Chapter – IV

Language As an Assimilation Strategy

...language is a discourse of power, in that it provides the terms and the structures by which individuals have a world, a method by which the 'real' is determined. notions of universality can, like the language which suggests them, become imperialistic. The language itself implies certain assumptions about the world, a certain history, a certain way of seeing. If one's own language, or one's immediate perceptions of the world do not concur then they must be suppressed in favour of that which the language itself reveals to be 'obvious'. (Bill Ashcroft Post Colonial 55)

Language, as a strong vehicle of communication, is formed and shaped by relations of power and is packed with ideologies. It is a form of social identity and it reflects culture. It determines one's thought. As a carrier of culture, language is a symbolic representation of the social exchanges. According to Andrew Radford, “Language [is] a cognitive system which is part of any normal human being's mental or psychological structure”(1). William O'Grady, Michael Dobrovolsky, and Francis Katamba in their Contemporary Linguistics detail the importance of language: “Language is many things- a system of communication, a medium for thought, a vehicle for literary expression, a social institution, a matter for political controversy, a catalyst for nation building” (1).

Language plays a crucial role in the organization of social groups and institutions. The ethnic groups remain apart from the dominant and they strive hard to retain their culture, tradition, custom and thereby try to assert their identity. But their struggle hardly gives them success. The question of identity
has always preoccupied them. Peter Brooker in his *Glossary of Cultural Theory* defines ethnic identity:

Ethnic identity implies a sense of belongingness, founded on an attachment to an actual or possible homeland, its cultural heritage, belief system, political history, language, characteristic myths, customs, manners, food, sports, literature, art or architecture style. A corollary of this is that ethnic identity is based on perceived differences between a given identity and that of a neighbouring group or dominant culture within which an ethnic group, or groups, may be positioned. (92-93)

It is true that the ethnic groups have not been able to pass on their language from generation to generation as they have their tradition, culture and custom. They have been forced to forget their language and volunteer themselves in adopting the language of the dominant group.

The ethnic groups use more than one language in their everyday life. This multilingual system has strengthened the minority conscious of the ethnic communities. Though some ethnic groups try hard to foster their language for cultural or religious purposes, they have not succeeded in achieving it.

In India, especially in the northern part of the country, multilingualism is found among the minority groups. As most of the Parsis are residing in places in North India like Mumbai and Gujarat, they are familiar with Hindi, the national language of India. Marathi, the official language of Maharashtra
and Gujarati, their enforced mother tongue. The Parsis are multi-linguals and hence they consider learning a language a social/survival strategy.

The Iranian ancestors of the Parsis followed Old Persian. Its oldest form is Avesta which belongs to the family of the Indo-European languages. Avesta, noted for its antiquity, is similar to Sanskrit, the Indian classical language. Thornton traces the importance of Avesta:

It [Avesta] is a sister of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Gothic—no longer in the prime of life, but rather in declining years. Notwithstanding the symptoms of decay, its relation to the most ancient Sanskrit, the so-called Vedic dialect, is as close as that of the different dialects of the Greek language to each other....So that the languages of the sacred hymns of the Brahman, and of those of the Parsi, are only the two dialects of two separate tribes of one and the same nation. It is noticeable that it is related closely to Vedic, and not to classical Sanskrit, differences in grammar being very small, and phonetic changes from one to the other very regular. (32-33)

Old Persian differs from Avesta to a lesser extent. The modified form of this language is known as Pahlavi and it was once the official language of the Sassanid Empire, one of the great empires in Persia. Ancient Iranians followed Avesta and later on Old Persian and Pahlavi. But the settlement of the Parsis in India not only changed their way of dressing, and food habit but
also their language. One of the conditions put forward by the Indian King Jadhav Rana to give them shelter was that instead of communicating in their language, they should adopt the language of their adopted soil, namely Gujarati.

Regarding the Parsis' adaptation of the Indian language, it has to be admitted that the process is not natural but forceful. Only for fear of socio-cultural alienation, the Parsis have accepted the Indian language. No human being possesses the utmost inborn talent to acquire a language. He should train himself from his infancy to follow the language. Learning a language requires training and practice. As language is a culturally transmitted entity, the emigrant Parsis felt hard to adopt the alien language. Cultural transmission denotes the process of passing a language from one generation to the next. George Yule in his *The Study of Language* describes the process of cultural transmission with regard to language. While talking about the changes in languages, Yule says:

> Although some changes can be linked to major social changes [with regards to language] caused by wars, invasions, and other upheavals, the most pervasive source of change in language seems to be in the continual process of cultural transmission. Each new generation has to find a way of using the language of the previous generation. In this unending process whereby each new language-user has to 'recreate' for him or herself the
language of the community, there is an unavoidable propensity to pick up some elements exactly and others only approximately. There is also the occasional desire to be different. Given this tenuous transmission process, it should be expected that languages will not remain stable, but that change and variation are inevitable. (222)

As for the Parsis, the cultural transmission of their language is impossible because they were compelled by the Indian King Jadhav Rana to follow the Indian language instead of their own.

The acquisition of speech skills in first language/mother tongue begins at infancy and in a second or a foreign language is acquired at a later stage. But, the migrated Parsis during King Jadhav’s period were all grown-ups and they were forced by the King to adopt Gujarati. The hostile attitude of the Parsis towards the Gujarati language reflected in their ready and willing adoption of English language during colonization. When the British came to India, the Parsis did not show any protest against the colonizers. Instead, they were very cordial to them. Above all, they identified themselves with the British because they have a distinct resemblance with the British in certain physical features with their Roman nose and protruding chin. The Parsis thought that instead of talking in “down-to-earth Indian language”, they could adopt English language, which appeared more suitable for their “Persian
glory”. The Parsis who live mostly in Bombay converse in English in public.

James Bissett Pratt writes about the Parsis who talk in English in public:

The stranger in Bombay is not there twenty-four hours before he acquires the habit of looking about for a Parsee when in need of information. The great majority of them whom one meets in the streets can speak English, and the evidence of intelligence and education which one sees in their faces and in their bearing easily marks them out from all but the exceptional Hindus and Moslems in the city. (325)

The Parsis wholeheartedly adopt English, the language of the alien rulers, under the mistaken notion that it is the language of the elites. It testifies that the Parsis are anglophile and they take pride in using the language of their oppressor of the oppressor. It can be argued that the Parsis’ unqualified assimilation of the English culture and language is born out of their undying hatred for India and her culture. Since they are loyal to the British, they are loyal to their language also.

The Parsis’ love for English culture is evident from the fact that they always supported their rule in India. During the Sepoy Mutiny, they supported the British, forgetting that they were only the invaders of India. Consequently, they had to face many anti-Parsi riots in most of the towns in Gujarat. Since their advent to India, they have served the rulers with great fidelity. When the colonizers ruled India, they were close to them. Unlike the other Indian
communities, they wanted the British to rule India because they thought that if the British left India, they would definitely lose their independence and once again they would become an insignificant minority in India.

In the year 1780-1840, Gujarat was struck with famine. Consequently, a large number of Parsis left Gujarat and flocked the city of Bombay. They were introduced as traders to the Britishers. Later on, a large number of them secured jobs in the British administration. They were appointed agents and mediators. Eckehard Kulke describes how the Parsis became the favourites of the British:

The European merchants preferred to transact their business with the Indian hinterland through Parsee agents and "brokers", who, on the one hand, had at their disposal the necessary knowledge of land and language, but whose minority role in Indian society, on the other hand, gave them the necessary flexibility in commerce with foreigners. (32)

The Parsis consider themselves not as Indians but English. Nirad C. Chaudhuri in The Continent of Circe discusses the Indian minorities under the title "The Half-Caste Minorities". He deliberately omits the Parsis in the chapter. The reason he furnishes is:

I have to explain that the omission of the two minority communities of the Parsis and Sikhs in this book is deliberate. The Parsis are foreign colonists settled in India, and except for a
small number of de-natured members of the community they have remained foreigners in spirit. On the other hand, the Hindus do not regard them as fellow-Indians. (337)

The Parsis were the first Anglophone community in India. Their anglomania is finely illustrated by their easy acceptance of the language. As far as the Parsis are concerned, English language is the language of the elites, whereas Indian languages like Hindi and Gujarati are the languages of the ordinary folk. The Parsis talk in English while they are at home and speak Hindi with their subordinates. By talking in English, they try to pose as if they had close link with the British. This is evident from the writings of the Parsi writers. The Parsi characters in their novels express their hatred for Indian languages and love for English language and English culture and customs. Language as a social medium carries the culture of a particular society. The Parsis neither speak their native language, Avesta nor the language of the adopted home Gujarati. It is alleged that the Parsis assumed that the culture of the west was superior to the Indian culture and therefore they attempted consciously to assimilate western culture and its language. The present chapter while highlighting language as an assimilation strategy simultaneously discusses the attitude of the Parsis towards western culture.

Parsi novelist Dina Mehta’s novel, Lover revolves around the life of a Parsi lady, Roshini. Roshini likes everything English. Mehta’s portrayal of the Parsi lady Roshini reflects the attitude of the young people of her community.
She does not know Persian language. She is more interested in English. She is not aware of their sacred script Avesta, but she likes the Bible. The following lines bring out her love for English:

The Parsee way of life was the most westernized in India. More than the Anglo-Indians they could afford the tastes, the standards, the luxuries introduced by the alien rulers. She (Roshini) spoke English better than her adopted mother tongue, Gujarati. She even thought in English...she read no Gujarati books or papers. She did not know Persian, the language of her ancestors ...she did not know a word of Avesta, in which her prayers were written. She knew more about Christianity than of her own religion... she was more familiar with the Bible than with the Gathas, with the Acts of Apostles than with the life of Zarathushtra. (Lover 188)

The Britishers cast bewitching influence on the Parsis. The Parsis wanted to follow the Britishers closely in everything. They wished to mimic the colonizers in their way of “talking, eating, and living”. Their love for everything English led them to love English language. They were eager to be thorough with English ways of life. The Parsi novels especially those of Mistry show clear-cut evidence of their extreme love for English. His works illustrate the Parsis’ undue predilection for English ways of life.
The Parsi children love English stories and English characters. The legends of India never attract them. They grow up with English stories. They do not like Indian mythologies. Jehangir in *Family* is fond of reading English stories especially Enid Blyton’s stories. He, sometimes, imagines himself as the characters in the stories and acts accordingly:

On rainy days, when washing couldn’t be hung on the balcony, the line became a fragrant curtain of wet clothes, and he [Jehangir] preferred the room like that, in two compartments. Then he pretended to be one of the Famous Five, Or the Five Find-Outers, who all had their own rooms and lived in England where everything was beautiful. His imagination transported the clothes-curtained room to the English countryside into a house with a lovely garden where robins sang and roses bloomed, and to which he could return after having an adventure or solving a mystery. How perfectly he would fit in that world, he thought.

(*Family* 87)

Kersi in “One Sunday” is fond of reading Enid Blyton books and wants to live “in a small English village, where he would play with dogs, ride horses in the meadows, climb hills, hike through the countryside....” (*Tales* 30).
The Parsi parents want their children to read English stories rather than the stories of India. Sohrab stages his own version of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* in which he is the actor, producer, director and costume designer. Mistry narrates the proudest moments experienced by Gustad and Dilnavaz:

Gustad’s and Dilnavaz’s proudest moment in Khodadad Building came when Sohrab put on a home-made production of King Lear, pressing Darius into service, plus a host of school and Building friends. The performance was held at the far end of the compound, and the audience brought their own chairs. Sohrab, of course, was Lear, producer, director, costume designer and set designer. He also wrote an abridged version of the play, wisely accepting that even an audience of doting parents could become catatonic if confronted by more than an hour’s worth of ultra-amateurish Shakespeare. (*Journey* 79)

During the colonial period, Indian streets were named after British names. After their departure, the streets regained their Indian names. But the Parsis wanted to live in British India, with all their British names. When Kapur in *Family* shows the old pictures of the roads of Bombay with their Indian names, Yezad protests. The following conversation between Yezad and Kapur reveals Parsis’ fondness for British names:

Yezad broke into a grin. “Hey, it’s a shot of Hughes Road. Where I grew up.”
"Why do you think I brought it? And for your info, the name was changed to Sitaram Patkar Marg years ago" [Kapur].

"It’ll always be Hughes Road for me" [Yezad]. (Family 216)

Dinshawji’s reaction to the name change exposes the psyche of the Parsis and their love for the British. He hisses through clenched teeth:

...Names are so important. I grew up on Lamington Road. But it has disappeared, in its place is Dadasaheb Bhadkhamkar Marg. My school was on Carnac Road. Now suddenly it’s on Lokmanya Tilak Marg. I live at Sleater Road. Soon that will also disappear. My whole life I have come to work at Flora Fountain. And one fine day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names? Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with these new names? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out, just like that? Tell me! (Journey 88)

Though the Parsis christen their children with names which are Parsi in origin, they shorten them to sound English. Firdaus Kanga in Grow gives ample proof of this:

We delight in stretching, snipping and squashing given names out of all recognition, with a view to making them roll off the tongue easily and, perhaps even sound English. So the boys who are named Faredoon become Freddy, Naoroji becomes Neville.
Adi becomes Eddy, and everyone is delighted with his new name and what he hopes is his new image. (26)

Jehangir in *Family* longs for a Christian name. He wants to change his name to John Chenoy, since it sounds very English. Mistry says:

Jehangir liked the names on the Catholic team: Henry, George, Francis, William, Philip. They sounded like the names in Enid Blyton’s stories. Although the surnames were D’ Souza and Fernandes and D’ Mello, not at all like the surnames of the Famous Five or the Five Find-Outers. He wished he could change his own name. Jehangir, Jehangla, Jehango. Could be shortened to Jehan. Which was a lot like John. John Chenoy. He liked the sound of it, drawing him one step closer to the lovely world of those books. (*Family* 209)

The Parsis were fed up with their lives in India as they could not enjoy some of the privileges enjoyed by the foreigners. Mistry depicts their craze for foreign countries through his diverse characters. Jamshed is surfeited with his life in India and he muses: “Absolutely no future in this stupid place”, “Bloody corruption everywhere. And you can’t buy any of the things you want, don’t even get to see a decent English movie. First chance I get, I’m going abroad. Preferably the U.S.” (*Tales* 178).
The Parsis love America and Britain more than they love India. Edul talks about the two serious ailments responsible for making India a backward country:

You know why America is a great country? Because they believe in do-it-yourself. And we are poor and backward because we don’t. Now I understand what Gandhiji meant when he taught Svavlumban. With his doctrine of self-reliance, Mahatmaji was the first genuine Indian do-it-yourselfer. His vision is true, DIY is the only way to save this country. (Family 169-170)

The Parsis’ love for western music, western musical instruments, and western theatres provides yet another example for their commitment to the English world. To quote from an extract published in the literary supplement of The Hindu dated 13.10.02 by Priya Moholay:

The Parsis’ social and cultural mores were now at par with the British. They came to cultivate a profound interest in western music and theatre.... The Parsees emulated English lifestyles by building some fine villas in the colonial architectural scheme and decorate them with typical Victorian furniture followed by paintings.(2)

Mistry’s creations Gustad Noble, Nariman and Rustom are music lovers. Rustom, the violonist says, “Like all good Parsi parents, mine made
me take violin lessons when I was little”... “When I feel like torturing myself, I take it out of its case to make it screech and wail” (*Balance* 36).

Quoting Shakespeare, Nariman requests Daisy, the violinist, to play violin for him: “If music be the food of love, play on, give me excess of it” (*Family* 231). Music consoles Nariman, “the moment her violin started, he grew calmer, as though he had taken a dose of medicine” (*Family* 231). Nariman is suffering from Parkinson disease and when he is in his sick-bed, Daisy plays violin for him and makes him happy by playing his favourite song ‘One day when we were young’. Daisy plays this tune, when Nariman lies dying.

The Parsis enjoy English songs. The following instance from *Family* testifies to their interest in listening to English songs: “…the announcer on the radio said it was time for one of yester-year’s golden hits, and Engelbert Humperdinck came on. Yezad and the boys [Murad and Jehangir] sang along with the refrain, ‘Just three little words: I love you!’ ” (*Family* 112). Daulat’s fondness for western music in *Tales* comes to a halt with her husband Minocher’s illness, “But the childhood proscription against music racked her with guilt whenever a strand of melody strayed into her room from the outside world” (*Tales* 70).

The Parsis’ love for nature is similar to that of the British. They like hilly areas like the English. Maneck, the hill-side dweller hesitates to go to the city for his higher studies. Because “…the thought of leaving the hill-station-
his entire universe – brought him to a state of panic” (Balance 243). Kohlah, Maneck’s father wants to be one with nature even after his death. Instead of being devoured by vultures—their traditional method of disposing of dead body, Kohlah wants to be cremated and wants his ashes to be sprinkled all over the mountain:

Maneck and his mother set off with the wooden box to scatter his father’s ashes on the mountainside where he had loved to walk. He had wanted to be strewn throughout these vistas, as far and wide within the panorama as human effort could accomplish. Hire a sherpā if you have to, he had joked. Don’t dump me in one spot. (Balance 681)

Kohlah has gone to the extent of violating the Parsi customs and age-old tradition for the sake of his special affinity with nature.

The culture of the English people is quite different from that of the Indians. The English people love drinks and never celebrate important occasions without drinks. But alcoholism in Indian society is a taboo. Women and children are forbidden from drinking. Yet the Parsis, in the tradition of the British serve liquor on all important occasions of celebrations. Parsis celebrate their birthdays as the Britishers do. When Gustad Noble celebrates his daughter, Roshan’s birthday, he invites his friend Dinshawji to the birthday party. Beer is supplied. Gustad and Dinshawji drink beer in front of Gustad’s children. Gustad even urges Sohrab to drink beer. When Sohrab longs for
beer, Gustad asks: “Are you sure? You never liked it before” (Journey 48). Darius, and Dilnavaz, too, taste beer: “Roshan had Raspberry in hers. Dilnavaz had only water, but she swallowed a litter beer from Darius’s glass” (Journey 54).

In “Auspicious Occasion”, Rustomji, was allowed to taste his first sip of scotch and soda when he was young: “Mother had protested that he was too young, but father had said, “what is there in one sip, you think he will become a drunkard?” (Tales 11).

Mistry’s collection of short stories Tales has eleven intersecting stories and deals with the life of the Parsis in all aspects. Some of the stories centre around the problems of language and discourse.

Firozsha Baag is a Parsi colony, having only a few non-Parsi residents. Mistry has succeeded in bringing out the life of the middle class Parsis before our eyes. He creates real and lifelike characters. He presents neither the blissful heaven-on-earth situation nor the problems of the untouchables. But he delineates the lifestyle, the beliefs and the problems of the people of his community.

The residents of the Firozsha Baag speak mixed languages. The Parsis in this fictitious residential block use English while they converse with the members of their Family. They use either Hindi or Marathi to converse with outsiders and especially with their servants.
In “Auspicious Occasion”, Mistry narrates the auspicious day of Behram Roze, Mehroo, Rustom’s wife as planned already, sets off to the Fire Temple. Later on, Rustomji with the intention of going to the fire temple, boards a double decker bus and as he stands on the lower deck, a tobacco chewing man from the upper deck spits the juice suddenly and it falls on Rustomji’s spotless clothes. “The squirt of tobacco juice caught him between the shoulder blades: blood red on sparkling white” (Tales 17). On seeing this, Rustomji scolds the man in abusive terms: “Saala gandoo! Filthy son of a whore! Shamless animal-spitting paan from the bus! Smash your face I will, you pimp…” (Tales 17). Soon a small crowd gathered around Rustomji and they begin to mock at Rustomji “Bawaji bawaji, dugli looks very nice now, red and white, just like in Technicolor…” (Tales 17).

Offended by the derisive comments of the crowd, Rustomji becomes furious and calls them ghatis and hisses in both English and Hindi, “Arr’e you sisterfucking ghatis, what are you laughing for? Have you no shame? Saala chootia spat paan on my dugli and you think that is fun?” (Tales 17). Nilufer E. Bharucha defines the term ghatis: “The term ghaati is a descriptive term for people who live in the Western Ghats, but as used by the Parsis, acquires a pejorative sense and generally means an uncouth, barbaric person” (80). Generally, the speech of the immigrants often contain some identifying feature and Rustomji’s speech also has certain characteristic elements and the crowd easily discovers that he is an outsider.
On hearing Rustomji’s filthy language, the crowd becomes agitated and reacts angrily at Rustomji: “Bawaji, we’ll break all your bones. Maaro saala bawajiko” (Tales 17). The crowd begins to beat Rustomji and he is all alone amidst the non-Parsi people. He knows well that only by talking in Hindi, he can escape from the present fiasco. He begins to talk in Hindi mixed with English to safeguard himself from being attacked. He adds, rather pleadingly: “Arre’ please yaar, why harass an old man? Jaane de’, yaar. Let me go, friends” (Tales 18). Rustomji takes out his artificial teeth to earn the sympathy of the crowd. Mistry proceeds to describe the pathetic figure Rustomji at the moment:

Then his desperate search for a way out was rewarded - a sudden inspiration which just might work. He reached his fingers into his mouth, dislodged the dentures, and spat them out onto his palm. Two filaments of saliva, sparkling in the midday sun, momentarily connected the dentures to his gums. They finally broke and dribbled down his chin. With much effort and spittle, he sputtered: “Look, such an old man, no teeth even,” and held out his hand for viewing. (Tales 18)

Rustomji’s pathetic condition invokes pity; the crowd is pacified and he is allowed to go. At last, “Rustomji the clown was triumphant” (Tales 18). Feeling insecure in front of the agitated mob, Rustomji realizes that he can pacify them only by speaking in Hindi and not in English.
The non-Parsis in Bombay call the Parsis “Parsi Bawaji” and the latter condescend to accept the salutation. Nilufer E. Bharucha in “Why All This Parsiness? : An Assertion of Ethno—Religious Identity in Recent Novels written by Parsis” while describing the plight of Rustomji explains how the Parsi, the sahib of the British Raj becomes Bawaji:

Rustomji’s encounters with the ghaati focuses on the confrontation between the Parsi and Indian identities. It is also symbolic of the social decline of the Bawaji, who in the British Raj was almost a sahib. In this story Rustomji is made aware of his changed status when a ghaati lets loose a stream of paan-spittle on him from the top deck of a Bombay bus. Rustomji reviles him in no uncertain terms but has to retract when he is surrounded by a crowd of ghattis all intent upon beating him up. He escapes only by removing his dentures and playing the clown. It is this distance between the Parsis’ own elite consciousness and their down-graded position in Post colonial India that the migrant Parsis are trying to escape. (258)

The bitter experience of Rustomji throws light on the Parsis’ identity crisis and their state of insecurity in India.

A similar incident in “One Sunday” describes graphically the helplessness of the Parsis. Najami is settled in the Firozsha Baag. She is the widow of Soli, and her two daughters have gone abroad for their higher
studies. Francis is doing the household work at her house. While he tries to rob her house, Kerci and Percy, the sons of Silloo Boyce, follow Francis, who is found going towards Tar Gully, a non-Parsi resident. On seeing them with cricket bat at night, some men taunt them “Parsi bawaji! Cricket at night? Parsi bawaji! What will you hit, boundary or sixer?” (Tales 35). Though they become furious, they remain silent. The non-Parsis derisively call the Parsis Bawaji as the latter feel hesitant to mingle with the former. The Parsis neglect those who treat them as outsiders. This is evident from Persy’s advice: “just ignore the bloody ghatis” (Tales 35).

In “The Ghost of Firozsha Baag” the Parsi way of life, their manners and their language are viewed from an outsider’s point of view. It is in first person narration and deals with the wonderful moments of a Goan ayah in a Parsi household. Jacqueline, the ayah reflects over the attitude of the non-Parsis towards the Parsis. She quits her native place Goa and comes to Firozsha Baag and joins a Parsi household to serve as a maid. She comments upon the language of the Parsis. The Parsis are experts in making Parsi words from English words. The ayah remembers how her old bai(owner) has coined words out of English words. As an outsider, she comments upon the Parsi way of coining new words. She observes:

Old bai took English words and made them Parsi words. Easy chair was igeechur, French beans was ferach beech, and Jacqueline became Jaakaylee. Later I found out that all old
Parsis did this, it was like they made their own private language.

(*Tales* 44)

Jacqueline is worried as the members of the Parsi household have mangled her name. She laments: "Now it has been forty-nine years in this house as ayah, believe or don’t believe. Forty-nine years in Firozsha Baag’s B Block and they sill don’t say my name right. Is it so difficult to say Jacquelin? But always say Jaakaylee. Or worse, Jaakayl!" (*Tales* 44).

The Goan ayah arrests the readers’ attention with her simple and interesting English. Her impression of the Parsis is striking as it echoes the opinion of the non-Parsis. The Parsis in the Firozsha Baag influence the ayah. She too talks in Parsi- Gujarati forgetting her own mother tongue. The house owners talk in English in their house. As Jacqueline stays in their house, she also learns a little bit of English. “And I talk Parsi- Gujarati all the time instead of Konkani, even with other ayahs. Sometimes also little bits of English” (*Tales* 44).

After coming from her native place, Jacqueline settles down in Firozsha Baag, “Forgetting my name, my language, my songs” (*Tales* 45). At the beginning, the low class people in Tar Gully mock at her by calling her blackie. But later on, as people from all over India migrate to Bombay, dark skin becomes familiar in Bombay and they cease to call her so.

Through the ayah, Mistry interprets various Indian languages, and the ideas associated with it make the readers think funny of Indian languages.
"...so many people from South are coming here, Tamils and Keralites, with their funny illay illay poe poe language. Now people more used to different colours" (Tales 46).

The Parsis are always enamoured of English language and its pronunciation. Nariman in “Squatter” plays the role of a story-teller. He entertains the children of the colony with his interesting stories. He holds the children of the Baag spellbound with his tales. He bewitches them with his stylish English. “Nariman liked to use new words, especially big ones, in the stories he told, believing it was his duty to expose young minds to as shimmering and varied a vocabulary as possible”(Tales 146). Jehangir is wonderstruck with the stylistic narration of Nariman:

When Nariman structured his sentences so carefully and chose his words with extreme care as he was doing now, Jehangir found it most pleasurable to listen. Sometimes, he remembered certain words Nariman had used, or combinations of words, and repeated them to himself, enjoying again the beauty of their sounds when he went for his walks to the Hanging Gardens or was sitting alone on the stone steps of C Block. (Tales 155)

While narrating the story of a Canadian Parsi immigrant Sarosh, Nariman focuses on his terrible plight there. He relates the situation:

But there was not much he could keep secret about his ways.

The world of washrooms is private and at the same time very
public. The absence of feet below the stall door, the smell of
faeces, the rustle of paper, glimpses caught through the narrow
crack between stall door and jamb—all these added up to only one
thing: a foreign presence in the stall, not doing things in the
conventional way. And if the one outside could receive the fetor
of Sarosh's business wafting through the door, poor unhappy
Sarosh too could detect something malodorous in the air: the
presence of xenophobia and hostility. (Tales 156)

It is always a pleasant experience for Jehangir to listen to Nariman. He
gets a considerable thrill out of the natural flow of language from his mouth
and exclaims: “what a feast of words! This would be the finest story Nariman
had ever told, he just knew it” (Tales 156). English as evident in the works of
Mistry comes quite naturally to the Parsi children. Jamshed in “Lend Me
Your Light” is confident that fluency in English is enough to shine in foreign
countries especially in Canada. Jamshed feels proud of himself for possessing
fluency in English. “According to my parents, I would have no difficulty
being approved, what with my education, and my westernized background,
and my fluency in the English language” (Tales 178).

The Parsi children like their parents, become easily familiar with
English. The parents feel content with their easy adoption of English. Mistry
describes Sohrab’s interview in the school for his admission:
Gaining admission was not easy. The school’s motto was Duc In Altum, adhered to with especial rigour when selecting new students. There was a tough entrance examination, followed by an interview, and Sohrab had done so well in both. Ten years old, and already his English was fluent. Not like that other interview for kindergarten when he was three, where the headmistress had asked, ‘what soap do you use?’ and Sohrab had answered, ‘Sojjo soap’, using the Gujarati word for good”.

(Journey 66)

In *Family* the protagonist Nariman is a professor of English about whom his old student Dr. Tarapur says: “For some reason I was thinking of your class, sir, in college. I loved your lectures, I still remember the ‘Ancient Mariner’ and ‘Christabel’. And all the stories of E. M. Forster that we studied from The Celestial Omnibus” (*Family* 53). Nariman likes Soli Bamboat, his parent’s oldest friend for his English pronunciation. For “Soli Bamboat’s vocal machinery, despite a lifetime’s struggle with the treachery of English vowels, was frequently undone by them. His speech had been a source of great puzzlement and entertainment for Nariman in childhood” (*Family* 11).

Yezad feels confident in his use of English language. He is rather interested in going to Canada. When he is called for an interview by the Canadian High Commission, he feels very happy and hopes that he will surely get immigration visa. He feels that the English language that he has used in his
application will help him procure a chance to migrate to Canada. Mistry describes:

Pulling out a sheaf of pages, he explained that years ago, when he was writing to the Canadian High Commission, he had decided that because his qualifications were limited— he was not an engineer, nurse, technician, or any one in high demand— his letter would have to accomplish what degrees and diplomas normally would. It should make the High Commissioner sit up and take notice that here was an applicant worthy of Canada. Words had power to sway, words had accomplished mighty things, they had won wars. Surely the language of Churchill and Shakespeare and Milton, ignited with a careful mix of reason and passion, could win him a mere immigration visa. (Family 240-241)

The mode of discourse changes when communication takes place between Parsis and non-Parsis. The immigrant Parsis feel very hard to adjust themselves with the Indian environment. The Bombay immigrants in Canada have bitter memories of their experiences in Bombay. It is very difficult for them to bargain with the shop keepers as the latter try to cheat the former, for, they are mistaken for foreigners. The Parsis who have a stint in foreign countries use broken Hindi on their return to assert their right to belong to India. In the words of Mistry:
Very cunning, they all are. God knows how, but they are able to smell your dollars before you even open your wallet. Then they try to fool you in the way they fool all the other tourists. I used to tell them – this, in broken Hindi- ‘go, go, what you thinking, I someone new in Mumbai? I living here thirty years, yes thirty, before going phoren’. Then they would bargain sensibly. (Tales 183)

Jal in Family converses in Hindi with the low class people. His step-father Nariman falls into a ditch, when he goes out for a walk. The persons employed in the ration shop bring Nariman to his house. Jal speaks a mixture of Hindi and English with them so as to make them understand. “Chalo, bring him in! Nahin, don’t put him on the floor! Sofa ki ooper rakho! Wait, maybe inside on the palung is better” (Family 47).

To repair the ceiling, Jal and Coomy seek the help of Edul, their neighbour. Two coolies come to their house, under Edul’s instructions. As they come earlier, Coomy tries to tell them in Marathi to come at eleven. Edul feels that his Marathi is better than Coomy’s. “My Marathi is much better than yours” (Family 377). He “started with a little scolding “Tumee lok aykat nai! Bai tumhala kai saangte”? (Family 377). Even though, Edul has confidence, his conversation is a synthesis of four languages: Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati and English. Mistry details:
That was as far as his vocabulary took him before he lapsed into a helpless medley of Hindi, Gujarati, and English, with the occasional Marathi word thrown in for flavour. “Asaala Kasaala Karte? Maine tumko explain Kiya, na, eleven o’ clock ao. Abhi jao, ration shop ko jao. Paisa banao, later vapis ao.” (Family 377-378).

In another context Edul scolds the labourers by using similar language. “Edul called out frantic instructions in his khichri of languages. “Ai baba! Assa nako ghay! This way, not that way, sunta hai kya. Sadanter idiot chhe, saalo” (Family 379).

In every state in the North, Hindi is commonly used besides the language of the state concerned. But, the Parsis are reluctant to follow this practice. They avoid the regional languages. Since the Parsis use English frequently and consciously, the Parsis are at ease in communicating in English.

The Parsis as already pointed out, consider Gujarati and Hindi as the languages of menial servants. Nusswan’s attitude towards his sister Dina changes after their father Shroff’s death. He does not want to send Dina to school. She complains about this to her grandfather. Being agitated by Nusswan’s proposal, grandpa sends for the latter. Grandpa, whose memory is falling due to old age, mistakes Dina and Nusswan as husband and wife and Ruby, his wife, as ayah. While Ruby touches his hands, he feels angry and
shouts in Hindi, as he thinks it is the language of the ayah “Kya Karta hai? Chalo, jao!” (Balance 30) Ruby is startled on being addressed in Hindi. Mistry describes the situation as: “Too startled at being addressed in Hindi, Ruby sat there gaping. Grandfather turned to Nusswan, “Doesn’t she understand? What language does your ayah speak? Tell her to get off my sofa, wait in the kitchen” (Balance 30).

Mistry conducts experiment in linguistic hybridity with Parsi coinages. His writings are replete with Parsi slangs and English-based creole. The creolization of Gujarati, Hindi and Parsi has led him to give new prominence to English language. Mistry’s novel Journey is replete with Parsi slangs and obscene dialogues and abusive terms. Mistry tries hard to make the text a Parsi text. Through Dinshawji, Mistry cracks obscene jokes using Parsi slang.

Dinshawji is found using Parsi slangs all through the novel. He is popular among his colleagues for his jokes about sex. Whenever he cracks jokes, his listeners enjoy them boisterously. His jokes evoke roars of laughter in the bank. He has an eye on Laurie Coutino, the young steno in the bank, where both Gustad and Dinshawji are employed. Laurie, without being aware of Dinshawji’s intention talks to him in a friendly manner. One day while talking to her, Dinshawji tells her, “Laurie, Laurie, one day I must introduce you to my little lorri” (Journey 174). Lorri is a Parsi slang for the male organ. Laurie does not know the meaning of the word lorri and she smiles at him innocently, “She smiled, ignorant of the Parsi slang for the male member”
Dinshawji continues: “you will love to play with my sweet lorri. What fun we will have together” (Journey 174).

When Laurie comes to know of the real meaning of lorri, she is upset and complains to Gustad:

I don’t know if you heard, but one day he began telling me he wants me to meet his lorri. She bit her lower lip, hesitating.

“You can play with my little lorri,” he said, “such fun two of you will have together”. Now she looked him in the eye. ‘You know, at first I thought it was his daughter or niece, or something like that, and I would smile and say “Sure, I would love to”’. (Journey 208-209)

Laurie continues, “Then recently, I found out what it really means. Can you imagine how I felt” (Journey 209). As her name Laurie sounds like the Parsi slang lorri, she says: “Mr Dinshawji has ruined my own name for me” (Journey 209). To console Laurie, Gustad says “Laurie is a beautiful name. That will never ever change just because of some silly slang word” (Journey 209).

Arun Mukherjee condemns Mistry for making use of the Parsi slang lorri and thereby harassing Laurie “…the bank teller Laurie Coutino was named Laurie. So that the author could tell us about the Parsi word for penis (lorri). Dinshawji’s teasing of Laurie Coutino, asking her to play with his “sweet lorri” is sexual harassment, not humour” (87).
Mistry makes use of abusive language through the character of Inspector Bamji, in spite of the warning by their Gatha that “those who use abusive language shall go to the house of Druj” (hell) (qtd. in Ervad Sheriarji Dadabhai Bharucha 56). Some of the Parsis in Khodadad protest against the sacred wall. Inspector Bamji flays them in abusive language:

You [Gustad] have made it pisser-proof. But you know, I don’t understand the maader chod mentality of our neighbours. Can you believe it? Some of them (I won’t say names) are grumbling- that why should all perjaat gods be on a Parsi Zarathosti building’s wall. I’m telling you, sawdust in their brains. (Journey 253)


In a fit of anger, the Parsi characters use foul words in Hindi. While condemning Pakistan for its hostile attitude towards India, Bamji employs abusive language in Hindi.

Bastards want to fight, now they will get a fight. Bloody bahen chod bhungees think they can just come over and bomb our airfields. What did they expect, our planes would be sitting outside? Our boys are damn smart, bossie, damn smart. Everything in underground concrete hangars. Now they will be clean bowled- off stump, middle stump, leg stump- nothing left standing. (Journey 349)
Dinshawji uses Hindi words in his conversation especially when his talk centres on sexual matters. When Gustad warns him against teasing a nurse in the hospital, Dinshawji says: “Have you seen her? Real futaakro. My lady with the Lamp. She can borrow my candle any time her lamp is out of order” (Journey 259).

The Parsis are adept at fusing English and Gujarati to coin a code language called Asmai kasmai. This code language helps communicate among themselves secretly. Bilimoria sends ten lakh to Gustad. Gustad hides the money in the kitchen. Later on, with the help of his friend Dinshawji, he deposits the whole amount in the bank. Gustad spends his nights in fear. In the meantime, one morning Gustad finds a headless bandicoot at the base of his vinca. Gustad is shocked to see the bandicoot and enquires of the baag gurkha (watchman) about it. Now Dilnavaz uses the code, so that the gurkha does not understand what she is telling. “Masmaybisme hisme wasmas sleasme pisming beasmecausmause ismit wasmas raismainisming” (Journey 161), which in normal language reads: “Maybe he was sleeping because it was raining”.

On the eve of the war, Gustad finds light in Tehmul’s room. To warn him, he hurries to Tehmul’s house but to the shock of Gustad, Tehmul is busy with enjoying sex with Roshan’s doll. With a feeling of pity, he leaves Tehmul with the doll. When Dilnavaz enquires about him, Gustad replies in
Asmai Kasmai Gujarati code “Nosmot in frosmont of the chismildren” (Journey 359) which means ‘not in front of the children’.

At the time of crisis, the Parsis identify themselves with India and Indian languages. For instance, Gustad finds a paper with a nursery rhyme written in pencil near his house:

Bilimoria chaaval chorya

Daando lai nay marva dorya (Journey 166)

This Gujarati rhyme means whoever steals Biliomoria’s rice is beaten black and blue. Gustad suspects that it may be sent by Bilimoria’s people to threaten him to return the ten lakh rupees. When the gurkha finds Gustad reading the “funny-shaped letters” (Journey 167) in the paper, he enquires about it and Gustad asserts at first that Gujarati is his mother tongue. The conversation runs as follows:

‘You can read Gujarati?’

‘Yes, it’s my mother tongue’.

‘What does it say, these funny-shaped letters?’

‘It says: “Stole the rice of Bilimoria,
we’ll take a stick and then we’ll beat ya.”’ (Journey 167)

The Parsis pay more attention to English than to their own language, Avesta. It is a language too difficult to learn. As the religious texts of the Parsis are written either in Avesta, or in Pahlavi script, the Parsis in India do not know how to read them. Nowadays, these languages are used only by the
Parsi priests for prayers. It is ironical that even the Parsi priests read and recite the ancient texts without knowing the meanings. James Pratt Bissett observes:

The majority of them [the Parsi priests] are unable to understand the meaning of the ancient sacred texts which they read and recite; and divine truth seems to play a much less important role in their thought than the possible size of the forthcoming fee. (329)

Instead of promoting their language, the Parsis are addicted to English. Gustad confesses his ignorance of the language of his ancestors without any sense of shame. He attends the funeral of his friend Dinshawji. The language in which the priest recites the prayer is Avesta. Though Gustad cannot understand the language, “the dead language” (Journey 293), the prayer entices him. Mistry focuses on the blissful state of Gustad, when he listens to the prayers:

The prayers filled the dark room slowly. Slowly, the prayer sound was the dark room. And before he was aware of it, Gustad was under its gentle spell. He forgot the time, forgot Alamai, forgot Nusli. He listened to the music, the song in a language which he did not understand, but which was wondrously soothing. All his life he had uttered by rote the words of this dead language, comprehending not one of them while mouthing his prayers. But tonight, in the dustoorji’s soft and gentle music,
the words were alive; tonight he came closer than he ever had to understanding the ancient meanings. (Journey 293)

Gustad has his own views on the language of the Indians. His views on the language represent the views of the Parsi community in general. Gustad listens keenly to the words pronounced by the persons to whom he is talking to. He rushes to the hospital when he hears about his friend Dinshawji’s death. He asks the nurse the whereabouts of the dead body. He questions whether “He’s still in the ward?” (Journey 281). The nurse answers: “What to do? If empty room is available, patient is put there”. She pronounced it ‘avleble’(Journey 281).

Dinshawji has formed a group in the bank and they crack jokes during the lunch period. The jokes do not spare any community. “No linguistic or ethnic group was spared” (Journey 84). The following jokes centre on Tamilians and Gujaratis regarding their English pronunciations:

...they told Madrasi jokes, mimicking the rolled-tongue sounds of South Indian languages (How does a Madrasi spell minimum? Yum-i -yen-i-yum-u-yum); they told Guju jokes, capitalizing on the askew English pronunciations of Gujaratis and their difficulties with vowels, ‘o’ in particular (why did the Guju go to the Vatican? He wanted to hear pope music. Why did the Guju bite John Paul’s big toe? He wanted to eat popecorn).... (Journey 84)
Mistry points out Indians’ craze for English in *Family*. Kapur has decided to celebrate Christmas in his shop and he incarnates as Santa Claus. He arranges Husain, the peon to direct people to the shop. Husain sees a man with his daughter who passes by the place. He grabs the little girl’s arms and asks her to come inside and to have fun with Santa Claus. The man protests, as he thinks that the peon is an abductor of children. Kapur interferes and begins his conversation in English. He asks the child whether she can understand English. The man is insulted by the question and replies with a sense of pride that his daughter can understand English as she is in standard one, English medium. The conversation is interesting:

"Rona nahi, my child", said Mr. Kapur, holding out a hand from which she flinched. "You understand English?"

"My daughter is in standard one, English medium", said the father haughtily, insulted by the question.

"Excellent", said Mr. Kapur. "So why are you crying, my little girl? You’ve never seen Santa Claus?" (*Family* 357)

Parsi characters in Mistry’s writings speak in English. It is very rare to come across their non-English conversation. In contrast in his *Balance*, Parsi characters, especially Dina and Maneck, share the same language with the Chamars Ishvar and Om.

Owing to reasons well known, English has become the national language in colonial countries. Yet, many writers in these countries hesitate to
adopt the English language, as it is the language of the colonizers and better suited to European tradition, their manners and their culture. Those who write in indigenous languages feel that writings in English fail to bridge the gap between native culture and people, and unwittingly allow them to focus on the culture of the English. Ngugi Wa Thionga, a Kenyan novelist gave up writing in English and started writing in Gikuyu language, one of the African languages, with the intention of establishing his views in his native language. Opposing Ngugi's view Chinua Achebe in *Morning Yet On Creation Day* says:

> For me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it.... I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings. (103)

Postcolonialism allows the writers to use more words from the native language. Mistry, a Post Colonial Parsi writer makes use of many languages and his English is punctuated with words from Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and Persian. He neither translates the words nor gives glossary for the words.

This chapter highlights the Parsis' committed love of the English culture, tradition, and language. Their voluntary adoption of English language isolates them from the ordinary Indians.