not suspect that this ride

Will be for me the beginning of a meditation

On the nature of truth and beauty. (34-39)
To him, all these smells hit the nostril as one invariable, habitual atmospheric thing and confesses that he does not suspect that his ride in the train of life will be the beginning of a meditation “On the nature of truth and beauty” (39).

In “My Affections,” Patel’s lifetime acquaintances with such inimical odour are described as transitory. He says all his affectations which were heaped on him for so many years “thousand strong, / Such odour, such rioting” (2-3) are now at a stroke reduced to a “passing trace / Of air” (7-8), when once his uncomfortable yoke is lifted off and withdrawn from his shoulder. He calls himself a donkey who could not presume that there could be a “Living without quarry and burden” (16). It seems as if their wounds have been soothed magically by their adaptability; the affectations which were earned for long due to their bond to the original land and the status acquired in the settled land have been staved off. Everything becomes decipherable due to the survival instinct which urges them to shed the dispossession instinct and accept reality:

A scent departing,
Decipherable
Just barely at all; magical
Most longed for deprivation,
My harness lifted off, sores
Touched with salve. (9-14)

“Squirrels in Washington” moves on pondering why the squirrels maintain a safe distance from him. Washington is known for freedom that no one bothers at what’s happening around. No one throws stones at the squirrels and therefore there is no fear. They do halt at some distance away, which made him wonder whether the Parsis emit “currents” at closer sectors to thoughts of social hierarchy of Nature and the non-observance of it would lead into a messy, inextricable accumulation in the majority:
A hierarchy, then of distances,
That must be observed,
And non-observance would at once
Agglutinate all of Nature
Into a messy, inextricable mass? (14-18)

The poet smoothly slips into the interesting speculation, almost in the classical mould, alluding to the myth regarding Daphne’s metamorphosis into a laurel tree. Daphne silently suffered herself to be metamorphosed into vegetation, out of her own choice, rejecting the scornful embrace of Apollo. It reminds one of Parsi’s own choice, to protect their community of its “purity” by prohibiting conversion into it. The idea of resistance to “agglutinate” can be seen as analogous to the Parsis’ sticking to their age old customs, identities and beliefs, unperturbed by the dynamics and realities of the world surrounding them and refusing to accept non-Parsi groom into their fold unmindful of the threat of extinction arising out of fast dwindling numbers:

Ah Daphne! Passing
From women to foliage did she for a moment
Sense all vegetable sap as current
Of her own bloodstream, the green
Flooding into the red? (19-23)

He concludes the poem with the survival instinct of the settlers’ concept of inter-dependence where in the present socio-cultural context, freedom is ironically traced moving from place to place:

Shed dewy tears each dawn
For that lost fleeting moment,
That hint at freedom,

In transit, between cage and cage? (25-28)

Patel beautifully examines the space consciousness of the Parsi community in the poem, “The Place” where he finds the issue of accommodation as not simply borne of availability, suitability or affordability; indeed, extraneous “inward” reasons impacted it. Like a “tryst” the reason is kept “inward” and not amenable to logics. There are no modest reasons to prefer a “lumpy, dusty” place, since the chooser is not ascetic but aesthetic, “Outright beauty too has pleased” (13) him. In fact he talks about the theme of replacement during migration. Madusudhana Rao in “Places without Road maps: Significance of Place in Postcolonial Discourse” says that in the post-modern era:

writers universalize “personal” description of the place, when they internalize their places – their imaginary homelands in their chosen linguistic metaphor. Here, language is the mode of internalizing the “place.” “As they vivify the place in language and metaphor, irony and apathy, endearment and disgust – finally the place “becomes” the poet’s self.” (47)

When Patel talks about “The Place,” it becomes the Parsis’ “self.”

. . . , we make

Too much of places where to meet,

And why some should seem right

Not others. The tryst is inward.

. . . . . . . . . . . . .

. . . But we fuss, we cavil

We make ponderous choices, rejecting
That cool well side for no mortal reason
Favouring instead a lumpy, dusty stone
To sit upon, . . . (1-4, 6-10)

Like atom bonding, the space is being selected and rejected to sit upon, “. . . as the one spot / We had been urgently seeking” (10-11). The journey helps him relive the racial memory that lands him onto the period of migration:

Like that seashore, dense with moonlight
Igniting water, sand and air
Into a blind shimmer; our
Recurrent wrangling the
One division to mar
That place’s simple perfection. (14-19)

Patel uses all life images like, “water, sand and air” to point out that life is full of struggles and all migrants would seek for yet another space to move on. The images get continued in “Of Sea and Mountain,” where Patel reflects on the community’s boredom and longing for an elusive fulfilment. Whenever he is perturbed at “a sinking boredom” (4) or at “pity and anger” (10) and “on both the occasions,” (14) he rushes out:

. . . from the gallery
On to the road
To fill your lungs with air
That is not bitter with your imperfections. (14-17)

Patel continues to say that it is at such occasions that he reflects on the sea to give him power to overcome the inconsistencies of his inner life: “Then O sea I think of you-
/Your unbroken chain / Of deep salt waters” (18-20). He then identifies himself with the
people around. He feels at ease with the creative unconsciousness to recollect the ancestral images of sea and mountain. As he examines a tired ageing woman turning her back on his table and of the “blows this back has taken,” (27) he identifies himself with her, thinking that he will also develop “a permanent hump”(37) like that of hers’ and says, “I, like her, will fail to withstand / The endless burden . . .” (34-35). The physical examination is shifted to examining his abstract experiences as a settler longing for a future that may save his generation from the impending fall. The words “fail to withstand” and “the endless burden” reflect the present state of the younger Parsi generation which sees its past but extinct pride as a superfluous hump with no purpose to rejoice at. Patel here uses two apostrophes: one to the sea and another to the mountain. He seeks the “unbroken” chain of the deep salt waters of the sea to give him depth and clarity in thought and the “immutable” structure of mountain to withstand the endless burden:

At such times O mountains
I long for your structure
Your seemingly immutable
Rise and fall. (38-41)

The sea image representing migration is evoked more effectively in “Haunting” where he says migration began earlier only: “In clotted har / bours”(1-2) by the, “tide’s pull”(6). He feels that the lepers and he himself are the last hopefuls “to haunt / the wat /er’s edge (12-14). They come with the hope of healing their sores and discomfits in “primal salt” but the harbours are clotted and filled with waste polythene shopping bags and they sewer the water gurgling in their bellies and there is no way for healing. But the sea never takes rest on their primal glories. His longing for the better future to transcend
all kinds of Parsi boundaries to enter into a global humanists’ attribute is best illustrated through descriptions like:

think

ing to heal

their sores, wishful faith

in primal salt. I

come watching for that hour, (15-19)

Sea has been viewed as a saviour, a source of migration and a space to promote life in the land. Migration is voluntary or otherwise and may be the resultant fear to avert catastrophe or of the search for better pastures or is a mixture of both rise and fall. The image, “Water to/ heal” (27-28) implies a hope of survival. Patel breaks the sentences and words to give an onomatopoeic effect and reiterates the impact of sea on the Parsis as he describes the sea:

. . . un

furl a stir in the air an

nouncing

a flood of green tides

signalling them to move on.(32-36)

Patel not only tries to reconcile with other religions but also transcends all religions finding the ‘world passage.” He has undergone the conflict of cross religious cult, may be the settler’s bewilderment whether to accept or to reject the commonality among gods, and of worshipping nature sources etc. And so in “It makes,” he argues that there is no sense in keeping the migrating body flawless, like a hermit sealed, in a compact, “box of in corruptibles”(5) not mingling with “the world passage”(13) and so it is better to break the shell and pierce out happily into the open-air, “Better shot through
and through! / Interpenetrated / with the world” (6-8). He considers himself a sorted, classified bead, “thumbed” on a string by threads of all hues, “riddled,” challenged to live happily in the modern world among varied heritage and senses from which he has to come out, interpenetrate into the world and absorb himself into the ways of the world.

The last three lines show the adaptability enforced by piercing the, “threads of all hues / riddled, / happily” (20-22). Allied to this is yet another poem, “The Return,” which talks about his aversion to live in this world overpowered once by the “odour of genitals”(2) and contemplates “the possibly / odourless body” (3-4) “possessing / every delight”(5-6) and “jasmine- scented” (10) delicately marshier areas.

The final transition into accepting the global reality and submitting to the adaptation and acclimatisation is found in the poems like “God or,” “Unsolemn Prayer” and “Turning Aside.” Most of the poems in Mirrored Mirroring express the poet’s urge to find something that can tranquil his perturbed mind. All visions of God come to him through the images of nature, and through what he sees around. He invokes one or other objects of nature to provide him strength and comfort. The Parsis are praised for their pure thoughts, words and deeds and Patel says that each part of “you” when, “beamed / right” (9-10) would lift even the worst of “your” rude pitilessness and “your fruitlessness” (14) out of sight and “you did not know” (9). Patel unearths the turbulence and the trauma that the Parsis undergo and reclaims to God as the only redeemer. In one of his poems, “Unsolemn Prayer” he finds God’s power “doubly glorious in turbulence!” and eulogises God’s supremacy:

Below me clouds dashed against
the mountain side like an absolute sea
tearing through the greenery in waves
with breathless glimpses
of a serene, lighted
valley under the grey. (7-12)

He sees a ray of hope of survival despite the turmoil and so he could glimpse below the clouds, “a serene lighted / valley” (10-11) which may be a comfort for the wounds; a kind of “sweet quietude” might be what they would have wished in India, where they landed in search of a safe haven:

Monsignor, I don’t know
about Your goodness, but
Your beauty floors me.
If that was Your face I saw
I am all praise for it, O
doubly glorious in turbulence! (1-6)

In “Turning Aside” he wishes his “Embattled mind” to settle down “to sweet quietude” so as to become one with a buffalo, in the “mango shade” of a pool full of water buffaloes. Patel tries to get quietude in the “mango shade” at the ponds along with the buffaloes. The very existence of the water buffaloes in the pond’s edge, their sleepy head wearing a mud crown with half shut eyes, cleaning the oozing into their nostrils with their tongues and their clod “by clod / plopping / into the water” (29-31) are all remarkably elucidated. It concludes with a revelation. What is sought from the fierce God is a sign of mutual regard to lull him, to quietude. Nature reappears, not merely to set the scene, but to lead to an illumination. The references to ageing and the quest for quietude embodied in the movement of the verses resonate the ageing community and its desperation: “Embattled mind, settle down so / to sweet quietude” (44-51). His fresh concern for God is a clear indication of his withdrawal from his social being. His earlier moral and intellectual earnestness has given way to an intense spiritual turmoil. The
moral conflict and revolt recede into the background; perhaps the tolerance to accept the world as it is might have turned him to look for a divine answer.

Patel brings in the beautiful images like “body,” “mother,” “woman,” “trees,” “seeds,” “smell,” “sea,” “mountains,” “valleys” to strengthen the identities of the Parsis. Qualities like resistance, tolerance, and all the virtues associated with the Parsis are emphasised through “body,” “mother,” “woman” images, while Parsi traits like behaviour, tradition and individuality are highlighted through “tree” images. Their persistence and continuance through the process of “seed within seed” image and survival instinct which urged them to remove the dispossession instinct and accept reality through the image of “smell” and the present empathetic outlook in society through the animal images like “sit mute” with “mute speech” depict the Parsi’s state of affairs. All the other images like “sea,” “mountains,” “valleys” and whatever he uses are all meticulously interwoven with the spatial travel that they experienced through their migration from Persia to India, suggesting the anticipated culture shift.

Thus Patel is unique in the way that he effectively captures the day to day unusual moments and very simple discomforting aspects of life. He adds a novel aspect to the hierarchy of socio-realistic poems by integrating his knowledge as a doctor and stands distinct as a self-conscious writer, both in his selection of the subject matter, and in his use of bare and uncontrolled verse. His views on notions of their home, history, migration, the trauma of displacement and rootlessness and above all their identity - are inextricably interwoven in an amazingly simple and straight voice. His success as a writer lies in exploring the “dead glass surfaces” of the life of “otherness” through the process of change, adaptation, adjustment, assimilation and acculturation, and finally softening himself to overcome the trauma of displacement and alienation by realising the humanist in him through the poems. In the end, everything becomes his own experiences.
conditioned by his racial memory as well as the contemporary perspective of the present society.

And as a Parsi with virtues of acceptance and lenience, Patel has been talented enough to portray the divergent squalor of Bombay in a remarkable way. Bombay is important to and inseparable from the Parsis. Though peace loving, Parsis are vibrant on the business front and are not nervous of the consequences of trade and industry on the social life, and love Bombay as it is, though not approving all its insufficiencies. Certainly his Parsi faith has involved in no narrowing of sympathies and tolerance but the other way round, encompassing all. The facts of life are such that this world of ours is made up of many cultures. This plurality is a fact, just as every language is adequate to meet the needs of its users, every culture is intrinsically on par with other cultures, and it is in their reciprocal relationship that they jointly seek fulfilment. As Ayappa Panicker says:

. . . the hegemony of any single culture over the other will create an unhealthy atmosphere in which all cultures will ultimately perish. Together they can flourish and replenish the earth, but when put ‘in jeopardy by stressing globalization and ignoring regional creativity, they may prove sterile and stunted. (34)

Since Indian society is, multiracial, multilingual, multi religious, and multiethnic, any attempt to reduce it to a mono-racial, mono-lingual, mono-religious, or mono-ethnic society will eventually lead to its ruin. To conclude with the words of Ayappa Panicker, “To stay in one’s own culture may be a virtue, but to outgrow one’s own culture and recognize and accept other cultures is a greater glory, a greater fulfilment” (34).