Chapter –IV

The Parsis’ Response to Socio-Political Upheavals

The Parsi community has first hand knowledge and experience of political upheavals. The once-mighty Persian Empire was humbled by Alexander the Great. Later, during the 8th Century, the Parsis indulged in mass migration to escape the Islamic invasion of Persia which resulted in their eventual settlement in the Indian sub-continent.

In India, as a minority, they had to witness and respond to such cataclysmic political events like the Partition of the country, the tumultuous Emergency years and ethno-religious fundamentalism.

A major concern in minority discourse and subaltern writing, whether fiction or non-fiction, is its interest in the socio-political conditions in which it is produced and located(Sadhath,6).

Sidhwa and Mistry’s fictions portray the Parsi response to the politics around them.

According to Chelva Kanakanayakam, “Bapsi Sidhwa wrote Ice – Candy Man from the Pakistani point of view”(Interview with Bapsi Sidhwa: TSAR,46) Sidhwa’s treatment of history is typical of a postcolonial novelist. History is also richly humanized where Lenny’s evolving consciousness integrates within itself the diachronic moment of her own growth and the disintegration of the sub-continent.

The Parsee attitude rendered through Lenny’s God mother and other characters like Colonel Bharucha is that of a neutral disinterest. As they are not so affected by the social, political or even economic consequences, they
are also considered as near perfect observers. Sidhwa displays a fuller grasp of the ‘human’ consequences of history.

The action is internalized in the young though fertile mind of Lenny. She thus becomes an eye – witness to and also a victim of a topsy – turvy world.

Zoroastrianism enjoins that a Parsee must be loyal to the ruler. The Parsees are very much celebrated for their unflinching loyalty to the British. Considering the loyalty of the Parsees to the British, Novy Kapadia observes that all that the Parsis wanted from the ruling British authorities was religious autonomy. The sense of insecurity in the Parsee community was due to alienation brought about by the rejection of the coloniser and distrust of the nationalists.

When objections are raised by some members of the Parsee community at a Jashan meeting on the eve of the Partition, Colonel Bharucha the spokesman of the Zoroastrian Community in Lahore observes: “I hope no Lahore Parsee will be stupid enough to court trouble. I strongly advise all of you to stay at the back and out of trouble” (ICM, 36-37).

Moreover, he argues that it would be very difficult to predict the outcome of Partition. He cautions them: “There may not be one but two – or even three new nations. And the Parsees might find themselves championing the wrong side if they don’t look before they leap.” (ICM, 37)

He feels that there is no need for the Parsee community to leave Lahore. He tells them: “Let whoever wishes to rule! Hindus, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land” (ICM, 39)
Only Ayah, the main character, an eighteen year old Hindu is at the centre of Lenny’s scheme of things. The Nexus between Lenny’s world of childish pleasures and innocence and the fast–changing ambience is realised in Ice- candy – Man whose presence is exhilarating for the young child. Sidhwa wrote Ice – Candy Man since she felt that enough had not been written about the Partition though novels such as Train To Pakistan, A Bend in The Ganges and Tamas deal with only the Partition horrors.

Lenny’s response to Gandhi is naïve. He is a mythical figure for her, but at last he emerges as a multi-dimensional reality whose presence is overwhelming.

Lennie truly realises the concealed nature of ‘ice’ lurking deep beneath the hypnotic and dynamic nature of Gandhi’s non – violent exterior only after the communal frenzy starts.

Sidhwa being a Parsee, did not suffer much during the Partition. The fight was chiefly between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs--people who were to gain by it and who were going to be empowered by it. Lenny, at least to some extent, takes after Sidhwa and most of the incidents did take place in her own life though she just fictionalises them.

Sidhwa’s Ice – Candy Man is a work that looks at the victims of the Partition on a religious basis. Sidhwa displays a fuller grasp of the ‘human’ consequences of history. Sidhwa is the second woman writer to write a novel dealing with the Partition and it is a novel dealing with the Partition and its aftermath. Attia Hossain who wrote Sunlight on a Broken Column too discusses the theme of the Partition like Bapsi Sidhwa.
Partition is treated as an upheaval that transformed millions of people on either side of the border in the sub-continent into refugees.

Partition becomes the moulding principle, a shaping force in the evolution of the consciousness of Lenny, the Parsee child – protagonist. The political developments in the sub-continent give Lenny, a clear idea of the crumbling familiar social order. Her realization of religion has profound importance. She closes her eyes and tries to shut out the voices. She remarks: “I try not to inhale, but I must. The charged air about our table distils poisonous insights. Blue envy, green avidity, the gray and black stirrings of predators and the incipient distillation of fear in their prey”(131-132). Lennie also starts to play violent games, a gesture that she borrows from the adult world. One day Adi and she pull the legs of a doll, and when the doll splits, she breaks down. In anger, Adi asks: “Why were you so cruel if you couldn’t stand it? He asks at last, infuriated by the pointless brutality. (139).

In Kapadia’s view, Lenny’s innocent act has a symbolic significance. He observes: “It shows how even a young girl is powerless to stem the tide of surging violence within, thereby implying that grown-up-fanatics enmeshed in communal frenzy are similarly trapped into brutal violence.”(Indian Women Novelists, 83).

Though the Parsis were not victims of the Partition, their misery was no less intense. Sidhwa highlights the quandary of the Parsee community on the eve of Partition. The Parsees were detached observers of a bloody event that broke India into two. Lenny’s innocent query is typical
of a child, “India is going to be broken. Can one break a
country?” (ICM, 92).

Sidhwa tries to re-examine the role of the British in ‘Cracking’ the
country. She attempts to expose the ‘illegitimate’ part played by the British
in the political process.

The birth of Pakistan leads to an identity – crisis in Lenny. She
observes bitterly: “I am a Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that” (ICM, 140)

Lenny takes another birth, though a symbolic one as a Pakistani.
The Ice Candy Man is Pakistani in setting and also in sensibility. The
perspective of Sidhwa is quite clear. According to her, Partition was a
‘mistake’, a tragedy that could have been prevented. Moreover, in the novel
she argues how Partition itself favoured India over Pakistan.

The Hindus are being favoured over the Muslims by
the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to
divide India is achieved, the British favour Nehru
over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri. They grant him
Kashmir spurning logic, defying rationale, ignoring
the consequence of bequeathing a Muslim State to the
Hindus…. They grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pattankot
without which Kashmir cannot be secured (ICM, 265)

Sidhwa rejects the British and Pro-Hindu Indian versions of history.
She also subverts the popular myth on the Partition that was nursed and
also cherished by people on either side of the border in the sub-continent.

It is Lenny who, without willingness surrenders Ayah to the rioters
led by the Ice – Candy Man. Even Imam Din’s desperate lie fails to save
her. Lenny’s sense of guilt is too acute. “I am the monkey men’s
performing monkey, the trained circus elephant the snake –man’s charmed
cobra, an animal with conditioned reflexes that cannot lie” (ICM, 184)
Lenny’s mother and God mother set her firmly on the path of truth. It is only her honesty that spells doom for Ayah.

The subsequent confrontation that occurs between the God mother and the Ice-Candy Man opens Lenny’s eyes to the wisdom of righteous indignation over compassion.

Ice-Candy Man who ravished the voluptuous Ayah, however repents and marries her. Even her name is changed to Mumtaz. So Sidhwa presents how patriarchy deliberately deprived women of liberty finally resulting in a crisis of identity. But Ayah rejects the new identity which her marriage offers. Lenny feels the pain of Ayah since it is she who perpetrates it, though in innocence.

They have shamed her. Not those men in the carts they were strangers but Sharbat Khan and Ice-candy-Man and Imam Din and cousins cook and the butcher and other men she counted among her friends and admirers. I’m not very clear how – despite cousins’ illuminating tutorials – but I’m certain of her humiliation(253-54).

Sidhwa stresses the idea of how the Partition affected two nations in general, and women in particular.

Lenny’s realisation that Ice-Candy-Man is a deflated poet and a collapsed pedlar’ is symptomatic of her arrival. She perceives the charge that comes over Ice-Candy-Man. “… and while Ayah is haunted by her park, Ice-Candy-Man is haunted by his future and his macabre future already appears to be stamped on his face”(ICM,265)

The eventual rehabilitation of Ayah which is mainly the work of God mother, the Good Samaritan she is, and also the repentance of Ice –
Candy-Man give Lennie a glimpse of the power of love and also the pain of separation.

In Bapsi Sidhwa’s fiction in general, and in *Ice-Candy-Man* in particular, there are many inter-textual references that not only enable Sidhwa to register her ‘cultural distance’ but also introduces the exotic to the Western Reader. This is one of the salient features of post colonial fiction and *Ice –Candy-Man* like Anita Desai’s *In Custody*, provides relevant fictional context for allusions to previous literatures.

*Ice-Candy-Man*’s newborn knowledge or wisdom is a mystery to the young mind of Lennie. She understands the power of love only when he also disappears across the newly created border into India.

Speaking on Sidhwa’s treatment of the Partition, Susie Tharu remarks: “By representing the Partition in ‘Universalist’ terms as outrageous and its effects as a metaphysical disorder that can be restored to an equilibrium only by the artist who is imaged as a magician healer, these texts inaugurate a narrative and a subjectivity that translates history and politics into a failure of humanity”(78).

She also argues that the trauma and suffering of people during the Partition is only due to the degeneration of politics that leads to sub-human acts. The tragedy of the Ayah and the trauma of Renna are only the result of what Tharu calls ‘failure of humanity.’ Lenny also cries out that she feels very sorry for herself and for her cousin.

Lenny’s education is only the growth of consciousness, a phenomenon that is hastened by events and situations at once tragic and brutal.
The novelist herself develops a philosophical conception of history. There are few aberrations in providing historical signposts.

Sidhwa employs two narrative voices in her account of Partition. The first one is that of Lenny, a child and the other is that of omniscient authorial voice.

Lenny’s rendering is only through her dreams and might mares. It is subjective, not involved or enlightened about its consequences.

Sidhwa’s Lenny tries to interpret the actions and events connected with the Partition though she is too young to do so.

Through the character of Lenny, Sidhwa demonstrates how absurd it is to break a country. The new title only suggests the idea of a quest of discovery: “This work is regarded by some Indian scholars as a moral allegory. According to Nilufer Bharucha “the Hindu Ayah is a symbolic of the Indian earth” (The Parsi voice: 81).

The world view that serves as the controlling point of the narrative is very much characteristically Zoroastrian. In Lenny’s consciousness, there is a gradual and purposeful shift from skepticism to faith. It is also a tale of arrival.

Lenny’s enlarged consciousness results from her experiment with truth. Lenny’s passage from a state of bliss to the misery of the adult world constitutes the core of the narrative. It is a progress from innocence to experience.

In the novel, Sidhwa portrays Lenny and her growth in a parallel time order and trace the chronology of the sub-continental Partition tale.
In Sidhwa’s fiction, there arises a tug between history and the hapless protagonist. He/she seeks to break away from the history and create his/her own world with temporal autonomy. *The Ice-Candy-Man* ends on a note of assimilation. Finally even with the Partition, what matters for the Parsi is a stable and unified country, India or Pakistan.

Ice–Candy Man’s departure for India is only a symbolic gesture, particularly at the end of the novel.

As per the novel, in Lahore, things are going from bad to worse. The impact of the struggle for power between the Congress and the Muslim League on the common man is also visualized by Sharbat Khan when he cautions Ayah: “These are bad times – Allah knows what is in store. There is big trouble in Calcutta and Delhi, Hindu-Muslim trouble. The Congress – Wallahs are after Jinna’s blood. . . (*ICM*, 75)

Seven year old Lenny senses a subtle change in the Queen’s Garden. The people of different communities are silting apart. Only the group around Ayah remains unchanged. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Parsees are as always unified around her. But children are not allowed to interact with one another. When Lenny goes to play with a bunch of Sikh children, Masseur follows her and drags her away. People have become so ghettoized.

When Lenny’s parents are fond of entertaining guests, one evening they invite their Sikh neighbor Mr. Singh, Mr. Rogers, the Inspector General of Police and their families to Dinner.

The dinner party starts with Lenny’s father making a joke about a British soldier. Mr. Singh at that time lets out a loud guffaw. But Rogers do
not relish it. This is enough to reveal that the British hold on India is on the wane. The whole discussion veers round politics. Mr. Singh accuses the British since they follow only the ‘divide and rule policy and say “you always set one up against the other… you must give Home Rule and see. We will settle our differences and everything” (ICM, 63)

According to Sidhwa, the literature on the theme of Partition written by the British and the Indian writers was not a balanced one. Hence, through Ice – Candy Man, Sidhwa tries to balance the account of the Partition riots by showing both Muslims and Sikhs indulging in violence. Sidhwa also describes the mass murder of Muslims in Pir Pindo.

Most of the political leaders of the time figure in Ice-Candy Man in some context or the other. The Hindu leaders have been portrayed in an unfavourable manner. The portrayal of Jinnah only creates admiration and sympathy.

Gandhi is respected throughout the world but in Ice-Candy Man, he has been described as a tricky politician. Masseur says of him, “He’s a politician. It’s his business to suit his tongue to the moment” (ICM, 91).

Lenny considers him as an “improbable toss –up between a clown and a demon and is puzzled why he is so famous. The butcher describes him as a ‘non-violent violence monger’, who indulges in double speak.

Kashmir has always been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan. Sidhwa thinks that the English have shown a favour to Nehru by granting him Kashmir.

According to Sidhwa, while Nehru is loved and venerated, Jinnah is still being treated harshly by Indian scholars and the British as she
observes: “And today forty years later, in films of Gandhi’s and Mountbatten’s lives in books by British and Indian Scholars, Jinnah, who for a decade was known as “Ambassador of Hindu – Muslim unity is caricatured and portrayed as a monster” (ICM, 160).

Sidhwa presents in Ice-Candy –Man, a Pakistani version of Partition. Sidhwa’s Parsi faith keeps her out of all religious feuds but regarding nationality, she is definitely a Pakistani.

The Ice-Candy Man, explains a feminine view of Partition too. The narrator of the novel is a little Parsi girl Lenny. Lenny’s world is limited. Ayah has friends and admirers of all races and faiths. But the group disintegrates due to communal tensions. Women are the worst victims when the riots start.

Sidhwa’s portrayal of women as sufferers conforms to her feminine perspective on the Partition. Ice-Candy Man presents a fictional account of the Partition from three perspectives – Parsi, Pakistani and feminine. Therein lies the uniqueness of this novel. Every country or community has its own distinct culture. There are also divergences within the country. Cultural diversity may bring colour and variety but at the same time it divides people into different groups and subgroups. Also, it proves to be a great barrier to human relationships. Bapsi Sidhwa presents the issue of cultural differences and the problems induced by them in almost all her novels.

The issue of cultural difference moves from the periphery to centre in Sidhwa’s fourth novel An American Brat. When Sidhwa was questioned by Naila Hussain about the theme of An American Brat, Sidhwa replied:
Naturally the book deals with the subject of the ‘culture shock’. Young people from the sub continent have to contend with when they choose to study abroad. It also delineates clashes, the divergent cultures generate between the families ‘back home’ and their transformed and transgressing progeny bravely groping their way in the New World. (AB,19).

The protagonist Feroza is a sixteen year old Pakistani-Parsi girl. She is a Matric student at the convent of the Sacred Heart Girl’s School in Lahore. She picks up fast, the conservative ways of her society.

Zareen, Feroza’s mother gets worried about her and feels sad, she tells her husband Cyrus of Feroza’s mentality. She feels her daughter is becoming more and more backward everyday. Cyrus tells her that there is no harm in Feroza’s staying narrow – minded if it means dressing decently. His words upset Zareen. She tells him: “I know you think my Sari – blouses are short, but they’re not half as short as your sister’s chotis. At least I don’t run around flashing my belly button” (AB,13).

Cyrus questions his wife what strategy she has in mind to tackle Feroza’s backwardness. She says that Feroza must be sent to America for a short holiday. Her brother Manek who is in America will take care of her. Cyrus also accepts Zareen’s words for a different reason. One week earlier, he had seen Feroza talking to an unknown young man in the sitting room. He fears that his daughter would love and marry a non- Parsi.

Zareen’s mother Khutlibai is very angry on hearing of Feroza’s visit to America. But Zareen convinces her. Feroza is very happy on hearing the news. America means to her at the moment ‘the land of glossy magazines’ of ‘Bewitched’ and ‘Star Track’, of rock stars and Jeans…” (AB,27)
Feroza is given a last minute instruction by her grand mother and aunts. She is advised not to talk to strangers, not to drink or eat from them as it might be drugged. She politely refuses a young Pakistani’s offer of coke or tea at Heathrow in London.

She is triumphant and glowing the moment she steps down in the Kennedy Airport. Still, she feels that she is in a strange country amidst strangers.

Following the other passengers to the baggage-claim section, Feroza finds herself suddenly confronted by a moving staircase. An elderly American couple help her out of her predicament by escorting her down the escalator. The courteous reception from the passport officer also moves her deeply.

When she loads her suit cases and hand – luggage on the cart, she finds the striking contrast between the Americans and her countrymen. According to her, the Americans are unselfconscious. They are really busy with their own concerns. They don’t stare at girls as people do in Pakistan. She enjoys the first taste of freedom. To quote from the novel: “She knew no one, and no one knew her. It was a heady feeling to be suddenly so free – for the moment – at least of the thousand constraints that governed her life”(AB, 58).

Feroza catches a glimpse of her uncle Manek standing just outside the exit. As she steers her cart towards him, a woman in a black uniform stops her “Hey! You can’t leave the terminal. Your passport please”(AB, 59). Later, she directs Feroza to go with the immigration officer for secondary inspection. The immigration officer grills her and at
the same time a customs inspector rummages through her bags and suitcases.

Feroza falls into their trap when she blurts out that her uncle is a student and he also works at two other jobs to make extra money. When Manek’s name is announced in the reception lobby, he is interrogated separately. Another immigration officer brings him to Feroza. The officers do not rely on Manek when he says that he is her uncle. They too feel that the girl has come to America only to marry her fiancé. When charged, Manek replies: “I work in the university cafeteria and at other odd jobs here…. I work only for them, I’m permitted that” (AB,63).

Manek assures the officers that the girl would go back to her country at the end of three months. Then the officers allow them to leave the airport.

Feroza’s initiation into the American way of life begins. Manek gives her the first lesson that she must learn to control her temper, while she is in America. When she talks of honour, Manek exhorts her, “And you’d better forget this honor- shonor business. Nobody bothers about that here” (AB,66)

After spending a week in New York, Manek and Feroza go to Boston. In order to accommodate Feroza, Manek shifts his room at an MIT dorm in Cambridge. He moves into an attic of a large two-storeyed, three bedroom house in a seedy part of Somerville near Union Square. He shares the house with five other Pakistani and Indian students.

Maneck realises soon how brazen Feroza has grown in the short while she has been exposed to American culture. She has become
disrespectful and uncourteous as she keeps on interrupting him. Manek also
decides to improve her manners and behaviour. Maneck tells her: “…. If
there’s one thing Americans won’t stand, it’s being interrupted. It’s
impolite. It’s obnoxious. You’ve got to learn to listen … what he’s talking
about” (AB, 101).

Manek undertakes the task of preparing Feroza for life in an alien
land. He likes her to pursue her studies in America and writes to many
universities and colleges for information. Feroza’s parents also permit her
to study in America.

Maneck advises her to be humble in life. Jo takes charge of
Feroza’s life after Manek’s departure. He makes Feroza give up wearing
her Pakistani outfit and dangling earrings. She starts wearing jeans. When
Jo wants her to wear skirts, Feroza tells her “It’s not decent to show your
legs in Pakistan” (AB, 151).

But later she starts enjoying the company of boys. She has feelings
of guilt. She also wonders what her family will say of her conduct if they
come to know about it. But she considers it as her assimilation into the
American way of life.

Feroza finds the American way of upbringing the children, entirely
different. Feroza decides to spend her winter vacation in Lahore. She is
given a hearty welcome when she arrives home. The family members are
delighted on seeing Feroza and ask many questions. There is an exchange
of views.
Feroza also perceives many changes in her family as well as in her country. After observing things in America, it is really painful for her to see her grandmother and others, looking older than they really are.

Feroza’s grandmother Khutlibai has stopped dying her hair and the other one, Soonamai, has got her vision considerably impaired on account of cataract. People have even forgotten Bhutto and his martyrdom.

Secularism has given way to Islamic fundamentalism. Non-Muslims are being eyed with suspicion. The Islamic laws govern the law courts. The rape victims are being punished for adultery while the rapists escape scot-free.

Poverty has spread like a galloping disfiguring disease. Feroza is also disconcerted to discover that she is a misfit in a country in which she once fitted so well. Feroza has grown up into a confident creature. She is very much interested in her studies. She also says, “I refuse to die an old maid! .. I’ll marry the handsomest”\(\text{(AB,240)}\)

Feroza buys a car with the gift of seven hundred dollars from the members of her family and her relatives. She is also jubilant. She also scans the classified ads., and consults her friend. She also makes an appointment with David Press to inspect his two – year – old car.

On the dance floor of the restaurant to which she has test-driven the car, she feels, as if she cannot sustain herself without David’s support. Soon, David and Feroza get physically close. Feroza decides to seek permission from her parents to marry and also sends a letter along with his photograph to her mother. The letter causes a flutter in the family.
The elders in the family settle down to thrash out the problem created by Feroza. They decide that Zareen should go to the U.S.A to prevent her from marrying a Jew.

Cyrus gives her a bank draft for ten thousand dollars and tells her to offer it or part of it to the scoundrel to leave their daughter alone.

Feroza entreats her mother to look at things in a different way as the Americans have a different culture. Zareen says: “And you’ll have to look at it our way, it’s not your culture! You can’t just toss your heritage away like that. It’s in your bones!” (AB,279)

When Feroza speaks of love, Zareen says that love comes only after being married to a right person. She regrets her having sent Feroza to America: “I should have listened. I should never have let you go so far away. Look what it’s done to you – you’ve become an American Brat”.

(AB,279).

But later Zareen broaches the subject of Feroza’s marriage by lauding the virtues of three marriageable Parsi boys in Lahore and two in Karachi whose mothers have expressed an ardent desire to make her their daughter in-law. But Feroza praises David’s parents and says that they are respectable people though they are not rich. When Zareen questions David’s ancestry and also his family connections, Feroza says: “If you go about talking of people’s pedigrees, the American will laugh at you”(AB,277).

Cut to the quick, Zareen explains to her, the risks of marrying outside her faith. She would be thrown out of the community. She would
not be allowed to enter the Parsi places of worship, nor to attend the funeral rites of her grandmother or her parents.

Zareen feels that she must protect her daughter from him by hook or by crook. She also consents to their marriage but wants it to be a regular wedding. She also describes the details of the Parsi wedding rituals and customs to David. He realises that Zareen’s offensive is not personal but communal. He feels compelled to defend his position. He tells Zareen that a Jewish wedding is an equally elaborate affair.

David’s anger shows that Zareen has succeeded in causing estrangement between him and Feroza. David starts calling Feroza as Zorastrian ‘ZAP’ meaning – American Princess. When Zareen casts the peppers on the hot griddle placed on the stove, and with a dark look, watches them sputter shrivel and charred to cinders, the room is filled with an acrid stench. David cries and “Oh, God! What are you? A witch or something?”(AB,304)

Ultimately it becomes very clear to him that Feroza’s culture is entirely different from his and he cannot adjust himself to it. His feelings for Feroza undergo a change. Her exoticism that once attracted him to her now frightens him. He thinks of going out of her life. Fortunately he gets a job with a firm in California and leaves Denver at the end of the summer term.

Zareen goes back to Lahore. But Feroze decides not to go back home but to live in America. Although the sense of dislocation of not belonging is more acute in America she feels it is bearable, because it was shared by thousands of newcomers like herself.(AB,321)
The attraction of America lies not only in the material comfort it provides but also the relief it gives from the pain of poverty and injustice. Feroza decides to manage her life to suit her heart and pursue happiness. As for her religion, she is Parsi and she will continue to be Parsi.

If the priests in Lahore and Karachi do not let her enter the fire temple, she will go to one in Bombay where there are so many Parsis. Moreover no one will know whether she is married to a Parsi or to a non-Parsi.

Feroza’s mental turmoil typifies the predicament of many in a modern multicultural society. She also represents the agonies of the expatriates. The expatriates have to strive hard to strike a balance between tradition and modernity past and present, dependence and freedom.

*An American Brat* deals with the inter –cultural theme which has assumed importance for many a post colonial novelist. The west is depicted as a set of values in conflict with the value system of the East. The conflict between the two cultures is discernible not only on the social plane but also on the personal level. Sidhwa evinces keen interest in the interaction of two cultures that exist side by side.

The Zoroastrian mode of life of Feroza, the Parsee protagonist clashes with the modern American way of life with its emphasis on material prosperity.

Feroza is caught between conservatism and the rising wave of fundamentalism in Pakistan. The progressive liberalism is presented through Feroza’s mother Zareen. Her lack of interest in religion is typical of the Parsee community today. Observing Feroza’s relationship with
Zoroastrianism, Sidhwa observes: “Like most Parsees who know very little about their religion. Feroza had a comfortable relationship with the faith she was born into she accepted it as she did the colour of her eyes or the length of her limbs. (AB,140)

Feroza resolves to have humata (good thoughts) hukhta (good words) and Varshta (good deeds) that would advance His Divine Plan. She too feels the spiritual power of the fire reach out from its divine depths to encompass her with its pure energy. She also feels herself being suffused with the presence of Ahura Mazda.(AB,42).

Novy Kapadia points out that through Feroza’s experiences Sidhwa also shows the expatriate’s assimilation to the way of life of the New World”(Novels of Sidhwa, 191).

In discussing the dilemma of the expatriates, Viney Kirpal points out that the compelling need in a migrant which almost becomes a survival strategy is to cling to his own traditions and to mix with people of his own traditions and to mix with people of his own country”(65).

Feroza remains Zoroastrian and her triumph lies in preserving her ethnic identity despite her long stay in America. Her quest is not only for social space which would ensure her an identity of her own but also for self-development.

Like a true Parsi, Feroza aims at ethical perfection and realises the significance of freedom. It is a privilege to which she is not entitled in conservative Pakistan. Feroza is the fictional embodiment of Virginia Woolf’s Cherished ideal of an empowered woman.
In the novel, Sidhwa portrays the love-hate relationship that exists between the land and the migrants. One of the causes of expatriation is the need to work in an intellectually stimulating environment. Feroza’s thirst for knowledge is kindled by the universities and the libraries in the New World. It is an intellectual desire that the conservative homeland fails to fulfill.

In Feroza’s case, a valid and active sense of self is destroyed by displacement. The sudden swing from the stifling conservative milieu of Lahore to the exhilarating ‘surreal’ world of New York disorients her. However a perceptible change comes over Feroza. Her gain of knowledge in the New World is a privilege which conventional morality denies her in Pakistan.

The attitudes of Feroza and Manek, her uncle are contrary to each other. In other words, he adapts himself in external behaviour for a smoother acceptance in the new chosen land. On the other hand, to Feroza it is only ‘assimilation’ which is a far slower process. Her ability to react instinctively and emotionally to the culture of the New World shortens her period of adjustment. Only because of Jo, an American student, does she understands the American ways.

When Feroza commits the sin of smoking, that night itself she performs the Kusti ritual, bows her head to beg Divine forgiveness for desecrating the holy fire, the symbol of Ahura Mazda by permitting it such an ‘intimate contact with her unclean mouth’.

Speaking about man’s quest for happiness Bertrand Russell observes:
“All happiness depends upon some kind of disintegration within the self through lack of coordination between the conscious and the unconscious mind. There is lack of integration between the self and society where the two are not knit together by the force of objective interests… the greatest joy is to be found” (191).

In Feroza, there is a lack of integration between the self and society at least initially. She achieves the fruitful fusion of heart and mind stressed by Russell and thus resolves the moral crisis in her later life.

*In An American Brat*, Sidhwa deals with the motif of expatriation that was dealt extensively by Bharathi Muherjee and other post-colonial novelists like Yasmin Gooneratne. They are considered to be coloured expatriates who faced a multi-cultural situation in the lands where they settled.

*In An American Brat*, Sidhwa employs a situation in the narrative to focalise the dissent among the younger generation of the Parsi community. She seems to suggest that the demand for some rethinking on the rigid code is justified. Zareen establishes that Zoroastrianism is purer and greater religion than Judaism.

Though not an avowed feminist, Sidhwa too raises the issue of male dominance and oppression of women in this narrative. The minorities in Pakistan in general and the Parsee community in particular are marginalised.

*In An American Brat*, Feroza’s visit to her homeland after emigration is a revelation. If poverty, sickness and fundamentalism in Pakistan are disgusting, the low status granted to and suffered by women is
even more disturbing. The third World Women continue to be objects. This is questioned and challenged though gently by Sidhwa and vehemently by other postcolonial novelists like Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande.

Thus with *An American Brat*, Bapsi Sidhwa has made a significant contribution to the literature of the Diaspora. If the New World provides Feroza adequate social space to grow, Zoroastrianism provides the final emotional and religious space to her.

Sara Suleri in her perceptive essay on feminist concerns in Third World countries like Pakistan observes:”If a post colonial nation chooses to embark on an official program of Islamization, the inevitable result in a Muslim state will be legislation that curtails women’s rights and institutes in writing what has thus far functioned as the law of the passing word”(766).

The Parsis migrated from Iran to the West coast of India to escape religious persecution in the 8th century. The Parsis have contributed much to the development of India. Though they are one of the fast diminishing communities of the world, yet they encounter their marginalisation with their ability to laugh at the struggles in their lives. Parsi writers are also sensitive to the various anxieties felt by their community. Rohinton Mistry is a chronicler of the Parsi fortunes in Bombay.

The Parsi community is on a long journey to growing and knowing in Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey*. The novel attains importance and even controversial nature only through its discourse on political issues. These issues are built around questions of identity, religion, culture, community
and country. On the surface, the novelist also presents controversiality and also multiple narratives along with the central narrative of the Gustads.

As a community, the Parsis have lived peacefully in the vast sprawling forest of Indian culture. On the other hand, the Indian politicians have become an object of their verbal assault. They also run down politicians like Pandit Nehru and Indira Gandhi since neither Nehru nor Indira treated Feroz Gandhi, a member of their community.

Gustad too adds: “No where in the world has nationalization worked, what can you say to idiots?” (SLJ, 38). Like Gustad, the other members of the community are scared of politicians like Mrs. Gandhi whom they consider responsible for encouraging the demand for a separate Maharashtra.

As a minority community, they have their little fears and anxieties. Dinshawji also voices his concern about the rising communal forces. “And today we have that bloody Shiva Sena, wanting to make the rest of us into second class citizens… Don’t forget she [Mrs. Gandhi] started it all by supporting the racist beggars”. (39)

Gustad sees no future for his son Sohrab and minorities in India.

Various characters in the novel belonging to the minority community express their anguish. There lies the changing pattern of communal relationships in society. This forms the narrative structure of the novel. Mistry’s sensitivity lies only with the dangers to his community and it is expressed by his characters’ consciousness.

*Such a Long Journey* was considered to be a much publicized first novel. Mistry is influenced by the little-known but rich Parsi tradition. He
employs the realist mode in his writings. The strategy of representing varied attitudes to tradition is visible and clear in Mistry’s early collection of stories.

The main action of *Such a Long Journey* takes place in a political background. The novel is set against the backdrop of the Bangladesh–Pakistan Wars of the 1970s. These public events have direct repercussions on the life of ordinary citizens. The wars become the narrative excuse for the exploration of both political ethics and all the related problems of ethical/moral responsibility. The plot of *Such a Long Journey* deals only with the life of the ordinary citizen, though it has its national political overtones. The story of Gustad Noble and his family is interwoven clearly with the events on the national scene. The War has direct results on the availability of goods and the price of essential commodities also shoots up.

The episode that involves with Gustad’s younger son Darius and a neighbour’s daughter creates a semi–comic situation. Dilnavaz is very much upset by the wastage because it is the resale of news papers that stretches the house-hold finances till the end of the month(*SLJ, 151*).

Later in the novel, newspapers are at issue again when Roshan’s school decides to collect newspapers to help national causes. This is seriously bringing an embarrassing situation to the family budget.

The fear of a Pakistani attack results in the blacking out of windows. Gustad also had put up the black out paper during the war against China in 1962. The memory of the subsequent riots related to the defeat of the national army also gains importance.
The Indo-china Wars also provide the perfect occasion to reveal how political greed and opportunism come in. “No Chinese soldier approached Khodadad Building. Instead, teams of fund-raising politicians toured the neighborhood. Depending on which party they belonged to, they made speeches praising the congress government’s heroic stance or denouncing its incompetency…” (SLJ, 10)

The ambivalent tone of this passage offers an objective assessment of state politics. It is a good example of the neutral style that Mistry favours throughout the novel. Gustad’s memory sweeps over the consequences that the Indo-China War had for the leadership of the nation.

The black out paper only symbolizes the recurrent state of emergency that the average home is forced to live with. The details presented in Bangladesh are both familial and social.

Gustad reads to Dilnavaz, details of the formation of the Awami League to proclaim the independence of East Pakistan, the reactions of General Yahya Khan and the influx of refugees through the Indo-Bangladesh border. This news is also ardentely discussed at the office. “In the canteen at lunch-time, I told all the fellows this is exactly what would happen” (SLJ, 12).

The discussion of international military issues is used as the occasion to introduce Major Bilimoria. Gustad is also smarting from what he considers his friend’s treachery. Billimoria’s heroic stature is called into question by the startling revelation that he is implicated in dirty politics and serious criminal frauds (SLJ, 195).
Mistry presents clearly international and intra –national politics when he shows Billimoria at the interface of both. Mistry’s politics can be gleaned through Billimoria’s tragic tale and also the detailing of a country’s political corruption.

His subsequent novels continue to explore this theme. Billimoria’s fate also reveals the false facade of nationalism and the corruption behind patriotic rhetoric.

Mistry also denounces the corrupt politics that was prevailing in the National Government. He seems to have great admiration for Nehru who was an idealist and his dream of a secular India. This is very clear and reflected through the main protagonist of the novel. Gustad thinks of Nehru as “The country’s beloved Panditji, everyone’s Chacha Nehru, the unflinching humanist the great visionary”(*SLJ, 11*).

The novelist has merged war and ethics in his work. When Roshan comes to Gustad with a request from her school for money to help the refugees, she asks her father why West Pakistan is killing East Pakistan. Gustad gives her a simplified explanation of the war: “Because it is wicked and selfish, East Pakistan is poor, they said to the West, we are always hungry, please give us a fair share. But West said no, then East said in that case we don’t want to work with you. So as punishment, West Pakistan is killing and burning East Pakistan”(*SLJ, 81*).

The lives of all the characters in the novel are steeped in the realities of the war-time situation. Though the War with Pakistan is at the frontiers, the scarcity of food supplies and the rationing affects the ordinary citizens of India.
A sense of insecurity and a fear for military attack are permanent, which are indicated not only through Gustad’s dark, covered windows, but also through the air raid sirens.

Denying the perception that the ordinary citizen is ignorant and uninterested in national and international politics, the text shows the political awareness permeating to all levels of society. Even Bhimsen, an office peon specifically looks for newspapers with Portraits of Nixon and Kissinger referred to as “the rat and the constipated ox”(SLJ,299). This shows the degree of political consciousness and individual and collective resistance that exists at all levels of the social scale.

The War and its sudden consequences form the background to Such a Long Journey. The War becomes the most significant thing in the duration of the entire narrative. The air raid siren sounds everyday at ten, keeping the threat of Pakistani bombing ever present. This becomes a routine affair for the inhabitants.

Mistry observes the universal in the particular. He strives to reach the universal through the specific story of the Parsi community. The Parsi community is to be seen clearly as an enclave that has helped him sharpen his literary and artistic vision.

The pavement artist first comes to Gustad’s attention when he is rushing to the bank to deposit Billimoria’s first instalment. The following is his impression of the artist:

The pavement artist did not restrict himself to any single religion—one day it was elephant–headed Ganesh, giver of wisdom and success; next day it could be Christ hanging on the cross, and the office crowds blissfully tossed coins upon the pictures. The
artist had chosen his spot well. He sat cross-legged and gathered. The wealth descending from on high. Pedestrians were careful with his square of pavement, this hallowed ground, as long it displayed the deity of the day *(SLJ,143).*

*Such a Long Journey* is a novel that introduces many of the preoccupations of its writer. It presents itself as a novel that seeks to locate the Parsi community in India. It also presents an important comment on independent India. The novel is set in the years preceding Indira Gandhi’s declaration of the state of Emergency in 1975. Gustad and his family have to live through the consequences of the Bangladesh war and the refugee tax relief as it affects the contemporary citizen. Politics is only represented in so far as it affects individual lives.

Hence the Billimoria story though based on a true incident, functions only in its human dimension. It affects Gustad’s life and also his relationship with his friend.

Mistry considers the issue along with the abuses perpetrated by the Congress and the Gandhi family. In *Such a Long Journey,* the incident of money laundering deals with the Prime Minister. It provides a disguised commentary on the nature of the abuse of power that took place in the early 1970’s. The novel was set in the early 1970’s during the War against Pakistan and chronicled in relation to his characters’ lives. It picturizes the abuse of political authority which affects the ordinary citizen.

Billimoria’s arrest becomes the subject of a national scandal and for the first time Gustad understands that Billimoria might have been either lying or ignorant of the real destination of the money. The nature of fact that is recounted in official quarters and reported by the press is ridiculous.
Bilimoria had impersonated Indira Gandhi over the telephone and ordered the Chief Cashier of the State Bank of India to withdraw money and deliver it to the Bangladeshi Babu who it appears was Bilimoria himself.

Jimmy Bilimoria is imprisoned on charges of laundering money but what happens really is never explained. What Gustad does witness however is the unbelievable disintegration of a strongman into a pathetic, weak figure. Here, the revelation is that Bilimoria has come to this situation through the ministrations of the hospital and the prison. What Gustad hears as the official explanation “High fever and a lot of weakness. Must be jungle weakness.. his duties took him to the jungle very often” (*SLJ*,266). It also sounds suspiciously like the onset of diseases that in turn become the pretext for the medication, Bilimoria receives. It ends in an utter state of weakness that comes between reality and fantasy. Bilimoria explains about the way the research and analysis wing (RAW) was hijacked for the personal use of the Prime Minister. He says: “Big surprise… she was using RAW like her own private agency. Spying on opposition parties, ministers … any one for black mail made me sick. Ever spying on her own cabinet …. RAW kept dossiers on her friends and enemies”(*SLJ*,270)

The abuse of power at the governmental level deals with Sohrab’s adolescent opinions and anger.

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 motor cars. 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. Dilnavaz listened intently as Sohrab described how the prototype had crashed in ditch, during his trial, Yet was approved because of orders from the very top(*SLJ*,68).
Dinshawji’s theories about American involvement in the war come true and the USA is also involved as they send their seventh fleet to the Bay of Bengal.

We are also informed that after their ‘antics’ in the straits of Malacca. “Nixon and Kissinger became names to curse with, names which if uttered had to be followed by hawking and spitting (SLJ,298). Thus the population reacts to mighty international decisions.

Gustad returns the money. Billimoria dies. His passing was mourned only by Gustad in the tower of silence and Ghulam Mohammed from afar. Ghulam Mohammed says that he will stay in RAW to avenge the injustice done to Jimmy.

In Such a Long Journey, the narrative is effectively woven and one cannot escape the connections between and transmutation of public decisions. Their repercussions on the private lives of the citizens also gain significance. The close connection between War and State politics, is explored. It also deals with the corruption of political leaders and its impact in the lives of ordinary citizens.

In A Fine Balance, Mistry deals with the emergency years of Indira Gandhi. If Such a Long Journey suggests the nature of the abusive power exercised by the top levels of the government, A Fine Balance sets out to document the election malpractices and misappropriation of power. It affects the life of the poor rural migrants as well as the urban homeless. This novel is situated immediately following the narrative period in Such a Long Journey during Indira Gandhi’s Emergency.
Mistry also historicises the life of the tailors placing it between the 1975 Emergency and also the time of Mrs. Gandhi’s assassination. The ordinariness of their existence is also unbearable in its poignancy.

The central action in *A Fine Balance* is structured between the opening chapter ‘Prologue 1975’ and the concluding section entitled ‘Epilogue 1984’. These were considered to be crucial years for the Indian nation. 1975 saw the declaration of the ‘State of Internal Emergency’, by the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In 1984, Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh body guards as vengeance for the Indian army’s attack earlier that year on the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest Sikh Shrine. This attack only resulted in the death of the Sikh religious leader Bhindran Wale. Mrs. Gandhi’s assassination triggered nationwide riots and serious communal violence. The Sikhs were targeted by furious Hindu mobs avenging the Prime Minister’s murder.

In a series of connected events covering the decades from the pre-independent India to the assassination of Indira Gandhi, Rohinton Mistry attempts to show the vulnerability of the average man’s life. The novel shows how political changes mercilessly cut through the psycho-social fabric of a country where justice is sold at all quarters.

The period of emergency is much like the country’s Partition, especially the one following the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Emergency disturbs the average lives of Ishvar Darjee and his youthful nephew Om Prakash Darjee and also their employer Dina Dalal, a middle aged widow. The paying guest Maneck Kohlah and Dina are the indirect victims of Emergency as their lives are dependent on the lives of the tailors, Ishvar
and Om. Though all of them struggle in their lives, they cannot connect it to the existing political scenario of the country. Moreover, their struggle for survival does not have a political angle to it. They all believe that the oft-heard word ‘Emergency’ is only a sort of game played by the power centre. They also think that it would not affect ordinary citizens like them.

Mistry’s novel is presented as a fine documentation of the human dimensions of the Emergency. Mistry has created the characters like tailors only to reveal the fate suffered by the ordinary people. The predicament of honest and sincere villagers becomes a mass of statistics in the city.

The two tailors represent common humanity as they face the consequences of all the political pressures and measures decided by the higher echelons of power. To quote from the novel:

Om and Ishvar can join the masses looking for jobs which are not easy to come by. They live in the slum quarters. They become easy targets for political parties gathering crowds to attend political rallies. Om and Ishvar are made to attend such a rally. The precise description of the political rally, the behaviour of the politicians leaves no doubts about the identity of the politician being described during his rally” *AFB, 324*

The third blow of Emergency in their lives is when Ishvar and Om are picked by the police from their rented foot-path dwelling to work as construction workers as part of the city beautification project.

Ishvar’s protest that they are not street urchins or beggars fall on deaf ears. They are forced into a trunk where in under foot, stray gravel stabbed the human Cargo(*AFB, 326*). The tailors are compelled to abandon their work for a number of days for reasons beyond their control. Maneck only tries to pacify the agitated Dina.
Dina comes to know through Maneck, the long-drawn sufferings of Ishvar and Om, the inheritors of caste-victimisation. She feels that “Compared to theirs, my life is nothing but comfort and happiness. People keep saying God is great, God is just. But I’m not sure”(AFB,340).

The caste violence drove the lower caste tailors from their village to seek employment in the teeming metropolis, Bombay. The overlapping stories help to create an intricate plot. Oppressing caste violence has driven Ishvar and Om Prakash from their traditional occupation (working with leather) to learn the skills of tailoring and from a rural background to overcrowded Bombay.

There are always upheavals, whether at the slums where Ishvar and Om Prakesh reside in Bombay or problems of food and political disturbance at the residential block at Maneck’s college. Some of these upheavals like the emergence of competition in the cold drinks business, occur as part of life’s struggle. However in A Fine Balance, most upheavals take place after the imposition of internal Emergency. The eviction of the poor from the cities, the forced labour camps, the sterilization are all manifestations of the internal Emergency. Mistry criticises the internal emergency. He shows how the avowed promises of the Emergency to abolish bonded labour, Sati, dowry system, child marriage and harassment of backward castes have not materialised.

Mistry points out in several instances in the novel, a nexus between the police and the established hierarchy, either the upper caste dominance in the villages or the land building mafia in Bombay.
Many episodes in the novel reveal Mistry’s sympathy for the oppressed and his concern with the authoritarian oppressive practices that prevailed during the Internal Emergency.

During the course of the narrative, Mistry makes some revealing political insights also. The transitions in rural life, the change in the aspirations of the lower castes, the attempts by the upper castes to preserve the old order are suitably delineated.

Mistry emerges as the foremost Parsi political novelist noted for a consistent depiction of ideology and politics in his novels. In other Parsi novels, references to political events are rare. The contrasting opinions of the Parsi community on the freedom struggle and the Quit India movement are suitably delineated.

Finally, *A Fine Balance* is a story of individual rather than of India. Almost 23 years after the events of the novel, one finds a Dalit government at the helm of affairs and the voice of the lower castes becoming increasingly assertive in the main stream of our political life. *A Fine Balance* showcases the political power-play within the frame of realism.

Social reality is very much a character in Mistry’s work, not just a background. The nature of social reality allows the characters to acquire complex dimensions.

In his novel *A Fine Balance*, Mistry has presented with the utmost sensitivity and depth, the relationships of a few characters with the milieu around them. Most of the characters belong to his own Parsi community, an ethnic minority in a predominantly Hindu India. The existential crisis which they confront in their personal, social and national life constitutes the
central concern of the novel. The protagonist Farokh Kohlah happens to be a victim of History, of the Partition of India in 1947. To quote from the novel: “A foreigner drew a magic line on a map and called it the new border; it became a river of blood upon the Earth. And the orchards, fields, factories, businesses all on the wrong side of that line, vanished with a wave of the pale conjurors’ word”\textit{(AFB, 205)}

Despite the loss of the family fortune, Farokh along with his wife Aban and little son Maneck continue to relish their lives in the foot-hills of the Northern mountain in India meeting out their needs from a small store. Like his father, Maneck too likes his home in the mountain, so much that his temporary departure for the city for education makes him terribly nostalgic. Moreover, a steaming bowl of water in the bathroom brings to his mind the vision of the dreamy mist that would be hugging the mountains in the morning. To quote from the novel:

“… at this hour it would be swirling fancifully encircling the snow covered peaks. Just after dawn was the best time to observe the snow dance, before the sun was strong enough to snatch away the veil. And he would stand at the window, watch the pink and orange of sunrise imagine the mist tickling the mountain’s ear chucking it under the chin or weaving a cap for it\textit{(AFB, 201)}.

Not only for Farokh and his family but for his friends like Major Grewal and others, the mountain was a part of their life like a living intimate persona who lived with them side by side.

Their harmonious relationship with nature was soon disrupted by the government’s plea to connect the hill town to the cities. They who had never dreamt of leaving the mountain were shocked to find the mountain, leaving them. Mistry’s subtle and veiled criticism is candid enough to
target the self-styled messiahs for the development of the nation. To quote from the novel: “These were to be modern roads…. Roads that would hum with the swift passage of modern traffic. Roads wide and heavy duty, to replace the scenic mountain paths too narrow for the broad vision of nation builders and World Bank officials (AFB, 215)

Due to the threat of the forces of modernization and urbanization, Farokh and his friend Major Grewal organise meetings to condemn “the flawed development policy, the shortsightedness, the greed that was sacrificing the country’s natural beauty to the demon of progress” (AFB, 215).

They protest with the authorities and sign the petitions. But the authorities never responded to their fervent appeal. The invasion of technology is presented by Mistry quite evocatively. To quote from the novel:

The beautiful hills by its side become gashed and scarred. From high on the slopes, the advancing tracks looked like rivers of mud defying gravity as though nature had gone mad. The distant thunder of blasting and the roar of earth moving machines floated up early in the morning and the dreaminess of the dawn mist turned to a nightmare (AFB, 215)

The menace of modernisation causes ecological imbalance and consequently an existential dilemma for Farokh.

Man interacts with nature through the medium of culture that provides the values and knowledge for such interaction. By his elaborate, and sensitive presentation of Man- Nature relationship. Minstry stands out as a spokesperson of the Ecological Movement.
Mistry’s characters have identical fate with those of Mulk Raj Anand’s. The circumstances of their life, induces them to rave for revenge. It is only this mental aggression that leads to physical aggression.

Mistry give examples from the memories of Hindu – Muslim clashes during post-Partition days: “They brought with them stories of Muslims attacking Hindus in many parts of the country… The trains are stopped at the station and every – one butchered on both sides of the border” \((A FB, 122-126)\).

During the Hindu – Muslim riots, Om Prakash and Ishvar save the life of Ashraf and his family though they have been humiliated by their own Hindu community people who taunt them: “Listen smart boy … Have you run out of Muslims?” \((A FB, 129-130)\)

Mistry vividly sketches the bloody aftermath of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s assassination. Since the security guards who killed Indira Gandhi belonged to the Sikh community, violence was unleashed against innocent Sikhs.

Sikhs are the ones being massacred in the riots. For three days they have been burning Sikh shops and homes, chopping up Sikh boys and men and the police are just running about here and there, pretending to protect the neighbourhoods. … Afterwards the group became so powerful fighting for separation and they made trouble for her only \((A FB, 570-572)\).

The horrors and traumas of emergency, the running tensions between the upper and lower castes in rural India are some of the ideological concerns of Mistry which make him one of the foremost Indian English political novelists of the 1990’s.
Many poignant scenes in A Fine Balance describe crowd-manipulation for political purposes. The poor people who were all living in the Thopdipat were compelled to board the bus which took them to the Prime Minster’s rally. They were compelled not by the party men alone but by the police too who joined hands with the political bosses. The government buses were used for transporting them. Mistry presents the corrupt political scenario of India. The logic of forced participation is simple: “The Prime Minister’s message is that she is your servant and wants to help you. She wants to hear about things from your own lips. There will be a payment of five rupees for each person … otherwise you will be arrested for trespassing on municipal property”(AFB, 256-265).

The policemen harass the poor and get money from them. The lines “The police came to investigate. Manager and police talked. Manager offered money, police took money and everybody was happy”(AFB, 303) reveal the stark social reality.

The so-called facilitator understands the government and its tamasha and the know-how to cheat the government and exploit the poor by claiming that he is helping them. “You see, since the Emergency started there’s a new rule in the department … Hundred now and hundred when you get the card, while there is government, there will be work for me”(AFB, 178-179).

Mistry feels that communal riots are well orchestrated and choreographed events directed by self-seeking politicians.

Mistry’s characters represent the perennial misery of the suppressed. Observing the social imbalances, political thinkers and social
scientists along with creative artists have raised questions to find solutions. Many forces collude to perpetuate the injustice prevailing among people. The nation’s ills cannot be mitigated unless the government shows the will to transform society.

Mistry internationalises the problems of the marginalized. Mistry’s main thrust is on the need for a national and global change and to usher in, a new pattern of impartial and healthy human relationships. He also desires for peace and love to reign for ever.

Thus, Sidhwa and Mistry have faithfully portrayed the effects of political upheavals in the Indian subcontinent on the minority community of Parsis and their response.