

HARMONIZING THE MINORITY INVOLVEMENT AND THE MULTICULTURAL PERCEPTIONS IN THE NOVELS OF ROHINTON MISTRY

1Mr. S. Uvari Antony,
Research Scholar,
PG & Research Department of English,
St. Joseph's College (Autonomous)
Tiruchirappalli -620002.

2 Dr.V. Francis
Assistant Professor of English
PG & Research Department of English
St. Joseph's College (Autonomous)
Tiruchirappalli -620002.

Abstract

Rohinton Mistry (b. 1952), an Indian novelist settled in Canada, is a challenging socio-political novelist. As a writer of Indian Diaspora, his fiction has much contributed to the areas of Indian English Literature, Indian Canadian Writing, Commonwealth Fiction and Cross-cultural Studies; and also provides an interesting study from multicultural angle. He left Bombay for Canada in 1975 after completing his graduation in Science with Mathematics in 1974. In Toronto Mistry took employment in the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. He worked there as a clerk and accountant from 1975 to 1985. Mistry secured his second Bachelor's degree in English Literature and Philosophy in 1982. He was second among the four siblings. He had one elder brother and one younger brother and sister. His younger brother Cyrus Mistry, a well-known playwright and short-story writer was, as Mistry himself says, the one who introduced him to the world of books. In 1983, he wrote his first story *One Sunday*.

The cause behind the writing of this story was the Hart-House Literary Prize about which he was told by one of his friends. The story won the prize and the succeeding year he also won the same prize for his second story *Lend Me Your Light*. *Auspicious Occasion* was published in the *Canadian Fiction* and won contributor's award in 1985. Because of so many awards received by Mistry, the publishers showed interest in publishing a collection of Mistry's short stories. The anthology of his stories *Tales from Firozsha Baag* was published by Penguin Canada in 1987. Later on it was published under the title *Swimming Lessons and other stories from Firozsha Baag* in Britain and the USA. This book was shortlisted for the Canadian Governor General's award. *Tales* is a collection of eleven interrelated short stories about the day-to-day lives of the Parsee residents of a decrepit apartment in Bombay: Firozsha Baag.

Diasporic studies, however part of the broad area of post-colonial studies, also falls into a still broader category of study, namely multiculturalism. As one explores and analyses different kinds of writings by the writers who live away from the lands of their origin, a series of questions burst up and a host of problems are to be negotiated. There are a few terms and concepts which demand attention. The differences in race, caste, language, gender, nationality, culture, colour and history play a key role in the formation of identity of those who belong to Diaspora. It has been defined through resistance, subversion and alterity. Power-relations have played a vital role in this "politics of recognition" and even critics like Homi Bhabha have talked about "hybridity" as one of its features.

But with a writer like Rohinton Mistry it is necessary to raise questions regarding his attitudes to identity and community and also “reexamine the conjunction between diasporic studies and post-colonialism. He presents his narratives from the perspectives of the Parsee protagonists and this enables him to see the world which is frozen in the historical past from the Parsee point of view. Hence, Mistry demonstrates that diasporic writing is not necessarily a literature of resistance or the narration of assimilation.

Rohinton Mistry’s first novel, *Such a Long Journey* (1991) carried him national and international acknowledgment. In Canada, the book won Governor General’s Award for Fiction in 1991 and the W.H. Smith Books in Canada First Novel Award in 1992. It also won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book in the same year. The novel was also short listed for the Booker Prize for Fiction (1991). The novel makes engrossing and refreshing reading with its first-hand and intimate presentation of a segment of Indian society by an insider that is not all too frequently portrayed in Indian fiction, namely, the Parsee community and its distinctive way of life. In the words of Ragini Ramchandran, “... its astonishing affinity with mainstream Indian life also proves to be an eye-opener” (Ramchandran, 1994: 24). *Journey* is a socio-political novel which narrates the life-story of a middle-class Parsee protagonist Gustad Noble against the backdrop of the political events in India during the 70s. Gustad stays in the Parsee residential colony of Khodadad Building in Bombay with his wife Dilnavaz and three children; two sons Sohrab and Darius and daughter Roshan. Gustad’s ancestral family had a glorious and prosperous past. His grandfather, a furniture dealer had made a fortune and father, an esteemed and reputed bookseller, had allowed himself to be betrayed into bankruptcy by an alcoholic irresponsible brother, i.e. Gustad’s uncle.

Although Gustad miseries being concentrated to the ordinary middleclass lifestyle, he has still retained the taste for good living. It reflects in his nostalgic daydream of building a bookcase with the help of Sohrab to arrange his collection of books. He has also inherited the purity of conscience and uprightness of which the Parsees are very proud of. Anjana Desai rightly comments, “...his father’s goodness and compassion inform all of Gustad’s actions and relationships which constitute the novel” (Desai, 1994: 132). In his moments of despair and dejection he used to get solace from the glory of his past. Upset by the audacious letter of his shameless friend Bilimoria who had suddenly disappeared without informing his bosom friend Gustad, “Once again, the furniture from his childhood gathered comfortingly about him. The pieces stood like parentheses around his entire life, the sentinels of his sanity” (6).²¹¹To overcome his present petty circumstances with the meagre income as a bank clerk he looks forward to regain his family’s lost prosperity through his eldest son Sohrab’s admission in the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology. All his hopes are pinned on Sohrab who is academically brilliant and intelligent enough to achieve this rare distinction. But his pride and the dream of elevation and upliftment to a higher social class that seemed so close to be realized are shattered by Sohrab’s defiant refusal to get admitted in IIT.

The delight of the dinner party to rejoice Sohrab’s admission in IIT along with his beloved daughter Roshan’s ninth birthday is marred by Sohrab’s illtemper. It offends and embitters Gustad when Sohrab bursts out, I’m sick and tired of IIT, IIT, IIT all the time. I’m not interested in it. I’m not a jolly good fellow about it, and I’m not going there.... (48). Instead he wants to pursue an Arts programme with his friends. Gustad, brokenhearted, cannot hold his frustration before his wife Dilnavaz who herself bewildered, advises him to be patient. Agitated, he speaks about his

parental duty to his son: What have we been all these years if not patient? Is it how it will end? Sorrow, nothing but sorrow. Throwing away his future without reason. What have I not done for him, tell me? I even threw myself in front of a car. Kicked him aside, saved his life and got this to suffer all my life (slapping his hip).

But that's what a father is for. And if he cannot show respect at least, I can thrill him again. Out of my house, out of my life! (52). The usual clash resulting due to the generation gap between a middle-aged father and a teen-aged son is a thematic motif repeated by Mistry in his ensuing novels too. In spite of doing his duties at his best and the privilege of age, Gustad's inability to exercise power over his son humiliates and disappoints him. His frustration is doubled by the thought as to what Sohrab would do after doing B.A., a non-professional qualification. The realization of the waste of Sohrab's talents and the loss of opportunity and hope, especially in a country where minorities are not at ease is very painful for Gustad. The fear, anxiety and the insecurity the minorities feel from the fundamentalists and fanatics like the Shiv Sena in Bombay or the Hindu fundamentalists like Bajarang Dal have got expression in these words of Gustad, What kind of life was Sohrab going to look forward to? .

It was going to be like the black people in America-twice as good as the white man to get half as much. How could he make Sohrab understand this? (55). Charu Chandra Mishra very significantly comments: It is his only chance to carve out a space for himself and his family in a country where politics of regionalism has named them "the other" (Mishra, 2001: 162). After the gaiety and humour of the birthday feast was spoiled by Sohrab's sudden uncalled-for rebuff with the heavy weight of his upside-down dreams, Gustad cannot stand the presence of Sohrab and the tension between the two grows gradually culminating in Sohrab deserting the home. Time and again, Gustad reminiscences how dutiful and loving he had been as a father and how cruelly he is rejected by his ungrateful son;

A Fine Balance (1995) is Rohinton Mistry's third book and second novel after the anthology of short-stories *Tales* and his first novel *Journey*. Like *Journey*, *Balance* too was short listed for the Booker Prize for Fiction (1996) and also for Irish Times International Fiction Prize. It won the Giller Prize (1995, Canada) and the prestigious Commonwealth Writers Prize (1996). *Tales* and *Journey* are more ethnocentric while dealing with the fads and foibles of the miniscule Parsee community in Bombay. Like many other post-colonial expatriate writers of Indian Diaspora, Mistry's literary voyage continues to bring him to India and he returns to Bombay in his *Balance* too. As Rushdie and Naipaul do, Mistry prefers Bombay to any other city in India as it is imbibed into his being. The urbane Parsis are located in Bombay, a metro exuding post-modernity. And the time chosen is the 70s. In both *Journey* and *Balance* it is the post-Nehruvian political 'order' of India. From the backdrop of the Bangladesh war of 1971 in *Journey*, Mistry in *Balance* takes us a little further to 1975, the next important year in the history of the post-colonial India, the year of Emergency imposed by the then Indira Gandhi government. *Journey* portrays an authentic 'factional' picture of the criminalization of the politics, while *Balance* engages the readers with the rise of Indira Gandhi's brand of politics that brought the Nehruvian value-based practices to an end. In fact, the change had already set in after the humiliating defeat of India in the Indo-China war in 1962. The Emergency span of 1975-77 saw the cessation of the basic fundamental rights of the citizens as prescribed and guaranteed by the Constitution of India. Such dreadful measures, which jeopardized the very pillars of the Indian Democracy, were taken under the pretext of protecting the country from the "threats from outside" as claimed by Mrs. Gandhi and her associates. From "outside" is meant Pakistan and the U.S.A.

But actually the purpose was to save her staggering government from the strong attacks of the opposition and to crush it brutally and violently. Healthy opposition and criticism are part and parcel of healthy democracy. To suppress them means to endanger the very life and foundation of democracy. India had passed through the critical phase of the crumbling democracy for the first time since her decolonization in 1947. This era has tainted the history of the post-independent India.²³⁶ Shahshi Tharoor looks at the novel as “a stark and moving portrait of life during Emergency” (Tharoor, 1996: 169) when the nation-state itself has become the oppressor instead of being the arbitrator for the democratic rights. Nation is a cultural construct while nation-state is a political construct having a huge apparatus consisting of judiciary, army, police etc. Benedict Anderson sees nation as an ‘imagined community’, a product of the collective imagination of people. The sense of nationality is the personal and cultural feeling of belonging to a nation making people love and die for nations, as well as hate and kill in their names.

As a cultural concept, nation is a fluid construct, always in a state of conflict not identifiable or homogeneous and can be modified from within and without. Nation-State is always in a framework where centralized power operates. It should be the medium through which the concept of nation should be realized but in *Balance* Mistry shows that there is a disjunction between them during the critical phase of Emergency. With the backdrop of this major political event of the post-colonial India, Mistry has made sincere effort to “embrace more of the social reality of India” (Gokhale: 1996) seeking a balance between the Nation, a social construct and the Nation-State, a political one. Not the cosmopolitan Bombay alone, but he also brings in a typical Indian village and its people and also a remote town located on the northern mountainous region. Ranging from the Parsees, the repertoire of his characters include the chamars, the tailors, the thakurs, the beggars, the students and a whole lot of people belonging to middle as well as lower middle and poor class of Indian social reality. Specifying this depressing reality Ramesh Mishra writes: “...this portrait of India is an astonishing work of suffering, death and degradation. It is India with its timeless chain of caste-exploitation, male chauvinism, linguistic strifes and communal disharmony...It is a nation torn by internal dissensions. Here, power-hungry politicians control the strings of administration like a puppeteer ... (Mishra, 2001: 188-89). Mistry, a creative writer has the poetic freedom to choose or to discard or set aside. He is not a historian or a historiographer who records the events as they happened. Even their records are incomplete.

Theorists like Michael Foucault and Hayden White opine that history, when made up by the historian, is necessarily a political act and the empirical and objective narration of historical material should be discarded as ‘real’²³⁷ life can never be truthfully represented (White, 1987: ix-x). The writer of the historical narrative, on the other hand, re-creates history; he re-constructs and renarrates the story which is there in the facts of the record. As such, there are innumerable possibilities of creating such stories contained in the record; each different from the other. Even though Mistry seldom goes back to India literally, he does persist in taking literary journeys. Asked if this dependence on memory rather than reality causes problems in his fictional re-creation of India, Mistry explained: Some people might say it’s arrogant of me not to live there and assume that I know everything from a visit every five or six years. But I’m confident that I do know. Its memory, plus imagination, which creates a *new* memory. When I don’t have that, I will not write about it I have promised myself that (Smith, 1995: 1, 65).

Mistry has deftly blended the factual details from the history depending on the memory as discussed in the above quote with his creativity and imagination resulting in a work of genius. Mistry, the master story-teller, has skillfully inter-woven the fragments of history with the pieces of his own fictional narratives into a wonderful ‘quilt’

of 'faction' (fusion of fact and fiction), to use his own metaphor from the novel. *Tales* and *Journey* had already established Mistry as a significant literary figure in the arena of Indian Writing in English as well as among the Indo-Canadian Fiction Writers. *Balance* too, written in the line of *Journey* can be read as a post-modern text proving its potential by being nominated for the most coveted Booker Prize. Set between its opening chapter "Prologue: 1975" and the concluding one "Epilogue: 1985", the 752 pages of this epic novel deals with its four protagonists, two Parsees among them are Dina and Maneck and two tailors Ishvar and his nephew Omprakash. The trio, Maneck and the two tailors, happen to be together in the train and find out that their destination is the same. The 'whole jing-bang trio' (85) land on the doorstep of Dina Dalal, a pretty widow in her early forties, striving to maintain her independence as a dress-maker.

The fates of these four characters, unlikely to get together otherwise, become inextricably entangled in the 'city by the sea', evidently Mumbai. The names of locales are not mentioned anywhere so as to suggest that it can be any such place in India. Apart from a metropolis the action takes place in an Indian village from where the tailors migrate and a hill station in the north where Maneck Kohlah belongs to. When her tailoring profession is endangered by her weakening eyesight Dina Dalal tries her hand as an entrepreneurial middle person, hiring two slum-dwelling tailors Ishvar and Om with the sewing machines laid at the back room of her tiny flat. She also takes a paying guest, a student Maneck, who is the son of her old school friend Aban. Commenced thus the narrative moves back and forth in time to make the reader encounter the not very pleasant, at times the horrific stories of these four individuals, their past and the circumstances that bring them together under one roof. Aspiring for different pursuits, their fates make it inevitable to 'sail under one flag'. They keep on striving painfully for better lives but get entwined in the unforeseen plights and predicaments. The lives of the tailors' forefathers who were actually 'Chamars' or 'Mochis' reflect the inhuman tyranny of the caste-system in the rural India where unimaginable atrocities are perpetrated on the lower castes by the upper-caste Jamindars and Thakurs. Oppressive caste-violence has driven Dukhi Mochi, the grandfather of Omprakash and father of Ishvar from their traditional occupation of working with leather to learn the skills of tailoring in the town.

The decision of renouncing the ancestral profession of the caste in which one is born and opt for the respectable profession of tailors, a step higher in the caste-hierarchy, is an unusually bold decision. Dukhi Mochi has sought a way out of the suffocating caste-system by deciding not to conform to the practices of his community which are looked down upon by the majority of the society. He becomes an eye-sore for the upper-caste people who have so far humiliated and insulted the members of his community. Mistry, here, shows that the dalits want to be out of their ascribed identity and their identities can be modified by such a very important decision of changing their occupation as the castes are identified by their occupations. Also the decision to migrate from the rural to urban areas and attempt to claim a modern identity suggests mobility that is not available in the caste system. Dukhi's decision of moving out of the given hierarchical social structure has been very much resented by the upper castes of the village as it has challenged their domination. Mistry touches upon the question of identity and community.

Continuity is required to maintain an identity and the assertion of identity is very often met with resistance. However, the depleting prospects of earning in the town take them to the metropolis only to be entangled hopelessly

in the maze of its dark world. The migration from rural to the urban India and urbanization are the very important features of the post-modern conditions. Mistry has very realistically narrated the squalor and hardships of the slums, the 'homes' of the illiterate migrants and the paupers who form the part of the inevitable conditions of any post-modern metropolis. In the city, things are no different. Mistry juxtaposes the caste-oppressions in the village with the oppressions of the dark world of the criminals in the city where the tailors fall in the lower economic class. The depriving conditions remain more or less the same. The imposition of Emergency, an abridgement of civil rights added to their woes. Maneck, too, comes from the hilly region to the city for higher education. In his background are also the pathetic story of Partition and the pangs of change.

Family Matters (2002) is Mistry's eagerly anticipated third novel following the success of his highly acclaimed *A Fine Balance* (1995) which won several major literary awards internationally. This novel also has received accolades from the critics. It is a renewed and bold attempt to secure a distinct space for the Parsee Zoroastrians within the dominant Indian cultural space. As such, there is no protagonist in the novel; for the focus of the narrative shifts among several characters: Nariman, Yezad, Jehangir and Roxana. In fact, it is this Parsee family and through it the geriatric community that it represents, is the protagonist. A. K. Singh has aptly commented on the central role of the Parsee community in the novels of Mistry. He writes: Rohinton Mistry has demonstrated immense ability in responding to the existing threats to the Parsi family and community, and also to the country. He narrates his community through the different narratives of his characters who invariably express their concern for their community and the changes that will affect their community as well as themselves. Their fate is bound up with the fate of their community. By centralizing their community in their narratives they centralize and preserve and protect themselves and thus use it as a psychological crutch (Singh, 1996: 29). In addition to the post-colonial concerns of narrating the country and community.

Mistry feels an exigent need to write about his community which is on the verge of extinction. He wants to leave a record of it for the benefit of posterity. Bharucha quotes Mistry's words in an interview: "...when the Parsees have disappeared from the phase of the Earth, his writings will preserve a record of how they lived, to some extent (Bharucha, 1995: 59). In *Matters*, Mistry's atavistic urge takes a violent turn and forcefully avows the predicament of his community in the wake of the Ayodhya issue. In it, Mistry introduces a bed-ridden, retired Parsee English professor, Nariman Vakeel, and makes him symptomatic of the feeble condition of his community. Nariman Vakeel is a 79 year old widower and an ailing patriarch of a small family consisting of his two middle-aged step-children Coomy and Jal and his real daughter²⁸⁴

Roxana, her husband Yezad and two sons Murad and Jehangir. Coomy's bitterness about her stepfather brings a discordant note in the otherwise happy family. The formative childhood years of Coomy and Jal have been wrought up in unhappiness resultant of the conflict between their mother Yasmin and stepfather Nariman due to his pre-marital affair with a Christian lady Lucy Braganza.

Coomy holds her father responsible for neglecting his family and submitting to the emotional importunities of the distraught Lucy. Though the whole family dotes upon the new-born Roxana and brings her up affectionately, Coomy, especially cannot forgive her father. Her unhappy mother had died an accidental death along with mentally deranged Lucy while jostling with her and falling from the top of the terrace. At a later stage, she nurtures jealousy also for the sweet-tempered Roxana who has been gifted a tiny flat in marriage by Nariman. The ageing Nariman has

been rendered infirm by the Parkinson's disease and Osteoporosis. When his illness is compounded by a fractured ankle, the bad-tempered Coomy plots to turn his round-the-clock care over to Roxana and dumps Nariman in her congested apartment "Pleasant Villa" without prior notice. Though "Chateau Felicity", Nariman's ancestral home, already given to his step-children in inheritance, is a once elegant, spacious seven room house having more than enough space for three people, Coomy and Jal have no space in their heart to nurse their sick septuagenarian father. Coomy takes disadvantage of Nariman's helpless condition and contrives to kick him out of his own house almost permanently and deprives him of his own pension too. Jal is a half-hearted accomplice to this scheme. There is a poetic justice done to Coomy when she becomes a prey to her own craftiness and dies an accidental death when a beam from a self-broken plastered ceiling falls on her.

The burden of the new responsibility of looking after his senile father-in-law on Yezad, who is already besieged by financial worries, turns him irritant and non-co-operative. He otherwise gets along very well with his father-in-law but he is helpless as he earns just enough as a manager in Bombay Sporting Emporium to support his family of four. The uninvited financial crunch pushes him into a desperate scheme of deception involving his eccentric but kind-hearted employer Vikram Kapur to persuade him for giving him rise in position as well as salary. This sets in motion a series of events and also some chance-events; with a revelation of the family's love-torn past brought by the flashback technique. Mistry plunges into the immobile Nariman's stream of 285 consciousness and digs out his love-torn past which often results into the midnight delirium of the old man, evoking sympathy of his family. Mistry has adopted to separate the past from the present by choosing to narrate Nariman's past in the italicized script. After his first novel *Journey*, the focus is once again on the Parsee community with its ethnic features, what we call, 'Parseeness' or 'Parseepanu' in Gujarati. It is a typical Parsee family, actually the Vakils, the Contractors and the Chenoy's combined, that Mistry talks about, and hence the focus is much more concentrated compared to *Balance*. Bharucha compliments,and the canvas has shrunk considerably but this is not a reductive book. It is a book which is very 'big' in compassion -- it is indeed Mistry's most compassionate book to date (Bharucha, 2003a: 168). Mistry touches many issues concerning the Parsees today.

The community being strictly endogamous is one such issue and the most important one for their survival. The rigidity of the Orthodox Parsees like Nariman's father in disallowing Nariman to marry a non-Parsi girl has not made his son's life miserable but also has far repercussions on his progeny too. Coomy nurtures bitterness for Nariman throughout her life. The history starts repeating when Yezad, once a jolly-good liberal person, has become a bigot and very stringent about religion. He frets and fumes about Murad's friendship with a Maharashtrian girl Anjali. He makes it clear to him that his relationship with the non-Parsee girl is totally inadmissible.

He shouts in anger and continues to harangue his sons, "You can have any friends you like, any race or religion, but for a serious relationship, for marriage, the rules are different" (469). Mistry has deliberately brought into the novel the love experiences of both the grandfather and grandson with non-Parsee girls to reiterate that the Parsees can never change their convictions whatever be the whims and fancies of the individual (Duresh, 2006: 94). When Lucy's persistent efforts to meet Nariman after his marriage failed due to Nariman's poor response, she accepted a job of an ayah at the Arjanis in the same building just to be closer to Nariman. The Arjanis had hired Lucy as an ayah in an act 286 of vengeance. Years back, Mr. Arjani had been sued by Nariman's father for a libel and this was the

reprisal. It was a religious controversy that had fuelled the feud. A priest had performed a 'navjote' ceremony for the son of a Parsee mother and a non- Parsee father, an absolute taboo for the conservatives. Nariman's father, famous for his letters to the editor of "Jam-e-Jamshed", wrote one condemning the priest, the 'dustoor' who performed the ceremony. Mr. Arjani, a Reformist, wrote a scathing letter against him and the dogma. A war began with the weapons of the vitriolic letters against each other. Nariman's father sues Mr. Arjani for the defamation of his character. Mr Arjani was offered the chance to withdraw his statements and apologize but he refused. A group of Reformists financed the defence but they lost.

Mistry deliberately shows the Orthodox Victory over the Reformists as the dogma has a strong hold on the community over the centuries and the fanaticism for the so-called 'purity' has been affecting the survival of the race, though it is one of the many factors. The purity of the race can still be questioned when the community allows to perform 'Navjote' for the children of a Parsee father and a non- Parsee mother and disallows for those of a Parsee mother and a non- Parsee father. This social and religious taboo is nothing but a sham based on the quasi-values and gender discrimination. Mistry also focuses on the other aspects affecting survival of the Parsees. The demographers estimate around less than one lac Parsees in the world and the number is dwindling fast. At this rate, they would be extinct by the end of this century. The ageing Nariman represents this geriatric community as the younger people are less than the older ones. There are too few young and able members to take care of the old and the disabled. There is also the fact that in the Parsee community, thanks to the economic pressures (high property prices in Bombay, where most Parsees live) and general societal norms (which are common with other communities in India), unmarried adult children continue to live with their parents. Those who get married generally opt to move away and lead independent lives.

Hence the burden of caring for ageing, ill and often cantankerous parents falls on the unmarried offspring. This often results in feelings of resentment toward the married siblings who, it appears, to have shrugged off their responsibilities towards the ageing parents. This is clearly evident in *Matters*, where Coomy resents her half-sister Roxana for having 'escaped' 287 parent-care duties and goes at inordinate lengths to force her sister into taking care of Nariman, who has fallen down and broken his ankle. Mistry mirrors the stark reality of the Parsees' existence in future in all of his novels. In *Journey*, Gustad's friend Dinshawji and his wife is a childless couple. Major Bilimoria and Miss Kutpitia are single. In *Balance*, Dina's marriage is short-lived and she does not remarry. Her Shirin aunty and Darab uncle is an issueless couple. In *Matters*, Nariman married late and had only one daughter. Jal and Coomy and also Yezad's three elder sisters are unmarried. Jal's prospects of marrying the pianist Daisy, a Parsee lady are shown to be very dim.

Villey Contractor is also a spinster. Keeping single, marrying late or outside the community and having no or maximum two children are the reasons for the Parsee's imminent doom. They are indeed "slow breeders" (Unisa et al, 2008). They will be no more very soon. This has caused serious anxiety among them and the Parsee Panchayat has announced certain incentives to facilitate early marriages and also help the couples to settle down in a metro like Bombay where the third fourth of the community is concentrated. Mistry has returned to Bombay in this novel too and this time it is the post-Babri Masjid Bombay of the mid 90s. Its middle-class life of a Parsee family is viewed by Mistry from the Canadian vantage point. Bharucha rightly points out that the old 'bete-noir', the Shiv Sena, is still

around and its religious chauvinism has been augmented by the pan-India fanatic Hindutva of the BJP (Bharucha, 2003a: 168). It is surprising that Mistry has not taken serious note of the 1993 bomb blasts that rocked Bombay. Also missing is any indication of the suspected involvement of the Islamic fundamentalists, in nexus with the underworld, in the Bombay blasts.

It must have anguished Mistry whose dear city was writhing in pain in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid by the militant Hindu mobs in Ayodhya in northern India, the other corner of the country, miles away from Bombay and the callous state government was a mute witness. One could surmise that the reason of such passing reference to this important event is that the novel revolves round the personal matters of a family. But the political reality does affect the personal lives of the ordinary people as Mistry always shows in his novels. It is allowed to intrude in a major way into the text in the manner in which it impacts the professional life of one of the central characters -- Yezad Chinoy (Bharucha, 2003a: 169). It is through Yezad that 288 the reader comes in contact with his office attendant, Hussain, the victim of the post- Babri Bombay riots in which his family was burnt alive and Mr. Kapur, his boss, a victim of the 1947 Hindu-Muslim riots resultant of the Partition of the country.

Mistry has squarely brought out minority community's grievances and remonstrations with the 'secular' multicultural image of the Indian polity. The demolition of the Babri Mosque was a major cataclysmic event aimed at hurting the secular polity of India. The role of the government agencies in perpetration of atrocities against the innocent civilians of the minorities has been questioned. An aged Parsee couple has been burnt down in their bedroom by the rioting mobs, under the 'impression' that Muslims were hiding there. Mistry unobtrusively points out that danger exists not only for the Muslim community but also for the Parsees. The people helping the rioters were none other than the guardians of law, the Bombay police, itself behaving like the gangsters. Mistry highlights how the apparatus of the post-colonial nationstate itself becomes oppressive and perpetuates what is called 'National Imperialism'. While narrating his woeful tale, Hussain becomes an authentic voice of not only the minority Muslim community but also of the author's own Parsee community: In Muslim mohallas they were shooting their guns at innocent people. Houses were burning, neighbours came to throw water. And the police? Firing bullets like target practice. These guardians of law were murdering everybody! And my poor wife and children...I couldn't even recognise them ... (148). Mr. Kapur, his benevolent employer, responds: "More than three years have passed, and still no justice. Shiv Sena polluted the police. And now Shiv Sena has become the government" (149). Mistry's diatribe against Shiv Sena at several places in this novel becomes understandable in the wake of Shiv Sena's alleged partisan role in post-Babri demolition riots in Bombay.

He is one of those who experience the resultant feeling of insecurity and fear; Parsees among the other ethnic minorities of India and most of them concentrated in Bombay. An undercurrent of tension between the Parsee minority community and the Hindu majority community may be taken cognizance of. However, this tension is not volatile enough to manifest itself into a violent confrontation causing the irreparable damage to the multicultural texture of the life of Bombay, as it happened in the case of Muslim minority. 'Hindutva Forces' on the Indian cultural and political scenario have pushed the Parsee Zoroastrians to retreat to 289 the ethnic enclosures. Nevertheless, the infectious right wing politics of Shiv Sena and the BJP haunts them in both their personal and public lives. Edward Said believes that the advanced cultures have rarely "offered the individual anything but imperialism, racism and

ethnocentrism for dealing with 'other cultures' (Said, 1979: 204). The scathingly abusive attack on the Shiv Sena and the BJP combine is not simply part of Nariman's birthday-party gossip but it is through this conversation that Mistry derides the whims and caprices of the party leadership and also exposes its double standards vis-à-vis the propagation of Indian culture and at the same time organising a charity show of the pop music concert of Michael Jackson in Bombay. It is also shown to raise funds through the ill-legal business of 'Matka'. In another incident the politicians-criminals-police nexus is exposed by Gautam, a non-Parsee journalist. He mentions Shiv Sena in his article offending the party. Some of the 'goondas' hired by the party catch him outside his office and blacken his face with shoe-polish.

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