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Selective Memory:  
Diaspora Writing in Rohinton Mistry's Fiction

by

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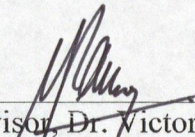
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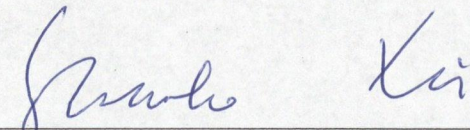
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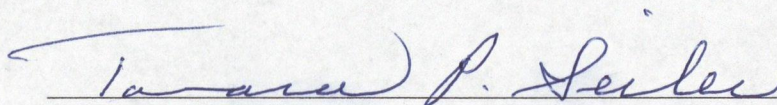
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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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## **Abstract**

Physical spaces are important sites of cultural production for diasporic writers. The use of memory is central to their idea of belonging and their construction of identity. Their memory creates an ambivalent response to their past, causing them to either idealize/romanticize or vilify/censure it. This binary of nostalgia and censure constructs home as an “imagined homeland,” to use a phrase introduced by Salman Rushdie and Stuart Hall.

In my thesis, I propose to apply these concepts of memory that produce nostalgia and censure to the fiction of the Canadian-Indian diaspora writer Rohinton Mistry. The theories of Hall, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Rushdie will be applied to Mistry’s stories and novels, forming the theoretical underpinning of my analysis of them. Although Mistry lives in Toronto, his texts are situated primarily in the 1960s, 1970s and 1990s Bombay; he provides an “insider-outsider” view of India, juxtaposing implicitly or explicitly his Canadian present with reconstruction of his Indian memories.

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## **Dedication**

To

My Parents who laid a strong foundation

and

My husband and children for moral support and patience



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## **Introduction**

Writers of the Indian diaspora have gained prominence in the last decade to a large extent because of the growing interest in cultural studies and recent theoretical formulations generated by the critiquing of their work. As migration became a fact of life, initially because of colonization and now because of globalization, immigrant and exiled writers demonstrate some prolonged or weakening tie to the myth of return to the homeland, resulting in a malleable often nebulous construction of the homeland, experienced through memory and imagination. Alienation from the adopted culture and distance from home affect the attitude of diaspora writers, which becomes a primary interest of their writings. In prolonged conditions of exile, literature can become the writer's instrument of forging the future. Rohinton Mistry is one such writer. He belongs to the Indian diaspora in Canada and his writing is representative of the diasporic sensibility – the dilemma of displacement, problems of ambivalence and border-crossing, anxieties concerning the present, and a longing for a homeland that is more often than not remembered and imagined.

The focus here, then, is on Mistry, as a diaspora writer. The process of diaspora writing is complex and has generated many theoretical assumptions about the relationship with the original and the adopted homeland. Formation of new diaspora cultures across the world has created opportunities for new discourses and has formulated new traditions and attitudes. Since the consciousness of a diaspora individual defines itself through negotiating between cultures and boundaries without apparently rooting itself in any of them, it creates a doubleness or multiplicity for the diaspora identity. A newly generated heterogeneity which constantly questions itself materializes as a result. A fundamental

aspect of this heterogeneity is the writer's attachment to his/her origins and his /her way of recreating his/her homeland. Mistry's writing testifies a similar attachment to homeland as reflected in his fiction. All his fiction except three short stories is set in India, not Canada. He provides us with as good a diaspora sensibility as any writer of Indian origins in Canada.

In Chapter One, I discuss Mistry as a diaspora subject emphasizing the new subjectivity of the migrant or exiled individual. The new immigrant, faced with dislocation and the anxieties of the new country, develops a fresh perspective, while the old consciousness and affinities are still in place. This materializes into what Edward Said describes in *Representations of the Intellectual* as a "double perspective" (60), forcing the diaspora subject to reinvent his identity. This also encourages the new subject to orient himself or herself into the environment as a space which is liminal, confirming Homi Bhabha's view in *The Location of Culture* that a new "presencing" has to begin from where a revaluation commences, creating a hybrid and novel awareness. Given the perimeters within which the diaspora writers function, it becomes obvious that their consciousness is operating on the level of the imaginary. Like all diaspora writing, Mistry's fiction too is placed within a similar awareness. In *Reflections on Exile*, Said's conceptualization of the intellectual exile can be applied to Mistry's situation too. And since the creative efforts of diaspora writers can only reproduce spaces of imagination according to Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homeland*--creating "fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (10)--even Mistry's creations of cities and landscapes are a product of his fantasy.



In this chapter, I elaborate on the dilemmas of displacement and the formulation of the new diaspora subject, in order to portray the anxieties the immigrant constantly faces, and show how these affect the choices the diaspora writer makes. Poised between two worlds, and between the past and present, both sensitivities are incorporated to formulate new realities that are situated in imaginary homelands. Mistry's preoccupation in his writing with India as the stage for his characters to enact their lives, does not then stand out as an exceptional occurrence, but can be linked to his representative position as a member of the diaspora negotiating between two worlds. He instinctively gravitates towards the more familiar world of India to draw instances from the "everyday" lives of people and "ordinary" events for his writing, as he "realistically" reconstructs them with confidence.

Memory dominates the diaspora writers' sensibility more than with the non-diaspora writers, as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures. Mistry's fiction, belonging to diaspora writing, abounds in memory too. Memory becomes central to the way that diaspora cultures produce, negotiate, and contest ideas of identity. I examine how for Mistry the notion of "memory" is a viable tool of analysis, which places his cultural "past" at a critical distance, foregrounding the modes and means of its retrieval. I attempt to show how memory is not merely a regressive and frozen moment in time but a factor in linking the "homeland" to the diaspora sensibilities of the present. The role of memory gains prominence in Mistry's works because the personal recollection and recall of his past experiences, especially the reconstruction of life in Bombay, is presented in his narratives with nostalgia as well as criticism. I select Mistry's fiction as a point of departure to show that the presentation of social facts is not real objects, but rather

arguments about reality – a set of debates about social, political, and historical registers of truth accessed through memory. He looks back to apprehend the specific event or situation as a particular personal illusion, and when the retrieved memory is recreated, it is unquestionably an imaginary concept that he is contemplating.

In Chapter Two, I proceed to explain the ways in which memory functions in Mistry's novels. The past is used to suit Mistry's purpose – he uses memory as a tool to strengthen identity. Rushdie defines this aspect of utilizing memory effectively in *Midnight's Children*. He catalogues the functioning of memory as something that “selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events (207). We see in Mistry's narrative, where he engages more with India than with Canada, that memory functions in two ways: one as romantic memory which idealizes and glorifies the past, and the other as realistic memory which vilifies and criticizes it. The author knits his discontinuous recollections into narratives only to re-create a world which reflects the author's personal world and life. Mistry being a Zoroastrian, is re-constructing primarily the Parsi world in his works, which he tends to idealize more than the non-Parsi world of mainstream society. It is also important to examine the different strategies he adopts in order to traverse the cultural space in the country of adoption. In Mistry's writings, the function of memory is not merely to idealize the past but also to portray the diaspora experience, especially as the Parsis are a diaspora community in India. He employs memory to relate his double-diaspora experience through the portrayal of his community in India. He manages to provide the diaspora perspective, showing how and why the Parsis are alienated in Indian society by portraying his

community as aloof and distant. In Chapter Two romantic/nostalgic memory is explored to argue that Mistry idealizes the past by nostalgically indulging in recollections to satisfy his longings and yearnings for his homeland, and to show how he portrays Parsis as a diaspora community in India.

The creation of imaginary homelands, as I have noted, is intrinsic to diaspora writing. I link this idea to memory that materializes into heartfelt, sincere renderings of stories and incidents in Mistry's works while drawing the readers' attention to the realities of life. Mistry's collection of works outlines his preoccupation with both worlds as he shuttles back and forth from an Indian past to a Canadian present. I illustrate my argument about Mistry's diaspora writings in this chapter from his one set of short stories, *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, and his novel *Such A Long Journey*. I refer briefly to his latest novel, *Family Matters*, to the extent that it testifies to his engagement with memory.

Living culture is never fixed; it involves a constant reinterpretation of the present situation. Concurrently, meaning can shift and practices can take on different forms. Since the definition of cultural identity for a diaspora person relies on a continuous exchange between memory and present perception of life, these factors play heavily on the definition of their identities. There are two forces at work in the consciousness that guides their perception – one, belonging to the place of origin, and the other, adapted in the country of residence. The definition of identity that results from this interaction of memory and present experience is deeply bifurcated and leads to an ambivalent consciousness. The immigrant is constantly aware of two worlds, and in appreciation of

the new society has to mediate between both, in order to evolve a new hybrid sensitivity to gain better appreciation and understanding of the present society.

Chapter Three moves on to discuss this major constituent of the hybrid identity – ambivalence. The expatriate develops a double consciousness which causes two different emotions, two disparate attitudes, to form within the same awareness. The experience of migration is one site where the sense of “home” and “identity” is disrupted, giving way to a new understanding of the idea of difference. The concept of individuality still exists, although the new identity based on shared cultural experience recognizes a sense of dissimilarity or “otherness.” This is the location of ambivalence in the ethnic articulation of identity, as it creates a belonging which is definitely homogenous. Conflicting responses to the dominant culture and society come into being when assessing one’s actual place in the scheme of things, thus posing a challenge for the hybrid personality to make a balanced adjustment. This ambivalence is evident in Mistry’s writing too (and, as we shall see, surfaces prominently in three stories in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*). The issues involved in formulating new identities are discussed, applying the theoretical arguments by Bhabha and Hall, in establishing the position of the liminal cultural space, and the diaspora hybrid identities respectively.

The perception of the diaspora writer is linked to the collective subjectivity of cultural roots, which are traced back to the homeland. The dual awareness of the immigrant writer is twofold: one, that of the insider belonging to internal realities of a familiar world, and the other, that of an outsider viewing aspects of an alien world, but looking in to learn more about the intricacies of a new society. Often, the whole situation is infused by the understanding of the exile, and is presented as an insider envisioning

things from an outsider's point of view. Mistry's writing epitomizes this interchangeability, and his work is discussed to highlight the shifting stances and multiple positions taken by the author. As he attempts to alternate standpoints, Mistry's perception of the subject or issue he is tackling undergoes a shift in viewpoint too, and his position becomes double edged in its presentation, more questioning in its reasoning than idealized and acceptable. As soon as any author becomes critical a definite posture develops in his/her writing, one that is a potential political and historical point of view. A similar tendency develops in Mistry's writing with his harsh critiquing of the social and political events of the 1970s; his fiction launches an expository attack on the state of affairs during the period of Emergency in India, unveiling the miseries and privations of the populace. He turns his attention to the social ills that the minorities face, because of castism, which leads to their dire state. The practices of a corrupt government and ruthless administration are exposed to reveal the pathetic conditions of the people. Realistic memory now serves to assail the factors responsible for the unacceptable affairs of the country. Distance from homeland enhances his understanding, which surfaces in his critical presentation of facts and events. Mistry employs realistic memory in *Such A Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* mainly to criticize and censure India of the 1970s, 1980s, and in *Family Matters* to shed light on the 1990s. I discuss the first two novels, making only partial reference to the third.

The focus, overall, is on three aspects of Mistry's fiction, which are representative of his diaspora writing: the diaspora experience centering on dislocation and re-construction of imaginary homeland; selective memory, functioning at one point as nostalgic / romantic memory to idealize and romanticize the past; and a hybrid

ambivalence that translates into realistic memory in order to censure the homeland. I show incidentally that Mistry's presentation of immigrant experience, a living reality of today's globalized world, is a relevant and enriching contribution to the literary world in general and diaspora writing in particular.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Homeland in Diaspora Writing: Dislocation and Attachment

The relocating of peoples in different parts of the world during and after the colonial period is a phenomenon that is perceived as a modern diaspora. Many novelists, including two foremost postcolonial writers, V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie, have written about this experience and it has become an important aspect of postcolonial studies. Rohinton Mistry is one such writer. The author of *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), *Such A Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995) and *Family Matters* (2002), Mistry was born in Bombay, in 1952, and emigrated to Canada in 1975. He explains, in the literary journal *Rungh*, that among his friends in India, migration was regarded as a fact of life:

After finishing college in Bombay or elsewhere in India, one had to go abroad for higher studies. If possible, one had to find a job after finishing a Masters or a PhD in the States or in England, find a job and settle in the country. That's how success is defined by Indians. So that is why I say that coming to Canada was in some ways decided for me. [Takhar n.p.]

This attitude is later portrayed in his fiction; many characters in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* move to the West or express their intentions to do so. Vera and Dolly, daughters of Najamai, the protagonist of the story in “One Sunday,” are the first residents of Firozsha Baag to immigrate to Canada. Sarosh of “Squatter,” the main character of Nariman Hansotia’s story, lives in Toronto for ten years. Jamshed of “Lend Me Your Light” relocates to New York, and Kersi, the narrator, makes Toronto his home. Jehangir



Bulsara from the story “The Collectors” is interested in living in the United States. Mr. Boyce of “Of White Hairs and Cricket” expresses his desire for his son Kersi to go abroad as there is no “No future here” (112), showing that migrating is an accepted reality.

Mistry’s story suggests that when one migrates, after the initial optimism, the reality of displacement, dislocation, and alienation sinks in. In an interview in *Wasafiri*, Mistry mentions his own idealistic expectations: “I left Bombay for Canada at the age of twenty three, and assumed before I got there that it would be no new thing for me. It would be a new land but I was sure I knew the language, that I would understand the culture and society” (16). He discovers that in actuality it “was all so very different” because any society as conceived from a distance, is not the same from within. For him, “it was strange and new” and Mistry’s assumption that “there would be wholeness to my being” never materializes. This awareness brings in a new perception which translates into a sense of separation. Mistry sums up his reaction thus: “However having arrived in the West, this sense of incompleteness turned around and I became aware of the loss of my home” (16). This leads to a sense of longing for the things left behind and a feeling of separation from the homeland. Mistry thus experiences a disconnection from his reality and sees the cultural difference between the two worlds, a recognized fact of diasporic sensibility. Along with a sense of loss comes the realization that the idea of “home” has transformed into a place of belonging, and along with this the perception of “identity” changes too.

Physical spaces then become remarkably significant sites of cultural production. Diaspora writers create their own narratives of inclusion and belonging. These writers

raise questions regarding the definitions of “home” and “belonging” and the writer’s relationship and perceptions of these physical and psychological spaces. Their narratives enable us to comprehend the emotions, the consequences of journeying, the changing of places, the efforts to find a new “home,” and the expectations of one day returning to their homelands have on these individuals.<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall has addressed these issues, contending that the formation of new diaspora cultures across the world bring about the possibility of new discourses, practices, and attitudes.<sup>2</sup> The apprehensions of departure, resettlement, and return are accessible through a myriad of stories, traditions, books, personal diaries, and other cultural expressions, which represent the material and spatial conditions underpinning the narratives of displacement. The authors of the colonial/modern diaspora feel, therefore, a real urge to write about their experiences. And if they do so, Hall continues to point out, it is precisely because at the end of it all, they know that all hope to return “home” is lost (362).

Much of the strength of present-day postcolonial writing lies to a great extent in its diaspora writers as much as in its indigenous authors. The reason for their creativity perhaps may rest in large measure on the strong sense of home which the exile has. Andrew Gurr attributes their distinctive writing not merely socially rooted, because he deems “their alienation is not psychological and economic [...] but also physical - a geographical removal from their origins” which impels them “towards the “higher consciousness” of a personal and social identity” (8). Their “stronger sense of home” gives the exiled writers a distinct sensibility to understand and interact with pressures around them, as we see in the works by V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie, with whose sense of exile Mistry could be linked. Their ability to examine and recount their

experiences and responses is evident in their writing. Through their works we can grasp the nature of the pressures that exiles confront, and realize the role of “home” in their lives. They create a sense of identity by constructing a home in their fiction, and struggle to hold on to that identity, since they are separated from their origins, both in space and time. Alienation from a familiar culture and distance from home affect the attitude of the writers, which in turn is reflected in their writings. Their self-knowledge is acute, leading to a self-consciousness that heightens their perception, resulting in subtlety, minuteness, and a marked sensitivity in their works. The writings of Mistry and other diaspora writers are thus distinct in their presentation of a unique perception: an awareness of the relationship between the individual and community, in particular the relationship between the dominant and the marginalized in society.

In order to grasp the particulars of Mistry’s diaspora writing, it is useful to understand the composition of his community. As we shall see of Mistry’s experience, his diaspora community is varied and complex as it is made up of diverse immigrants. Distinctions can be made among exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés. During this discourse of diaspora writers, I discuss the class-privileged intellectual immigrants, exiles by choice, rather than individuals expelled by force, and it is these immigrants who are referred to as “exiles.” These exiles are also positioned within the confines of diaspora communities, as the purpose here is to demonstrate how the diaspora writers are distinct from what Gurr calls “stay-at-home” (20) writers and why the literature produced by these exiles defines its own unique space. Space is a meaningful concept for these exiles, as the term “diaspora” indicates dispersal or scattering of a body of people from their traditional homes to foreign lands. For the exiled individual faced with the predicament

of displacement, “place” and “home” become important concepts, as evident in Mistry’s focus more on his relationship with home (India) than his adopted home (Canada). The three stories “Squatter,” “Lend Me Your Light,” and “Swimming Lessons” from *Tales from Firozsha Baag* illustrate that dislocation forces the exiles to maintain a stronger link with culture, which either results in hybridity or behaviour that challenges notions of cultural dominance, location, and identity. Caught between two worlds, the characters try to discern, construct, and shape new subjectivities. Similarly, the displaced writer confronts, embodies, and represents multiple identities and is in a constant state of transformation in order to achieve a multifaceted and comprehensive identity.<sup>3</sup> With migration comes the realization that life has no permanence and so the migrant thinks differently, well prepared to give up one way of life for new beginnings, as we shall see in Mistry’s North American stories. Edward Said’s quotation in *Culture and Imperialism* from Victor Hugo’s text describes the circumstances of the diaspora subject aptly:

The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign place. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong person has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his. (335)

Mistry is a “tender beginner,” who “has fixed his love on one spot.” His one spot is India to which he is still attached, having left it not too long ago.

The displaced individuals construct new subjects, who constantly question the concerns of identity, since their identity is always under construction, always open, complex, and unfinished. Said, in *Representations of the Intellectual*, discusses the

position of the exiled writer as existing “in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old” (49); thus placed, the diaspora subject is not only compelled to inhabit several identities but also confronts an ambivalent state of being. And yet it is because of this doubleness characterizing the diaspora subject’s cultural identity that the viewpoints of both the worlds are explored in the same narrative. The writers coming from the diaspora cultures have to face the responsibility of dealing with the enigma confronting them, and attempt to demystify the uncertainty surrounding their dislocation. For Said, the intellectual diaspora subject, and more specifically the exile, is therefore “beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another” (49). Survival, along with safeguarding the essential identity of one’s being, becomes the main imperative of the individual. Since identity is based on one’s own home, one’s history, and one’s past, the exiled writer spends his life rebuilding his home in his art as is most aptly shown in Mistry’s “Swimming Lessons.” In fact, the distance of exile only intensifies the faithful minuteness with which “home” is recorded.

The diaspora writer’s attachment to his origins causes the freedom of exile to work paradoxically; the regard for one’s roots becomes a constraint to create a fresh identity only through the record of home. The diaspora writer tends to direct his awareness inwards, and thus, the distancing from home is followed by its reconstruction in fiction. Mistry’s fiction conforms to this idea of reconstructing home. His works testify to his involvement with home as the narratives are situated in his homeland, India. He constructs his imaginary world in his stories *Tales from Firozsha Baag* and his novels *Such A Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance*, and *Family Matters*, by situating the characters

and events in Bombay, where he grew up, giving his writing an autobiographical quality. In his narrative, the past and present memories mingle to present voices and viewpoints to construe a precise image of India. He writes detailed descriptions of traditional customs, religious rituals, ethnic festivals, and minute features of cultural life. In a faithful record, Mistry meticulously evokes the cultural nuances by describing the ethnic foods – like the Ayah’s Goan curry and *masala*,<sup>4</sup> by giving details of the typical Parsi clothing – *dugli*<sup>5</sup> and the *pugree*,<sup>6</sup> and by infusing vernacular in the dialogue of his characters – *gaaribi hatao*<sup>7</sup> and *patla Babu*,<sup>8</sup> giving clear evidence that he is rebuilding his homeland in his fiction. In his longing, he recaptures such events as the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi and Coconut Day to get a feel of the celebratory atmosphere and the excitement of processions and gatherings left behind, suggesting that he maintains a constant link with his country.

Mistry’s fiction deals with the Parsis extensively because the Parsis are a diaspora community in India. Mistry’s preoccupation with community finds an explanation in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, where Hall elaborates on this process astutely, stating that “identities are constructed within, not outside discourse [...] in specific historical and institutional sites [...] by specific enunciative strategies [...] and thus are more the product of marking the difference and exclusion” (4). The playing field for the diaspora subject is then established within the periphery of ethnicity. Consequently, ethnicity becomes closely linked with identity and becomes a powerful place from which one can represent one’s self. We see this in Mistry’s leanings towards the Parsi traditions, as most of his characters come from the Parsi community, especially in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, *Such A Long Journey*, and *Family Matters*. Firozsha Baag is a building in Bombay

where all the events related in the book take place and the residents are mostly middle-class Parsi families. Similarly, *Such A Long Journey* is concerned with the life of Noble Gustad, an honest, devout Parsi and his family. In *Family Matters*, Mistry goes one step closer to defining an even more pronounced Parsi identity as his focus shifts to one Parsi family and their concerns as part of a diaspora in India. Through these fictional worlds, Mistry informs us about the insular and exclusive Parsi world; he describes in detail their customs and traditions, their religious practices and rituals, their celebrations of special days, their peculiarities and eccentricities, their fears and anxieties about being a minority in India, and many such details that enlighten non-Parsis about them.

Choosing to live in one society but linked to the other by origin, the diaspora writer faces a challenge. Since the new identity is fundamentally linked with home, there is a definite relation established between home, identity, and writing. The relationship between diasporas and homelands is complex, ambivalent, and dialectical. Victor J. Ramraj, in his essay, "Diasporas and Multiculturalism," sums up this relationship this way: "Diasporic writings are invariably concerned with the individual's or community's attachment to the centrifugal homeland. But this attachment is countered by a yearning for a sense of belonging to the current place of abode" (216). This makes the diaspora narrative liminal and transitory. The variance between two distinctive cultures becomes the determining factor in their continuing interaction. These writers, who keep going back to the homelands for their fictional material, are not always celebratory and glorifying in their portrayal of the mother countries. This approach reflects the ambivalence the writers' sense in their new environment. Ramraj attributes their position to the fact that they "may not want to actually return home" yet "they retain a conscious



or subconscious attachment to traditions, customs, values, religions, and languages of their ancestral home" (215). In "West Indian Writing in Canada," he observes that immigrant writing is "preoccupied with the complexities, contradictions and ambivalences associated with leaving one society and adjusting to another" (142) which reiterates that diaspora writing is without doubt linked with and is inseparable from homelands. "Swimming Lessons" is the best example of Mistry's effort to balance his attachment to his homeland and his desire to assimilate in the Western society of Canada. The plot here concerns the protagonist's decision to learn to swim – a metaphorical inflection of immersing in the new culture – with a narrative strand used in italics to relate episodes set in Firozsha Baag. Mistry describes the narrator's view of both Canada and India, and his need to come to terms with both, which are reflected in images of distance and belonging. Until the time Kersi, the protagonist/narrator, decides to take swimming lessons, his view is essentially that of an outsider; once he immerses himself in the metaphoric waters of Western culture, he tries to "see what is inside" the waters. We gain an insight into Mistry's perspective when in the course of the story Kersi realizes that the two women he has seen sunbathing from a distance do not appear as attractive on close quarters. His decision to see the "inside world" is not for the purpose of assimilation but to clear any illusions that he has formed by viewing it from a distance. As for his depiction of the "inside world" of India in this story, he writes most nostalgically.

For the diaspora subject, the combination of cultures is bound to involve many social factors in determining the final composition of identity, and many dialectics can work their way into the production of a new identity. The exile is often left searching for

an ideal space to claim. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha addresses the issue of identity beyond the dialectics of the postcolonial dualities to define what he calls the “Third Space of enunciation” (37) – a space in-between the boundaries of the binaries. In order to explain these “in-between” cultural differences, Bhabha attempts to exemplify the “liminal” negotiation of cultural identity across differences of race, class, gender, and cultural traditions. Bhabha alternately argues that cultural identities cannot be attributed to pre-given, constructed, or ahistorical cultural characteristics that define particular ethnicity. Alternatively, he suggests that the negotiation of cultural identity involves the continual interface and exchange of cultural forms that in turn produce a mutual recognition of cultural difference.<sup>9</sup> In Mistry, this is evident in his portrayal of certain characters such as Kersi and Sarosh, who are liminal characters in the new Canadian society, and in his portrayal of the political events of India in the 1970s through Gustad Noble’s situation in *Such A Long Journey*. Mistry maintains a balance as he situates himself in a liminal space defining his own view of history, voicing his concerns on the ills of the world, and reflecting his own understanding of the events and society in general.

Moreover, in diaspora communities a new dialectic of belonging and not belonging, as *somewhere-in-between*, emerges, constructing figures whose identities are hyphenated. So, to create their own niche, diaspora subjects rely on their ethnicity, which is embedded in the customs, traditions, and values of their homelands. This traps the individual in the past, but the problem is that the past is not a frozen moment in time, because time moves on into the present and future. In an attempt to rediscover and reinvent the identity, the diaspora subject is unwittingly relying on the static past. Hall

voices the same concern in “Old & New Identities, Old & New Ethnicities” when he describes the problem of dwelling in the past:

The homeland is not waiting back there for the new ethnics to rediscover it. There is a past to be learned about, but is now seen, and has to be grasped as a history, as something that has to be told. It is narrated. It is grasped through memory. It is grasped through reconstruction. It is just a fact that has been waiting to ground our identities. What emerges from this is nothing like an uncomplicated, dehistoricised, undynamic, uncontradictory past. Nothing like that is the image which is caught in the moment of return. (38)

Time back home progresses, but the diaspora subject tends to ignore this fact, continuing to deal with the past as if it was part of the present and so when a new identity is realized, it is based on a “return.” Mistry has addressed this reality in “Lend Me Your Light” and “Squatter.” In both stories, the characters imagine home with a sense of nostalgia and longing; they tend to ignore the fact that while they were away time has moved and with it the reality in India has changed too. Thus, when they return home it strikes them that what they had pictured in their mind’s eye and the actuality of life do not correspond. Jamshed and Percy in “Lend Me Your Light” find Bombay “dirtier than ever” and a place where “hostility and tension seemed to be perpetually present” which was “disconcerting to discover” especially for Percy, as he had lived in the city all his life (187). Even Sarosh, the protagonist in “Squatter,” was in for a surprise when, on his return from Toronto, he “found himself desperately searching for the old place in the pattern of life he had vacated ten years ago.” The people too “were strangers” and to his dismay “the old pattern was never found by Sarosh; he searched in vain” (167). The diaspora subject is

introduced to a reality, which is a rude shock, but he has to accept this as time that has moved on.

The dialectics of “longing” and “belonging” come into play in diaspora fictions because the “fiction” of spaces and people is imagined and fantasized in the minds of the diaspora subjects and that their conceptualization of “home” has different versions of culture and “homelands.” If one were to ask how diaspora subjects construct homelands, there would not be a simple and direct answer; at the best one could surmise that each would respond to one’s own needs and compulsions when creating different homelands. But the fact that their conception is more an imagined rather than experienced reality is indisputable. There is a disconnection between places, people, and cultures, as discussed above; and in the distance between place and people, there exists a place for imagination and fantasy. However, the imagination of left-behind and remembered places is often pronounced or distorted. Homeland becomes a series of distant memories – an imagined homeland.

Rushdie, in “Imaginary Homelands,” an essay which may be considered a paradigm of the discourse on diaspora writers in the between-world condition, examines the presentation of the homeland in the works of the diaspora writer. He points out that the attempt to portray one’s land of origin is inevitably coupled with the inability to be faithful to any objective reality. His observation applies to most writers who share the multicultural experience:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do

so in the knowledge —which gives rise to profound uncertainties— that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

The realities of home are of particular concern to exiles as home is clearly an insistent presence in their works. Some remain outsiders, while others prefer to keep the insider's perspective in their writing, but their memories create images that are divorced from immediate realities. A strong sense of referentiality pervades the work because of the attachment to their country.

But the immigrant writer is further urged by his complex situation to go beyond external perceptions of differences and changes, to underlying similarities and motives, as Mistry does in "Swimming Lessons," where he parallels the Firozsha Baag Parsi community with that of the multicultural one in the Don Mills apartment. Again, in *Family Matters*, when two different but fanatic religious attitudes of the Hindus and Parsis are juxtaposed to bring out the illogical extremism each can foster to the detriment of society. The writer's discontinuity, as Rushdie puts it, his "out-of-country and even out-of-language" experience, is often the force that enables him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal (12). Wedged between cultures, the diaspora writers are offered innumerable opportunities of understanding and presenting the world with extraordinary perspectives.

Undoubtedly, the works of Mistry are representative of emotions and experiences typical to the immigrant as well as to an Indian immigrant in Canada. His particular

diaspora /immigrant experience is heightened by the Parsi community's historical diaspora /immigrant experience. He is a Parsi Zoroastrian whose ancestors were forced out of Iran during the Islamic conquest and sought refuge in India 800 years ago. Forced into adopting the Indian ways of dressing and using the Gujarati language, stopped from proselytizing, and ordered to venerate the cow, the Parsis find themselves alienated to an extent from mainstream Indian society. They refused to identify themselves as Indians and led a secluded life, still nurturing the hope of returning to their ancestral land. Maja Daruwalla, a Parsi, comments on the situation of his community: "the Parsis have developed a particularized culture from a mixture of ancient myth and legend" (102; qtd. in Dharan). Along with this, they consciously resisted being influenced by other cultures.

It was only during the colonial era that the Parsis came out of their shells. Among the Indian minorities, the Parsis were the most Westernized; they consciously and deliberately imitated the British. The Parsis regarded English education as one of the blessings conferred by the British on India and this gave them some advantage in British India. They were employed as agents, mediators, and diplomats; this brought about a change in all the Zoroastrian institutions, except the Zoroastrian religion. The privilege enjoyed during the colonial rule paradoxically became counterproductive in postcolonial India. The Parsis were alienated from mainstream India because of their identification with the British. Westernization also produced adverse results. As a result of excessive espousing of Western attitudes, the Parsi way of life was also uprooted and the middle class suffered a double alienation. After the British departed, they were left isolated and estranged.

An absence of social will to interact and a rigid submission to traditional religion militated against any constructive understanding with other cultures, which accelerated the community's journey towards extinction. As a chronicler of his community, Mistry is keenly aware of their predicament and the ethnocentric attitude, which he portrays poignantly as the idiosyncrasies of his community in stories from *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. Mistry refers to their sense of religious superiority when he exposes a common belief in his stories: "Parsi prayers are so powerful only a Parsi can listen to them. Everyone else can be badly damaged inside their souls if they listen" (54). The Parsis regard the non-Parsis as inferior in culture and less refined in taste. The soiled seat of the washroom in the fire temple provokes the comment that "it was not a Parsi who used the WC" (15). Even children are advised not to play with marbles and spin tops as these "activities were considered inappropriate for a Parsi boy" (30), and they insisted on condescendingly calling all cleaning ladies "Ganga," irrespective of their actual name. Thus, mainstream India is kept to a large extent out of the Parsi world.

In *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, a fictionalized enclave in metropolitan Bombay, Mistry evokes, as we have seen, a Parsi world with its traditions, customs, conventions, and typical habits. With subtle irony, he disparagingly portrays the Parsi mentality of remaining confined to themselves. In "Auspicious Occasion" and "Condolence Visit," Mistry exposes the rigid religious practices with wit and humour. In "Auspicious Occasion," the most religious occasion of *Behram roje* ends up being the most disastrous and inauspicious day for Rustomji and his wife Mehroo. The day begins with Rustomji being sprayed by a steady leak from the lavatory upstairs; Rustomji's *dugli* (crisp white coat) is tainted by *paan* (betel leaves) stains on his way to the *agiary* (fire temple), when,



according to him, “some swine spat paan on my *dugli* “(19), and the priest is brutally murdered by a temple worker –“Parsi killing Parsi” (20) as the narrator says. The couple are shown as leading secluded and insular lives. Mehroo is involved in her religious activities from which she gets sustenance; she was “oblivious to the hustle and meanness of lives on these narrow streets. [As none] of it pierced the serenity with which she anticipated the perfect peace” (12) that the temple and her isolated life offered. Rustomji, on the other hand, had an exasperated and irate existence; he was nicknamed Rustomji-the-curmudgeon by the colony residents and led an unsociable life, reading the *Times of India* and lusting over the *Gangas* who came to do the household chores. Mistry chooses to characterize him with a “Stomach is still heavy. [He must] be constipated” (21), and leaves him to fester in his isolation. In his portrayal of the Parsi couple, Mistry is pointing to the fact that lack of interaction with the outside world leads to stagnation and stultifies the Parsi community, and sheds light on the behaviour of diaspora communities in general.

In “Condolence Visit,” Mistry draws attention to the narrow-minded approach that blind adherence to traditional beliefs can foster. Daulat, grieving her husband Minocher’s death, defies all societal rules by refusing to light-out the lamp on his deathbed, which she is supposed to do after four continual days, because it gave solace in her loneliness. Having endured a painful, long-drawn out illness, she would rather put the pain and suffering behind her than “relive the anguish of the most trying days of her life” (59). Minocher’s peaceful death had let him go with grace and she remembered him in the tranquil state relieved of his misery. She further aggravates the situation by giving away Minocher’s *pugree* (turban) “so shiny and black” (63) and in good condition to a

young Parsi man, who is about to get married. Mistry points ironically to these facts as audacities and irregularities, because not following the rules threatens the Parsi identity that they have preserved for nearly a thousand years despite being surrounded by the dominating ethos of Hinduism. Their memory has engraved unpleasant experiences of coercion that they had rigorously resisted in order to maintain their Parsi identity and religion, and even today they guard it with the same religious fervour and commitment. They insist that their Parsi identity remain intact through adherence to old Parsi traditions and cultural values, and they are not willing to compromise Parsi principles, even though they are open to embracing certain attitudes and mannerisms, such as Western education, the Gujarati language, and the Indian ways of dressing. This reflects the Parsi diaspora's need to maintain a tie with their homeland in Persia through retaining attachments to traditions, customs, religion, and ceremonies.

The Westernized Parsis were always attracted by the West, as the value system of these countries was more akin to their way of thinking than the values and relationships at home, and like Indo-West-Indians, this made their adaptation to North America easier than others from South Asian descent. In "Lend Me Your Light," Kersi's parents believe that Canadian immigration authorities do not want hordes of barbaric Indians to apply for status —"who would want these bloody ghaties to come charging into their fine land?" But they are convinced that Kersi, as a Parsi, is a "highly qualified applicant" and will be admitted. Kersi comments: "According to my parents, I would have no difficulty being approved, what with my education, and my westernized background, and my fluency in the English language" (178). The Boyces' prediction comes true, and Kersi's approval shows how their idea works. Besides this conception, their marginality serves as a

motivating force and the Parsis carry their ethnicity to the West in search of greener pastures. Their double migration provides a stimulating climate for intellectual and economic growth. Since dislocation is part of their psyche, India now becomes the homeland left behind. Their adjustment in the West is again a carefully chosen synthesis. Their religion is kept intact and the alien culture is never allowed to influence their attitude towards life, which is quintessentially Zoroastrian. Though the Parsis dress like the Europeans, adopt some British ways, educate themselves in a Western manner, their inner Parsi values remain unchanged.

The evidence of this attitude is present in Mistry's work too. At one level, he describes the experience of being a Parsi in India, and on another level, he deals with the apprehensions of the Parsi immigrants in Canada. The feeling of being alienated and uprooted and the attempt to plant one's self in a different soil with the people of the new homeland is humorously portrayed in three of his stories in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. In "Squatter," Sarosh immigrates to Canada, Anglicizes his name to "Sid," and vows to return to India in ten years if he cannot fully adapt to Canadian society. Ten years later we find Sid fairly adjusted, except for one major hurdle – he is unable to use the Western toilets. This inability was "no more than mildly incommodious" for him, but with the passage of time "the frustrated attempts caused grave anxiety" as he "remained dependent on the old way, and this unalterable fact, [...] suffocated him" (154). This incident though presented in a light vein describes an undeniable reality of cultural dislocation. It points to the uneasiness that prevails in negotiating between different cultures – the old ethnic values and the new social ones. Ajay Heble condenses this argument, stating Sarosh's plight "bespeaks an uneasiness which can only be the result of the problematic

relationship between interlocking cultural landscapes, between an ethnic heritage and a new life in the West” (52). Sarosh’s predicament represents the dilemmas the immigrants face. His personal discomfiture about using Western toilets signals a failure to adapt to the new culture, showing that the cultural divide creates alienation and unease. In the perception of an immigrant like Sarosh, it is an acknowledgment of not becoming truly Canadian, leading to anxiety and eventually a feeling of marginalization.

In “Lend Me Your Light,” Mistry offers a different perspective on the immigrant experience: the pressures of dealing with two different worlds create anxieties about identity, as Hall states, causing a perpetual need to invent a new one. Mistry portrays different responses to this conflict. While some assimilate willingly, others are faced with conflicting emotions and take their time in coming to terms with the new society. It is a tale about two brothers and their friend in which each of them looks at life in a different way. Jamshed is the friend of brothers Percy and Kersi, who is scornful of India and “was trying his best to get out of the country” (178). He realizes he has no future in his country in which “bloody corruption” was rampant and any chances of prosperity were negligible. He succeeds in leaving for green pastures in the “Promised Land of America,” where he proceeds to assimilate to his new life only to return and condemn his country folks; Indians he thinks are “too meek and docile, and should learn to stand up for rights the way people do in the States” (185). He has happily embraced the American life style and forsaken his Indian values. On the contrary, Percy, his complete opposite, insists on staying in India to fight injustice and corruption in order to make India a better place. His brother and the narrator of the story, Kersi, goes to Toronto, but unlike Jamshed, is committed to keeping his ethnic past alive and tries to retain his culture by

becoming “a member of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario. Hoping to meet people from Bombay” (182) and he also participates in the Parsi New Year celebrations. Kersi takes more of an ambivalent attitude than the other two characters as he struggles to strike a balance between the extreme positions of his brother and his friend. He reacts disapprovingly to his friend’s negative comments about Bombay, but feels his brother’s endeavours to fight corruption are a more worthy cause compared to his meaningless interaction with the immigrant community in Toronto. In this story, Mistry grapples centrally with the issue of identity and portrays what Hall has termed are multiple, restless, complex, and unsettled identities in diaspora communities.

The last story in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, “Swimming Lessons,” is mostly about day-to-day life in Canada, and the narrator’s experiences, feelings, and emotions away from home. It is perhaps the most telling of Mistry’s diaspora stories in the adopted homeland. Initially, Percy is unable to assimilate but by the end of the story he is reborn in the neutral waters of his hybridity. The protagonist in Canada misses the rich cultural life of India: the festivals, ceremonies, and the religious rituals. He remembers the Ganesh Chaturthi festival when the clay idol of Lord Ganesh adorned with garlands is carried in a procession to the Chaupatty beach for immersion. The music reverberates in his ears, and in picturing the frenzied crowds dancing to the drums, he relives the past moments. Mistry also gives us a glimpse of the expatriates’ reaction to Canadian weather. The narrator informs his parents in India about the “record breaking low temperatures all through March and February,” which they call his “Canadian weather report” (232), and furthermore, he shows he is aware that the immigrants always enjoy the snow the first year or two, then inevitably fret and mope as they dread the harsh

conditions. The author also compares the socio-economic conditions of Canada to the ones in India. He sees the prosperity of Canada “where everyone eats well whether they work or not,” and he contrasts it to the situation in India. Father comments that “he should be worrying about us with all the black market and rationing,” causing long “waits in line” to get weekly rations (232). Even the parents perceive him in Canada as an immigrant, wanting him to write expansively about his Canadian experience, and are happy to see him relate his “day-to-day life in his apartment” because it makes them feel “they knew at least a little bit” about his life (248). Mistry translates his personal situation into that of his character’s, reflecting the thoughts and reaction of his immigrant experience, and establishing his place as a diaspora writer just like the narrator in this story.

In these early stories, then, we see Mistry engaging with the issues of the enigma of double displacement, the constant struggle to make adjustments in a new world, and the ambivalence caused by alienation, all salient features of expatriate sensibility. His works include India in a macrocosmic sense and focus on the microcosmic Parsi community to project his experience as a diaspora writer. Mistry’s expatriate experience provides him with a vantage point from where he can emerge with the production of a new breed of South Asian immigrant voice. His fiction serves as a catalyst for rethinking the cultural, ethnic, and diverse postcolonial immigrant world and his voice fulfills on another level the desire of readers who are interested “*in reading about life through the eyes of an immigrant, [as] it provides a different viewpoint*” (248).

In “Swimming Lessons” the protagonist’s Father and Mother discuss another important feature of their writer son’s story. Mother notices sentimentally “that his

childhood in Bombay and our home here is the most valuable thing in his life just now, because he is able to remember it all to write about it,” and Father responds logically, “he is writing of these things because they are far enough in the past for him to deal with objectively” (246). This brings the question of the various ways of using memory as a vehicle to retrieve material from the past and create new narratives with it. Taking as his point of departure his writing of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie dwells on the complexity of fictionally re-creating the land he had left more than twenty years ago. Recognizing that the distances of time and space distort facts, he envisioned his novel in order not to fall into the trap of having to validate his remembered experiences with objective realities. He centres his efforts on making the novel “as imaginatively true,” and explains that “what I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: ‘my’ India, a version and no more than just one of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions” (10). Mistry too has similar thoughts about his writing when it comes to reconstructing his India; however, he says, “I’m confident that I do know. It’s memory. Well – I suppose that when one says memory, it’s memory plus imagination, which creates a new memory” (240; qtd.in Ross). I will show the function of memory in constructing nostalgia, as well as vilifying situations in Mistry’s portrayal of India in his fiction.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Locating Homeland through Romantic/Nostalgic Memory

It's very naïve to assume that you go to a new country and start a new life and its new chapter — it's not. Canada is the middle of the book. At some point you have to write the beginning.<sup>10</sup>

Mistry made these comments in an interview in response to the questions of why he persistently writes about India in his works, acknowledging that the beginning cannot be ignored because for him India has been his foundation. Edward Said would approve of Mistry's view, disagreeing with the assumption that being exiled is to be totally separated and isolated from the place of origin. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, he says, "Once you leave your home, wherever you end up you cannot simply take up life and become just another citizen of the new place. Or if you do, there is a good deal of awkwardness involved in the effort, which scarcely seems worth it" (62). Mistry's fiction is initiated through memory; he re-visions the history of his homeland and defines his ethnic identity and sense of self through recollections. Mistry himself goes back to India infrequently, but this does not, he says, present problems when he writes about it in his fiction:

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. It's memory. [...] When I don't have that, I will not write about it. I have promised myself that. (240; qtd. in Ross)

To Mistry, recreating his country, especially Bombay, in his fiction appears to be of utmost significance. His aim is to record minutely everything that he can recall to preserve in writing the city that exists in his mind – corresponding to Rushdie’s notion that writing about the homeland is to “create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (10). However, Mistry has maintained a close proximity with the actual city of Bombay when creating the one he has in mind, perhaps proving his word that his memory has not yet faded. The tendency to reach for some sort of memory, which for the immigrant writer translates into meaning, is the essence of diaspora writing and Mistry’s writing abounds in reminiscences of Bombay, an evident characteristic of his narrative.

In his capacity as a diaspora writer, Mistry demonstrates – at this point in his career – his consistent involvement with the original homeland rather than with his adopted homeland; and in his characteristically diasporic portrayal of it, he builds on this foundation of memory. But what is the nature of this memory? I shall discuss introductorily how the past informs the writing of diaspora writers like Mistry, and how it tends to be on one level nostalgic and romanticized. In “Imaginary Homelands,” Rushdie says that any writer who writes about his homeland from the outside must necessarily “deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (11). However, it is precisely the disconnected nature of these memories, the incomplete truths they encompass, the mysteries they offer that make them particularly meaningful for the displaced writer. For Rushdie, these “shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance because they were *remains*; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities” (12). It is precisely these

“shards of memory” that materialize in Mistry’s fiction as heartfelt sincere renderings which guide the readers’ attention to Mistry’s homeland life.

Mistry’s writing highlights the diaspora writer’s preoccupation not so much with his Canadian present but with his Indian past; but both are implied in most of his fiction. Literature created by diaspora writers portrays stories that retrieve losses incurred in migration, dislocation, and translation. Referring to the plight of the displaced, Said writes that an exile’s plurality of cultural experience gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous perspectives.<sup>11</sup> From this point of view, the distance between homeland and new country appears to collapse as both worlds exist simultaneously one through memory, the other through actuality. In his stories, Mistry too, utilizes memory for similar purposes by portraying the uneasiness of immigrant characters living in Canada with an awareness of the world left behind, and trying to adapt to their new world and new reality. This dual awareness is specifically conveyed by the parallel narration in “Swimming Lessons,” where the narrator parallels his life in Toronto along with memories of past events in Bombay. He recounts both the worlds in his narrative simultaneously.

Memory provides the dual vision necessary for a humane critique of one’s condition. Through memory one builds a kind of imagined link between the individual and society, between past and present reality, in order to provide a rationale for any present struggle and to impart a sense of comfort and stability. It delineates different stages of the transition encountered by displacement and then inscribes the continuity in a series of discontented glancing backwards. It navigates through the brutalities of homelessness and the dilemmas of adapting to new realities. In other words, memory is

inscribing the flow of life within the narrative of life, connecting the past to the present and leading a way towards the future. This perhaps supports Rushdie's claim that "it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (9). Mistry's personal history (as discussed in the previous chapter) is that of the immigrant writer caught between two worlds, especially since much of his writing is situated in Bombay, his birthplace. He admits this in an interview with Geoff Hancock:

I think it's something I owe to the place where I grew up. Honesty, truth and accuracy is the least I owe to that place. [The most I owe is] never to forget. The most and the least then combine, I don't want to forget anything about Bombay. The life, the places, the people. (146-47)

There is a conscious effort on the part of the author to write about India. He needs to re-create his country, to put together all memories and imaginary ideas he has about his world, in order to keep it safe, preserve it in a book before it fades away. Mistry emphasizes that "I am determined to write good literature. This is my primary concern. But to write well, I must write about what I know best" (145). His writing testifies to the fact that India is the country he primarily selects to concentrate on, and Bombay, the city he is most knowledgeable about.

The past, or rather one's sense of the past, is then a combination of personal experience, present conditions, and anxieties concerning the future. Representation of the past is certainly linked with memories, as David Lowenthal explains: "All awareness of the past is founded on memory. Through recollection, we recover consciousness of former events, distinguish yesterday from today, and confirm that we have experienced a

past” (193). In Mistry’s works, we get an insight into how the writer uses memory to recollect past experiences and witness it in his renderings of the political events and social realities. Christopher Lasch elaborates on the nature of memory:

It is less concerned with loss than with our continuing indebtedness to a past the formative influence of which lives on in our patterns of speech, our gestures, our standards of honor, our expectations, our basic disposition toward the world around us. (83)

The past, in other words, shapes the present and defines a specific identity. In order to access the past through memory, one has to rely on recollections of the past, and recall experiences and events that have left a lasting impact on one’s life. Recollections of the past, it can be assumed, are never viewed with precision but are perceived according to the inclination of the individual looking back on memories. In an attempt to capture the past, the present is often played down, making it necessary to keep a balance between both, in order to hold on to reality. Annette Kuhn argues that memory should act as “an aid to radicalized remembering [that] can create new understandings of both past and present” (8).

In the diaspora or non-diaspora individual, it is undeniable that memory pervades life, as we devote much of the present to keep in touch with the past, especially for the individuals of the diaspora. Habits are residues of past acts and thoughts, and memories are accumulations of all these recollections. The expatriate seeks to identify or create a cultural history and identity that is based on the past. This involves the construction of a perspective, a need for stasis in a changing world, a need which only memory can satisfy. Moreover, these revived memories also protect the expatriate from the isolation of exile

and ease the discomfort of alienation. This narrative is used to reassure the writer's place in a new and marginalized world. The feeling of exclusion and hiatus faced in a new world compels the writer to revert into the past from where he can particularize his existence and move on to reassert his new sense of belonging

In diaspora writing, ties with the homeland can never be completely severed. The tendency to reach back in the past – and that too with longing – exists constantly. The diaspora sensibility is preoccupied with reconstructing the home in writing. The yearning for the homeland leads to the desire of returning home, but because of indeterminate circumstances the return is often not possible and a fixed relationship with the past develops by creating an imaginary homeland. Through memory these writers fictionalize a past and through memory validate the imaginary, transforming their yearning into a consciousness of duality. This longing often gives them the means to move beyond themselves and their past. Memory unlocks the fixed moment of the past and invites them into the present. Possessing a double consciousness and living in two worlds simultaneously enables them to function with memory. Ann Colley discusses the sensibility of the separation from homeland and how memory works to defuse tension:

[P]eople who reach for the metaphor of history [...] tend to take comfort in the past, for they are part of a culture that finds in it a means of resolving (rather than creating) tension or difference. The past gives them a way of discovering synthesis. [...] They are part [...] of a sensibility in which there is a distinction and a distance between the past and the present. They belong to a world that has a memory; consequently, they move about in places that carry the burden and the authority of what was once them. (4)

There is meaning and objective in reaching into the past through memory, because in the engagement with homeland, the yearning never completely escapes, and the consciousness of being in a new world is dominant. Thus, rather than simply retrieve the past, memory moves forward to meet and intersect with a present that either rejects, acknowledges, or uses it.<sup>12</sup>

Mistry's diasporic writing prominently deploys the past and memory by using different strategies to traverse the cultural space. In negotiating this space, as we have noted, Mistry's memory functions on two different levels: the first is romantic memory that idealizes and glorifies the past; thus he privileges the Parsi community, in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, *Such A Long Journey*, and *Family Matters*, in nostalgic recollections and gratifying thoughts. The second is realistic memory that vilifies and critiques the past whereby he censures the Parsi community's shortcomings as a diaspora community, and attacks the larger community by exposing its unjust social practices and corrupt administration, making memory a tool to employ the past to work for social change, especially, in *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters*. Mistry's fiction will be discussed in this chapter with specific references to the romantic, idealizing aspects of his use of memory.

In most of Mistry's fiction, memory functions to recollect primarily a specific perspective, that is, the Parsi community and the predicaments of its members. The Parsis constitute a diaspora in India, and thus Mistry maintains the simultaneity of their expatriate experience in India and his in Canada. The marginalization, alienation, and peripheral existence felt by the Parsis in India is translated into their immigrant experience in Canada. Though Mistry is settled in Canada, his journey into fiction

transports him back to India where in remembering the past, he combines different memories to present a whole picture. For Mistry, memory collapses the distance in time and space, enabling him to juxtapose his inside /outside position as a Parsi: he writes about India as an outsider but with an insider's view; concurrently, he describes the Canadian experience as an outsider despite living for decades in Canada. He achieves this duality by mingling his memories with both his past and his present. This unique blend of positionality and perspectives accords his fiction a universal quality because it enables him to change situations and characters to fit a broader human perspective. He selects bits and pieces from his past to create his stories, themes, characters, and experiences which revolve around the particularizing of the Parsi community.

Moreover, Mistry shows in his first set of stories, *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, that memory of home can also provide some form of stability and order that is missing in the dynamic adopted society. The eleven stories set in an apartment building in Bombay bring to life the daily activities of middle-class Parsis and trace the journey of some of the characters to Canada and show how they come to terms with the new life in the West. As we have seen in chapter one, the Parsis lead a secluded life in postcolonial India, thanks to their closeness to the colonizers. They were the favoured community during the colonial era because of their isolated existence and willingness to Westernize. But in postcolonial India, their status is downgraded as there is little tolerance for their elite colonial consciousness. Mistry parallels the alienation of the Parsi community with that of the Indian diaspora's in Canada, especially because they are lumped together as Asian groups. As a Parsi, Mistry challenges the dominant culture in India exactly as he privileges the marginalized groups in the West. In these stories, he portrays with much



affection the insular world with its peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. Taking an insider's view, he presents the outsider's perspective on the community simultaneously. Mistry lovingly introduces us to the rich, complex patterns of life inside Firozsha Baag. In these stories, he has created multifarious characters representing without harsh censure typical mannerisms and character traits through which he informs us about the interactions in the community: there is Jaakaylee, the ayah visited by a ghost, whose behaviour is typically that of an uneducated person; Najamai, the only owner of a refrigerator in Firozsha Baag, whose generosity in sharing her fridge also provides her with chances to gossip; Rustomji the Curmudgeon is ill-tempered and stays aloof; and Kersi, the young boy whose life threads through the book and who narrates the final story as an adult in Toronto provides us with multiple perspectives on his generation.

Similarly, as a knowledgeable Parsi, when Mistry is recapturing with understanding and warmth details about the Zoroastrian religion, the Parsi priests, their customs, their fire-temple, and the Parsi cuisine, he objectively and concomitantly includes the critical way they are perceived by their compatriots. He notes especially their reputation as a diaspora community for testiness and haughty behaviour, which is neither acceptable nor gets any sympathy. In "Auspicious Occasion," the Parsi community is the focus of attention and is portrayed as standing apart from the rest of society. Rustomji, who steps out of Firozsha Baag with a "feeling of resplendence and invincibility," (16) is sprayed with a "generous quantity of sticky, vicious, dark red stuff [...] the squirt of tobacco juice... (17) from the mouth of a passenger in the Bombay bus. Rustomji reacts to this incident furiously with a barrage of foul-mouthed bickering: "Filthy son of a whore! Shameless animal — spitting *paan*<sup>13</sup> from the bus! Smash your

face I will, you pimp...” To this outburst the crowd reacts with customary mirth (since the Parsis are perceived as eccentrics): “*Bawaji*<sup>14</sup>, *bawaji*, *dugli*<sup>15</sup> looks very nice now, red and white and, just like in technicolor...” (17). Rustomji in his anger and irritation responds with contemptuousness, berating the crowd “*Arré*<sup>16</sup> you sisterfucking *ghatis*<sup>17</sup>, what are you laughing for? Have you no shame? *Saala chootia*<sup>18</sup> spat paan on my *dugli* and you think that is fun?” The crowd’s light hearted teasing turns into an aggressive threat: “*Arré* who does he think he is, abusing us, giving us such bad-bad *ghali*<sup>19</sup>? [...] we’ll break all your bones [...] Beat up the bloody *bawaji*” (17). People start jostling Rustomji while they pluck his headgear and tug the bows of his *dugli*. Noticing that the tables have turned, he changes his attitude. His arrogance vanishes and Rustomji resorts to antics by dislodging his dentures and urging the crowd to let an old man go. Seeing the “collapsed mouth and flapping lips appeased everyone. A general tittering spread through the assembly. Rustomji the clown was triumphant” (18) and the crowd left him alone.

Mistry has depicted two important dynamics in the diaspora community through this incident: first, the arrogance of the Parsi gentleman isolates him in mainstream society, and second, the perception that the non-Parsis have of Parsis determines their interaction. The crowd is taking pleasure in Rustomji’s predicament in a light-hearted manner but is not prepared to tolerate his condescending behaviour. They let him go when he “restored to himself the harmlessness of the original entertaining spectacle” (18) because that is how the Parsis are stereotyped. Mistry indicates that as long as the Parsis are high-handed and conceited they will have to remain distant and reserved because their superiority is not acceptable to the rest of society, or like Rustomji, they too will not feel

as glorious and invincible by the end of the day, suggesting that positive interaction with the host culture can bridge the gap between them, and get rid of the stereotyping of the Parsi diaspora community.

Mistry's warm yet critical recollection of his Bombay Parsi world is evident in his portrayal of the community's superiority complex and intolerance of the Indian way of life. The interactions between their community and others are limited to a minimal level to maintain a discreet distance. Mistry perceives this as a barrier to fostering a better relationship with the larger society, as a result isolating the Parsi diaspora even further. In "One Sunday," Mistry introduces us to Tar Gully life neighbouring Firozsha Baag, whose inhabitants are perceived as "those satanic animals and fiends of Tar Gully" (31) by the Baag residents. The evocation of the Tar Gully atmosphere with its "*ghatis*" is the counterpoint to the sophisticated life in the Baag where Tehmina hears "the strains of 'The Blue Danube.' [...] Strauss!" (32). One resident of Tar Gully, Francis, the odd-job man, employed as a delivery boy by the furniture store near Firozsha Baag, when laid-off, does petty jobs for the Baag's residents so that he would not starve. Except for Kersi, the inhabitants of Firozsha Baag treat Francis with suspicion. When Tehmina encounters Francis in the hallway, he is seeking Najamai to ask for work - Tehmina is rude, bossy, and offensive, calling Francis an "idiot" (27) and "rascal" (31) for no particular reason. Francis, however, does not respond. He is courteous and always wears a smile. Francis does not have the money to buy food. As a result, the hungry Francis stole eighty rupees from Najamai, when she was out on a Sunday to visit her sister in Bandra. On her return in the darkness of night, she encounters a thief in her apartment, who turns out to be Francis. He is chased by Kersi and Percy, two boys from the complex, with a cricket bat

into Tar Gully where the “*Matka*<sup>20</sup> waiting patrons” galvanize “without delay to punch him.[...] Then the others arrived and joined in the pounding” (36). The boys cannot bear the roughing up and take him to the Baag where Najamai chuckles to see the boys with their big bats, thinking “How silly they looked. Going after poor Francis with their big bats! As if he would ever have hurt them” (38). Najamai is aware of Francis’s temperament and does not deem him harmful, yet gives him up to the police. Thus we see how Najamai’s Sunday outing caused quite a flutter in the peaceful and safe environment of the Baag. In this detailed description, one notes two perceptions in Mistry’s portrayal of his community: the over-reaction of the community to Francis’s act of thieving as a result of their paranoia about Tar Gully residents, and the “enclave” lives of Parsis that distances the community from other sections of society, causing misconceptions about each other. The gentle and humane bearing of the Parsis is obscured by their mistrust of other communities. As a diaspora writer, on the one hand, Mistry is directing his attention towards the expatriates who tend to live in enclaves like the Parsis, and on the other hand, from a different perspective, juxtaposes them with the marginalized Francis, whom he portrays with understanding rather than with censure.

Looking back at his past, Mistry embraces the Parsi community’s alienation from the dominant culture and sees its secluded existence as a paradigm of his diasporic sensibility. Wherever and whenever two distinct cultures meet, a tension is created by their differences, resulting in misunderstandings. In the case of the Parsis, it is a historical fact that their disinterest in assimilating is not so much rooted in division, but the result of a schism caused by coercion into giving up their traditions. This gap is never bridged. In fact, it is widened further by Westernizing. The Parsis view the Indian

society with scorn and contempt as it lacks the positive Western values defined as well-mannered behaviour and practised discipline. Mistry portrays this awareness in “Auspicious Occasion” in Rustomji’s arrogant behaviour towards the local populace, calling them “Ghatis” and hurling insults at them. In the Parsi mind, the etiquette and niceties that are social conventions of Western society are not known to Indians in general but restricted to the few influenced by Western education. The Parsis by and large feel that they are exposed to the style and grace of the educated milieu. Mistry keeps this background in mind when he recollects his community’s historical memory, and relates the Parsi attitude, critiquing its arrogance. Mistry has recorded this phenomenon with tolerant humour and wit even though he is casting aspersions on the community’s attitude in “The Ghost of Firozsha Baag,” in which the life of its residents is observed from an outsider’s point of view. The Goan Ayah, a devout Catholic, is the narrator, who relates the happenings in her life at the Baag. We get to sample the language and thoughts of a simple, honest, and uneducated person whose background and unsophisticated upbringing are all displayed through her narration.

The prejudices and pretences of the Parsi masters are also exposed in their interactions with her. In her typical dialect, she complains about the way she is treated:

Now it has been forty-nine years in this house as ayah, believe or don’t believe. Forty-nine years in Firozsha Baag’s B Block and they still don’t say my name right. Is it so difficult to say Jacqueline? But they always say, Jaakaylee. Or worse, Jaakyl. (44)

She recalls how in her younger days she was physically more able and now she tires, yet she has to do all her work manually; she is not given the machine to grind the spices:

My breath was coming fast fast. Fast-fast, like it does nowadays when I grind curry *masala* on the stone. Jaakaylee, my *bai* calls out, Jaakaylee, is the *masala* ready? Thinks, sixty-three-year-old ayah can make *masala* as quick as she used to when she was fifteen. Yes fifteen. The day after my fourteenth birthday I came by bus from Goa to Bombay [...] (44)

Ayah too is a member of the diaspora not belonging to Bombay and is marginalized in the Baag community. This simple soul believes in ghosts, and once a week, on Fridays, one comes to visit her. The ghost affair takes a bizarre, yet amusing twist when Jaakaylee is mistaken for a ghost by her employer, Bai. On a cold night, Ayah covers herself with a white sheet and goes out on the balcony. She is noticed by Bai and her husband returning home around 2 a.m. and mistaken for a ghost. Since then all of Firozsha Baag starts to believe in the *bhoot*.<sup>21</sup> As long as it was ayah's problem the existence of the ghost is considered a joke, but now the situation turns serious. Soon *Dustoorji*<sup>22</sup> is summoned to say special prayers and ayah has to leave when the prayers are being recited because "Parsi prayers are so powerful, only a Parsi can listen to them. Everyone can be badly damaged inside their soul if they listen" (54).

Mistry has revealed through this story how his community stands apart in their practices and beliefs, how they like to keep their identity intact, and how they manage to keep their prejudices alive as a result of their seclusion. As for Ayah, she faces the same predicament that is a reality of immigrant life. Through ayah's viewpoint, he displays the newly acquired perception of his community as an outsider. In creating his stories, Mistry is revisioning his memories to present truths about his homeland as his affectionate recollection leads him to see it. He envisages his community along with

their passions, their fears, and their betrayals in a witty and poignant manner. These intertwining stories weave a finely textured mosaic of lives and exemplify a world poised between the old and the new. Furthermore, in recapturing the memories of his immediate Parsi community left behind, he translates the past to fit into the present situation.

We see romantic memory function in Mistry's writing to retrieve the past in nostalgic ways in the story entitled "Of White Hairs and Cricket." Mistry reconstructs a Sunday with some reminiscences from childhood. The story is a recollection in which the narrator, a fourteen-year-old boy, remembers his father, mother, and grandmother "*Mamaiji*." He interacts with them in various ways through bits and pieces of information that he can recall, while he is busy "uprooting the sign posts of mortality" (107), that is, his father's white hair. Mistry conveys a sense of longing and loss for things left behind when, at the end of the story, the narrator voices his feelings passionately:

I wanted to cry [...] for *Mamaiji* and her tired, darkened eyes spinning thread for the *kustis*, and for Mummy growing old in the dingy kitchen smelling of kerosene [...] I wanted to weep for myself, for not being able to hug Daddy when I wanted to, and for not ever saying thank you for cricket in the morning, and pigeons and bicycles and dreams; and for all the white hairs that I was powerless to stop. (120)

These are not only memories but thoughts recollected with agony, pain, hopelessness, and misery. The story reflects the desperation and helplessness that the distancing from family over a period of time can induce, especially when one chooses to leave the homeland behind. This kind of nostalgia is only experienced when the past stings with merciless cruelty, reaffirming the uprootedness of exile. Mistry captures the emotion

with characteristic poise, displaying controlled feeling and heartfelt attachment to relationships. He portrays memory in “One Sunday,” with a touch of nostalgia. Tehmina becomes nostalgic when she hears “the strains of ‘The Blue Danube.’[...] Strauss!” Here the romantic memories spoken about are of a different sort: “The music reminded her of a time when the world was a simpler, better place to live in” (32), memories are tinged with a sense of nostalgia and recollection of a “simpler” and “better” past. Mistry thus utilizes memory to depict different kinds of attitude towards the past to show the difference and uniqueness of culture and values.

In his novels, too, Mistry employs nostalgic memory, trying to satiate his longing and yearning for the past left behind in his homeland. In *Such A Long Journey*, he recreates an essentially admirable protagonist, Gustad Noble, a kindly, and honourable man who scrapes along on the salary of a bank clerk while coping with recalcitrant sons, an ailing daughter, senseless neighbours, and his own sorrow over lost loved ones. Gustad’s life is a journey to recuperate the lost years. Mistry externalizes his longing in Gustad’s character since he too is living his life, remembering a past that was full of happy memories. The Nobles were once a well-to-do family, who could afford vacations on hill stations with the luxury of servants, Bournvita drinks for relaxing, and mosquito nets to keep the insects from disturbing their sleep. Gustad recalls the joyous days spent along with his family, especially, his mother:

That picture of my mother – locked away for ever in my mind; my mother through the white, diaphanous mosquito net, saying goodnight-Godbleesyou, smiling, soft and evanescent, floating before my sleepy eyes, floating for ever with her eyes so gentle and kind.” (242)



The nostalgic tone is dominant here. The passage largely deals with childhood memories, in which the child associates the mother with comfort and stability.

Gustad even remembers the food and flavours that were associated with this blissful time: “There had never been cornflakes as delicious as the ones he ate;” there was the special pudding “moulded from sugar and gelatine” (242). Food becomes another feature that provides comfort and satisfaction. Mistry nostalgically dwells on it perhaps indicating his own longing for it and for the comfort it offers to one far from home. But immediately Mistry reminds us, through the voice of the narrator that recollections can be hazy because the past that is remembered is always connected with some dominant fact or experience. As Lowenthal puts it, we “recall only a small fraction of what has impinged on us” (204); therefore it can be surmised that when authors use it to recreate their imaginary homelands it is only a selective past that is summoned. Memory retrieval diverges from the original experience; memory selects only the prominent facts and tends to blur the details, as Mistry shows in Gustad’s recollection:

But what pudding was it that night? Lemon? No, it was pineapple. Or maybe caramel? Perhaps. Even memories do not stay in tact for ever. Have to be careful, scrupulous, in dealing with them. (243)

Mistry illustrates here that if memory alone is relied upon, it can become disruptive, because as a tool it can never produce the quintessence of reality or actuality; it can be representative of a partial truth recollected from the past and always tinged with imagination. Nevertheless, in closing the gap of time and space, nostalgia provides a cure for the expatriate’s anxieties; simultaneously, the writer’s indulgence in nostalgia can be relaxing and rewarding because it provides impetus to create fictional worlds in

the absence of actual ones as illustrated in Gustad's experience (and Mistry's) in *Such A Long Journey*.

Mistry's fictional world is a world of romantic memories of his homeland, but his expatriation has provided him with distance, both temporal and spatial, and he tries to reflect upon his memories detachedly, as we have noted above. In *Such A Long Journey*, he opens the window of memory to broaden the view to include the larger picture of India not just the Parsi community: its corrupt politics, its miserable economic problems, and its unjust social disparities. All these are presented along with the disastrous consequences accompanying the social maladies. Sorting through his landscape of memory, he selects the era of the 1960s and 1970s for the novel's temporal setting. Here he traces the journey from past to present and attempts to address issues that divide individuals from the community, to create borders and isolate them from the realities of the world. Mistry tries to tear down the walls to enable the past and present to interact in order to make a smooth transition towards a new future – a new identity. In a constantly changing world, the social identity feels threatened by the dominant culture; the past having fixity seems a safe refuge, and with the help of memories the personal identity is stabilized. In such circumstances even insignificant matters connected with identity and familiarity of place give comfort and a sense of belonging.

This feeling is voiced by Dinshawji, a friend of Gustad Noble when they are discussing the changed names of Bombay streets:

Names are important I grew up on Lamington Road. But it has disappeared, in its place is Dadasaheb Bhandkhamkar Marg. My school was on Carnac Road. Now suddenly it's on Lokmanya Tilak Marg. [...] My whole life I have come to work

at Flora Fountain. And one day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names? Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with all these new names? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out, just like that. (74)

What Mistry bemoans here is not the loss of old names but the security and reassurance of a personal world that is settled and familiar and now is erased and absent. Thus, without the customary identifications of familiar things, life feels interrupted and estranged especially for a displaced individual.

Mistry uses nostalgia to present identity in relation to resisting loss. He creates, as we have noted, characters given to romantic memories. He focuses on Gustad Noble as one who opposes change, which becomes a detrimental quality when taken to obsessive limits. His fixated attitude perceives any change in the established practices as a drastic and appalling shift in values. Even the feel of a fountain pen evokes nostalgia for his childhood world and the lack of its use is considered an irretrievable loss. No one uses the fountain pen any more:

This was the bloody problem with education. In the name of progress they discarded seemingly unimportant things, without knowing that what they were chucking out the window of modernity was tradition. And if tradition was lost, then the loss of respect for those who respected and loved tradition always followed. (61)

To envision the loss of one value leading to the collapse of the old system is unproductive. Gustad's limited understanding foresees the lack of respect threatening all authority, and according to him the old familiar life vanishes, being replaced by chaos

and uncertainty. Therefore, any change is seen as a threat, not only to personal identity but to cultural values too. Mistry demonstrates the futility of resisting change in one's life. In an interview in *Wasafiri*, talking to Robert McLay, he explains how tradition and the past can augment the present, depending on one's perception of it. He states, "there is a great difference between remembering the past which is creative and life enhancing and trying to preserve it which is detrimental and debilitating"(17). In Gustad's character, he manifests how nostalgia can be disadvantageous as it prevents one from forging ahead by resisting change in life.

Another facet that Mistry tries to explore in Gustad's journey is that a constant attachment to romantic memory can be counterproductive as it distances the individual from present reality. Gustad erects walls around him to hedge him in from the world and his family, as he constructs his world in imagination and memories of his past life. His son Sohrab has angered him by not fulfilling his expectations and going to the school of technology. Instead he opts out to become an artist. Gustad reacts to this by saying: "Throwing away his future without reason. What have I not done for him, tell me? [...]" And if he cannot show respect at least, I can kick him [...] Out of my house, out of my life!" (52). He shuts his son out of his life to show his disgust and displeasure, hence building a barrier in the father-son relationship. Even when it comes to keeping pace with reality he is not willing to open up his mind. He has not removed the blackout paper tacked to the window nine years earlier, which he had put up during the war with China. His insistence on keeping the windows covered indicates the blockage his mind has towards accepting reality, as though his obstructing the entrance of light, a symbolic act, is restricting the admittance of wisdom and understanding.

Mistry, writing in isolation in Canada, uses the wall surrounding the apartment compound in Bombay as a metaphor for isolation; the wall limits access to the outside world. To his diaspora perception, the wall separating the street from the apartment compound represents a refuge from the Hindu majority. The wall becomes a border to separate the Parsis from the rest of the people because they choose to cling to their collective memory as a community. Each day Gustad prays, within the walls sheltered from the curious stares of the passersby. To avoid the stench of urine and the nuisance of mosquito breeding, he hires a painter to draw images of gods and goddess, saints, and places of worship of different religions of the world, which gives him respite from the misery of foul smell and unhealthy living. “But the wall is neither as holy nor as ecumenical as it first appears,” according to David Williams’s analysis, “since its saintly face masks a more divisive purpose: to preserve the Parsi in his self-sameness and hierarchical privilege, and to protect the threat of difference, of Otherness of itself” (60).

In Mistry’s romantic perception, wall has a dual meaning: on the outside it speaks of universal brotherhood, while on the inside it stands for social segregation. But since all meaning is a construct it is subject to constant revision, thus, the wall has to come down along with all its signification and connotations. Gustad has to readjust his conviction, now that the wall will be razed. His whole world seems to be in chaos, and for “the briefest of moments he felt the impending loss cut deeply, through memory and time; the collapse of the wall would wreck the past and the future. Helpless amid the noise and turmoil, he searched for words” (329) but is unable to find any consolation. All that follows is more confusion; in the frenzy of agitation and in the excitement of defending the wall, Tehmul, the idiot of the Khodadad building, loses his life. The

sudden force of activity explodes the pent up feelings within Gustad and the death of innocent Tehmul snaps him out of his isolated inactivity. Not only does the social and cultural wall collapse for him, but the partition within the family is also removed. Once he is alone with Tehmul's body, he "closed his eyes and began to pray softly. He recited the Yatha Varyo, five times, and Ashem Vahoo, three times [...] He kept his eyes closed and started a second cycle of prayer. Tears began to well in his closed eyes. His voice was soft and steady [...] as the tears ran down his cheeks" (337). As though the emotions held back for thirty years had broken the limits of forbearance and burst forth in a flood. At the death of his mother, Mistry says of him nostalgically, Gustad had been unable to shed a single tear, because seeing his father broken and weak he had resolved "to himself, then and there, that he would never indulge in tears – not before anyone, nor in private, no matter what suffering or sorrow fell upon his shoulders; tears were useless, the weakness of women, and of men who allowed themselves to be broken" (101). But the drastic events confronting him weakened Gustad's resolve: "the salt water of his eyes [was] as much for himself as for Tehmul. And for Dinshawji, for Pappa and Mamma, for Grandpa and Grandma, all who had had to wait for so long" (337). Mistry's portrayal here verges on the sentimental.

In weeping for his loved ones, Mistry shows, Gustad cleanses his mind along with his heart and his eyes open to accept his own son:

Gustad turned around. He saw his son standing in the doorway, and, each held the other's eyes. Still he sat, gazing upon his son, and Sohrab waited motionless in the doorway, till at last Gustad got to his feet slowly. Then he went up and put his arms around him. "Yes," said Gustad, running his bloodstained fingers once

through Shorab's hair, "Yes," he said, "yes" and hugged him tightly once more."

(337)

The melting of barriers between them is realized as a result of the violence that reality has projected in Gustad's awareness. Again, Mistry has to rein in sentimentality. The wall separating time is also erased as Gustad embraces his present realities. He overcomes his stubbornness to block out the wisdom of time and in a symbolic gesture "stood up on the chair and pulled at the paper covering the ventilators." (339). Nilufer Bharucha has this interpretation of the uncovering of the ventilators:

This letting in of the light can be seen as a metaphor for the letting in of Indian reality into the cocooned isolation of the Parsi world. The tearing down of the blackout sheets could also signal a readiness on the part of the Parsis to let the Iranian past go and let "new melodies break forth from the heart; and where the /old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders". (63)

Mistry too is trying to open himself to the reality of the new world he inhabits and let go his isolation and alienation just like he does with Gustad. He wants to use his romantic memory to improve his present life with the richness of nostalgia, instead of letting it hold him back in the name of tradition and community.

Mistry underscores that Gustad tries to cling to his identity and tradition either through recollections of past romantic memories or restricting active interaction with the present. These revived memories protect him from the isolation of society and serve to ease his alienated discomfort with his son Sohrab and his estranged friend Major Jimmy Bilimoria. The tenebrous memories made tangible with the furniture he "gathered comfortingly about him [...] stood like parentheses around his entire life, the sentinels of

his sanity” (6), isolated him even further from his own reality, “for darkness made everything seem clear and well ordered” (6). With the wall torn down and the covering taken off the windows, the freshness of the present and the light of the future can penetrate his life, guiding Gustad’s journey towards a brighter destination.

In his romantic portrayal of Gustad, Mistry is informing us that the journey of diasporic writing needs the same direction and future as long as we are prepared to remove the covers of darkness and not construct barriers between the past and present. Rooted in one culture, one should not be hampered by prejudices and inhibitions to reinvent a new self and lead a more open and accommodating life. Mistry has made a positive paradigm of Gustad’s life for the future of diaspora communities. Memories should be a vehicle to advance and enhance the quality of present life, rather than deter progress and be regressive. As discussed earlier, the purpose of memory is to bridge the gap between time and space and open up better venues for the future in order to keep the displaced individual from fragmenting and disintegrating into confusion and rootlessness. The stability and confidence that homeland provides is essential for isolated persons so that a sense of distinct identity is retained, as only this fact can help diaspora figures like Gustad reinvent a new identity with a double consciousness.

*Such A Long Journey* testifies that romantic memory has a powerful role to play in the awareness of the diaspora writer. His preoccupation with homeland and memory reiterates the need of the uprooted immigrant to keep in touch with his roots. Even though the diaspora writer is living in an imagined community and creating imaginary homelands, the lived past is an intimate reality and needs to be retained to function in an uncertain and fluid world. Memories become “the sentinels of his sanity” (6), as



Gustad's life proves. The image of the "frightened moth [who] flew out and circled the room" (339) is very much the predicament of the immigrant person especially one coming from the darkness of superstition (as represented in the characters of Miss Kutpitia and Dilnavaz, Gustad's wife) and what Mistry calls "a country stuck in the nineteenth century" (155). Through Mistry's reconstruction of Gustad's life story, we get to look into the Parsi world, while at the same time, are asked to look out of insular often self-perceived superior worlds that diaspora individuals live in, just like Gustad's limiting world.

In his latest novel *Family Matters*, Mistry's memory of his Bombay Parsi community is still romantic but the nostalgic tone is much more tempered by socio-political and economic realities. The story, as he maintains in various interviews, is once again set in Bombay but in the mid-1990s; and, as with the earlier novels, he traces the legends, myths, and present anxieties of India's dwindling Parsi community. To situate this novel as an exercise in memory retrieval is a straightforward task as we discover early in the novel that Mistry juxtaposes the past and present by using italics to narrate the protagonist's recollection of his past as opposed to his present life and reality. Mistry employs memory as a device to unfold the past of the characters, granting it a permeating and expansive scope to function on the movement of the narrative.

In *Family Matters*, the internal tensions within the Parsi community and the domestic conflicts of a particular Parsi family form overlapping narratives, but this time Mistry's canvas is much more intimate, dealing with a single Parsi clan living on the edge of the middle-class Bombay society. *Family Matters* is a compelling and persuasive testimony to the importance of memories in a family's history and as such it tends to be

nostalgic and romanticized. In the prime of his life, Nariman Vakeel, the central character, was compelled by his parents and their orthodox Parsi circle to give up the woman he loved, Lucy a non-Parsi Goan, and marry the more appropriate Yasmin, a widow with two children, Jal and Coomy. Mistry, expertly intersperses Nariman's tortured remembrances of a forbidden love and its inescapable consequences, and the dilemmas he has to face as the demons of memory haunt him in his old age. Nariman tries to compromise with his fate but a loveless marriage blights him for decades and Lucy's perpetual presence in his thoughts and on the pavement under his window torments him, making him weak in his resolve to ignore her existence, especially because, "*Lucy on the footpath brought back the past with a force that left him shaken ... Lucy, standing motionless, her face turned towards his window, had accomplished what he had dreaded -- filled him with a torrent of memories from their early days together*" (61). This austere image is overwrought with remorse and romance. Mistry mingles the romantic memory with the harsh reality of Nariman's existence which in the novel is presented as a comprehensive memory for the seventy-nine year old Nariman struggling to keep his sanity.

Mistry weaves in layers of memory shading each with a different emotional response. He employs memory to function with a dual objective: romantic memory satisfies the yearning and longing of loss, and realistic memory haunts and torments exposing the painful emptiness of defeat. But it is the romantic that is predominant. Nariman's romantic recollections of Lucy color his world with happiness. The narrator describes Nariman's nostalgic reminisces, stating "*he and Lucy went for a stroll along the Cuffe Parade. [...] The sea was rough, the high wind making it difficult to talk as it*

*whipped their voices and hair and clothes. [...] He brought a strand of jasmine [...] wrapping them round her wrist. He raised it to sniff the fragrance. "Jasmine wrist and rose-petal hand," he said"* (245). This picture of enchantment and tenderness glorifies the past for Nariman giving him emotional sustenance in his lonely and painful present. Alternatively, Mistry utilizes memory to chart the effects of religious bigotry and rigid traditionalism as they work their insidious way through generations of a family. Mistry shows how the distortion of the religious impulse into an instrument of prejudice and exclusion propels the novel and its characters, influencing their lives.

Nariman is shown significantly affected by this attitude; he is torn between his love and his family's bigotry. He pleads with his father to consider meeting Lucy but elicits only a negative response from him: *"His father said she might be a wonderful person, as gracious and charming as the Queen of England, but she was still unsuitable for his son because she was not a Zoroastrian, case closed"* (120). Later in the novel, Nariman's son-in-law Yezad's "fervent embrace of religion" (437) converts him into a religious bigot too, and his son, Murad, like his grandfather Nariman, has to face the fury of his father's prejudices. His girlfriend Anjali is a non-Parsi, and thus disapproved by Yezad for marriage with his son "Because we are a pure race, a unique contribution to this planet, and mixed marriages will destroy that" (452). His prejudice is reflected in the remarks he makes about Anjali's behaviour when he comes across the couple kissing "I suggest you consider what your Maharashtrian friend was doing with you under the stairwell. A Parsi girl would never behave in such a way" (453). Mistry sheds light on how Parsi fundamentalism wrecks the family's harmony and peace ravaging the lives of people with misery and torment. He grants memory a significant and prominent role by

using it to portray the frailties of his community and utilizes it to indulge nostalgically in glorifying the past.

The discourse on memory in this chapter argues that in much of Mistry's diaspora writing, the diaspora sensibility of reaching towards the homeland is reconstructed in an imaginary world by employing memory to idealize rather than censure the world left behind. Mistry weaves memory as aspects of idealizing and romanticizing events and situations in his narratives to realize a world that is his own reality, preserving and reconstructing his Parsi community in his writing. Memory functions with a primary purpose of bringing out the multifarious facets of a complex and thriving world, providing it shades of romantic recollections rather than harsh truths of social inequalities. The Parsi community is specifically privileged because Mistry identifies with it and the diaspora sensibilities, fears, and anxieties are translated with ease; it is a situation that corresponds with the author's experience.

Although memory provides an outlet for the diaspora writer to channel his thoughts and feelings, it cannot eliminate the dilemma that living between worlds creates. The diaspora writer, caught between two worlds, questions his/her own truths and awarenesses, creating ambivalence in his/her present perspective of reality. Preoccupation with home is a result of the double consciousness of the diasporic writer and therefore, ambivalence also becomes part of the awareness. The diasporic writer has to deal with the enigma of displacement and resettlement in a new society and has to find a balance in order to negotiate his new existence. This new-found space abounds in memories that are full of experiences that the writer both idealizes and censures.

Mistry's ambivalent response to India and Canada in his fiction is the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Mistry's Ambivalence: Censure Counterpointing Nostalgia

Mistry the diaspora writer captures the quintessential hybrid experience of the immigrant. "If you have a cupboard with a certain amount of space in it, then you have to arrange your belongings in that cupboard the best way you can, given the space, but if you buy a new cupboard you have more space."<sup>23</sup> These are Mistry's views about the presence of two cultures in his texts: the old Indian and the new Canadian cultures. Belonging to the diaspora, he has established a niche in the literary sphere by imbuing his fictional discourse with an ambivalent sensibility to arrange the two metaphorical cupboards, which he has done simultaneously. In *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, as we shall see, there is evidence of this ambivalence in characters like Kersi, Sarosh, and Jamshed, through whom Mistry negotiates the expatriate experience of balancing the dual consciousness and of realizing a new way of perceiving things in the host country. In idealistic recollections, Mistry makes them use their nostalgia to recapitulate the finer side of life left behind. Simultaneously, we witness Mistry employing memory to retrieve the ugly realities of life that were a living fact of India; he refers to the historical situation and fictionalizes it into a critical exposé of the corrupt system prevalent there. He utilizes his diaspora sensibility to reconstruct objectively the flaws and failings of the system, especially since he belonged to the diaspora in India, too. When a writer expresses disparate responses in his writing, the question about how and why this ambivalence appears in the writer's perception comes to mind. To understand this

dichotomy one has to look into the workings of the diaspora sensibility and factors that have likely determined these reactions.

The diaspora individual – like any individual – is shaped by society. Living culture is never fixed; it involves a constant reinterpretation of the present in relation to the past simultaneously; consequently, meaning can shift and practices can take on different forms. Persons who are part of a diaspora rely on a continuous exchange between memory and present experience; these factors play an important part in shaping their identity. There are two forces at work in their consciousness that guides their identification: belonging to their place of origin, and adapting to their country of residence. The specific identity that results from this interaction of memory construction and present experience is deeply bifurcated and leads to an ambivalent consciousness. We situate Mistry in this milieu in which he is constantly aware of two worlds, and has to mediate between both, in order to evolve a new hybrid sensitivity. His ambivalence arises from conflicts revolving around the new dominant cultural system and the marginalized status of being an immigrant. This chapter discusses the ambivalence present in Mistry's texts, sheds light on how this ambivalent which both idealize and censure elements in both cultures.

Mistry's art is informed largely by his hybridity. Hybridity and identity are linked in diaspora cultures. Hall suggests that there are primarily two different ways that one can think about identity: identity as *being* (which offers a sense of unity and commonality) and identity as *becoming* (or a process of identification, which shows the discontinuity in our identity formation).<sup>24</sup> Both means are inseparable in the formation of new individual identities. Although identity is embedded in shared cultural

experiences, it is also based upon individuality. Hall points out that identities are “becoming” something new as they interact with and are influenced by other cultures. Migration is one site where the sense of “home” and “identity” has been disrupted and becomes linked to culture, and is explicitly constituted by cultural difference. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie explains the effects of migration:

The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human beings: people who root themselves in ideas rather than in places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves - because they are so defined by others - by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. (124-25)

The “new types of human beings” are the object of both of collective memory and of desire and attachment, which is constitutive of diasporas. The space between “what they were” and “where they find themselves” is attended with adjustment, transformation, and balancing – successively posing a cumbrous challenge for them to fully integrate or worse, assimilate, into mainstream society. There is, of course, their customary commitment to ancestral home and devotion to traditional values versus their permanent racial visibility making them feel ostracized in the place “where they find themselves.” Orientation towards the “homeland” tends to magnify, not reduce, the problem of identity as it articulates and confirms a position of subordination in relation to Western hegemony, on the one hand, and of cultural domination, of otherness, on the other. This brings us to the idea of difference as understood in ethnic representation. Ethnic identity can be empowering as well as weakening, because the strength one feels as part of an



homogenous group can also confirm one's minority status in the dominant culture. And, it tends to become an affirmation of otherness. The identification with an imagined place of belonging is also a sign of, and a cumulative surrender to, a condition of actual marginalization.

People occupying this marginalized place have complexity and flexibility of spirit to adapt to hybrid cultural forms and create cultural syncretism. They can gain duality of perception or a double consciousness, which gives them the objectivity to privilege neither country but construct a balance between both, the homeland and the host country. This in-between space can be converted into a space of possibilities that enable the diaspora writer's creativity. Rushdie expresses the same ideas when he says, "It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained" (17).

Thus, for the immigrant writer, viable avenues must be forged, negotiated, and articulated. The notion of ethnicity for the expatriate is no longer dependent only upon tradition or values rooted in one culture because the new "identity" comes from constantly renegotiating with experiences and reinventing oneself. . Diaspora identification with to certain ethnic groups can be seen as reassertions of "difference," which are represented through their cultures and traditions of origins. So, when a diaspora writer lifts his pen it is to write about traditions, customs, and histories of the homeland. Likewise, for Hall displacement initiates creative ways of expressing these in cultural production. As he states in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora,"

The diaspora experience [...] is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of

“identity” which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.

Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (235)

For Hall, diaspora hybridity exhibits that identities are not essentially manifested in ethnicity or culture but are located in history and culture accessed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth. Identities cannot therefore be preserved through acculturation, assimilation, pluralism, and multiculturalism. However, Hall is aware that people are compelled to question the “truth” and “certainty” of identity and culture. Accordingly, the diaspora writer questions his own truth and awareness creating ambivalence in the present perspective of reality.

Bhabha’s theory of cultural hybridity acknowledges that all cultural relations are ambivalent, subversive, transgressive and hybrid. It is important to emphasize that hybridity does not determine ethnic or racial forms of “biculturalism.” In Bhabha’s view, the hybrid is not a thing, but a process.<sup>25</sup> Hybrid renditions are thus an encounter with innovation that do not conform to one thing or another but are an amalgamation of difference and duality. Hence, the diaspora writer writes from the margin to claim a voice of resistance to essentialist narratives, at the same time, occupies a new hybrid space, although this positioning is mediated by ambivalence.

Hybridity is basically located in a marginal site, the unfixed space in-between the location of resistance and intervention in hegemonic narratives of race and culture.

Bhabha mentions in *Nation and Narration*, the significance of the “turning of boundaries and limits into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated” (4) and postulates that the critical constituent of this

third space is ambivalence – the avoidance of decisiveness or closure, and the idea of an awareness holding its opposite within. For him, these incomplete spaces are the ambivalent, “in-between” spaces of the margins that allow for intervention and resistance.<sup>26</sup> To review Mistry’s fiction from this perspective provides a better insight into his ambivalence towards India, especially as he idealizes and vilifies simultaneously. Through his juxtaposition of people as “objects” of the myth of the nation, and as “subjects” of his own myth (story), Mistry intervenes in the national narrative. The possibility of intervention emerges in-between the shift from the confined, cultural space (homogenous) to an abstract space (transnational). Thus, Bhabha’s emphasis on the contravening position of the liminal (occupying a position on, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold), relies on distancing away from the social conditions of actual borders and spaces.<sup>27</sup> Mistry’s fiction testifies aptly to this genre of writing. His portrayal of the Parsi community, as we have seen, validates the inherent nature of that community and as will be discussed his acerbic censure of Indian politics elucidates the character of the nation.

Hybridity contains its past within it. Contemporary approach to the concept ignores this past, focusing on the element of in-betweenness, rather than on the racial theories prevailing within: straddling a problematic position between the East and the West. Though hybridity signals the bringing together of two or more essences of culture, it still works within the framework of a culturally essentialist model of social relations. Diaspora hybridity is a consequence of intercultural penetration allied to a self-reflexive or open-to-the-other-cultures attitude, but is substantially rooted in the homeland. Rushdie has written that “we are all irradiated by history, we are radioactive with history

and politics” (100), and that is true of Mistry’s work – India prevails pervasively.. He “radiates” a sense of politics and history when he writes.

So far we have considered the hybrid inclinations and tendencies that dictate such sensibilities, but Mistry’s creativity demands we go further. The nature of his ambivalence works in a forked manner; he utilizes his duality to access the homeland from bifurcated perspectives. Being an exilic author, he has the advantage of distancing himself objectively, and he manipulates this position, both as an outsider and insider, to manoeuvre constantly back and forth in his journeying to the imaginary homeland. People belonging to ethnic groups, possibly hold diverse and often contradictory points of view as defined by such aspects as nation, religion, ethnicity, gender, and race. They do so for the edification and reassurance of those “outside” of the community, as much as for those isolated “inside” it. The heterogeneity of the dissenting, questioning voice is heard in the voices of people like Mistry, who is both “inside” and “outside” the Orwellian whale. Rushdie’s essay “Outside the Whale,” addresses this issue categorically; he refutes George Orwell’s notion that a whale, a place of refuge, exists. Taking an anti-Orwellian political stand, he says, “works of art, even works of entertainment, do not come into being in a social and political vacuum; and that the way they operate in a society cannot be separated from politics, from history” (92). Orwell’s restrained stance, symbolized by his desire to retreat, like Jonah, to the “safety” of a womblike space “inside” the whale, caters to specific identities. The identity most clearly being exhibited by Orwell is that of the bourgeois English intellectual to maintain a sense of his “community” intact, unthreatened by political, historical, and cultural changes. Rushdie too, reveals his identity as a postcolonial critic speaking on behalf of

the community of the Third World who hastened the demise of colonialism and neocolonialism in their countries. Mistry in his turn represents the diaspora of a globalized world with his dual presentation of his reality. His fiction testifies that the shifting stances he employs achieve diversity and impart a profound insight into the understanding of issues he wants to present. In his short stories, he projects the immigrant perspective – the outsider’s vision – to portray the discomfort of alienation, and awkwardness of assimilation into Canadian society. On the other hand, in his novels he provides an insider’s view of the politics and duplicitous game that politicking plays in the lives of ordinary people with specific reference to India.

Mistry’s fiction subscribes to the question that Rushdie asks about the displaced Indian writer: “What does it mean to be ‘Indian’ outside of India?”(17). The spatial and temporal distance from homeland prompts them to undertake a literary journey back home, where they put together a narrative out of the “shards of memory.” They have to build a new world out of an old culture that they know, “writing from a kind of double perspective: because they [...] are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. [A] stereoscopic vision...” (19). Mistry’s perception of both India and Canada is made profound and complex because it entails examining the past with what Rushdie has called “stereoscopic vision.” The writer’s discontinuity, his separation from home is often the force that enables him to speak concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal. The loss of a past and a home compels the writer to seek that necessarily self-made identity precisely in the gap between his past and his present, between where he used to be and where he now is. Rushdie asserts that

[O]ur identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles. (15)

Mistry intersects past reality with “new angles” and therefore we find his fiction vacillating between the idealized remembering resulting from longing and regret, and a critical viewing, juxtaposing present reality with the flaws of the past world. Mistry articulates the ambivalent space between two cultures; he is engaged in defining a new hybridity. He chronicles times and events to voice the marginalized and to know and accept reality in order to forge ahead into the future. Mistry’s own identity and response to immigrant awareness are evident in stories taken from *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. Elements of ambivalence and the “stereoscopic vision” illuminate Mistry’s diaspora experience in the Canadian stories “Lend Me Your Light,” “Squatter,” and “Swimming Lessons.”

In “Lend Me Your Light,” Mistry deals with the immigrant experience. He narrates the opposition between two friends: Jamshed, who is scornful of native India and soon leaves for America the Promised Land, and Percy, who adamantly refuses to go out of India and is committed to doing social work by helping villagers. The story focuses on the narrator, Percy’s brother Kersi, who becomes a representation of the ambivalent immigrant. His anxiety on embarking on a new future is described with a sense of guilt:

I saw myself as someone out of the Greek tragedy, guilty of the sin of Hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth and paying the price in the burnt-out eyes; I, Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one in Toronto. (179-80)

The blind Tiresias ends up having a double vision.<sup>28</sup> The modern Tiresias is “throbbing between two lives;” on the one hand, he is completely unable to dissociate himself from cultural moorings, while on the other hand he finds the new life attractive enough to emigrate. The Tiresias-like throbbing comes through in the description of a party in Canada. His hybridity sets him apart at the social gathering where he is an extremely “ill at ease” (182) Indo-Canadian. The authentic Indian culture that he is familiar with is replaced by mimicking an “atmosphere” of Indian culture, a re-creation that is superficial and hollow. Kersi notes with alarm a Parsi New Year celebration:

[T]he semblance of a wedding party at Bombay’s Cama Garden ,with its attendant sights and sounds and smells, as we Parsis talked at the top of our voices, embraced heartily, drank heartily, and ate heartily. It was Cama Garden refurbished and modernized, Cama Garden without the cluster of beggars waiting by the entrance gate... (182)

Kersi’s observation points to the fact that he is still attached to the homeland and dwells on the authenticity of the culture even though it is only a reconstruction of his memory.

It could be argued that Mistry is externalizing his attitude in the character of Kersi imbuing him with similar diasporic feelings and sensibilities (given what we know of Mistry’s own experiences).<sup>29</sup> Consequently, Kersi seems more comfortable reminiscing about the good old days he spent with his brother, listening to music or making model

airplanes, or recollecting the vacations to Matheran where “automobiles were prohibited [...] to preserve the pastoral purity of the place and the livelihood of the rickshawallas” (177). He does not forget the concerts of the Bombay Chamber Orchestra, or the charity work done by his brother, who “organized a charitable agency that collected and distributed funds to destitute farmers in a small Maharashtrian village” (177). Kersi’s conflicted position is evident when he returns to Bombay. Upon arrival, his first impression of the place is that it is “brown, weary, and unhappy,” as he is already comparing it to the sight of the landscape he noticed at the stopover in London. He sees the world outside the plane as “lush, everywhere green and hopeful” (186). Earlier in the story, he receives a letter from Jamshed visiting India in which he describes his view of India: “Bombay is horrible. Seems dirtier than ever, and the whole trip just made me sick,” his reaction is one of irritation and anger. He wonders why Jamshed expressed “so much disdain and discontentment even when he was no longer living under those conditions” (181).

Another incident on his visit to India points up his ambivalence. Kersi is unable to catch the bus as his “momentary hesitation” deters him from doing so. In the old days, he “would have been off and running” even if was only to be “hanging from the door rail” (187). He is already an outsider in Bombay; he has reached the point where he feels “a tourist here, and not committed to life in the combat zone” (188). His agreement with Jamshed’s view about Bombay is yet another indicator of his alienation. He admits guiltily: “Bombay seems dirtier than ever. I remembered what Jamshed had written in his letter, and how it had annoyed me, but now I couldn’t help thinking he was right” (187). This reaction elucidates two factors: one, that of the imaginary and static nature of



memory, and, two, that with time reality changes. His ambivalence comes to the forefront as he does not feel Indian in Bombay or Canadian in Toronto. He is straddling two worlds, belonging to neither and feeling alienated in both. He returns to Toronto, unable to resolve the tension; he discovers that he brought back with him “the entire burden of riddles and puzzles, unsolved,” representing the predicament of the hybrid, a space which resists closure. Kersi has to formulate a new hybrid identity for the “whole sorry package was there, not lightened at all” though he was “humbled by the ambiguities and dichotomies confronting” him. It is not easy to come to a conclusion: “The epiphany would have to wait for another time, another trip” (192). Kersi’s dilemma is explained poignantly in Vijay Heble’s understanding of the situation as the “plight of the cultural hybrid: the impossibility of defining immigrant identity exclusively in terms of one’s ancestral past or in terms of one’s ability to assimilate into the new culture” (58). Kersi is thus left “throbbing between two worlds” (192), just like many in the diaspora.

For Mistry and other diaspora writers, hybridity is not an easy balance to achieve since it combines two or more often conflicting cultural traditions, values, and observations. It is not merely the adaptation of extraneous, incongruous habits but a new perception of an entire new way of doing things, which, although it may seem a simple adjustment to make, requires much more effort and time to evolve into regular habits. The complexity of the issue does not end here, because the adjustments that appear uncomplicated and undemanding may be mentally conflicting or physically incompatible, alienating the individual from ingrained cultural practices. Hence, the hybrid experiences an awkward inhibition in accomplishing mundane and regular acts. For someone not exposed to or experiencing these life-changing balancing acts, the alterations may be

trivial pursuits, but for the person reworking his whole life style, it can be extremely daunting. Displacement and relocation are not only physical or geographical but an uprooting from a cultural value system, and cause a social disorientation, leaving the immigrant alienated and lonely in an unknown and strange environment. The obscure, shadowy, uncertain, unclear, and undefined boundaries create the ambivalence which the hybrid deals with constantly.

Mistry explores this precarious balance in "Squatter," through the character of Sarosh, who, as we have seen earlier, is the protagonist of the story. An immigrant in Toronto for nearly ten years, he is "miserable and depressed" (153), as he is unable to relieve himself on the Western style seat, and has to perch "on the top of the toilet, crouching on his haunches" in the Indian style to do so. This daily routine of purgation was not only physically tiring but mentally and psychologically draining. He had promised his friends jocularly, "if I do not become completely Canadian in exactly ten years from the time I land there, then I will come back" (155). Sarosh begins to rethink this promise, because his inability "mildly incommodious" (154) is causing him enough anxiety to consider a return to India. His secret ways of performing his private acts feel very public in Canadian washrooms and his whole identity appears to him as a "presence in the foreign stall" (156). In his awkwardness, he experiences an alienation, which leads him "to detect something malodorous in the air: the presence of xenophobia and hostility" (156) in the social environment of Canada. The isolation that being different creates for the hybrid in him is a result of the attempt to assimilate, and the inability to do so is heightened when he has to do it "in the conventional way" (156). Sarosh thinks that wherever he goes he is "reminded of the ignominy of his way [...] nothing but a failure in

this land – a failure not just in the washrooms of the nation but everywhere” (162). This sense of failure causes him to withdraw from social interactions and to feel detached from the culture that he has so enthusiastically embraced. In this story, Mistry has captured the hybrid’s predicament with clarity and perspicuity. His perceptibility arises from his status as a member of the diaspora, affording a discernment and comprehension that is so precise.

Mistry shows that Sarosh’s ordeal does not end here. Upon his return to Bombay, Sarosh realizes his inability to explain “the real reason” of his return, even to his mother, who had professed to him: “It is better to live in want among your family and friends, who love you and care for you, than to be unhappy surrounded by vacuum cleaners and dishwashers and big shiny cars” (155). A culture grounded in tradition and values is welcoming him back, but he is unable to respond to that warmth. Sarosh has become an outsider both at home and in Toronto. Walking along Marine Drive, he feels a stranger and finds “himself desperately searching for his old place in the pattern of life he had vacated ten years ago” (167). The dilemma of the immigrant is portrayed with astute sensitivity by Mistry in positioning Sarosh between two uncompromising situations and two worlds apart. Unlike Jamshed, who willingly assimilates, and Kersi, who manages to find a precarious ambivalent balance, Sarosh is left suspended in-between: as the “other pattern was never found by Sarosh; he searched in vain” (167). Otherness and estrangement make his plight one of an irredeemable outsider. Sarosh, who once had “a life of promise stretching endlessly before him,” gets disillusioned by his marginalized existence. Sarosh insists that his predicament be relayed as a warning to prospective

immigrants. They should know “that the world can be a bewildering place, and dreams and ambitions are often paths to the most pernicious of traps” (168).

Mistry uses Sarosh’s stance as an opportunity to implicate the hegemonic forces for his miseries and disenchantment. Mistry takes into account the Canadian Multicultural Policy, assailing its existence as a façade to cover up the inability to deal with racism. The differences that multiculturalism intends to promote have no impact on Sarosh’s plight in Toronto. His alienation and discomfort are not alleviated by the presence of such institutions. The narrator of the story, Nariman Hansotia, sums up the transparency of their purpose this way:

The Multicultural Department is a Canadian invention. It is supposed to ensure that ethnic cultures are able to flourish, so that Canadian society will consist of mosaic cultures that’s their favourite word, mosaic instead of one uniform mix, like the American melting pot. If you ask me, mosaic and melting pot are both nonsense, the ethnic is a polite way of saying bloody foreigner. (160)

What is made apparent here is that ethnic modes of behaviour and social practices are relegated to an inferior position by the dominant culture, thus marginalizing other cultures. Heble interprets Sarosh’s position in terms of hegemonic resistance, and he wants to focus on the minority theory, quoting Jan Mohamed and David Lloyd, who, he says, “call for the need to see difference and otherness not as symptoms of an inferior position, ‘but as figuration of values radically opposed to those of the dominant culture.’” Heble describes Sarosh as a figure “clinging to old world social practices,” who is “attempting to preserve remnants of meaning unique to his domain of experience in India” (55). According to this interpretation, Sarosh’s circumstances are a result of his

marginalization and the “land of milk and honey” converts into “a pain in the posterior” (*Tales* 168).

These two stories, “Lend Me Your Light,” and “Squatter,” demonstrate different perspectives on the immigrant experience; the hybrid immigrants have varied ambivalent responses: Jamshed assimilates, Kersi is indecisive, and Sarosh rejects the multicultural society. In “Swimming Lessons,” Mistry portrays best the dual perspective of immigrant existence. The budding immigrant writer in Toronto is determined to swim literally in the pool and metaphorically within his adopted culture. This story, as we have seen earlier, moves between memories of India and the present reality in Canada. Both worlds are juxtaposed with characteristic immigrant awareness. The old man in the wheel chair in the Don Mills apartment cared for by his daughter reminds the narrator of his Grandpa back home in Firozsha Baag, who was looked after by his daughter. The loneliness of both the aged men is connected in the narrator’s mind. The Parsi community of the Baag is replaced by the multicultural tenants of the apartment building foregrounding the cultural parallels. Surrounded by immigrants, the narrator experiences hybridity all around him: the Portuguese Woman, a noisy neighbour, is the “communicator for the apartment building” (230); the Yugoslav caretaker Berthe articulates a kind of “rough-hewn English” (237); the two women whose ages he mistakes speak with a Scottish accent that he has “learned to identify” (242). The hybrid nature of the people around him is determined by the difference in accents and language. In this story, Mistry explicitly explores the multicultural space that he creates in his fiction.

The diaspora narrator renews his contact with his country renewed by writing letters and stories to his Father, who has a tendency to theorize, and his Mother, who is

“not very fond of theories” (250). In his correspondence with his parents, his Parsi identity is reasserted when their concerns about prayers is reflected in their letters; Father wants to “*remind him [he] is a Zoroastrian: manashni, gavashni, kunashni, better write the translation also: good thoughts, good words, good deeds [...] and tell him to say his prayers and do kusti at least twice a day*” (236), keeping a religious identity intact is an essential factor of the Parsi diaspora. Mistry also uses this space to elaborate on the celebratory aspects of Parsi community. In Father’s opinion, the readers should also be informed about positive facts of the Parsi heritage:

*[T] here was so much to be proud of: the great Tatas and their contribution to the steel industry, or Sir Dinshaw Petit in the textile industry who made Bombay the Manchester of the East, or Dadabhai Naoroji in the free movement, where he was the first to use the word swaraj, and the first to be elected to the British Parliament where he carried on his campaign; he should have found some way to bring some of these wonderful facts into his stories, what would people reading these stories think, those who did not know about Parsis – that the whole community was full of cranky, bigoted people; and in reality it was the richest, most advanced and philanthropic community in India, and he did not need to tell his own son that Parsis had a reputation for being generous and family- oriented.*

(245)

This is the first time we get an insider’s perspective with actual facts about the Parsi community. These credentials emphasize the pride of place that identity has in their consciousness, illustrating the nostalgic memory we discussed in Chapter two.

Mistry uses water imagery and symbols to deploy the conflicted, immigrant perspective of his former and his adopted home. The narrator's interstitial position shifts during the discourse, often creating a blurring of perspective. Mistry deploys the cause and effect argument to examine the uncertainties faced by the hybrid sensibility. Disoriented by his dislocation, the immigrant learns to see his reality in two ways. Comparing the experience to writing, the narrator says:

When images and symbols abound in this manner, sprawling or rolling across a page without guile or artifice, one is prone to say, how obvious, how skillless; symbols ,after all, should be still and gentle as dewdrops, tiny, yet shining with a world of meaning. But what happens when, on the page of life itself, one encounters the ever-moving, all-engendering sprawl of the filthy sea? (234).

The writer uses the dirty waters of Chaupatty beach to explain the confusion of cause and effect:

It seemed that the dirtier it became, the more crowds it attracted: street urchins and beggars and beachcombers, looking through the dirt that washed up. (Or was it the crowds that made it dirtier — another instance of cause and effect blurring and evading identification.) [234]

In contrast, the chlorinated waters of the Toronto pool do not help to resolve the dilemma as it has “produced still birth” (240). It is near the end that the narrator comes to a reconciliation; “water means regeneration only if it is pure and cleansing” (240) and he finds some direction in the waters of his tub (hybridity). He notes that “the water loses its opacity once the chlorine, or whatever it is, has cleared” (248). Here he sees with a clearer vision as he can “slowly discern under water objects” (249). The hybrid

perception that the neutral water of the tub (the immigrant's vision) provides, is acceptable, as it is not dominated by either force: the Indian origins or Canadian values. He prepares to immerse himself in the cultural discourse of Canada and see from the insider's perspective but on the terms of the hybrid: "The world outside the water I have seen a lot of, it is now time to see what is inside" (249). In comparison to the other two stories, "Swimming Lessons" reinforces hybridity, privileging neither the essentializing cultural extreme nor the totally assimilative posture, leaving the narrator free to negotiate the cultural differences and help translate a new identity. Heble too sees the story as "an acknowledgement of the necessity of translation: an awareness of the extent to which Kersi has been involved in the process of integrating his ethnic differences into the sameness of a Western cultural mainstream" (60).

The diaspora writer is not just caught between two worlds but between antithetical responses to his two worlds. In Mistry's case, this is particularly evident in his protagonists' responses to India, which is the main setting of his fiction (as opposed to Canada). The two visions of India materialize in the nostalgic reminiscing of Kersi in "Lend Me Your Light" and "Swimming Lessons" and of Gustad in *Such A Long Journey* and in the attacks on the corrupt and decadent political and social fabric of the country in *Such A Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*. Although displacement signifies loss, it also provides the diaspora writer with the advantage of seeing home with renewed clarity. Since the immigrant often leaves home to avoid certain unpleasant circumstances or goes looking for better prospects, his attention is nevertheless diverted towards home, but now with the added knowledge of another world. The reality of the inward life seems more tangible than the alienation of the outward life, and the exiled writer inclines towards the



realities of home to depict life there from a distance. This aloofness changes his/her perspective to include truths that may not always valorize the homeland. Anne Colley defines this condition: talking about the manner in which the exile's memory functions, she says,

[T]heir yearning for home [...] readily acknowledges the troublesome as well as the blissful events of another period in their lives. Their nostalgia does not always mute the negative. Similarly, their homesickness does not contaminate their judgment so that they naively embrace something that never was, negate what is valuable in the present, and resist the possibilities of the future. On the contrary, their longing often gives them the means to move beyond themselves and their past – it creates new maps. (4)

In Mistry's novels this characteristic surfaces in *Such A Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*, where a dark India materializes with apparently "uncontaminated" honesty. Distance from India in terms of time and space provides a candour in portraying the political events of the era while Mistry was there. But it remains a personal perspective, however "objective" or "uncontaminated" in other words, "an imaginary homeland." Mistry attacks the corrupt politics and shows the repercussion corruption has on the society of the country. Narendra Kumar describes Mistry's narrative as "a blend of history and fabulation, examining the Indian society from the perspective of an ethnic community" (76). Arun Mukherjee thinks Mistry attempts to "make sense of actual historical events by narrativising them, by extending them beyond the curtain of silence in which the official discourses have tried to enshroud them" (145). Mistry is evidently narrating the Indian political era of the 1970s and 1980s to expose the inequalities and

injustices prevalent in society. The political system is presented as completely decayed and the leaders equally corrupt, as they let the country disintegrate into the shambles of poverty and privation.

*Such A Long Journey* is set in 1971, when the war between India and Pakistan was in progress, which resulted in the independence of Bangladesh. It foreshadows the dark period of Emergency (25 June 1975— 21 March 1977), which is assessed as a smear in the narrative of postcolonial India. Mistry creates a world of corruption, dynastic rule, and the insecurities of the minorities in the midst of falsely acclaimed social progress and economic betterment in the background of the romantic portrayal of Gustad and his family and friends. This backdrop juxtaposes the glorious past and ideals of Nehru's dreams with a disappointing picture of the state of affairs prevalent in the country in the 1970s.

Gustad's story is interwoven with the political reality disturbing the lives of ordinary people. Mistry depicts Gustad as an honest and simple Parsi, a member of a marginalized community, who negotiates his life through the vicious socio-political environment in India during the Bangladesh War. The narrative involving the establishment revolves around the mystery of Gustad's friend, Jimmy Billimoria, the fictional counterpart of the infamous Sohrab Nagarwala.<sup>30</sup> It shows how the two are trapped in a political intrigue and exploited because of their minority status. Through Gustad, Mistry reflects on the sad plight of the Parsis in Bombay caused by regional hegemonic influences. Gustad says that there is "No future for the minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense" (55). His comment highlights the discomfort and isolation felt by the minorities. The suspicious

reappearance of Major Billimoria into Gustad's life, when he is already facing many anxieties (a sick daughter, a deserting son, and the unbearable stink of excretions from beyond the wall of his compound of the Khodadad building) seems like a portent event. A package sent by the Major changes Gustad's fate poignantly. It turns out that the packet contains the sum of ten lakh (10,00,000) rupees to be deposited in the bank under some pseudo name; this unnerves the Nobles and steals Gustad's peace of mind, shaking the foundation of his unperturbed existence, leaving him betrayed and angry. With the help of his co-worker and friend, Dinshawji, he manages to deposit the whole amount in the bank. It is gradually disclosed to him that Major Billimoria is a RAW Officer (secret service) and is involved in the training of Mukti Bhainis (Bangladesh freedom fighters) against the Pakistani army. All this contributes to Gustad's discomfiture, because not only is he in the dark about the truth of things but he is also intimidated by unusual phenomena taking place, such as receiving suspicious notes and discovering a headless bandicoot and a headless cat in the compound. He cannot handle the stress of all that is happening around him and he confides in Dinshaw to get some solace and moral support. In narrating all these complications, Mistry makes the governing establishment an ominous entity.

It becomes more ominous as the situation reaches a climax with the arrest of Major Billimoria on charges of corruption. Gustad's world collapses around him; he is completely in the dark about the happenings and is gripped with fear and anxiety that his complicity in the affair may be established. Subsequently, he is asked to return the whole amount in one month's time to save Bilimoria's life. To add to his woes, a great blow is dealt in the form of Dinshawji's death, leaving him alone to bear the burden of all the

confusion around him. Shortly, Gustad visits Major Bilimoria in Delhi where it is revealed to him that the Prime Minister is directly involved in a big fraud. Bilimoria was asked to get sixty lakhs from the SBI (State Bank of India) Director to finance the guerrilla war; this was done by impersonating the Prime Minister's voice on the telephone. Major Bilimoria is implicated and asked to confess his crime; he writes a confession but embezzles ten lakhs from the amount. The money sent to the Prime Minister for training the army was intercepted and Bilimoria arrested for stealing ten lakhs. He gets four years' imprisonment, and while serving his term dies of a heart attack under suspicious circumstances. Gustad loses yet another tower of strength in the death of Major Bilimoria and is left to deal with the cruel realities of life. Mistry projects this incident in a negative light, severely criticizing the politically motivated exploitation of common people and the disintegration that follows in the lives of people who are honest, modest and innocent like Gustad. Bilimoria's story is a fictionalization of an incident based on the Nagarwala case.<sup>31</sup> Mistry provides a Parsi perspective on the Indian socio-political world. The corrupt government and incompetent leaders are attacked in a way that contrasts with the sympathetic portrait of Gustad, who alleges that "our wonderful Prime Minister uses RAW like a private police force to do all her dirty work [...] She made a real mockery of democracy" (93). This overt pugnacious belligerence speaks volumes of Mistry's antagonistic feelings towards the Indian political establishment of the 1970s.

Mistry has mounted direct attacks on Indira Gandhi, denouncing her for nationalizing banks. He has Dinshawji say: "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.” Gustad responds accusingly: “Nowhere in the world has nationalization worked. What can you say to idiots?” (38). This elucidates the fact that Parsis view their position as one that is discriminated against and thus they have no respect for the leadership that victimizes them. Through Gustad, Mistry also accuses Indira Gandhi of creating disharmony in the country: “At once she began encouraging demands for a separate Maharashtra. How much bloodshed, how much rioting she caused” (39). Mistry is at the same time incriminating her for being indirectly responsible for the creation of Shiv Sena, “the racist buggers,” who divide people, “wanting to make the rest of us into second class citizens” (39) just to gain some political mileage. These are “vote getting tactics” (38) to win over the poor by showing that she is on their side. And he fears that this will cause the country to disintegrate into chaos because it is the harmful elements in society that are being encouraged: “What to do with such low class people? No manners, no sense nothing. And you know who is responsible for this attitude – that bastard Shiv Sena leader who worships Hitler and Mussolini. He and his ‘Maharashtra for Maharashtrians’ nonsense. They won’t stop till they have complete Maratha Raj” (73). Mistry’s verbal assault on the political establishment mirrors his perception of the political reality of the country. Such vilification is never evident in his portrayal of figures like Gustad and most other members of the Parsi community, who are often victims of the socioeconomic and political order.

Mistry’s intention is not to create a utopia in his fictional world where life is a reflection of harmony and peace, but to bring into focus the corruption, hypocrisy, and decadence rampant in the society, underlying the optimistically publicized government

progress and proficiency. For Mistry, the leaders and their government were making a mockery of the country in the name of democracy. The physical ugliness, decay, and pollution of the country epitomize the moral depravity, pestilence, and degeneration at the centre. Mistry portrays this degradation in metaphorical terms. Dr. Paymaster paints this picture of decay and canker:

...our beloved country is a patient with gangrene at an advanced stage. Dressing the wound or sprinkling rosewater over it to hide the stink of rotting tissue is useless. Fine words and promises will not cure the patient. 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.

(313)

These words express Mistry's thoughts about the society that is doomed to chaos and anarchy unless roused to a rude awakening. It is only then that the country would have any chance of bettering its prospects. Otherwise, he pessimistically says, recalling society in Canada and judging it by his new identity, India, like a cancer patient, will succumb to its disease. Mistry prescribes removing the canker of passiveness in order to be cured. He merely points to the causes of degeneration but does not suggest any radical change or any formulation of a new ideology to replace the political environment. Yet he wants the present system to be corrected. His attitude is apparent in the dialogue between Major Bilimoria and Gustad. Sohrab, Gustad's son, approves the Major's ideas: "Only two choices: communism and military dictatorship, if you want to get rid of these Congress party crooks. Forget democracy for a few years, not meant for a starving country" (68). Gustad responds with irritation at the idea of communism and dictatorship being a better

alternative to democracy: “Be grateful this is democracy. If that Russiawala was here, he would pack you and your friends off to Siberia” (69). This comment clearly indicates that Mistry values the democratic right of freedom of speech and proves that he is not inclined towards any change in the political ideology. It is the corrupt system and the incompetent administration which govern the country that should be redressed to put the country back on the right track. Jaydipsinh Dodiya describes Mistry’s approach this way: “The nationalistic fervour in the novelist makes him at times a ruthless critic of the corrupt government at the Centre. His nationalism is above petty selfishness” (83). In fact, there is no political agenda, covert or overt, that Mistry presents in his work; it is a sincere and truthful consideration for the well-being of the country and its people that drives his writing.

The imaginary journey undertaken by Mistry to his homeland defines his concern about the unity of the nation and the good-will of its people. When he vilifies his homeland it is only to show his commitment as a member of that community. He uses the objectivity that distance has granted him to highlight the discrepancies in the system as indicators of correction that the country needs, and demands that it come out of its lethargic inaction to improve the prevalent, pathetic conditions. Mistry’s words at the opening of the novel provide a clear pointer to what he is setting out to achieve by writing the book. The choice of the quotations indicates that he is looking back to an era in Persia that was ideal and exemplary. The first is from Firdausi’s *Shah-Nama*:

He assembled the aged priests and put questions to them concerning the kings who had once possessed the world. How did they,’ he inquired, ‘hold the world in the beginning, and why is it that it has been left to us in such a sorry state? And

how was it that they were able to live free of care during the days of their heroic labours?’ (Epigraph)

The Parsi philosopher has posed a question that Mistry has applied to the “sorry state” of affairs prevalent in India. In search of an answer, he embarks on the long journey to arrive at some conclusion or at least gain some insight into conducting the fortunes of a country with dignity and honour. And in his endeavour to find an answer, he stops to contemplate what Rabindranath Tagore has to say in *Gitanjali*:

And when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart; and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.  
(Epigraph)

Mistry insists that the old order has to change, yielding place to new because the corrupted system cannot be beneficial to anyone. He is hoping for an admirable country to emerge out of the ashes of corruption and decadence. And this is the message we get after reading Mistry’s *Such A Long Journey*, though its dominant tone is one of sympathy and understanding for those who are the victims of the system.

Being an exilic author, Mistry has the advantage of distancing himself objectively, and he manipulates this position, both as an outsider and insider, so while he is an outsider writing from Canada, he assumes the insider’s view projecting what he sees as the reality of the “actual” India. As stated earlier, Rushdie maintains that “we are all irradiated by history, we are radioactive with history and politics” (100), and that art cannot come into being in a social and political vacuum. This is what Mistry’s second novel, *A Fine Balance*, demonstrates even more strongly than *Such A Long Journey*. Furthermore, Mistry’s existence as an expatriate writer is tinged with the sensibility of



the liminal figure, one over whom as Bhabha describes in *Nation and Narration*, “no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority” (299). The acumen that Mistry possesses as a liminal figure has led to new kinds of manipulations of community and nation. It is through his juxtaposition of people as “objects” of the myth of the nation, and as “subjects” of his story that Mistry intervenes in the national narrative and we see the “split in the discursive ambivalence” (299). *A Fine Balance* stands as a testimony to the kind of tight-rope walking Mistry is doing in trying to keep a fine balance between politics and his presentation of the suffering of the people affected by the antics of the controlling authorities, and between his censure of the establishment and his fondness for the “little man.”

Mistry begins the novel, as is his custom, with a quotation. The epigraph itself taken from Honoré de Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*, is a persuasive argument in preparing the reader for occurrences in the story:

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

Mistry is preparing the reader for two things: one, that the novel is a tragedy with misfortunes, and, two, that it is all true. This truth is Mistry’s truth and presented from his perspective entirely; he is entitled to artistic license; he gets to control the flow of the narrative according to his vision of history and his position in politics. Mistry’s claim of authenticity of historical events and their impact on the characters of the narrative reflects

the author's imagined construction, imbued with both nostalgia and realism. As discussed earlier, the re-constructed world is presented according to the recollection retrieved by the author: If the memory is romantic then the effect is a nostalgic idealization, and if realistic then the writer's response is informed by censure. Nila Shah endorses this point of view when she says:

[P]ostcolonial writers in particular endeavour to postulate their own version of history of their people, and thereby reject the traditional history. Hence, a novelist shares "emplotting strategies" with an historian who excludes, emphasizes or subordinates details of historical events. A postcolonial writer [...] rejects stories about his people and weaves his own. The change that matters comes in the postcolonial narrator's viewpoint. [Mistry too] rejects many existing narratives about post-Independence historical happenings and achieves a fusion between fact and fiction. (97)

He is providing us an insider's view of one who himself as a Parsi in India is of a diaspora community which, he would claim, validates his perceptive even further.

*A Fine Balance* is a story of four unlikely characters coming together in an unnamed city (presumably Bombay), soon after the government declares an Internal Emergency. In the tiny apartment of Dina Dalal, Maneck Kohlah, a student, and Ishvar and Omprakash Darji, two tailors, (brought together under unforeseen circumstances) are laboriously constructing their lives. All four characters are marginalized members of society, Dina and Maneck coming from the Parsi minority, and Om and Ishvar belonging to the low caste of Chamars (Untouchables). The tailors are marginalized primarily because they have changed their profession from Chamars (tanners) to Darjis (tailors),

which is not done under the norms of society, and thus they are particularly targeted by the upper-caste Brahmins. The lower caste is facing the same castigation even after the government has put in place laws to protect them. As one of the Chamars complains: “Government passes new laws, says no more untouchability, yet everything is the same. The upper class bastards still treat us worse than animals” (142). Besides being marginalized, all four characters are displaced in their own ways: Maneck is from the mountains in Northern India and is in the city to study, as his wealthy family has fallen on hard times; Om and Ishvar have escaped the horrors of castism to seek a better life; and Dina is on her own in defiance of her brother Nussan’s authoritarian attitude. Struggling financially, she still prefers to retain her dignity rather than face discrimination because of her gender. Unfortunately, by the end of the novel, they all become homeless and totally alienated from the brutal and callous society. It is in the midst of these divisions based on caste, class, and gender that they try to balance their lives between hope and despair. Already having their hands full surviving the onslaught of prevalent social and economic tensions, their lives are further inundated by the anarchy of the Emergency.

The Prime Minister’s self-justifying speech, however, presents a paradoxical picture of the Emergency, and it is evident that Mistry’s recollection/memory is not imbued here with romantic nostalgia. In her political rhetoric, Indira Gandhi paints an optimistic picture,

There is nothing to worry about just because the Emergency is declared. It is a necessary measure to fight the forces of evil. It will make things better for

ordinary people. Only the crooks, the smugglers, the blackmarketeers need to worry [...] I began introducing programmes for the common man and woman... What we want to do is provide houses for the people. Enough food, so no one goes hungry. Cloth at controlled prices. We want to build schools for our children and hospitals to look after the sick. Birth control will also be available to everyone. And the government will no longer tolerate a situation where people increase the population recklessly, draining the resources that belong to all. We promise to eliminate poverty from our cities and towns and villages. (308-09)

Mistry is relentless in his harsh realism. He shows that the promises made by Indira and the rosy future predicted in her speech are translated in reality only as abuse of authority and exploitation of the poor illiterate masses. Through the stories of the characters, Mistry makes us live the traumas of censorship, police brutality, custody deaths, and MISA<sup>32</sup> which were terrifying the poor. Along with these atrocities, the efforts of Beautification under the Slum Clearance Programme were driving out the poverty-stricken masses from their meagre dwellings. The tailors were a part of this group. In addition, The Family Planning Programme and the promise of health care materialize only as a coercive measure enforcing sterilizations, which completely sounds the death knell of any bright future for Om and Ishvar. Both suffer on account of it; Ishvar loses both his legs to a gangrene infection as a result of unhygienic conditions during his sterilization, and Om loses his chance to marry and have a family, when, on orders given by the village head Thakur Dharamsi, he is castrated. Ishvar laments: "What kind of life what kind of country is this where we cannot come and go as we please? Is it a sin to visit my native place? Is it a sin to get my nephew married?" (626). Om acknowledges his

uncle's views and grieves: "we are not less than animals to them" (627). The tailors are crushed to nonentities by the government machinery, leaving them helpless and dejected since all means of a better future have been snatched from them; Ishvar becomes an invalid and Om has to devote all his time to taking care of his uncle.

As for Dina Dalal, Mistry depicts her as never stopping to regret or question her fate but continuing to live day- by-day with whatever life offers her. She plans her survival with courage and fortitude and exists with dignity and respect. After her husband's death, she does not remarry but manages to get a contractual assignment for Au Revoir Exports House. She hires the tailors as helps to complete these assignments. Maneck, the son of her classmate, arrives as a paying guest to compensate for the shortfall in her budget. He is unhappy at the hostel provided by the Institute where he is studying and upon his mother's insistence comes to share the apartment of his mother's friend as a paying guest. This is how they all come together. Starting as an ordinary business transaction, their relationship it transformed into a bonding of caring humans, which finally turns into a lasting friendship. Unwittingly, ironically Mistry shows it is the atrocities committed during the Emergency that bring about this unusual arrangement and lead to a relationship with special significance. The tailors' ordeal begins after a series of experiences (sleeping on pavement dwellings, sharing scanty space at Nawab's house); the tailors manage to get government housing allotted. Delighted to acquire some space they could claim as their own, they settle down with their meagre belongings, but their celebration is cut short during the Emergency when their housing is bulldozed in a plan to beautify the city. Having no place to live, they tell Dina of their plight. Dina

fears she may lose them as helpers and takes them, with certain reservations, into her house as boarders.

The curious combination of four characters separated by class and religion, on one hand, and age and gender, on the other, brings about a new blend of relationships as the story progresses. Mistry deploys the idea of give-and-take, as in cultural exchange in a hybrid situation, making these individuals adjust and adapt to each others needs. They show respect for each other's feelings and go out of their way to make others comfortable, by trying to be amicable and considerate in every possible way. In the midst of their afflictions, tribulation, and adversity caused by social evils, official corruption, and ruthlessness, the humanity of these characters surfaces through their bonding. Mistry offers this collaboration as hope for the future of society and as concrete foundation for building personal relationships. Though things start on an uncertain and hesitant basis, surprisingly, solid and sincere friendships are formed. Initially, Dina has her inhibitions and class consciousness; she wonders: "Where was the line between compassion and foolishness, kindness and weakness?" (445). However, the tailors' overwhelming gratitude changes her perception: "Now Ishvar and Om were wrapping her in the mantle of kindness and generosity. Deceit, hypocrisy, manipulation were more the fabrics of her garment, she thought" (452), because the simple and honest gestures of Ishvar's friendship make her feel guilty. Gradually, she cast off all her defences, and on Maneck's suggestion also begins to share the bathroom and eat meals together, steering her to conclude: "What a change, she thought – from the saddest, dingiest room in the flat, the kitchen was transformed into a bright place of mirth and energy." The "bleakest hour," thought Dina, "has now become the happiest" (467). For their part, the tailors

adapt the hygiene and grace of living up to the class above theirs. While Dina and Ishvar alter their brushing habits, Om gives up applying oil in his hair to please Maneck. Mistry introduces another interesting pattern in the adjustments made in this odd family. The older characters gravitate towards a companionship that can relate to serious discussion of such topics as marriage and economics, and interact on a mature level; Ishvar helps with the cooking and Dina makes sure they get fed properly. Similarly, Om and Maneck form a bond with common interests. They influence each other. Om is particularly set on imitating Maneck's ways, as he is thirsting to learn the modern manners and upper-class preferences:

Slowly but surely, Om had reinvented himself in Maneck's image, from hairstyle to sparse moustache to clothes.[...] He smelled like Maneck, thanks to Cinthol Soap and Lakmè Talcum Powder. And Maneck had learned from Om as well – instead of always wearing shoes and socks in the heat, which made his feet smell by the end of the day, he now wore chappals. (550)

There seems to be something of value that each could teach or learn from the other. This is also the hallmark of hybridity and Mistry incorporates it through the interaction among his characters. The reciprocity between them weaves a fabric of understanding and caring. Soon their lives settle into a routine, as Dina realizes in her use of the metaphor of dress making: “the pattern of each day [...] was like a pattern of a well-cut dress, the four of them fitting together without having to pull to make the edges meet. The seams were straight and neat” (452); they fit into their small world with amicability, compatibility, friendship, and unity. In Mistry's presentation of this odd family domestic harmony, he combines a tenderness that is informed by sympathy for the unfortunate ordeals each has

faced. This shows that memory related to nostalgia produces sympathy for the people which balances the harsh reality that realistic memory had aroused through vilification for the system and the establishment.

Mistry portrays the world of harmony, concord, and compassion constructed within the walls of Dina's apartment as antithetical to the negative and counter-productive world outside it. The brutalities of social and political injustices and atrocities create only misery and pain, especially when juxtaposed with the sincere and dedicated commitment and cooperation of Dina, Maneck, Ishvar, and Om, with whom Mistry clearly sympathizes and whom he perhaps romanticizes. In a "limited" world inside the apartment, and the huge space of politics and society outside it, Mistry creates a chasmal antithesis, in the affirmation of life and the worth of individuals. In vilifying the outside world, he points to the flaws in the Emergency laws responsible for the degeneration of conditions prevailing in the country. In anger and frustration, Mistry scathingly criticizes the corrupt politics of the Prime Minister. In a verbose speech explaining the appalling subservience of the courts to gratify her, Mr. Valmik, a lawyer and a man of all seasons, explains to Dina:

What are we to say, madam, what are we to think about the state of this nation?

When the highest court in the land turns the Prime Minister's guilt into innocence, then all this [...] becomes a museum of cheap tricks, rather than the living, breathing law that strengthens the sinews of society...

The Prime Minister cheats in the election, and the relevant law is promptly modified. *Ergo*, she is not guilty. We poor mortals have to accept that bygone



events are beyond our clutch, while the Prime Minister performs juggling acts with time past...

True, there are goondas galore in the wilderness of our time. After all, this is a Goonda Raj. So who can blame you for taking that route? Who would want to enter the soiled Temple of Justice, wherein lies the corpse of Justice, slain by her very guardians? And now her killers make mockery of the scared process, selling replicas of her blind virtues to the highest bidder. (651-52)

The dismaying conditions of the country could only spell disaster, and it is Mistry's contention that the intelligentsia of the country had also failed in stopping the deluge of corruption by keeping silent about the crimes towards humanity.

At the same time, Mistry advises that to be too sensitive will not resolve the problem but create more frustration and disillusionment. He feels that the injustices of the world cannot be erased by succumbing to them; on the contrary, trying to locate a balance and generate means to annihilate it would be more productive. Through Valmiki's wisdom, we are informed of this stand, reading about "stories of misery, caste violence, government callousness, [and] official brutality [...] many of us felt [...] an emotional outburst would be normal. But too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart" (266), and in Maneck's suicide, the reader is warned about being too idealistic and emotionally engaged, as it closes all doors to mediating a realistic and meaningful solution. It is crucial to be prepared for the harsh realities of life and be open to change, fortunate, or unfortunate. An alternative to Maneck's position is provided by Mistry in Valmiki's erudite words: "Please always remember, the secret of survival is to embrace change, and to adapt. [...] You see, you cannot draw lines and compartments, and refuse

to budge beyond them. Sometimes you have to use your failures as stepping stones to success. You have to maintain a fine balance between hope and despair” (268). Thus, in the portrayal of the lives of the four characters, Mistry has tried to show how to keep the fine balance. If we view our lives from the right perspective only then can the balance be achieved, and, in order to gain a new insight, we need to know the meaning of life, which he explains poignantly: “After all, our lives are but a sequence of accidents – a clanking chain of chance events. A string of choices, casual or deliberate, which add up to that one big calamity we call life” (653). Mistry goes on to suggest that it is “a knack that humans had, for cleaning up their untidy existences – a hidden weapon, like antibodies in the blood stream” (654) that gives them the perseverance to accept life as it comes. Mistry perceives this pattern as a common facet of all humans: “But isn’t it the same with all life stories? Loss is essential. Loss is part and parcel of that necessary calamity called life” (655). Having accepted the real meaning of life as a massive calamity, he still does not believe in succumbing to the tragedies, loss, misgivings, and misfortunes. He propounds courage and resilience because, as he says: “There is always hope – hope enough to balance our despair. Or we would be lost” (652). Even in the tragic experiences of the tailors and Dina’s compromise there are lessons to be learnt.

Mistry feels it is the responsibility of society in general and the government in particular to provide and protect the well-being of its entire people. Since this essential component is missing from the composition of the country, physical misery prevails and morality degenerates; it is largely the economically down-trodden and ethnic minorities that are disadvantaged and marginalized. They are the ones who have to balance their lives between comfort and misery, hope and despair.

In *Family Matters*, Mistry's focus moves to social ills and is less concerned with public events than with the lives of individuals and families, and their personal tragedies. He feels that religious bigotry is counter-productive and he targets religious fundamentalism which has become prevalent in personal as well as public life of contemporary India. On one hand, he shows how Hindu fundamentalism, in the manifestation of Shiv Sena thugs, recklessly ruins the lives of thousands, and, on the other, he portrays how religious intolerance devastates the contented environment at Nariman's flat in the ironically misnamed Chateau Felicity apartment building. Since Mistry is dealing with personal events, we see a mingling of romantic and realistic presentation. Here memory relates more with flashbacks of Nariman's life to idealize the past and torment his present than vilify the events of public nature. Mistry as a diaspora writer utilizes his objectivity to scrutinize the present events from a distance and critique the damage it is doing to society in general, destroying harmonious coexistence and inflicting personal tragedies on individuals and families. His emphasis is for the individuals to change in order to improve their lives or, like Nariman, be trapped in a romantic past looking for glorious times.

To prove how any individual can arise above all the chaos of religious fanaticism, intolerance, and bigotry, Mistry introduces the touching character of Vilas, a salesman at a bookshop, who has a sideline in writing letters for illiterate persons to send to their families. Though he charges by the page, his kindness goes far beyond the writing process and he rarely stops even when the money runs out. The narrator describes him as "a writer of letters for those who couldn't, who poured out, into his willing ear, their thoughts, feelings concerns, their very hearts, which he transformed into words upon

paper” (127). His clients were illiterate immigrant labourers from different parts of the country, for whom he becomes a link to their families. Mistry explores the anxieties of displacement and distance through the emotions expressed back and forth via the letters. And through Vilas, Mistry brings out the idealism in the midst of religious intolerance and social injustices to create an oasis of kindness and generosity. The events in the letters that Vilas writes form a pattern “like bits of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope” (130); similarly, Mistry’s diaspora writing provides a colourful window to the world left behind. Moreover, Vilas’s letters present an opportunity to unify the differences and create a better understanding in a world torn apart by strife and friction. Vilas’s perception is portrayed thus:

He felt that chance events, random cruelty, unexplained kindness, meaningless disaster, unexpected generosity could, together, form a design that was otherwise invisible. If it were possible to read letters for all of humanity, compose infinity of responses on their behalf, he would have a God’s-eye view of the world, and be able to understand it. (130)

Mistry’s diasporic consciousness illustrates that one must look beyond personal prejudices to embrace difference and make life worth living. In *Family Matters*, Mistry blends idealizing memory and realistic censuring to present the miseries created by religious intolerance and shows how the ghosts of memory can haunt the individual, making the present unpleasant.

In his novels, Mistry’s diaspora writing incorporates the elements of hybridity and ambivalence to portray a dual perspective typical of the immigrant sensibility. In his imaginary return to his homeland, he negotiates his passage through memory in idealistic

recollection of happy times and nostalgic forays into traditional experiences, while at the same time he questions and condemns the shortcomings and misgivings that he encounters, as a result of the new perspective he has gained through distancing himself in time and space. He utilizes the “third space,” the dual perception of “double-consciousness,” and the expatriate position of “straddling two worlds” with an ambivalent awareness which imparts to his writing a meaningful depth and progressive outlook. His ability to function between the immigrant and the Indian awareness totalizes his experience towards a hybridized identity, which, though censuring is fluid, creative, and accommodating. In his process of reinventing his outlook and identity, Mistry relies on ambivalence to mediate a new awareness that balances life between the past and present, home and displacement, assimilation and alienation, and a multitude of dualities and dichotomies faced by the diaspora figure.

## CONCLUSION

Rohinton Mistry, the Indian-Canadian diaspora writer, maintains his link with his past by reconstructing the homeland of India through recollections of the past, selecting memory to serve a dual purpose: one, to idealize his homeland in nostalgic and romantic reminiscing, and, two, to critique and assail the social and political ills in what he would see as a realistic recollection of unpleasant memories. His diaspora attachment to homeland provides him with resources for the production of exceptional fiction. The distancing from home grants, as Andrew Gurr puts it, a “higher consciousness” (8) of cultural identity. Since home is the basis of self-knowledge, all sense of belonging is rooted in the country of origin, and, for a diaspora writer, the only way to access that is by recreating the personal and social world left behind. Mistry is no exception to this rule. In his works, I have attempted to demonstrate his preoccupation with the homeland in his involvement with India on a macrocosmic level, and his own Parsi community on a microcosmic level. I have argued that the concept of “home” and “belonging” undergoes a re-evaluation as relocating in a new culture instils a sense of alienation, which Mistry’s texts manifest poignantly in characters from “Squatter,” “Lend Me Your Light,” and “Swimming Lessons.”

For diaspora writers, boundaries of time and spaces are continually transgressed by social formations that come into being through imaginative and political renderings of themselves elsewhere. Thus identity becomes a paramount concern of the displaced. If the breakdown of geography as a centrally defining force in people’s lives is considered a force giving descriptive power to narratives of rupture in social life, then difference is

another way to think about the unease that cultural identities have produced in diasporic cultures. This distinctness, as I have contended, causes a sense of marginalization which often leads to a strong urge to assimilate in the predominant culture, resulting in a double consciousness. This aspect of dual awareness at the heart of the diaspora experience is what Mistry's writing in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* admirably captures. In this collection, the character of Kersi replicates Mistry's movement from the tight-knit and reasonably self-sufficient Bombay community to the unknown and potentially hostile spaces of Canada. In the blended narrative form adopted, there is a pervasive sense of an art springing not from one culture alone, but from the tension between overlapping cultures and contexts. This reaction is related to the hybrid experience as shown in his stories, which creates ambivalence in the perception of two diverse worlds being present in the consciousness simultaneously. In an interview with Shaikh, Mistry voices his reaction to superficially emulating behaviour in order to assimilate, he says, "It suddenly brought home to me very clearly the fact that I was imitating something that was not mine, that made no sense in terms of my own life, my own reality"(Web page). This results in a conflict that reveals the ambivalence in Mistry's perception where he is placed in terms of time and space between two worlds he knows. This contradictory set of impulses--on one level, an attraction to the new society, and, on another, a fear of total assimilation that the old coordinates of identity may be lost entirely--manifests itself, in "Squatter" and "Swimming Lessons," in a tension between the desire to belong in the new host society and the urge to hold onto something of the old one.

The dual perspective simultaneously inculcates a sense of longing and yearning for the world left behind. The sense of alienation caused by dislocation causes the writer

to look back with nostalgia. In his desire for his homeland, Mistry nostalgically recalls the sentimental experiences of the Parsi community. He indulges the eccentricities and idiosyncrasies of the Parsis by creating characters with wit and humour, thus recapturing the joys and delights of their lives. In “Of White Hairs and Cricket” and *Such A Long Journey*, the protagonists gratify themselves with nostalgic recollections. The community is remembered affectionately with distinctive details: indigenous food, Hindi and Gujarati dialects, customary Parsi clothing, and other characteristics typical of the Parsis, each providing a delightful memory.

Mistry successfully evokes a sense of loss and nostalgia in the immigrant’s experience in a fusion of pictures of fact and fiction about his imaginary homeland. Whether it is Firozsha Baag in the *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, the Khodadad building in *Such A Long Journey*, Dina’s apartment in *A Fine Balance*, or the Chateau Felicity in *Family Matters*, they are all imaginary locations capturing factual aspects of Parsi ethos and India’s social chaos. As Kersi’s Father says in “Swimming Lessons”:

[F]iction does not create facts, fiction can come from facts, it can grow out of facts by compounding, transposing, augmenting, diminishing, or altering them in any way –you must not confuse what the story says happened , you must not lose your grasp on reality, that way madness lies. (250)

To construct this imaginary space, Mistry construes recollections and memories to contrive his characters and improvise events. Father’s justification of the author’s use of memory adds that “all writers worked in the same way, they used their memories and experiences and made stories out of them, changing some things, adding some, imagining



some, all writers were very good at remembering details of their lives” (243). This statement best sums up Mistry’s use of memory.

The fusion of fact and fiction is connected with the blurring of boundaries in the mental landscape. In this new setting, Mistry is perhaps faced with a gaping void of uncertainty that makes him nostalgic for the homeland. As we have seen, his memories are based not just on nostalgic reckonings celebrating his community in romantic recollections, but also on realistic memory that recognizes the harsh realities of life as he remembers them. His novels, *Such A Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance*, and *Family Matters*, reflect an ironic consciousness for the generality of human pain and suffering, a sense of disenchantment with the spurious progress in society, and a feeling of despondency at the world’s indifference to address such wrongs. Mistry has taken on the challenge in his writing to attack furiously any encounters with social disparity, government corruption, and religious discrimination. Dodiya categorizes his fiction as realistic and he says “Mistry comes out as a critical realist so far as the treatment of social reality is concerned. Through his method, his ideology comes out to project the kind of society he wants to be part of. In his consciousness of the social and political aspects of a particular historical period he emerges as a progressive writer...” (94).

In his realistic recollection, Mistry stridently denounces forces that promote extreme and vicious attitudes and behaviour. He delineates a basic struggle of the mind to comprehend life in its totality: a confrontation with the complexity of life. The overall atmosphere created in the novels reflecting the socio-political awareness – his objectivity a result of distancing himself from the country – is one of gloom and despair but he tries to achieve his goal to instil a sense of desperation, and to draw attention to

loss of human values, such as apathy to the sufferings of fellow-beings and inconsideration for relationships between family and friends. Mistry has been criticized for writing about India from memories and an occasional visit. “Germaine Greer said publicly that she hated *A Fine Balance* for its portrayal of ‘a dismal, dreary city,’ nothing like the Mumbai where she spent four months teaching” (Wyndham). This disapproval can be silenced by seeing Mistry’s fiction as a process in memory. As discussed earlier, in the formation of exilic/diaspora identity, the preoccupation with homeland leads to a construction of imaginary homelands. Despite his writing “realistic” fiction, the city that Mistry constructs “is an imaginary city” because as Rushdie puts it, the diaspora writers “create fictions, not actual cities or villages” (10), therefore Mistry is entitled to represent his reality and depict Bombay according to his perception.

Mistry’s fiction testifies to his diasporic consciousness that calls on an inner need to live more deeply with greater awareness, to know other’s experience, and to relate his own to others; hence, he thinks it is important to tell others one’s own story, as he does in *A Fine Balance*: “It’s extremely important because it helps to remind yourself of who you are. Then you can go forward, without fear of losing yourself in this ever changing world. [...] Ah, yes to share the story redeems everything” (700-01). He makes it clear while talking to Shaikh that “For me telling the story and being true to your characters is more important than demonstrating your skill with words, all your juggling acts, the high-wire acts, the flying trapeze acts”( Shaikh), and he proves his point by showing sensitivity and commitment in handling his characters and subject.

The relation between life and literature is the object of attention in Mistry’s writing and he brilliantly captures the crowded and throbbing life of his past and present

in literature with a large scope and vision, and which is both nostalgic and realistic. He imbues his characters with heroic perseverance and hopeful struggle in the midst of adversity and intolerance as he does with all four characters in *A Fine Balance* and with Gustad in *Such A Long Journey*. He occupies two positions at once, as a member in a community, and as an individual in society, whether he is in India or Canada; hence, his writing epitomizes diaspora literature as it embodies the quintessential immigrant sensibility. Journeying with Mistry in his fictional world we learn not only about the Parsi community in particular and India on a larger scale (as he sees them), but discover how memory can create diverse responses of idealizing and vilifying in the same consciousness as a result of segregated immigrant sensibility.

Rohinton Mistry's fiction has been discussed here with specific focus on his diaspora writing, emphasizing three factors: his diasporic awareness, the function of selective memory with the double-pronged effect of nostalgia and realism, and the way this selective memory functions to produce a dual response; diasporas carry a repertoire of conceptions and experiences that meet alternative narrative productions in new places of settlement. Mistry's writing resonates with this duality: one, a profound desire for India, and, two, a practical membership in the host country. The fact that he writes more about India than Canada can most likely be attributed to the role that memory plays in his writing, causing the balance to tilt towards his homeland.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Tamara Seiler's article "Fictionalizing the Journey: Patterns of transformation in Canadian Immigrant Fiction since 1945" discusses the dynamics of immigrant writings.

<sup>2</sup> See Stuart Hall 349-63.

<sup>3</sup> According to Hall, the diaspora cultures are not, and will not, in the future be culturally unified. The members of the diaspora have the capacity to live in, and negotiate between and across, several cultural worlds. They have the ability to struggle with the burden of a double consciousness. On the one hand, they bear the traces of their own particular cultures, traditions, histories, languages, and systems of belief; on the other hand, they have to come to terms with, and make sense of, the new host culture and society in which they take residence. This populace can be considered as the product of different and interrelated cultures and histories, and therefore, it can be said, they inhabit different "homes" at the same time.

<sup>4</sup> *Masala* means "spice mix" in Hindi.

<sup>5</sup> *Dugli* is a white crisp coat the Parsis wear

<sup>6</sup> *Pugree* is a turban worn by respectable or elderly men.

<sup>7</sup> *Gaaribi hatao* is a phrase meaning remove poverty.

<sup>8</sup> *Patla Babu* means a "thin gentleman".

<sup>9</sup> According to Bhabha, hybridity is the construction of a political object that is new, "*neither the One [...] nor the Other [...] but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both" (28). This identity does not necessarily involve the formation of a new synthesis, but the negotiation between them, in the knowledge of "the

displaced, diversionary, differentiated boundaries in which the limits and limitations of social power are encountered in an agonistic relation” (28). Bhabha’s theory then progresses into the beyond as he states: “It is in this sense that the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing* in a movement [...] as a passage that crosses” (5). Bhabha’s idea of liminality engages culture effectively in that it enables a way of rethinking “the realm of the beyond” (1). Liminality not only relates to the space between cultural collectives but also between historical periods, politics, and aesthetics.

<sup>10</sup> This quotation is from an interview in an essay by Savita Goel, 119.

<sup>11</sup> Borrowing a phrase from music, Said terms this awareness *contrapuntal*. In Said’s view, an exile’s “habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the *memory* of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally” (*Reflections on Exile* 186; emphasis added).

<sup>12</sup> The significance of memory in the awareness of the contemporary diasporic writers can thus be accepted as an internalized reality. Since memory simplifies and composes perception it can be seen as a formulator of consciousness. It alters and transforms past experience into idealizing and vilifying, consequently, events and facts are either heightened or eliminated, according to the person’s favoured need of the present. Gayle Greene identifies the function of memory in her essay “Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory.” Greene examines the importance of memory in fiction, arguing that many texts turn to the past as a means of effecting change in the present: “Memory is especially important to anyone who cares about change, for forgetting dooms us to repetition”

(291). The sense of the past is then a combination of personal experience, present conditions, and anxieties concerning the future. Quoting Shattuck, Lowenthal too, illustrates how memory functions in transforming experience: “‘the remembered image is combined with the moment in the present affording a view of the same object’, [...] ‘Like our eyes, our memories must see double; those two images then converge in our minds into a single heightened reality.’”(210). The function of memory as stated so far then is not to preserve the past but to adapt it in a manner that cannot only enrich the present but also manipulate to create a better life for the future. In the mind’s eye, the writer resurrects the past both to glorify and sully the events that have impacted his life.

<sup>13</sup> *Paan* is betel leave chewed with tobacco, betel nut, and other condiments.

<sup>14</sup> *Bawaji* is an affectionate yet pejorative term for addressing Parsi men.

<sup>15</sup> *Dugli* is a white crisp coat which the Parsis wear.

<sup>16</sup> *Arré* is Hindi for “hey”

<sup>17</sup> *Ghatis* is a pejorative term for locals considered uncivilized.

<sup>18</sup> An abuse translating as “bloody fuckers”

<sup>19</sup> *Ghali* in Hindi means “abuse”.

<sup>20</sup> *Matka* is the illegal betting done in the stock markets.

<sup>21</sup> *Bhoot* is “ghost” in Hindi.

<sup>22</sup> *Dustoorji* is the Parsi priest.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Charu Chandra Mishra 131.

<sup>24</sup> See Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora 392-403.

<sup>25</sup> Bhabha says hybridity does “not comprise of two original moments from which the third emerges”, but signals an ambivalent “third space” of cultural production and reproduction (Interview, 211). What is significant about hybridity and “third space” is not the “culture” that emerges, but that this space dislodges essential histories, permits other positions to emerge, and establishes new structures of authority and political inventiveness. Hybridity has become a common criterion in diaspora writing as it was in postcolonial theory. The hybrid stands as the perfect channel for the advantages of pluralism, ambivalence, and non-fixity. Its inherent resistance to fixed binaries causes it to remain in a constant state of fluidity. Largely, because of the poststructural leanings of contemporary diaspora, there are creative possibilities present in hybrid culture which allow it to undo dominant influences by challenging the prevalent paradigms.

<sup>26</sup> Bhabha writes: “The marginal or “minority” is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalization. It is a much more substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity - progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past - that rationalize the authoritarian, “normalizing” tendencies within cultures in the name of the national interest or the ethnic prerogative. In this sense, then, the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration will establish the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as “containing” thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production” (4). This abstract cultural space provides the crucial contradictory place from which the nation can be exposed as ambivalent.

<sup>27</sup> To quote Bhabha, he says: “The liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves. This is because the subject of cultural discourse—the agency of a people—is split in the discursive ambivalence...” (299). This understanding of the liminal figure has led to new kinds of manipulations of community and nation, and narratives and counter-narratives of essentialized identities.

<sup>28</sup> Tiresias, in Greek mythology, is a Theban, who was transformed for a time into a woman for killing the female of a pair of snakes. Zeus and Hera questioned him about the pleasures of love and when he chose to support Zeus’s opinion was spitefully struck blind by Hera. Zeus gave him the gift of long life and prophecy. Here the reference to him is dichotomous as he is able to be a man and woman. According to Eliot’s use of Tiresias, in *The Waste Land*, he is a witness to the whole narration and thus unites the narrative. The narrator in this story too serves the same purpose as he sees the double perspective, one of his brother Jamshed and the other of the friend Percy. Not having any decided leanings, he constantly sways between his brother’s social work inclinations and the assimilative stance of Percy.

<sup>29</sup> Mistry reaction to his immigrating is mentioned in Chapter One. He mentions he “felt strange and new” and “all was so different.” Reference to the chapter will illustrate the point clearly.

<sup>30</sup> Sohrab Nagarwala was a Parsi who was involved in political intrigue and became a controversial figure of his time.



<sup>31</sup> Sohrab Nagarwala was implicated in an incident where he received nearly sixty lakh rupees from a bank manager in Delhi. It was alleged that this payment was made upon a phone call from the Prime Minister whose voice had been imitated. He was dead after a few months raising many queries. The money too was never traced. The Parsi community was perturbed by this incident considerably.

<sup>32</sup> Maintenance of Internal Security was an Act passed during the Emergency under the pretext of security, where any one could be detained without right of trial for up to two years.

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