Conclusion: Community Novel and Hybridized Cultures

I

Cultural studies make culture the centre of social and literary analysis. Culture breaking its precious bondage of literature, music and theatre, has become the ensemble of meanings, beliefs, values, norms and rituals, which structure a society. It is both a source of meaning for individuals and communities and an ideological force related to power dynamic (a force of both domination and resistance). ‘Grand narratives’ have lost their power and post-modern culture is featured not by the loss of beliefs but by the acceptance of the plurality of beliefs with out the need—or credible effort—to create a hierarchy of truth. New Historicism fuses together literature, ethnography, anthropology, art history, and other disciplines in such a way that its politics, its innovation, its historicality, and its liaison to other existing discourses all remain open questions.

Those who belong to post-colonial camp maintain a distinct social identity rooted in colonial experience and a unique social perspective, and they insist upon analyzing nations in their interdependence, particularly in relation to their history of colonialism with its ambivalent characters. The self or subject has become more fluid, and multiple being put into webs of discourses that always station in multiple, intersecting ways. Thus, it provides a rationale for a coalitional-based politics that demands equality and respect for difference. Whereas modernity was allegedly constructed on the destruction of community and postmodernity on the eclipse of the social, which had characterized the age of modernity, we can see how community has in fact become a key concern of some of the more recent postmodernist approaches (Delanty, 114,128).

There can be no (single) truth about the world, and our knowledge of ‘reality’ is always a construct, mediated by the multifarious contexts we inhabit (race, gender, economy, culture and so on). ‘Truth,’ that is, about justice, beauty, morality, progress, events, is therefore radically relative, there being no ‘essential’ meaning to things which the subject can apprehend as ‘object’ of his knowledge. There is no authoritative projection into the future and no ‘objective’ history from which to derive it (Lemon, 359). Man’s own reflective insight into his consciousness has revealed the fallacy of a world which can be ‘represented’ in objective, universalist terms. So in the field of culture, we see two contradictory but knotted historical processes that are operating simultaneously: a
globalizing tendency, where the economics and cultures around the world are being fixed more and more in pervasive global webs; and a localizing tendency, expressed in its extreme form by a number of insurgencies on the basis of ethnic, religious and other local identities.

Aspiration behind global community is to form a world-wide historical field, involving the development of global memory based on shared global experience. This aspiration may well be related to man’s longing for the totality of epic experience. Lukacs envisages that creators of ancient epics were at peace in their communities because they could capture the totality of the communities’ experiences. This totality expressed a world "where everything is already homogeneous before it has been contained by forms…where knowledge is virtue and virtue is happiness, where beauty is the meaning of the world made visible." (Lukacs, 40-1). But unlike national cultures, a global culture is memoryless. When the ‘nation’ can be constructed to draw upon and renew dormant popular experiences and needs, there are no ‘world memories’ that can be utilized ‘to unite humanity.’ (Smith, 172-92).

We also see that so called ‘national memory’ is also losing its power, as those small communities inside national territories are showing interest in recovering their specific cultural memory, and huge migrations and transnational formation of diasporic communities with their double/triple loyalties towards nations demanding a re-examination of the old shared national memories. So ‘community’ has become a chief area of cultural expression and political identification, of maintaining cultural sameness and difference and of historical specificity. Traditional communities which are based on shared beliefs, values, and norms, history, and a strong sense of group membership, no doubt, provide their members with stability, passing the culture from one generation to the next and resisting change. But this old concept of community has been under evolution as post-colonialism, immigration and globalism compel cultures to mix with each others and put the question of cultural purity itself under severe investigation.

This ‘return’ to community or a ‘recovery’ of community makes us assume that community was a thing of the past and the present is poorer for letting it pass. The idea of community is expressed in terms of personal proximity and face-to-face contact zone. It entails voice, a ‘moral voice’, and social responsibility rests on person responsibility.

182
Unlike the communities of the past, which were spatial and fixed, ‘emotional community’ is unstable and open, a product of the fragmentation of the social and the disintegration of mass culture. People are increasingly finding themselves in temporary networks, or ‘tribes’, organized around lifestyles and images. Community still involves proximity but this is something temporary and has no fixed purpose characterized by ‘fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal’. It serves to ‘re-enchant’ the world and to provide a sense of solidarity that draws its strength from proximity (Maffesoli, 76, 104).

Understandably, as people move beyond an abstract and ideological universalism they go to the roots of cultural and ethnic identities as foundations for personal and social life. But there has emerged as well differences between the identities of many groups which easily can turn into conflictual relations, especially under the stimulus of the competition for political power. Hence, beyond the positive process of rebuilding an intellectual and cultural life, an economy and a political structure, in some areas there have been significant tensions between groups within a country. In some instances these have degenerated into violence, atrocity and genocide. It situates cultural values in the basic struggle of peoples to avoid non-being and to build a way of life that enables them to flourish as persons and as peoples.

Over time, this set of values and corresponding virtues, hammered out in facing crises and striving for human fulfillment, comes to constitute a culture by which human life can be cultivated, passed on and adapted to the succeeding generations. In this light cultural identity can be seen as the cumulative wisdom and freedom of a people, which can be expected to be promoted and where necessary, defended at all costs. In this light any approach by way of compromising or diminishing the importance of a people’s cultural identity would appear simply to miss the issue, indeed to worsen the problem while looking for a response (Hroch, et.al, 1,2).

But this turn to community, be it in sociology, in politics or in literature, has its own danger too. “In our wish to make ourselves heard,” Edward Said notes insightfully, “we tend very often to forget that the world is a crowded place, and that if everyone were to insist on the radical purity or priority of one’s voice, all we would have would be the awful din of unending strife, and a bloody political mess, the true horror of which is beginning to be perceptible here and there in the re-emergence of racist politics in
Europe, the cacophony of debates over political correctness and identity politics in the United States, and—to speak about my own part of the world—the intolerance of religious prejudice and illusionary promises of Bismarckian despotism, ala Saddam Hussein and his numerous Arab epigones and counterparts.” (Said, 1993:xxiii) In India, the rise of Shiv Sena Hindu fundamentalist and the ethnic conflicts in the North-East are the examples.

Impracticality of this longing for national or global homogeneity makes rootless contemporary writers turn to novelistic narrative to give expression to their mobile unstable existence. This rightly tallies with Lukacs’ perspective that in contrast to epic, the novel is "an expression of transcendental homelessness" because the novelist can never recapture the perfect wholeness of the community (41). While the novelist desires to give expression to his/her vision of the world, the very act of giving novelistic form to the vision foregrounds the impossibility of rendering the vision in its totality, or as Lukacs explains "form giving...points eloquently at the sacrifice that has had to be made, at the paradise forever lost, sought and never found" (85). Subsequently a novelist’s turn to community may well encounter this longing for totality, which is an impossibility. A vision of a community, be it that of a national, global or small one, with hard edges and specifically labeled pointers goes against the structure of the novel which emphasizes the break down and blurring of boundaries.

Languages of the diasporic experiences develop within the new context their own complex histories of representation and hybrid textualities. Multicultural literature which is a globalized manifestation of the local culture in writing, or varied writings embedded in their immediate particular communities, is one facet of this phenomenon. Different but equal is the leitmotif of multiculturalism whether in political or literary theory. But one can argue that the liberal principle of neutrality as well as the emphasis on universal rights of citizenship has, in some contexts, sustained the dominance of the majority community in society. When religion, race, gender, caste and class were identified as the primary basis of discrimination, the attempt was to include people of all identities in the political domain by extending the same rights of citizenship to all people.

However, multiculturalism mistrusts the pursuit of uniformity because it is usually a way of establishing the hegemony of the majority community within the polity.
Historically, in the formation of the nation-states in Europe, officially recognized religion and language structured the norms that defined the public sphere. While they helped weld together a political community, they did so by eliminating minorities and differences. Multiculturalism builds upon these experiences to underline the need for heterogeneity and diversity in the public sphere (Mahajan, 23-25).

In the case of ‘identity politics,’ that is, political groupings that advocate agendas based on race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, there has been an increasing criticism. Although the making of identities involves an active process of inclusion and exclusion, there is no identity that is without the dialogic relationship to the Other. To be ‘us’, we need those who are ‘not-us’. The imaginary procedure of constructing traditions and of re-imagining collective memories continues in the course of time. In recent years, one issue that one has become alert to about the history of identity politics is not one that has progressed unproblematically from resistance to a broader politics of democratic struggle.

While the intensification of identity politics has been envisaged by some as defying cultural homogeneity and granting spaces for marginal subaltern communities to assert the legacy and significance of their respective voices and experiences, it has often failed to move beyond a notion of difference structured in polarizing binarisms and an uncritical appeal to a discourse of authenticity. Identity politics may have permitted several previously silenced and displaced groups to emerge from the margins and to reassert and reclaim suppressed identities and experiences. In doing so, however, they have often substituted one master narrative for another, invoking a politics of separatism, and suppressed differences within their own ‘liberatory’ narrative (Giroux, 1-27).

Another argument is that such politics hardens boundaries between oppressed groups and, further, stops them from mobilizing collectively around the more important issues of class division and economic inequity. The critics of identity politics insist that multiculturalists must ‘stretch beyond’ their cultures and identities, beyond a shaky coalition of outgroups, beyond the demands that have nothing to do with a larger concern for our common humanity and everything to do with a narrow concern for fragmented and supposedly oppositional cultures. Moreover, a debate has been going on among multiculturalists themselves about the inadequacy, incompleteness or possible transience.
of identity labels like ‘black’ or ‘gay’ or ‘Latino’ in the west. Many minority intellectuals 
are troubled about the inability of overarching categories or labels to represent accurately 
the complexities and sometimes overlapping identities of individual lives.

There is danger too in referring to ‘communities’ as if they were homogenous 
units rather than the sites of contradiction they actually are. Yet one holds on to a group 
identity, despite its insufficiencies, because for most non-mainstream people it is the 
closest one has ever achieved to having a political home and a voice. Despite the 
simplification of identity politics, despite its being a kind of prison, it is also, 
paradoxically, a haven. It is at once confining and empowering. And in the absence of 
alternative havens, group identity will for many of the minorities or the marginalized 
continue to be the appropriate site of resistance and the main source of comfort, of 
literary occupation (Duberman, internet).

II

Hybridity, in fact, has been a permanent feature of art and cultural discourse in 
spite of its recent declaration as a mark of the postmodern, postcolonial and post-
nationalist moment. One can say that the celebration of hybridity is itself a kind of jujitsu, 
since within colonial discourse the investigation of hybridity was associated with the 
prejudice against race-mixing, the ‘degeneration of blood,’ and the alleged infertility of 
mulattoes. But if the nationalist discourse of the 1960s drew sharp lines between First 
World and Third World, oppressor and oppressed, post-nationalist discourse replaces 
such binary dualisms with a more nuanced spectrum of subtle differentiations, in a new 
global regime where First World and Third World are reciprocally overlapped.

As a result, accepted wisdom of ontologically referential identity transmute into a 
conjunctural play of identifications. Purity gives way to ‘contamination.’ Rigid models 
and postures crumple into sliding metonyms and multiplicity of ‘positionalities.’ Once 
secure boundaries become more porous, an iconography of barbed-wire frontiers 
metamorphoses into images of fluidity and crossing. A rhetoric of unsullied integrity 
gives way to miscegenated grammars and scrambled metaphors. A discourse of ‘media 
imperialism’ gives way to reciprocity and ‘indigenization.’ Colonial tropes of 
irreconcilable dualism give way to postcolonial tropes drawing on the diverse modalities
of mixedness: religious (syncretism); botanical (hybridity); linguistic (creolization) and human-genetic (mestizaje) (Stam, internet).

Although early anti-imperialist critics like DuBois and Fanon depended on unproblematic designs of ethnic identity or to ideals of a traditional ‘people’s culture,’ later thinkers have spotted out the similarity of racist and racialist ideologies as well as the mistakes of supposing the uncomplicated continuation of such things as ethnic identities where fluctuation, change, and temporary blood-line arrangements are more likely to be the situation. Others have contended that recourse to a supposedly more authentic traditional culture as a counterpoint to imperial or neocolonial domination merely reduces the complex history of cultural change to an inaccurate folkloric myths and selectively privileges quaint ‘tribal’ practices which are misconstrued as original and without history.

For the feminists, it is contended that there would be no ethnic identity without the forced containment and channeling of women’s reproductive capacities along consanguine family and clan lines and that the privileging of ideals of ethnic or national cultural identity conceals internal fissures of gender and sexual domination. And Poststructuralists argue other concepts of identity, from the nation or the ethnic group to the national culture, are no longer relevant to a transnational, migratory, and diasporic world culture. Experience of geographic displacement teaches us that all the supposedly stable equations of place, ethnos, and national political institution are imaginary constructs and they relocate displacement by substituting for the history of permanent migratory dislocation an ontologizing image of home or of a homeland, a proper place where a bogus pure ethos can substantiate itself (Rivkin and Ryan, 853-4).

The fact is that there are hardly ever ‘pure’ forms of a cultural past to which one belongs. Still the need of a grounding on cultural legacy, history and identity is crucial for many people caught in the flux of exile, immigration and globalization. Occupying oneself with one’s ‘cultural identity’ is a particularly vital practice, but acknowledging the complexity of our hybrid identities in this swiftly shrinking globe is similarly momentous. On one side, globalization disperses a uniformization of culture and identity, and on the other, it encourages heterogeneity and syncretism. Migration of people and
cultures has significantly altered the picture of the world as it promotes the growth of multiculturalism, hybridity and the creation of diasporic cultures.

Thus, transaction in culture between nations or among different communities within a nation, as a trope for exchange, status, desire, political motivation, international relations, and so on, became palpable in the current of literature, criticism, and theory transpiring from the work of Third World writers. Because the current is intricate, multi-directional, and constantly shifting, no model on its own can sufficiently can dealt with the dispute on postcolonial literature. This has also led to “the collapse of borders in scholarship reflects and parallels the collapse of borders in the postindustrial world.” Our traditional nations of rigid geographical and cultural borders have given way to globalism, multiculturalism, and trans-nationalism, while generic boundaries have collapsed into ‘blurred’ or ‘mixed’ genres. A consciousness of positions and positionalities overdetermining the perceptual frame have defied our traditional expectations, our concepts of disciplinary have also acquiesced to interdisciplinary studies, and crosshatched provinces of orientation that can be “neither contained nor limited, but must constantly refer to something outside, inside, or beyond themselves” (Henderson, 4).

In this terrain individuals are compelled to re-imagine themselves and espouse multiple affiliations while altering existing ones. Therefore, the issue is not simply about individuals identifying with those inside the same boundaries but also with those located outside of their borders. Diasporic communities have to constantly negotiate their identities within the borders of their adopted home as well as across borders with their homeland. Despite the magnification of knowledge and sensibilities to the point of cosmopolitanism (or universal humanism), there has been a reassertion of traditional cultural values. Thus, a feature of globalization at the cultural level is that it has also brought about the fragmentation and multiplication of identities. However, such a fragmenting and multiplicative configuration may require, paradoxically, a return to the local and the familiar.

Cultural hybridization is all about the mixing of Asian, African, American, European cultures. But global diasporas have themselves develop into sites for the creation and elaboration of new, hybridized cultures. The plasticity and complexity of
postmodern identities are such that possibility of recovering the essence of the original identity is almost overruled. As an alternative, fragments of a mythologized past are combined with a fractured, multi-cultural, multisourced present to create a new ‘ethnicity.’ This structure of local bonding, this ‘grounding,’ is required exactly because globalization has jeopardized our structures of meaning and meaningfulness. Diaspora, traditionally conceived, modern, global, and newly affirmed, may provide a vital bridge between the individual and society, between the local and global. The sense of uprootedness, of disconnection, loss, and estrangement, which hitherto was morally appropriated by the traditionally recognized diasporas, may now signify something of the human condition. Emphasizing the creative, enriching side of ‘Babylon,’ the importance of difference, may provide a new form of universal humanism (Cohen, 103).

According to Hall, an ethnicity, a cultural identity, is not a ‘fixed essence.’ Instead, it is constructed through a blend of memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth. He contends that “diaspora does not refer to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, the imperializing, the hegemonizing form of ‘ethnicity.’” He claims that the diaspora experience “is defined not by essence or purity, but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” (Hall, 1990:235). Diaspora identities keep constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

It is no longer possible for a culture to develop along purely ethnic lines and it compulsorily follows complex patterns often described as ‘syncretism’. The Third World cosmopolitan writers always resist a fixed national and ideological identity. Postcolonial cultures are fluid unities. Ethnicity is not absolute but complex, and it expresses itself in cultures as part of that culture only insofar as it modifies it and modifies the very idea of culture (Brennan, 1989: 50-51). One of the aftermaths of being colonized, migrating, and being identified with ‘minorities’ wherever they go, these writers are, as an offshoot of their reputation, shifting the identity of Literature, from English Literature, the monolithic canon which replicates discourses of Empire, Commonwealth and nation, to writing-in-
English, which disperses the repressive apparatus of language currency (Degabriele, internet).

Authorized power in a hybrid culture, according to Homi Bhabha, “does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through conditions of contingency and contradictoriness” (Bhabha, 1994: 2). It is also about coordinating this observation of culture with that of the idea of flux and transition. Progression of time generates hybrid cultural identity, which is to some extent grounded on contingency. The precincts of hybrid cultures are negotiated and consequently leave space for recognizing and taking in diverse cultural influences: borders are dynamic terrains of meeting point and overlap, which spawn and sustain the construction of in-between identities. Hybrid cultures are often antagonistic to standing authority and cultural hegemony; and heterogeneity and multiplicity are underscored as significant features of hybrid cultures (Bhabha, 1990:211).

Transnational writers such as Salman Rushdie or Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri or Jadie Smith or Boman Desai, have succeeded in remaking themselves and fashioning new kinds of cultural identity by, consciously or unconsciously, drawing on more than one cultural repertoire. Even those novelists rooted in their native cultures and histories like Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe wrote hybrid forms of novel by mixing the European novelistic form and their respective traditional local narratology, be the use of Harikatha or the oral style of telling stories. They speak from the in-between of different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspectives of another, and thus finding ways of being both the same as and different from the others among which they live. So the borders, the boundaries, and the frame(-works)s that structure our various and multiple notions of identity-textual, personal, collective, generic, and disciplinary identities become problematic which demand working out or reworking.

For instance, Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* glorifies "hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the pure". Regarding the issue of identity, history and tradition in India he suggests: “My view is that the Indian tradition has always been, and still is, a mixed tradition. The idea that there is such a thing as a pure Indian tradition is a kind of fallacy,
the nature of Indian culture has always been multiplicity and plurality and mingling’
(Rushdie, 1985:10).\(^5\) Most of the Third World Novel is characterized by mixed narrative
styles, mixed languages and obvious relations to strong predecessor authors. The novels
hailing from different cultures and histories radically incorporate different narrative
techniques and voices. Subsequently, the idea of community novel working on the basis
of hybrid culture is more feasible that the idea of a pure culture or pure form.

III

Literature, while sharing porous borders with many other disciplines, has its own
unique space in the realm of epistemology. And novel, like many other art-forms, is not
merely an extension of or coterminous with any community, ethnic, national or
otherwise. Though a community novel is about accentuating the history and culture of
the insider-novelist, it does not pretend to do full-time job of a real sociologist or
anthropologist. In our examination of novel from the community perspective, we only
highlight the influence of the novelist’s specific culture in the structure and content of his
narratology.

Regarding this Wellek and Warren made a crucial remark, “There is great
literature which has little or no social relevance; social literature is only one kind of
literature and is not central in the theory of literature unless one holds the view that
literature is primarily an “imitation” of life as it is and of social life in particular. But
literature is no substitute for sociology or politics. It has its own justification and aim”
(Wellek and Warren, 109). Works of Chinua Achebe, Raja Rao, Toni Morrison, and
Rohinton Mistry are fine artistic products. They besides being anchored in their
respective socio-historical specificities, also contain universal appeals which can be
identified by readers from other communities and generations.

This project has shown how the immediate particular ‘way of life’ or culture of a
community to which the novelist belongs to is given importance in community novel.
The premise is that novelist is an individual born into particular culture, the collection
of ideas, habits and beliefs, and it sculpts the way in which s/he sees the world and transmits
from generation to generation. This culture is not only the source of his identity, but also
their creative literary expression, and by addition, the identifier of his work. Accordingly,
the terms and conditions of whether this culture belongs to an emergent (as in diaspora), a dominant (Hindu in India) or subservient (Dalit or Parsi) is a major force in the politics of this kind of writing.

But we know that in the present era no culture lives in isolation as it is always already mixed with one or another culture. Africa’s diversity of climates fashioned widely different cultures with comprehensive theologies and philosophies and technological, medical, and scientific structures suitable to extensively different requirements. Indian writing is as varied and complex as the country’s multicultural, multi-geographical dimensions. Obviously readers come across many voices and styles, as well as a range of thematic interests, some of them certainly center on India’s enormous geography, but generally a medley of concord and discordant echoes and ethnicities. Hybridity takes out the issues of rigid clear-cut boundaries in the poetics and politics of community novel.

Take the case of the diaspora community in multicultural Canada which is occupied with people not only from India but also from different parts of the world. Different writers of the same diaspora articulate the meaning of identity differently because of different geographies, histories, and ethnicities. To cope with their exilic consciousness they know the need for re-imagining their familial, social, cultural, political histories. So the Indo-Canadian diasporic writers like Vassanji, Mistry and others, keep on going back to their own traditions and cultures. About the resultant dichotomy, Meira Chand has observed that the expatriate writer has forsaken all the tradition that nurtures and offers the consistency of a bloodline, a springboard for evolution, growth and experimentation. “He has been cut off from his own tradition and culture from osmosis and introspection, and from his own context within it. How he deals with this trauma, this crisis of identity is perhaps the greatest problem confronting him in his situation.” (Chand, 51). Different as they are, they dwell in that cusp formed by the intersection of two cultures, the space of exile and longing for home. Yet Vassanji’s representation of his space is significantly different from that of Mistry's.

This miscegenation of histories, cultures and forms wittingly or unwittingly influences the poetics and politics of community. When Toni Morrison tries to articulate her experience of slavery, her worldview is found to be already bound up with that of the
white American master or that of being a woman in a Black patriarchal world. Chinua Achebe’s novelistic articulation of his culture cannot be separated from the historical encounter of Nigerian culture with that of colonialism. Even when community writers go on to employ novelistic genre to give expression to their particular way of life, they cannot help producing a hybrid type of novel, something which is neither completely European nor completely a narrative form found in their cultural tradition. For this raison d'être, Raja Rao said that it is not possible for him to write simply as an Indian just in the way to write like the English is an impossibility. For Rohinton Mistry also, it is not feasible to write simply as a Parsi. He cannot express the worldview of his Parsi particularity without speaking of their Anglophiliac weakness (or strength), his Indian and Canadian parts of his immigrant experiences. Our point here is to indicate the unfeasibility of discussing a culture or a novel in terms of purity only.

However, when we come to the politics of hybridity, two facets are evidently to it: first, an assimilationist hybridity that inclines towards the centre, approves the canon and mimics the hegemony; and secondly, a destabilizing hybridity that blurs the canon, reverses the current, subverts the centre. On the one hand, an assimilationist hybridity in which the centre predominates, as in V.S. Naipaul, known for his trenchant observations such as there is no decent cup of coffee to be had in Trinidad or declaring India as ‘area of darkness’, a gesture often called as Naipaulitis. And on the other hand, an hybridity that blurs (passive) or destabilizes (active) the canon and its categories. Perhaps this gamut of hybridities can be figured up as varying from Naipaul to Salman Rushdie, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Rohinton Mistry. But wherever we look closely regarding relations of power and hegemony inscribed and reproduced within hybridity we find traces of asymmetry in culture, place, descent. Hybridity provokes the inquiry of the terms and conditions of mixture, the mixing and mélange. Simultaneously it is imperative to consider the ways in which hegemony is not merely replicated but rebuilt in the procedure of hybridization (Pieterse, 57).

Community while it lends social and cultural authenticity to the fiction a novelist writes, also in a way delimits its scope in terms of its appeal among general readers. It may drive one to suppose that there is no conflict individual identity and the community identity at all, that the alliance between the two positions is all in a peaceful harmony,
which is not always so. So for an artist, it becomes imperative to ask: should a writer be totally and exclusively accountable to his or her ethnic community? Or is she or he entitled to an individual vision and personal concern? The idea of reading a novel from the perspective of a particular community culture or a writer’s rootedness in his specific way of life may encounter the charge of parochial communalism and fetishism.

Accordingly, this fixation of community novelists on their specific community culture may encounter the anxieties faced by native intellectual who “sets a high value on the customs, traditions, and the appearances of his people, but his inevitable, painful experience only seems to be a banal search for exoticism. The sari becomes sacred, and shoes that come from Paris or Italy are left off in favor of pampooties”; and unavoidably, the “culture that the intellectual leans towards is often no more than a stock of particularisms. He wishes to attach himself to the people, but instead he only catches hold of their outer garments.” (Fanon, 221-24). Fanon recommends the native poets who have taken his people as subject “cannot go forward resolutely unless he first realizes the extent of estrangement from them.” Intellectuals are being disloyal to this estrangement by their fetishistic attitude toward the customs, folklore, and vernacular traditions of their people.

It will not be understatement if we say that immigrant or native writers, to some extent, indulge fetishistically in their cultural images, in collaboration with the mass culture with no organic relationship with people’s everyday life. Community novel may be just a manufactured item, sold in the form of attractive packages: the way fast food, soft drink, movies and cosmetic are reproduced and sold. Even when the concerned community member exhibits fervor to preserve the folk culture, it comes as a packaged item disconnected off from its soil. Folk or oral tradition is participatory without there being much qualitative differences between the entertainer and the entertained, the creative artist and the community which enjoys artistic forms. The whole community participates in artistic creations.

However, in mass culture there is no such participation; people are just consumers or passive receivers. Culture becomes just artifact with no live experience. With the consumptionalist ownership of the folk cultural form, it gets shrunk into a matter of decorum or a piece of vogue (Pathak, 181-82). The old Indian diaspora used to take with
them a sort of “Hindu toolbox” to Indianize its new surroundings: “their homeland is a series of objects, fragments of narratives that they keep in their heads or in their suitcases. Like hawkers they can reconstitute their lives through the contents of their knapsacks: a Ganapati icon, a dog-eared copy of the Gita or the Quran, an old sari or other deshi outfit, a photograph of a pilgrimage or, in modern times, a videocassette of the latest hit from the home country” (Mishra, 68).

Rohinton Mistry is sometimes blamed for exoticizing the image of India in his fictional representation, for catering to the forces of mass consumerism, for playing up to the demands of the Western or American publishers. Makarand Paranjape contends that the literary products of the new diaspora not only portray the motherland, but also rationalize why it has to be left behind. The narratives of the new diaspora are elaborate and eloquent leave-taking, often elegiac in tone. For him, Rohinton Mistry’s FB is “marked by its utter absence of balance” and it assembles the motherland “as not only an area of darkness, confusion, violence, but a hopeless and doomed country which must be rejected.” In the story, the protagonist doesn’t leave, but, commits suicide.

Another instance is that of Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children which created the trend-setting text of this elegiac type of representing India. In it India is seen as literally cracking up in the fragmentary personality of Saleem Sinai, whose digressive and disjointed narrative cannot encapsulate the chaos that is India. Midnight’s Children becomes a tale of the decomposition of India, about its disintegration and dispersal. He argues that this deconstructive narrative is a result of the new diasporic consciousness which, because it lacks internal coherence, cannot see any cohesion in the objects that it describes. It tries to incorporate its fictional India into a borderless, deterritorialized, but yet commercially lucrative marketplace whose multiple sites are scattered across the most advanced nation-states of the world (Paranjape, 2001: 1-12).

Though it is important to understand the importance and the influence of global market and the publishing houses on the literary writings, it is also true that they have open up for many new voices to come out. It has provided the opportunities to the writers from many previously silent communities to articulate their cultural perspectives. But to categorize novelistic narrative with its deep concern with the culture of the specific culture of the writers as mere fetish will mean not giving due credit to a group, especially
subaltern community, which is going through real predicaments of exile, exploitation, and inarticulation. Community novelists, especially for the minority writers, carry the responsibility of telling histories of their suppressed silent cultures, and going beyond the realm of aesthetics, their writing becomes importantly political in nature.

Consequently when novelists become a culture’s representative, they also become part of the process of change itself. Paul J Hunter comments that just as culture is never static but always in motion toward a later point in time when it will be something definably different, any text that has readers participate in the process of change. Readers read, respond, react; the culture itself is altered, made different as a result of the text. Writers to some extent anticipate- and to some extent control the process. They have positions to uphold, causes to support, axes to grind, things they want to happen. They rhetoricize as well as report and record. Novels, then, may be said to “represent” the culture both in rendering a version of it and in being a vehicle of ongoing self-adjustment and change (Hunter, 30-31).

John Paul Sartre pointed out that “perhaps he (writer) is a Jew, and a Czech, and of Peasant family, but he is a Jewish writer, a Czech writer, and, of rural stock…the public intervenes, with its customs, its vision of the world, and its conception of society and of literature within that society. It surrounds the writer, it hems him in, and its imperialous or sly demands, its refusals and its flights, are the given facts on whose bases a work can be constructed”(Sartre, 1948:57-58). For this reason, one can say that for Mistry too, his state of being a Parsi involves boundaries which make a distinction between ‘self’ and ‘other.’ His Parsiness surrounds him with all its imperialous or sly demands, its refusal and its flights. But to value the works of community writers primarily as autobiography or ethnography may reduce their works from being taken seriously as literature. However, Mistry’s fiction, despite its overt Parsi consciousness, goes beyond the interests of his community alone, as it deals with as much aplomb themes such as displacement, emergency, communal politics and saffronization of space in India etc.

Mistry’s tales show the struggle of a Parsi protagonist (be it Gustad, Dina, Maneck, Nariman or Yezad) who belongs to a minority community against the hampering materiality of the multi-cultural world and this struggle becomes the
structuring device of his community novel. His narrative structure shaped as it is by the
ancient Zoroastrian metaphysics of the struggle between good and bad, sacred and
profane, can be identified with any ethical struggle of man between good and bad visible
in Hindu, Jewish and Christian tales. Mistry promotes “a universal paradigm with respect
to moral ideas” (Leckie, 38) and invites us to “discover shared values and a common
humanity” (Ekelund, 6) in all his novelistic narratives.

Nevertheless, we can propose that Gustad, Yezad and Nariman go beyond the
restricting category of a mere male gender or a Parsi. At the centre of the novel is Gustad
Noble “in whose life and suffering a large rhythm of universal pattern is carved out”
(Meitei, 74). This ‘universal pattern’ which structures much of Mistry’s fictional
enterprise, can be specified as an individual’s struggle for a meaningful life. His
protagonists are an Everyman. They embody mankind as a whole. They are human
beings like you and me who make mistakes, who repent, and come back with deeper
human understanding. They are like us who love and struggle to live with dignity and
honesty in a degenerating world, who in a meaningless world seek anchor of life in
religion, friendship, their care for the loved and dear ones.

As political disorder in India, present economic imbalance of the Parsis and other
forms of insecurity persuade the movement of this small community to new spaces,
geographical or psychic, Parsi writer like Mistry encounters the challenge of fashioning
new idioms for comprehending their predicaments. Mistry’s location of being a thrice-
exiled (exile from Iran, an exile in India, still an exile in Canada) writer makes his
fictional projects connect to all the people who have been uprooted from their homeland
in one or the other. His fiction touches on the universal theme of exile like absent
landscapes of home, home as alien and (re)creating home, utopian visions, nostalgia, the
unbearable present; melancholia in exile; exilic histories of remembering and forgetting;
the journey and the myth of return; hospitality and hostility in exile; camaraderie/solidarity in exile vs. isolation in exile: the individual and the collective;
inserting oneself into a new collectivity while trying to maintain allegiance with the old.
“Exile knows no borders” and it is “too big to be defined by borders” (Wali, internet) and
often transcends the confinement of narrow community and nationalistic definitions.
Mistry’s characters confront the consciousness of exile in different degrees, some
poignantly like Maneck and Sarosh, some reconciliatorily like Dina and Yezad, some seeking consolation in religious memory like Gustad, and some humorously like Dinshawji and Dr. Fitter who turns doom and gloom into something comic.6

Mistry’s humane concerns with the brutal exploitation of the Dalit community in the village of India, his critique of the nightmare of Emergency and the authoritarian politics of Shiv Sena, and the killing of Panjabis and Muslims in communal riots, show that his writing does not deal simply with problems of his specific culture alone. He does come out of his cultural self-absorption, accept the presence and importance of others’ cultures, and vouch for a harmonious co-existence of one and all. At the same time his general observation on the corruption pervading in the political system of India, the corroding influence of the Hindu fundamentalists and the dictatorial tendency of Indira Gandhi are subjects of concerns for all who believe in Indian secular society.

He explores other big issues of existence like old age, family, ingratitude, hatred, death, the passing of time, the inevitability of loss, God or the corresponding God-shaped hole. He draws attention to what we have and what we are constantly in the process of losing. Children leave; families disintegrate; love slips away; moments of happiness, too often unrecognized at the time, vanish into the past. He indicates that despite all the man-made superficial differences of castes, religions and cultures, every man is the same underneath as Beggarmaster in FB piercingly observes, "People forget how vulnerable they are despite their shirts and shoes and briefcases, how this hungry and cruel world could strip them, put them in the same position as my beggars." In his characteristic consummate manner,

And Valmik in FB philosophized that “the central theme of life story—loss. But isn’t it the same with all life stories? Loss is essential. Loss is part and parcel of that necessary calamity called life...thanks to some inexplicable universal guiding force, it is always the worthless things we lose—slough off, like a moulting snake. Losing, and losing again, is the very basis of the life process, till all we are left with is the bare essence of human existence.”(693) We lose only what is impure and unnecessary, and for Mistry, perhaps, the bare essence of human existence is Asho-Purity, the theme which Zoroastrianism recites for humanity “Make thyself pure, O righteous man! Anyone in the
world here below can win purity for himself, namely when he cleanses himself with good thoughts, words and deeds.” (Qtd in Wadia, internet).

And in the moment of human sorrow, he or she takes recourse to what is available to him or her for consolation of any kind. The pavement artist in SLJ said about the abiding potency of religious faith: “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?”(289) That’s why, Yezad while looking after the bed-ridden Nariman in FM had this insight, “…if you knew a person long enough, he could elicit every kind of emotion from you, every possible reaction, envy, admiration, pity, irritation, fury, fondness, jealousy, love, disgust. But in the end all human beings became candidates for compassion, all of us, without exception…and if we could recognize this from the beginning, what a saving in pain and grief and misery…” (348) Nothing can be more local and general, more individually and universally relevant than this.