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DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND PARSİ IDENTITY IN  
ROHINTON MISTRY'S WORK

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to explore the identity and voice of the surviving Diaspora in India. Parsi (Parsee), a group of followers in India of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster. The Parsis, is also called "Persians", are descended from Persian Zoroastrians who from Greater Iran to Gujarat and Sindh between the 8th and 10th century CE to avoid the religious persecution of Zoroastrians by Muslim invaders who conquered Iran. They live chiefly in a few towns and villages mostly to the north of Bombay, but also a few minorities nearby in Karachi (Pakistan) and Kolkata, Chennai Bangalore, Pune as well in Hyderabad (India). The word "Hindu" was used by Iranians to refer to anyone from the Indian subcontinent, "Parsi" was used by the Indians to refer to anyone from Greater Iran, irrespective of whether they were actually ethnic Persian people. It is about the Parsi writers who delineated their community and the locale. Thus there is a rich corpus of Parsi fiction lending a very mighty voice to the community of Parsis besides Rohinton Mistry's novel Such a Long Journey.

**Key words:** Identity, culture, adaptability

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INTRODUCTION

Rohinton Mistry, the author of many acclaimed best seller, was born and brought up in Mumbai in 1952. He earned a BA in Mathematics and Economics from St.Xavier college, Mumbai. He emigrated to Toronto in 1975 and studied English and Philosophy as a part time student at the University of Toronto. He is the author of three novels and one collection of short stories. His first novel, Such a Long Journey (1991), won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book and also the Governor General's Award, it was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize. His second novel, A Fine Balance (1995), won many awards, including the Commonwealth Writers Prize, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction and the Giller Prize, as well as being shortlisted for the Booker Prize, the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and the Irish Times International Fiction Prize. His collection of short stories, Tales from Firozsha Baag, was published in 1987. In 2002 Faber published Mistry's third novel, Family Matters, which was long listed for the 2002 Man Booker Prize. Mistry, belonging to

the community of Parsis, has a lot of Parsi voices speaking through him. Before this endeavour moves on to look for such references, it would be equally beneficial to have a glance at the roots of the community itself, to which this writer belongs.

II

Zoroastrian by faith and Persian (Iranian) by their origins, the Parsis, as Gillian Tindall observes, "... have been a people curiously marked, and perhaps favoured, by fate."<sup>1</sup> Around the year 650 A.D., the Parsis, a peace-loving and hard-working community, harassed much by the religious persecution of Muslims, fled from Persia and came to settle in India at the Gujarat coast. They achieved a smooth entrance in Gujarat with the help of their wisdom, which has become part of a legend. According to this legend when the Parsis landed near Sanjan harbour on the Gujarat coast, they were taken to the local king. As there were barrier in language to communicate, the king ordered his soldiers to bring a cup full of milk, insinuating that there was no place to stay for Parsis. The Parsis instantly plucked few leaves from a tree and sprinkled in the bowl, conveying that they would mingle with natives as leaves in milk. The king happily welcomed them. On their part the Parsis adopted Gujarati language. The intermarriages took place.<sup>2</sup> They were allowed to practice their own religion after the sunset. And in spite of many changes and advancement among the community, the Parsis have retained their specific identity through their customs and rituals and by the way of living as a community.

According to Zoroastrian belief, as Khushwant Singh has noted, Ahura Mazda is the good and all wise God and Angra Mainyu, the evil spirit. Zoroaster's hymns called the 'Gathas', form the oldest part of the scripture, the Zend Avesta.<sup>3</sup> In Parsi temples, known as 'agiaries', a sacred flame is constantly kept burning. The Parsis also consider water and earth sacred and forbid their pollution. 'Dokhma', the Tower of Silence, is an ingeniously designed place where the Parsis dispose of their dead. The dead are picked clean from these places by vultures, "the beasts of air."<sup>4</sup>

Religious customs of the Parsis are very much influenced by the Hindu way of life. At the age of seven or eight a Parsi child undergoes 'Navjot', in which the child is to put on a sacred shirt and a sacred thread known as 'sudra' and 'kusti' respectively. The marriage among the Parsis is more or less a monogamous Hindu marriage.

According to Nilufer Bharucha there were 90,000 Zoroastrian Parsis in the last decade of the 20th century. Of this number, 70,000 lived in India and the rest in Europe and North America. There are unsubstantiated claims of another 20,000 Zoroastrians in Iran and a few more in Pakistan. However, even with these additional numbers, the laws of statistics state the eventual annihilation of the race.<sup>5</sup> Khushwant Singh, showing his concern for the community has observed in his India:

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It is a dying community: the rate of death is higher than the rate of birth: they admit no converts nor recognise offspring of non-Parsi fathers as Parsis. An increasing number of Parsi girls now marry outside the community.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of this threat of demographic extinction the Parsis' faith in their unique identity and racial parity is unflinching. Otherwise adaptable in all the situations, the community has honoured its centuries' old religious beliefs, once founded by Zoroaster, a pious scholar of the Spitma clan in Iran.

However, this minuscule community in a huge country like India, where racial differences are looked upon severely, has adapted itself quite comfortably in the existing mould from time to time. Initially they mingled with Gujaratis adopting many of Gujarati customs and language as well, and proved themselves to be those tell-tale grains of sugar poured into milk.

Their adaptability is again discernible in their collective migration to Bombay. They could perceive greater opportunities in the advent of the British in India. And Bombay being the centre of the British activities, they also, showing their everlasting elasticity, shifted their centre of activities from rural Gujarat to the city of Bombay. Gillian Tindall observes, in this regard :

With their speedy arrival in Bombay, it was almost, as

if the Parsis sensed in the arrival of the English, a unique historical opportunity, that was to be as momentous for them in the long run as the chance that had carried them to Gujerat a thousand years before.<sup>7</sup>

Their marked capacity to adjust themselves to situations helped them in finding a place in the hearts of the British. In fact, the Parsis were the first and fastest among Indians to anglicize themselves. Their readiness to perform any job became their characteristic mark of identification as the Parsis did not have surnames of their own. For instance, some of the Parsi surnames still are,; Engineer, Merchant, Paymaster, Mistry, Bottelwallah, Sodawaterwallah etc..

The process of Parsis' anglicizing themselves was almost complete, not on account of a fairer skin they had compared to the native Indians, nor for their anglicized surnames, but for their flexibility and sincerity. They were much liked by the British because they were unlike the rigid Hindus and Muslims of the land. Their religion, their customs, their habits, almost everything about them was marked by flexibility.

It will not be incongruous to relate the Parsis to Bombay as the Jews are to Israel, but the Parsis found a real home in the city of Bombay, far from their own in Persia. They migrated to Bombay during 1660s almost collectively, and thereafter they have progressed well. They benefited a lot from their hard-work and flair for education. They made Bombay their dwelling as well as work place, and the fact bears a proof that "Parsi names crop up all over Bombay today, attached to streets, blocks of housing, public gardens and water fountains."<sup>8</sup>

With education and advancement, a further change is noticeably discernible;the change caused by further migration and, westernization. The very knack of changing with times and their mobility, which brought the Parsis to Bombay, also took them to western countries. Today many of the Indian Parsis, according to Nilufer Bharucha, live in Europe and North America. Gillian Tindall has a similar observation in this regard. She writes:

...it is also true that though they have played something of the traditional role of the Jew in Indian society, living between the two worlds of the East and West, they have seldom if ever aroused the antipathy that has traditionally dogged the Jew in Europe, and that their image is one of honesty.<sup>9</sup>

However, it is true that they have contributed a lot towards the Indian Freedom struggle and to the development of the country in the post-independent India. Certain names like Dadabhai Naoroji, Firozshah Mehta and Jamshedji Tata, to name only a few, in this context would suffice to prove the reverence and respect that the community has earned for its contribution.

The shifting of the Parsis from country to country and from continent to continent - has many psychological implications as well. In an article entitled "Reflections in Broken Mirrors: Diverse Diasporas in Recent Parsi Fiction", Nilufer Bharucha opines that the community caught in diverse diasporas feels a sense of loss, nostalgia and alienation, which is reflected in Parsi writings from time to time. She identifies four different diasporas beginning right with the first fleeing of Zoroastrians from Iran around the year 850 A.C. She calls the first type the Indian Diaspora. Secondly, in post-colonial India Parsis are in the stage of Psychological Diaspora. During the partition of India and Pakistan, Parsis had to walk the tight-rope between two antagonistic nations, and that was their Partition Diaspora. Several Parsis, feeling uncomfortable in the decolonised subcontinent, migrated to the U.K. and North America, which was their fourth, the Western Diaspora.<sup>10</sup>

Pre-colonial Parsi writings and to certain extent their poetic and fictional accounts like those of Behram Malbari and Cornelia Sorabji, both belonging to the colonial era, display a sense of loss and nostalgia. And for decades altogether, before and after the Independence of India, the Parsi voice remained more or less silent.<sup>11</sup> However, the 1980s, which has been a prolific decade in terms of the production of Indian English fiction, saw the emergence of a host of Parsi writers, especially the novelists like Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus

Kanga, Boman Desai, Farrukh Dhondy, Dina Mehta and Bapsi Sidhwa among others. These writers very strongly reflect the Parsi sensibility caught in diverse diasporas. Their nostalgic attempts to return to their roots or their search for their lost identity are the prominent themes of almost all the fictional works. For instance, *Fire Worshipers* by Perin Bharucha and *The Memory of Elephants* by Boman Desai are the examples having strong elements of nostalgia because both the works re-narrate the Parsi history in their own manner. And certainly, a comprehensive study of the works of these writers would be an enduring chapter in the history of literature because these works represent the concerned community and depict their consciousness and the changes they underwent.

Rohinton Mistry was born in Mumbai in 1952. He graduated with a degree in Mathematics from the University of Bombay (Mumbai) in 1974, and emigrated to Canada with his wife the following year, settling in Toronto, where he worked as a bank clerk, studying English and Philosophy part-time at the University of Toronto and completing his second degree in 1982. Mistry wrote his first short story, 'One Sunday', in 1983, winning First Prize in the Canadian Hart House Literary Contest (an award he also won the following year for his short story 'Auspicious Occasion'). It was followed in 1985 by the Annual Contributors' Award from the Canadian Fiction Magazine, and afterwards, with the aid of a Canada Council grant, he left his job to become a full-time writer.

His early stories were published in a number of Canadian magazines, and his short-story collection, *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, was first published in Canada in 1987 (later published in the UK in 1992). He is the author of three novels: *Such a Long Journey* (1991), the story of a Bombay bank clerk who unwittingly becomes involved in a fraud committed by the government, which won the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best Book), *A Fine Balance* (1996), set during the State of Emergency in India in the 1970s, and *Family Matters* (2002), which tells the story of an elderly Parsi widower living in Bombay with his step-children. *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* were both shortlisted in the previous years for the Booker Prize for Fiction, and *Family Matters* was shortlisted for the 2002 Man Booker Prize for Fiction.

Mistry's fiction is rooted in the streets of Bombay, the city he left behind for Canada at the age of twenty-three. This 'imaginary homeland' - something of a literary capital within South Asian diasporic writing today - has inevitably led to comparisons with Salman Rushdie, another Bombay born author now based abroad. However the differences between the two men are perhaps as compelling as their similarities. Take Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1996), both of which are set in Bombay during the administration of Indira Gandhi and the state of emergency. Where Rushdie's novel gravitates toward the Muslim middle classes, Mistry's seems more at home among the Parsi community and the poor. Rushdie's magic realism (what Mistry refers to in his latest novel, *Family Matters*, as 'magic-realist midnight muddles') is Realism with a capital 'R' in *A Fine Balance*. Beyond such differences however, both novels have a tendency to collapse the distinctions between public and private worlds. Both share a sharp wit. Both (whether it is Rushdie's Booker of Bookers or Mistry's Booker shortlisted) have enjoyed a good deal of critical and commercial success.

*Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1992), Mistry's first collection of stories, marked the arrival of a prodigious talent. Published in the US as *Swimming Lessons*, the collection contains eleven interrelated short stories that bring together some of Mistry's earliest and finest writing. The tales detail the day to day lives of the residents of a decrepit apartment block in Bombay, Firozsha Baag. Mistry's affectionate, thumb nail sketches bring together the lives of miserly Rustomji, the deranged Jaakaylee and Pesi, who is able to look up girls' skirts with the aid of his torch.

*Such a Long Journey* (1991), Mistry's first novel, won numerous literary awards when it was first published and has been adapted for a film. The novel is set in 1971, during the time of the Indian Pakistan war. Its protagonist is not a conventional hero. Gustad Noble is a bank clerk and a family man, a vulnerable figure whose world is still haunted by the war with China in 1962. The fate of Gustad's family is closely bound up with that of the subcontinent during a time of crisis and turmoil. His daughter's illness and his son's refusal to go to college, are events that we are encouraged to read symptomatically in *Such a Long Journey*. When Gustad

receives a parcel and a request to launder money for an old friend, the event's ramifications are at once personal and political.

A Fine Balance, critically Mistry's most successful work to date, tells the story of four characters (Maneck, Dina, Ishvar and Omprakash ) and the impact of Indira Gandhi's state of emergency on them. One of the most successful aspects of this book is its carefully crafted prose:

"The morning express bloated with passengers slowed to a crawl, then lurched forward suddenly, as though to resume full speed. The train's brief deception jolted its riders. The bulge of humans hanging out of the doorway distended perilously, like a soap bubble at its limit."<sup>12</sup>

This intricate opening paragraph, which is typical of the precise prose of A Fine Balance throughout, helps propel the novel forward through what is one of the most memorable portraits of post-Independence India ever written.

Mistry's latest novel, *Family Matters* (2002), is based in Bombay once more. Whereas his first two novels were set in the 1970s and were essentially 'historical' fictions, his *Family Matters* depicts contemporary Bombay and is set in the 1990s. At the centre of the book is an old man, a Parsi with Parkinson's disease. Nariman Vakeel is a retired academician whose illness places renewed strains on family relations Nariman, an English professor, compares himself to King Lear at one point). A widower with skeletons in his closet, Nariman's memories of the past expose the reader to earlier moments in the city's, and the nation's history in a novel that moves across three generations of the same family. In *Family Matters* we have the familiar slippage between public and private worlds. Similarly the lives of the residents of 'Chateau Felicity' (Nariman's former residence) and 'Pleasant villa' (where he is forced to move by his scheming step daughter) recall the world of Firozsha Baag. Where the earlier novels tended towards a decisive closure however, the epilogue of this novel seems much less ready to console.<sup>13</sup>

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, the runner up for the Booker Prize 1991, is another enchanting account of the Parsis and their home Bombay, in general, and of Gustad Nobel, a Parsi protagonist and Khodadad Building, a Parsi enclave, in particular. In fact, the novel is a continuation of the experience in vexations, anxieties and anguish as perceived by the characters belonging to the minority community of the Parsis in the city of Bombay as explicit in Dhondy's *Bombay Duck*. The novel is a story of Gustad Nobel, an ordinary pious Parsi. The happy and chuckling family of Gustad inclusive of his wife Dilnavaz, his two sons Sohrab and Darius, and his daughter Roshan -is met with certain inescapable adventures in life. The calamities they face are characteristically overcome by them in a manner of, as it happens in, an action and thriller movie. This thriller like novel, set against the backdrop of the city of Bombay, befits the environment of the city.

The story, in a way, is history, too, as its fragments are strewn all over the novel. Thus the novel encompasses various issues and is woven around the backgrounds of various upheavals in the subcontinent, like the partition of the subcontinent and ensuing violence, the wars between India and Pakistan and India and China, the birth of Bangladesh, and how the community of the Indian Parsis responded to all these occurrences. Moreover, the novel is – as A. K. Singh and Nilufer Bharucha among others, view - a retelling of the 1971 Sohrab Nagarwala conspiracy case, involving the personality as important as the Indian Prime Minister and a huge sum of Rs. 60 Lacs. In fact, the novel is a kind of attempt at defending the prime accused Sohrab Nagarwala, a Parsi, disguised as Major Bilimoria in the novel. This curious mixture of fact and fiction easily puts the novel in the category of 'faction' (or, "fictional history").

The novel, set against the background of post independence era, is on the verge of yet another war against Pakistan during early 70s. The Indian Parsis seem more or less comfortable in the post independence India, as are Gustad, his family and friends. Their diasporic fate brought them to Indian subcontinent and since then their attempts to join the Indian mainstream and remain loyal to the causes of the country and contribute to its progress are remarkable. In spite of many migrations and hardships that they underwent on the strange land, they have exhibited exceptional capacity to adapt themselves to situations.

In the post-Independent India, the Parsis still seem to have many grudges against the political leadership of the country. Various characters in the novel express their fears and anxiety as they are worried about the changing pattern of communal relationships in the country in general and in the city of Bombay in particular. For instance, Gustad expresses his fear thus : "No future for minorities, with all these Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense."<sup>14</sup> Dinshawji's accusation is also on the similar lines. He says :

And today we have that bloody Shiv Sena, wanting to make the rest of us into second class citizens. Don't forget, *she* started it all by supporting the racist buggers. (My Italics)<sup>15</sup>

This *she*, Indira Gandhi, was the real person behind the demand of a separate Maharashtra, as some of the political commentators like C.P. Surendran think. He states:

The rise of the Shiv Sena was partly a populist answer to a political demand.

The ruling Congress Party at that time could not use force to wipe out the Left from the labour scene in Mumbai. As a result, the Shiv Sena enjoyed the patronage of the Congress in its teething years.<sup>16</sup>

Obviously, Indira Gandhi is held responsible for this phenomenon as she was at the helm of the affairs of the Congress Party at the time.

Dinshawji has one more complaint against Indira Gandhi because she deprived the Parsis, as they feel, of their traditional business of banking. Dinshawji sadly remembers :

What days those were, yaar. What fun we used to have... Parsis were the kings of banking in those days. Such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalized the banks.<sup>17</sup>

Dinshawji is also concerned with disturbing developments in the form of changing names of roads and streets in Bombay. He considers them as symptomatic of bad times ahead for the minority community. He says angrily:

'Wait till the Marathas take over, then we will have real Gandoo Raj.... All they know is to have rallies at Shivaji Park, shout slogans, make threats, and change road names'. He suddenly worked himself into a real rage; there was genuine grief in his soul.' Why change the names? Saala, sister fuckers! Hutatma Chowk! He spat out the words disgustedly. 'What is wrong with Flora Fountain?'<sup>18</sup>

The 'real rage', the 'genuine grief' and the 'disgust' apparent in the character of Dinshawji are not his only, but of community's, too. Like other fellow members of his community he is concerned more about the future than about the present, for the rise of 'fascist' forces will lead to communal frenzy which will threaten the very fabric of the relationship between majority and minority communities and the character of the city of Bombay marked by communal harmony, coexistence and cosmopolitanism.

In spite of such turmoil, Malcom Saldana is not so uncomfortable in India. He says, " Lucky for us... that we are minorities in a nation of Hindus."<sup>19</sup> Gustad also seems to agree with that and symbolically he subscribes to happy coexistence of all religions as he gets the wall of the Khodadad Building painted with the figures and symbols from all religions. Inspector Bamji also agrees with it: "A good mixture like this is a perfect example for our secular country. That's the way it should be."<sup>20</sup>

Notwithstanding the grievance that the Parsis have against certain individuals, the community has whole heartedly been committed to the causes of the country and many of the Parsis, like Dadabhai Naoroji,

Phirozsha Mehta, Firoz Gandhi and Jamshedji Tata among others, have contributed to the development of India. And even while maintaining the community's own cultural and communal identity, they have led their lives peacefully in multicultural sprawls like those in India. Gustad's attempts of having the wall of the Khodadad Building painted into a collage of all religion-gods is also an effort toward coming into the mainstream. Gustad himself is a devout Parsi who never misses his *kusti* prayer. Highlighting this scene, Vinay Kirpal, appreciates Mistry's effort at bringing this novel to the level of post-modernist mould. According to him Bharti Mukherjee, Shobha De and Shoma Ramaya among few others may be selling Indian exotica to the West, but Mistry's approach has a kind of depth embedded into the cultural significance. He says:

If the postmodern Indian English novel... foregrounds the world of the Indian minorities as against the earlier novel (which were about Hindus predominantly) then this is one of the ways in which, the novelists have tried to 'de-doxify' the prevailing stereotypes, and dispel misconceptions about these communities. Mistry's inclusion of these scenes is therefore, necessary to foreground the rich culture, customs and traditions of the marginalized Parsi community.<sup>21</sup>

These Parsis, proud of their cultural and communal specificity, are seriously concerned about the welfare of the members of their community who were not treated well. Among them Sohrab Nagarwala and Firoz Gandhi, who were maltreated by Indira Gandhi and Nehru respectively, are the cases before them.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, they are conscious of their cultural specificity. For instance, Gustad is a pious Parsi who would never miss his Kusti prayer, and he was the person to ensure that the last rites of his dead friend Dinshawji are carried out in accordance with the Parsi customs and rituals. At times, Gustad also grows nostalgic about his fore-fathers, their business, their love and affection, and their daily chores characteristic of the Parsis, which are also a kind of attempt at retaining their Parsi identity. The very mention of their typical food, their articles of clothes, the use of Gujarati words in the novel suggest assertion of their special identity. Gustad also tries to establish the supremacy of Zoroastrianism as he tells Malcom, his Christian friends :

...our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before your son of God was even born; a thousand years before the Buddha ; two hundred years before the Moses. And do you know how much Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam ?<sup>23</sup>

Thus the novel examines, among other issues, the questions of Parsi identity and its diasporas. Amidst these issues the other interesting aspect of the novel is its treatment of the city of Bombay. In the novel Bombay emerges strongly and perhaps it is the most authentic expression of the city with its minute details. The novel abounds in details regarding Chor Bazaar and Nal Bazaar, Crawford Market, Flora Fountain, the torrential rains and traffic jams which are the heartthrobs of the city. These details give the narrative of the novel a realistic touch. The writer not only moves around the public places but he also makes his readers encounter the dubious restaurants - with " private rooms" and the sign boards reading "Don't Discuss God & Politics" - and the red-light districts with " high-class" whores at Colaba and so-called low-class ones at the "House of Cages" at some unidentified location. The location of the Khodadad Building and its neighbouring area are also not well identified, however, the reader does not fail to recognize them as irrevocably belonging to Bombay.

The city emerges in its myriad shapes and shades in the novel, but mostly it is a telling account of anxiety ridden pre-war gloom and fear psychosis prevailing the minds of the people of Bombay, particularly Parsis and the seamy side of it. The tenants at the Khodadad Building are, as if, always mentally ready for the impending war and Gustad would not let Dilnavaz remove the blackout paper fearing that war could break out any moment. The 'milk bhaiya' would also pose a threat for them and they feel that these "Poor people in slum shacks and jhopadpattis in and around Bombay looked at you sometimes as if they wanted to throw you out of

your home and move in with their own families."24 The danger of living in this city is doubled when the inhabitants come on to the roads. In order to save his son from a road accident, Gustad almost staked his life, and Ghulam Mohammed, Major Bilimoria's colleague at RAW, was almost run over by a fast running car which perhaps, intentionally tried to kill him. Mistry tries to give a verbal picture of the horrible traffic :

Cars were pulling out from inside the traffic island and recklessly leaping into the flow. The BEST buses, red and double deckered, careened dangerously around the circle on their way to Colaba. Intrepid handcarts, fueled by muscle and bone, competed temerarily against the best that steel, petrol and vulcanized rubber threw in their paths. With the dead fountain at its still centre, the traffic circle lay like a great motionless wheel, while around it whirled the business of the city on its buzzing, humming, honking, complaining, screeching, throbbing, rumbling, grumbling, sighing, never-ending journey through the metropolis.25

In spite of the traffic the city has more to afford than the mere giddy experience of traffic as described above. The gang-wars like the one of which Ghulam Mohammed is, perhaps, the prey, the personal wars like that between Gustad and Mr. Rabadi or the war of ideas like that between secularism and fascist forces are part and parcel of this ever minatory city. Gustad feels insecure even at the market places and "Crawford Market was a place he despised...and...felt intimidated by..."26 Not only the butchers at the market, but the very dirt, smell, slippery floors, vegetable waste and the horrible sight of the wicked-looking meat hooks hanging from the ceiling scare him out of his wit. The inhabitants of this city are unable to do anything about overflowing gutters and huge heaps of garbage, overcrowded buses and trains and traffic jams, and perpetually stinking Mahim Creek, except " wrinkle their noses".27 And as Khodadad Building is a microcosm of the Parsis living in the world the city is the microcosm of the world of dirt, ugliness, pollution, decay, greed, treachery and moral turpitude outside the city. Dr. Paymaster describes the situation in his own manner, and suggests a remedy, too :

...Our beloved country is a patient with gangrene at an advanced stage. Dressing the wound or sprinkling rose-water over it to hide the stink of rotting tissue is useless.. The decaying part must be excised. You see, the municipal corruption is merely the bad smell, which will disappear as soon as the gangrenous government at the centre is removed.28

This is no simple urbanity. The peace-lovers and the lovers of idylls are always at loss in this fast and rushing metropolis. Only those who are able to cope with the ways of the speeding city are able to live in it, or else they fall prey to the tension and anxiety created by the pressure of this city. Malcom is so enraged at Bombay that he calls the place a "bloody city, turning into a harsh merciless place."29 Tehmul Lungara, the idiot, is the toll taken by this crushing urbanity. Dr. Paymaster also, because of the decaying and degrading conditions around his dispensary, becomes psychosis just like Cavasji Pastakiya at the Khodadad Building who keeps shouting and cursing throughout the day like a maniac. Hutokshi Doctor, in her article on urban stress, observes

....urbanization and modernization overcrowding and hunger...have resulted in sharp increase in the incidence of depression, dementia, anxiety, chronic stress, violence, alchoholism, schizophrenia and suicide.30

Dr. Paymaster and Cavasji are, perhaps, the victims of such urban stress.



And this tension ridden city is balanced by smaller streams of joy and matters of solace for the people living there either in the large groups or small minorities. The Khodadad Building, a Parsi enclave, itself is a matter of great solace. Although the building wall is constantly exposed to "bloody pissers", the Parsis living inside find themselves safe. Gustad has a unique idea of painting the wall with the pictures of Gods from all the religions, which not only makes it "pisser proof" but it also caters to the secular mould of the society. In spite of many threats from within the city, the Parsis feel safe in Bombay. In fact, Gustad sees poetic justice in Bombay's traffic jams caused by torrential rains. There is a kind of metaphoric suggestion in Bilimoria's death who goes outside Bombay and courts disaster for himself. Gustad's journey to New Delhi is also full of fears and doubt. He thinks : "Would this long journey be worth it? Was any journey ever worth the trouble?"<sup>31</sup> And perhaps, he feels that he can extricate himself of these doubts only in Bombay.

The social and religious institutions add to the cosmopolitan mould of the city. For instance, the restaurants with private rooms, the Irani tea shops, the House of Cages and the paan shops around them are some of the social institutes and systems of the city which emerge prominently in the novel as emancipator of the people caught in deep city vexations. " The "dabbwalla" is, " as Nilufer Bharucha observes, "an important emissary in Mistry's novel and carries messages between Gustad Nobel, the human hero and his wife Dilnavaz." <sup>32</sup> Peerbhoy Paanwalla is the great reliever of the anxiety ridden people as he is always ready with his lewd stories as a marketing strategy for his variety of *paans* which not only claim of aphrodisiac effects but also of great medicinal and healing value. The religious places offer solace to many grieving hearts, and staunch Parsi Gustad also would not hesitate to visit the church of Mount Mary at Bandra and the famous mosque of Haaji Ali. Crayon artist also tries hard to give the semblance of sanity to fanatic people around the city with his all religion-Gods painted on the wall of the Khodadad Building.

Thus the city that emerges in the novel is a curious mixture of various characteristics, which, perhaps, is very natural of the huge cities everywhere. An interesting observation made by Rahul Singh, in this regard, will help to substantiate the point of view. He writes :

A curious and delicate balance exists in most cities  
between stimulation and apathy, well-being and  
illness, idealism and venality, orderliness and  
anarchy. It is this balance which gives a city its  
excitement. But should the scale tip the wrong way  
you get a Beirut or a Karachi, cities wracked by  
sectarian violence.<sup>33</sup>

The characters in the novel are depicted as the battle line between good and evil runs through the heart of every man in the city. In order to maintain the sanity and wisdom some small sacrifices are also called forth. The wall of the Khodadad Building had to be demolished and the life of Tehmul Lungara is offered at the alter of peace in the city. The city dust-up the evil and pursuit to repulse from effacing the place. And Still Bombay exists in the name of Mumbai ,efficiently maintaining that delicate balance between the two.

Coincidentally, during this period when this novel came out, there were few other Parsi writers who delineated their community and the locale in the similar fashion as done by Mistry. Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow*, Boman Desai's *Memory of Elephants* and Farrukh Dhondy's *Bombay Duck* among others are but few examples of such writing. The various similarities and the treatment of the subject matter dealing with the Parsi community in these works make them the novels of interface. All these novels are maiden attempts by the respective authors, and they are set in the background of the city of Bombay. Moreover, the Parsi authors mentioned above and a few others are expatriates living in the different cities of the world. Thus distanced geographically from their foster-city Bombay, their country and their community which are passing through a phase of severe identity-crisis, these writers are pulled to them again and again and they try to revive the lost glory of their faith. The community caught in the crisis of identity feels a sense of loss and alienation resulting into anxiety, frustration and depression. These novels try to give voice to these feelings of the community. Nevertheless, their community consciousness does not clash with their national consciousness as is evident in the novels. Besides the novel discussed in this dissertation, almost all the works by the Parsi writers of the later

twentieth century, more or less, reflect these features prominently. For instance, Perin Bharucha's *Fire Worshippers*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Crow Eaters*, *Ice Candy Man* and *An American Brat* and Dina Mehta's *And Some Take a Lover* among others, concern themselves with the questions of Parsi identity and its diasporas. Thus there is a rich corpus of Parsi fiction lending a very mighty voice to the community of Parsis besides Rohinton Mistry's novel *Such a Long Journey*.

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