Chapter – III

The Predicament of the Parsis in Multi-cultural Societies

There are many multi-cultural nations in the world today. India, the United States, Canada, England and Australia are the immediate examples. Apart from the historical waves of migration of people of different ethnicity and religion, political turmoil has sent waves of refugees from country to country seeking asylum, paving way to more multicultural nations in the process. The exodus of the Srilankan Tamils is an example for this.

The arrival of these new people often results in socio-political turmoil. For example, According to The Hindu, a prominent Indian English Daily (October 18th, 1999), the German authorities were offering an equivalent of Rs.50,000 per person as “inducement money” to each of the over 3,50,000 Bosnian and Balkan refugees in Germany living as either “asylum seekers” or “displaced persons.” It is also mentioned that these refugees were reluctant to go back. This act of the German authorities clearly reveals a racist attitude and the complex nature of the issue faced by Germany as a multicultural nation.

Traditionally, India has had remained a nation of minorities. It has even received waves of foreign invaders and got assimilated them as Indians. Apart from the Hindu majority, there are Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Bahais etc., in India with each offering a cultural fabric to the multicultural fabric of India.
Persia (modern Iran) was conquered by Muslims during the 8th Century and this resulted in the mass migration of the Parsis to the West Coast of India. True, they were allowed by the king of Sanjan, Jadi Rana to settle in Sanjan, on certain conditions like they have to explain their religion to the king; they have to give up their native Persian language, and take on the languages of India; their women should wear traditional dress of India; the men should lay down their weapons, and they should hold their wedding processions only in the dark (Kulke 28)

The Parsis accepted these conditions and gradually settled down in India and later moved to other multicultural cities like Lahore and Mumbai. There what kind of life was led by them? Were they able to assimilate themselves with the ways of the majority? Were they able to acculturate themselves in these multicultural societies, especially after the Partition?

The fiction of Sidhwa and Mistry strive to find artistic answers to these sociological queries.

In Ice – Candy Man, Sidhwa turns her attention to a terrible period of her country’s history as she dramatically recreates Lahore (the predominant setting of her novels) during the months of the Partition.

To realise Pakistan, Sidhwa appears to suggest, it is necessary to understand the events that led to its emergence as a new nation in 1947. The novel begins at the end of the 19th Century. It is really an unusual passage to India that transports the reader to the heart of the Parsi community. Lahore is clearly brought to life through a wealth of local detail.
The hero of the novel is Freddy, a Parsi and through him, his family and their Parsi friends, the culture of this minority community is recreated as an apt setting to the story. The focus on Parsi customs and beliefs is interesting itself. This decision to set the story among the Parsi community is sound on literary grounds too.

Sidhwa as a Pakistani, writes against the Indian views of the past. As a Parsi, she appears on occasions to write against Pakistani interpretations of history too.

In *Ice-Candy Man* Lenny’s unreliable narration proves to be reliable in its own way, at least as reliable as the British and Indian versions on events and personages. The *Ice Candy Man* is both a Pakistani version of Partition and a major contribution to the list of Partition novels that continue to emerge from the Indian sub-continent.

The novel examines the inexorable logic of the Partition. It is an offshoot of the fundamentalism that is sparked off by communal attitudes. This novel includes a bevy of characters from all communities. There are Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Parsis. This enables the writer to present multiple perspectives of Partition.

In the novel, Lenny, a precocious, handicapped Parsi girl who is eight year old, narrates the story of her changing world with a sense of wonder.

Lenny is observing a social change and human behaviour, noting interesting sidelights and listening to opinions in making judgements. Her childish innocence can be compared to Chaucer’s persona, a source of sharp irony. The device of the child narrator enables Bapsi Sidhwa to treat
a historical moment as horrifying as the Partition. The author maintains a masterful balance between laughter and despair sensitively. She shows the human toll of the Partition when a concerned Lenny asks: “Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is?” (*ICM*, 92).

The Parsi dilemma in whether to support ‘Swaraj’ or to maintain loyalty to the British Raj is also humorously delineated. With the arrival of Independence, the paranoid feelings of the Parsis as a minority get accentuated. The Parsis in Lahore attend a special meeting in a temple hall on Warris Road, especially to debate on the political situation. The meeting expresses the insecurity of the Parsis not due to communal antagonism but because of their changed status at the departure of the British. Col. Bharucha and Lenny’s father blame the British for bringing polio to India. At the meeting, India’s smallest minority is trying to redefine their strategy which Colonel Bharucha sums up as, “We must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare” (*ICM*, 16).

Colonel Bharucha, the President of the community advocates the statusquo. He also warns fellow Parsis to shun the anti-colonial movements. He says if there is ‘Home Rule’ political glory, fame and fortune will be obtained by the two major communities. Moreover the Parsis traced their secured status as a prosperous minority community to British Rule. Parsis considered loyalty as a self-evident precept. Col. Bharucha advises Parsis not to offend British sensibilities by espousing nationalist causes in a tone of admonition: “I hope no Lahore Parsi will be stupid enough to court trouble. I strongly advise all of you. Do stay at home and out of trouble” (*ICM*, 37)
Some Parsis express apprehensions about remaining in Lahore after independence. They desire to migrate either to London or Bombay. The president of the Lahore Parsis, Col. Bharucha says, “As long as we conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present no threat to anybody we will prosper right here” (ICM, 40).

The Parsis remained in the urban areas of India and Pakistan, trying to preserve their identity by not meddling in political matters. Bapsi Sidhwa presents the underlying fears of the Parsis about the Partition and independence.

Sidhwa portrays the Parsis as captives of circumstances in the upheaval of the Partition. Adaptability becomes part of their social code and the Parsis adjust to the changing situations. Col. Bharucha and Lenny’s father curse the British for bringing polio to India (ICM, 61). Even Lenny suffers from polio and the disease is treated as another example of British treachery. Lenny’s mother Mrs. Sethi and other Parsi women help Hindu and Sikh families to escape in safe convoys to India. They also assist in the rehabilitation of destitute and kidnapped women. It is Lenny’s God mother who rescues the Hindu Ayah who is forcibly married to her former Muslim friend the seller of Ice- Candies.

The God mother is responsible for sending the Ayah to Amritsar under police escort. There arises a sense of involvement with the new reality. Lenny’s parents, God mother and Parsi friends try to bring some semblance of sanity into frenzied Lahore.

Charity and social usefulness form the major duo in the Parsi moral code. This code is based on the teachings of the prophet Zarathushtra. This
is amply revealed in Eckehard Kulke’s scholarly book, *The Parsis in India: A minority as Agent of social change*. Parsi charities are cosmopolitan. They venerate the ancient scriptures and daily prayers extol philanthropy. This charity system was made possible and furthered by the basic philanthropic attitude of the Parsis, motivated by their religion.

The innocence and disbelief of the children—Lenny, her brother Adi, cousin Ranna— together with the humanity of people like Lenny’s mother who smuggles rationed petrol at great personal risk to help her Hindu and Sikh friends to escape Lahore are expressions of their humane attitude.

The dinner party in Lenny’s parents’ house during which Lenny and her brother hide under the large table and eavesdrop on the conversation overhead allows Sidhwa to introduce a discussion on the major political issues of the day—Swaraj. Lenny only overhears much about the current political situation when he sits with Ayah and her followers.

Lenny also becomes aware of the different religions around her and understands that in the Lahore of 1947 people are not simply themselves “It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves and the next day they are Hindus, Muslim, Sikh, Christian People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah-she is also a token. A Hindu” (*ICM*, 93).

The *Ice-Candy Man* is concerned with the events of the Partition, and is more interesting for its characterisation and narrative techniques. The novel is deeply political in retelling of the events of Partition from a
Pakistani rather than an Indian perspective. The novel is laden with historical references.

   Lenny is told of her childhood and receives historical news of Gandhi out of time. It has all become a part of the ethos of the age. The burning of Lahore is compared with the celebration of Holy, a spring festival that would have taken place some months earlier.

   Gandhi’s visit to Lahore allows Bapsi Sidhwa to reassess his place in history. To quote from the novel: “Gandhijee certainly was ahead of his times. . . He has starved his way into the news and made headlines all over the world” (*ICM*, 86). He is a man who loves women and lame children and the untouchable sweeper.

   Bapsi Sidhwa’s treatment of the Parsi Community in *Ice – Candy Man* provides the reader with an intimate view of the plight of minority ethnic groups in Pakistan. *The Ice Candy Man* is considered as both a Pakistani version of the Partition and one of the finest novels on Partition to emerge from the Indian sub-continent.

   Several communities interact in *Ice Candy Man*—Lenny’s immediate and extended family, Ayah and her circle of admirers, the Hindu neighbours and the Muslim villagers. In the novel, Sidhwa describes the Partition through the young Lenny’s eyes. Sidhwa’s humour tones down the horror and pity of the scenario as she tells the story of the Partition through the perspective of a child. Lenny’s comprehension of the events of the Partition are explained through the story of what happens to her beloved Hindu Ayah.
Sidhwa makes her Pakistani identity clear in *Ice-Candy Man* where she suggests how the Partition favoured India over Pakistan. To quote from the novel: “The Hindus are being favoured over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favour Nehru over Jinnah. … They grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot without which Muslim Kashmir cannot be secured (*ICM, 1959*).

Sidhwa has made an attempt to give a Pakistani perspective on the Partition of India. According to Sidhwa, the British glorified Mountbatten, the Indians and Gandhi. But only Gandhi sowed the seeds of the Partition and turned the whole independence struggle into a Hindu movement. As a Pakistani, Sidhwa finds it difficult to defend Mohammed Ali Jinnah. The reference to Jinnah is made suitably in the Parsi family, that is the centre of the novel.

Lenny comes across the picture of an astonishingly beautiful woman and is said that it is the picture of Jinnah’s wife. As a Parsi, she married the Muslim Jinnah braving her family’s displeasure. But the marriage was not a happy one.

Sidhwa rises above petty nationalism. *Ice-Candy Man* does not stress the two-nation theory behind the creation of Pakistan. Sidhwa does not emphasise the belief of Pakistani Muslims in the necessity of the partition and the creation of Pakistan.

The novel explains the religious and cultural differences that are artificially created and fostered through Lenny’s perspective. Sidhwa describes how religious differences were deliberately exploited on the eve of the Partition. To quote from the novel: “Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Iqbal,
Tarasingh, Mountbatten are names I hear. One day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink especially dwindling into symbols (ICM, 115)

The United States enabled Sidhwa to give a ‘happy’ ending to the story of the Partition. But here too it may be observed that the victim is only the Muslim woman. Sidhwa portrays and presents a different perspective on the story of the Partition.

Lenny attempts to have free social interaction with a group of Sikh children. But Lenny is pulled away by Masseur. Moreover the Sikh women ask her about her home and the name of her religion. When Lenny says that she is from a Parsi family, the Sikh women express amazement at the discovery of a new religion. Only then does Lenny realize the social divide between communities.

Rationalizing her feelings she expresses her view: “That’s when I realize what has changed. The Sikhs, only their rowdy little boys running about hair piled in topknots are keeping mostly to themselves” (ICM, 96).

Cultural and religious exclusivity leads initially to indifference and later to contempt. This contempt becomes the breeding ground for communal violence and bigotry.

The Ice-Candy Man pretends to speak to God over telephone. The scene is really ridiculous and filled with a sense of humour. The Ice – Candy Man’s predicament provokes only amusement. The duplicity of people, all in the name of religion is criticized here. Their gullibility is exposed clearly. “Suddenly he springs up … Allah! Wah Allah!…. the madder the mystic, the greater his power.” (ICM, 99)
The secular group of Ayah’s admirers maintain a facade of unity by cracking ribald jokes on community characteristics. They too become vicious and fall prey to a communal frenzy.

The Ice – Candy Man’s attempts to marry the Ayah become fruitful. He frostily marries Ayah, and changes her name as Mumtaz. He also recites love poetry to her. Love becomes powerless. Moreover Ayah has a revulsion for her newly –acquired Muslim identity. With the help of Lenny’s God mother, she is taken to a recovered women’s camp. Later she is sent to the family in Amritsar. Love does not conquer all especially when communal passions are aroused.

Only with the help of humour, parody and allegory, Bapsi Sidhwa does convey the danger of compromising with religious fundamentalism of all categories. Though her novel is about the Partition, Sidhwa reveals that communal riots are contemporaneous.

In the world of the Ice-Candy Man, what transpires in the great halls of Delhi matters. The fate of Ayah’s circle, Lenny’s family the refugees who go and come, the Muslim villagers who face death remain disturbing.

Post coloniality is a major theme and preoccupation in Sidhwa’s novels. The chronological moment of post-coloniality is the centre of The Ice Candy Man. Moreover it is set in the period of Partition and around what Sidhwa tells us is a quintessential post colonial moment.

The horror experienced by the people at the time of the Partition permeates this work. The Parsis are the most-colonised of the people. They
come to an understanding of themselves and their connections with the subcontinent.

Sidhwa’s works are timeless and speak of the cultural conflict in the migrations of people. The novels of Bapsi Sidhwa reveal her as a Parsi and a Pakistani writer.

In *Ice Candy Man*, the Parsis are not implicated in the Hindu–Muslim struggles even though an innocent child becomes the victim of questioning and betrays her Hindu maid servant to the Muslims.

The main theme of Bapsi Sidhwa’s work is how the Parsis interact with the rest of the multicultural populace around them, whether in India, in Britain or as in the case of *American Brat* in the United States.

Following the advice of their elders like Faredoon, the majority of the Parsis adopted a discreet politically naïve profile. They also directed their efforts towards achieving success in their personal lives. But within the next four years, the freedom movement gathered such a momentum that some Parsis like Dr. Maneck Mody of the *Ice-Candy Man* found it difficult to remain uninvolved.

In the Jashan Prayer meeting to celebrate the British victory in the Second World War, the Parsis of Lahore exchange their views freely on the political situation prevailing in the country. Colonel Bharucha, a doctor and president of the Parsi community in Lahore warns against joining the struggle for power: “Hindus Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power and if you jokers jump into the middle you’ll be mangled into chutney” (*ICM, 36*)
Moreover one impatient voice expresses his distrust of the three major communities, “If we’re struck with the Hindus, they usurp our business from under our noses and sell our grandfathers in the bargain, if we restrict with the Muslims they “convert us by the sword, and God help us if we’re struck with the Sikhs (ICM, 37). Colonel Bharucha asks them not to develop rancour against any community. He tells them that they will cast their lot with whoever rules Lahore. “Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land” (ICM, 39).

When a question arises if they should move to Bombay in case the Muslims rule Lahore, Col. Bharucha replies that they must remain where they are “As long as we conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present no threat to any body, we will prosper right here” (ICM, 40).

The final decision is that they will not meddle in political matters; will keep equidistance from the three major communities contending for power.

In the opening of the novel, the narrator Lenny is four years old. Her parents are quite well off since they live in a big house on Warris road. Her brother Adi is one year and a month younger than her. Because of her affected leg she is pampered by everyone everywhere. Her world is compressed and her movement is also limited. Her eighteen year old Ayah only takes her out to her godmother and aunt’s houses on the opposite sides of jail road. Lenny loves visiting her god mother most.

Lenny is jolted out of her Jollity by her nightmares about a German solider To quote her words: “...coming to get me [Lenny] on his motor
cycle. Another nightmare which is more ominous is that of ‘men in uniforms quietly, slice off a child’s arm here, a leg there, she exclaims “I feel no pain, only an absymal sense of loss – and a chilling horror that no one is concerned by what’s happening” (ICM,22).

The chilling horror that she feels over no one being concerned about what is happening is symbolic of the general lack of sensitivity to the blood bath of Partition.

Lenny’s another nightmare is that of the zoo lion breaking free and sinking his fangs into her stomach. To quote from the novel, “… the hungry lion cutting across Lawrence road to Bird wood road prowls from the rear of the house to the bedroom door and in one bare-fanged leap crashes through to sink his fangs into my stomach’(23-24)

Generally the hungry lion foreshadows the lust for blood and the murderous cruelty with which people of different communities treat one another at the time of Independence and Partition. Through the personal nightmares of Lenny, Sidhwa sets the stage for the lurid details of real violence in public life.

Lenny has her first experience of communal amity in rural India among the Muslims of Pir Pindo and the Sikhs from the neighboring village forty miles east of Lahore. When Lenny’s family cooks and a townsman Imam Din broaches the subject of Sikh and Muslim trouble, the villagers both Sikh and Muslim raise a protest. After the tumult subsides, the Sikh Granthi Jagjeet Singh says: “Brother, our villages come from the same racial stock. Muslim or Sikh we are basically Jats. We are brothers. How can we fight each other? (ICM,56).
Seconding the views of the Sikh Granthi, the Muslim Cleric of Pir Pindo tells Imam Din: “…. Our relationships with the Hindus are bound by strong ties. The city folk can afford to fight … we can’t. We are dependent on each other bound by our toil by Mandi prices set by the Bunyas – they’re our common enemy – those city Hindus. To us villagers what does it matter if a peasant is a Hindu, or a Sikh? (ICM, 56).

Moreover the avowal of love allays Imam Din’s fears. He feels sure that communal frenzy will not affect the villages. Sikh Granthi says: “If need be, we’ll protect our Muslim brothers with our lives” (ICM, 56).

When Ayah remarks generally that Jinnah, Nehru and Patel are not fighting their fight, Sherbet Khan says that “May be true but they are stirring up trouble for us all” (ICM, 75-76) and reports to her on the incidents of violence that take place in many parts of the old city.

Parsis especially being a minuscule community are reduced to irrelevant nomenclatures. Even jokes get tainted. To quote from the novel: “Cousin erupts with a fresh crop of Sikh jokes, and there are Hindu, Muslim, Parsee and Christian jokes” (ICM, 95).

The seven year old Lenny senses a subtle change only in the Queen’s garden. The people of different communities are silting apart. Only the group around Ayah remains unchanged, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Parsee are as always unified around her.

The most pathetic thing is that even children are not being allowed to interact with one another. When Lenny goes to play with a bunch of Sikh children, Masseur follows her and drags her away. These incidents are only instances of what was happening on a large scale in Lahore and other cities.
in India before the Partition. The Ice Candy Man poses as a sufi saint. Sidhwa also conveys the message that in a society where different religions struggle with one another for superiority, genuine faith gives way to religious exhibitionism.

As the time of Independence and Partition draws near, Lenny notices a lot of hushed talk. “In bazaars, restaurants and littered alleys, men huddle round bicycles or squat against walls in whispering groups” (ICM, 101).

Moreover the atmosphere of fear, suspicion and distrust takes its toll on general health especially that of children. More than a year has passed since Lenny’s visit to Roxana’s village, Pir Pindo. The tension in the cities is likely to infect the villages. Imam Din decides to pay his kin another visit. Lenny also goes along with him.

When Lenny observes Delhi Gate from the roof of the Ice-Candy man’s tenement in Bhathi Gate, she finds English soldiers chased by a mob of Sikhs. Such scenes of violence have a baleful influence on children. When Lenny reaches home, she picks out a big bloated celluloid doll and pulls its legs apart. Lenny’s brutality results only from the re-enacted scenes that she witnessed in the street.

The Ice–Candy Man helped his friend Sher Singh in getting his tenants evicted from his house. At that time he had said, “I’m first a friend to my friends … And an enemy to their enemies …. So I serve my friends” (ICM, 122).

Ice –Candy Man cajoles Lenny to reveal the truth about Ayah’s whereabouts and gets her forcibly carried off. Sidhwa through Lenny’s eyes,
relates the scene of Ayah’s abduction: “The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces” (ICM, 183)

When Lenny’s God mother learns about Ayah’s presence in the Hira Mandi, she swings into action to get her rescued. Initially she calls Ice – Candy Man to her house and then she herself visits Ayah. She tries to console and comfort her. Apart from helping Ayah, Lenny’s family helps everyone who is in distress.

The Parsis emerge at the end of the novel as Messiahs of the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, bogged down in a maze of communal hatred and violence. The strength of charity makes the Parsis both venerable and invulnerable. Sidhwa’s Parsi perspective makes her account of Partition largely free from religious fanaticism. She has also a different bias owing to her Pakistani nationality.

Sidhwa was not happy with the literature written on the theme of the Partition and also with the film Gandhi because she thought that Gandhi was unduly glorified. On the other hand, Jinnah was caricatured as a monster. As a Pakistani, Sidhwa felt it incumbent upon herself to defend Jinnah, the father of Pakistan. She says to David Montenegro:

And I felt in Ice-Candy Man, I was just redressing in a small way, a very grievous wrong that has been done to Jinnah and Pakistanis by many Indian and British writers. They’ve dehumanised him, made him a symbol of the sort of person who brought about the Partition of India. A person who was hard headed and obstinate. Whereas in reality, he was the only constitutional man who didn’t sway crowds just by rhetoric and tried to do everything by the British standards of constitutional law (532).
Sidhwa exhibits her love for Pakistan in two important ways: first she highlights the atrocities committed in East Punjab against the Muslims; secondly she reappraises the personality of Jinnah. She also suggests that the British were less than fair to him as well as to Pakistan.

In *Ice – Candy Man* Sidhwa tries to balance the account of the Partition riots by showing both Muslims and Sikhs indulging in violence. Sidhwa describes clearly the mass murder of Muslims in Pir Pindo as Ranna saw it. Most of the eminent political leaders of the time Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Iqbal, Patel, Bose, Master Tara Singh and Lord Mountbatten figure in *Ice – Candy Man* in some context or the other. The Hindu leaders have been presented in an unfavourable manner while the portrayal of Jinnah evokes admiration and sympathy.

Gandhi is described in *Ice – Candy Man* as a tricky politician. Masseur says of him, “He’s a politician. It’s his business to suit his tongue to the moment”(91). Lenny is puzzled by Gandhi’s popularity. For the butcher, Gandhi is a ‘double-speak.’

Kashmir is always a bone of contention between India and Pakistan. Sidhwa also thinks that the English have shown favour to Nehru by granting him Kashmir. Nehru received this preferential treatment because he is young and handsome. He is also a favourite of both Lord and Lady Mount batten. On Nehru Sidhwa says: Nehru wears red carnations in the button holes of his ivory jackets…. He is in the prime of his Brahmin manhood. (*ICM*,159)

Jinna was not been given even his rightful due because he is a scholarly man. Depicting him sympathetically, Sidhwa says:”Jinna is
incapable of compliments …. The fading empire sacrifices his cause to their shifting allegiances”*(ICM, 59-60)*.

Moreover Sidhwa laments the way Jinnah is being treated by British and Indian scholars she observes: “… Jinnah who for a decade was known as ‘Ambassador of the Hindu – Muslim unity’ is caricatured and portrayed as a monster”*(ICM, 160)*.

To support Jinnah, Sidhwa quotes from Sarojini Naidu, an eminent Indian poet and freedom fighter of Jinna: “… the obvious family and serenity of world wisdom effectually disguise a shy and splendid idealism which is of the very essence of the man.”*(ICM, 161)*.

Thus, *Ice – Candy Man* presents a Pakistani version of the Partition.

Sidhwa’s Parsi faith and her trust keep her out of the religious imbroglio of the Partition. Regarding nationality she is surely a Pakistani and it also places her in favour of Pakistan.

*Ice- Candy Man* also represents a feminine view of the Partition. The narrator of the novel is a little Parsi girl Lenny. Because of her lameness, caused by polio, her world is limited but has colour and variety. Ayah, the eighteen year old girl has friends from different religions and she wants to keep them united. But during the Partition, the communal tension takes alarming proportions.

The Ice – Candy Man forces Ayah to embrace Islam and also marries her. But Ayah has not even an iota of love for him. When Lenny’s God mother visits her, she entreats her to get her away from him. God
mother saves her and gets her sent to her family in Amritsar. Lenny’s mother, God Mother, and lecture-aunt do all they can for the riot victims.

Sidhwa portrays men as perpetrators of violence and women as sufferers and saviours. This reveals her feminine perspective on the Partition. *Ice – Candy Man* pictures a fictional account of Partition from three perspectives – Parsi, Pakistani and feminine.

Sidhwa selects her themes for her novels from widely different aspects of life. She presents life as she knows and feels it. She considers even common place things highly important. Her plot moves freely from any artifice. She also follows the epic method of narration.

In *Ice – Candy Man*, Ayah is abducted after Lenny discloses her hide out to Ice-Candy Man. To Lenny, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs are all alike. She is a child and children are generally innocent. They are also free of bias and are truthful.

The story of the novel depicts the historical events of the Partition. Sidhwa aims to throw light on the mutual distrust and communal hatred in the sub-continent. The unpleasant happenings of the Partition gain significance in the lives of the characters. Sidhwa chooses characters from all classes of society.

Ice –Candy Man and Sakhi do villainous things but Sidhwa doesn’t portray them as villains. She is always sympathetic in the portrayal of her characters. Her characters reveal themselves through their dialogue and actions. She refrains from giving unnecessary details and also avoids delivering judgements on her characters.
Sidhwa’s keen insight into the workings of their human heart makes her characters real. Fardun Zaitoon, Jerbanoo, Ice-Candy Man and Feroza are unforgettable examples.

In *The Crow Eaters* Sidhwa portrays the Parsi community in colonial Lahore. The outsider could not help but love these people and identity with them since they faced life’s most rewarding and difficult tasks especially the formation of relationship, the maintenance of community apart from human jealousy and domination.

In *Crow Eaters*, Sidhwa tries to respond to many queries by recreating a fictional yet typical saga of a Parsi family and also the corresponding social milieu. The novel deals with the psychology of the Parsis, their social behavior, value systems and customs.

Faredoon Junglewalla, his equally successful son Billy and mother–in-law Jerbanoo create an entertaining piece of literature. The social mobility of a Parsi family, the JungleWallas during the British Raj in the early 20th century is the main theme. The Jungle Wallas increased their business from a single general merchants store in Lahore to a chain of stores in a few months.

The description of Faredoon JungleWalla and his family is not just historical fiction, but has a strong autobiographical element also. The achievement of Freddy is stupendous. The novel commences on a note of praise; many doubts are raised about Freddy’s fame and wealth.

The Parsis settled in India and realised that they could survive as a minority only by being strictly loyal to every ruling authority and avoiding tensions and conflicts especially between various groups and the powers in
the state. The community itself becomes a power factor that would enforce its interest against the will of the rulers. Parsis also learned to realise that only loyalty to the ruler generates the right political climate for survival. Moreover the Parsis were not hindered in the practice of their religion. The exaggerated servility of Freddy, his son Billy and the other Parsis towards the British is revealed as a strategy to ensure legal security, peace and economic prosperity. The flattery of the Parsis is humorously and obviously revealed in the novel. It expresses an underlying identity crisis and quest for security among the community. Putli as a dutiful and God-fearing wife must walk one step ahead of her husband and she considered it as hypocritical. She also considered it to be barbarous.

Putli also adapted to what she considered new –fangled customs when she and her husband were invited to the formal tea parties, especially on the gracious lawns of Government House. She is also cajoled to attend these functions by her husband. To her husband, it is a chance for advancing contacts and consolidating friendship. The Parsi milieu of Putli had a different value system and this is highlighted by the author.

Putli only preserves and follows certain Parsi customs like walking behind her husband. But her daughter Yasmin vehemently protests and after marriage she ignores such notions and raises her voice against the servile attitude of women.

Her seeming relationship of equality, with her husband in following the manners and customs of the ruling colonial power was a gradual process. Putli’s inability to realize the ways of Yasmin is seen as the generation gap. The scope of the novel is large and it shows the reality of a
whole family and also its network of relationships. Only these relationships spread out to encompass a wide variety of human beings of different ages. Sidhwa portrays the changing generations in the Junglewalla family.

The new generation with their increasing economic contacts with the British like Billy’s scrap iron deal become totally westernized. This is clearly exemplified by the life style of the youngest son Billy and his fashionable wife Tanya.

The changing social milieu and identity crisis which Sidhwa depicts was visible among Parsis in British India too. It is also a social problem for many in the community even in contemporary India and Pakistan. Parsis also maintained group identity by their dress, and the general change of attitude is also evident and clear.

Faredoon and his family took it as a pride to wear their traditional dress. The next generation of Parsis, Tanya and Behram slowly discard the traditional dress. Besides their limited status as a minority community, there is another reason for the supreme regard, the Parsi had for the British manners and their way of dressing. The Parsis desired only religious autonomy and protection from the ruling British authorities. Their concept of good governance hinged on religious tolerance and common justice.

In *The Crow Eaters*, Freddy makes use of every chance to demonstrate his loyalty to the British. After his settlement in Lahore, he wears the finest clothes and visits government house to sign his name in the visitor’s book.

Bapsi Sidhwa treats the Junglewallas’ as the representatives of the majority of Parsis especially the business class, bankers and civil servants.
The apprehensions of Jungle Wallah are not figments of a dying man’s fevered imagination, but based on social realities and the threat they pose to the Parsi sensibility.

There were three anti–Parsi riots in Bombay and other cities in 1851, 1874 and 1921. On the last occasion, Gandhi called for a boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales to India. Many Parsis refused to join this boycott and that sparked off a violent riot. Anti-Parsi aggressions continued for a couple of years. These memories form an integral part of the Parsi mind and reinforced their loyalty to the British. Later, on realizing the inevitability of Independence, the Parsis displayed remarkable adaptability and changed their allegiances.

This important facet of the identity crisis that verges on Paranoia is exemplified by the escapist behaviour of Yezad. He is aggrieved by the conspicuous commercialism and sycophancy of the Parsis. He revolts as his father does not permit him to marry his sweet heart, the Anglo–Indian Rosy Watson. He breaks away from his family and gets his share of the family money and invests it in a trust. He receives monthly interest from the trust and helps the dying children. The portrayal of Yezad adds to the richness and variety of the novel. It shows that Parsis are not ‘types’ nor do they have ‘stereotype’ reactions to social issues.

In The Crow Eaters there is a net work of human relationships. This networking serves to cement the actions. There are no loose ends in the plot. Sidhwa ironically hints at Freddy’s ambivalent attitude towards charity. This irony highlights the Parsi Paradox.
The overall mode of the novel is comic. It is not a social comedy like that of Jane Austen, or a satirical comedy of Swift or a genial comedy of manners, that has an experiential dimensions and hints at the paradoxical ways one glean philosophical principles from life.

*The Crow Eaters* purports to present a satirical account of the successful story told by Faredoon to the youngsters in his later years. Jungle Walla relates how he managed to succeed: “Yes I’ve been all things to all people in my time… within a year I was handling all traffic of goods between Peshawar and Afghanistan!” (*TCE, 47*). The Parsi background becomes an integral part to this narrative. The story also finds its way from the anonymous forests of Central India to Lahore where the Jungle Wallas settle down after an anxious search for the right locale.

Freddy saw no future for himself in his ancestral village, tucked away in the forests of central India and resolved to seek his fortune in the hallowed pastures of Punjab. “… loading his belonging…. he set off for the North” (*TCE, 12-13*). Freddy knows well how to manage himself as a godfather of his community. When Yazdi violates the family’s tradition he admonishes him on the necessity of maintaining the family tradition.

Sidhwa writes from a deep historical consciousness. She herself grew up in Lahore and made her home there. The title of the novel refers to the Parsis’ notorious ability to talk ceaselessly at the top of their voices like an assembly of birds.

Bapsi Sidhwa looks at Parsi experience as an outsider who knows her people’s inner secrets, their real strength and weakness. Her novel encompasses life beyond particular situations and characters.
In this, the novel seems to be unique. It reads like an exploration of life, the Parsi code of feeling and behavior. Sidhwa’s view of life is optimistic. She loves life inspite of all its ugliness, brutality and horror. Her novels are full of physical humour.

Freddy manages as a God father of his community to dispense favour and to command obedience and gratitude. His wife Putli is the ideal Indian wife marked by submission, love and responsibility. She is equally understanding towards her children.

The novel explores both the superficial and the more profound dimensions of the comic mode. It is an entertaining satire on the foibles of its main characters. It also embodies a larger vision of the world. This vision is ‘comic’ like Chaucer’s or Shakespeare’s. It tries to convey the variety, diversity, vitality and validity of life in all its dimensions.

The first section of the novel belongs to Freddy. In the middle the attention shifts from Freddy to his children. The novel depicts Yazad’s other-worldliness and attempts to recognise life’s totality. The third and final section properly belongs to Behram Jungle Walla or Billy the youngest son who not only carries on Freddy’s business, but goes on to become one of the richest men in India.

Her works have aroused a variety of reactions. Her interests are vast and so she cannot be easily categorised as just a comic writer or a Parsi novelist.

In her novels, the social idiosyncrasies of the minority Parsi community are portrayed with themes like marriage, women’s problems and patterns of migration. Sidhwa has drawn extensively on her communal
heritage and benefited as a writer from the privileged environment. She has enlarged her canvas. This expansion serves her well in *An American Brat*.

Through this novel, Bapsi Sidhwa has made an important contribution to the literature of the Diaspora. If the new world offers Feroza adequate social space to grow, Zoroastrianism provides the ultimate emotional and religious space for her.

Feroza is sent from Pakistan to America since she is becoming more backward every day. One day when Zareen Gin Walla, Feroza’s mother goes to school to bring Feroza back home in sleeveless Sari – blouse, Feroza says: “Mummy please don’t come to school dressed like that” (*AB*, 10)

She won’t even attend the phone call for her fear of having to talk to some unknown person. Zareen considers it as her daughter’s conservative state of mind, promoted by the orthodoxy around and she wants her daughter to grow and expand.

Zareen consults her husband Cyrus and decides that Feroza must go for three or four months to America to get rid of her conservative habits and to inhale liberal air. Cyrus too agrees to this.

Zareen also contacts her brother Maneck studying in America Maneck too agrees with his sister and says, “I will look after her. Don’t worry, just send her” (*AB*, 26). Feroza is also happy to go to America.

Thus Feroza a sixteen year old girl, born in an apparently liberal Parsi family and brought up in a closed Muslim culture becomes
conservative in Man – Woman relationships, clothing, eating and drinking.

She has come to America to break out of the narrow shell of life. Feroza passes through different phases of experience in the brave new world of America in general and particularly in the company of Maneck, her uncle in New York studying chemical Engineering at MIT.

Maneck receives Feroza at Kennady Airport and frees her from the unhappy situation created by the immigration officer and makes her aware of the facts: “You’ll have to learn to stand a lot of things in this world” (AB, 66). He tells her as if in warning.

Feroza’s stay with Maneck makes her undergo adventures, teaches her manners and helps her to cope with all sorts of unexpected situations.” (AB, 135).

Maneck wants Feroza to join a junior college in Twin Falls, Idaho, a small town which he thought would ease her assimilation into American way of life. The college was ready to offer a stipend. Her parents also permitted her to study in America (AB, 39)

Maneck makes Feroza join the junior college and hands her over to Emily, the college counsellor. Jo takes charge of Feroza’s life to become her friend, philosopher and guide. Jo and Feroza join the Hotel Management Course in the University of Denver. The third phase of Feroza’s life starts and the new set up makes her think that “she was in the right place and that her life would develop in unexpected and substantial ways” (AB, 212)
Shashi, a gregarious youth from India enters Feroza’s life and cuts off the umbilical cord by which she had attached herself to Jo” (AB,214).

He was a year ahead of her in the Hotel Management Program. He made a magnetic impact on her. For Feroza, it was like looking through Alice’s wonderful mirror.

Shashi’s non–possessiveness, lightness and free wheeling congeniality rubbed off on Feroza’s angularities and helped her see that freedom was “an essential condition of any relationship” (AB,230).

The process of expansion and transformation reaches its climax in the fourth phase when Feroza meets David Press to buy his second hand car. David takes her across the unchartered seas of her emotions” (AB,251).

She submits herself completely to David. She writes about it to her parents. Later, Feroza’s mother dissuades David from this marriage. The marriage proposal comes to an end but without paralysing Feroza’s ambitions. As for marriage in future, Feroza’s vision is very clear: “There would never be another David, but there would be other men and who knew, perhaps, someday, she might like some one enough to marry him. It wouldn’t matter if he was Parsee or of other faith. She would be more sure of herself and she wouldn’t let any one interface” (AB,317).

Feroza comes to America as a Parsi-Pakistani school girl with a conservative mind and her mind starts growing and expanding and acquires new heights. The final outcome is also positive as she accepts the
break up with David. She is also ready for the next. Feroza considers America to be the catalytic agent (312).

Feroza shows increasing levels of adaptability and gets readily Americanised. In her, there is successful assimilation into the pattern of American life though she preserves her ethnic identity.

Sidhwa’s roots too continue to be in Pakistan. This is precisely what makes her a creative artist and complements her expatriate experience though the experience of exile plays an important role in her writing, she has not really experienced it. For, whenever she felt like an exile, she would rush back to Pakistan to nourish her psyche and the well-springs of her creativity.

An American Brat deals with the intercultural theme which has assumed vital significance for many post colonial novelists. The West is depicted as a set of values in conflict with the value systems of the East. The conflict between the two cultures is discernible not only on the social plane but also on the personal level. This leads to an identity crisis and consequent quest for acculturation stemming from a sense of isolation/alienation.

Bapsi Sidhwa evinces keen interest in the interaction of the two cultures that exist side by side. Especially the Zoroastrian mode of life of Feroza, the Parsee protagonist clashes with the modern American way of life. The stress is also laid on material prosperity. The resultant fiction compels her to make a moral choice in life. This fate is shared by many expatriates today.
Feroza, the protagonist is caught between conservatism that stems from the rising wave of fundamentalism in Pakistan and newfound liberalism, a result of her life in America. In the novel, Zareen stands for progressive liberalism. Her lack of interest in religion is typical of the Parsee community today. Feroza has a peculiar relationship with zoroastrianism. Though she did not have sufficient knowledge of the Parsi rituals, she had a blind faith in them. She symbolizes the younger-generation Parsees of her times.

Bapsi Sidhwa like Firdaus Kanga detaches herself from issues pertaining to religion. Feroza resolves to have *humata* (good thoughts) *hukta* (good words) and *hvarshta* (good deeds) that would advance His divine plan. She also feels the spiritual power of the fire reach out from its divine depths to encompass her with its pure energy. She feels being suffused with the presence of Ahura Mazda. She prays, “Come to my help O Ahura Mazda! Give me victory, power and the joy of life” (*AB, 42*) This is an assertion of Parsi religious identity—a sort of armour the anxious expatriate wears in the eagerness to be loyal to one’s roots. The same tension is visible in the expatriate’s relations with the land of birth and the land of adoption.

Writing on the major trends in post colonial literatures, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin say that, “A major feature of post colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being, the concern with the development of recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (*pp.8-9*).
This is the anxiety to belong to somewhere. This belongingness often is only ‘be-longingness’ to the migrant.

In Feroza’s case also the active sense of self is destroyed by displacement. The sudden swing from the conservative milieu of Lahore to the ultra-modern world of New York disorients her. A perceptive change comes over her. Her gain of knowledge in the New World is a privilege. This privilege was denied to her in Pakistan. As Novy Kapadia points out through Feroza’s experiences, Sidhwa shows the expatriates’ assimilation to the way of life of the New World.

The attitudes of Feroza, and Maneck-her uncle are contrary to each other. He adapts himself in external behavior with the smoother ways of the chosen land.

In the novel, Fr.Fibs’ message is nothing but an enunciation to the migrants’ experience in general, Feroza’s in particular. He compares young men and women to birds. He observes that they would fly and fall and fly again, He says: “And once you are no longer afraid to fall, away soar –up, up to where you need never fall. \textit{(AB,117)}

This message fires her imagination and has a catalytic effect on the process of her assimilation. The pressures of constraint so deeply embedded in her Pakistani psyche slowly loosen their grip under Jo’s influence.

But the loosening is not easy. A taboo-ridden mind will protest, revert to its rigidity often kindling feelings of guilt and sinfulness. On such occasions, as Vinay Kirpal points out the compelling need in a migrant which almost becomes a survival strategy, is to cling to his own traditions
and to mix with people of his own traditions and to mix with people of his own country (P.30).

Feroza too revives her ethnicity like most expatriates. This leads to nostalgia.

One evening, Feroza commits the sin of smoking (at least in Zorastrianism). The same night she performs the Kusti ritual, bows her head to beg divine forgiveness for desecrating the holy fire. This becomes a symbol of Ahura Mazda by permitting it such an intimate contact with her unclean mouth.

The interior mindscape of Feroza remains Zorastrian. Her private triumph lies in preserving her ethnic identity despite her long stay in America. Her quest is not just for social space that would ensure her an identity of her own but also for self development. The emotional space is gained by her through sticking to Zorastrianism. Like a true Parsi, she aims at ethical perfection but at the same time she also realises the importance of freedom—something she is not entitled in the conservative Pakistan. Feroza becomes the fictional embodiment of Virginia Woolf’s cherished ideal of the female protagonist, eager for a room of one’s own.

Sidhwa explains in An American Brat the complex love–hate relationship which exists between the land and the migrants. Feroza grows nostalgic with the passage of time. This is typical of one in exile. She is caught between the two worlds: the one she had forsaken since it grants no hope or prosperity; the other one she feels has failed her despite initial promises. She also becomes a marginal being, unable to discard the old ways and equally unable to find comfort in the chosen land. The sense of
dislocation (which is part of diasporic consciousness) in Feroza is more acute in the New World. It is shared by thousands of expatriates like her. The introduction of the Islamic Law at home she feels has really crushed her freedom. She admits: “The abandon with which she could conduct her life without interference was possible only because of the distance from her family and the anonymity America provided.” (AB, 312).

In other words, the New World promises Feroza enough freedom and abundant joy. For her, life at home is only gloomy. One of the reasons for migration is the need to work in an intellectually stimulating environment. Feroza’s thirst for knowledge is kindled by the universities and the libraries in the New World. It is an intellectual need that is not fulfilled in the conservative homeland. She resolves: “Surely she could arrive at a compromise if her conscience troubled her and even as she thought this, she knew it would. Her deeply ingrained and early awareness of political and state evils and her passion for justice would always make her fight injustice wherever she was” (AB, 313).

However, Sidhwa is not blind to the defects of the New world. Feroza praises the American ideal of prosperity. But at the same time she is critical of America for its sale of weapons to impoverished countries like Pakistan. She considers alcoholism as the other evil that she perceives in her adopted land. Her efforts in shaping the future brings a tormenting dilemma to an end. In the end she invokes the blessing of Ahura Mazda. She muses: “As for her religion no one could take it away from her, she carried its fire in her heart. If the priests in Lahore and Karachi did not let her enter the fire temple, she would go to one in Bombay where there were
so many Parsees that no one would know it she was married to a Parsee or a non. (AB,317)

Feroza considers herself a fellow participant in the construction of the new order. Her quest for identity is not the pursuit of the narcissistic self. It is to be regarded only as a search for self-respect as the citizen of a free country. In her case, the prediction of Fr.Fibs comes true. She is also very optimistic. To quote from the novel: “If she flew, and fell again, could she pick herself up again? May be one day she’d soar to that self-contained place from which there was no falling, if there was such a place”(AB,317).

Thus, Feroza’s realization of her creative potential is significant. The central tenet of Zorastrianism is exemplified with the triumph of the forces of good.

Regarding the quest for happiness, Bertrand Russell observes: “All happiness depends upon some kind of integration with the self . . . there is lack of integration between the self and society. . . it is in [such profound] instinctive union with the stream of life that the greatest joy is to be found”.(31)

Feroza attains successfully the fusion of heart and mind stressed by Russell and so resolves the moral crisis in her life.

Sidhwa deals with the motif of expatriation that was dealt with extensively by Bharati Mukherjee and also by other post-colonial novelists like Yasmine Gooneratne. These two novelists emphasised the multicultural situation in America and Australia in their works.
But for Sidhwa, multi – culturalism becomes only a mode of perception. The clash of cultures and the need for adaptation become part and parcel of the diasporic experience.

Expatriate experience constitutes the core of the narrative in *An American Brat*. Important issues such as mixed marriage and oppression of women become integral themes in Sidhwa’s fiction. Sidhwa’s canvas is also much broader than Bharati Mukherjee’s or those of other novelists.

Mixed marriages are not allowed in the Zorastrian community. Parsis who marry outside their community forego all the privileges usually enjoyed by them. Feroza’s affair with David Press, an American Jew becomes a potent threat to the orthodox Parsi community of Lahore. Zareen, mother of Feroza also tries to dissuade her daughter but ironically she modifies her stand on mixed marriages and conversion to the Zorastrian faith. She also raises a question on the rigid code that exists in Zoroastrianism.

How could a religion whose prophet urged his followers to spread the truth of his message in the holy Gathas, the Songs of Zarathustra prohibit conversion and throw her daughter out of the faith? Her predilection for mixed marriages is an existential necessity.

She muses: “Perhaps the teen agers in Lahore were right. The Zoroastrian Anjumens in Karachi and Bombay should move with the time that were sending them to the New world… the various Anjumens would have to introduce minor reforms if they wished their tiny community to survive.” (*AB, 288*).
Sidhwa also focuses on the younger generation of the Parsee community. She does not advocate blind conformity with the prevailing ideology of the Parsi community. Through Feroza and Zareen, Sidhwa stresses the need for change. She emphasises the crucial issues of mixed marriage and the survival of the microscopic community. If she resents the mindless current of fundamentalism in Pakistan, she is also critical of the rigid custodians of the Zorastrian faith too.

Zareen also attempts to establish that Zorastrianism is a greater and purer religion than Judaism. David resents this condescending stance of her.

Feroza’s first visit to her homeland after emigration is only a revelation. The poverty, Sickness and fundamentalism in Pakistan are disgusting and the status granted to women is also disturbing.

Rohinton Mistry too has dealt with the predicament of Parsis in multicultural societies. His realistic novels make use of events and personages from the historical past in order to add interest and a picaresque quality to the narrative. Mistry cites the following reasons for his migrating to Canada:

The Westernised education which Mistry received in India provided him a better place in Canada. In 1975, Australia was racist. America was fighting war with Vietnam. England was also not England any more. So, he selected Canada, the land of milk and honey. He also felt that Canada would provide him a prosperous and luxurious life. In one of his interviews he said, “those who are very rich and also
share my background and education wouldn’t want to leave India, because they could create the west for themselves in India, whereas I couldn’t (TCE, 56).

Mistry himself selected this self-exile since he concluded that there was not much of a future in India, for persons like him who were economically poor and also alien by culture and community.

In 1989, he published a novel, Such a Long Journey. This work won the Governor General’s award and Commonwealth Writer’s Prize in 1991. Such a Long Journey was nominated for Britain’s prestigious Booker prize.

Mistry belongs to the South Asian Diaspora. The establishment of the South Asian Diaspora provides an identity to South Asian writers including Rohinton Mistry. The term ‘diaspora’ actually meant the dispersal of Jews. But it is now interpreted as alienation, migration and marginalization or being in the minority.

Generally there are two phases of diaspora namely the old and the new that suggest the voluntary migration to a foreign land for a brighter future. Mistry’s migration belongs to the second phase. He tries to retain his ethnic identity in Canada by attending the congregations of Zoroastrian society of Toronto. Mistry’s ancestors came to India and settled as refugees. Then Mistry became a Parsi Zoroastrian in India. The Parsis have the hope of returning to their ancestral land having somewhat failed to merge in the Indian milieu.

As a Parsi and an immigrant in Canada, Mistry considers himself, a symbol of double displacement. This sense of displacement is a recurrent theme in his literary works. Immigrant writers have a tendency to look
back to their home land from an alien soil especially to expose its culture, geography, politics etc., through their works.

They do not desire to return to their homeland voluntarily. But they create imaginary spaces in their fiction. From salman Rushdie’s words, one can understand that “Exiles, immigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim to look back even at the risk of being mutated in the pillars of salt”(Qtd., in Dodiya, 170).

The portrayal of yearning for the past and looking forward to the future forms the basis of Mistry’s fiction. The writings of Mistry are governed by the experience of being a Parsi, a diasporic minority community in India and also by being an emigrant in Canada.

Mistry’s novels also present the various patterns of empowerment in a world that refuses individual voices. Political supremacy, parental authority and personal betrayal are dealt in Mistry’s fiction. He is very much interested in revealing the problems of the untouchables, upper castes and the politicians through his fiction.

Mistry’s writings expose religious bigotry and the political debacles of the era. He is ethnocentric and community specific in his themes and attitudes.

So, there is a typical Indianness in Mistry’s writings. They really hold the mirror up to Indian society and culture. As a post modern writer, Mistry analyses the social imbalances in Indian communities. His texts have undergone critical scrutiny.
Mistry emigrated to Toronto at the age of 23. As an expatriate writer, he is again the embodiment of the fundamental dialectic of a multicultural consciousness.

Multiculturalism can be defined as a social rather than a political ideal. Both politico-economic and cultural influences in the multicultural world are after the erosion of the nation-state concept. The aim of multiculturalism is only to stimulate pluralism in the universe rather than singularity and particularity. Multiculturalism combines a pre-rational sense of belonging with a claim to collective rights. It can be articulated in universal terms.

Like all eminent writers, Rohinton Mistry too is interested in cross-cultural issues. Mistry is a writer free from all labels. He cannot be pigeonholed as one or the other type. Mistry is a representative of Global culture. His multiple identities as an Indian, Parsi, post-independence born, metropolis-raised male expatriate writer are reflected in his work.

Mistry like Mulk Raj Anand holds the writer’s craft in high esteem and has raised basic social questions. One of the problems that Mistry challenges for a solution is that of national integration.

Mistry’s protagonist in *Such a Long Journey* deals with Indian Society and Social problems through the woven-story patterns. Even disgusting characters become human in the hands of Mistry. He conveys various moral attitudes through his characters.

In *Such a Long Journey* that is set in Mumbai, the life-style of the Parsis is clearly depicted. The novel also portrays various issues in the sub-continent like the wars India fought with Pakistan and China. The novel
also presents the emergence of Bangladesh, and how the community of the 
Indian Parsis responded to all these occurrences.

Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey* narrates the sufferings of Gustad 
Noble who suffers at the hands of self-centered politicians and also callous 
officials. His son rebels and acts against his wishes. To be a member of the 
minority community, he must ensure the survival of his family. The hero’s 
struggle against odds becomes a challenge and every day ordeal. The novel 
provoked great literary response and Mistry received many awards. 
Recently, the novel formed the basis for a film. This novel deals with the 
predominant theme of the predicament of the central character whose hopes 
are destroyed by circumstances beyond his control.

Gustad, the hero, is cast into the mould of a classical tragic hero. He 
is passing from happiness to misery and is also pitted against many odds. 
He faces all these struggles with extreme serenity. He also cherishes the 
values of friendship and he condemns the scourge of war. He denounces 
the corrupt and hypocritical political leaders who have eaten the vitals of 
the nation.

Mistry’s opposition to social and class distinctions and his anguish 
over environmental pollution have widened the spectrum of contemporary 
reality. In the opening of the novel Gustad is pictured as a God-fearing 
man. The envy of all, Gustad is portrayed as a bank employee and the 
father of three children, two sons Shorab and Darius and a daughter 
Roshan. As the novel progresses, one finds Gustad’s hopes, dreams and 
aspirations being blighted in a manner that is contrary to his likings. His 
fortunes makes him feel helpless. Initially the sudden disappearance of
Billimoria from the Khodadad building shatters Gustad. Billimoria was like a loving brother to Gustad and almost a ‘second father to the children.’ Next, Gustad’s son Sohrab refuses to enroll himself as an IIT student. His bold manners and violent temper spoil the ninth birthday party for Roshan, especially in his desertion of his home. Gustad has to face the protracted illness of Roshan, a complicated case of diarrhoea. Once, Gustad receives a package from Major Billimoria and the trouble that lies in hiding ten lakh rupees. Gustad is pained by his close friend Dinshawji’s illness and the death of Tehmal Lungraa, a retarded child who is the tenant of Khodadad building. The destruction of Gustad’s sacred wall by the municipal authorities completes his cup of woes.

For a time, everything goes smoothly. Gustad’s son Sohrab gets admission to IIT, a mark of Pride. Gustad decides to celebrate it on the ninth birthday of Roshan, for which his close friend Dinshawji has to be invited.

He also brings a live chicken into his house much to the embarrassment of his wife Dilnavaz. The initial atmosphere of gaiety, humor, songs, jokes and fun are contributed by Dinshawji. The dinner is enjoyed by the entire family, but there comes an abrupt end to the happiness—Sohrab’s refusal to join IIT. There lies surprise and sudden turn of events due to Shorab’s act in the later part of the novel. Mutual hatred starts from this incident and mars the father-son-relationship.

Many incidents start surfacing at an alarming rate. Gustad corners Mr. Rabadi who is called by him ‘Dogwalla’ another tenant of Khoadadad building. The charge arises that Darius has an affair with Mr. Rabadi’s
daughter. Gustad is awaiting a letter from Major Billimoria very anxiously which has not yet come.

The real event that changes and reverses Gustad’s fortune is the coming of the long-awaited package from Billimoria. This package turns out to be a huge sum to the tune of ten lakh rupees to be deposited in a bank in the name of one Mitra Obili. Gustad and Dilnavaz do not know how to hide such a huge amount. But even before the amount is deposited, the secret is out. Gustad also feels ill-at ease when Tehmal informs the inspector that Gustad has a huge amount in his flat.

Another woman also makes a reference to the money to his shock. The forbidden package is responsible for spoiling Gustad’s happiness and peace of mind. He also feels betrayed. Initially he hides the amount in the kitchen and then with the help of Dinshawji deposits the amount in a bank because he is unable to meet Ghulam Mohammed from whom he gets the package.

Gustad’s fear and restlessness are due to a folded paper on which is written a nursery rhyme in pencil. It is found inserted between two adjacent branches of his Binaca brush. Due to all these disturbances, Gustad grows suspicious.

The most disturbing is Dinshawji’s inadvertent disclosure to Laurie, a typist in the bank where Gustad and Dinshawji are working. The whole secrecy lies with Dinshawji. Gustad observes an imminent danger in Dinshawji’s frolicsome ways. Dinshwji is taken to task, reminding him of the serious occasion in which they are drawn into. Dinshwji changes his character from a public entertainer to a reserved person.
Major Billimoria is arrested on charges of corruption. The news is published in the paper. Gustad’s horizon is entirely darkened with fear. Ghulam Mohammed asks Gustad in a semi-threatening tone to return the entire amount to save Billimoria’s life.

Roshan’s illness assumes an unexpected proportion and Gustad’s fear is intensified. At this critical juncture, Dinshawji is hospitalised after a sudden collapse in the office. The death of Dinshawji is a great blow in Gustad’s life. Gustad makes a trip to Delhi to meet Major Billimoria who desires to tell him all that has happened.

It is really a big fraud of sixty lakh rupees in which the Prime Minister’s office gets directly involved. Billimoria is requested to get the amount from the SBI director on an emergency basis to finance the guerilla training pending official sanction by impersonating the Prime Minister’s voice on telephone. Major Billimoria is asked to write a confession which he does without any second thought. Before the money is used for the original purpose, the Prime Minister’s voice intercepts. Billimoria is arrested and is kept in prison for four years and later dies of heart attack.

Sohrab pays his visit to his mother during the office hours of his father. Sohrab also foresees a rift between him and his father because he knows that he is responsible for the latter’s unhappiness. He reacts: “It’s no use I spoilt all his dreams, he is not interested in me anymore” (SLJ, 321).

Gustad feels sad and prays reciting the Yatha Ahu verse five times and Asham Vahoo three times with tears rolling down from his eyes. He also prays for all, cries for all, for him, for Tehmul, for Jimmy, for
Dinshawji for his papa and mama, for grandpa and grandma, “all who had to wait for so long” (*SLJ*, 337)

In this novel, the archetypal cycle of birth, death and rebirth gains added significance. The universal pattern is carved out through the central character Gustad Noble. Like Oedipus, he bows to the will of Providence.

Mistry himself responds with passion to the slow death of the Parsi family and community. He clearly narrates the community’s woes and sufferings through the characters. The individual’s fate is tied up with the fate of the community. The psychological crutch gains significance with the stories of their community embedded in the narratives.

*Such a Long Journey* grows controversial in its discourse on political issues and questions of identity, religion, culture and community.

The novel as a cluster of narratives centralises the Parsi community as a protagonist. There is an interaction between stories about the past and present of the Parsi community. Mistry informs the past of his community, comments on its present and foresee the flow of events to follow through his characters.

*Such a Long Journey* traces the chequered history of the Parsi community in India. The identity of the Parsis as a religious minority does not fail to emerge on the occasion of Dinshawji’s funeral in *Such a Long Journey*. Dinshawji’s body is carried to the tower of silence, an authentic banner of distinction for the religious minority where according to the strict Parsi tradition, the corpse will be left to be picked clean by vultures. The reader is also confronted with a rare example of a genuine dustoor. To quote from the novel: “The dustoorji prayed beautifully. Each word
emerged clear and full-toned, pure as if shaped for the first time by human lips. And Gustad, lost in his thoughts began to listen. It sounded so soothing, such a wonderful voice. Like Nat King Cole’s when he sang: “You will never grow old, soft smooth, rich as velvet (SLJ, 247)

In pre-colonial India, the Parsis were allowed to practise their ancient monotheistic religion. The Parsis had to adapt themselves to the traditions and language of their Hindu hosts. This shows the imposition of the majority will and power over minority peoples.

The disposal of coconuts and clay Gods and Goddesses by the Hindus and the disposal of the dead men by the Parsis in the sea also reflect Indian cultural practices.

The Parsi community lived peacefully in India but maintained their cultural and communal specificity.

Mistry’s focus centres on ethnic, racial and religious diversity. In Such a Long Journey he portrays various religious groups. Finally Gustad is reconciled and accepts the imperfections of existence and stops hoping for better times.

Mistry foregrounds, issues relating to traditional beliefs and rituals. He also analyses the nature of belief in and through various tones and moods.

The Parsi community is observed as an enclave that has helped him sharpen his literary and artistic vision. Though the main action of Such a Long Journey occurs within the limits of the Parsi community of Khodadad building and the bank where the protagonist Gustad works, it deals with the entire gamut of Parsi life.
The action swells to encompass the wider world within which the protagonists function. The technique of moving from the localized Parsi story to the larger national story is one that the author refines in this novel.

At the centre of *Such a Long Journey* are religious rituals, that are of death and burial. The ritualism surrounding the funeral for Dinshawji and Billimoria conveys to the readers the emotions of Gustad and also his inner vision. The preoccupation with religious rituals have a great impact on Mistry’s novels. As a Parsi writer, he cleverly tackles religion and rituals, since these two elements become the predominant features for Parsi identity in the context of the many changes imposed upon the community by the forces of history.

The themes that exist in traditional folk belief are also treated in a comical manner with the character of Mrs.Kutpitia who generally suggests ludicrous prescriptions to enable Dilnavaz to effect reconciliation with her family.

Moreover Mrs. Kutpitia’s recipes and Madhiwalla’s magic function could have influenced the flow of events. Tehmul does die. Sohrab does return home. Roshan is cured. Gustad finds serenity and Dilnavaz is happy with the healed family.

*Such a Long Journey* introduces many of the preoccupations of Mistry which will become more obvious in his later works. The novel presents the plight of the Parsi community in multicultural India. It also serves as a comment on post-independence India. It is written in the years preceding Indira Gandhi’s declaration of a state of Emergency in 1975. Gustad lives through the consequences of the Bangladesh War and the
Refugee Tax relief. Politics is presented as it affects individual lives. The Billimoria story that is based on a true incident functions only in its human dimension. It affects Gustad’s life and his relationship with his friend.

Gustad takes Dinshawji into confidence about the money. He does not hesitate to reprimand him in very strong terms. The strength of Gustad’s friendship is revealed at Dinshawji’s hour of greatest need and the constant companionship he offers when Dinshawji is taken to the hospital. At the bank Gustad’s friend Dinshawji’s antics serve to throw Gustad’s ability and balance into relief. Gustad is politically aware as well as clever in observing Dinshawji’s antics. Gustad is personified as a character capable of strong bonds of friendship, with Jimmy Billimoria, with Dinshawji and with Malcolm Saldanhe. Dinshawji is the most visible of the three friends. He is also considered to be the best companion for Gustad.

The plot of Such a Long Journey deals with the life of the ordinary citizen and it also explores the manner in which it is connected with the national political scene. The story of Gustad’s family is interwoven with events on the national scene in the novel.

The novel is set during the Bangladesh–Pakistan Wars of the 1970’s. In this novel, the public events have repercussions on the lives of the ordinary citizens. The War and its consequences form the background to Such a Long Journey. This novel also suggests the abusive power exhibited by the top levels of government. The novel is located during Indira Gandhi’s emergency.
Such a Long Journey functions through Gustad Noble’s perception of the world. The Parsi is shown in Mistry’s works as resistant to change. Parsi uniqueness receives the narrative emphasis through elaborate descriptions of their rituals.

Mistry demonstrates an ability to transform the features of the conventional narrative into explorations of cultural and social realities. His fiction explores the realities within the family and the nation itself. Politics forms an important subtext to the main action. The plot of Such a Long Journey is linked with the national political scene.

When Roshan comes to Gustad with a request from her school for money to help the refugees, she questions her father why West Pakistan is killing East Pakistan. Gustad gives her a simplified explanation of the war:

“Because it is wicked and selfish. East Pakistan is poor, they said to the West we are always hungry please give us a fair share. But West said ‘no’. The East said, in that case we don’t want to work with you. So as punishment West Pakistan is killing and burning East Pakistan” (SLJ, 86).

The novel is steeped in the realities of a war-time situation. The real war with Pakistan is at the frontier. The scarcity of food and the rationing affect the ordinary citizen.

This novel depicts the connection between War and State politics, between the corruption of political leaders and the life of the ordinary citizen.

The Indian politicians become an object of derision as they appear to have affected the pride of the Parsis in Such a Long Journey. Nehru and Indira Gandhi had been unfair to Feroz Gandhi, a Parsi. Nehru’s feud with
his son-in-law, the thorn in his political side was well-known. Nehru never forgave Feroze Gandhi for exposing scandals in the government. He no longer had any use for defenders of the downtrodden and champions of the poor. . . ”(SLJ, 11).

The title of the novel is taken from T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Journey of the Magi’.

The Journey of the three wisemen to the birth place of Jesus Christ is not an ordinary physical Journey; it is really symbolic of man’s spiritual quest, in which he has to undergo numerous hardships. Gustad triumphs in a calm manner as he faces each trial in his life.

At the climax of the novel is the beginning of the real journey. The search is without an end. Gustad Noble experiences everyday life, its struggles and disappointments, its pains and problems. He realises that the ordinary man has no control. He finds hope and salvation and understands the meaning of heroism. Thus, he becomes a universal symbol of human survival and triumph.

Mistry becomes a critical realist so far as the treatment of social reality is concerned. He emerges as a progressive writer. He portrays the universal principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The story in A Fine Balance really centres around the innocent characters Ishwar Darji and his nephew Om Prakash the tailors of Dina. Mistry presents shades of history and corruption during Indira Gandhi’s time. Mistry mingles history with the personal lives of the characters. The novel also deals with its socio – political turmoil. The first world is with the middle class urban world of Dina Dalal, a pretty widow in her forties.
There is a glimpse into rural India provided by Ishwar Darji and his nephew Om Prakash.

There is also another world portrayed and symbolised by Manech Kohlah, a sensitive Parsi boy, Ishver Darji and Om Prakesh two rural untouchables are from a family of tanners. They struggle themselves to rise above their designated caste roles. They better themselves by becoming tailors.

Even after they become fully qualified tailors and return to their village, they are deeply conscious of their own roots in the society.

Ishvar and Om decide to migrate to Bombay and become exiles by choice like Rajaram who says, “thousands and thousands are coming to the city because of bad times in their native place. I came for the same reason”(AFB, 171).

Although they are aware of the pain and disorientation involved in migration, they feel that displacement would really metamorphose their lives. Their life in Bombay is contrary to their expectations. It symbolises the pain, anxiety and restlessness of people. Om and Ishvar are caught in an inescapable dilemma between two worlds: their native village which they abandon because it holds no promise or hope and Bombay, the indifferent metropolis. They stay on as marginal men like the protagonist in Lend me your light, unable to discard the old or to find peace in the new.

The tailors, uncle and nephew were born into a family of untouchables. But they rise in the world only to fall again. They become beggars in the end. They also fail in their enterprise because of the emergency. Dina chooses to be displaced from her home. She also wants to
assert her individuality and sense of self. She has grown up in Bombay. Her sense of independence after her husband’s accidental death keeps her away from her family. She decides to restructure her life without being economically dependent on a man. Life is a series of emotional upheavals for her and also of emotional bonds.

Maneck is also a victim of displacement. He himself is displaced from the protective environment of his home in the hills to the college in the city. He is always insulted and humiliated by his seniors. He struggles hard to adapt himself to the political atmosphere of the college. He feels alienated. He also indulges in nostalgic reflections and thinks of his home constantly and in the end, commits suicide.

Maneck and Dina fail in their attempts to survive because of Emergency. Because of poverty and civic beautification, beggars are treated as slaves in labour camps. Due to population control, villages are denied wells, farmers are refused fertilisers and ration cards are also withheld.

In A Fine Balance, Mistry highlights crucial events in the country’s chronicle by depicting the background of each protagonist. The lives of the tailor’s fore-fathers express the tyranny of the caste system in rural India. The horrors of lower caste are unimaginable. This illustration from the text is enough evidence for this:“….. I listen, you stinking dog’ you have destroyed my property. Yet I am letting you off. If I wasn’t such a soft hearted foci. I would hand you to the police for your crime. Now get out (AFB,104).
Poverty in the bleak season is responsible for the untouchables depending upon the higher castes. The Thakurs get cheap labour from the lower caste villagers. At the time of granting wages, they are threatened with violence.

Dukhi Mochi accepts to powder one sack full of chilies alone for a meagre wage though the Thakur asks him “Can you finish that by sunset”? or may be I should call two men”(AFB, 103)

Dukhi Mochi is from a tanner family and due to that he carries the stamp of shame even from birth. Class and communal discrimination is based on birth and profession. Dukhi’s individual dignity, value and identity are not respected. He is considered a slave, treated just like an animal, not as a human being Dukhi says, “I spit in their upper caste faces, I don’t need their miserable jobs from now on”(AFB, 107). So he migrates to the nearby city and becomes a cobbler. He meets his Muslim friend and tailor Ashraf luckily. Through the story of Mukhi, one is brought face to face with the Independence struggle in India. The pre-independence pledge of fighting against caste injustice becomes ironic, since the evils are still to be mitigated. The speaker who comes to spread the Mahatma’s message says, “This disease, brothers and sisters is the notion of untouchability.. No one is untouchable for we are all children of the same God…”(AFB, 107)

This kind of rhetoric tries to bring out good will and appeals to the good intentions of the upper castes and classes to create a social change. As a result of this change, an egalitarian society will come into existence.
Ishvar’s father violates caste rules by making his sons tailors. He accepts his position according to the caste hierarchy without any murmur. He knows very well about the conditions prevailing in a village community. The upper caste people punish the lower caste people cruelly even for minor offences committed knowingly or unknowingly. A moving section of the novel brings out the living conditions of low-caste Indians living in rural India.

During the General Elections, the chamaars come into conflict with the land lords, Zamindars and the Thakurs. Mistry presents ruthless details of the exploitation and torture suffered by the poor.

The ideological concerns of Mistry make him one of the foremost Indian English political novelists of the 1990’s. Mistry pictures the corrupt political scenario of India. The two poor tailors happened to be a part of the crowd. To quote from the novel: “The Prime Minister’s message is that she is your servant and wants to help you… you will be arrested for trespassing on municipal property” (AFB, pp.256-265)

The officers in charge of the labour camp sell the poor job seekers to Beggar masters even for a meagre amount. “Two thousand is okay… don’t try to bargain with me” (AFB, 358-360).

Even the holy places and the court are no exception to corruption. One can’t get justice against money power. Mistry portrays many types of individuals in his fiction.

The ending of A Fine Balance is also surprising and unconventional. Maneck, the Parsi young man is deeply upset by his
misfortunes. His sorrows multiply when he visits Bombay and finds that Dina has been evicted from her house. Now she stays with his brother.

Walking away from Dina’s house, Maneck is confused on seeing Ishvar and Om as handicapped beggars. Mancek becomes highly disappointed by these surprising and shocking events. So in despair, he commits suicide by throwing himself in front of a train. Mistry emphasises the concept that as a member of the privileged middle class, the sensitive character Maneck lost out in the struggle to sustain ‘a fine balance between hope and despair’.

*A Fine Balance* opens with a train journey and ends with ‘Epilogue’ 1984. Dina completes her journey of emancipation and self-realisation. Ishvar and Om, as beggars have their own ambition and dream, and are still in their own journey.

This novel explores a problematic decade beginning with 1975 and concluding with an epilogue in 1984. Mistry portrays the gloomy saga of the country during the Emergency. Thematically, the novel articulates the sagacity of cultures that are very much suppressed. At the same time the novel depicts the life and longings of the middle class that craves for honour and dignity. The age-old existing problems of caste and communalism become the central theme in this novel. Om and Ishvar, Shankar, and Rajaram by their actions knit the texture of the novel.

The major part of the novel is replete with life and longing in the house and in the city in India. The novelist also comments on the responsibility of the Indian bureaucracy and the socio-political compulsions of the country. The tailors accept life as a token of comedy.
despite all the odds and obscurities that they face in their lives. The concept of tomorrow is beyond the grasp of the human hand.

Mistry like Balzac, considers *A Fine Balance* a human comedy. The events highlight only individual characters and their life styles. Mistry being a Parsi keenly deals with the customs and culture, traditions and life styles of the Parsi community. Moreover this community is basically known for its silent suffering and selfless service rendered to the nation. His Parsis are the most urbanized community. This community opts only English medium schools for its children.

This novel is noteworthy for its wit, wisdom, narratology and fun. The novelist makes use of puns and paradoxes. The novel reveals an artistic brilliance to generate comic pleasure and profit.

In *A Fine Balance* there is an attempt to depict the truth of real life honestly. This book can make readers ‘laugh and cry’ as they read it. It is full of complicated religious and social conflicts that are related to the dynamics of the Parsi community.

*A Fine Balance* is not a political book nor a reportage about the conditions of the underdog. It is a fictional reflection about caste and privilege in the light of the consequences of Indira Gandhi’s political decisions on the unprivileged. Mistry also focuses on dealing with people who are rarely represented in Indo-English fiction. To Mistry, exaggeration becomes a specific comic tool away from reason and argument. Like Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*, presents the new edition of Sthalapurana, “By this token and augmented by
“Indianisms’ and words incorporated from other Indian language, the novel develops a distinct character and identity of its own. (*Rakshat*, 22).

In the novel, Mistry deals with the Emergency and oppression. But his language is very comforting and sonorous. It is basically a socio-linguistic expression of the pluricentricity of English. It synthesizes various aspects of bilingual creativity in English. English is a symbol of linguistic imperialism, while Hinglish is an attempt to get it freed from the shackles of linguistic slavery. In the creative exploitation of the theme and thought, the right choice of language plays a key role which enhances the readability of the novel.

Mistry has made use of many clichés but not in traditional form. Knowing that the cliche cannot rest upon its laurels, he has rejuvenated these worn-out expressions to fashion new phrases and create a bright new line”. *A Fine Balance* is nothing but the criticism of contemporary life and literature. The linguistic mode of thought used by the characters have dramatic overtones and undertones. The novel is treated as an artistic piece of good-natured comedy and in the lightness of touch and urbanity. Mistry can be compared to the great comic masters of English. V.K. Sunwari rightly comments on the novel as he says: “Though it could not make it to the Booker Prize, for critics feel it was a Canadian Book about India – a bit like cosmic slick Joke. *A Fine Balance*. Mistry claims rightly, it is a fine balance between hope and despair, the novel ends certainly on an optimistic and hopeful note”. (*Sahwani, 111*)

Societies are generally patterned unequally and individuals are really born with differences and deprivations. Due to social imbalances
many problems occur and political thinkers and social scientists emphasizes the need for solutions to those problems.

Caste and religion have affected the social functions and social institutions. Despondency, disaffection and disenchantment affect the social fabric. Autonomous individuals find social restraints only in the name of caste system, as social injustice. Mistry observes the community as the pivot of all social changes. Mistry is against social imbalances and he protests against the social apparatus that perpetuate disequilibrium. As a social humanist, he looks forward to an egalitarian society based on our common humanity. Mistry’s expectations of a society run high. A free India should necessarily usher in peace and prosperity to all sections of society.

Mistry finds it very difficult to free himself from his Parsi identity. The Parsis are an urban community and their religion is really alien and new to the Indian religio–cultural ethos. In order to break out of their besieged mentality to reach out to other communities, the will of spirit is imperative. Mistry succeeds to a large extent to break free, but the gravitational pull of his religious identity is too strong to resist.

Mistry himself falls in line with the life that is cocooned with his community. He had no experience of village life or the urban slum dweller’s life. He had an intuitive experience and his narrative was based on hearsay observations. The theme of identity gains a global dimension in the novels of Mistry.

Mistry portrays human personalities that are under socio-economic and cultural pressures. Due to this, the individual achieves intimate growth
and adapts himself to the respective social milieu. The untouchables and
the suppression of the Dalits in the name of religion are inhuman and also
bestial according to Mistry.

Mistry makes use of history and geography to his advantage in his
fiction. Indian social realities are narrated with due need to time and place.
This helps to achieve a balance in characterization. Characters are created
in historical and geographical contexts.

In Mistry’s novel, Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s shadowy presence is felt
everywhere. But Mistry does not display any obsession with history. All
the events occur only with history as their backdrop. Geography wise,
Mistry is very accurate and keen in describing towns, and villages. He
employs religious fatalism, casteist determinism, empiricism, humanism
and historicism in his narration. He presents the problems of the
marginalised and has shown how human problems need humane solutions.
He reveals an optimistic spirit in his writings.

Social balance or harmony is a worthy state to be maintained.
Man’s search for identity is very important especially in this era of
desolation and despair. We must all feel that all human beings are equal
and belong to one fraternity.

Satire has been hailed as a valuable tool in the hands of writers who
have used it to condemn intellectual moral or philosophical constructs of an
age. Mistry portrays realistically the life in Indian villages with its
problems of caste prejudices, seldom lack of amenities etc., In the novel A
Fine Balance, he shows his concern for human beings. The Indian middle
class gets wide coverage in his fiction. Religious leaders are shown as
responsible for spreading superstition and witchcraft to keep people in bondage. But the writer’s sympathies are with the suffering people.

Mistry’s engagement with the Indian reality is revealed by his concern for the problems of the fast-depleting Parsi Community that is well-acknowledged. Mistry also highlights significant domains of values and identity politics.

In *A Fine Balance*, Mistry laughs at the fate of his own characters, who live as worms and insects. They settle down somehow in life and continue to exist. Only Maneck fails to strike a compromise with life. The reconciliation with life is due to compulsion of situations.

The fine balance exists only between the realities. Om and Ishvar on the one hand and the urbanities Dina and Maneck on the other. Towards the end of the novel, it seems the author finds his writing skills no match to the unimaginable grief and misery in this world. Mistry makes his characters forego the fine balance of mind. Maneck is aghast with mental tension brought out by Avinash’s disappearance. It is also followed by the macabre suicide of his three sisters and Maneck wilts: “What sense did the world make? Where was God the Bloody fool? Did he have no notion of fair and unfair?.... He allowed to happen” (*AFB*, 585).

Dina is the balance of patriarchy for Ishvar and Om. It is a balance between their low caste origin and also the newly found ‘Darji’ status. The balance in the life of nations is lost by India during Emergency. Mistry has succeeded in his portrayal of socio-political reality, He has lodged a powerful protest against the status quo. *A Fine Balance* is
certainly an artistic and caustic comment on the meaningless search for stability and meaning in the given context.

When a culture vanishes, humanity is the ultimate loser. The cultural situation of the Parsis looks grim. This concern for a progressive community with a glorious past and a dismal future underlies the writer’s attempt to present the life style and culture of the Parsis wherever he finds a chance in his fiction.

Many young Parsis decide to migrate to the West. The present Parsi predicament is marked by a buried past and an uncertain future. After living in the Indian Subcontinent for centuries, still the Parsis remain the ‘other’, since they are depicted as conservative and religious minded persons in an Indian modernity that is considered to be secular. The Parsi identity could be seen as ‘otherness’. It is a way of foregrounding Parsi uniqueness.

Nusswan takes Dina to the fire temple in *A Fine Balance* and compels her to pray to become a ‘good’ girl. Dina is portrayed as a sceptic within the Parsi community. Mistry writes:

> While she bowed before the sanctum, he travelled along the outer wall hung with pictures of various dustoors and high priests,… Like Talcum powder, thought Dina watching from the corner of her eye, from her bowed position, straining to keep from laughing. She did not raise her head until he had finished his antics (*AFB*,24).

Mistry’s portrayal of both orthodox and sceptical Parsis is meant to show how there is scope for change—questioning and assimilation of
secular ideals within the Parsi community. Mistry also feels the need to document the various aspects of Parsi belief. According to the Census figures (2004) the Parsis are the fastest diminishing group in India. This can be attributed to factors both intrinsic to the community like modes of localization and group marriage as well as migration.

Mistry’s socialist pity for the poor, the down trodden and the outcastes finds a larger canvas in *A Fine Balance*. The story of the tailors itself is a story of horrors. To quote from the novel: “The over-worked women who are doubly ‘othered’ as poor and as women who help Ishvar, A women filled Ishvar’s gravel basket or helped him hoist it to his head. Her stumpy grey plait slid forward over the shoulder” (*AFB, 423-424*).

Dina Dalal in *A Fine Balance* spends her life struggling against all types of ‘othering’ that the structure of the traditional family thrives upon. She decides to accept the subaltern role of unpaid domestic servant that her status as both unmarried sister and widow demands. The characters are ‘othered’ in the very space where they expect to belong—the family.

The social order takes various forms of oppression. Caste, class, clan, community and religious faith caste, oppression and riots form the evidence of the marginalization of the subaltern, the homeless, the poor and the manual workers within the geography of the city and the nation.

Mistry demonstrates an ability to transform the features of the conventional narrative into an exploration of those cultural and social realities that are presented marginally. His novels explore the realities that exist within the family the nation and the community that make up real societies.
In *A Fine Balance* the law becomes a powerful tool for political oppression. History, Politics and Law affect individual lives in Mistry’s fiction. Om and Ishvar and the slum dwellers are compelled to load onto buses and brought to a political rally to be addressed by the Prime Minister. The slum dwellers deliberately comment ironically on the party workers, when they are invited to attend the rally. “Tell her how happy we are! Why do we need to come? .... Ask your men with the cameras to pull some photos of our lovely houses, our healthy children! Show that to the Prime Minister”(*AFB*,318-19).

The description of the activities of the audience during the political speeches reveal the utter insignificance suffered by the slum dwellers. The Prime Minister’s Twenty–point programme will have direct impact upon their lives. The implementation of the programe is almost immediate. But Om and Ishvar are being razed to the ground for ‘city beautification’.

The tailors are represented as slaves. The tailors’ return to the city as beggars indicates the fate of urban subalterns. Ishvar’s dreams for his nephew Om are also shattered. This is due to the brutality of the State. The Age-old caste oppression and tyranny take over. Caste injustice becomes arbitrary. It is ironic that Dukhi had tried to save his progeny from caste oppression by motivating them to become tailors and to leave the village.

Mistry’s subject is the Parsi enclave in multicultural India. The depiction of the Indian Parsis in the throes of redefining their role in nationhood – forms the crux of the novels. As a Parsi inheritor who has witnessed the complicated processes of immigration and adaptation over
time, Mistry tries to redefine the role of the Parsi in the context of the Indian nation.

Thus, Sidhwa and Mistry deal with the Parsi-life in multicultural situations in both India and Pakistan; they deal with the various trials Parsis have undergone and probe their ability to adapt to the sad-cum-challenging reality of the Partition and their response to such calamitous events like the Emergency years in India and the rise of fundamentalism around them. Both are humanistic in their viewpoint and provoke the reader to meditate on the situations and characters presented through a wide variety of identical perspectives. They explore the problems of multiculturalism and diasporic experience. In this lie the relevance to the 21st century.