Chapter – II

Reaffirmation of Parsi Consciousness

Ethnicity has come ... to embody a paradox: on the one hand, it holds out the promise of social recognition of spiritual ties and cultural difference; on the other, it is a fiction produced in the process of nationalization which erases underlying social hybridization. (Kerr 363)

Rohinton Mistry, in his Parsi trilogy, explores the marginalized Parsi consciousness so as to present the subordination and the ill-treatment meted out to the Parsis by the dominant Hindu society. His novels Journey, Balance, Family and story collection Tales explicate the Parsi psyche, and reaffirm the Parsi consciousness quite assertively.

The Parsi settlers in India discriminate themselves by keeping and following their native culture, religion and language in the alien land. Being obsessed with a strong sense of placelessness, they suffer from alienation and cultural ambivalences as they hesitate to mingle with the mainstream community either due to their alleged inferiority complex or pride in their own culture. By negating the social construct of the Indian mainstream community, they try to assert that the Parsi self is significant. Having been brought up with these strong sentiments, Rohinton Mistry voices the muffled consciousness of the Parsi community and expects others to treat and regard his community equal. He recollects his ancestors’ past, their miserable state at the time of settlement, and the present plight of the members of their community in India. While analyzing their darker side, he presents their consciousness quite
assertively, and his works undoubtedly portray the unique nature of the Parsi community.

The researcher, in the present chapter, discusses the Parsi consciousness as dealt within the works of Rohinton Mistry. The discussion is based on the physical, social, religious and cultural aspects.

The physical body has its own consciousness distinct from the mind and emotions and as it is the site of authentic identity, it allows all the higher level of consciousness to be poured into one’s mind. In this regard, the physical appearance of the Parsi settlers is distinct from that of the native Indians. They have Roman nose and protruding chin and are fair in complexion. Their great pride in their attractive physical feature and fair complexion forms the Parsi consciousness to such an extent that they mock at the other Indian communities who are dark in complexion.

To the Parsis, the fairness of complexion is very important and they deride the coloured people. The birth of a black coloured child is considered to be an occasion of misery in the Parsi household. If a newly born Parsi baby is black, they brand it as ayah’s (servant maid’s) child. In “The Ghost of Firozsha Baag” Goan Ayah Jacqueline, who is working in the Parsi auditor’s house, feels alienated due to her dark complexion. She laments:

I was saying, it was lucky for me to become ayah in Parsi house, and never will I forget that. Especially because I’m Goan Catholic and very dark skin colour. Parsis prefer Mangorean
Catholics, they have light skin colour. For themselves also Parsis like light skin, and when Parsi baby is born that is the first and most important thing. If it is fair they say, O how nice light skin just like parents. But if it is dark skin they say, arre’ what is this ayah no chhokro, ayah’s child. (Tales 46)

Ruby, Nusswan’s wife, in Balance laments over his grandfather’s rude behaviour towards her “Just because my skin is a little dark” (Balance 30).

The Parsis are well-built and they ridicule the Indians especially the low class people for being ‘skeletal’. Kersi in “Lend Me Your Light” observes of a railway coolie (loadman): “This skeletal man then tottered off towards the train that would transport us to the little hill station. There, similar skeletal beings would be waiting with rickshaws” (Tales 176-177).

Apart from the physical features, the Parsis are proud of their social customs which they adhere to quite sincerely. This is evident in their sacrament of marriage.

Marriage is a social institution which maintains purity of race as well as purity of sex. It is not just coming together of two individuals but also the union between two different groups, hailing from the same community. Marriages ensure a cordial relation between the two groups and are sanctioned with governmental, social, or religious recognition. The sacrament of marriage varies from one community to the other. They have certain customs, and
rituals of their own to be observed during marriages. Marriages provide an opportunity to display the culture of the community at its best.

The Parsis, who are a monogamous community in India, follow unique wedding customs and rituals. Their wedding ceremony is interesting and unique. The sacrament spreads over a couple of days. The celebrations fall into three types of rituals namely pre wedding rituals, wedding day rituals and post wedding rituals. In the post wedding rituals, the reception is held on a grand style and a feast is provided with varied menu of food and drink.

Mistry in his works, lends his attention to the controversies surrounding their rituals, customs and traditions.

Mistry in Family discusses his community’s disapproval of intermarriage through the tragic relationship between Nariman (Jr), a Parsi and Lucy, a Christian girl. Yezad, Nariman’s son-in-law, is strongly of the view that they “are a pure Persian race, a unique contribution to this planet, and mixed marriages will destroy that” (Family 469). Nariman (Sr) wants to foster their tradition and culture, by not allowing Nariman (Jr) to marry a Christian girl, but the son remonstrates about their culture and religion. To Junior Nariman, the Parsi religion is “the religion of bigots” (Family 432). While Senior Nariman sees Junior Nariman and Lucy locked up in the house, he admonishes his son and remarks: “This son of mine has turned my house into a raanwada, bringing his whore here! It’s the kind of immorality that’s destroying the Parsi community” (Family 259). In spite of the ban,
intermarriages among Parsis have often taken place. However, the Parsi community resists a lot before accommodating a non-Parsi into its fold. A real incident quoted in James Bisset Pratt's *Religious Faith of India* vouchsafes this:

When a very wealthy and influential Parsee, who resided part of the year in Paris, converted his French wife to the Zoroastrian faith, invested her with the sacred thread and shirt and applied for her recognition as a Parsee and her admission into the Fire Temple at Bombay. The question became an issue for the whole Parsee community. And was finally tried (odd as it may seem to us Westerners) before the Government court of justice. The court decided that there was no precedent of a non-Parsee becoming Parsee through conversion or marriage, and that therefore the lady in question had no right to be admitted to the fire temples or to consider herself as Parsee. Proselytism, in short, is simply impossible. (337)

Nariman's (Jr) parents in Family want him to marry a widow rather than a non Parsi. As a boy, submissive to his parents and Parsi traditions, he marries Yasmin, widow of Palonji Contractor and mother of two children namely Coomy and Jal under compulsion. Yezad narrates to his children about Nariman's (Jr) inability of marrying Lucy, because she is not a Parsi. Jehangir. Yezad's son innocently asks "if there was a law against marrying someone
receptacle for the dead. The Tower of Silence has a circular enclosure which is open to sky. The corpses are exposed to vultures or birds of prey till the skeleton remains. Then the bones are collected, and put into the well where they gradually crumble to dust.

Mistry discusses the prominent problem of throwing the dead bodies to the vultures in his *Journey*. Some people complain that the vultures leave particles of the remnants on their balconies:

They claimed that the sated birds, flying out from the Tower after gorging themselves, invariably snatched a final bite to savour later. And if the tidbits were lost in mid-flight, they landed on the exclusive balconies. This, said the indignant tenants, was absolutely intolerable, considering the sky-high prices they had been charged for their de luxe flats. (*Journey* 373)

The Parsis do not want the flesh of their departed ones to be thrown down on posh colonies. They have made a request to the Parsi Panchayat either to train the vultures properly or to import more vultures so that the flesh would not be littered over everywhere. The reformists vehemently protest against the system of leaving the dead to the vulture since it is unbecoming on the part of a sophisticated community like Parsis to do it. Mistry says:

The orthodox defence was the age-old wisdom that it was a pure method, defiling none of God's good creations: earth, water, air,
and fire. Every scientist, local or foreign, who had taken the
trouble to examine the procedure, using modern hygienic
standards, sang its praises. But the reformists, who favoured
cremation, insisted that the way of the ancients was unsuitable
for the twentieth century. Such a ghoulish system, they said, ill
became a community with a progressive reputation and a
forward-thinking attitude. (Journey 374)

The orthodox Parsis uphold their argument by quoting the world
famous ornithologists who have stated that the vultures are unable to fly after
a heavy meal. They often suspect the hands of shady individuals who may
drop human flesh on the balconies from aeroplanes to hoodwink investigators.
They suspect that the flesh can be dropped on the balcony “from single-
engined aeroplanes piloted by shady individuals on the reformist payroll”
(Journey 374).

Mistry expresses the changing attitude of the modern Parsis in his short
story “Condolence Visit”. On Minocher Mirza’s death, the widowed wife
Daulat receives relatives and neighbours. But she does not like such custom
and wants to leave Firozsha Baag and live elsewhere for the subsequent
weeks. According to the Parsi custom, a lamp at the head of the death person’s
bed must be lit up for four days. The Parsis believe that the soul of the dead
hovers for three days near the home. On the fourth day the soul is led by
Fravashis, the Guardian spirit and Sarosh Angel, an angelic power,
symbolizing divine intuition leading the soul to Chinvat (the bridge of judgement). Rashu, an angelic power holding the scale of justice, weighs the good and evil deeds of the departed. Later, Justice Mithra (Angel of Eternal Light) pronounces judgement. If the soul is a righteous one, it is accepted in Garo Demano (House of ecstatic song).

Daulat scarcely believes in Parsi customs. She violates the Parsi customs and would like to "keep the lamp lit as long as she felt the need" (Tales 64). She decides to give the clothes of Minocher to old men at the Parsi old-Age Home without waiting for the stipulated period of mourning to expire.

Nowadays, the young Parsis like to wear English costumes for their marriages. Mistry in his Tales drops several hints of it. He also speaks about Parsi women's violation of their conventional norms. Daulat has decided to sell her husband's pugree, their traditional cap, shortly after his death, "the man barely digested by vultures at the Towers Of Silence!" (Tales 74). After seeing her advertisement, a young man visits Daulat to get the pugree. Nagami and Miti, her neighbours are shocked at her decision. In direct contrast to Daulat is the young man who says that he and his fiancé have decided to celebrate their marriage in the proper traditional way with the "correct Parsi dress" (Tales 74).

Since Daulat's husband died only ten days before, Nagami asks the boy to collect pugree later. She muses:
...with help of prayers, the soul usually crosses over after four days. But some times the soul is very attached to this world and takes longer to make the crossing. And as long as the soul is here, everything such as clothes, cup-saucer, brush, comb, all must be kept same way they were, exactly same. Or the soul, becomes very unhappy. (Tales 74)

Daulat flouts the Parsi convention by giving away the pugree to the young man free of cost. She does so with the good intention of helping the young man.

In Family too, Mistry's characters are being torn apart by the conflict between modern ideas and orthodox beliefs. Nariman(Sr), who is noted for his traditional beliefs, wrote in the Letters to the Editor column of “Jam-E-Jamshed”, a Parsi newspaper, about the unpleasant incident in which a priest had performed Novjote ceremony for the son of a Parsi mother and a non Parsi father. Novjote ceremony is solemnized when the child is between seven and fifteen years of age, during which a Zoroastrian child is formally initiated into their religion. On the day of the ceremony, after a bath, the boy or the girl wears the Sudra, the sacred shirt, for the first time and after a short prayer, ties the 'kusti' around the waist. He/she is made to chew the leaf of pomegranate and drink a little Haoma juice, the juice of Eupedra plant symbolizing immortality, and wisdom. The ceremony ends with Fravarane, the confession of faith. Nariman(Sr) condemns the priest who performed Navjote for the non-
Parsi boy “who would destroy this three-thousand-year-old religion, that Zoroastrianism had survived many setbacks in its venerable history, but what the Arab armies had failed to achieve in A.D.652, priests like him would accomplish” (Family 126). He considers such priests as “poison for the community” (Family 126), and wants to hook up this controversy with Lucy-Nariman affair. He is stubborn in his view of Lucy “… charming as the Queen of England, but she was still unsuitable for his son because she was not a Zoroastrian” (Family 126). Arjani, the ground floor Parsi neighbour, joined in this battle and he was in favour of intermarriage. Nariman (Sr) considers him a “traitor in his own camp” (Family 127). They seek the help of the court. Nariman (Sr) wins the case and he celebrates the victory as not only of his own but also of the whole community.

Names are important to everyone and they reveal one’s identity. Name traces one’s communal and religious backgrounds. The Parsis are name-conscious and they emphasize that their names must indicate their Persian heredity. They name their children after their religious leaders and famous Iranian kings. Certainly, the Parsis do so with the explicit intention of retaining their Iranian identity in their adopted home land. However, Jehangir in Family longs for a Christian name to pose himself as English, “he ...preferred the sound of John Chenoy” (Family 215). Yezad reacts and tries to inculcate the Parsi pride in him,“your Christian friends have Christian names. Your Hindu friends have Hindu names. You are a Parsi so you have a
Persian name. Be proud of it, it’s not to be thrown out like an old shoe” (Family 239).

The Parsis patronize newspapers which carry news about the Parsis only. Most of them read only ‘Jam-E-Jamshed’. In order to raise Refugee fund, the students are asked to bring old newspapers daily. The newspapers are weighed every morning and the weight and the amount fetched by them is announced during assembly. Nevertheless, Darius, Gustad’s son in Journey ridicules this Parsi sentiment and wishes to take “Times of India” rather than “Jam-E-Jamshed” for, the students are making “fun of the Parsi bawaji newspapers” (Journey 100). Gustad retorts “You should be proud of your heritage. Take the Jam-E-Jamshed! or nothing at all” (Journey 100).

Mistry depicts Parsi children as geniuses. He portrays Sohrab, Gustad Noble’s son in Journey as a boy who outshines his father in political awareness. Major Bilimoria, Gustad’s friend sends ten lakhs to Gustad and asks him to save it in the bank where he is working by opening an account in the name of a lady, Mira Obili. Sohrab, on hearing this, reacts that Mira Obili is no one but Bilimoria himself. He further says, “You take a name, mix up the letters, and form a new name. Mira Obili is an anagram of Bilimoria” (Journey 144). Sohrab poses to be an expert while conversing about politics. He comments on Indira Gandhi and RAW, “She sends men from RAW to spy on opposition parties, create trouble, start violence so the police can interfere. It’s
a well-known fact" (Journey 111). He also condemns Indira Gandhi saying "She made a real mockery of democracy" (Journey 111).

The Parsis consider their progeny to be their future link with their past glory and the carrier of their culture. The child is every parent's hope. The child is the man and he/she transmits culture, tradition and custom to the future generation. The Parsis want to bring up their children with their cultural background. They want their children to be obedient and fulfill the wishes of their parents. While Junior Nariman defies his parents for the sake of Lucy, Nargese aunty advises him: "No happiness is more lasting than the happiness that you get from fulfilling your parents' wishes" (Family 13). Similarly, Roxana advises her son Jehangir: "Listen to the advice of elders. When we grow up, we think we know everything. We assume old people are not right in their heads. Too much pride we acquire with our years. And then it brings us down" (Family 481). Kersi's mother is of the view that "the blessings of an old person were the most valuable and potent of all, they would last my whole life long" (Tales 231).

The Parsis view their religion as superior to all other religions. Religion is a set of beliefs, doctrines, practices, ideas, and values. It includes cultural traditions, myths, saint worshipping, and ethos. Religion leads man towards perfection. Thornton in Parsi, Jaina and Sikh claims the superiority of the Parsi religion:
This religion served as a high standard of conduct for the Persians for centuries, and it left its mark upon later religions. The Jews borrowed their idea of hell and Satan from the Persians, and these features were passed on to Christianity and Mithraism. Mohammedanism also was influenced by Zoroastrianism, and many less important beliefs were likewise affected. (8)

The different aspects of Parsi cultural life are obvious in terms of many symbolic forms. Parsis like Hindus worship fire. Agni, (Hindu deity of Fire) has a very prominent place among the Vedic deities and may be compared with the Greek god Vulcan. Many hymns are addressed to Agni than to any other god in the Vedas.

Fire occupies a place of prominence in Zoroastrian religion too. Fire is the emblem of their supreme god, Ahura Mazda and is known as his son. The Parsis establish temples to adore fire. Veneration of fire constitutes a separate identity for the Parsi community. These fire temples are known as Atas Behrams. In these temples, the sacred fire is kept glowing day and night. The devotees offer sandalwood to the fire. The priests give the ash to apply on their forehead. Malini Bisen in “Khordad Sal” says:

In the Zoroastrian religion... fire is looked upon as a visible symbol of godhead and it is believed that the Sacred Fire was brought to earth from heaven by the prophet himself. In
Zoroastrian temples that are known as Fire temples, fire is kept burning all the time. These temples are tended by Priests called Jozdalhregavs. (3)

The Parsis inherently believe that the purity of Zoroastrianism and the uncompromising religious rituals maintain the purity of the race. Their firm faith in religion constitutes the Parsi identity and thereby creates the Parsi consciousness.

The Parsis have deep reverence for their prophet Zarathustra. They revere their founder more than they do their god because they know of their prophet more than their God. Rabindranath Tagore, in his The Religion of Man, dedicates a chapter to describe the popularity of Zoroastrianism. He writes:

There can be hardly any question that he was the first man we know who gave a definitely moral character and direction to religion and at the same time preached the doctrine of monotheism which offered an eternal foundation of reality to goodness as an ideal of perfection. All religion of the primitive type try to keep men round with regulation of external observances. Zarathustra was the greatest of all the pioneer prophets who of all showed the path of freedom to man, the freedom of moral choice, the freedom from the multiplicity of
shrines which draw our worship away from the single minded charity of devotion. (68)

The novel Journey opens with Gustad’s offering of prayers to Ahura Mazda and reciting his Kusti. The opening of the novel signifies the fact that the Parsis are always in search of light to illuminate and enlighten the inner and outer selves: “The first light of morning barely illumined the sky as Gustad Noble faced eastward to offer his orisons to Ahura Mazda” (Journey 1). He is of the opinion that the Kusti prayer would protect him from all evil powers. For, he believes “Prayers are powerful” (Journey 295). The power of prayers, the Parsis believe, gives physical and moral confidence to them. When Gustad, as a little boy, was frightened:

... he used to imagine himself a mighty hunter plunging fearlessly into unexplored jungles, deep in uncharted lands, armed with nothing except his powerfully holy kusti. Lashing that sacred cord through the air, he would slice off the heads of behemoths, disembowel sabre toothed tigers, lay waste to savage cannibal armies. One day, while exploring the shelves in his father’s bookstore, he found the story of England’s beloved dragon-slayer. From then on, whenever he said his prayers, Gustad was a Parsi Saint George, cleaving dragons with his trusty kusti wherever he found them: under the dining-table, in the cupboard, below his bed, even hiding behind the clothes-
horse. From everywhere there tumbled the glory, dissevered heads of fire-breathing monsters. *(Journey 5)*

The Parsis’ unshakable faith in their religion and Kusti is evident that they recite only their prayers in crisis and helpless conditions. During nationalization of banks, riots were triggered off all over the place. Banks were vandalized by the goondas. The bank in which Dinshawji was working was destroyed by the goondas. The staff members of the bank remained locked inside holding their breath tightly. The hatred against the prosperous Parsis is evident that the goondas behaved wildly and shouted “Parsi crow eaters, we’ll show you who is the boss” *(Journey 46)*. Goover-Ni-goan, a Parsi staff in the ledger department asked the workers not to panic, and began reciting his Kusti and others joined him. Unable to stand the chanting of the prayers, the goondas quit the place in great fear, “Bhum, That’s all, and the Maratha brigade ran like cockroaches” *(Journey 47)*.

In the beginning of the novel *Family*, Yezad is introduced as an atheist who does not have any respect for religion. He wears sudra only because, “nothing more pleasant against the skin than soft mulmul” *(Family 329)*. He has not performed the Kusti prayers for the past twenty years. Later his frustration leads him to the Fire Temple and finally he turns to be a pious man.

Yezad initially does not know how to pray in the Fire Temple and to tie a knot with the Kusti thread. But when he starts praying, there is an outpouring of words as if he has been reciting it for many years. Of this Mistry writes:
And now, to his amusement, the words of Kern Na Mazda rose silently to his lips as though he'd been reciting the prayer all his life, morning and night, without missing a day. Phrase upon phrase, into the next section, through Ahura Mazda Khodai and manashni, gavashni, Kunashni, [good thoughts, good words, and good deeds] into the final preparation for retying the Kusti. (Family 330-331)

Though, Yezad criticizes Parsi religion, he goes to the Fire Temple eventually not for praying but for peace of mind. He, as every Parsi, realizes that the Fire Temple is “a real oasis in the midst of this big, mad city” (Family 299). Fascinated towards the Fire Temple, he observes the fire:

How still it was, how restful. And the fire burning ... burning continuously for almost a hundred and fifty years, since this atash bahram was built ... the same fire his parents had gazed upon, and his grandparents, and great-grandparents. The thought filled him with quiet, with reassurance. (Family 332)

Yezad is startled at the sight of the sacred fire as he looks at the fire intently and with great enthusiasm.

The Fire was burning vigorously, the flames leaping with joy, and the room was a dance of light and shadow. He stood absorbed for a few moments, then felt it was churlish-churlish to refuse to bow before a sight so noble in its simple beauty. If he
Yezad, years later, becomes fully involved himself in religious acts. His mornings begin with prayers; he visits fire temple; he spends an hour before the sacred fire. He gets a kind of solace from his prayers. His bedroom is “filled up with volumes about Parsi history and Zoroastrianism, various translations of the Zend-Avesta, interpretations of the Gathas, commentaries, books by Zaehner, Spiegel, Darukhanawala, Dabu, Boyce, Dhalla, Hinnells, Karaka, and many, many more” (Family 451). He becomes the embodiment of Parsi religion. He tries to impose his ideas upon his children. According to him, he can treat his son Murad as a man only when, “he understands his duties as a Zarathustrian” (Family 470). However, Jehangir detests the new incarnation of his father and says, “My real father is gone, replaced by this non-stop praying stranger” (Family 487). He further observes:

Nowadays he hardly smiles, let alone laughs. And he never whistles, never joins in with songs on the radio. The last time I heard him sing was for Grandpa, the night before he died. And the radio is seldom played-only while Daddy is out of the house. When he is home, he’s either praying or reading, and says the music disturbs him. (Family 453)

Roxana, wife of Yezad longed for a pious husband in the past. But she too is fed up with his excessive commitment to religion. Yezad imposes
menstruation laws upon her. During the period time, she must not enter the drawing room. She will spend her days in a spare bedroom and the cook will bring her meals to the room. When she enquires about this, he reacts stubbornly: “I was ignorant before. Now I have studied the religion, attended the lectures of learned men” (Family 480).

Yezad’s commitment to the conventional rules makes him a laughing-stock among his family members. In order to make fun of him, Murad hits his head with slippers. Being amused at his behaviour, Roxana and Jehangir try hard to control laughing. Yezad flies into rage at Roxana: “purity and pollution is not a laughing matter. Your son behaves like jackass and you encourage him” (Family 455).

In addition to strong religious faith, the Parsis’ fear of Hinduism has fostered the Parsi identity. The Parsis feel as if they are suppressed by the dominant Hindu community. They claim a great antiquity for their religion. Such an attitude may be due to the sense of insecurity, which always haunts them as a shadow. Malcolm Saldana in Journey introduces Gustad to Christianity. Gustad goes to a church along with his friend Malcolm and follows the ceremonies there by imitating his friend closely. He feels a unique experience, which he does not get in the Fire Temple. Though Christianity is attractive, the temple of fire yields him a sense of serenity. Malcom often feeds stories of Christianity to Gustad. While narrating the story of Apostle Thomas, he claims that the Apostle landed on the Malabar coast amongst
fishermen long before the Parsis came in the seventh century from Persia. At this, Gustad becomes furious and asserts the superiority of their religion:

But our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before your son of God was even born; a thousand years before the Buddha; two hundred years before Moses. And do you know how much Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? (Journey 28)

On Parsi religion and prayer, Mistry observes that “Parsi prayers are so powerful, only a Parsi can listen to them. Every one else can be badly damaged inside their soul if they listen” (Tales 54). Parsis are sensitive about their religion. Nusswan, the autocratic brother believes in the existence of Zarathustra and the power of their religion: “Did you pray properly?” he demanded when they were outside. She[nodded] “Good. Now all the bad thoughts will leave your head, you will feel peace and quiet in your heart” (Balance 22).

Though, the Parsis claim superiority of their religion, they never wish to propagate their religion. They do not encourage proselytism and a non-Parsi is never allowed to enter their Fire Temple, even though he is ready to observe their religious customs and traditions. It is ironical that in Iran, the Parsis welcome others to their most ancient shrines at Yazd/Kerman. The early Parsi settlers gave the promise to the King that they would not convert other people into their religion. They neither allow nor welcome outsiders into their
community. Ghulam moans over the Parsi custom of not allowing the outsiders into the Tower of Silence, "Your Parsi priests don't allow outsiders like me to go inside" (Journey 380).

The Zoroastrians are known for their rituals and beliefs. The Parsis do not kill spiders. They eat only female chicken and never a cock as the cocks are believed to be the saviours of this world. They know it is just a story and a belief. Yet, for them "beliefs are more powerful than facts" (Family 156).

Dilnavaz, Gustad’s wife, in Journey is a typical Parsi woman, who believes in black magic. She loves all the members of her family. To re-route Sohrab's attention towards his studies and to cure Roshan's illness, she performs magico-religious rites, following the advice of Kutpitia, "a typical loose-screw eccentric" (Journey 102). Kutpitia uses Tehmul, the mentally retarded boy and gives black magic juice to him. She cuts his nails as is the practice in black magic and burns lizard. Mani Meitei, in "Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey and its critical realism" writes about Kutpitia:

In fact, the misfortune that befalls Gustad's family is interpreted by Miss kutpitia from her own ideological point of view rooted in beliefs and superstitions, culturally accepted and transmitted from generation to generation. First, the genesis of the trouble in Dilnavaz's family is attributed to the killing of a live bird in the house—the live chicken brought by Gustad to celebrate his son's selection to IIT and the birthday of Roshan. Killing a bird in the
house is very ominous, according to Miss. Kutpitia, second, what has happened to the dinner party has many things to do with the incident which took place at Miss Kutpitia's home the same day. In the morning Miss Kutpitia had killed a lizard on her breakfast table, its broken tail wriggling and dancing for about five minutes a definite omen forbidding her to go out for the next twenty four hours. (108)

When Kutpitia's house is caught fire and all her belongings including the marrows of her dead brother and nephew are incinerated, all her superstitious beliefs also die out. By suggesting the death of Kutpitia's superstitious beliefs, Mistry symbolically annihilates the false beliefs of the Parsis and appears before us as a modern Parsi who wants to liberate himself from the hold of superstition.

Compared to other religious books, the sacred books of the Parsis Zend Avesta are more difficult to understand. They are written in Avesta language which is akin to Sanskrit. Zoroastrian religious books are also available in many languages such as Pahlavi, Pazand and Persian rather than in Avesta. The Parsis read their religious books without knowing the meaning. Gustad in Journey does not know the meanings of the sacred writings. Yet he is delighted in listening to the prayer said as ritual over the death of Dinshawji. Mistry further describes Gustad’s mystical experience:
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. (Journey 293)

Zoroastrianism as a religion does not spread its philosophy all over the world. It is not universal but restricted only to the west Asian region of Iran. However, in the past this religion had its impact on many countries because of several invasions. Iran had been invaded by several kings several times. Iran's two famous libraries Daz – i Nipist or the Fortress of writings at Persepolis and the Ganj – i saspigan or the treasury of Sapigan, were destroyed during the Greek invasion. Martin Haug in The Parsis: Essays on their Sacred Language, Writings and Religion details the loss of their sacred writings:

The loss of most of these writings, known to the ancient Greek, is ascribed by the Parsis mainly to the ravages attendant upon the conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great .... One of these was deposited in the royal archives at Persepolis, which were burned by Alexander, and the other, which was deposited
in another treasury, fell into the hands of the Greeks, and was translated into their language. (123)

Though the Parsis have lost their sacred writings, they still keep the memories of their ancient glories. Yezad, the pious Parsi in Family possesses all pictures of Zarathustra including the ruins at the Persepolis. Mistry attempts to vividly portray Yezad's prayer cabinet which is decorated with the following remarkable paintings:

...framed pictures of Zarathustra and the Udvada fire-temple, along with a silver model of Asho Farohuar, photographs of the ancient remnants of the Persian Empire, the ruins at Persepolis, palaces, fire altars, and royal tombs of the Achaemenian and Sassanian dynasties. The arrangement of items is in a rough semicircle that keeps growing. (Family 450)

The Parsis still harbour painful memories of the destruction of their valuable literature. Mistry expresses his anguish through his characters over the heavy loss of sacred books. While Murad in Family mispronounces 'Zoroaster' their saint, Yezad is infuriated and asks his son to utter it correctly as Zarathustra as Zoroaster is a Greek distortion of their prophet Zarathustra. He shouts: "Don't use Zoroaster, that's a Greek perversion of our prophet's name, say Zarathustra. And before you mock me, read the scriptures: Vendidaad, fargard XVII, explains the distance" (Family 451).
Parsis do not want to violate their religious ethics and rites. When Coomy and Edul die in an accident, the Parsi friends do not want to call the police because, "If the police were informed, there could be all kind of complications and formalities, may be even a post mortem, delaying the funeral beyond twenty four hours from the time of death, which was undesirable within Zoroastrian rites" (Family 384). Yasmin, Nariman’s wife and Lucy, Nariman’s paramour quarrel with each other over Nariman’s issue. Unfortunately, they slip from the terrace and die. Inspector Masalavala wants to keep their death a secret. He says, “No sense washing Parsi linen in public” (Family 385).

The Parsi morality and values are based on Zoroastrianism. Yezad’s owner Kapur, a Punjabi in Family praises Parsi honesty, “the Parsi reputation for honesty is well known. And even if it’s a myth—there is no myth without truth, no smoke without fire” (Family 150). During the British regime, the Parsis held high posts in all fields. Yezad's Hindu friend, Vilas too observes:

Myths create the reality. Point is, there was a time when living accordance to certain myths served your community well. With the present state of society, those same myths can make misfits of men. Even the British knew when to observe their myth of ‘not cricket, old chap’ and when to hit below the belt, kick you in the balls, poke you in the eyes. (Family 205)
Mistry portrays Yezad's father as an honest man; but strangely enough, he presents Yezad as a dishonest man, whose circumstances compel him to deceive Kapur.

It is alleged that the Parsis always feel inferior to others and consider that their religion exerts little influence on Indians. Gustad wants to inaugurate the holy wall with the portrait of Zarathustra. But he soon realizes the futility and drops the idea. Because he thinks that the picture of Zarathustra would have little impact on the road side urinators. “He would have preferred a portrait of Zarathustra to inaugurate the wall, but realized that this triad would have a far-reaching influence in dissipating the urinators and defecators” (Journey 217).

When Gustad discovers a stick of sandalwood before Zarathustra, he consoles himself, “And there was even a stick of sandalwood before the portrait of Zarathustra. The black wall had verily become a shrine for all races and religion” (Journey 338). These lines, besides betraying their sense of inferiority, also illustrate that the Parsis want to flow voluntarily with the mainstream community.

Nevertheless, Parsis are aware of other religion and curious about their customs. Dina, attending the funeral procession of the beggar Shankar, asks the beggar master, “Is it hard to watch? Some one told me there is a very strong smell. Can you actually see the flesh burning?” (Balance 585). Jacqueline’s owner in “The Ghost of Firozsha Baag” asks her when she is
praying “what is it Catholics say when they touch their head and stomach and both sides of chest?” (Tales 55).

The Parsi community, which is the most urbanized community in India, is going to be endangered species due to many problems such as low birth rate, ban on inter marriage, late marriage, migration and urbanization. The Parsi population in 1941 was 1,14,890, and it has declined to 70 to 80,000 in 1947. Novy Kapadia quotes Madhavankutty Pillai's findings with regard to the dwindling of population rate and observes:

Due to prosperity, extreme individualism, urbanization, late marriages, low birth rate and antique laws about not accepting the children of Parsi women married outside the community into the fold is taking their toll on the Parsi community in India. (16)

Parsi writers warn the members of their community timely about the situation and condemn their religious fanaticism. Mistry discusses Parsi problems more seriously in his Family than in his other works. The most important problem which shackles the community is its falling rate of population. The survival of the Parsi community is seriously challenged. For, “Demographics show we’ll be extinct in fifty years. May be it’s the best thing. What’s the use of having spineless weaklings walking around, Parsis in name only” (Family 400). Mistry is worried about his community. Inspector Masalavala and Dr. Fitter in Family discuss the primal issue and list out causes for the falling population and “Our dwindling birth rate, our men and women
marrying non-Parsis and the heavy migration to the west” (Family 400). Since they are elite-conscious, they like nucleus family only. This also makes the community as a moribund community. Inspector Masalavala in Family, who broods over this, suggests:

Our community, our youth has to rediscover the joys of a large family.... They have to realize what they are missing. The happy music of children’s laughter filling the home, wife cooking huge hearty meals in the kitchen, clatter of pots and pans, the aromas of dhansak and dhandar. (Family 402)

Masalavala and Dr. Fitter feel that the Western ideas which prevail in the minds of the Parsis seem to be an obstacle to the growth of population. The Parsi youngsters’ wish to lead a luxurious life is an added reason. The youth give consent to their marriage only when they have a flat of their own. Mistry groans in anguish:

Take the falling birth rate. Our Parsi boys and girls don’t want to get married unless they have their own flat. Which is next to impossible in Bombay, right? They don’t want to sleep under the same roof as their mummy and daddy. Meanwhile, the other communities are doing it in the same room, never mind the same roof, separated by a plywood partition or a torn curtain. Our little lords and ladies want soundproofing and privacy. These western ideas are harmful. (Family 401)
Mistry suggests that the Parsi Panchayat may intervene and advise the parents to allow the young couples to enjoy their privacy. It should also make arrangements to bring changes in the parents flat to suit their convenience. Rustom S. Gae, a Parsi scholar in “Causes and Effects of Decline in Parsi Population” comments upon the activities of the Parsi Panchayat regarding their earnest attempts to find ways and means to encourage the growth of population:

Some years ago, Trustees of Bombay Parsi Panchayat passed a resolution allowing Parsi women marrying outside the community under the special marriage Act, 1954, to avail of Doongerwadi facilities on their death in Mumbai. In the same magnanimity, they should accept children of such Parsi-women as Zoroastrians on performing their Navjote ceremony. In the larger interests of the community, Trustees should give a lead in the matter and thereby open the door for increase of the Parsi Population. (68)

The mortality rate which is high among the Parsis is also a contributory to the fall in population. Parkinson disease and Osteoporosis are described as Parsi diseases to which many Parsis fall prey. Kersi in “Lend Me Your Light” mourns over the downfall of his community due to the above diseases. He adds that highest divorce rate among his community members has also led to the fall. “The Parsi community has the highest divorce rate in India. It also
claims to be the most westernized community in India. Which is the result of
the other? Confusion again, of cause and effect” (Tales 230).

While the Parsi community regrets over the fall in their population, as
observed by Mistry it is contented that the “Parsis seem to be the only people
in India who follow the family planning message. Rest of the country is
breeding like rabbits” (Family 401). Being the most educated community, the
Parsis know the need for small families.

Inspector Masalavala has two suggestions to improve the population of
the Parsis:

First, our youth must be prohibited from going beyond a
bachelor’s degree. Give them cash incentives to study less. And
those who want to do post-graduate studies, tell them they will
get no funding from Panchayat unless they sign a contract to
have as many children as the number of people over age fifty in
their family. Maximum of seven—we don’t want to spoil the
health of our women. (Family 402)

Persian ancestors volunteered to give up their favorite homeland, Iran,
only to safeguard their holy religion. The only purpose behind their migration
was to free their religion from adulteration i.e mingling with the
Mohammedanism. They feared that if they were in Iran, the new Arabian
rulers might compel them to follow Mohammedans which would push their
religion into ruins. But the Parsi youth at present give no importance to their
religion as their ancestors. They scarcely visit the Fire Temples and think that the Fire Temple is a place where one has to go only on auspicious days. Mistry in *Family* highlights this by narrating an incident. On Seeing Murad and Jehangir with their father Yezad in the Fire Temple, the priest feels very happy. He comments, “It always makes me happy to see young people here” (Family 425). When Yezad invites his children to the Fire-Temple “Murad refused, saying it was not Navroze or Khordad Sal.” (Family 423).

Even though, Mistry tries to strike a balance between the elders and youngsters, the dominant theme of his novels is the father-son hostility which also constitutes a threat to the Parsi community. Gustad dreams the best future for his son Sohrab. He thinks if Sohrab joins IIT, “he will be the best engineer ever to graduate from there” (Journey 32). But Gustad’s attempt to admit his son in IIT ends in a fiasco. For, Sohrab’s mind lies not in science but in arts. He is too obstinate in his decision and Gustad gets upset. Gustad bursts in anger: “…he is not my son. My son is dead” (Journey 61). Sohrab decides to leave the house, since he is fed up with his father’s threats, “I’m not a little boy he can hit and punish” (Journey 148). Gustad recalls the accident from which he saved the life of his son: “Throwing away his future without reason. What have I not done for him, tell me? I even threw myself in front of a car. Kicked him aside, saved his life, and got this to suffer all my life” (Journey 61-62).
on his father's fanaticism "He's gone over the edge. Deep into the abyss of
religion" (Family 479). Yezad decides to disown Murad if he continues his
affair with the girl. In Mistry's novels the hostility between the father and the
son is only short-living. Towards the end they reconcile with each other.

Despite the routine domestic disharmony, Mistry points out, the Parsis
love their ancestors. The Parsis feel proud of their forefathers' contribution
for the development of India. Compared to their forefathers, Mistry ridicules
the Parsi men of today who are "useless, dithering idiots"(Family 49).

Dr. Fitter, Nariman's family friend, extols the merits of their forefathers:

When you think of our forefathers, the industrialists and
shipbuilders who established the foundation of modern India, the
philanthropists who gave us our hospitals and schools and
libraries and baags, what lustre they brought to our community
and the nation. (Family 49)

In another context, Yezad pays tribute to their ancestors: "They are the
elders and achievers of the community, the stalwarts. If there were more of
them alive today, the Parsi komm wouldn't be in such dire straits. They must
stay as an inspiration to us all. Especially to the boys" (Family 472).

Besides the socio-cultural agencies, the Parsi consciousness, as pointed
out in Mistry's works, is promoted by political factors. In the Post independent
era, the mind of the Parsis were preoccupied with an extreme sense of
insecurity. They felt that the Indian rulers would oust them from all kinds of
power and positions. As a result, they vehemently criticized the Congress leaders who have been ruling India from the beginning.

Generally, the Paris do not like Indira Gandhi and her administration. She, with her bold decision of nationalization of banks evoked little sympathy from the Parsis. This move, in fact, left a deep scar in the heart of every Parsi. Dinshawji, Gustad’s friend in Journey condemns her act and says “Parsis were the kings of banking in those days. Such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalized the banks” (Journey 45). The Parsis always remember, with delight, their glorious days in the past especially those during the British regime. The mind of Dinshawji dwells quite often on memories of those good old days:

Remember the olden times? When they took attendance just by counting the jackets hanging on the chairs? No bloody time-book nonsense. Arre, they trusted you in those days to do your work. Honour system. Jackets on the chair, hat on the rack, and you could go out for one-two hours, take a nap. No body minded. Age of honour and trust is gone for ever now. (Journey 173)

Indira Gandhi married Feroze Gandhi on 1942 March 26. Their marriage was an auspicious event for the Parsis. For them, a member of their community marrying the daughter of the country's Prime Minister was a
matter of pride. But their happiness did not last long as Indira Gandhi parted from Feroze Gandhi due to differences of opinion. It was said that Feroze Gandhi did not approve of her political ambition. Feroze Gandhi died of heart attack. The Parsis felt that his death was not a natural one. They believed that “Feroze’s heart attack was not really a heart attack” (Journey 234). They were aware of the fact that “Nehru never liked him from the beginning” (Journey 234). Mistry, in Journey places on record the discord between the two:

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, roles he had himself once played with great gusto and tremendous success. (Journey 13)

The Parsis are of the opinion that Indira Gandhi and her father were responsible for everything undesirable that has happened to this nation. Now, they blame Shiv Sena for trying to make the Parsis second class citizens. Dinshawji observes on Shiv Sena:

She [Indira Gandhi] is a shrewd woman, these are vote-getting tactics. Showing the poor she is on their side. saali always up to some mischief. Remember when her pappy was Prime Minister and he made her president of Congress Party? At once, she began encouraging the demands for a separate Maharashtra. How much bloodshed, how much rioting she caused. And today
we have that bloody Shiv Sena, wanting to make the rest of us into second-class citizens. Don't forget, she started it all by supporting the racist buggers. (Journey 45)

Major Bilimoria, presumably a fictitious replica of Rustom Sohrab Nagarwala, is a culprit involved in the notorious Nagarwala Case. In Journey, Mistry consciously narrates the pathetic story of the political victim, Bilimoria who was inescapably caught into the cobweb, cunningly woven by Indira Gandhi. It is said that Indira Gandhi had asked him to get sixty lakh from a State Bank Director on emergency to finance the Mukti Bhahini Movement started in East Bengal to fight against West Pakistan. Major Bilimoria, who was her devotee, obeyed her commands. Later, she asked him to confess that he only imitated the Prime Minister’s voice. He discovered later that the money was meant “to finance her son's car factory. Or could be for election fund, or may be....” (Journey 329). Realizing her trick, he sent ten lakh to his friend Gustad through Ghulam Mohammed. This scam soon came to light and he was arrested. To recover the amount from him, he was tortured and put into the jail. He got four years imprisonment and died in the prison hospital of heart attack. Mistry depicts the prisoner’s miserable plight:

On the bed lay nothing more than a shadow. The shadow of the powerful-built army man who once lived in Khodadad Building. His hair line had receded, and sunken cheeks made the bones just sharp and grotesque. The regal handle moustache was no
more. His eyes had disappeared within their sockets. The neck
... was as scrawny as poor behesti Dinshawji’s, while under the
sheet there seemed barely a trace of those strong shoulders and
deep chest which Gustad and Dilnavaz used to point out as a
good example to their sons, reminding them always to walk
erect, with chest out and stomach in like Major Uncle. (Journey 315-316)

The helplessness of the Bilimoria is vividly described:

Not what I should have done... but something very stupid.
Should have exposed the whole thing. Told the press, opposition
parties. Started an inquiry. But I thought, everything is
controlled by her. RAW, the courts, broadcasting... everything
is in her pocket, all will be covered up.... (Journey 329)

Nagarwala who was the alleged culprit in the scam, was a member of
Parsi community. Hence, the Parsis felt that the case has stained the Parsi icon.

Jaydipsinh Dodiya in “Such a Long Journey: A Critical Study”, portraits the
anguish of a Parsi regarding the Nagarwala Case:

The Nagarwala incident, because it involved a Parsi, jolted the
self-image of the community none less. Having long ago lost
their literature or the vandalism of Alexander the Accursed, and
their dance, music, art, poetry, even their language to the process
of adapting to a new home in India the Parsis have developed a
particularized culture culled from a mixture of ancient myth and legend overlaid by a life sustaining sense of recent achievement. Gratified to have earned an honourable place in the country of their adoption through their contribution to every field of endeavour and proud of having retained a strong ethical tradition, the Parsis were deeply anguished by the ambivalent role Nagarwala had played in the sordid story. (72)

As a Parsi, Mistry could not imagine a Parsi to be involved in a sordid political game. He condemns Indira Gandhi’s act and asks rhetorically “what hope for the country? With such crooked leaders?” (Journey 329). He abuses the politicians in no generous words, “those bastards, those ministers and politicians, those ugly buffaloes and pigs...getting fatter and fatter, sucking our blood”(Journey 330). According to Major Bilimoria, Indira is shrewd woman and she would finish off her enemies by making use of many techniques. He suspects that his friend Ghulam’s life is also in danger. Because, “They tried to finish him off on his Lambretta. Their favourite way, traffic accident” (Journey 328).

Mistry expresses his dislike for Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi through Sohrab. Sanjay Gandhi started two motor sheds in Haryana for producing Maruti cars and he obtained a loan from nationalized banks by force. This was questioned by the opposition parties in the parliament.
Newspapers described it as "Indira's Watergate". Sohrab speaks for the writer thus:

But what about the leaders who do wrong? Like the car manufacturing licence going to Indira's son? He said Mummy, I want to make motorcars. And right away he got the licence. He has already made a fortune from it, without producing a single Maruti. Hidden in Swiss bank accounts. (Journey 81)

Apart from politics, the sense of rootlessness and nationless are also major factors in the Parsi consciousness. India is the host for the Parsis. They feel that the Indian politicians treat them in a step-motherly way. Since most of the Parsis are living in Bombay in Maharashtra, the Parsis have a vile disgust for the fascist party, Shiv Sena. They consider Shiv Sena as the enemies of the minorities. Mistry has bitter memories of Shiv Sena and he expresses his fear of and hatred for the party. Shiv Sena has appointed Tehmul to distribute racist pamphlets. But Tehmul becomes the victim to their evil plan. He is beaten up by a group of outraged South Indians. Mistry dovetails:

Shiv Sena had recruited him [Tehmul] to distribute racist pamphlets aimed against minorities in Bombay. They had promised him a Kwality Choc-O-Bar if he did a good job. Gustad, returning from the bank, saw him, on the verge of being
beaten up by a group of outraged South Indians who worked in the office building down the road. (*Journey* 103)

Dinshawji’s anguish represents the Parsi mind. According to him, Shiv Sena knows only “to have rallies at Shivaji Park, shout slogans, make threats, and change road names” (*Journey* 87). To him, the Maratha regime is a “Gandoo Raj” (*Journey* 87). Gustad in a dejected mood, muses: “No future for minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America - twice as good as the white man to get half as much” (*Journey* 65).

Yezad hates Shiv Sena for its attitude towards minorities in Bombay for the past thirty years. Mistry ridicules Shiv Sena for conducting Michael Jackson’s concert in Bombay:

Michael Jackson’s crotch-clutching and his shiny codpiece must be vital to the nation. I’m surprised the Senapati [Paul Thakeray] doesn't find him anti-anything, not even anti-good taste. Otherwise, the crackpot accuses people left and right of being anti-this or anti-that. South Indians are anti-Bombay, Valentine’s Day is anti-Hindustan, film stars born before 1947 in Pakistani part of Punjab are traitors to the country. (*Family* 30-31)

Nariman butts in, and humorously observes on Pal Thakerey. “I suppose... if the Senapati gets gas after eating karela [bitter gourd], the gourd will be declared an anti-Indian vegetable” (*Family* 31).
Being a minority, Parsis are always afraid of the Shiv Sena and its members. They could not oppose them as they have both money power and muscle power. Two drunken Shiv Sena men tease Roxana before Yezad. They sing a vulgar song “Choli Kay Peechhay kya Hai” (Family 41). Yezad becomes furious and wants to show his physical power. But they laugh hysterically and caution him, “Don’t tingle-tangle with us, bavaji! We are Shiv Sena people, we are invincible” (Family 42). When Jehangir wants to react to the situation Roxana reminds him of their position. She says, “You shouldn’t react to such loafers. Especially two together” (Family 42). This testifies to their fear for the dominant. Since Shiv Sena agitation with the slogan “Maharashtra for Maharashtrians”, the linguistic minorities in Bombay have been living in fear. They always feel insecure. The government employees equally frightened the public:

...workers nowadays thought no end of themselves, strutting around like peacocks, ever since all this Shiv Sena agitation about Maharashtra for Maharashtrians, threatening strikes and Bombay bundh all the time with no respect for the public; bus drivers and conductors were the worst, behaving as if they owned the buses and were doing favours to commuters, pulling the bell before you were in the bus, the driver purposely braking and moving with big jerks to make the standees lose their
balance, the conductor so rude if you did not have the right change. (Tales 231)

Unlike the other minorities, Parsis hardly protest against the mainstream community. Naturally, they become the victims. Mistry’s Parsi characters are victims of some sort or other. During partition “when two nations incarnated out of one” (Balance 236), Farokh Kohlah lost his land: “A foreigner drew a magic line on a map and called it the new border; it became a river of blood upon the earth. And the orchards, fields, factories, business, all on the wrong side of that line, vanished with a wave of the pale conjuror’s wand” (Balance 236).

The demolition of Babri Masjith has led to severely unpleasant situations throughout India especially in Bombay. Though the Parsis did not have any hand in this incident, they were victimized. Their feelings of insecurity is further strengthened by this event. In Family, Mistry expresses his shock at a real incident in which a Parsi couple were mistakenly killed in their bedroom by the rioters under the impression that they were Muslims. He writes, “How often does a mosque in Ayodhya turn people into savages in Bombay” (Family 5). The Parsis still have the fear of another riot in Mumbai. Villie Cardmaster, Yezad’s neighbour expresses her fear when she sees a person suspiciously roaming around their place. She feels that “…he was most likely from Shiv Sena, listing names and addresses that’s how they had singled
out Muslim homes during the Babri Mosque riots. Probably planning ahead for next time” (Family 101).

The corruption prevalent in every walk of life in India, especially among politicians, suffocates the Parsis. They do not have much respect for them. Mistry raises his accusing finger at them, “Because the country has gone to the dogs. And not well-bred dogs either, but pariahs” (Family 30). He regrets, “Corruption is in the air we breathe. This nation specializes in turning honest people into crooks” (Family 30). Sohrab, a student in Journey too shares the same sentiment. He quotes Major Bilimoria's view: “Only two choices: communism or military dictatorship, if you want to get rid of these Congress Party crooks. Forget democracy for a few years, not meant for a starving country” (Journey 81). Dr. Paymaster describes India as a patient who needs urgent surgery for its wound:

...our beloved country is a patient with gangrene at an advanced stage. Dressing the wound or sprinkling rose-water over it to hide the stink of rotting tissue is useless. Fine words and promises will not cure the patient. The decaying part must be excised. You see, the municipal corruption is merely the bad smell, which will disappear as soon as the gangrenous government at the centre is removed. (Journey 369)

Pandit in “Fiction Across Worlds: Some Writers of Indian Origin in Canada” says that much of Mistry’s mind is taken up with the thought of
Gustad is fed up because the compound wall of the Khodadad building is used as a common latrine by the passers-by. He appoints pavement artist to change the stinking wall into a holy wall which will be a “perfect example for our secular country” (Journey 253). The wall is emblematic of the Parsis’ security. Inspector Bamji, who always uses abusive language, talks with Gustad, regarding the Municipality’s decision to raze the wall to the ground, “If the bastards break down this wall, it will completely fuck up our privacy” (Journey 150). Gustad’s mind is totally shattered since “the collapse of the wall would wreck the past and the future” (Journey 388). He laments, “Nothing is beyond the government. Ordinary people like us are helpless against them” (Journey 399). The destruction of the wall symbolically leads to the absorption of the minority and majority cultures.

The Parsis do not have much faith in Indian education. Sohrab decides to learn arts instead of joining IIT, but Gustad blames the Indian education system and observes, “Every bloody peon or two paisa clerk is a BA these days” (Journey 82). Gustad asks his son to learn job oriented subjects.

The Parsis have very poor opinion of Indian politics. Yezad is not happy with the political system in India. He compells Kapur to contest the municipal election. When Kapur asks whether Yezad would vote for him, the latter replies: “For the last seven or eight years, I haven’t voted in any election not local not in national. But for you I will vote early and I will vote often” (Family 159). Yezad represents the Parsi consciousness and his attitude
towards election bears testimony that the Parsis are not interested in Indian politics.

Parsis lament the scarcity of great leaders in India. According to them, once good leaders flooded the nation. Nowadays, India has only fools, "Nincompoops" (Family 52) but not leaders. Current Indian leaders fail to command and respect throughout the world unlike the leaders of the past like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. Ranga Rajan, the doctor and student of Nariman in Family has the following remark to make:

Although after the collapse of the Soviet Union, welcome for Indians is not as warm as before. In the old days there was love between us-how many Russian boy-babies were named Jawahar, girl- babies named Indira. Nowadays, I, don't think any Russians are naming their children Narasimha or Atal Behari.

(Family 51 - 52)

Sharing Ranga Rajan's sentiment, Nariman asks: "This five-thousand-year-old civilization, nine hundred million people, cannot produce one great leader? How much we need a Mahatma these days" (Family 52).

The Parsis think that, "India is a country of despair and ruin" (Tales 178). They are often haunted by the thought of going in search of fresh woods and pastures new:

There is a lot of opportunity in Toronto. We've seen advertisements in newspapers from England, where Canadian
immigration is encouraging people to go to Canada. Of course, they won't advertise in a country like India—who would want these bloody ghatis to come charging into their fine land?—but the office in New Delhi is holding interviews and selecting highly qualified applicants. (Tales 178)

Jamshed in “Lend Me Your light” reveals his extreme hatred for India. He is deadly tired of India and goes to the USA. He condemns Indian shop keepers who are “Very cunning…. 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” (Tales 183). Parsi parents want their sons to migrate to the West. For, there is “no future in this stupid place” (Tales 178). They feed their children with the stories of the West. Jehangir in “Squatter” loves Behroze but his mother does not approve of his affair. Jehangir’s mother wants his son to live “in the land of milk” (Tales 168).

The religion of the Parsis and that of their host society differ considerably. They cannot cope with the religion of the mainstream community. Snake, an important symbol, is worshipped in India. It is considered to be the keepers of life energy. In many of the Hindu Temples, serpents are represented as guardians at the entrance. In India, especially in Maharashtra, Naga Pancami, a feast in honour of the snakes, is celebrated every year. According to the legend, it is celebrated to commemorate the triumphant return of Lord Krishna from the banks of the Yamuna after
destroying the great Serpent Kaliya. On that day, the snake charmers display their reptiles and make a good profit. To the Parsis, snakes are frightful reptiles. Gustad expresses his fear of the snakes:

The black rubber strips were particularly frightful during August, with the Naag Panchmi festival approaching, when every street corner featured snake-charmers collecting alms from devotees anxious to feed the cobras a little milk in exchange for reptilian blessings. In the dark, it was easy to mistake a six-foot strip of black rubber for an escape from the snake-charmer's basket. (Journey 185)

Gustad’s fear of the snakes and the community’s absence of faith in Naga Pancami illustrates that the Parsis have only scant respect for the Hindu religious rites. The Parsis have an aversion to Hinduism and its religious practices, which cause environmental pollution. The Canadian immigrant Kersi in the short story “Swimming Lessons”, dwells on his nostalgia for Mumbai. He feels that the Indians misuse the Chaupatty sea and he condemns the Hindu custom of immersing the clay idols of the lord Ganesh into the sea. He condemns coconut day celebration, when coconuts are chucked into the sea. He admits that the Parsis are also using the sea but for a sacred purpose. He remarks:

We used the sea, too, to deposit the leftovers from Parsi religious ceremonies, things such as flowers, or the ashes of the sacred
sandalwood fire which just could not be dumped with the regular garbage but had to be entrusted to the care of Avan Yazad, the guardian of the sea. And things which were of no use but which no one had the heart to destroy were also given to Avan Yazad such as old photographs. (Tales 235)

As the Parsis are conceited about their culture and religion they look down upon the Hindus and also the Catholics. They are of the view that the Catholics are not hygienic. For, they “wiped their arses with paper instead of washing hygienically” (Family 14). Dinshawji quite unwittingly makes the observation that Catholic women lack morality and “Everything they would open up” (Journey 118). Yezad turns pious and adheres strictly to the law of Zoroastrianism. He scolds Murad for having affair with a Hindu girl, “A Parsi girl would never behave in such a way” (Family 470). Murad decides to invite Anjali on his 18th birthday. Yezad protests and says that if he calls her, he will “vomit on the dining table” (Family 473). At last a compromise is reached. Yezad agrees to let Anjali but on the condition that a special rearrangement of the furniture must be made “It must be deployed to form a barricade at the appropriate distance from the prayer cabinet” (Family 482). The Parsis fear the trespass of other religion upon theirs. They fear that it may handicap their religion. Coomy's parents are afraid of sending her to a Catholic school:

Like most non-Christian families, Coomy's parents too questioned from time to time if this school was the best place for
their child. They were not worried about Jal, he was safe in Bharda New High School, but they wondered if there might not be too much of a Catholic flavour in Coomy’s education, especially since there was so little Zoroastrian influence to countervail it. They felt their Parsi customs were seriously handicapped by the lack of any entertaining Santa Claus type of figure. (Family 376)

Though the Parsis are suspicious of other religions, they exercise tolerance towards the religion of the mainstream community. Journey affords evidences for this truth. In Journey, the black stone wall of the Khodadad Building is symbolic that it protects the Parsi occupants from being influenced by the outside world. The wall which is over six feet high, protects them from “non Parsi eyes while they prayed with the glow spreading in the east” (Journey 99).

However, the pedestrians spoil the environment and the wall by urinating and defecating at the side of the wall. So, Gustad decides to change the wall into a sacred wall by painting the pictures of the deities on it to avoid the urinators. The pavement artist under the instruction of Gustad superimposes the pictures of all the deities of various religions. Soon the wall turns holy. Those who urinated earlier offer gifts to their gods.

The wall is the venue for the summit of all religious deities. Rabadi, the occupant of the khodadad building asks the artist to draw the picture of
Dustoorji Baria, a Parsi priest. Inspector Bamji denounces the drawing by saying that it is only the picture of a charlatan, but the pavement artist expresses his religious tolerance:

You see, I don't like to weaken anyone's faith. Miracle, magic, mechanical trick, coincidence—does it matter what it is, as long as it helps? Why analyse the strength of the imagination, the power of suggestion, power of auto suggestion, the potency of psychological pressures? Looking too closely is destructive, makes everything disintegrate. As it is, life is difficult enough. Why to simply make it tougher? After all, who is to say what makes a miracle and what makes a coincidence? (Journey 342)

Despite their religious tolerance and readiness to mingle with the mainstream community, the Parsis prefer to migrate to various countries. Seligman in Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences observes:

Emigration most commonly occurs when a condition of maladjustment arises. It is characteristically an act of escape. In very rare cases the motive may be a patriotic or missionary one, to extend an empire or propagate a faith, but the overwhelmingly dominant influence is the thwarting of an individual or group. Those who emigrate are those who are badly adjusted to the culture pattern of their home group. The successful do not emigrate. (489)
Emigration is an act of leaving one's native country to settle in another country. The people immigrate to other countries for several reasons. It may be due to political, economic or personal reasons. But it is true that the thought of emigration comes in one's mind when he/she is not successful in one's land.

Those who move to other countries face vast cultural differences. They distance themselves from their present home and it quite naturally leads them to feel alienated. They try to assert their identity by preserving their original culture, tradition and language in an alien land. Parsis in large numbers migrate to foreign countries hoping to attain good status. But in western countries also, they are not granted any elite status. They are categorized as Asians. Nilufer E. Bharucha in “When Old Tracks are Lost: Rohinton Mistry’s Fiction as Diasporic Discourse” describes their status in the West:

In colonial times, the Parsis enjoyed a privileged status as brokers between the British and other Indians. They became very westernized and identified almost completely with the colonial masters. This in turn has created problems in post colonial India where their social and economic status has been much downgraded, prompting many Parsis to move to the west and shed their Indian identities. This too has resulted in psychological trauma as in the West, they have been lumped together with other Asian groups-specially Indians. (24)
Nevertheless, most of the migrated Parsis want to come back to India since they face serious handicap in the foreign soil. Mistry is basically a folk singer. He migrated to Canada in 1975 with the hope of establishing himself as a singer. But he failed in his attempt and became a writer. Like most of the emigrated Parsis, he also wants to come back to India. This is well known from Mistry’s yearning to merge with his community members in India.

Mistry expresses his longing to return to India through Yezad in Family. Yezad earlier is eager to emigrate to Canada for he wants “clean cities, clean air, plenty of water, trains with seats for everyone” (Family 131). It indicates the Parsi eagerness to achieve economic status with a view to ensuring security in life. But in the end, he decides not to emigrate to Canada and he destroys the letters, forms and photocopies related to his intended emigration. When Roxana enquires about it, he bursts out, “Getting rid of garbage” (Family 246).

Nariman Hansotia, the story teller in “Squatter” narrates the story of a Parsi immigrant who has experienced difficulties in assimilating the life of Canada. Sarosh, the immigrant briefly narrates his terrific condition in Canada, “for some it was good and for some it was bad, but for me life in the land of milk and honey was just a pain in the posterior” (Tales 168). Immigrant Parsis always think about India as they are not quite at ease in the western countries. They, at times, express their sense of guilt for having left India. Kersi feels
like Tiresias, wavering in mind, "I Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto...." (Tales 180).

Kersi, who settles down in Canada writes stories, but the stories depict only the life in Bombay and of the Parsis. For, he could neither fit himself with the melting pot Canada nor discover any interesting events there to serve his literary purpose. His father is at his wits end:

...that there will be some story based on his Canadian experience, that way we will know something about our son's life there, if not through his letters then in his stories; so far they are all about Parsis and Bombay, and the one with a little bit about Toronto, where a man perches on top of the toilet, is shameful and disgusting, although it is funny at times and did make me laugh, I have to admit, but where does he get such an imagination from, what is the point of such a fantasy. (Tales 245-246)

Though it seems that the Parsis hate India outwardly, at the heart of heart they love India very much. Mistry depicts their love for India as innate and unshakable. During Chinese invasion, the Indians proved their patriotic fervour by donating things, throwing blankets and sweaters out of the windows into the open lorries that passed by before their houses. But their helps did not reach the sufferers. Mistry portrays how the things donated by
the people during Bangladesh war were sold in the Chor bazaar. He mourns as a real Indian:

What a time it was, and it brought tears of pride and joy into the eyes of everyone to see such solidarity, such generosity. Afterwards, it was said that some of the donated goods had turned up for sale in Chor Bazaar and Nul Bazaar, and in the stalls of roadside hawkers everywhere, though not much attention was paid to that nasty allegation; the glow of national unity was still warm and comforting. (Journey 12)

Yezad wants to migrate to Canada, which is “not only just the land of milk and honey, also the land of deodorant and toiletry” (Family 131). The Canadian immigration officer Mazobashi asks many questions to Yezad at the interview in connection with his migration. Yezad struggles to answer and the officer comments: “You Indians,... you are no naive. You want to go and freeze your butts in a country you understand nothing about, just to make a pile of money. Well, thanks for your interest in Canada, we’ll let you know” (Family 244). Yezad’s retorts to the officer’s remark spiritedly like a really patriotic citizen of India:

You have sat here abusing us, abusing Indians and India, one of the many countries your government drains of its brainpower, the brainpower that is responsible for your growth and prosperity. Instead of having the grace to thank us, you spew
your prejudices and your bigoted ideas. You, whose people suffered racism and Xenophobia in Canada, where they were Canadian citizens, put in camps like prisoners of war-you, sir, might be expected, more than anyone else, to understand and embody the more enlightened Canadian ideals of multiculturalism. But if you are anything to go by, then Canada is a gigantic hoax. (Family 245)

The above observation made by Yezad on India bears testimony to the Parsis' patriotism. For Yezad, India is easily better than Canada:

...unemployment, violent crime, homelessness, language laws of Quebec. Not much difference between there and here, he would think: we have beggars in Bombay, they have people freezing to death on Toronto streets; instead of high-and low-caste fighting, racism and police shootings; separatists in Kashmir, separatists in Quebec-why migrate from the frying pan into the fire? (Family 132)

Finally Yezad gives up the idea of leaving India, which he once considered a place of "disaffection" (Family 241). According to Nariman, leaving India and settling in another country is a greatest mistake. He thinks, "emigration is an enormous mistake. The biggest anyone can make in their life. The loss of home leaves a hole that never fills" (Family 246).
his sense of relief: "Gustad felt relief: now I can cancel the trip with a clear conscience" (Journey 303). A deep sense of alienation has possessed him in Delhi. He feels, "very alone as the auto-rickshaw rattled away. Wish I was inside it. Heading back to the railway station" (Journey 314). He does not have the eagerness to meet his friend Bilimoria whom he has missed for a long time. He is now occupied with a "feeling of profound loss and desolation, of emptiness" (Journey 315). Major Bilimoria regrets his decision of leaving Bombay. He moans: "How I miss Khodadad Building ...wish I never took Delhi posting. But I can come back...in four years" (Journey 317).

Mistry, in Family, expresses his love for Bombay through the Punjabi character, namely, Kapur. During partition in 1947, Kapur and his family had to flee from Punjab to Bombay but the city whole heartedly welcomed them. He recollects, "We had to run. And we came here. But Bombay treated us well. My father started over, with zero, and became prosperous. Only city in the world where this is possible" (Family 145). Kapur speaks further about Bombay:

What I feel for Bombay you will never know. It's like the pure love for a beautiful woman, gratitude for her existence, and devotion for her living presence. If Bombay were a creature of flesh and blood, with my blood type, Rh- negative-and very often I think she is -then I would give her a transfusion down to my last drop, to save her life. (Family 146)
Parsis regret their beloved Bombay being “in an unholy nexus of politicians, criminals, and police” (Family 145). It becomes the playground of the politicians. They feel that Bombay is in the grip of all illegal activities, including Matka, an illegal play. “Matka is Bombay and Bombay is Matka” (Family 200).

Bombay is a symbol of secularism. “In her heart there is room for everyone who wants to make a home here” (Family 152). It provides refuge to all irrespective of creed, religion, and caste. Since Bombay is cosmopolitan, it welcomes all and sundry. The memories of Bombay always haunt Mistry and his love for her is expressed in Shakespearean hyperbole:

This beautiful city of seven islands, this jewel by the Arabian Sea, this reclaimed land, this ocean gift transformed into ground beneath our feet, this enigma of cosmopolitanism where races and religions live side by side and cheek by jowl in peace and harmony, this diamond of diversity, this generous goddess who embraces the poor and the hungry and the huddled masses, this Urbs Prima in Indis, this dear, dear city now languishes. (Family 154)

Mistry even goes to the extent of comparing Bombay with Shakespeare for its infinite variety. He says, “Shakespeare is like Bombay. In them both, you can find whatever you need—they contain the universe” (Family 295). Mistry appreciates Bombay for providing ideal living condition
to people. "Bombay endures because it gives and it receives. Within this warp and weft is woven the special texture of its social fabric, the spirit of tolerance, acceptance, generosity. Anywhere else in the world, in those so-called civilized places like England and America, such terrible conditions would lead to revolution" (Family 152).

Kapur decides to live in Bombay. He is ready to accept, "everything my city has to offer" (Family 336). He further says "I want to mingle with her people, be part of that crush of bodies in the streets and trains and buses. Become one with the organic whole that is Bombay" (Family 336). For him "Bombay is a religion" (Family 350). He loves Bombay. But Bombay has betrayed him. He breathes his last in his beloved Bombay soil due to the atrocities caused by the Shiv Sena.

Broadly speaking, the Parsis contribute a lot to the development of the city Bombay. Thanks to their tireless efforts, Bombay has become an industrialized city. They are proud of their contribution, "we Parsis were the ones who built this beautiful city made it prosper" (Family 404).

To sum up, the Parsis being an ethno-religious minority community suffer all the disadvantages of a miniscule minority in India. But they never wish to give up the tradition, culture, religion and belief systems of their community. Having discussed the Parsi consciousness in Mistry's fiction, the next chapter analyses the major political strifes in India and their impact on the Parsis.