CHAPTER 4

FARRUKH DHONDY
Farukh Dhondy, an expatriate Parsee novelist, offers two dense and energetic narratives in *Bombay Duck* which address the painfully current issue of religious fundamentalism. The other motif in the novel is an expatriate’s quest for roots. Divided into two parts the novel has Gerald Blossom as the protagonist in the first part and Xerexes in the second. If the first narrative concentrates on *Sanskriti* in all its ramifications, the second is a vehement expression of the angst the alienation of Xerexes who is the centre of consciousness. Set in a white milieu, Dhondy’s novel celebrates the bicultural identity of the young Asians in Britain and moves between the two worlds of Bombay and London. A tragic undercurrent pervades this multi-dimensional narrative. It is a novel of belongingness, of the breaking down of cultural barriers. Dhondy questions the negative in life which is the cause of intellectual alienation and cultural vacuum.

The first narrative in *Bombay Duck* provides a near factual detached and unsentimental portrayal of the multiculturalism of England. Immigration and the psychological consequences are frankly narrated and also partly dramatized in the second narrative. In particular Dhondy’s purposeful contrast between the Indian in Bombay and the Asians in England assumes significance. The *Ramayana* provides the selling for the multiculturalism in the narrative.

David Stream a shrewd British director of plays discovers a new international metaphor in the *Ramayana*. The epic of India tantalizes him as it incorporats the quest for the ideal man. Stream’s discovery of the smallness of the European past and the richness and complexity of Indian life are part of Dhondy’s subversive strategy. Dhondy, at the same time is sarcastic in depicting the indifference of Indians to their own cultural past.
for which the Ramayana stands. Like some post-colonial novelists, Dhondy employs irony to project the apathy of Indians towards their own cultural treasure whereas foreigners like David Stream are ‘discovering’ India. Aliens like David Stream in their enthusiasm, however, fail to avoid the pitfall of perceiving Indian culture thorough their own manners. Dhondy observes:

> What is it but folly to bring a play which is a prayer book in India to Britain and have all the races of the world play in it to European audience?!

Dhondy objects to the western tendency to misrepresent India through street-performers, beggars, village dancers as symbols of ‘spontaneous culture’ for the entertainment of the prosperous West. Hence Tilak in one context, tells Ali:

> Tcha, these people are herded like cattle, animals into cages and bring here and flung on the public.

Discussing the terminology of the coloniser to describe the native.

Dhondy questions the racist move behind the ‘cynical parading of people.’ In one context, there is an outburst against the ‘racist show’ of David stream:

> David, who the fuck is David? Some trendy white director thinks he can capture Indian culture?

The Indians are, at the same time, reminded of the significance of their own culture which appear both unique and exotic to the West.

In this narrative, Dhondy resorts to the ironic mode in individualizing the principal characters. Ali, a black Muslim of West Indian origin, plays the role of Sri Rama whereas Anjali a mediocre Indian actress is Sita. Kojin, a Chinese, plays Lakshman. The real life of these stands in sharp contrast to the roles they play. If Ali is a sexually frustrated man, Anjali is a throughly westernized woman who enjoys watching nude paintings. She does not
believe in anything that Sita, the ideal woman in India symbolizes. Ali’s wife, on the other hand, deserts him for another man. Thus both are far from being able to imbibe the Indian sensibility.

The *Ramayana* is essentially a story of the conflict between Good and Evil. David, a foreigner, fails to adopt it as it is an ‘intellectual’ thing strongly knit in the Indian milieu. He regards himself as the ultimate authority on dramaturgy. His motive is to arouse the Indian conscience. But the lack of sincerity and intellectual dishonesty of aliens like Stream results in the degeneration of values. Dhondy’s aim is to highlight man’s insensitivity to the real culture that elevates. He rejects institutionalism as it adversely affects human nature and acquires an illusion of culture instead of reality. The first narrative in *Bombay Duck* thus preaches true humanism. Ali, Stream’s Rama, observes:

*To the gods we must look alike, so I want to help them along, the gods, make myself shine out like it gives me a sense of myself. Because if you get a sense of yourself, as reflected in some purpose, like in the eyes of God, or in the eyes of a bird what loves you, well then, you got a sense of yourself.*

According to Dhondy, in love for each other lies hope and salvation for the world infested with fundamentalism. For an individual like Ali, it provides an opportunity to question himself ceaselessly and arrive and answers. As in the Christian mythological tradition, Indian culture also attaches paramount importance to the quest of the one half for the other half as typified in the concept of ardhanareeshwara. Complications arise when this way of life is corrupted for narrow or ulterior ends. In his memorandum on the ethnic arts, Tilak makes a point:

*The Asian civilisation is a vast and wonderful arch beneath which humanity can take shelter ... Beneath that archway of Asian*
culture can be found means of survival which the peasants in numberless villages in Indian have preserved the best.

The quest for the other half by Ali and Anjali is construed as a ‘civilisational insult.’ Their innocent discovery of each other’s sexual charms through the night before the performance of the Ramayana is an ‘affront’ to the moral code of India. Dhondy builds up the atmosphere of initial euphoria and subsequent communal violence without ever becoming subjective. If Ali is knifed, Anjali is attacked by an angry mob. The tragic death of Anjali is an eye-opener for Ali and Stream. Ali observes:

*We have insulted their gods. The rages break loose. I never get into look into anyone’s eyes but I can Swear that if I looked into One of their eyes, it is affront and civilisational insult I would see there.*

The attempt of Stream to interpret the Ramayana is thus a fiasco. Ali too realises his folly:

*We have sacked their Dharma. We have ventured into the heart of their country to steal its heart. To eat the entrails of their religion and make what is mysterious into a message. Not their message.*

Stream too accepts his limitations as a creative genius. He resolves not to ‘revive’ the Ramayana.

Anjali in Bombay Duck is drawn in contrast to Feroza in An American Brat. If Feroza’s alienation, at least initially, is psychological, Anjali’s alienation is cultural which results out of wsternization. An upperclass Indian who lives in Paris, Anjali is an alien to Hindu ethos, though ironically she is a Hindu herself. The Ramayana fascinates her. Her words reflect her initial enthusiasm:

*You know why I joined the troupe? I think David is doing the exact reverse for the Ramayana. It stunned me when I first heard of it. The real Eastern myth, the whole soul of Hinduism and everything comes west.*
However, her realisation of David’s limitations is a significant step in the evolution of her consciousness. She confesses:

*I don’t think it’s the Ramayana the real way. It’s just David’s thing, and I like the story, it is tremendous, but the story is made too philosophical.*

Her expatriate past haunts her. Thoroughly westernized, and culturally far removed. Anjali remains an alien to her own culture. Her quest is radically different from Feroza’s; it is an intense search for an alternative to westernized life which is characterized by ennui. Feroza, on the other hand, survives since her revival of interest in ethnicity resolves her dilemma in the New World. But in Anjali’s case, the divorce between her Hindu culture and the westernized life brings about the ultimate catastrophe. In Feroza, there is a fruitful reconciliation between ethnicity which she preserves and the glittering materialistic life of the New World.

Discussing Dhondy’s preoccupations as a novelist, Awasthi observes:

*Bombay Duck is a novel illustrating life realistically and interpreting it intellectually. Farmkh Dhondy succeeds in turning the traditional and conventional issues into matters of real intellectual concerns which normally do no effect man because he is ever prepared to submit to them un-thoughtfully even though he is pricked and belittled at times by them. The novelist seems to believed that only such strides at thought can stimulate a cultural rethinking and perhaps a positive change or receneration.*

Dhondy voices concern over the loss of culture in the Indian context. Stagnation and distortion are not eating away the vitals of growth and substance. Thus the tragic and brutal death of Anjali provides a cultural focal lens of the novelist to depict the multicultural milieu.

The second narrative in *Bombay Duck reveals* Farrukh Dhondy’s unconcealed and frank dislike for Zoroastrianism. This offers a sharp contrast
to the other expatriate writers under study. Xerxes acts ad Dhondy’s narrative consciousness. His growth, if there is any, is negative and anti-heroic. He is an uprooted man, history as a Parsec, and also an exile always struggling to put down his roots somewhere. Here, his journeying mind acts as the cultural metaphor of displacement of Asians in general, and Indians and Pakistanis in particular. Xerxes’ narration is nearly objective and of documentary type. Dhondy’s utter disgust with contemporary India is narrated in it's unmitigate disdain.

Religious fundamentalism raises its ugly head and consequently, disintegration sets in. The brutal death of Anjali in racial violence is a symbolic act; it is suggestive of the loss of culture. Boman who advocates desim and rejects the shallow doctronies of his own religion, embrace Christianity in America. His prosperity in America is what he denounces at home.

Xerxes is a marginal man whose quest is for roots. If life at home is bleak, poverty and hunger stare at him in the west. He realises, like a typical exile, that ‘roots are deep.’ Ironically, his search for roots in Bombay where most Parsees lives is an exercise in futility. Dhondy, though a Parsee, is not a devout Zoroastrian. However, he does not favour anarchism. Xerxes too rejects Zorastrianism, which is an institutional religion, at least in his view, for it does not provide a key to the existential dilemma confronting him.

Xerxes’ experience at Poona is that of an alien, an outsider. Though born in India, he takes the stance of a critical outsider, as in the case of Naipaul and Chaudhuri. His observation is significant:

My country is a chamber of horrors, and I’m a tourist.

His nostalgia and alienation are typical of an exile. The hand-to-mouth existence in the West enhances his awareness of the expatriate Indians, who like him are ‘culturally deprived.’
Xerxes views Zorastrianism with indifference. Ironically his garbled views on Zorastrianism and his essays (mis)interpreting Zorastrian legends and myths fascinate the West. Dhondy, unlike other Parsee novelists, attaches no importance to the central doctrine in Zorastrianism, that is, the conflict between Good and Evil. Xerxes, his protagonist, too rejects the concept of duality in human nature. He contends that Evil weighs as much as Good. His triumph as a Parsee historian lies in his ingenious use of his own religion which provides him with opportunities of livelihood. He admits:

*The elder the religion, the easier it is to plunder its myths, the less like blasphemy it sounds.*

Xerxes’ deliberate controversial stance as an interpreter is an existential imperative. It is a desperate attempt to acquire an identity of his own. According to him, Buddhism is in love with death. Gautama was in love with perfect and ultimate oblivion. He was not seeking an answer to life. On the contrary, he was looking for perfect and ultimate death. The kind of deaths we know and are terrified of an imperfection, are only states of being which bring us back through rebirth. So the ultimate is to seek a way of a way of annihilation. Referring to Xerxes’ treatment of religion, Awasthi remarks:

*Dhondy’s misunderstanding of Buddhism is only symbolic for misrepresentation of religion brings money to the organizer but ignorance to the follower. Propagation of religion doesn’t require money, or anybody’s life: it requires only sincerity.*

For Xerxes, what matters is money since the choice at least for him is between life and starvation.

Like some postcolonial novelists, Dhondy employs a subversive strategy to highlight the predicament of an exile. If Shashi Tharoor subverts the *Mahabharata* myth in *The Great Indian Novel*, Xerxes challenges some
of the age-old Zoroastrian doctrines and legends. According to him, the absorption of Parsecs in India in 760 A.D. is a matter of controversy. Likewise, he questions the claim of the Parsees to be racially pure for there is no evidence to establish that the first settlers had no women with them. Similarly the idea of the arrival of the original flame of Zoroastrianism from Iran to India is also a matter of doubt.

*Bombay Duck* presents a purposeful study in contrast. Xerxes, the son of Cyrus, was a legendary figure who expanded his empire from Persepolis to Africa. His name is given to many a boy in the Parsee community. It is truly ironic that Xerxes, unlike his legendary namesake, fails to acquire some social space for himself. If the legendary Xerxes is a conqueror, Dhondy’s protagonist is a misfit, a loner without roots, and inevitably, a loser. Equally ironic is the way Xerxes acquires an indentity of his own as a Parsee historian in the West. He is even regarded as an authority on fundamentalism. As a Parsee, he believes that there is no atmosphere of insecurity or danger to the existence of Parsees in India. This view is in striking contrast to the apprehensions of Gustad in *Such a Long Journey* and Zareen in *An American Brat*. In one context, Xerxes observes:

*The only solution is for India to declare itself a non-secular Hindu state. Iran burns with fervour, Pakistan is going that way, and Bangladesh and China have religions of their own. The paradox is that only by becoming an official, Hinau state with the damned thing enshrined in the Constitution can the country get protection for the minorities.*

His perceptions are typical of a detached outsider, a man living on the fringes of the society, a black bird in a white society.

In Xerxes’ view, evil is the collective will of the fundamentalists. He suggests a formula:
If we could let Hinduism constitutionally into the frame-work of political recognition, we could codify if. And in that condification, the Hindu theologians would have to agree for everything that Gandhi stood for. Secularism is part of Hinduism because it isn’t a religion at all in the normal sense. Then the Constitution would say that Muslims, Parsees, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and Jews all have have to be free to practise their religions and have equal political rights.

His views disturb the listeners, although they evoke the intellectual curiosity of the community.

Farrukh Dhondy raises the issues of conversion to Zoroastrianism. This is an issue on which the Parsee community is divided today. Xerxes is a radical Parsee who advocates conversions to Zoroastrian faith. His experience at a meeting in India strengthens his conviction. In his lecture at Bombay, an erudite dastur speaks in favour of conversations. He argues that the Zoroastrian reluctance to allow conversions is a product of bigotry and racism. This brought about a self-protective instinct in the Parsee community. He observes in a provocative tone that Parsees should know their religion. Anyone can be a Zoroastrian because it is a matter of belief. For his part, he would ‘divorce’ the fire temples, the religious practices, the Towers of Silence and all restricted places from the racial question. Roshan Ribbon – walla, a Parsee girl whom he is expected to marry, too holds a similar view. The unjust treatment meted out to the bastard children of Parsee fathers, bred by contact with servant classes, is a telling comment on the current state of affairs in the Zoroastrian community, though there is a rule in the Parsee community that children of Parsee fathers are Parsees.

In Xerxes’ theories about Zoroastrianism, there is neither intellectual honesty nor profundity, although he attains recognition as a scholar both at home and in the West. He is an intellectual who even establishes, however cleverly, that the Egyptians got their religion from the Zoroastrians and
Mithraism is, in fact, at the root of Christianity. Thus it is interesting to note that he carves out a niche for himself in the British society as a leading authority on Zorastrian history, religion and culture.

Xerxes’ third role as child-snatcher, at least to him, is a vocation. His love for children is genuine. On one occasion, he confesses:

The world is full of starving children, homeless, parentless.

What mad thing possessed me to become a baby thief?

Bombay Duck invites comparison with the novels of Bharati Mukherjee who faced rejection in Canada but found her roots in America. In Wife and Jasmine, her handling of diaspora is astute. Deeply indebted to Malamud whose protagonists are mostly from proletariat, Bharati Mukherjee’s protagonists, Tara, Dimple and Jasmine are women who belong to the professional class. Tara’s predicament, like Xerxes’, is that of a divided self ‘suspended between two worlds and rooted in neither.’ On the other hand, Dimple’s self is ‘aborted’ before it ever takes a concrete shape in the world of reality. In Mukherjee’s novels, as in Sidhwa’s An American Brat, there is a celebration of America as the land of freedom and opportunity. This pre-occupation constitutes the mainspring of the diasporal dream cherished by her protagonists, Tara, Dimple and Jasmine whereas Dhondy’s Xerxes, like Anita Desai’s Baumgartner, is a rootless vagrant.

In Xerxes, there is a gradual progression, a shift in aware-ness which is brought about by painful realisation of his predicament. It is an existential dilemma which results in a heightened awareness. It is truly ironic that the juncture of realisation is also a point of no return in his odyssey. His existence as a child-snatcher is conditioned by altmistic, not ulterior motives. His individual moral law clashes with the social norms as a consequence of which he becomes an exile in his chosen land. Towards the end of the narrative, Xerxes is a reborn, symbolically though, for there is a visible transformation in his attitude towards life at large. However, it is not
moral turpitude that drives him to child-snatching. The stalemate in his existence is largely due to the marginality, which in turn, in the outcome of his race religion and history.

The title of the novel is very suggestive. ‘Bombay Duck’ is actually ‘Bombay Duck’ or ‘Bombay Mail’, by means of which the plenty of dried fish of Bombay was supplied to the other parts of India during the British Raj. Commenting on the source of title, Dhondy writes:

_Bombay Duck is not a duck at all. In fact, it should be spelt Bombay Dak. What it is, dried fish (known in Bombay as aombil) and when the British introduced the railway system to Western Indian under their Raj, it started going in waggon-loads to the interior from Bombay. The crates stank of dried fish, like stale penises. They were marked ‘Bombay Dak: literally ‘Bombay Mail’. At the time the railway was run by whiteys. The English may call a spade a spade but they don’t call ‘stinking fish’ by that name. They referred to it euphemistically as Bombay Dak the Bombay Mail._

At the end of the novel Xerxes confronts the sea breeze carrying with it the smell of Bombay Duck drying on the sands just a hundreds yards away. It is only the second part of the novel that has relevance to the title.

The narrative technique of Dhondy in Bombay Duck is a blend of direct, analytical and epistolary methods. It employs the flashback technique for the revelation of the two protagonists, Ali and Xerxes. The narrative moves forward through direct statement as well as through dialogue. Dhondy’s dialogue is short, witty and crisp. He employs the direct method of narration when he discusses the various religious customs and traditions in general and Zorastrian customs, in particular. Occasionally Dhondy also employs the epistolary mode of Smollett. Thus the whose of David Stream affair in the first part and the opening of the second part are cast in this method.
Bombay Duck expresses Dhondy’s reformatory zeal. He extensively deals with institutional religion and social behaviour. He advocates a society where not the institutions, but the individual must only matter. Speaking of Dhondy’s handling of diaspora. Subhash Jha observes Hwt his approach to the expatriate experience in Britain is unorthodox restless but resourceful. The expatriate experience of Xerxes is akin to that of Dev in Anita Desai’s Bye-Bye Blackbird where the Asian immigrants are treated like pariahs in the white society. Dhondy’s protagonist is nowhere man whose roots exist neither at home nor in the west.

To sum up, Dhondy’s Bombay Duck deals with two motifs viz., religious fundamentalism and an expatriate’s quest for roots. In the first narrative, Dhondy narrates and dramatizes however partly, the problems and issues concerning the society and the individual. Indian culture is in a state of chaos which needs revival. The second narrative depicts a misfit’s quest for roots. But his failure to achieve what he sets out to do in life is typical of the diasporic experience.

This novel has some features of post-Modernist fiction such as the achronological narration, diluted storyline and patterning of images. The omniscient narrator is superseded by the single point of view convention. The external event is attenuated and the narration is by the interior monologue method. The psychological experience of Homi, the Parsee protagonist, is so intense that the narrative acquires the magnitude of a vision. Homi’s narrative mind is like the celluloid medium in which memory becomes the film to trigger off many intensely felt racial associations-historical cultural, religious and moral. Ultimately, memoscan a memory machine Homi invents is nothing but the narrator’s intuitive journey into his own racial self. The Parsee ethos is filtered through Homi’s consciousness which is in a state of flux.
Rusi, Homi’s younger brother, on the other hand, is enchanted with all things western. America is the new El Dorado, the Promised Land for most Parsecs who are closer to Rus. He opts for America as it offers an intellectually stimulating environment. However, like many migrants, Rusi experiences a ‘culture shock.’ The white American milieu’s is hostile to Rusi whose failure to comprehend the Americans results in ‘ethnic anxiety’. The Asian immigrants are viewed with suspicion for they interfere, at least in the view of some whites, with the American process. Rusi’s existence in America, like Manek’s in *In American Brat* is a quest for identity, a painful process of acculturation. The self-built elite status which the Parsee like Rusi enjoys in India crumbles at the first encounter with the reality in the chosen land.

Besides historical and cultural associations which are triggered off by Homi’s tryst with the collective unconscious, the narrative focuses upon the religious issues. Desau’s narrative employs a series of visual images. One of the significant images in the novel is the one in which Jalbhai Phirozshah Cama; the great grandfather of Homi appears. His revelation not only brings relief to the fractured self of Homi but also clears the debris in Homi’s mind. Speaking of his ennobling experience at Jerusalem, Jalbhai Cama says:

*Christianity became relevant to me as a variation on the theme of Zoroastrianism, each of them was profound by itself, but their conjunction provided a breadth which neither possessed alone; the many religions of the world reveal the world in all its variety like the variations of a theme. Heaven is not a place as Bapaiji, Granny and your Papa have imagined, creating it to suit their own needs, but a state of mind which encompasses all these possibilities.*

His experiential truth the Zoroastrianism and Christianity could serve us complementarities hastens the process of Homi’s self-knowledge. Hence he
rejects Julie’s condition of embracing Christianity before marriage. He argues that it would not be real. His cosmopolitan outlook is reflected in his musings:

*I was a Zorastrian, but not as devout as I might have been because I did not wish to close myself off to what other religions had to offer. That was why I had attended all the celebrations. In Hinduism, the Buddha was the ninth avatar of Vishnu, Jesus, the tenth. I liked that. Gandhi had conducted prayer meetings for Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Jains whoever chose to attend. I liked that, it did not make me a heathen.*

Homi who also faces rejection in the west like Rusi, takes refuge in Zoroastrianism. Though not deeply religious, he evinces keen interest in the Zoroastrian tenets. His stand on religious matters is clear and pointed:

*I was born a Parsi. My religion is Zoroastrianism but I am not devout. I believe in God, but not too much in anyone religion.*

Christianity, the religion of the coloniser, is part of the design of the ‘centre’ to marginalises and maintain its supremacy, an idea which Achebe too rejects in *Things Fall Apart*. An indwelling voice in Homi speaks:

*They are blessed who follow the truth for they are loved by Ahura Mazda. They are blessed who work not for themselves because they work for Ahura Mazda. They are blessed who give to the poor because they know the will of Ahura Mazda.*

Thus it is Homi’s daemon which brings him back to the path of *Asha*. Though he is a westernized Parsee, his attitude towards life is characteristically Zorastrian. His failure to visualise the archetypal battle between *Ahura Mazda* (Good) and *Ahriman* (Evil) is a juncture where Homi and Bapaiji accept their limitations with humility. She observes:

*Something even the dead cannot show. May be my next death will make things clear.*
Though the various associations in the narrative are significant, the moral dilemma of Homi is central to the narrative. His involvement with Candace leads to a moral crisis in his life. He resolves to annihilate himself:

*If I wouldn’t with Candace the way I wanted, I would be with her the only way I could, by repeatedly reliving the memory of my night with her until it became my whole life.*

He tries to relive the moment of his union with Candace in order to reach the core of his being. Bapaiji, who is invisible, witnesses Homi’s attempt at self-immolation. She demonstrates him:

*A drop of water can become lost in the Ocean; it can also become the Ocean. I am giving you the chance to become the Ocean. You were so obsessed with reliving the times you spent with your American muddum that you didn’t even care about the cost to yourself. You would have sacrificed your gift, the brain of an Einstein, for a muddull who slept with waiters and barkeeps.*

Thus Homi’s experience transforms the fantastic into the familiar. Memoscan becomes a ‘benevolent alternative’ for Homi. However, the potential of the memoscan begins to dawn on him only after he sets out to abuse it. He speaks of his own heightened consciousness which is the result of his tryst with the collective unconscious:

*my brush with the collective unconscious had shown me a way to control the past, at least in my imagination, and I wanted to exercise that control one more time, to prove to myself that I was finally the master, no longer the slave of what I chose to see.*

As Harris aptly points out, it is Homi’s imagination which acts as the ‘transforming power’ in this context. The ‘violent’ act of Homi effects a ‘genuine’ change.

In the final visual image which captures the essence of the narrative, the Zoroastrian ancestors of Homi appear to bless him. He is overjoyed:
I had done it; I had brought them all together in one place at one time, made a whole of all the scattered pieces.

Thus, Homi’s true triumph lies in ‘connecting’ the racial past and the present.

Homi’s ‘dialogue’ with the racial past holds the key to his existential dilemma. After wandering through time and space, Homi is back where the roots of most Parsecs exists-India. The crowing of the cock is a symbolic gesture in the narrative suggesting a fresh beginning in the protagonist’s life. Homi’s fragmentary existence ends with his firm resolve to lead a fuller and more meaningful life.

In this narrative, it is Bapaiji who guides Homi in his quest for the racial unconscious. Discussing the portrayal of ideal woman in expatriate fiction, Viney Kirpal observes:

*In the Third World, the ideal woman is one in whom the feminine elements and masculine elements blend to produce a personality that is gentle but not passive, strong but not egoistic: she is the spiritual centre of her family – the opposite of “adrift”. In all Third World writing, the picture of the ideal native woman converges around this traditional norm.*

All the major women characters in Parsee novel in English are depicted as a blend of strength and tenderness. Put it in *The Crow Eaters*, Rodabai in *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sera in *Trying to Grow*, Shirin in *More of an Indian*, Dilnawaz in *Such a Long Journey*, Zareen in *An American Brat* and Bapaiji in *The Memory of Elephants* are gentle yet dynamic women whose response to life is imaginative. It is their presence which provides sustenance and hold their respective families together. Bapaiji is a combination of prudence and sagacity whose fruitful assimilation into the Indian ethos is a singular achievement. She preserves her ethnic identity even after becoming an integral part of Indian life.
References