Rohinton Mistry was born in Mumbai on 3rd July 1952 to Behram Mistry and Freny Jhaveri Mistry. He was the second son of the three and he also has a younger sister. Cyrus Mistry, well-known playwright and short-story writer, is his younger brother. He did his schooling from Villa Theresa Primary School and then St. Xavier’s High School. He graduated from St. Xavier’s College in Bombay. He completed his degree in Mathematics in 1974. His craze for music was such that Polydor released an EP, *Ronnie Mistry*, on which he sang his own compositions and traditional folk songs. Later on, he migrated to Canada and there he married to Freny Elavia in 1975. In Canada, Toronto, he worked as clerk in the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. In 1978 Rohinton Mistry and his wife enrolled for evening courses at the University of Toronto. He was financed by his bank. He completed his second degree in English Literature and Philosophy in 1982. He wrote his first short story *One Sunday* in 1983 and won Hart House Prize for it. Next year he won it second time for *Lend Me Your Light*. In 1985 *Auspicious Occasion* won the contributor’s award of Canadian Fiction. Thus, in 1987 Penguin Canada published his collection of stories entitled *Tales from Firozsha Baag* and later in Britain and USA under the title *Swimming Lessons and other stories from Firozsha Baag*. It was short-listed for the Canadian Governor General’s Award. Mistry published his first novel *Such a Long Journey* in 1991. It was short-listed for the Booker Prize and The Trillium Award. It won the Governor General’s Award, the Smith Books/Books in Canada First Novel Award and the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize for the Best book. His second novel *A Fine Balance* appeared in 1995. It was shortlisted for the Booker Prize once again. It won the Governor General’s Award once again, the Giller’s Prize. It also received the Royal Society of Literature’s Winfred Holtby Prize and the 1996 Los Angeles Times Award for fiction. *Family Matters* was published in 2002 and won several award including the seventh annual
Kiriyama Prize for literature of the Pacific Rim and the South Asia Subcontinent. It was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize and IMPAC award.

His fictional world deals with his home metropolis Bombay. His brother Cyrus is a great influence on his literary career, who advised him to write about his home city as “Bombay is as viable a city for fiction” [Saraiya, *The Independent*]. His books are re-fashioned from memory. Mistry himself said:

> Writers write best about what they know. In the broad sense, as a processing of everything one hears or witnesses, all fiction is autobiographical - imagination ground through the mill of memory. It’s impossible to separate the two ingredients. [Lambart, *The Guardian*]

In 1996, Mistry was awarded an honorary doctorate of the Faculty of Arts at Ottawa University. His main concern in his fictional world is the representation of his microscopic community under the various political phases in India and its subjugation by majority. He portrays the various problems faced by his community in the present time.

II

**Tales from Firozsha Baag**

Rohinton Mistry’s collection of short stories *Tales from Firozsha Baag* marks the beginning of his literary career. The locale of these short stories is a Parsi housing complex. It describes the daily life of the Parsi residents in a Bombay apartment. The stories are concerned with the troubles and the idiosyncrasies of Bombayite Parsis. Mistry explores the relationships at the heart of this community, their cultural identity and the uniqueness of their community. At the same time Mistry seeks to shed light and fully embrace the syncretic nature of the diasporic Parsi experience whether in North America or in India. Some of the stories focus
on the journeys undertaken by some of the Firozsha Baag’s Parsis, those who dared to leave for North America, leaving behind their imaginary homeland. However, Parsis have felt guilty after their flight and subsequent world-wide resettlement, particularly their movement towards the west. This diaspora, contrary to the Iranian diaspora, has been fulfilled in a positive way by the Parsis. Western diaspora results into guilt-consciousness as it is reflected in the story entitled as *Lend Me your Light*. Mistry has aptly reflected the “psychological diaspora” of the Parsis after their loss of elite consciousness in post-colonial India. Parsis found themselves toeing “the line of discontent” between two regions. This situation provoked many departures to England and to America, marking the Western diaspora of the Parsis. Mistry’s fictional world is guided by this experience of double displacement. As a Parsi, Mistry aligns himself to the margins of Indian society and so his writing challenges and resists absorption by the dominating and Hindu-glorifying culture in India. Mistry used the memory and remembering as a narrative techniques in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. Mistry through his recollection of Parsi past in Mumbai tried to reconstruct the Parsi identity, as Craig Tapping aptly said: “Mistry is engaged in identity construction through the location of the present in the past” [1992:39]. The space, locale or its inhabitants are not sentimentalizing on large scale. They are presented to us as unveiling the layers of memories of the Baag, what could be said as remembering the past and constructing it for the readers. Nilufer Bharucha while talking about ‘*On white hairs and Cricket*’ gives the recurrent themes in this volume of short stories. It weaves within itself various persistent themes in the collection.

First of all is the leit motif of the Parsis as an ageing and dying race; …the motif of cricket stands for notions of honor, valour, and manliness as it is the game of the rulers and also called as gentleman’s game… that had been inculcated into the Parsis by the British during the colonial period; the
remembered past leads to alienation from postcolonial India; this in turn leads to immigration to the West; this immigration mainly by the young leaves behind old parents; loneliness and age is thus the other motif; related to this loneliness of the old Parsis in India, is the loneliness and lack of acceptance of the Parsis in the West; such alienation and loneliness often leads to dysfunctional and aberrant behavior both within the Indian as well as the Western contexts. [Bharucha 2003:92]

The First story in the collection Auspicious Occasion is typical in its Parsipanu, which can be said as identity construction. It highlights various issues regarding Parsi community like Ethnic mores, Zoroastrian religious rituals, Parsi customs, costumes, and cuisine, we-consciousness among the Parsis, estrangement from the center, dominant community and decline in status in postcolonial India. It has made it “‘Shadow-window’ discourse for … the Parsipanu” [Bharucha 2003:74]. It represents the Parsis as warts without any glorification. It is in a real sense “a myth-buster” [Bharucha 2003:74] sentimentalizing the daily confrontations to so many havoces of the common life. Thus the Parsis in Firozsha Baag are portrayed as middle class. Being middle class in Bombay, they have “to engage in daily battle with intermittent water-supply, dilapidated homes, peeling paint, falling plaster and leaking WCs.” [Bharucha 2003:74]

It opens with the male protagonist Rustomji’s complaint about leaking WC. This sets the tone of the story ‘Auspicious Occasion’. Rustomji’s language is salted with Gujarati phrases and slang abuses. Mistry shows the age difference between Rustomji and Mehroo which is the result of the rarity of a ‘Parsi Suitable’ boy in the community. Mehroo was married to thirty-six year old Rustomji when she was just a girl of sixteen. He was “a fine catch” (03) by her parents. The story covers the action of a religious festival day of Behram roje, an auspicious occasion. Mehroo belonged to “an orthodox” (03) Parsi family which celebrated all important days on the Parsi calendar with prayers and ceremonies
performed at the fire-temple. Her family had “a room with an iron-frame bed and an iron stool for the women during their unclean time of the month” (04).

Mehroo had practiced “all the orthodoxy of her parents” (04). Mistry highlights the duality of modern Parsis, who pretend to be modern but at the same time enjoy the age old traditions. Mehroo is permitted everything during her “unclean” (04) phase once a month as Rustomji insisted not to follow religious mores. Here Mistry shows the paradox in Rustomji’s character that “secretly enjoyed most of the age-old traditions while pretending indifference” (04). He cherished going to the fire-temple clothed in his “sparkling white dugli, starched white trousers, the carefully brushed pheytoe on his head…” (04). Mistry portrays the poor and unhygienic conditions of Parsis living in the Baag. It is the result of lost glory of the Parsis of the Post-Raj India where they became minority, and middle-class suffering from so many problems. As Rustomji complains about WC:

“That stinking lavatory upstairs is leaking again! God only knows what they do to make it leak. There I was, squatting - barely started- when some one pulled the flush. Then on my head I felt- pchuk- all wet! On my head!” (04)

It is this inauspicious beginning of the day so auspicious to both of them. She peeked into the WC and experienced “fearing a deluge of ordure and filth” (04). Mehroo suggests hiring a good plumber themselves instead of complaining to the Baag trustees. She doubts of “shoddy work” (05) by Baag trustees. Mehroo’s remark suggests the corruption in the Parsi trustees and misuse of the funds. It is clearer when Rushomji denies Mehroo’s suggestion. He abuses Baag trustees as “scoundrels” (05), who have “piles of trust money hidden under their arses” (05), suggesting the fraud and corruption in Parsi trusts. Mistry highlights the policy adopted by the trustees as: “…to stop all maintenance work not essential to keep
the building from being condemned” (6). It results into Rustomji’s anxiety when he planned to take a bath but water was covered by “plaster from the ceiling” (05). Mistry highlights the reasons why the Firozsha Baag building, like other Parsi Trust properties in Bombay, were in worse condition. Mistry gives the reason of dilapidated plaster of flats in the Baag as:

The... flats had been erected in an incredibly short time and with very little money. Cheap materials had been used, and sand carted from nearby Chaupatty beach had been mixed in abundance with substandard cement. Now during the monsoon season beads of moisture trickled down the walls...which considerably hastened the crumbling of paint and plaster. (07)

Mistry gives the details of Parsi ceremonies. He portrays the preparations of Behram roje:

Her (Mehroo) morning had started early: ...cooked dhandar -paatyo and sali-botí for dinner; ...decorate the entrance with coloured chalk designs, hang up the tohrun... and spread the fragrance of loban through the flat - it was considered unlucky to omit or change the prescribed sequence of these things. (07)

But for Rustomji customs were “dead and meaningless” (07-08). Mistry comments on the way Parsis have the perceptions of other Non-Parsis specially the servants. Mistry comments on the colonial attitude of the Parsis to see Indians as the source of pleasure. As a young boy, Rustomji had heard that most house-maids, “gungas, had no use for underwear- neither brassiere or knickers” (09). Gajara has provided this proof, “proof which popped out from beneath her short blouse during the exertion of sweeping or washing” (09). Parsis have inherited such notions of racial superiority from British during coloinal period, as the rights of the ‘Master Race’ [Bharucha 2003:76].
Mistry focuses on the changing attitude of young Parsis and their approach to the religious rituals. Mehroo remembered how her brothers and sisters and she used to enjoy all the rituals but expressed sorrow on her children’s indifference towards Parsi ceremonies and rituals. She had to persuade them to finish “the chasni or it would sit for days, unnoticed and untouched” (12). Mistry underscores how old generation Parsis respected and adored the religious cult. Mehroo even as a child adored visiting the Fire Temple. It is described as:

She loved its smells, its tranquillity, its priests in white performing their elegant, mystical rituals. Best of all she loved the inner sanctuary, the sanctum sanctorum, dark and mysterious, with marble floor and marble walls, which only the officiating priest could enter, to tend to the sacred fire burning in the huge, shining silver afargaan on its marble pedestal. (12-13)

Here, Mistry talks that common Parsi people can not enter into the “inner sanctuary” (12). Only “the officiating priest” (13) who has undergone the state of complete purity can enter. Mistry captures the changing attitude of modernized Parsis towards the priests and their morality as a religious person:

Under the priestly garb of Dhunjisha... lurked a salacious old man taking advantage of his venerable image: “Loves to touch and feel women, the old goat- the younger and fleshier, the more fun he has hugging and squeezing them.” (13)

On Mehroo’s protest Rustomji explains Dhunjisha’s manners to exchange vulgar remarks between lines of prayer, “especially on days of ceremony when sleek nubile women in their colourful finery attended in large numbers” (14). His favourite example was Ashem Yahoo:

Ashem Yahoo,

See the tits on that chickie-boo… (14)
It was a famous joke among “the less religious” (14) Parsis. Rustomji calls all dustoors as “masked bandits” (14). Rustomji’s remarks on WC of Fire Temple suggest the superiority complex among Parsis: “To look at it, it was not Parsis who used the WC, he felt, but uneducated, filthy, ignorant barbarians” (15). It suggests the mentality of the Parsis and we-consciousness which is inherited from the Raj era. Everything which is neat, tidy, beautiful, ordered, organized, systematic is Parsi and exact opposite is non-Parsi. This is the colonial mentality, which is permanently imprinted on their psyche. They are still unhappy over the departure of British-Raj that’s why they are called as “reluctant Indians” [Kanga 1991: 27]. The sadness is depicted as:

The one change wrought by the passing years was that Johnnie Walker Scotch, freely available under the British, could now be obtained only on the black market, and was responsible for Rustomji’s continuing grief over the British departure. (15)

This Anglomania Parsis suffer that is described as “the Parsee disease” [Kanga 1991:161]. The reasons of this grief of loss of colonial elite status are aptly reflected by Tanya Luhrmann:

They [Parsis] were remarkably successful during the Raj. But their success came at the cost of jettisoning their adopted Indian identity in favour of western one. As a native colonial elite, Parsis were more westernized than most other Indian elites, and as displaced Persians, they committed themselves thoroughly to a non Indian sensibility. Now they feel marginalized in a postcolonial world, with an aching sense of loss of status, of cultural genius, of their historical moment. [1996:81]

Rustomji left home for the Fire Temple. While stepping down at Marine Lines someone spat “a surfeit of juice ... of sticky, viscous, dark red ... stuff” (16-17) on his complete stark white dress from the upper deck. Rustomji yelled and roared painfully abusing in his scatological humourous language. He also cursed the crowd who made fun of him. The
crowd started to harass him and Rustomji played a clown to escape from the situation. This appealed to the assembly and the crowd gave him way. Mistry picturizes the traumatized effect of the situation: “Tears of shame and rage welled in his eyes, and through the mist he saw the blood-red blotch” (18). Bharucha aptly writes on this:

Behind Rustomji’s self-directed joke lies the trauma of the realization that in spite of the Parsis’ continued belief in their superior status, in postcolonial India they have been downgraded to the unenviable status of a has-been community of eccentric old men and women. [Bharucha, 2003:78]

Rustomji anxiously remarked on Dhunjisha’s murder: “What is happening in the world I don’t know. Parsi killing Parsi…chasniwalla and dustoor…” (20). It is an allegorical incident of Dustoor Dhunjisha’s murder in the Fire temple which refers to the legend of Zarathustra’s death in the temple while he was praying.

The second story in the collection ‘One Sunday’ deals with Najamai - the only Fridge owner in the Baag. Boyces and Tehmina enjoy the facility of the Fridge. Tehmina used the fridge as an equipped resource of ice cubes for her midday drinks of ice-cold lemonade and evening scotch. The Boyce family made abundant use of it to store the weekly supply of beef. As beef is cheaper than mutton, poorer Parsis like Boyces use it, though cow is sacred and venerated in Parsis. The eating of beef aligns Parsis with Muslims to some extent though their customs and habits were different from Muslims which is another subaltern group in India. Drinking wine by female members of the community suggests the freedom and liberty in Parsis; it aligns them with Christians, another subaltern group in India.

On a Sunday, in Najamai’s absence Tehmina forgets to lock the door properly. Francis, the servant, remains in the house. After coming home, Najamai presumed him as a thief and started yelling at him. To save
himself, Francis ran away from the spot, which caused the anger in the Baag residence. Kersi and Percy ran through the Tar-gully to trace him with their bats. In Tar-gully, they were disliked as representing the race that measured itself superior to them. The boys were teased as “Parsi bawaji! Cricket at night? Parsi bawaji! What will you hit, boundary or sixer?”(35) Both of them retorted them as “bloody ghatis” (35). The term is used for people from West Ghats, but here it connotes as uncouth, barbaric person. The story ends with the brutal beating of Francis by the Boyces and other residence of the Baag. Kersi broke his bat in the frenzy of guilt as he had beaten Francis, one of their friends. It reflects the post-colonial status of the Parsis in India. Kersi has shown empathy with the more subaltern group. Kersi’s destroying the bat “can also be seen as the ultimate inability of the ‘elite’ group to align with the truer subalterns” [Bharucha 2003:81].

The third story in the volume ‘The Ghost of the Firozsha Baag’ has non-Parsi narrator and sees the Parsi colony and Parsis with a different way. Here it is the shift from internal to external perspective of the Firozsha Baag. The narrator is a Goan ayah Jacqueline - hailed as Jaakalee by the Parsis of the Baag. For Parsis ghaati women were good enough for the rough work, but children could not be given in their custody. For this purpose the English-speaking Goan ayah was imported by Mr. Karani. This was the part of the heritage of having been colonial elite. Jaakalee herself tells in the story that, “They thought they were like British only, ruling India side by side” (46). Mistry highlights the hybridity of language used by Parsis: ‘Jaakalee’ (44) for Jacqueline, ‘iggeechur’ (44) for easy chair and ‘ferach beech’ (44) for French beans. This was done by all old Parsis as though, they have created their “own private language” (44). Mistry notes down the influence of Parsi atmosphere on Jaakalee: “I talk Parsi-Gujarati all the time instead of Konkani, even with other ayahs” (44). It suggests that Parsis adopted what was forced on them but they did it
with adding their touch. Indianization of the English by the Parsis in such a way has created the comic situation and confusion too. Once again the *gora* or white complex is reflected by the Tar-gully people who hailed Jaakalee as “Blackie, blackie” (46). Mistry highlights how Parsis liked “light skin” (46). A child born with light-skin is praised as: “O how nice light skin just like parents” (46). But a baby with dark skin is considered as “ayah no chhokro” (46) or the child of a nurse.

The next story in the collection deals with ‘*Condolence Visit’*. The story has serious, ethno-religious and black-humor overtones. Mistry very brilliantly has used the *tape recorder* to take reader to the past and back to present with the buttons *Rewind* and *Forward* to narrate all the incidents surrounding the death of Minocher Mirza. After *charam* -fourth day-ceremony, the lamp should be extinguished as per the Parsi custom. This would help the soul to break the ties with this world and go “quickly-quickly to the Next World” (64). But Daulat ignores it. In Najamai’s opinion burning lamp would confuse the soul between two worlds. Daulat has decided to keep it going until she thought the proper time to extinguish it has arrived. As per the Parsis charity, all the clothes of the dead are donated to the destitute, poor and needy Parsis. She sorted all the items of Minocher. Among these items, she found his Parsi pugree, which is rare in the vastly changing Parsi outlook where all the Parsis prefer to clothe like the Westerners even at wedding ceremonies. The pugree is worn on ceremonial occasions by Parsi men. Minocher’s pugree was an antique, valuable piece, as these typical ethnic dresses are also vanishing with the Parsi traditions in the whirl of westernization. Daulat decided to give it to someone who would value it more. She gave an advertisement in Jam-e-Jamshed, in the hope that Minocher’s pugree would find a suitable home. The visit by the approaching buyer of the pugree gives Daulat as relief from her oversympathetic first ‘condolence visitor’ i.e Moti. In a melodramatic and almost mock-tragic manner Moti falls upon Daulat’s
neck reeking of eau de cologne, uttering loud cries of distress. This cologne is normally associated with the sick room and death in the Parsi psyche. A Parsi patient is often made comfortable by the careful use of a little eau de cologne on his/her forehead. A Parsi dead body is kept smelling fragrant by moderate sprinklings of this scented water.

Hence it is the most appropriate perfume to be worn on a condolence visit. As the young man came for the pugree, both Najamai and Moti were horrified as: “Minocher’s pugree being sold and the man barely digested by vultures at the Tower Of Silence!” (74). Daulat was firm and she not only made him try on the pugree but also denied to accept the payment for it and then she extinguished the lamp:

“It is yours, wear it in good health. And take good care of it for my Minocher… If you have a son, maybe he will wear it, too, on his wedding.” (76)

‘Of White Hairs and Cricket’ highlights the gluttony of the Parsis and other Parsi issues. The story opens with Kersi’s unwillingly pulling out the gray hair of his unemployed father who dreamt of bright future prospect while searching for job opportunities in news-paper. Mistry comments on the poor condition of the Parsis. Kersi and his father have had the toast smelling of kerosene due to unavailability of microovens and toasters. This reference to kerosene suggests the poverty and financial troubles so many poor families suffer from. Kersi’s maternal grandmother used to purchase the edible items from the hawkers. But Kersi’s disability to digest the food always revealed the truth. On such occassions Mamaiji in rage shouted at him. It was fun to listen to her scatological reproaches:

“Mua ugheerparoo! Eating my food, then shitting and tattling all over the place. Next time I’ll cork you up with a big bootch before feeding you.” (112)

Pulling out the gray hair from father’s head is considered to be illusion of the youth (past glory) and truth of coming of old age (dying community).
These hair-pulling activities are resulted in the conflict between his father and grandmother. Like most orthodox Parsis, She was sure that hair was a thing of evil and could be used for the black magic. That’s why Parsis always covered their heads with white clothes by women and cap by men. She thought by compelling Kersi to pull hair, his father was committing a sin: “Sunday dawns and he makes the child do that duleendar thing again. It will only bring bad luck” (109). She is not only superstitious but also a devout Parsi woman who spun wool for the kustis.

The next story ‘The Paying Guests’ deals with the problems of tenants and their evacuation from the rented house. The Baag has all the Parsi inhabitants, except one Muslim sub-paying-guest. An old Parsi couple had become the paying guest in the flat of the young couple Kashmira and Boman. This is typical situation in space-trapped Mumbai where an outdated rent act in cooperation with extremely high real estate prices, makes it unfeasible for the average person to either rent or own a flat. Neighbours sympathized with Boman and Kashmira but no one wanted to go to court as witness. Boman was desperate and knew that the only person who would speak up in court was the Muslim who lived in the next flat. Though he was very desperate to get rid of these tenants, he was not ready to request him “to testify against a fellow Parsi” (138). At this juncture Nilufar Bharucha aptly comments:

There are two interesting things happening in this refusal to approach, one is the fact that the Parsis like most minority communities have a ‘closing-of-rank’ approach to their problems. A minority does not invite attention to one’s self or expose one’s internal weakness, to the communal other. [Bharucha 2003:98]

Here it is understandable that most Parsis still brood over the inherited distrust towards the Muslim as inherited enemies because they caused their expulsion from their ancestral land of Persia. Parsis still blame Muslims for their booting out from Persia. It was the outcome of the
feelings of nostalgia of their homeland: “It’s [Persia is] the land of our ancestors… of great Zoroastrian empires… under Cyrus…. Darius. If it weren’t for the bloody Mussalmans, Zoroastrians would be ruling the world” [Pestonji 1999:43]. But here is another reason. Baag is firmly a residence for the Parsis and supervised by the Parsi Trust. So it is scandalous that Parsi Baag has a Muslim resident.

‘The Exercisers’ highlights the issues related with better future prospects, love-marriages and religious beliefs. The story opens with Mr. and Mrs. Bulsara in quest of the aid of their family guru, Bhagwan Baba, to induce Jehangir of how unsuitable the girl was for him. Here, Hindu element of the personal guru is unfamiliar to Zoroastrianism which does not believe in the negotiator between believer and God. However, centuries of living in India and co-existence has apparently meant that some of the beliefs of the dominant community have been absorbed by the Parsis. After two years at college, Jehangir succeeds in the love affair with a girl from his choir group. His parents resented her as too modern. Moreover his mother charged her with her interest in Jehangir just because, “she knows you will go to study in America one day and settle there” (207). Parsi children are brought up with the purpose of: “Young men and women grew up with the idea of emigrating to Velaat-which could mean England, America, Canada or Australia- as soon as they were qualified enough to seek higher qualifications abroad” [Pestonji 1999:5-6].

The three stories ‘Squatter’, ‘Lend me Your Light’, and ‘Swimming Lessons’ belong to the group of Mistry’s Canadian stories. They deal with the diasporic experience of the writer in Canada and vying for the homeland, searching the place for existence in both locations. These are the stories which are concerned with Rushdie’s Periscopic vision of both India and Canada.

Nariman Hansotia begins the story of Squatter by shaping it within the story of the courageous Savukshaw, the cricketer and hunter.
Savukshaw changed his professions at will. The disgrace of and mortification of the contemporary Parsi immigrant to the West is thus off-set by the boasting Parsi. Savukshaw had single-handedly salvaged the prestige of the touring Indian cricket team by hitting whatever the English bowlers sent him, all round the field with complete freedom. Savukshaw would have escorted the Indian team to victory. But due the rain, it had resulted in a draw. This reflects the pride of the Parsis and their contribution to modern India, as Bharucha rightly says:

This tale of derring-do filled Hansotia’s young listeners-all male- with pride in thier lineage. This has for long been one of the reasons for story-telling, magnifying the self-esteem of the tribe. [Bharucha 2003:104]

Mistry describes the Parsiness in eating habits while giving the description of Mrs. Savukshaw’s mastery in the cooking of the favourite Parsi dish - dhansak. Mrs. Savukshaw’ dhansak is described with details of ingredients of spices and one can almost smell “the aroma” (151) that wafted around Mr. Savukshaw’s camp-fire as he heated up his chicken dhansak dinner. Nariman begins the story of ‘Squatter’ whose hero is Sarosh - Sid. He figures in the backdrop of ‘Condolence Visit’. Mistry highlights Sarosh’s immigration and his problem to cope with Canada and compares it with Vera and Dolly’s successful immigration. Unlike them did not “find happiness there” (153). The glorious opening of the Savukshaw’s story is contrasted with the pathetic stance implement by Sid-as he climbs up onto the toilet seat in his Canadian home every morning to clear his bowels. This scatological opening is an ironic comment on the immigrant’s identity-construction and identity-confusion that at the front level imitate the Western mores and depict him in the mirror of the White world. But the personal self is often unwilling to keep rhythm with outward, cosmetic changes.
Before flying to Canada, at the farewell gathering he promised his friends and family to return to India if he does not become “completely Canadian” (155) within ten years from the time he lands there. This promise was resulted into the traumatized and pathetic condition which however led to great humiliation as Sid was unable to assimilate in the American atmosphere:

The absence of feet below the stall door, the smell of faeces, the rustle of paper, glimpses caught through the narrow crack between the stall door and jamb -- all these added up to only one thing: a foreign presence in the stall, not doing things in the conventional way. And if the one outside could receive the fetor of Sarosh’s business wafting through the door, poor unhappy Sarosh too could detect something malodorus in the air; the presence of xenophobia and hostility. (156)

Excessive visits to toilets and late comings were marked by the supervisor who advised him to visit for “an immigration-related problem” (157) to his Immigrant Aid Society: “They should be able to help you. Every ethnic group has one: Vietnamese, Chinese- I’m certain that one exists for Indians” (157). Here the concept of ethnic group can be said to be an American term for the non-Europeans or one from outside the USA. It also suggests the national aspect of ethnicity. Nariman Hansotia explained the “Multicultural Department” (160) to his audience:

The Multicultural Department is a Canadian invention. It is supposed to ensure that ethnic cultures are able to flourish, so that Canadian society will consist of a mosaic of cultures - that’s their favourite word, mosaic - instead of one uniform mix, like the American melting pot. If you ask me, mosaic and melting pot are both nonsense, and ethnic is a polite way of saying bloody foreigner. (Emphasis added) (160)
P.A. Abraham has also talked about the connotations of the term ‘ethnic’. He points out it as: “Personally, I consider ‘ethnic’ to be a derogatory term. The expressions ‘mainstream’ and ‘ethnic minority’ should be replaced by ‘ethnic majority’ and ‘ethnic minority’, as these terms imply a more balanced and comprehensive framework for Canadian life and which can be meaningfully related to the historical and social reality of Canadian society” [Ed. Jasbir Jain 2003:51].

Sarosh instead of CNI and Multicultural Department opted for the travel agent’s office for his forthcoming departure from Canada. Just as the plane began to move down the runway, Sarosh labored in the washroom. Sarosh for the first time in ten years was able to perform without squatting. He was not sure when he succeeded. Sarosh once again uprooted this time from Canada. He was searching his roots in India. He was unsuccessful in his attempt:

Week went by and Sarosh found himself desperately searching for his old place in the pattern of life he had vacated ten years ago (167).

Everything was strange and unknown. People became strangers for him. He was unable to identify himself with the home: “The old pattern was never found by Sarosh; he searched in vain. Patterns of life are selfish and unforgiving”(167). Ashish Gupta highlights such predicament of the immigrant suffering the double dislocation from hostland and homeland. He describes it as “…seem to be living with ghosts from … past. They are like hyenas ripping apart the carcass of … personality… little consolation in the fact that cultural dislocation is not restricted to … alone, but is a phenomenon affecting many in Indian society as well ”[Ed. Jasbir Jain 2003:45]. This is exactly what Edward Said has said: “Exile is punishing… Once you have lost your homeland, it cannot be recovered as Paradise.” [Nikhil Padgaonkar 1998]

Then Nariman Hansotia talks to the protagonist of his story directly. Sarosh denies to be called as ‘Sid’ as “that name reminds…of all troubles”
This reflects that changing names to adopt new identity is troublesome, because they remind people the troubles and suffering after shedding that identity. Here protagonist himself speaks to preach the moral of the story by his own example:

Tell them... ‘that the world can be a bewildering place, and dreams and ambitions are often paths to the most pernicious of traps’ ... “When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice: tell them that in Toronto once lived a Parsi boy as best as he could. Set you down this, and say, besides, that 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.” (168)

Here, Mistry has adopted self-mocking tone, suggesting the failure in adopting and adapting the host country.

In the next story, Lend me Your Light, Mistry expressed his guilt-consciousness that comes with immigration. The story begins with Tagor’s line from Gitanjali: “Your lights are all lit- Lend me your Light”. These words of Tagore obtain a critical poignancy in the context of the story. It interpretes “the need for Indians to remain rooted to their soil, help their fellow brethren who are oppressed, deprived and exploited, but are completely helpless and at the mercy of the powerful” [Chandra 2002:69]. The story focuses complex issues related with Parsi diaspora, identity crisis, and assimilation. The three protagonists of the story highlight different dimensions of above problems. Jamshed’s character portrays the alienated Parsi in the Indian context, who in the postcolonial period pants for the elite status that colonialism bestowed on his forefathers. Like many westernized rich Parsis, his life as a boy had circled round imported model-airplane kits, records of Mantovani and Broadway musicals and later classical music “from Bach to Poulenc”(175). Jamshed is a completely westernized Parsi who sees India as nothing but heat and dust, poor,
hungry and further hell to live. It suggests the reluctance of the post-colonial Parsis to merge with Indian masses. Percy deep-rooted in Indian soil works for the upliftment of the oppressed in the villages. He is an idealistic social worker working for villagers at the stake of his life for farmers to free them from the yoke of the landlords and moneylenders whereas Kersi because of his English education migrates to west for better future prospects. Kersi, a migrant, is confused with his new space and identity. At the same time, he does not want to lose the roots and wanted to be connected with his country. He appreciates the efforts of his brother, thinks himself guilty of running away from the home-reality and hates the ways of Jamshed and tries to assimilate in the new environment. It is rather contradictory to convey that even though he might have abandoned India, he did not share Jamshed’s anti-Indian sentiments, the land which had given the refuge to his ancestors. So the guilt of leaving it and Parsi alienation is given in the beginning.

Kersi’s brother Percy and Jamshed were friends when at school, but later their ways become different, as Jamshed’s obsession with all western things led him to migrate to the USA, while Percy had different vocation having greater assimilation within Indian diasporic situation through work in the Indian villages. Jamshed’s anger is concerned with instability and no future in postcolonial India:

“…absolutely no future in this stupid place,”
“Bloody corruption, everywhere. And you can’t get to see a decent English movie. First chance I get, I’m going abroad. Preferably the U.S.” (178)

This suggests that Parsis are “reluctant Indians” [Kanga 1991:27] and Anglophilia is “the Parsi disease” [Kanga 1991:161]. The same hint of migration was echoed in Kersi’s preparation to immigrate to the USA. It is fully supported by his parents as foretold, his “education and …westernized background, and …fluency in the English language” (178). The night
before departure Kersi suffered from a searing pain in his eyes and wondered if he was being punished for the sin of immigration:

...the sin of hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth, and paying the price in burnt-out eyes: I Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto... (180)

This use of classical European myth is the direct result of English education that the British colonisers had imposed on their Indian subjects. The irony here is the immigrant acquired the status of blind prophet unable to see either the past (Bombay) or the future (Toronto). It is the beginning of the conflict between Indian roots (soul) and Canadian space (dream). In Toronto Kersi became a member of the Toronto Zoroastrian Society. Percy’s letters from India about his work in the Indian village show the brutal reality of poverty and exploitation that Parsis like Kersi are trying to leave behind them, when they migrate to the West. Mistry gives the difference of lives Kercy and Percy were leading: Percy “waging battles against corruption and evil” whereas Kersi was watching sitcoms on …rented Granada TV. …attending dinner parties at Parsi homes” (184). Percy’s letters revealed that the gulf between him and Jamshed was unbridgeable. When Kersi made his first visit back home, he bought gifts for everybody and wondered why he was doing that:

I felt like one of those soldiers who, in wartime, accumulates strange things to use as currency for barter. What was I hoping to barter them for? Attention? Gratitude? Balm to soothe guilt or some other malady of conscience? (186)

A wellknown writer and critic Ashis Gupta highlights on this sense of guilt. The guilt of immigration is not escapable as he says, “I was trying to expiate a nagging sense of guilt, but knew in my heart that I didn’t really deserve forgiveness. This is the guilt of expatriate Indian, the cornerstone of the immigrant personality” [Ed. Jasbir Jain 2003:40]. Like most
immigrants, Kersi, too, encountered the culture-shock after reaching Bombay. He felt a contrast between the lush greenery of the West and “the parched land: brown, weary, and unhappy” (186) of India. Indian soil was strikingly different. The city also appeared dirtier and more crowded. Mistry used the device of the morality play to describe the city scenario: “All the players were there: Fate and Reality, and the latter’s offspring, the New Reality, and also Poverty and Hunger, Virtue and Vice, Apathy, and Corruption” (187). Dom Moares too has similar feelings of alienation from India. Standing at Kanheri, he feels, “a kind of vacancy of hollowness waiting to be inhabited... in Europe I had positive emotions, in India I sank into the dream in which the whole country was sunk.” [Moraes 1990:162]

This distancing from India is evident when he gives up the option of boarding a running bus and the realisation hits him that: “I was a tourist here, and not committed to life in the combat zone” (188). This is the debatable point where immigrant visits his imaginary homeland and lives in the present of his past, but is no longer member of the combat zone, i.e. life in India. But Mistry’s picturization of comfort zone i.e. life in Canada is not that glorious as expected by the immigrants.

The last story in the collection ‘Swimming Lesson’ has autobiographical overtones. It highlights the various issues what Bharucha says:

…the trauma of finding an identity and location in a Western space is linked to sexuality, in a trajectory that is a deliberate or inadvertent mirroring of the manner in which imperialism itself saw in sexual terms - the male West and the female East and also in the way in which current postcolonial theorists image colonisation as a rape of the non-West by the West. [Bharucha 2003:115]

It also highlights that in the white-western space of Canada, the elitist status of the Parsi-immigrant and the Parsi self-esteem is in even greater danger than it is in Post-colonial India. Mistry exposes the racism
and growing influence of the majoritarian culture. Yet, even this lowered status is to be preferred to the real or perceived threat and pressure on Parsis of post-Shiv Sena Bombay:

_The postman rang the doorbell the way he always did, long and continuous; Mother went to open it, wanting to give him a piece of her mind but thought better of it, she did not want to risk the vengeance of postman, it was so easy for them to destroy letters; 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._ (231)

Mistry highlights the attraction of white-pink bodies for the Indians, here the Parsis. He also comments on the disillusion Kersy witnesses. The women, he saw sunbathing from his upper floor window, was rather unattractive with “wrinkled skin, aging hands, sagging bottoms, varicose veins” (233). Kersi compared the clean swimming pool with dirty beach of Bombay Chowpatty. He was unable to swim in the sea at Bombay as well as in the pool in Canada too. These failures could be seen as the failure of Kersi and through him most Parsis, to assimilate in either Indian or Canadaian (Western) Diasporas. However by the end of the story, Kersi was able to open his eyes underwater in his bath-tub and see life in a double-perspective i.e. Indian and Canadian. But before the successful assimilation Kersi went through horrible problems faced by any immigrant - the racism, the bitter winter etc. Kersi’s first encounter with racism and xenophobia were when he enrolled himself in swimming class where he found three boys singing: “Paki Paki, smell like curry. …pretty soon all the water’s going to taste of curry” (238). His final comments bring out the inner fear of immigrants evocatively:

_Maybe the swimming pool is the hangout of some racist group, bent on eliminating all non-white swimmers, to keep their waters pure and their white sisters unogled._ (239)
The next problem he suffered was the bitter winter in Toronto. He saw the old man staring outside watching the snowfall. Kercy imagined the old man’s thoughts of childhood days, snowmen with hats and pipes, and snowball fights and white Christmas, and Christmas tree. Then next was his reaction and thoughts when he would grow old in this alien country:

> What will I think of, old in this country, when I sit and watch the snow come down? For me, it is already too late for snowmen and snowball fights, and all I will have is thoughts about childhood thoughts and dreams, built around snowscapes and winter-wonderlands on the Christmas cards so popular in Bombay; my snowmen and snowball fights and Christmas trees are in the pages of Enid Blyton’s books, dispersed amidst the adventures of the Famous Five, and the Five Find-Outers, and the Secret Seven. My snowflakes are even less forgettable than the old man’s, for they never melt. (244)

This reflects the problem of memory and aging. At the same time it suggests that one can’t become the native unless born in that particular land. The contrasts between the memory of the old man and Kersi as would-be-old man is that old man has experienced those all snow-games and related adventures in his childhood where as Kersi has just read and seen all those things in the books alone. In this reference George Steiner describes the expatriate writer as “the contemporary everyman”. It is also described as “a state of mind and emotion which includes a wistful longing for past. It is often symbolized by the pain of exile and homelessness. There is a complex view of the double vision of the expatriates-both a looking forward and a yearning backward. It is, in fact, part of every person’s life, it is part of the human condition. No matter where you lived, even if you lived in the same place all your life, you would look at the past, at lost moments, at lost opportunities, lost loves. [Ed. Jasbir Jain 2003:51]. Kersi gives the glimpses of the Canadian experiences directly to the reader. There are other readers also within the story who experience and comment
on it. His parents, especially his father evaluate his son’s work mainly the last one, i.e. ‘Swimming lessons’ which dealt with Canada:

...if he continues to write about such things he will become popular because I am sure they are interested there in reading about life through the eyes of an immigrant, it provides a different viewpoint; the only danger is if he changes and becomes so much like them that he will write like one of them and lose the important difference. (248)

Here, the need of the diasporic writer to write about the homeland and about the host-land is important. The writer has to maintain the distance with the host-country as well as enjoy the privilege being one of them. It also relates the problem of assimilation of mental set-up. All these diasporic writers dealt with such problems. While reading the stories one by one Kersi’s father remarked on the portrayal of Parsi families in the Firozsha Baag. He expected the positive aspect of Parsis and Parsiness:

... all the Parsi families were poor or middle-class....but there should also have been something positive about Parsis, there was so much to be proud of .... he should have found some way to bring some of these wonderful facts into his stories, what would people reading these stories think, those who did not know about Parsis- that the whole community was full of cranky, bigoted people; and in reality it was the richest, most advanced and philanthropic community in India and he did not tell his own son that Parsis had a reputation for being generous and family-oriented. (245)

It is obvious that Mistry’s Canadian stories draw dark and gloomy picture of Canada mercilessly and even warn reader against the act of immigration.
III

Such a Long Journey

Mistry has brilliantly used three epigraphs from well-known poets to initiate readers into the leit-motives of the narration. The first epigraph is cited from famous Iranian (Persian) epic *Shah Nama* that recalls both the glorious Iranian heritage of a mighty empire: “…the kings who had once possessed the world. ...hold the world in the beginning,” as well as marks the downgraded condition of the present-day Parsis, even in Iran: “and why is it that it has been left to us in such a sorry state”. It also hints the post-colonial predicament of the Parsis as they are always worried of their miniscule community and its existence: “… they were able to live free of care during the days of their heroic labours?” The second epigraph is from T.S. Eliot’s *Journey of the Magi* that reminds the three wise ancient Zoroastrian priests who were present at the nativity of the Christ. This epigraph not only provides the title of the text but also highlights the central motif of *journey* as a metaphor:

A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year,  
For a journey, and such a long journey…

This most difficult journey is undertaken by the protagonist of the novel. The final epigraph from Tagore’s *Gitanjali* concludes the way in which the Parsis have moved from one country to another and how they had adapted themselves to new realities by forgetting the old thing: “where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders”.

Mistry has reviewed major phases of the Indian political history of 70s and 80s where reference of Indo-China war (1962) and humiliation of defeat that resulted into the end of Nehruvian era of dream of a secular India, Indo-Pakistan war (1965), death of Shastri at Tashkant, Indo-Pakistan (East) war (1971) which led to the liberation of Bangladesh from the ruins of East-Pakistan. It reflects how contemporary politics has
severally affected Mistry’s miniature community under the uprising of fundamentalist right-wing parties like Shiv-Sena. The nationalization of the banks was the terrible shock to the Parsis, who were the Kings of the Banks. There is mutual hatred for Indira Gandhi who troubled Sohrab Nagarwala, the cashier of State Bank of India, and a Parsi agent from RAW. In the novel Mistry has used the story with the fictional name of Major Jimmy Bilimoria.

This is the betrayal of marginal Parsi community by central ruling government which Mistry portrays in the novel. It is precisely what Bharucha said:

As a Parsi he is on the periphery even in India, so his discourse also challenges and resists the totalization of dominant culture within India itself. [Bharucha 1995:59]

Mistry has provided the vision of Bombay that was falling victim to the fundamentalism where all the religions, communities were at peace in idealistic utopian world. During partition, whole of north India was set on the fire of ethnic hated because of Hindu-Muslim riots. It was the direct result of increasing fundamentalism of right wing parties like Shiv Sena whose cry for the Maharashtra for Maharashtrians shattered this frame that entrapped Bombay in the clutches of the fundamentalist, mafia dons and all other criminal activities in 1960s.

Mistry opens this novel against the backdrop of portraying the lives of the Khodadadad building, a Parsi housing complex where Gustad Noble and his family lives. In the war time (1962) Gustad had put the black-out paper on the window panes and ventilaters that he never removed then. Gustad’s family grumbled but then “grew accustomed to living in less light” (11). This adjustment suggests the submission of marginal cultures to the mainstream cultures. In 1965 the same blackout papers needed to go up again, as Pakistan waged war against India. Years after it was trouble in East-Pakistan that attracted the attention of Gustad to read from the daily
newspaper. It reminded him and his family his neighbour Major Bilimoria through whom Gustad’s Parsi world got extended to the wider experience of Indian world. Mistry has created the dynamic character of the Wall which is used as the open lavatory “like a wholesale public latrine” (16). All the passersby urinated there which resulted in the great stinky smell and caused mosquito nuisance to the residents of Khodadad building. It also marks the boundary which stands for the inclusion and exclusion. It is protective as well as reductive. It protects the Parsi minority from the outer world but at the same time reduces their world within it and isolates them from the Indian millieu.

Mistry highlights pathetic conditions of Gustad’s family after his interaction with Jimmy Bilimoria’s plan to deposit ten lakh rupees in his bank. This captures the happiness of Gustad and his family into a vortex of political turmoil of India and subaltern status of his community fellow. Mistry’s use of irony underlines the growing corruption in Indian politics and society as Sohrab expresses his views:

Jimmy Uncle says this is government money, right?  
So let’s spend it on all the things government is supposed to do. Wouldn’t it be nice to fix the sewers in this area, install water tanks for everyone… (121)

Gustad’s delay in depositing the money in bank earned rage and danger for his family as he found one morning “A headless bandicoot” (134) and “the dead cat” (137). At last he received a paper scrap with rhyming couplet, “Bilimoria chaaval chorya/ Daando lai nay marva dorya” (140). Such threats to his family enraged Gustad and raised a sense of betrayal from a fellow Parsi, a dear brother to him:

Damn Jimmy, the bastard. Once like a brother… and now? Those Bible stories, that Malcolm used to tell me. One about Cain and Abel….. Fairy Tales, I used to think. ...Jimmy, another kind of Cain. Killed the trust, love, respect, everything. And that other story, about Absalom, son of David. (178)
The use of biblical story is the effect of Gustad’s Christian friend Malcom and the English education of Parsis. Dinshawaji showed Gustad a newspaper Colum entitled, “CORRUPTION RIPE IN RAW” (194) which made Gustad angry. It described the details of Mr. Bilimoria’s arrest on the charges of impersonating the Prime Minsiter’s voice on telephone and ordered Bank’s Chief Cashier to hand over sixty lakh rupees to Bangladeshi Babu. Mr. Bilimoria received the money in the persona of Bangladeshi Babu. The report read that Mr. Bilimoria took the whole responsibility of this plan as he wanted to help “The Mukti Bahini” (195). Mistry very brilliantly focused the gap-holes of the real incident. The crime is described as “highly imaginative” (195) and the circumstances as “unusual” (195). It put forth the question of faith in the banks as well as great political leaders. The news was a great blow to the Parsi community as it caused the decline in their honour and respect:

It was not very often that a Parsi made the newspapers for a crime. The last sensation had been more than a decade ago, when a naval commander had shot and killed his wife’s lover. (207)

Major Bilimoria requested Gustad to come and see him in the prison of Delhi. Ghulam brought the news from the newspaper which said: “SENTENCING SOON IN RUPEES-FOR-RAW CASE” (233). Ghulam added more information and confirmed the corruption in the government and its system as “the courts” (233) were managed. The “chief investigator” (234) suddenly died in a car accident. Ghulam’s bitter comments and rage hints at the corruption rate and indulgence of influential leaders in the fraud scam as well as the common public cry against such ill-activities. Gustad read the signs in the hotel: “Don’t Discuss God & Politics” (174). It shows the corrupted politics of contemporary India. Sohrab’s comments are apt in this context, as he says:

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. (68)

Dr. Paymaster explained corruption as “gangrene at an advanced stage” (313). While discussing the East-Pakistan problem, Pakistan is called as “Bloody butchers” (76), America as “maader chod” (76), Nixon as “chootia” (76) licking his way up into Pakistan’s arsehole. This description of Pakistan and America suggests the anger among the common people of India. Mistry shows the paradox of the American attitude which they are famous for the roles and identities worked out for a long on all the essential international stages: “that Americans were a kind and friendly people, champions of justice and liberty, supporters of freedom struggles and democracies everywhere” (299). Gustad left for Delhi to meet Jimmy. Jimmy narrated all the events of his present condition. Jimmy described the Prime Minister as “Spy”, “blackmail”(er), “control”(er), “very strong woman... very intelligent”(270), “calm”, “crooked”(271), “Very clever woman”(277). Jimmy provides the information of her cabinet suggesting the corruption rate on moral as well as economic level: “One of them... prefers little boys. Another takes pictures of himself… doing it with women” (270). He further describes the attitude of the Prime Minister who keeps control over friends and foes by black-mailing as “Blackmail is the only way she can keep control” (270). The Prime Minister took the written confession from Jimmy Bilimoria about the telephone and sixty lakh rupees:

She said, yes, but he did not see me speaking... we can always say someone imitated my voice... all you have to say is.... you imitated my voice. ...under proper conditions, people will believe anything. She promised... nothing would happen to me. (277)

But the money was rerouted to “a private account” (278). Jimmy thought to tell this corruption to the press and opposition parties. But
Prime Minister controlled everything like “RAW, the courts, broadcasting…” (278). Jimmy thought if Prime Minister used money for her personal causes then he and his friends can also use it. For this he put ten lakh rupees aside. This changing behavioural pattern of Jimmy, an honest Parsi, suggests the adverse effect of dictatorial political rule of majoritarians on honest and tiny community like Parsi.

After Major Jimmy Bilimoria’s death, Ghulam planned to take revenge. His plan displays the growing hatred among marginalized subaltern groups against the central majoritarian rule. Ghulam is ready to wait for the right timing:

From whoever is responsible. If it’s the car manufacturer, he will have to pay. Lots of possibilities - his car might explode, for instance. He also likes to fly aeroplanes, so: bhoom, crash, the end. As I said, whatever is necessary to get the job done. (323)

Ghulam revealed the dictatorship and dirty politics of the Prime Minister who made enemies “from Punjab to Tamil Nadu.” (323)

Mistry has portrayed the caricaturesque character like Dinshawaji who used to flirt with the young woman Laurie Coutino. Here his remarks on Laurie Coutino expressed the moral superiority of Parsis with racial pride:

‘Arre, Gustad, these Catholic girls are all hot-hot things. Listen, my school was in Dhobitalao area, almost hundred per cent ma-ka-pao. The things I would see, my eyeballs would fall out. Not like our Parsi girls with all their don’t touch-here and don’t-feel-there fussiness. Everything they would open up. In every gully-gootchy, yaar, in the dark, or under the stairs, what-what went on.’ (99)

Mistry focuses on the religious tolerance of the Parsis. Gustad agreed to visit the Mount Mary on Malcolm’s suggestion. Before this time, Gustad would have promptly dismissed such an invitation because: “Dabbling in religions was distasteful and irreverent, an affront to the other
faith and his own” (222). The pavement artist had described him the miracle of Mount Mary. Malcolm, too, said the same thing:

Gustad learned more about the Church, how it had a tradition of welcoming Parsis, Muslims, Hindus, regardless of caste and creed. Mother Mary helped everyone, She made no religious distinctions… Like divine intervention. Maybe Dada Ormuzd is telling me something. (222)

Gustad visited Mount Mary. This praying brought him peace of mind, for always religion is the source of peace and purity to lead a healthy and joyful life.

Another important character which stands for religious tolerance is the wall which encompassed all the religions of the world. Pavement artist made heaven out of hell by painting the portrayals of the saints, religious places of different religions:

Gautama Buddha in Lotus Position under the Bodhi Tree; Christ with Disciples at the Last Supper; Karttikeya, God of Valour; Haji Ali Dargah, the beautiful mosque in the sea; Church of Mount Mary; Daniel in the Lions’ Den; Sai Baba; Manasa, the Serpent-Goddess; Saint Francis Talking to the Birds; Krishna with Flute and Radha Holding Flowers; the Ascension; and finally, Dustoor Kookadaru and Dustoor Meherji Rana. (212)

Inspector Bamji congratulated Gustad to make the wall “pissproof” (213). But some of the tenants from Khodadad building complained in private about presence of “parjaat gods on a Parsi Zarathosti building’s wall” (213). The wall became the sacred place of all religions, “a shrine for all races and religions” (286).

Mistry focuses on religious beliefs, ceremonies and customs of the Parsis. The novel begins at the dawn Gustad Noble turning Eastward to rising sun to “offer his orisons to Ahura Mazda” (01). Ghulam has arragned the funeral of Jimmy Bilimoria. Dilnavaz read about it in Jam-E-Jamshed. Thus, Mistry very aptly highlights that humanity, emotion and
love are very essential things to live and die happily which are sans
religion, caste and any ethnic group. Contradictorily, Mistry also highlights
the rigidity of Parsi community as Ghulam, being a non-Parsi, was denied
entrance into The Tower of Silence: “Your Parsi priest’s don’t allow
outsider like me to go inside” (322). Slaughtering in the house brings bad
luck. Dilnavaz opposed Gustad for his “mad and wholly impractical
scheme” (18) of cooking chicken by bringing it alive in kitchen and then
killing it in the house. In Dilnavaz’s family “a chicken was always brought
home slaughtered” (18). Parsis believe in good and bad omens. Mistry
gives the details of such omens. Miss Kuptitia excused Dilnavaz for her
dinner invitation, as she faced the bad omen in the morning and decided
not “to step outside her home for the next twenty-four hours” (35). Raining
is considered as “good luck if it rains when something new is beginning” (57).

Parsis perform some religious rituals before the start of some work.
Mistry gives the details of such a ceremony:

Before leaving, he had been adorned with a
vermilion dot on the forehead, and a garland of
roses and lilies. Dilnavaz did the overnaa and
sprinkled rice, presenting him with a coconut, bete
leaves, a dry date, one areca nut, and seven rupees,
all for good luck. She popped a lump of sugar in his
mouth… They said more or less the same things as
on a birthday, but the emphasis was on school and
studies. (57)

Mistry gave the details of final rites of Dinshawji. The news of
Funeral and Uthmna Ceremony was published in the Jam-E-Jamshed to
convey all the people about Dinshawji’s final rites. Parsis pray for one day
or four days. The corpse is washed before dokhma for “purity” (246).
Alamai argued with the men who came to perform Dinshawaji’s suchkaar
and sponging the corpse with Gomez, “‘All this nonsense with bull’s urine
is not for us …‘We are modern people. Use water only, nothing else’”
(246). Mistry gives details of Kusti prayer for Dinshawji:
Two men entered with the body, white-clad now, and laid it on the low marble platform. The face and ears were left uncovered by the white sheet. A priest arrived and lit an oil lamp next to Dinshawji’s head… The priest picked up a sliver of sandalwood, dipped it in oil and held it to the flame. He transferred it to the thurible and sprinkled lobar upon it. The fragrance of frankincense filled the room. The priest started to pray. (247)

Gustad felt the serene and powerful impact of prayers on the listeners. Mistry highlights the extinction of the Avestan language as Parsis adopted Gujarati and English. He points out the Parsi attitude of following the prayers without understanding the language:

...Gustad was under its gentle spell. He listened to the music, the song in a language which he did not understand, but which was wondrously soothing. All his life he had uttered by rote the words of this dead language, comprehending not one of them while mouthing his prayers. But tonight, in the dustoorji’s soft and gentle music, the words were alive; tonight he came closer than he ever had to understanding the ancient meanings. The dustoorji cantillated the verses of the ancient Avesta. (247-248)

Dog is considered as the life-detector in Parsis. Parsis use it to know whether the person is really dead or not. When the char-chassam dog walked round the bier, sniffed and left in silence, Alamai wailed: “‘O dog! Make some little sound at least! O Parvar Daegar! No barking? Now it is certain! O my Dinshaw, now you have really left me!’” (251). Gustad observed the contrasts between her “modernistic ideas and her orthodox confusions” (251). After due time, the nassasalers carried the bier to the Tower, to the well of vultures. Gustad wished to carry Dinshawji, but in Zoroastrianism only nassasalers could carry the dead body. Gustad points out the contrast between belief and reality: “Silly custom, to have professional pall-bearers. And on top of that, poor fellows treated like outcasts and untouchables” (252).
Women are not allowed to approach “the well of vultures” (252). So, women lined up on the “bungalee’s verandah” (252). The procession had arrived at the Tower. The common Parsis are not allowed to enter the well. So, only nassasalers entered inside the Tower closing the door behind them. But they knew what would happen inside:

…the nassasalers would place the body on a pavi, on the outermost of three concentric stone circles. Then, without touching Dinshawji’s flesh, using their special hooked rods they would tear off the white cloth. Every stitch, till he was exposed to the creatures of the air, naked as the day he had entered the world. (254)

Misry gives some of the problems related with Dokhma and also suggests the reforms to improve over it by giving some paradoxical and comic details. Gustad at the Tower of Silence heard from the man at counter that two women last week requested him:

‘We forgot to remove a diamond ring from Grandmama’s finger,’ they said. ‘Can you please shoo off the vultures for a few minutes? So we can go inside the Tower and get it back?’ (316)

Mistry shows the dual nature of such Parsis with practical purposes:

But the women told him to hurry before the priceless diamond ring wound up in a vulture’s belly. Money was not the question, it was the sentimental value. ‘We have no faith in the work of illiterate cretins like nassasalers,’ they said, ignoring his reminders that laity were forbidden inside the Tower. (316)

The most important problem related with the Dokhma is the littering of the flesh by the vultures which troubled the clerk a lot as tenants from luxurious costly flats around Doongerwadi had often complained against vultures:

‘Control your vultures! Throwing rubbish on our 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 launched 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. (316-317)

On the other hand, relatives of dead read about the skyscraper scandal and protested:

…they were not paying funeral fees to have their dear departed ones anatomized and strewn piecemeal on posh balconies. The bereaved insisted that the Punchayet do something about it. ‘Train the vultures properly,’ they said, ‘or import more vultures, so all flesh can be consumed in the well. We don’t want a surplus which can be carried off and lost in impure, profane places.’ (317)

Mistry talks about the continuous battle between the reformists and the orthodox Parsis. They fought over any topic with community interest like “the chemical analysis of nirang”, “the vibration theory of Avesta prayers” (317). On the vultures’ controversy, both the orthodox and reformists joined the battle. The orthodox defended it as “a pure method, defiling none of God’s good creations: earth, water, air, and fire” (317) and on the basis of “modern hygienic standards” (317). Here, the stance taken by orthodox can be seen in what Kanga said: “That we are burned to ashes like the Hindus? Or chewed by worms like the English men? I, for one, prefer to be eaten by vultures” [Kanga 1991:73]. The reformists, who favoured cremation, rejected it on suitability ground and changing of the time:

…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. (317)

Mistry provides very funny as well as intelligent reasons for the battle between Orthodox and Reformist on the issue of traditional dokhma.
The reformists called orthodox “vulturists” (317). Orthodox Parsis put charge on reformists as their relatives in foreign has no access to Tower of silence or some of them own “shares in crematoria” (317). That’s why these reformists are not interested in traditional dokhma. The orthodox provided the proofs from well-known ornithologists that “vultures, as a species, were unable to fly after a heavy meal or if their talons and beaks were loaded” (318). In the bank, there was passionate argument over “the Tower of Silence controversy” (71). Whenever matter grew worse Dinshawaji would manage to end matters on a light note, saying things like:

‘Better that my dear domestic vulture eats me up than the feathered ones. With her I have a guarantee- she at least won’t scatter pieces of my meat all over Bombay.’ (72)

Mistry deals with religious issues and other values which resulted into ethnic anxiety. Parsis held the cow in the highest regard. Parsis have promised it to the king, Jadav Rana. But for the economical reasons some Parsis started feasting on beef. Malcolm taught Gustad to eat beef. Malcolm thought to be blessed as:

‘Lucky for us,’…‘that we are minorities in a nation of Hindus. Let them eat pulses and grams and beans, spiced with their stinky asafoetida - what they call hing. Let them fart their lives away. The modernized Hindus eat mutton. Or chicken, if they want to be more fashionable. But we will get our protein from their sacred cow.’ At other times he would say mimicking their economics professor, ‘Law of supply and demand, always remember. That’s the key. Keeps down the price of beef. And it is healthier because it is holier.’ (23)

Here, one can understand that the prices of mutton and chicken are raised as the majority of Hindus eat mutton and chicken as the sign of “modernized” (23) or for being “fashionable” (23). But they never ate beef. So the prices of the beef are always down. Minority like Christian and
Muslim eat beef because it is cheap as well as “healthier because it is holier” (23). They have an interesting notion about vegetarians that vegetarians do not have physical stamina. It is reflected aptly as: “Vegetarianism is the reason for India never winning medals at the Olympics” [Pestonji 1999:10]. Gustad experienced an embarrassing incident in the bus while carrying beef in the basket to home. He dexteriously carried the beef in the multi-layerd paper bag. But to his misfortune he was disclosed to the woman. She covered her nose and mouth with a sari corner. Gustad says, “Smells my fear, like a dog. Eyes of a Doberman. These bloody vegetarians. A sixth sense for meat” (223).

Gustad and Malcolm used to go Crawford Market for the beef. But Gustad gave up to go there for “his fear of riots and bloodshed” (220). He was afraid because he had witnessed such riots which began with rallies. Rally had brought “a herd of cows” as per the “modern trends in political campaigning and public relations” (221).

Gustad observed the Church rituals and found them just opposite to the rituals in the Fire Temple:

Gustad went in with him, dipping his fingers in the font of holy water and crossing himself, imitating his friend closely, to fit in and not give offence to anyone. The first time, Gustad was quite intrigued by the church and its rituals, so different from what went on in the Fire Temple. (23-24)

But Gustad knew that he should respect all religions. For him all religions were equal but at the same time one should be faithful to one’s own religion as “religions were not like garment styles that could be changed at whim or to follow fashion” (24). His parents always opposed the “conversion and apostasy being as rife as it was, and rooted in the very history of the land” (24).

Gustad preferred the Fire Temple to Church for its “sense of peaceful mystery and individual serenity” (24). Sometimes he doubted whether Malcolm was making “an amateurish, half-hearted attempt at
“proselytism” (24). Malcolm provided the information regarding the arrival of Christianity in India. He tried to impress Gustad with his knowledge and superiority over the Parsis. But Gustad too, answered with the same zeal:

‘Long before you Parsis came in the seventh century from Parsia,’ he teased, ‘running away from the Muslims.’ ‘That may be,’ rejoined Gustad, ‘but our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before your Son of God was even born; a thousand hundred years before the Buddha; two hundred years before Moses. And do you know how much Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?’ (24)

Gustad and his friends used to tell jokes from various ethnic groups like Sikh, Madrasi, and Gujarati etc. “No linguistic or ethnic group was spared; perfect equality prevailed in the canteen when it came to jokes” (71).

The widening of the roads caused great violence as the religious wall was about to be demolished by Bombay Municipal Co-operation. Malcolm was the project supervisor. The morcha against the corruption in municipality was proceeding ahead and stopped before the wall. The leader called it “sacred wall of miracles” (326). He appealed to all the religions and its followers:

The wall of Hindu and Muslim, Sikh and Christian, Parsi and Buddhist! A holy wall, a wall suitable for worship and devotion, whatever your faith! So let us give thanks for the past success! Let us ask blessings for future endeavours! (326)

Mistry highlights the diversity of Indian culture with multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-culture attitude. It can be noticed from the members in queue, the decline in Parsi demography as “At the painting of Zarathustra there was only one person: Dr.Paymaster” (326). There was public uproar after learning the destruction of the wall:

Disbelief turned into indignation, then to outrage, that surged through the congregation and swelled
into a tidal wave, making the ground tremble as it galloped for the shore... The wall of gods and goddesses cannot be broken! We will see that not one finger is raised against the deities! We will protect them with our blood if need be! (326)

Mistry shows minoritarian trend to learn the tactics of majority group for the assimilation. Inspector Bamji explained Gustad about the indifference toward the incident to be occurred. He learned from “Maratha buggers” (330) to say “umacha section nai” (330) shamelessly. It shows hatred for the center and inherited indifference of minority from majority as well as following rules of the majority. Tehmul’s reiteration of the Bamji’s abuses and grinning at the crowd resulted into the violence which took his life. Thus in violence the wall, a place of worship for all religions, was destroyed by the authorities causing the ethnic anxiety among the people. Pavement artist leaves the place. Gustad asks him where to go. His reply shows the Indian cultural scenario as, “In a world where roadside latrines become temples and shrines, and temples and shrines become dust and ruin, does it matter where?” (338)

Mistry gives the post-colonial predicament of the Parsis in India. Dinshawaji expresesed sorrow for present conditions of the Parsis and remembered the glorious past of his community which used to enjoy the “respect” (38). In those days Parsis were “the kings of banking” (38). But the present is full of frustration because “Indira Gandhi nationalized the banks” (38). Dinshawji, as the representative of his tiny community, disrespects the Prime Minister. He abuses her as “a shrewd woman”, “Saali” (38). He also highlights the mischievous attitude of the Prime Minister who encouraged the demands for “a separate Maharashtra”(39) which caused bloodshed and the parties like Shiv Sena raised the questions of religious-other, lingual-other, favoring the sons of the soil. This move of the Prime Minister caused the downgraded condition of the Parsis:

‘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.’ (39)

Shiv Sena harassed the minorities like Parsis with the processions and hooliganism resulting into the violence: “They were shouting “Parsi crow-eaters, we’ll show you who is the boss” (39). He calls Marathas as “…all those Sakarams and Dattarams and Tukarams only stood outside, screaming like fishwives” (40). These rioteers were pushed back by the Pathan guards and “the Maratha brigade ran like cockroaches” (40). Dinshawji’s word-selection for the Maratha majority clearly suggests his anger for them just because of making their lives hell. Dinshawji hails Shiv Sena leader as the worshiper of “Hitler and Mussolini” (73). He blames Shiv Sena for the arrogant attitudes of the “low-class” (73) people like “dubbawalla” (73) who hijacked his seat in the bus. Dinshawji talks of Shiv Sena and its agenda:

‘He and his “Maharashtra for Maharashtrians” nonsense. They won’t stop till they have complete Maratha Raj.’ … ‘Wait till the Marathas take over, then we will have real Gandoo Raj,’ said Dinshawaji. ‘All they know is to have rallies at Shivaji Park, shout slogans, make threats, and change road names.’ (73)

He describes them as “Saala sisterfuckers!” (73). He talks about sheer nonsense of the changing the road name from English to Marathi. It is a genuine grief of the Parsis as they lead western life with all that is English. To change these things was like an attack on their existence and identity as an ethnic group. He expressed in rage:

‘Hutatma Chowk!’… He spat out the words disgustedly. ‘What is wrong with Flora Fountain?’ …. Names are so important. I grew up on Lamington Road. But it has disappeared, in its place is Dadasaheb Bhadkhamkar Marg. My school was on Carnac Road. Now suddenly it’s on Lokmanya Tilak Marg. I live at Sleater Road. Soon that will
also disappear. My whole life I have come to work at Flora Fountain. And one fine day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names? Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with these new names? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out, just like that?” (73-74)

Tehmul was recruited by Shiv Sena to “distribute racist pamphlets aimed against minorities in Bombay” (86). He was about to beat up being “a Shiv Sena agent” (86) by a group of enraged South Indians.

Mistry attracts the attention of his reader on the poverty of Parsis in post-independent India. Gustad’s family can’t afford costly rice of superfine quality like basmati. Dilnavaz prepared “fragrant basmati rice” (45) for Roshan’s birthday obtained from the “black-market” (45) by exchanging tasteless rice worth one week’s quota. When Gustad was trapped in the financial crisis, he sold his camera for “medicine bills” (209) and Dilnavaz sold her “two gold wedding bangles” (219).

Gustad planned for IIT degree course for his son, Sohrab to go abroad in future for better prospects. Gustad prayed to God:

What kind of life was Sohrab going to look forward to? 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. How could he make Sohrab understand this? (55)

He thinks B.A. as a “useless degree” (69) because even peons and clerks too have such degrees. It suggests a western attitude towards education that gives weightage to the professional degrees and hires the Indian brain for their countries. Gustad had applied to many Parsi institutions for financial help for Sohrab’s education. He visited “Parsi Punchayet Education Fund. R.D. Sethana Trust. Tata Scholarships. Wadia Charities For Higher Studies.” (81)
Mistry highlights the ill-services given in the Parsi General hospital where financially sound Parsis avoid going. After Gustad’s accident Major Billimoria told Dilnavaz:

‘Take him to a regular hospital like Parsi General, and all you will get is regular treatment. Or regular ill-treatment, depending on Gustad’s luck.’ … ‘They love to use their chisels and saws and hammers and nails in the hospitals. And after their carpentry is done, they give you a big fat bill because their tools are so expensive.’ (60)

Mistry has depicted pathetic conditions of the Parsi General hospital (only for the Parsis, now only for the poor Parsis). Dinshawaji describes:

O give me a home where the nurses’ hands roam,
Where they all have big beautiful tits;
But where seldom is heard an encouraging word,
And the patient is treated like shit. (209)

Doctors and nurses harass patients in various ways like, “‘When you ask for the bedpan, they make you wait and wait till you think you cannot hold it any more’” (209).

Mistry highlights economical conditions of the middle-class Parsis who are trapped in financial crisis. Gustad even could not afford “Odomos” (79) to prevent mosquito trouble. There were times when “the water supply was generous and the milk from Parsi Dairy Farm was both creamy and affordable” (82). Gustad denied to give English newspaper to Roshan and Sohrab as “…they used a newsprint quality superior to the regional ones, and fetched more by the kilo” (83) to pay the monthly paper bill. Darius wanted *Times of India* because his friends would make fun of “the Parsi bawaji newspapers” (83). Gustad encouraged and then warned: “You should be proud of your heritage. Take the *Jam-E-Jamshed* or nothing at all” (83). The only person with luxurious life style was Miss. Kutpitia. She was the only “telephone” (85) owner in Khodadad Building. Other Parsis used to gossip about her:
There was no shortage of money, they said, that much was certain. How else could she afford Parsi Dairy Farm milk and custom-catered meals from the Ratan Tata Institute? (85).

Mistry focuses on the vast economical gaps among the rich and poor Parsis. Through the character of Cawasji, Mistry depicted the economical problems of the middle class and poor Parsis.

‘To the Tatas You give so much! And nothing for me? To the Wadias You give, You keep on giving! You cannot hear my prayers? The pockets of the Camas only You will fill! We others don’t need it, You think?’ (87)

Cawasji complained God after the cry of fire:

‘Once again You have done it! Inflicting suffering on the poor only! The stink, the noise, the flood- now the fire! Have You ever burnt the homes of rich sethiyas? Have You ever, tell me!’ (168)

Caswasji gave ultimatum to God to take care of poor Parsis also:

‘Tomorrow is Monday morning, do You know that? And the Tatas will have their board meeting! When You bestow Your bounties on them, remember us also! Be fair now! Bas, it is too much for -!’ (236)

During the war nights Cavasji warned God to guard the poor Parsis:

I am warning You now only! If You let a bomb fall here, let one fall on Birlas and Mafatlals also! Bas! Too much injustice from You! Too much! If Khodadaday Building suffers, then Tata Palace also! Otherwise, not one more stick of sandalwood for You, not one silver!’(299-300)

Thus, Mistry portrays brilliantly the long journey of Gustad Nobel and his family facing the political, financial, racial, problems in course of changing time.
III

A Fine Balance

*A Fine Balance* deals with the emergency period during 1977 in India and it focuses on the contemporary political scenario and its adverse effects on the middle class and poor people in India. It is “…a history of oppression, the cultures, of longings much suppressed” [Sunwani V.K. 1997:107]. The novel opens up with pages from the internal emergency of Indian history. The novel has traced history from the perspective of people who were thrown on margins. Thus novel becomes the fictional history of emergency. Muriel Wasi briefly highlights this inter-relation of history and fiction. He puts it:

> It…can explore large areas of the world’s history that have not yet been illuminated by the human memory, or its imagination. History is an abiding source, for the novelist of the future. It need not yield the unpopular historical novel; it could give rise to novels that use history as a parallel. [1993:1]

It is the tragedy of four characters that accidentally crossed each other and became the important facets of each other’s life who fought against all the odds of destiny to keep themselves on the surface from sinking down in the drastic famine of poverty, caste and politics in the emergency period. They share the common bond of humanity and emotional attachments. It made their life heaven, though for a very brief time. Later on they were scattered by the whirlwinds of corruption and destiny and yet they maintained their ‘fine balance’ except Maneck. After reading this cosmic tragedy, one can aptly think what Honore de Balzac, Le Pere Goriot says at the beginning of the novel:

> ‘Holding this book in your hand, sinking back in your soft armchair, you will say to yourself: perhaps it will amuse me. And after you have read this story of great misfortunes, you will no doubt dine well, blaming the author for your own insensitivity, accusing him of wild exaggeration and flights of
fancy. But rest assured: this tragedy is not a fiction. All is true.’

The novel is a critique of internal emergency and contemporary Prime Minister. It is a bitter criticism of that particular political turmoil a common man and a minority suffered in India. A. G. Khan aptly puts the reasons behind such portrayal:

Everything in India stinks—not only the place but also her leaders as well. Hence, a writer with a conscience cannot keep his tongue-tied. As soon as he is away from the Indian soil his conscience pricks him to be frank and fearless. As long as Indira was alive their courage was under control. Her death made them bold (and democratic honest). Away from Bombay, Mistry is bold enough to curse and abuse… [1995:16]

Mistry portrays the contemporary political scenario. He satirically criticizes the Prime Minister’s declaration of emergency as another “government tamashā” (06). Mistry comments on the linguistic fundamentalism in Maharashtra when Darab Uncle points out the banner: “‘It’s another silly morcha about language. …The fools want to divide the state on linguistic lines’” (66).

Mrs. Gupta’s complaint about the labour union suggests the harassment of the factory owners by the labour unions, their strikes, and the leaders:

‘Especially these days, with so much trouble in the country. And leaders like that Jay Prakash Narayan encouraging civil disobedience. Simply at all creating problems. Thinks he is Mahatma Gandhi the Second.’ (80)

Such reference to Mahatama Gandhi reminds the British rule in India and the subsequent colonization and imperialism Indians suffered during this period. It is what Pradeep Trikha says about the novel:

‘A Fine Balance’ portrays the years of the Emergency in Bombay—a mini India. In this period,
the functioning of the government revived the memories of colonial India under the British rule. It was the period when ‘the nationalist imperialism’ was challenged by people like Jaya Prakash Narayan. [2001:214-215]

But Mrs. Gupta’s attitude describes the variety of point of views regarding the emergency as it has blocked the freedom of common man. Her happiness at declaration of Internal Emergency is reflected in the novel as:

…the Prime Minister’s declaration yesterday of the Internal Emergency had incarcerated most of the parliamentary opposition, along with thousands of trade unionists, students, and social workers. ‘Isn’t that good news?’ she sparkled with joy. …Now all those troublemakers who accused her falsely have been put in jail. No more strikes and morchas and silly disturbances. (89)

Such remarks suggest the alienation of the rich section of the society from the problems of common people who are trapped in poverty. Mrs. Gupta’s tone reflects the capitalist tendency of loss and profit for money making:

‘Union loafers want to work less and get more money. That’s the curse of this country- laziness. And some idiot leaders encouraging them, telling police and army to disobey unlawful orders. Now you tell me, how can the law be unlawful? Ridiculous nonsense. Serves them right, being thrown in jail.’ (90)

Mrs. Gupta thinks Prime Minister as “someone strong at a dangerous time like this” (90). Ishvar’s question displays his innocence of politics and unawareness of national events like emergency. Dinabai sees emergency as “Government problems -games played by people in the power. It doesn’t affect ordinary people like us” (92). In Emergency discipline is highly regarded. But the “train keeps coming late” (96). Ishvar’s bitter comment shows the indifference of common people towards
the government and worse conditions of contemporary politics: “If government kept their promises, the gods would come down to garland them” (96). Corruption, injustice crept into all walks of life which badly affected common man’s life. The Government strategies about sterilization, temptations as well as threats given to officers suggest the tyranny and dictatorship of the government. Every officer has to persuade people “to get sterilized” (217). If he doesn’t fill his quota, there is no promotion for him.

Mistry describes the suppression of “the Prime Minister’s enemies—union workers, newspaper people, teachers, students” (221). Mistry’s description of the statue highlights the paradox of freedom ransacked in emergency:

The plaque said he was a Guardian of Democracy. Om had studied about the man in his history class, in the story of Freedom Struggle. The photo in the history book was nicer than the statue… The sides of the pedestal were plastered with posters extolling the virtues of the Emergency. The obligatory Prime Ministerial visage was prominent. Small print explained why fundamental rights had been temporarily suspended. (232-233)

Mistry portrays the corrupted political situation where political parties attract people to attend the public meeting. People did not fall prey to the promises. So Sergeant Kesar ordered his men to block the slum exits. They were threatened to “be arrested for trespassing on municipal property!” (320) Rajaram described the meeting as: “a day at the circus—we have clowns, monkeys, acrobats, everything” (324). Mistry also highlights how Shiv Sena harassed common people during emergency. Even in the movie theatres common people were made target:

A squad of Shiv Sena volunteers guarding the doors blocked their way. …The crowd in the front couldn’t go forward, however, threatened by the Shiv Sena’s waving sticks and an assortment of signs: RESPECT THE NATIONAL ANTHEM! YOUR
In the emergency, once again the poor people were harassed and they were thrown on the road as all the shacks were destroyed to clean the city. Thus Om and Ishvar became homeless. Om and Ishvar experienced that, “homelessness is always a curse” [Hartman 1984:07]. On the way to Dinabai’s home they came across two hoardings of Prime Minister. The workers were unanimously working on the slogans:

THE CITY BELONGS TO YOU! KEEP IT BEAUTIFUL! …FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY! HOMES FOR THE HOMELESS! … THE NATION IS ON THE MOVE! (373)

These slogans reflect contradictions and various aspects of emergency. Om and Ishvar, at the chemist shop, were loaded to the camp where all beggars and people from slums gathered together to clean the city. Instead of Garibi Hatao, they followed the Garib Hatao motto. The life in the camp was hell. Mistry presents a vivid picture of contemporary Bombay, a mini India:

... the poor struggling for their ‘survival of the fittest’ in the metropolitan city where ‘a roof to cover the head’ is a dream. [...] Thematically, the novel articulates the sagacity of the cultures which are very much suppressed. ...the age old problems of caste and communalism, the burnt of which has been borne by the down trodden, has been duly focused. [Gajendrakumar 2001:76-77]

The Emergency ruined every opponent like Avinash who struggled for the rights of the students. Mistry dexterously describes the ethnic anxiety while picturing from the emergency to Indira Gandhi’s assassination. Ibrahim remembers the Partition riots in 1947 when he decided:
…with great reluctance, to leave behind his distinctive fez. It was like abandoning a dear friend. The only other time he had forsaken this fixture of daily wear was during Partition, back in 1947, when communal slaughter at the brand-new border had ignited riots everywhere, and sporting a fez in a Hindu neighbourhood was as fatal as possessing a foreskin in a Muslim one. In certain areas it was wisest to go bareheaded, for choosing incorrectly from among fez, white cap, and turban could mean losing one’s head. (107)

Here, Mistry aptly highlights that dressing codes are considered an authentic ethnic markers during the ethnic anxieties. At the same time it is very easy to deceive by abandoning such ethnic markers just for the survival. Novel has abundant occurrences of oppression and hatred against the oppressor as well as cathartic predicament of the oppressed. Bharucha focuses on the tendencies of oppressor:

*It is colonial ideology to consider the colonized as underdogs having “inferior” qualities like having primitive feminine qualities, thereby establishing doctrine of racial superiority and sexual inequity. The effects of colonialism do not end with the transfer of political power or first giving the right of self-dermination for electing their representatives. As a result, postcolonial societies continue to image themselves in the mirror of colonialism. [Bharucha 1992]*

This novel deals with ethnic anxieties within the Hinduism. India’s caste system includes a hierarchy and is often considered to be a feature of Hinduism. Individuals are believed to be born into a particular caste and continue to live in that caste throughout their lives. Such rigidities are stuck to Hinduism that T. Kumar describes it as:

*Broad caste categories (varnas) separate caste groups according to occupation (although mobility between occupations does not lead to change in caste identity). Outside these caste categories are the “untouchables”, like sweepers, tanners, sanitation*
workers, etc were viewed as “polluting” the community. Untouchability of dalits continues to be practiced in India in many forms, reinforcing an iniquitous social hierarchy and allowing for the continuing disempowerment and humiliation of millions of people. [2005:1-2]

The localities and housing colonies of lower caste people are often segregated from those housing non-dalits, a segregation which often extends to the provision of separate wells, eating places and temples and restrictions on the use of land to defecate. Dalits do not have proper access to schools which accounts for high illiteracy rates and serves as a basis for increased discrimination. Additionally, dalits are routinely subjected to beatings, mutilation, murder, rape, and destruction of property by members of the upper-caste and the police. A culture of impunity ensures that most of the criminals go unpunished. T. Kumar has enlisted the various abuses committed against dalits. Such abuses include variety of punishments like:

**Socioeconomic discrimination.** Beatings, slashings, and other forms of torture. Arson- the burning of dalit communities. Violence against women - Rape, gang rape, and the parading of women through the streets naked

As a form of punishment
As the right of the upper-caste male
To punish or embarrass the woman’s family

Beating and torture of women
Summary execution, many times by burning alive
Bonded labor
Denial of rights, especially land rights
Police abuses against dalits, custodial abuse.

[2005:1-2]

Mistry portrays the caste-system and inherent oppression of lower-caste by the upper-caste people. Mistry comments on punishments given to the lower-caste for their minor mistakes or mistakes not at all:

‘...But where he (Bhola) was working, they accused him of stealing. - they chopped off his left-hand fingers today.’ ‘Last year Chhagan lost his hand at
the wrist. Same reason.’ ‘Dasu got a whipping for getting too close to the well. Buddhu’s wife… refused to go to the field with the zamindar’s son, so they shaved her head and walked her naked through the square.’ (117)

Injustices were continuously following on lower-caste people with slight change in the name; otherwise the details were the identical. For strolling on the upper-caste side of the street, Sita was stoned till first blood. Gambhir was found within hearing range of the temple when prayers were in progress so “he had molten lead poured into his ears” (132). Dayaram did not keep his promise of ploughing a landlord’s field. He was forced “to eat the landlord’s excrement in the village square” (132). Dhiraj requested to get few sticks in advance from Pandit Ghanshyam for the wages for chopping wood. But Pandit went distress and accused Dhiraj of poisoning his cows. Dhiraj was “hanged” (132). Dukhi’s wife Roopa was raped by orange-grove guard as she stole oranges from the grove. He first allowed her to take oranges and then asked to sleep with him. He threatened her about the possibility of whipping and communal rape (“They would take turns doing shameful things to your lovely soft body” (119)) by the upper-caste land-lord. Then he raped her.

Ishwar and Narayan were punished cruelly for entering the classroom. Pundit Lullaram also appreciated the punishment who talked at length in favor of the caste system:

‘...You always try to do your duty, don’t you, according to your caste?’‘...for it is the path to happiness. Otherwise, there would be chaos in the universe. You understand there are four varnas in society. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. Each of us belongs to one of these four varnas, and they cannot mix. Correct?’ (138)

Dukhi sent Ishwar and Narayan to Ashraf the tailor to train them in tailoring. It was the decision taken with purpose to change the ethnic group, subalterm in the hierarchy of Hinduism. Though he chose another
ethnic group, it was less harmful, and shameful. It produced great rage for Thakur Dharmasi who decided to punish Dukhi for his daring “to break asunder” (180). Dukhi had turned cobblers into tailors, “distorting society’s timeless balance” (180). Thakur Dharmasi burnt Dukhi’s home in the night when all the members were sleeping. All members died except Om and Ishwar.

When Dukhi and Roopa begot two sons, it created great “envy in upper-caste homes” (121) where women were “still childless” (121) or waiting for “a male issue” (121). They lamented on the reversal of the Manu’s law of hierarchy:

‘Why two sons in an untouchable’s house, and not even one in ours?’ What could a Chamaar pass on to his sons that the gods should reward him thus? Something was wrong, the Law of Manu had been subverted. Someone in the village had definitely committed an act to offend the deities, surely some special ceremonies were needed to appease the gods and fill these empty vessels with male fruit. (121)

This typical Hindu belief of importance of male issue is criticized here. All Hindu families desperately wanted a male child to continue the family for the generations to come. Such kind of topsy-turvy of the hierarchy was considered just because of Kaliyug, “…the Age of Darkness” (122).

Mistry highlights on Hindu-Muslim conflicts during the turmoil of partition. The two-nation theory was based on the religion. Pakistan was purely based on Islam. It caused problems of belonging and partition exchanged largest population based on religion from Pakistan to India and vice versa. This caused hatred within these two religions. Mistry talks of R.S.S. as:

Strangers belonging to a Hindu organization that wore white shirts and khaki pants, and trained their members to march about like soldiers, had been visiting the district. They brought with them stories
of Muslims attacking Hindus in many parts of the country. (150)

This organization was making Hindus aware about the violent intention of Muslim community. They cautioned to be ready to defend all Hindus (including Shudras). If Muslims cause the blood-shed of Hindus, whole nation would “run red with rivers of Muslim blood” (150). It highlights Islamic invasions on Hindu India centuries ago as well as Islamic fundamentalism during Mogul Emperor like Aurengzeb which impinged Hindu psyche permanently. In Dukhi’s village, the Muslim population was too small to cause a threat to anyone. But the landlords perceived an opportunity in the stranger’s caution. They did their best to stimulate people against the imaginary danger from Muslims by recalling the history of Moguls and Muslim invaders and the destruction they caused to Hindu people and their “temples” (150), “wealth” (150). So it is “Better to drive out the Mussulman menace” (150).

Mistry calls Gandhi as “the chief traitor, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi” (150) in the eyes of RSS. Dukhi and his friends discussed the RSS men and the stories they brought with them. They concluded not to believe the religious bias of upper-caste Hindus after their injustice and suffering:

...The lower castes were not impressed by the rhetoric. They had always lived peacefully with their Muslim neighbours. Besides, they were too exhausted keeping body and soul together... ‘The Zamindars have always treated us like animals.’ ‘Worse than animals’. ‘Mussulman... never bothered us before. Why would they do it now? Why should we hurt them because some outsiders come with stories?’ ‘Yes, it’s strange that suddenly we have all become Hindu brothers.’ ‘The Muslims have behaved more like our brothers than the bastard Brahmins and Thakurs.’ (150-151)

Such situation focuses that the margin denies being hold by the center. These subaltern groups wanted to align together to stand against the
center. Rajaram shaved the long-hairs of women or men at crowded places. At the docks, mathadis unloading ships cheered the exploits of the mysterious hair-hunter, convinced that “it was the work of a lower-caste brother extracting revenge for centuries of upper-caste oppression, of stripping and rapes and head-shavings of their womenfolk” (588).

In the city Ashraf Chacha, Om and Ishvar were the paragon of India’s composite culture who stood by each other in the vast fire of ethnic angst. It can be said that:

Dukhi’s sons and Muslim Ashraf’s family look after each other in times of uncertainty and communal discord, and so cement bonds of unity for all times to come in spite of the British strategy of dividing the country into India and Pakistan. [Pandit M.L. 1998:20]

Mistry gives the details of the riots after Prime Minister’s assassination by her Sikh guards. Her assassination was a protest against ‘Golden Temple’ action. It resulted in anti-Sikh riots:

Such terrible butchery for three days… ‘They are pouring kerosene on Sikhs and setting them on fire. They catch men, tear the hair from their faces or hack it with swords, then kill them. Whole families burnt to death to their homes.’ (711)

The Driver was afraid of Maneck’s beard as looters were killing every person having beard. Here one can understand that how the symbol of that ethnic group can be harmful for them in severe condition like riots. To survive, one has to shed the sacred, religious sanctioned symbols of the faith to change identity for the security. But it is not possible, as an identity can be verified by the official documents:

‘There will be no trouble because of my beard. If we are stopped, they’ll at once know I’m a Parsi- I’ll show them the sudra and kusti I am wearing.’
‘Yes, but they might want to check my license.’
“So?"
‘You haven’t guessed? I am a Sikh- I shaved off my beard and cut my hair two days ago. But I’m still wearing my kara.’ He held up his hand, displaying the iron bangle round his wrist. (711-712)

Mistry aptly describes the misguided people who became the puppets in the hands of politicians. Politicians would never be punished though they target any ethnic group for the sake of power and benefits:

‘The real murderers will never be punished. For votes and power they play with human lives. Today it is Sikhs. Last year it was Muslims; before that, Harijans. One day, your sudra and Kusti might not be enough to protect you.’(712)

After such terrific details of riots and insecure position of harmless community like Parsis, Mistry highlights lost glory of the Parsis. Mistry used the powerful medium of memory and nostalgia here. Manek’s parents and neighbors often “shifted gently to times gone by, to the stories of their lives” (253). Mr. Kohlah used to tell about the glorious days of his family, “not from self-pity or notions of false grandeur, nor to sing his own achievement in the present” (253). The purpose was to remember the great lesson of history:

…a lesson in living life on the borderline- modern maps could ruin him, but they could not displace his dreams for his family. (253)

The Partition was recollected by remembering the chronology of events, and mourning the senseless slaughter. Brigadier Grewal imagined if only by magic “the sundered parts would some day be sewn together again” (254). All these neighbours consoled themselves by criticizing the colonizers for their lack of proper decision.

The novel contains various references regarding Parsi belief, values, and rituals. After the death of Mr. Shroff, Mrs. Shroff attended her husband’s prayers at the fire-temple. Mistry focuses the contradictory behavioral pattern of Dustoor. He portrays the character of dustoor in
complete contrast to their profession. Dustoor loves to take disadvantages of his much respected position as a religious person. He gave Dina “a prolonged hug of the sort he reserved for girls and young women” (23). His habit for squeezing and fondling had earned him the title of “Dustoor Daab-Chaab” (23). His colleagues feared that one day he would disgrace the fire-temple.

Nusswan and Dina used to visit the fire-temple once a week. While she bowed before the sanctum, he travelled along the outer wall hung with pictures of various dustoors and high priests. He applied the ash on his body – “a pinch on his forehead, another bit across the throat, and undid his top two shirt buttons to rub a fistful over his chest” (24). Cutting hairs in the house is considered as the bad omen in Zoroastrianism. So, when Dina cut her hair and entered into house with hair clippings, Nusswan yelled at her to take a bath spreading hairs after cutting bring “misfortune upon” (28) family. After Rustom’s death, Dina began with haircut for her earnings. But it was not successful as an indoor activity that “most people regarded hair clippings within their dwellings as extreme bad luck” (72). People used to make hue and cry about her hair cut within four walls. Some of them helplessly tried to appeal emotionally: “‘Madam, you have no considerations? What have we done to you that you want to bring misfortune within our four walls?’” (72) Some people offered her their children’s heads but only “outside” (72).

Mistry highlights the professional envy among the dustoors. Dustoor Dab-Chaab was very unhappy as ceremonies regarding Dina’s wedding were performed by some other Dustoor in the Fire-temple. He complained as:

‘It’s disgrace,’ he grumbled to a colleague, “Especially after my long association with Shroff family. For death, they come to me - for saros-nu-paatru, for afargan, baaj, farosky. But for a happy occasion, for wedding ashirvaad, I am not wanted.’” (45)
Parsis are often famous for their gluttony. Mistry comments how Parsis are the food-lovers giving special Parsi flavor of the recipes. Parsis performed all their religious ceremonies after sunset. In the evening Nusswan gave small reception party:

The aromas, that had been filling the house with appetizing hints all evening, teasing nostrils and taunting palates, suddenly overwhelmed the gathering. A hush fell across the room. Someone chuckled loudly that where Parsis were concerned, food was number one, conversation came second. (47)

Zoroastrianism doesn’t allow suicide as it’s against Ahura Mazda’s wish and belief. In the hot debate over suicide, Dina expressed her religious belief in Almighty’s plan of life:

‘…as a Parsi, my belief makes me say this: suicide is wrong, human beings are not meant to select their time of death. For then they would also be allowed to pick the moment of birth.’ (582)

Parsis felt alienated from the Indian freedom fighting which resulted in their indifference or neutrality towards it. Mistry does talk about Parsi attitude towards the Freedom movement. Nusswan cursed the Indians as “bloody uncultured savages” (29) because of his financial loss during the partition. Here the reasons are economical rather than political or racial pride. He expressed his anger at Indians and freedom struggle. Mistry described his anguish as:

Cooped up inside the flat, Nusswan lamented the country’s calamity, grumbling endlessly. ‘Every day I sit at home, I lose money. Those bloody uncultured savages don’t deserve independence. If they must hack one another to death, I wish they would go somewhere else and do it quietly. In their villages, maybe. Without disturbing our lovely city by the sea. (29-30)
Here, the reference to “our loverly city by the sea” (30) refers to Bombay which was built and developed by Parsis. Bombay suffered a lot during the independence struggle. It has also created problems in the lives of Parsis because Parsis reside in Bombay in a large number.

Parsi community is hailed as the most westernized and modernized community in India. Mistry highlights the modern thought of the Parsis. Nusswan tried to find out a good Parsi boy for Dina. He explained her about her fortunate position being a Zoroastrian:

‘Do you know how fortunate you are in our community? Among the unenlightened, widows are thrown away like garbage. If you were a Hindu, in the old days you would have had to be a good little sati and leap onto you husband’s funeral pyre, be roasted with him. (63-64)

It was really a blessing for the young widows like Dina to remarry and lead a happy life which was just impossible in Hindu community at that time. It was the outcome of English-associations. This association also gave elite-consciousness and a sense of superiority to Parsis.

Parsis have distinct way of final rites. Mistry focuses on Parsi final rites. Maneck returned home to attend his father's funeral. Maneck’s family lived on the mountain so the “nearest fire-temple” (715) was quite far. His mother arranged for the prayers. Dustoors were coming from the nearest fire-temple. Being on mountain, and as Maneck’s father’s wish was to be cremated, Mr. Kohlah was cremated. It created great problem for his family. Most of the Dustoor rejected to perform Zoroastrian ceremony on cremated soul:

It had been an effort to find two who were willing to perform the ceremony. Most had refused the assignment when they discovered the deceased was to be cremated, saying their services were available only to Zoroastrians bound for the Towers of Silence - never mind if it was a long trip by railway. (715)
Such “narrow-minded” (715) attitude raised the debate in the community. It was Mr. Kohlah’s wish to cremate. Mrs. Kohlah question Maneck, “But what about the people who cannot afford to transport the body? Would these priests deny them the prayers?” (715) Here, Mistry highlights the financial weakness of the Parsis from mountain or remote areas who could not afford to transport the dead bodies to the cities like Bombay. So, the traditional dokhma was replaced by the “electric crematorium” (715) in Mr. Kolha’s case instead of “an open-air pyre” (715).

Mistry highlights the poverty and adverse conditions in Mumbai to live a minimum common life. Maneck’s early life in mountains made him uncomfortable to cope with the poverty and pollution of Mumbai. Om and Ishvar too, came for short span to make money. Both of them were fed up of Bombay life: “Noise and crowds, no place to live, water scarce, garbage everywhere. Terrible.’ (08).

Mistry focuses on the poverty of Parsi community. Nusswan planned the wedding of Dina and Rustom. He wanted to book a hall for reception and pay for everything out of the money he had been collecting for her:

‘We’ll have the wedding after sunset, and then dinner. We’ll show them how it’s done- everyone will envy you. A four-piece band, floral decorations, lights. I can afford about three hundred guests. But no liquor- too expensive and too risky. Prohibition police are everywhere, you bribe one and ten more show up for their share.’ (45)

Dina suffered financial crisis time and again. She had to keep a paying guest and run a garment factory at home with the help of two tailors. She had to go back to get help from her brother against her wish.

The colonial attraction for the white skin is an important part of Parsi psyche. Mistry deals with this _gora complex_ when Dina, Nusswan, Ruby, his wife went to visit their grandfather. When Ruby began to
massage grandfather’s foot, he yelled angrily and tore his foot from her hands: “Kya karta hai? Chalo, jao!” (33)

The grandfather presumed Ruby as an ayah because of her dark skin and spoke in Hindi as a sub-standard medium to address servants especially non-Parsi or non-Christian:

Too startled at being addressed in Hindi, Ruby sat there gaping. ‘Doesn’t she understand? What language does your ayah speak? Tell her to get off my sofa, wait in the kitchen.’ Grandfather turned to Nusswan. Ruby rose in a huff and stood by the door. ‘Rude old man!’ she hissed. ‘Just because my skin is a little dark!’ (33)

Western education, westernization, modernization are the causes which led Parsis to appreciate everything western as a high standard. Mistry gives various references of western books and music. She knew very little about music – “a few names like Brahms, Mozart, Schumann, and Bach” (36). She was introduced these habits by her father. This initiation into everything western made Parsis to think of themselves as superior to others. Rustom too was initiated into music. He practiced the violin: “Like all good Parsi parents, mine made me take violin lessons when I was little” (40).

Mistry highlights critically on the decline in eco-system. He deals with the Coco-Colanization of foreign multi-national companies. Mr. Kohlah has created his own niche in his cold-drink business. He was unhappy about the sudden sprouting of foreign companies on the hills. His friends agreed it as “a malevolent growth” (264). It reduced the business at the General Store. It had very adverse effect on his psyche as well as financial affairs. This wave of urbanization of hill-area brought urban problems of poverty, unemployment, homeless beggar and slum areas. It resulted into the decline in the Mr. Kohlah’s Cola. Mistry expressed Mr. Kohlah’s fears and strategies of multi-national companies:
But the giant corporation had targeted the hills; they had Kaycee in their sights. They infiltrated Mr. Kohlah’s territory with their boardroom arrogance and advertising campaigns and cut-throat techniques. Representatives approached him with a proposition: ‘Pack up your machines, sign over all rights of Kohlah’s Cola, and be an agent for our brand. Come grow with us, and prosper.’ (268)

Thus, Mistry has thrown light on the politics of the corporate world, where expansion, merging, destruction of the opponents is highly practical and tricks of the trade. The company applied various tactics to win the race and finally:

Kohlah’s Cola never stood a chance. The General Store’s backbone was broken, and the secret formula’s journey down the generation was nearing its end. (269)

Mistry focuses on the Parsi trend of accepting any change which is a fact for them as they survived through all invasions, calamities. Proofreader, Manek’s friend, explains Maneck:

Accept it, and go on. Please remember, the secret of survival is to embrace change, and to adapt… to quote “All things fall and are built again, and those that build them again are gay.” (282)

He explained Maneck to maintain “a fine balance between hope and despair” (282) because “In the end, it’s all a question of balance” (282). But unfortunately Maneck failed to maintain a fine balance and committed suicide on the railway track. On the other hand Om, Ishvar and Dina accepted the change and reality of the life and thus maintaining their fine balance continued to live.
IV

Family Matters

*Family Matters* is the story of King Lear in Bombay (now Mumbai) especially Bombay of post-Ayodhya issue where minorities were threatened by the increasing Hindu fundamentalism. Mistry tells the story “of familial love and affection, of personal and political corruption, the religious complexity, the power of memory to keep truth alive, and the ultimate peril memory denied” [Daruwalla 2002]. It is the story of Nariman Vakil, 79 year old Parsi patriarch, who lives with his unmarried step-children Coomy and Jal. It is a story of “not only a helpless old man’s cross to bear but a burden to those who love him most” [Jha 2002:85]. They are scared of taking care of their step-father in his old age due to his unhealthy conditions and Parkinson’s disease. Bharucha analyses it very aptly:

> The fears of these two middle-aged siblings has to be seen in the context of the geriatric Parsi community in which there are today too few young and able members to care for the old and disabled. …late marriages and/or a rampant individualism that does not brook the adjustments required within marriage, have led to most Parsis not marrying at all, or if married, either opting not to have children or being forced into a childless state by infertility caused by the advanced age of one or both spouses at the time of the marriage. There is also the fact that in the Parsi community thanks to economic pressures and general societal norms... unmarried adult children, continue to live with their parents. Those who do get married generally opt to move away and lead independent lives. Hence the burden of caring for aging, ill and often cantankerous parents falls on the unmarried offspring. This often results in feelings of resentment towards the married siblings who it appears have shrugged off their responsibilities towards ageing parents. [2003:171]
It is this feeling of envy that Coomy grudges in her heart against Roxana and later on transfers Nariman to her flat and in course postpones Nariman’s return to their house.

Mistry begins the novel with the discussions of post-Ayodhya riots. In Mumbai it was nowhere safe. Houses were set on fire, and minorities were being assassinated. As Jal and Nariman converse the surroundings of a Parsi couple murdered in thier house. They discuss “the old Parsi couple” who died in their bedroom. ...The goondas who assumed Muslims were hiding in Dalal Estate and set fire to it?” (Emphasis added) (04). It suggest that the rioters were not real Muslim but fanatic Hindus. Jal provides one more example of an old lady from Firozsha Baag who was beaten and robbed inside her flat. Coomy’s remark on ethnic riots depicts the sensitivity of such ethnic issues: “How often does a mosque in Ayodhya turn people into savages in Bombay? Once in a blue moon” (4-5). Mistry expresses the predicament of India and Maharashtra under BJP and Shiv Sena. Yezad calls the government as “the dogs ... and not well-bred dogs either, but pariahs” (31). BJP and Shiv Sena coalition is “a poisonous snake” (31). He blames these two parties for encouraging the Hindutva extremists to destroy the Babri Mosque. Further he lashes the Shiv Sena and Sena Supremo for spreading “all the hatred of minorities” (32) for the last thirty years. His observation aptly reflects the outlook of Shiv Sena:

“Senapati... the crackpot accuses people left and right of being anti-this and anti-that. South Indians are anti-Bombay, Valentine’s Day is anti-Hindustan, film stars born before 1947 in the Pakistan part of Punjab are traitors to the country.” (32)

Nariman and Jal turn the Senapati as a butt of ridicule, one who works on whims:

“I suppose... if the Senapati gets gas after eating karela, the gourd will be declared as anti-Indian vegetable.” “Let’s hope his langoti doesn’t give him
a groin rash,” said Jal. “Or all underwear might be banned.” (32)

Murad points out the duality of these leaders who object to anti-Indian attitude on the basis of culture and patriotism. Shiv Sena’s arrangement of “Michael Jackson concert” (32) for sheer financial profit is criticized as Jal replies:

“Shiv Sena will pocket millions—they’ve obtained tax-free status by classifying it as a cultural event of national significance.” (32)

This extreme hatred has affected the sports also. For instance, whenever India and Pakistan play cricket, it is treated like a “war in Kashmir” (33).

Mistry portrays the picture of unsafe Bombay where decent people can’t travel in the night. Some of the “Shiv Sena people” (44) harrassed Roxana questioning her: “Choli Kay Peechhay Kya Hai” (43). On resistance they threat Yezad: “Don’t tingle-tangle with us, bavaji! We are Shiv Sena people, we are invincible!”(44). It suggests how minorities are insecure in the nation of majority. Here, Parsi existence is clearly marginalized. Parsis are considered as cultural and religious ‘other’ or subaltern.

Mistry highlights fanaticism and love for Marathi, or what can be said a fascination for ‘swadeshi’ names. Shiv Sena’s insistence for Marathi names for the cities is shown when Mr. Rangrajan comments on suspicious atmosphere in Mumbai:

“...we Bombayites, Or should I say Mumbaikars” ...
“These days you never can tell who might be a Shiv Sena fanatic, or a member of their Name Police. It is my understanding that some Shiv Sainiks have infiltrated the GPO, subjecting innocent letters and postcards to incineration if the address reads Bombay instead of Mumbai.” (53)
It raises the question of ‘lingual other’. Such ‘othering’ results into the ethnic anxieties. Mr. Kapur was murdered by two Shiv Sainiks as he denied changing the name Bombay to Mumbai.

Mr. Rangrajan highlights the changing relations of India with other countries. In the countries like Russia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Indians are not welcomed as before. Mistry hails the present world leaders as “Nincompoops” (54). Rangrajan tragically expresses the helplessness of India. India had Five-thousand-year-old civilization and nine hundred million people but unable to produce one great leader. Instead of “a Mahatma” only “micro-mini atmas” (54) are available in India. Rangrajan criticizes the USA for its war against Kuwait. George Bush killed the Iraqis, and killed the jobs in Gulf. But he is optimistic to get job in US. In India political processions are normal. For the common man all the processions are the same: “ It’s hard to read the banners from here BJP, JD, CP, VHP, BSP, doesn’t matter, they’re all the same”(60).

Mistry focuses the insecurity of the minorities under the fundamentalist majority rule. Majority kept close track record of their residence to harass them in times of anxieties:

**Rubbish... Villie Cardmaster said 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. (106)**

The havoc of threats and violence on businessmen denied increasing charges for letter writing. He was afraid if his clients asked any help to a Shiv Sena shakha, they would discover nasty communal propaganda. They may even employ their “sticks-and-stones method of political persuasion, their fine art of scoring debating points of breaking opposition bones” (141). Hussain was the victim of Babri Mosque riots. He was hired under the program of Ekta-Samiti working for the rehabilitation of the Babri Mosque riots victims. Mr. Kapur and Yezad shared the common thought
about Shiv Sena and Bombay. They lamented for the Mumbai’s slow death. It is destroyed “by goonda raj and mafia dons, as the newspaper put it, “in an unholy nexus of politicians, criminals, and police”” (151).

Mistry highlights the corruption and dictatorship of the government. Mr. Kapur read the news of shutting down of Shrikrishna Commission which was set up to investigate the Babri Mosque riots. Mistry criticizes that the guardians of the society are turned to be the destroyers. This action suggests that government took this action because everything was about to be exposed: “Shiv Sena involvement in looting and burning, police helping rioters, withholding assistance in Muslim localities” (154). Hussain called police as “budmaash!”(155). Mistry portrays the picture of Babri Mosque riots where Police itself vindicated the common people on the basis of their ethnicity:

...in those riots the police were behaving like gangsters. In Muslim mohallas they were shooting their guns at innocent people. Houses were burning, neighbours came out to throw water. And the police? Firing bullets like target practice. These guardians of the law were murdering everybody! (155)

This is just one side of the story. As in such areas Hindus were also brutally killed but Mistry turns blind eyes to that. Mistry shows the paradox inherent in the politics that the rioters are now the makers of law and order which results into delayed justice or justice denied:

“More than three years have passed, and still no justice. Shiv Sena polluted the police. And now Shiv Sena has become the government.” (155)

This is exactly what Vilas describes: “life is not an Amitabh Bachchan movie? That justice is a mirage?”(211). Shiv Sena is described as, “our greatest urban menace” (209), “Clowns and crooks. Or clownish crooks”(273). Muslims are called as “favourite scapegoat as usual” (273).
Shiv Sena, saviour of Indian culture and values, censored the lives of minorities as well as destroyed, banned the freedom of expression:

… destroyed the work of famous Indian artists, deeming it disrespectful towards Indian gods and goddesses. Men’s magazines, endangering Indian morals with nudity and sex and vulgarity, had their offices set on fire. And women weren’t allowed to work in bars and discos after eight o’ clock because it was against Indian family values. (273)

Mistry’s hatred for Hindu majority is clearly shown when he portrays Muslims as underdogs. At the same time, whenever Prophet is portrayed in humanshape, the whole Islamic world has caused great destruction to the civilization. So, what Mistry portrays here is a one facet of the problem. This may be the outcome of his Parsi-psyche which is affected by Hindutva extremism. Mr. Kapur comments on the arrogance and hooliganism smashing the people who stand in their way. Mistry laments for such destruction of his beloved city: “And poor Bombay has no champion to defend her. Unhappy city, that has no heroes” (336).

Mr. Kapur warns Yezad not to underrate these “Skinny…Baji Raos and Bhaji Khaos…are descendants of Marathas, tough as nails- though as that other spinach-eater, Popeye” (336). It reflects the anger due to oppression and suppression under majority.

Mr. Kapur’s recollection of 1947 partition-riot stories made Yezad to think over the trauma and sufferings of uprooting and blood-sheding of millions:

Punjabi migrants of a certain age were like Indian authors writing about that period, whether in realist novels of corpse-filled trains or in the magic-realist midnight muddles, all repeating the same catalogue of horrors about slaughter and burning, rape and mutilation, foetuses torn out of the wombs, genitals stuffed in the mouths of the castrated. (151)
Mistry’s reference to “corpse-filled trains or in the magic-realist midnight muddles” (151) reminds the partition novels like Khuswant Singh’s ‘A Train to Pakistan’ and Salman Rushdie’s ‘Midnight’s Children’. Mistry compares these stories of Indian sub-continent’s history with ethnic violence and sufferings of Jews from Europe:

...about the Holocaust, writing and remembering and having nightmares about the concentration camps and gas chambers and ovens, about the evil committed by ordinary people, by friends and neighbours, the evil that, decades later, was still incomprehensible. What choice was there, except to speak about it, again and again, and yet again? (151)

Cherishing the old memories from the old photograph collection of Mr. Kapur, who remembered how boys used to tease the Shahrukh, a Muslim to go to Pakistan. He was teased for his circumcision as “an ABC… Adha Boolla Catayla” (227). Mr. Kapur regreted and wanted to undo the past by rewriting it neatly, and wanted to portray hormonious picture. But what is done can’t be undone:

“...When I dream about my childhood, I wake up wishing I could find Shahrukh, tell him I’m sorry. The sad part was, later the family did go away to Pakistan, where they had relatives. We all felt guilty afterwards.” (227)

Mistry highlights the cricket teams in St. Xavier’s school which used to compete for the championship with religious title like Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, and Europeans. It caused great sadness for Mahatma Gandhi who convinced that for national integrity and unity, cricket should be played on the basis of “religious or ethnic divisions” (215). Father D’silva addressed all the children not to think of as “Catholic or non-Catholic....no distinction of caste or creed” (215). But students categorised teams as:

Vegetarians versus Non-vegetarians... Oiled Hair versus Unoiled, and Starched Uniforms versus Un-startched... the school was always on its guard
against the slightest whiff of communalism, and especially so after the Babri Mosque riots. (215)

Mistry uses Mumbai as the character representing religious harmony, unity in diversity of India. Mr. Kapur’s father came to Bombay and prospered. This city of love and longing was developed by Parsis and that’s why this fascination for Bombay is recurrent in Mistry’s works. Parsis are proud to be the makers of Bombay. They are “proud… being Parsi” [Pestonji 1999:30] for, “… Parsis built Bombay with the help of the British” [Ibid, 30]. He expressed his love for this symbol of unity:

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. (159)

After lashing Shiv Sena for its Hindu fanaticism, Mistry turns his discussion to analyse the true definition and nature of Hindu religion:

...Hinduism has an all-accepting nature, agreed? I’m not talking about the fundamentalist, mosque-destroying fanatics, but the real Hinduism that has nurtured this country for thousands of years, welcoming all creeds and beliefs and dogmas and theologies, making them feel at home. Sometimes, when they are not looking, it absorbs them within itself. Even false gods are accommodated, and turned into true ones, adding a few more deities to its existing millions. (362)

Mistry’s nostalgia for Bombay has turned it into religion. Especially being a migrant he can compare it with religion, here Hindu religion. It might be the result of the memory of booting out from Persia and refuge in India given by a Hindu King. Mr. Kapur used the simile of religion for Bombay:

Bombay is like a religion? Well, it’s like Hinduism… Bombay makes room for everybody. Migrants,
businessmen, perverts, politicians, holy men. Gamblers, beggars, wherever they come from, whatever caste or class, the city welcomes them and turns them into Bombayites. So who am I to say these people belong here and those don’t? Janata Party okay, Shiv Sena not okay, secular good, communal bad, BJP unacceptable, Congress lesser of evils? (362)

Mistry talks about the real religious tolerance in general and particularly related with Parsis. Jehangir recites the history lesson on Shivaji which goes like:

Shivaji was born in 1627, and was the founder of the Maratha kingdom. He respected the beliefs of all communities, and protected their places of worship. In a time of religious savagery, Shivaji practised true religious tolerance. (444)

This is really mocking and ridiculous as a party like Shiv Sena respects this great leader as their ideal and the idol but behaves in complete contrast. Jal shows Murad and Jehangir holy pictures of Sai Baba, Virgin Mary, a Crucifixion, Haji Malang, several Zarathustra, Our Lady Fatima, and Buddha. Jal reveals that the pictures used to be hanged all over the flat: “You know how, in those days, it was usual for most Parsis to keep tokens of every religion” (485). Mr. Kapur declares to celebrate all the religious festivals like Divali, Christmas, Id, Parsi Navroze, Baisakhi, Buddha Jayanti, and Ganesh Chaturthi. Mr Kapure expresses himself as “We are going to be a mini-Bombay, an example to our neighbourhood” (159). He narrates the incident when one passanger was saved by the fellow passenger without any sense of caste, creed, race, religion while entering into the train:

Whose hands were they, and whose hands were they grasping? Hindu, Muslim, Dalit, Parsi, Chirstian? No one knew and no one cared. Fellow passengers, that’s all they were. (160)
Yezad made the analogy between the Santa Claus and Dustoorji. Both of them brought happiness into the lives of human beings. As Yezad witnesses the love of Murad for Jehangir in Santa Claus’s gift so he found the peace of mind as he was at peace when the Dustoorji prayed in the fire temple.

The downgraded conditions of the Parsis in post-colonial India compelled them to migrate to the West. It is a highly westernized community. Mistry talks about one more unsuccessful attempt of migration to the West (Canada). The dream of wealth, prosperity, status, respect is discussed brilliantly. But to migrate one needs professional degree like computers or M.B.A., so Yezad advises his children to “Study useful things- computers, M.B.A. and they’ll welcome you” (45). He wrote a letter full of figurative language as he was not “an engineer, nurse, technician, or anyone in high demand” (249). Yezad, like all immigrants, had a very posh and neat dream of the promised home. He aspired for clean cities, clean air, plenty of water, trains with seats for everyone, where people wait in queue at bus stops and behave courteously. He dreamt for “Not just the land of milk and honey, also the land of deodorant and toiletry” (137). He dreams this utopian world as he wants to end “apeman commute” (137). The interview was a great fiasco and his fantasy about the new life in a new land had finished quickly. Yezad called it then as a “naive nonsense” (250). Yezad convinced himself by comparing adverse conditions in Canada and India:

… 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? (137)
Immigration has dark and bright aspects also. It is blissfull as one can enjoy the materialist pleasure with the developed countries as well as a curse as one has to live in alien people, land, culture etc. Mistry highlights these two parts of immigration story. First part deals with dream: the dream of prosperity, house, car, CD player, computer, clean air, snow, lakes, mountains, abundance and second part with reality that this dream was never going to come true. Yezad praised Canada’s policies, its people, its geography and its place in the world:

...the munificence of Canada; multicultural policy, a policy that in the beauty of its wisdom did not demand the jettisoning of the old before letting them share in the new… The generosity of the Canadian dream makes room for everyone, for a multitude of languages and cultures and peoples. In Canada’s willingness to define and redefine itself continually, on the basis of inclusion, lies its greatness, its promise, its hope. (249)

While comparing American and Canadian policies towards immigrants, Yezad bitterly slammed the “American dream” (249) of immigration, its “melting pot” (249) theory which was “more a nightmare: a crude image better to sulphurous description of hellfire and brimstone than to a promised land” (249). Lashing American dream and favoring Canadian dream, Yezad wished to migrate to Canada with his family to share this “mosiac vision” (249) for its “nobility” (249) to sing “O Canada” (250) with all his hearts. Yezad described India as “this place of disaffection” (250) whereas praises Canada as “…where that values of compassion are paramount, where the creed of selfishness is caged and exterminated, where compromise is preferred to confrontation, and the flower of harmony is cultivated” (250). For the interview Chenoy family is all dressed up in western outfits. There were so many families in the immigration office like “a wedding party” (251). Yezad thought his surname “Chenoy” (251) as Canadian after knowing the immigration officer’s name as “Mazobashi” (251). But in the office Yezad met
disillusionment, changed his opinions. He found Canadians even more causal than Americans. Yezad’s unawareness about Canada’s geography, weather, and sports were responsible to the failure of his interview. At last immigrant officer scolded him:

“‘You Indians... You’re so 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.’” (253)

Abraham Verghese writes a real incident about such interviews in New Yorker in an article entitled “Cowpath to America”. He writes:

One morning, the visa officer turned down six consecutive doctors and told the seventh, who happened to be a friend of mine, and whom I’ll call Vadivel. “Spare me the crap about coming back with specialized knowledge to serve your country. Why do you really want to go?” Vadivel, who held on to his American dream for so long that he could speak with the passion of a visionary, said, “Sir, craving your indulgence, I want to train in a decent, ten-story hospital where the lifts are actually working. I want to pass board-certification exams by my own merit and not through pull or bribes. I want to become a wonderful doctor, practice real medicine, pay taxes, make a good-living, drive a big car on decent roads, and eventually live in the Ansel Adams section of New Mexico and never come back to this wretched town, where doctors are as numerous as fleas and practice is cutthroat, and where the air outside is not even fit to breathe.” The consul gave him a visa. The eighth applicant, forewarned, tried the same tactic but was turned down. [June 23 and 30, 1997]

It depicts the variety of issues and dimensions of immigration. In case of Yezad, his frankness is not rewarded as his dual nature is completely displayed. He abused India, its people as “place of disaffection” (250). Then, he abuses Canada and its policy that he regarded as “paramount” of “compassion” and “the flower of harmony” (250). He expressed his anger:
'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 Canadians ideals of Multiculturalism. But if you are anything to go by, then Canada is a gigantic hoax.’ (253)

What an outburst and confrontation with reality! Mistry like Neil Bisoondath favours neither the American “melting pot” nor the Canadian “multicultural mosaic”:

The American system likes to pretend that it is possible for individuals to shrug off their past, to pretend that it does not exist, and assume a new identity. Whereas the Canadian one says that it is possible to freeze the past and maintain it as it used to exist, while the country one left, by the way, continues to evolve. The melting pot and the mosaic-they’re equally false. There has to be a middle way. And the first part is to have governments and bureaucrats get out of it...And so my attitude, simply put, is leave it to the individual. [1995:31]

Yezad himself analysed the causes of failure. He thought his slamming of the American melting pot, could have gone against him. Mr. Mazobashi might have marked Yezad as “a radical, an America-hater or -baiter who might be trouble” (250). At the same time there was “a slight note of disloyalty to India?” (250). Thus, Yezad’s Canadian dream was shattered. Nariman pointed out that Yezad’s decision not to migrate to Canada was correct:

“I think emigration is an enormous mistake. The biggest anyone can make in their life. The loss of home leaves a hole that never fills.” (254)

Ashis Gupta reflects on the immigration dream of prosperity and comforts which is too fragile that immigrant find himself/herself trapped in the host country. He call it as “a venus-fly-trap” and explains it as: “When
I use the words “in a venus-fly-trap” it is because often you get into that, a beautiful image of society, where you have every thing, all the comforts of the world, where every thing works. It is very easy to go complacent and sort of get lost in that without realizing, without sighting, like the fly there in a big jungle.” [Ed. Jasbir Jain 2003:212].

Mistry’s loss of home is clearly mentioned when Chenoy family approached “Jehangir Mansion” (45). Jehangir cried “my building!”(45). Yezad sadly replied that his house was sold and now “strangers” (45) have inhabited his house. But this dream of immigration always made Yezad anxious about his present financial conditions. After knowing about the bribery of Jehangir, Yezad regretted over giving up on his Canadian dream. He believed that the racist immigration officer could not have closed his way forever. He imagined their happy life in Toronto, breathing the pure Rocky Mountain air instead of the “noxious fumes of this dying city, rotting with pollution and garbage and corruption” (283). Roxana brilliantly argued the Canadian policies and Yezad’s general knowledge of Canada:

**Canada was a land of living saints? And so far as she knew, the Rocky Mountains were still in Alberta, unless government had quietly shifted them to Ontario one night. (283)**

After so many years, Yezad is still unaware of Canada and its weather and geography as well. He is not satisfied with his present life in India.

Mistry deals with inter-faith marriage of Nariman Vakil. He loved a Christian girl and was opposed to get married with her just because she was a non-Parsi. Parsis are famous for the broad mindedness and they even encourage love-marriages but within the community. Nariman’s father thought that his son is “incapable of falling in love with a Parsi girl” (14). Whenever his parents tried to findout a good match for him, people used to dig out his love affair with Lucy. His father blamed it for: “Modern ideas”
and his incapability to “preserve that fine balance between tradition and modernness” (15). It was impossible to find a perfect Parsi bride for Nariman so family selected a Parsi widow. He believed that “the traditional ways were the best” (16). Nariman was unhappy even after his marriage within the community. Mr. Arjani hired Lucy as an ayah to their grand-children. It was a kind of vengence on Nariman because his father filed a lawsuit against Mr. Arjani. A priest had performed a navjote ceremony for the son of a Parsi mother and non-Parsi father. It is forbidden for the orthodox Parsis. The event had exploded debates and polemics and internal strife that infected “the Reformists and the Orthodox from time to time, like the flu” (131). Nariman’s father wrote to Jam-e-Jamshed about the non-religious work of the “misguided dustoor” (132). Mr. Arjani debated over this issue through the letter in newspaper. The war of the letters fired between neighbours. Mr. Vakeel called Mr. Arjani as “a prime example of the substandard mind whose cogitations were clearly worthless, unable to grasp the simplest tenets of the religion and the supreme significance of the navjote” (133). Mr. Arjani slammed Mr. Vakeel and accused, “…of being rabid racist who, in his maniacal quest for purity, wouldn’t think twice about eliminating the spouses and offspring of intermarriage” (133).

Mr. Vakeel denied invitation to Lucy on the grounds that she is not a Zoroastrian and not applicable as Nariman’s wife. She might be a wonderful, as gracious and charming as the Queen of England, but “she was still unsuitable for his son because she was not a Zoroastrian, case closed” (132). All these things ruined Nariman’s family life and Yasmin’s too. Nariman’s father called Lucy a “whore” (267) and declared that such immoral attitude is “destroying the Parsi community!” (267) This is the way of abusing others and distancing them. Such efforts are made to bring about the break up of the lovers to push the “non-Parsi girl…to a safe
distance” [Pestonji 1999:152] which results into preserving the “self-image of being ‘liberal modern Parsis’” [Ibid, 152].

Mistry has shown double-standards of some Parsis on the issue of morality when Soli said: “Boys weal be boys, Marzi. Better that he has all his fun and froolreek now. Afterwards, find a nice Parsi gull and settle down. Right, Nari? No hanky-panky after marriage” (268). Further Soli humorously asked whether his girl friend confessed what they two did in the home. It is funny the way Parsis think of themselves as morally superior to Christians, their masters who claimed to be the only moral race in the world. He gives Nariman about the confessions made by Christian girls. Here, Mistry turns blasphemous when Mr. Soli narrates, “I have it on good eenformation that these padres make the gulls tell all the juicy details- was he touching you, were you touching him, did he put it een? (268). Obviously, in course of action Nariman was married Yasmin, a window. But he did not forget Lucy either. It caused great trouble and further tragic death of Lucy and Yasmin.

Mistry portrays changed Yezad who was liberal and never gone to Fire Temple but in course of time he became “non-stop-praying strangger” (500) for Jehangir, “as though making up for lost time” (463). Yezad has been reading nothing but religious books and the holy cabinet contained the religious photographs. His bedroom also was full of religious books and the books on Parsi history. The drastically changed Yezad often attended The League of Orthodox Parsis and the Association for Zarathurstrian Education. He discussed these meetings with family. He told them about the incident happended in 1818 of a Parsi bigamist who was married to a non-Parsi woman in Calcutta and a Parsi woman in Bombay. He was “excommunicated by the Panchayat” (466) for his crime. Panchayat threatened his father “to disown” (466) him otherwise he would be “excommunicated” (466). He humiliated himself by taking “a pair of shoes, one in each hand, and striking his head five times with them. Right
before the assembly” (466-467). Panchayat members have agreed unanimously to follow the policy of excommunication strictly:

**Parsi men and women, who have relations with non-Parsis, in or out of marriage, will suffer the consequences. Excommunication will be reversed if they repent publicly with the shoe punishment. (467)**

Yezad scolded Murad and Roxana who were laughing when Murad practiced the shoe punishment: “Purity and pollution is not a laughing matter” (467). Yezad caught Murad kissing a “non-Parsi” (481) girl on the staircase. He told Murad about the impossibility of their relations as she was “a non-parsi” (481). He also tried to convince him of his behaviour as wrong:

“Either she’s your girlfriend, which is unacceptable, or you’re having your fun with her, which is even more unacceptable. …The rules, the laws of our religion are absolute, this Maharashtrian cannot be your girlfriend. …You can have any friends you like, any race or religion, but for a serious relationship, for marriage, the rules are different. …Because we are a pure Persian race, a unique contribution to this planet, and mixed marriages will destroy that.” (482)

Mistry here has shown orthodox and modern Parsis fighting on this issue. Yezad expressed his opinions about the purity: “Inferior or superior is not the question. Purity is a virtue worth preserving” (482). Murad calls his father “a bigot” (482) and compares him with “Hitler” (482). Murad being a modern Parsi wants to deny the “racial superiority” [Pestonji 1999:63] of the Parsis, and thinks that ideas of racial purity are like “a Nazi or Afrikaner” [Ibid, 63]. For Murad in the “age of democracy” [Ibid, 63], such ideas like the “racial superiority humbug went bust long ago” [Ibid, 63].

Roxana wanted to explain him the contrast between the moral behaviour of a Parsi girl and a non-Parsi girl. Here she unconsciously aligns her community as morally superior to non-Parsi communities. She
convinced him that a Parsi girl would never behave in such a way as his Maharashtrian girl-friend did. But Mistry also highlights paradox of the racial purity and moral superiority complex of the Parsis. Jehangir wanted to reveal that Parsi girls can behave the way Murad’s Maharashtrian girl friend behaved:

...in the lift... we were holding each other tight, pretending to fight, pressing against each other and kissing, and I squeezed her breast. If the lift doors hadn’t opened, she would have let me slip my hands inside her T-shirt. (483)

Yezad denied entrance to Murad’s Maharashtrian girl-friend for the dinner. They fought over it. Murad hailed Yezad as “fanatical” (486). As Yezad grew old his quest for spirituality has converted him from a liberal modern Parsi to an orthodox and fundamentalist Zoroastrian.

Purity as an essential religious element is ridiculed by modern day Parsis like Murad. He asked Yezad “Orthodox Parsis could invent a Purity Detector” to detect “an impure person” (486). Modern westernized Parsis think that the issues like purity, the life and death of community as “a joking matter” (486). Murad gave the last blow when he retorted on these religious beliefs like purity:

“He started it. He’s using religion like a weapon. Do you know the obsession with purity is creating lunatics in our community? I’m never going to accept these crazy ideas.” (486)

This is crucial as considering important religious matters were ridiculed by modern day Parsis. It is what Firdaus Kanga says, “We Parsis don’t take our religion too seriously, those who do are considered downright dangerous and little mad” [1991: 14]. Maya Jaggi in her article highlights the various developments taken place in the novel as well as in Yezad’s character. According to her “Yezad’s fundamentalism is born out of guilt” [2002], guilt of spending many years in irreligiousness, ridiculing
his own religion as the religion of bigots etc. the interesting fact is Murad is going on the same track. Jaggi points out this aspect as:

There is also an echo of Sectarian intolerance in Orthodox Parsis’ obsession with Purity, fearing extinction through inter-marriage or migration. The novel both affirms Zoroastrian ritual and derides bigotry. Though the sceptic Yezad returns to the fold, his insistence that his sons marry Parsis threatens in to replicate into Nariman’s tragedy. [2002]

In this way Mistry shows the predicament of orthodoxy within the Parsi community.

Mistry talks about the Parsi honesty. Mr. Kapur flattered Yezad for “the Parsi reputation for honesty” (156) and said:

…it was a blessing to have a Parsi employee: “I don’t need to worry about cash sticking to the lining of your trousers. If only there were more communities like yours.” (156)

Parsis are known by their honesty. Yezad tells his sons the story of his father who had jeopardized his life to save his name, and reputation for honesty of his community by saving money in the bank:

“When your grandfather was in danger of being killed, what concerned him most was not the loss of his life, but the loss of his good name. He always said, when he finished telling me the story, ‘Remember, people can take everything away from you, but they cannot rob you of your decency. Not if you want to keep it. You alone can do that, by your actions.’” (234)

Vilas believed Yezad’s nature and trust in “integrity and fair play” (212). Yezad called it as “non-sense about Parsi honesty” (212). Vilas stretched the argument:

Not nonsense. Myths create the reality. Point is, there was a time when living according to certain myths served your community well. With the
present state of society, those same myths can make misfits of men. (212-213)

This Parsi honesty really helped this tiny community to survive during its ups and downs during the reign of every empire. Parsis believe in cleanliness and hygiene. Roxana counted old notes cautiously as it was unknown who might have touched or handled the notes and “how hygienic were their hands, did they wash twice with soap after going to the toilet?” (237). Parsi made fun of the Christians who did not follow the cleanliness and hygiene precautions. Soli passed insulting comments about “ferangis who wiped their arses with paper instead of washing hygienically” (15). Mistry highlights the various religious beliefs of the Parsis. Parsis never keep cats. Cats are considered as “bad luck because cats hate water, they never take a bath” (162). Jehangir provides the scientific reasons about the cat’s hygienic condition as cat licks itself. Nariman gives psychological explanation: “But beliefs are more powerful than facts” (162).

Parsis never kill spiders and male chicken. Nariman tells Jehangir that Spider spins the web and mends the chains that Zuhaak is about to break during night when Cock crows to keep the world safe again: “The Cock and Spider keep it safe for us, one day at a time” (164).

Parsis offer sandal wood and loban to fire on their religious occasions. The fragrance delighted Roxana. Yezad did not believe in these religious rituals. For him it was enough to go to fire-temple on Navroze and Khordad Sal and “loban smoke was merely one way to get rid of mosquitoes” (25). Modernized Parsis believe in the modernity and allow women and even teenagers to drink liquor. Nariman insists Roxana to drink on his birthday. Even her sons demanded that she must drink. Mistry discusses the Parsi beliefs related with final rites. As per Parsi belief, funeral of the dead should not be delayed “beyond twenty-four hours from
the time of death” (397). Navjote ceremony initiates the Parsi child into Zoroastrian fold. Yezad remembered about his Navjote:

The prayer cap his mother had bought for his navjote ceremony had been this very shade of marron. He was seven then - and how proud the family was that he had mastered the prayers already. Others had to wait till nine or eleven. (339)

Palonji Contractor wished that his children should properly initiate into the Zoroastrian fold in his presence as his time was up:

...better for the father to witness the navjote, even if the initiates were a few verses short, so he could die secure in the knowledge that his progeny had been properly welcomed into the Zoroastrian fold. (28)

Yezad hadn’t visited Fire Temple in years and even not recited the prayers. He even had forgotten the tastes of “a chasni… paapri and malido” (306). When he visits Fire Temple, he found it “cool” and “a real oasis in the midst of this big, mad city” (308). Non-Parsis are not allowed in the Fire Temple: “The sign said Admittance For Parsis Only - he was one, and entitled to go inside” (338). He is worried about the future of Parsis when he saw a young boy trained into his family business of selling Sukhad in Fire Temple:

Would there be a business when the boy became a man, wondered Yezad, the way the Parsis were dwindling in Bombay, and the way people like himself treated the faith? And the sandalwood trees fast disappearing, thanks to bandits and smugglers like Veerappan... (338)

In the years of irreligiousness, Yezad forgot how to perform the kusti prayers. Prayers are sacred and can not be disturbed in between by “profane speech and unnecessary explanation” (340). In Zoroastrianism, common people and even dustoors are not allowed to enter into the interior sections of the Fire Temple: “only those in a state of ritual purity” (341) can go inside the interim sections of the Fire Temple and “the laity could
not cross” (341) marble threshold. Parsis never extinguish fire as it is the symbol of sacredness and purity of God. Fire in the Fire Temple is always burning:

…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. (341)

Fire is not polluted by human breath. So the priest lowered the protective square of mulmul from his head to cover his nose and mouth. According to Zoroastrian belief each day is divided into the geh. A Parsi priest performs certain ceremony for the changing geh:

…dustoorji stepped into the sanctum to perform the ceremony for the changing geh. Sunset, thought Yezad, and the fourth geh of the Zoroastrian day had commenced. He watched the ritual cleansing of the sanctum, the pedestal, the afargaan, the quiescent preparations before the offerings to the fire. (342)

Yezad offered prayer for Nariman to soothe his anxious and unhealthy condition. But Roxana knew, he has abandoned prayers and “prefunctional observations” (444) and has not stepped inside a fire-temple in forty years because of the way his parents had treated Lucy. He used to call it “the religion of bigots” (444). Yezad is confident about the powers of Zoroastrian Prayers. He chanted the prayers loudly “Kemna mazda!” (445) by the time he finished the segment, Nariman became calm and quieter. Day by day Yezad grew more religious. He followed his religion very strictly. He yelled at Murad for entering into the holy place of prayer in his impure state after “a haircut” (462). Murad ridiculed Yezad’s too much religiousness and minimum distance of pure prayer-zone: “This is twenty-first century… and you still believe such nonsense. It’s sad… How did you get the exact figure? Did Zoroaster whisper it in your ear?” (463).
These are stereotype reactions from younger generation who are exposed to science and technology. This irreligious attitude of Murad offended Yezad. He warned Murad not to use Zoroaster instead of Zarathustra. He also gave reference the scripture: “Vendidaad, fargard XVII, explains the distance” (463). Murad was not ready to leave the argument. He called it “a rough estimate” (464) and would achieve “approximate purity” (464). Yezad was hurt and regretted that their “faith is a subject of ridicule” (464) for Murad. It is really tragic when Parsis, the younger generation, made fun of their own religion. Murad jokingly asked Yezad:

“What if an impure fly or mosquito or cockroach violates the sofa boundary? Do you check if they’ve showered? Maybe you should enclose your cabinet in a bubble.” (464)

Mistry discusses seriously with slight black humour about the future survival of his tiny community. Parsis are highly modernized and westernized. They believed in the values of individualism. Parsis suffer from typical diseases and one of them is Parkinson. Nariman suffers from this illness; Mistry aptly puts the frustration of such people and expects that “the new research in America would hurry up, something with foetal tissue, embryos” (357). Coomy calls Nariman “a walking medical dictionary” (34) suffering from “osteoporosis, Parkinson’s disease, hypotension” (34). Dr. Fitter’s anger shows the frustration due to the present day Parsis status and attitude of young generation: “Parsi men of today were useless, dithering idiots, the race had deteriorated” (51). This feeling of unworthiness and unimportance made Parsis what is called as “boring” and “…all doodh-paus. All flab, no muscle. No sex appeal” [Pestonji, Meher, 1999:63]. He compares them with the glorious past of the community:

“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.” (51)

Dr. Fitter is worried about the demographic decline in the Parsi community. He believes that his community is about to “doom and gloom” (51). He doubts whether his community would see the next century:

Demographics show we’ll be extinct in fifty years. Maybe it’s the best thing. What’s the use of having spineless weaklings walking around, Parsi in name only. (51)

Jal witnessed the hot discussion about the future of the Parsi community. They cover all topics regarding his dwindling community like the orthodox and reform argument, dwindling birth rate, men and women marrying non-Parsis, and the heavy migration to the West. If Parsis would extinguish: “Vultures and crematoriums, both will be redundant” (412). For Jal this was “explosive topic” (412). He admits the minority status of his community “right from the beginning” (412) but they have survived, and prospered in course of time. Inspector Masalavala didn’t want to “tolerate optimism” (412). Demographic experts predict the decline of the community in coming fifty years. This problem of survival is severe as the Parsis are not taking firm steps to prevent their extinction. It is what Aditi Kapoor says:

Unless something is done to augment their fast depleting numbers and to revive their religion the Parsis after an illustrious past could well just fade out in oblivion. [“The Parsis; Fire on Ice” in Times of India, 14th May 1989]

If concrete decisions and active participation is not initiated then the possibility of extinction will be increased and the result will be that Parsi “will become a decadent community with a glorious past, a perilous present, and a dim future.” [Palkhiwala 1994:320]

Dr. Fitter compares the extinction with dinosaurs. If people want to study Parsis they will have to study the Parsi bones. His humour
characterized the Parsi spirit, the gift to laugh in the face of darkness. Dr. Fitter imagined the names given to Parsis skeletons like “Jalosaurus”, “Shapurjisaurus”, “Pestonjisaurus”, and “Whiskysaurus” (413).

Mistry has highlighted that reasons like late marriages, individualism, westernization, modernization are responsible for 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… These Western ideas are harmful.” (413)

Inspector Masalavala blamed the Parsis producing just one or two children: “Parsis seem to be the only people in India who follow the family planning message. Rest of the country is breeding like rabbits” (413). Another reason for low-birth according to demographers is that “the more educated a community, the lower the birth rate” (414). So they wanted to prohibit the Parsi from higher education:

“Give them cash incentives to study less. And those who want to do post-graduates 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 young women.” (414)

He suggested the solution in such cases where the problems like “medical problems, inability to conceive?” (414) are troubling the Parsi couples, and then they can use “virto fertilization and all those mind-boggling technologies” that result in multiple births. They can produce six and seven Parsis in one shot. But such large families would result in the evils like “sickness, poverty” (414).

Inspector Masalavala rejects such possibilities as Panchayat has enough money for all the Parsis. He blames excessive individualism for this. Such ideas are “Poison…Pure poison” (414) for the Parsi community.
He thinks that the extinction of Parsis would be a great loss to the whole world because “When a culture vanishes, humanity is the loser” (415). Assuming the end of Parsis they plan for:

…a time capsule for posterity. To be opened in one thousand years. Containing recipes for dhansak, patra-ni-machhi, margi-ni-farcha, and lagan-nu-custard… “How about including the Zend-Avesta, and words and music for Chhaiye Hamay Zarathosti?” a few old issues of Jam-e-Jamsheed… Also, some cassettes of Adi Marzban’s radio comedies… Complete instructions and explanations for all our rituals and ceremonies, …a copy of our great Navsari epic, ‘Ek Pila Ni Ladai’… With an English translation.

As the evening wore on, the three of them filled their imaginery time capsule with their favourite items, ancient and modern, serious and frivolous, sacred and profane, till they ran out of ideas. (415-16)

Inspector Masalavala sadly expressed the emotional bond between Parsis and Mumbai. Both prospered together and now for Parsis the city has just lost its old charm and luster. For them Bombay is dying now, as there community is dying too. Parsis built this beautiful city and made it prosper. In a few more years, there won’t be any Parsis left alive to tell this tale of great city and its grandeur. Inspector Masalavala concluded, “Well, we are dying out, and Bombay is dying as well …When the spirit departs, it isn’t long before the body decays and disintegrates.” (416)

There is a deep longing of the Parsis to imitate the British, and love to be like them. Mistry highlights Anglomaniac tendency of the Parsis. Using the Christian name is also the craze among the Parsis. Jehangir wanted to change his name to “John” (247) for short form. Yezad warns Roxana about Jehangir’s becoming “a Christian” (247). Jehangir denied the possibility and convince them his Parsisness but just name will be slightly different. Roxana explained him:
“Listen, Jehangla, 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.” (247)

Mistry in a masterly fashion sketches the predicament of Parsis in post-colonial India with their downgraded economical status. He portrays the Parsis as middle class who are always in the financial crisis. It is very difficult for middle-class Parsis to manage the monthly budget. Coomy for this reason does not allow the use of ear-batteries to her brother Jal. Coomy was unable to cook “a decent dinner” (36) due insufficient income. Coomy and Jal’s damaged house can not be repaired due to the lack of money. Coomy took Nariman to a Parsi General Hospital to save money. Yezad was fed up of his life after Nariman’s arrival in his house. Nariman’s medical bills caused financial crisis. Such problems lead to the corruption in the lives of Yezad and his two sons. Jahangir is made “a Homework Monitor” (31). While checking Ashok’s incomplete homework, Ashok bribed Jehangir some cash. At first Jehangir denied but when:

**He looked once more at Ashok’s money. A small packet of butter. Or mutton for one meal. Or a week of eggs for Daddy’s breakfast. (220-221)**

He tick-marked his home work. On the other hand Murad went to school by walk “for saving the bus fare” (246). Roxana wanted Yezad “to give up eggs, or at least cut down, have them on alternate days” (94). She also complained Yezad about the illness and payments to doctors. She is advised to budget everything as it was very difficult to “buy both food and medicine” (96). Financial crisis in Roxana’s family reached height when they have to cut on their eatings too:

**She (Roxana) passed him (Murad) one of her slices, and his father pointed at him: “Give it back to Mummy,” he commanded, and held out one of his own. “No, we cannot deprive Daddy,” she said, “He has to go to work, bring home the salary.” (197)**
Insufficient economic source and starvation of the whole family compelled Yezad to go to Villie Cardmaster to play the Mataka number. Jehangir thought of doing small jobs with Murad to earn money for his family. Yezad indulged himself in playing Mataka. He won few times but at last when Police raided Mataka mafia, he lost all the money. Yezad thought of telling Mr. Kapur all about his present family condition:

...that he had pinned all his hopes on the promotion.
...it had become impossible to make ends meet on his salary: two children, school expenses, prices rising month by month. ...Sick father-in-law ... no money for medicines. (295)

Thus it is very catharatic that Parsi community in the fictions of Mistry suffers due to financial instability.

Rohinton Mistry in an interview highlights the predicaments of the Parsi characters as per the choice, they made in their lives. Mistry highlights that the book supports the idea of destiny and sufficient to show that everything happens as a consequence of what the character choose to do. Mistry says:

If Yezad had not undertaken the scheme with the actors, everything would have been different; Mr. Kapur would not have been killed. If Coomy had listened to her brother and said right, 30 years have gone by, it is time to forgive and forget, things could have gone differently. It is choice of each character that leads to the denouement. [Canadian Fiction Magazine, 2002]

Thus, Mistry concluded Zarathustra’s preaching of choice as man would be rewarded and punished as he chooses accordingly.

In this way Mistry has portrayed various anxieties of the Parsi Zoroastrian community. His portrayal of middle class Parsi community is a medley of post-colonial predicament of Parsi-Zoroastrian who is sidelined as a minority and ‘other. At the same time, he highlights the various
anxieties of this small ethnic group related with dokhma, prayers, conflict of national identity, recitation of prayers, vulture controversies etc. At last one can say that his novels will “preserve a record of how they lived to some extent,” [Ali Lakhani] when the Parsis will disappear from the earth.