Chapter VI

Summing Up

Striving to offer a Parsi Discourse is a challenging task for a diasporic writer. Because, most of the Parsis are subjected to diverse diasporas and receive fragmented images that reflect the glorious past, reduced present and their insecure future. On the unenviable task of the diasporic writer, Salman Rushdie opines that, “It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India has to reflect the world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of these fragments have been lost” (Homelands, 10-11). But both Bapsi Sidhwa and Rohinton Mistry have succeeded handsomely in chronicling the fortunes of the Parsis of the Indian Sub-continent in their works.

The significant achievements of Parsis, their crises of identity and survival strategies of identification and withdrawal as revealed in the works of Bapsi Sidhwa and Rohinton Mistry form the main topic of this thesis. Both writers portray the life style and culture of the Parsis and the crises and upheavals they have passed through.

The introductory chapter focuses on the exodus of the Parsis to the Indian subcontinent and also their predicament as an ethnic minority and explains the significant accomplishments of the Parsis and their unique insider-outsider status especially in India and Pakistan. Parsi consciousness and cultural predicament form the central theme in the works of Bapsi Sidhwa.
In her novels such as *The Crow Eaters, The Pakistani Bride, An American Brat* and *Ice-Candy Man*, Sidhwa gives an authentic picture of the Parsis and this lends a cultural specificity to her works. Sidhwa’s *An American Brat* deals with the diasporic experience as experienced by Feroza, the central character. The community’s plight between the world left behind and the new one in which it seeks acculturation runs as an undercurrent in the events in the novel.

In Mistry’s fiction, the religious aspects of Parsi life, their social and economic struggles, are documented in detail. Mistry focuses on racial and cultural diversity through the portrayal of characters. His analysis of gender discrimination adds a new dimension to his fiction.

Mistry’s perspectives on the Parsi-mind are particularly penetrative and panoramic. His works—both novels and short stories—portray a kaleidoscopic spectrum of attitudes and perception in the past, present and future of Parsis.

The second chapter entitled “Parsi Nostalgia” examines the strange cat-on-the-wall position of the Parsis. Bapsi Sidhwa’s presentation of nostalgia differs from Mistry’s.

In Sidhwa’s world, the immigrant experience becomes the basis for the re-formation or realignment of the community in a sort of anthropological paradox. The experience of the Parsis in their new environment and how they accustom themselves to the new land, their longing for their native land add significance in the works of Sidhwa. In *An American Brat*, Feroza’s experience in America is portrayed by Sidhwa with care and interest. Once settled in America, Feroza accommodates and
involves herself with the society in which she lives. She also participates in all the activities of the majority community.

As far as Mistry is concerned, his characters are recollecting the joyful events they had witnessed in their lives. Mistry’s vision is only on the community-centred existence.

The reminiscences that are presented in the fiction of Mistry add glory to the past way of life. In his fiction, the central characters often undertake a journey down memory lane recollecting events of the past. The unexpected emergence of a nostalgic past in Villie Cardmaster in *Family Matters* serves as an example. Similarly, Gustad in *Such a Long Journey* expresses his longing to be in Iran and in his portrayal, the nostalgic past gains prominence.

In the third chapter, the Parsi predicament in the multicultural societies, and their quest for identity as a marginalized group as portrayed by Sidhwa and Mistry is explored.

Bapsi Sidhwa portrays multiculturalism in her fiction by establishing the variegated experiences in Asian life. With the comic spectacle of human kind, these experiences form the basis for a multicultural ethnic mosaic. Sidhwa’s presentation of multicultural situation is not only a theme. But it becomes a mode of perception. Sidhwa’s *An American Brat* deals with an intercultural theme that has assumed vital significance. In this narrative, the West is portrayed with its set of values in conflict with the value systems of the East. The conflict that arises between the two cultures leads to a quest for identity. Feroza’s quest
for identity is nothing but a formation of her personality, influenced by her acculturation to the new land.

Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey* is only an allegory on multiculturalism. This novel represents the vision of a multicultural society and also the place of minorities in it. Dina’s relationship with Om Prakash, Ishwar and Maneck in *A Fine Balance* clearly signifies the Parsi predicament and their adjustments. Cultural issues and Politico-economic developments play vital roles in Mistry’s fiction.

The fourth chapter highlights the abuse of political authority over the ordinary citizen and the Parsis’ response to socio-political upheavals such as the Partition, the Emergency and the killing of the Sikhs in 1984. The anxieties of the Parsi writers attain vitality in their presentation of political issues. These issues are portrayed through various characters.

Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man* is the first Partition novel written from a Parsi-perspective. In the novel, Lenny symbolizes the damaged Parsi identity that was under threat during the Partition of India. The novel approaches the theme of Partition on a religious ground. Sidhwa deals with history as a Post-Colonial novelist. Despite her admiration for Gandhi, she holds him as partially responsible for the Partition. Being a Parsi, Sidhwa did not suffer much during the Partition. The fight was only among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.

The Parsi Paradox that is whether to support ‘Swaraj’ or to maintain their loyalty to the British Raj is humorously delineated in the novel. The meeting convened by the Parsis reveals their insecurity on the eve of the
Partition. It happens not because of communal antagonism, but due to an apprehension of their status at the departure of the British.

Allegory is the literary device used by Bapsi Sidhwa to depict the trauma of Partition. Lenny’s foolish betrayal of her Ayah is an apt allegory on the mindless violence of the Partition. Another Partition novel Attia Hosain’s *Sun Light on a Broken Column* (1961) also uses a narrator heroine to similar effect. As in *Ice – Candy Man*, the enigma of Partition is sensitively presented by the novelist.

With a sprinkling of humour, parody and allegory, Sidhwa conveys a sinister warning of the dangers of compromising with religious obscurantism and fundamentalism of all categories. Like Amitav Ghosh, she reveals that communal riots are contemporaneous and those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.

In *The Pakistani Bride*, Sidhwa gives a clear description of Sikhs’ ambushing a train going to Pakistan and killing the Muslims mercilessly. After the Partition, most of the Hindus and Sikhs left Pakistan and a large number of Muslims left India. The Parsis remained where they were both in India and Pakistan.

Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*, serves as the best example for the portrayal of human tragedy that was part of the Emergency. Emergency disturbs the coherence of routine in the average lives of Ishwar Darjee and his youthful nephew Om Prakash. Their struggle for survival does not have political angle to it.

The Parsi attitude and response towards the Partition signify the religious differences. The communal tensions and also the anxiety of the
The Parsi community maintains its specificity and protests against the encroachment by other communities. *A Fine Balance* shows how political changes cut mercilessly through the psycho-social fabric of a country.

Sidhwa portrays the political upheavals by exhibiting soft spot for Pakistan. Partition forms the central theme for all the works of Sidhwa. In Pakistan, the Parsi identity proves to be a reductive entity.

In both *The Pakistani Bride* and *Ice-Candy Man*, the riots cause a dangerous situation. Muslims attack Hindus and the latter attack the Muslim areas. But her sense of the absurd helps Sidhwa to comprehend the uselessness of artificial divisions.

But Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey*, that was set up in the early 1970’s during the Indo-Pak War, chronicles only the individual lives of his characters. In *Family Matters*, the political subtext moves towards India of the 1990’s.

In the fifth chapter, familial relationships, the tie between family friends and the community, all forms of human happiness and sorrow become the prime focus. The predicament of individuals in coping with the family and self in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa and Mistry deepen the life of communities.

Sidhwa’s portrayal of parents and their children, the relationship between the sexes, the dissent among the younger generation of the Parsi community are discussed in detail. In depicting familial relationships,
Sidhwa’s attitude towards the relationship between parents and children deepens the life of the community. She discusses the revolt of the younger generation of the Parsi community through the character Feroza in *An American Brat*.

Mistry’s *Family Matters* is a moving picture of the helpless situation of parents in old age and also the merciless attitude of children. Prof. Nariman Vakeel’s character reveals the problems faced by aged parents. In the novel, Nariman says: “In my youth, my parents controlled me and destroyed those years. Thanks to them, I married your mother and wrecked my middle years. Now you want to torment my old age. I won’t allow it”(7).

Dina Dalal’s individuality and the relationship she has with the family add a new dimension to the theme. The treatment of parents by children, the misery and travails of parents in old age set the humanistic premise that the “universal lies in the ordinary.” In depicting familial relationships, the interaction between family, friends and community is the technique of both the writers.

To conclude, this research was conducted to get a comprehensive picture of the variegated predicament of Parsis as portrayed in the selected novels of Bapsi Sidhwa and Rohinton Mistry. Both these writers (whose own predicament is that of an insider-outsider) have provided interesting insights on the predicament of Parsis from female and male points of view, respectively.

This study points further avenues for research. At present, radical changes are taking place in the Parsi community. Religious orthodoxy has
limited the Parsi-population. The Parsi women go to court to secure their religious rights. Parsis of the younger generation marry outside their communities. The literacy rate of Parsis also is fast-changing. The search for the elusive Parsi identity, the alarming decline in the Parsi population, the high rate of divorce, the highly Westernized life style of Parsis, their ongoing migration to the West, the chasm between the Parsis and other communities in India all warrant research.

In fact, all these have been well-documented by creative writers of Parsi origin. As such, Research studies are possible on the works of writers like Firdaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy, Ardhashir Vakil and others. Also, comparative studies involving the works of Parsi writers and writers from other minority communities could be revealing.

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