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A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF SAROS COWASJEE, ARDASHIR VAKIL AND FARISHTA MURZBAN DINSHAW

A DISSERTATION
TO BE SUBMITTED TO
SAURASHTRA UNIVERSITY, RAJKOT
FOR THE AWARD OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
ENGLISH

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I hereby declare that the work embodied in my thesis entitled as “A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF SAROS COWASJEE, ARDASHIR VAKIL AND FARISHTA MURZBAN DINSHAW”, prepared for Ph.D. degree has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University on any previous occasion.

And to the best of my knowledge, no work has been reported on the above subject.

And the work presented in this thesis is original and whenever references have been made to the work of others, they have been clearly indicated as such and the source of information is included in the bibliography.

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When I decided to undertake my doctoral research, I faced the problem which majority of research scholars do. It was the problem regarding finding a relevant research problem. It is true that there are very rare problems which are absolutely untrodden but I was interested in the literature written by a minority community. While I was a student at graduation and post graduation level, I had been interested in Parsis and their contribution in literature and other fields. I had come across the names of the few Parsi writers during this period. After completing my post graduation, I read the few works of the Parsi writers at random. When I decided to undertake my doctoral research I discussed about my interest with my supervisor Dr. Jaydipsinh Dodiya who encouraged me to work on the Parsi novelists. In this manner I set out on a journey into Parsi fiction which had been a highly rewarding experience.

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- Ketan K. Gediya.
CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

Who are the Parsis?:

Parsis, the followers in India of the prophet Zoroaster (Avestan Zarathushtra) are descendants of Persian Zoroastrians who emigrated to India to avoid religious persecution by the Muslim rulers. The name Parsi is from Pars (The Middle Persian word for Fars) region now within the geographical boundaries of Iran, and the original homeland of the Persian people. The word Persia itself derives from Persis, the Greek form of Pars. Indian census data (2001) records 96,601 Parsis in India, making them India’s smallest racial-cum-religious minority. The number of Parsis worldwide is estimated to be less then 1,00,000. In 2004, the Indian government accorded the Parsi community the status of Scheduled Tribe, which provides them with special protection and direct representation in Parliament. The word Parsi is really an ethnic term or identity for this minority community. As the Parsis are followers of prophet Zoroaster their religion is known as Zoroastrianism.

Zoroaster was born in Azerbaijan, North Iran in 660 BCE. Both his father’s name Pourushaspa and his mother’s name Dughdova bear striking resemblance to the Sanskrit words having the same meaning. Pourushaspa is a combination of two words: Pourushapa or Purusha in Sanskrit means man, and Aspa, which becomes Ashva in Sanskrit means a horse. The term Dughda in Dughdova means milk in Sanskrit and in Avestan. The word Zoroaster which in the Avestan Language means ‘loving the camel’ is exactly identical with the Sanskrit word for camel, which also is Ushtra.

Zoroaster reformed the existing polytheistic beliefs of the ancient Persians. He established a new religion, which was named after him as Zoroastrianism. The originality of Zoroastrianism lay in its rejection of the
myriad gods of the age and its concentration on the spirit of good. Zoroaster combined in an orderly ethical system data familiar to his age, handed down by Persian and Indian prophets. His doctrines appear not to have been greatly influenced by the more ancient-orient but seem rather to have sprung from his own soil and people, growing out of the older Aryan faiths. He sought a purification of current beliefs and strove to establish a monotheism, which would free man from loyalty to deities connected with magic. Many modern scholars believe that Zoroastrianism had a large influence on Judaism, Mithraism and Manichaeism and thus indirectly influenced Christianity and Islam.

Zoroastrianism combines elements of monotheism and dualism. To Zoroaster the sole God was Ahura-Mazda, whereas to other people this God only one among many deities. Other divinities, for example, the sun God Mithra, were revered at the time, but to Zoroaster these traditional deities were not gods at all, but demons. Central to Zoroastrianism is the world's constant struggle between good and evil. In the beginning of creation, the supreme God Ahura-Mazda created two twin spirits, for good 'Spenta Mainya' and for evil 'Angra Mainya' or 'Ahriman'. Man is free to choose the path of either spirit. The path of good or righteousness 'Asha' will lead to happiness 'Ushta', whereas the path of evil will lead to unhappiness, enmity and war. Therefore it's strongly encouraged that one chooses Asha. This Philosophy is symbolized in one of the religion's main mottos: 'Hvarshta' Good Deeds, 'Hukhta' Good Words and 'Humata' Good Thoughts. The twin spirits are not regarded as physical beings, but abstract emanations that exist in a person's mind. With the duality of good and evil come the concepts of Heaven, Hell and the Final Day. After death, a person's soul crosses a bridge 'Chinvato Peretu' on which its good deeds are weighed against its bad deeds. Whether the soul reaches heaven or falls to hell is based on the outcome. When evil is finally defeated on the final day, the world will be purified by a bath of molten metal and the souls of sinners will be released from hell. According to the Encyclopaedia Americana:
The chief features of Zoroaster’s vision are his incisive solution of the problem of evil of which he absolves God without detracting from his omnipotence, the pivotal significance of truth in his system, the dignity he confers on man as a free and responsible agent, and the belief in a savior and a resurrection into a state of eternal perfection. Such a vision, in the 6th century BCE, only a powerful mind could have conceived. Intellectual power also pervades his versification, which although based on inherited patterns, stands out unmatched in originality and concentration among the early products of Indo-European poetry.\textsuperscript{1}

Among the Iranian contributions to world thought Zoroaster’s is not only the earliest but also one, which ranks highest. Despite the immense difficulties of interpretations, no one who has studied the prophet’s utterances can escape the impression that he had anticipated and possibly inspired some of the assumptions of Greek, Jewish and early Christian thinking. Although the extent to which these three sources of Western civilization were indebted to him eludes us, his conception of God and of man’s destiny still seems remarkably akin to the one, which prevails in the West.

**History of Zoroastrianism:**

Zoroastrianism flourished in Persia, Bactria, Media and a part of Tibet up to the time of Alexander the Great, but its influence declined after his death in 323 BCE. When the Sassanian dynasty came to the throne of Iran about 226 A.D., a general compilation of the sacred books *Zend-Avesta* was ordered by king Ardashir I. Translations made into the vernaculars were distributed among the people. Once again Zoroastrianism flourished, its popularity continuing for over four centuries, until 641 A.D., when the
Persians, led by Yazdegerd (Yezdegerd) III, were routed by Caliph Omar I at the famous Battle of Nehavend. Zoroastrianism fell with Persia, for the Muslim conquerors offered the defeated people a simple choice of the sword or the Koran. The majority accepted the Koran, but a small band true to the ancient faith, fled to a mountainous region Kohistan where they remained for about a century. When the tyrannous arms of the Muslim rulers finally attained this refuge in 766 A.D. the Zoroastrians fled to the island of Hormuz. Nineteen years later most of them abandoned their fatherland and sailed for India, where they landed at Diu and later at Sanjan. Jadhav Rana, the Hindu ruler permitted them to build their homes and to practise their religion.

Very little is known of the life of Zoroaster apart from the scanty information to be found in the Gathas, which are generally held to have been composed by him. The Gathas are very different from the rest of the Avesta, not only do they proclaim a new philosophy of life but they consistently reflect the hopes and doubts, the fears, hatreds and triumphs of a single and most distinctive personality. He lived for many years at the court of King Hystaspes, whose kingdom included Tajikistan and northern Baluchistan. He set out to reform and systematize the traditional ancient Iranian polytheism and establish it on an ethical basis. He appears at first to have met with general opposition, probably because of his bitter attacks on the priests of the ancient cults and their followers, who he accused of demon worship. Eventually he succeeded in converting Hystaspes together with several of his court.

After Zoroaster’s death, legends rapidly formed round his name. Nature is said to have rejoiced at his birth, while the demons who had roamed freely on earth in human shape, fled underground. He was supposed to have been born laughing, to have conversed with Ahura-Mazda and his angels and to have repulsed Ahriman who tempted him. He was the model of all priests, warriors and husbandmen, also excelling in medicine and all the crafts. He founded ritual fires and fought in a sacred war waged by Hystaspes. The principal sources of these legends are Pahlavi text of the 9th century A.D., the Denkart and the ‘selections’ Zatspram. Preluded as they are by foreboding of
his miraculous birth, they seem intended to emulate events in the life of Jesus Christ recorded in St. Lukes’ Gospel.

In the West, Zoroaster’s reputation always loomed large. He was supposed to have been the master of the Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras. Innumerable books in Greek were circulated in his name dealing with a wide range of subjects including natural science, astrology and magic. On the other hand, he was also held responsible for the worst of errors, astrology and magic. Throughout the Middle Ages, Zoroaster was famous as a magician. Not until the end of the 18th century did a true picture of him began to re-emerge, owing to European scholars led by A.H.Anquetil-Duperron. When he visited the Parsis at Surat they expounded the Avesta to him according to the tradition maintained by the Gabars. Afterwards he translated the work and it appeared for the first time in a European language in 1771, under the title *Zend Avesta, Ouvrage de Zoroastre*. European scholars in classifying the original form of the religion and in tracing its developments have helped the Parsis to reestablish the foundations of their ancient faith. In the 19th century, Nietzsche, in his book *Also sprach Zarathushtra* (1893), deliberately twisted Zoroaster’s doctrine to his own ends, portraying him not as one of the first great moralists but as the first immoralist.

Zoroastrianism encourages a joy filled worldly life, procreating of family, seeking learning and knowledge. It also advocates pleasures of good living amidst honestly earned wealth and fame, and socializing and feasting within bounds of morality and moderation. The Zoroastrian religion urges an active approach to life with hard work, achievement and enjoyment of life. Because of the life-affirming dimensions, for the Parsis a re-interpretation of their ancient traditional literature or reformulation of religious doctrines has not been necessary in the Modern Age. In fact many Parsis have been able to combine modern, economically oriented rational behaviour with religious traditionalism without consciously experiencing a conflict of norms. Jer D. Randeria writes:
The Zoroastrian religious prescriptions of ethicality through absolute purity of body and mind, diligence for accumulating wealth, munificence in sharing it and beneficent activities to enhance progress have yielded positive results in the practical life and led to the hypothesis of a direct positive influence of religious norms on the Parsees’ behaviour in daily life and economy. Such religious prescriptions have become cultural codes influencing the Parsi mind in daily behaviour and enable the mind to become a veritable Zoroastrian asset to culture. A code of conduct that aims at absolute purity will leave for the pure mind only the absolute or the perfect choice of an action. The concept of a single perfect choice, even if seen as a theoretical possibility, must be considered as capable of supplying the mind with an attitude to leap forward free, unconfused and steadfastly determined in every pursuit. The well-known Zoroastrian laws of ritual purity by opposing polluting evils become moral aphorisms adding a dimension of morality to complement the inner purity of an ethical mind. The Zoroastrian religious prescriptions thus are virtuous touchstone, by which large numbers of Zoroastrians have continued to gain spiritual solace, live successful worldly lives, bring benefit and enjoy prestige among all...²

The Parsis in India:

The only source of information relating to the early history of the Persian refugees who came to India by sea is the Kisseh-I-Sanjan, - 'The tale of Sanjan', a Persian poem of 864 lines written around 1600 A.D. by Bahman
Kaikobad, a Parsi priest. According to this chronicle, after the collapse of the Persian empire at the battle of Nehavend in 642 A.D. those Persian who clung to the beliefs of Zoroaster were forced by the religious persecution of the Muslims to leave their homeland. The Parsis initially settled at Hormuz on the Persian Gulf, but finding themselves still persecuted they set sail for India arriving in the 8th century. They settled first at Diu. After their stay for about 19 years, they set sail towards the south and landed at the port of Sanjan in Gujarat around 785 A.D. Sanjan was then ruled by the liberal monarch, king Jadhav Rana. The Dastur who was heading these refugees approached the king, narrated their story and sought permission to settle down in Sanjan. The Dastur also gave details of the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism in sixteen Sanskrit shlokas. Initially Jadhav Rana was hesitant about giving shelter to the refugees from Persia. At this crucial juncture, the Dastur requested that an urn filled with milk to the brim be brought to the assembly. When the same appeared, he took off his ruby studded gold ring and dropped it into the urn. Using symbolic gesture, the Dastur showed that just as the contents of the urn had not spilt over but become richer by the insertion of the precious ring, similarly the Parsis would bring further prosperity to that area if granted shelter. Moved by the reasoning of this priest, the king asked him to narrate their actual requirements. The Dastur replied that they desired freedom of worship, freedom to bring up young children in their own tradition and land for cultivation so that they become self-sufficient. Jadhav Rana agreed to these demands but imposed five conditions for allowing the Zoroastrians to settle in Sanjan. The five conditions were:

1. The Parsis high priest would have to explain their religion to the king.
2. The Parsis would have to give up their native Persian language and adopt the local language.
3. The women should exchange their traditional Persian garb with customary dress of the country.
4. The men should lay down their weapons.
5. The wedding processions should be held only after sunset.
The first of these conditions was fulfilled by the Parsis as their priest Neryosangh described the main characteristics of the Parsi religion in the sixteen Sanskrit shlokas. The Parsis obeyed conditions 2 and 3, Gujarati became the native language of the community and the sari is now the traditional garment of the Parsi women. Condition 4 found its fulfillment in the loyalty of the Parsis still observed today towards the ruler or the respective government. The last condition points to the cautious conduct of the Parsis who, nevertheless, strictly preserved their own religion. The Parsis do not convert or accept people from other faiths.

Between the 8th and 15th centuries the Parsis settled in several towns in Gujarat as farmers, horticulturists, toddy planters, carpenters and weavers. For the first 400 years of their history in India, the Parsis appear to have lived in peace and obscurity. When the Muslim armies invaded Gujarat in the 13th and 14th centuries, the Parsis fought valiantly alongside the Hindus. With the arrival of European traders in the 17th century in India, especially the British who took over Bombay in 1662 the Parsis’ circumstances altered radically, for they were in some ways more receptive of European influence than the Hindus or Muslims and they developed a flair for commerce. The British offered conditions, which would attract migrants to help develop Bombay. Two attractive features for minority groups were freedom of religion and equality in law. Over the following decades, Parsis migrated to Bombay in greater proportion. As a result, at the dawn of the 19th century they owned much of the land and established themselves in leading position in key areas like the dockyard, railways and shipbuilding. When private traders entered India after 1813, the port of Bombay boomed and the Parsis flourished as middlemen in trade. By the 19th century they were manifestly a wealthy community and from about 1850 onwards they had considerable success in heavy industries such as railways, shipbuilding and textiles. Wealth brought power and the Parsis distinguished themselves for the charitable manner in which they dispensed these acquisition.
Rituals and Ceremonies:

Since coming out to India the Parsis have adopted three things belonging to the people of this land – the language, the dress and the part of the marriage ceremony. Yet, on the whole the Parsi community has kept up its ancient traditions and has maintained an individual existence, even though in actual numbers they seem seldom to have exceeded some hundred thousand in India. On the most important occasions of human life – initiation, marriage and death – the Parsis clearly show their individual existence as a separate people, distinctly different from the other races of India. Rustam C. Chothia observes:

The lofty teachings of Prophet Sahib Zarathushtra are universal. His teachings will remain forever and are a benefit to the whole humanity. Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians, however, are the only followers of Prophet Sahib Zarathushtra who have continuously maintained the traditions taught by the Prophet Sahib in the form of daily practices and ritual observances. In so far as Zoroastrian practices are concerned, therefore, it is the Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians who possess the indigenous tradition. Hence, although everyone can advantageously follow the ethical principles not everyone can become a part and parcel of this ethnic group. The truths taught by Prophet sahib are universal, but the rituals and ceremonies are part of our identity as a community.³

The Parsi Zoroastrian ceremonies are far from being simplistic primitive rituals. In every ceremony time, labour and expense are involved for the strict observance of the laws of purity, which are highly ritualistic in their
physical display of outward cleanliness, which of course, is linked to inner purity or benevolence in Zoroastrianism.

The religious ceremonies of the Parsis are several and of different types. There are ceremonies for purification, initiation, marriage, ceremonies for the departed, consecration, thanks giving, ceremonies for maintaining the Holy Fire and several inner liturgical ceremonies, etc. The ceremonies may be broadly grouped on the basis of the nature of the occasion: (a) The joyous sacred: The Navjote or Nozad ceremony for initiation into the Zoroastrian religion, the Navar and Martab for initiations into priesthood, the Wedding, the six Gahambers, the New Year or No-Ruz, the Khordad-saal celebrated as Spitama Zarathushtra’s birthday, the Jamshadi No-ruz on the 21st of March, and the popular Jashan-Afringan for thanksgiving and auspicious days. (b) The solemn and purificatory: The funeral rites, called Zinda Ruvan if performed while yet alive, the annual Muktad or Remembrance ceremony together with the Farrokhshi-Baj, Padiyab Kusti, the elaborate Bareshnom nahn-ablations, Riman, the Nirangdin for consecration of Gomez, the entire Yasna-Ijashne for various consecration and the Machee sandalwood offering. Here is an account of the most important ceremonies.

There are four types of purification ceremonies. The first one is the shortest and can be performed by a layman as well as a priest. It is called the Padiyab Kusti. It involves washing one’s hands, face and other exposed parts of the body with clean water and then untying and retying the Kusti with accompanying prayers. It has to be performed several times a day – early in the morning upon rising from the bed, on answering calls of nature, before taking meals and before saying prayers.

The second type of purification ceremony is called the Nahn. It consists of a ritual bath where the symbolic eating of a pomegranate leaf and nirang-consecrated bull’s urine, is taken and a prayer of penance is recited, followed by a bath. This ceremony has to be performed before initiation and marriage ceremonies. It is also to be performed by women at the end of their
period of accouchement. It should also be performed during the last 10 days of the year, but today very few people follow the practice.

The third purification ceremony is the Bareshnom ceremony, performed by the priests at the time of their initiation and before undertaking inner liturgical ceremonies. It is also to be undertaken by corpse bearers before joining the profession and after leaving it. This is a nine-day ritual purification ceremony. It was intended to be a joint purification cum segregation (a sort of quarantine) for a person coming in contact with people who die of infection. The ceremony has to be performed in an open space with no vegetation or trees around. It requires nine pits and the candidate has to go from one to the other with the officiating priest reciting prayers and the candidate having to clean himself from head to foot with Gomez, sand, consecrated urine of bull and finally water. He has to do this for three days and on the fourth day; he has to take a bath. This is repeated three times. Therefore, on the tenth day, he is deemed to be purified. During this ceremony, a dog has to be present.

The fourth type of purification is called Riman purification, which is for one who has become polluted by coming into contact with filth from dead bodies. The method is slightly different from the Bareshnom and there is no ten-day segregation involved.

The initiation ceremonies are of two types. The first is the initiation of a child into the religion through investiture with a sacred shirt and thread called Sudra and Kusti. The age for investiture is between seven and fifteen years. The name of this ceremony is the Navjote. The rite of Navjote, meaning ‘new birth’ begins in private with a ritual bath. Once cleansed in body by bathing and spirit through prayers, the child is led into the room where the Navjote is to be performed. A senior female member of the family performs a traditional Indian greeting ceremony. The child then sits before the officiating priest and in the presence of the fire, which, as the representative of God, is present at all ceremonies. After introductory prayers, basically affirming belief in
Zoroastrian teaching, the child is invested with the sacred emblems of the religion, the sacred shirt and the cord, the Sudra and Kusti. The Sudra is a white, cotton, vest-like garment worn next to the skin at all the times. It is invested with heavy symbolism, having, for example, a small pocket at the ‘V’ of the neck, which is said to be the spiritual purse in which the individual should store up good thought, words and deeds. The Kusti is a belt for doing prayer and showing obedience to the religion. The 72 strands in the Kusti symbolize the 72 chapters of the Yasna. Tying the Kusti three times round the waist reminds the Parsis to have only good thoughts, speak only good words and perform only good deeds. The four knots tied at the end signify that God has created the human body from the four elements - Fire, Water, Air and Earth. The Kusti is tied on the waist to symbolize that one should take the middle path.

The second type of initiation ceremony is for the initiation into priesthood. Here, there are two stages: the basic initiation and the advanced initiation of priests. In the simple initiation ceremony, the Bareshnom purification ceremony has to be undergone twice. Then, a ceremony called Gewra, which lasts for six days and involves performing the Yasna takes place. On the final day of the initiation, the initiate performs the Yasna ceremony himself. The initiate is now called Navar and can perform outer liturgical ceremonies. The advanced initiation is for the second degree of priesthood called the Martab. Here, the candidate goes through one Bareshnom of ten days and on the eleventh day, performs the Khub ceremony with another priest. The next day, he has to recite another Yasna ceremony and at midnight, he has to recite the Vendidad ceremony. He is now qualified to perform any liturgical ceremony.

Marriage is a sacred duty of the Parsis. The marriage is preceded by an engagement ceremony a few days earlier. Just before the marriage ceremony, the couple has to undergo the Nahn purification ceremony. The couple come to the stage one by one and is greeted with a welcoming ceremony with egg and coconut, rice and water. The bride and groom are
seated opposite each other separated by a piece of cloth. The priests then recite a prayer and fasten the couple’s hands with a thread, which is then passed seven times round the couple as the priests pray. At a signal thereafter, the curtain type cloth is dropped and the couple sprinkle rice grains at each other. This signifies that they were separate individuals till now and are united as one, from this moment. The couple now sits side by side with the groom sitting on the right of the bride. The main ceremony now begins with the senior priest blessing the couple and asking them individually whether they voluntarily consent to take each other as partners for life. The bride and groom have witnesses who also testify to the marriage. This is followed by a prayer of benediction and admonition by both the priests as they throw rice grains over the heads of the couple. This last benediction is a prayer for good health and bodily vigour.

The solemn hour of death and the ceremonies that follow naturally form the most important and the most impressive part of the ritual in every religion. Among the Parsis the ceremonies associated with death have two main concerns: the restriction of the power of pollution present and the care for the soul. If the approach of death is foreseen, it is traditional to move the dying to a separate part of the house kept specifically for the purpose. The priest is called and the prayers are recited affirming the faith and seeking forgiveness for sins. When death has occurred, a fire is brought into the room and the prayers begin. The body is laid on the ground, the corpse bearers summoned, and a member of the family washes the body before it is clothed in a clean, but used Sudra and Kusti. The Sachkar ceremony is then performed when a circle is drawn round the corpse into which only corpse bearers should enter, for within that area the presence of evil is potent. The corpse is removed to the funeral grounds as soon as possible. The funeral procession is led by Nasarsalars - the corpse bearers, who carry the body to its final resting place. A dog, man’s ally in the Zoroastrian tradition, is present now, as at several points in the ceremony, because of its ability to ‘see’ death and to guard man. The corpse is laid on a slab and the bereaved take their last leave before the corpse bearers carry it into the ‘Tower of Silence’ or
Dokhma, where it is exposed to the vultures. The Dokhma is generally about thirty feet high. It is round and encircled by high walls so that no one can see inside. There is but one entrance up a flight of steps to a door set high in the wall, through only the Nasarsalars enter. Inside, there are usually three concentric circles of rectangular spaces into which the corpse is placed. The corpse is stripped and the Nasarsalars leave. It is estimated that the vultures devour the corpse in approximately twenty minutes, during which time the mourners pray nearby. After the bones have been bleached and powdered by the sun, they are cast into a central pit. The mourning ceremonies last for four days. On the afternoon of the third day, the Uthamna ceremony is held at which charities are announced in memory of the deceased.

The Parsis worship in fire temples. Fire is the creation of Ahura-Mazda and has been held sacred from the pre-Zoroastrian era. Though fire is held sacred in all religions, it has a special significance for the Zoroastrians. Prophet Zoroaster saw fire to be the physical representation of Asha, and as a source of light, warmth and life for his people. All the religious rituals are solemnized in the presence of fire. The holy fire is consecrated by collecting various fires and purifying them by elaborate rituals. The consecration of the fire of the highest order requires sixteen fires collected from various trades including one from the lightening and one from a burning corpse. Each fire is purified between 33 and 91 times. Purification is done by allowing the fire to burn in the open and igniting dry twigs at least nine inches away from the fire without direct contact to the fire. The Yasna ceremony and the Vendidad ceremony are performed after each purification. In the Yasna ceremony, the priests recite 72 chapters of the Yasna, while they recite 22 chapters of the Vendidad in the Vendidad ceremony. In all, the whole ritual is performed 1128 times to consecrate a fire of the highest order. On the final day, the fire is collected upon a big censer in a chamber known as Atash-Behram and henceforth the fire has special service rendered five times a day. Today, there are only nine such fires in the whole world out of which eight of them are in India. The Iranshah Atash-Behram established in 720 A.D. at Udwada in Gujarat is the oldest - the original fire brought by the Parsis from Iran and
consecrated shortly after their arrival at Sanjan. A lesser order fire can be consecrated using four fires instead if sixteen.

The Parsis' Contribution to Indian Life And Culture:

The Parsis collectively as a group owing allegiance to India and as individuals have played an unforgettable role in diverse fields in India. Nani A. Palkhivala observes:

History affords no parallel to the role of Parsis in India. There is no record of any other community so infinitesimally small as Parsis, playing such a significant role in the life of a country so large.  

On numerous occasions, Indian national leaders expressed appreciation for the role that the Parsis played in India. A politician and social reformer Rande said:

In our national car, hoary with the weight of ages, and immovable in numbers, we too often serve as a dead weight and a break. The car would never have moved an inch but with the inspiring contact with the English, and the elevating examples of the Parsis. They pioneered the way, and we slowly follow at a distance…

About the multifarious role played by Parsis in India, Eckehard Kulke observes:

…the Parsis were accepted as member of this nation thanks to the leading role of some of them in the early phase of the Indian National Movement, thanks to their role in social reform,
education and economic development and thanks to their well-known generosity, from which non-Parsis in India often benefited.⁶

The extraordinary Parsi progress has been seen synonymous with the country’s political and economic successes for the reason that the Parsis’ played the leading role in Indian national movement and education development, pioneered all-India industrialization, professional services, and the Parsi printing press and initiated the socio-economic reforms in India.

The role of Parsis in Indian politics has been truly significant. Before 1880, only three Indians succeeded in being elected by British voters into the British Parliament. These three Indian members of the Parliament were Parsis - Dadabhai Naoroji (Indian National Congress, candidate of the Liberal Party, 1892-1895), M. M. Bhownagri (Conservative Party, 1895-1906) and S. D. Saklatvala (Labour Party, 1922-1923 and Communist Party, 1924-1929). The three Parsis who made a significant contribution to Indian National Movement were Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), Sir Phirozeshah M. Mehta (1845-1915) and Sir Dinshaw Edulji Wacha (1844-1936).

Dadabhai Naoroji, the ‘Grand Old Man of India’ was born of a clerical family from Navsari on 4th September, 1925. He graduated from Elphinstone College, and later become the first Indian to be appointed as a professor at the same college in 1852. He was a social reformer and founder of Rast Goftar in addition of various reform associations. He also founded the London Zoroastrian Association in England. He was appointed the Chief Minister of the state of Baroda in 1873. He was the first to formulate and articulate the ‘economic drain theory’ in his book, Poverty and Un-British Rule in India, published in 1901. He fought for the Indianization of the Indian Civil Service and protested against the extravagant expenditure on British military expeditions outside of India against Afghanistan, Burma and Egypt, undertaken at the Indian tax-payer’s expense for the glory of England. In 1892, he stood for elections to the British House of Commons as a Liberal.
He won by three votes and his constituents nicknamed him ‘Mr. Narrow Majority’. In 1893, Dadabhai Naoroji expressed the spirit of an emerging national identity when he stated:

> Whether I am a Hindu, a Mohamaden, a Parsi, a Christian, or of any other creed, I am above all an Indian. Our country is India, our nationality is Indian.\(^7\)

He strongly believed that the Indian National Movement could only be successful if it would carry its agitation to the center of the imperium. Though his political work was done for the most part in London, he was very popular in India because of his uncompromising and unselfish attitude. He returned to India and was thrice elected to the post of the President of the Indian National Congress in 1886, in 1893 and again in 1906. The Congress’s demand for ‘Swaraj’ (Independence) was first expressed publicly by him in his presidential address in 1906.

Pherozeshah Mehta, nicknamed ‘Ferocious Mehta’ and Dinshaw Wacha were closely associated with Dadabhai Naoroji. Unlike Naoroji, who stayed most of the part of life in London, Pherozeshah Mehta made Bombay the base of his political activities. Known as the ‘Father of Municipal government in Bombay’; he drafted the Bombay Municipal Act in 1872. He was the Municipal Commissioner in 1873 and the Chairman in 1884-85 and again in 1905. A lawyer by profession, Mehta was elected the president of the Indian National Congress in 1910 and in the same year he was made the Vice Chancellor of the Bombay University. His rhetorical talent made him known as, ‘by far the best debater in India’. Mehta’s dominance in national politics was recognized in wide circles. The ‘Madras Standard’ wrote in 1903:

> Even if Mr. Mehta be a despot, we would rather have the Congress led by him then by the most popular of our democrats. If the Congress is to be
under the despotism of one man, it will be to its advantage to be under the despotism of such man as Mr. Mehta, perhaps the best and the most picturesque of the Congress leaders. 

Gopalkrishna Gokhale said in Madras:

It is true that we have not got many single-minded leaders in the country to lead us, but we are not wholly without them. We have one such man in Sir Pherozeshah Mehta—earnest and patriotic, possessing high abilities and qualified in every way to lead the country.

Pherozeshah Mehta was every inch the son of the soil. His sense of patriotism can be seen reflected in his following words:

To my mind, a Parsi is a better and truer Parsi, as a Mohamedan or a Hindu is a better Mohamedan or Hindu, the more he is attached to the land which gave him birth.

D. E. Wacha, the third in the trio of the Parsi Congress politicians was born in a middle class family. After prematurely ended studies at Elphinstone College, Wacha went into the banking business. Later, he worked with a Tata textile factory where he acquired the organizational and technical abilities and basic knowledge of financial affairs. With the help of this knowledge he acquired a strong position in Bombay’s local politics and economic associations. He was appointed a member of Bombay Legislative Council in 1915, and a member of Imperial Legislative Council in 1916. He was elected the President of Indian National Congress at its 1901 session. He never attained the rank of a Naoroji or a Mehta, but his actual contribution to the
National Movement lies in his decades of successfully working for the movement’s continuity till his death in 1936.

Parsi women also did not lag behind in Indian National Movement and in India’s struggle for independence. Madame Bhikaji Cama was the first Parsi woman on the stage of the National Movement. She was a tireless propagandist for Indian independence. She was exiled from India and Britain and lived in France. Russian comrades used to call her India’s Joan of Arc. In 1907, she addressed an audience of about 1000 Germans and unfurled a flag, a tricolour, at the Stuttgart Conference. This flag, with some changes became India’s national flag forty years later. She started ‘Vande Mataram’, a revolutionary paper in 1905 from Geneva. She had a widespread influence on young Parsi women. She returned to Bombay due to a serious illness and died in 1936.

The Parsis were predominantly employed by the European traders in India, firstly because of their rational behaviour, in absence of religious taboos. The marginality of the Parsis also helped them in maintaining their unique identity. They neither assimilated with the dominant British group nor identified themselves with the underprivileged Indians. They maintained a critical distance to both which led them to creative innovative behaviour. Jer D. Randeria observes:

The ‘marginality’ of the Parsis; the factor of the British colonial policy of western education together with the employment of the educated; the increased occupational opportunities for modern innovative entrepreneur roles due to Parsis’ own religious value systems; and the religious norms that favoured progress along with influence of liberal politics on Parsi intellectuals as well as the early establishment of the Parsi printing press as a powerful medium of mass communication were the
four independent factors whose cumulative dynamics enhanced the social status of the community as well as the community’s role in the social change of the Indian society.\textsuperscript{11}

The Parsis’ contribution to Indian commerce and industry, politics, science and medicine, art and culture is really notable. The Parsis have played a significant role in the upliftment of nation’s economy and in making India, a developing country. During the 18\textsuperscript{th} century Parsis made their name as constructors of dockyards and shipbuilders. Lowji Nusserwanji Wadia built three dockyards in Bombay. In 1736, East India Company officials, very impressed with the work of this young Parsi foreman in their Surat dockyard, invited him to Bombay. He came to Bombay and put in fifty years of service, handing down his skills to his sons and grandsons. Since the establishment of the first dockyard in Bombay by the British, the management for this dockyard was commissioned to the Wadia family in uninterrupted succession for 150 years (1735 to 1885). Jamshedji Bamanji Wadia built battleships for the British Royal Navy. Ardeshir Cursetjee Wadia introduced the steam engine in ships for the first time. The history of Indian ship building in recent times is actually identical with the family history of the Wadia master-builders.

The Parsis made huge profits in the commission business as well as in the China trade which put them in a position to make their influence felt in financial business like money lending, banking and insurance. The Parsis played a leading part in foundation of most of Bombay’s important banks like Government Bank of Bombay, Oriental Bank, Asiatic Banking Corporation and Central Bank of India. The first Parsi bankers in India were Vicaji and Pestonji Meherji. They were in charge of the mint of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Sir Sorabji N. Pochkhanwala was the man who revolutionized Indian Banking. He was the only Indian to qualify from the Bankers Institute, London. In 1930, the State of Kashmir invited Sorabji to start a bank in Shrinagar. In 1934, the government of Ceylon also invited him to start a bank in their country. Even
today, many Parsis, men and women, are serving in National and International banking.

Besides trade and finance, the Parsis successfully played a leading role in the development of cotton industry in India. In contrast to the foundation of a coal and a jute industry, which was financed and managed primarily by the British, the Indian cotton industry originated solely through the initiative of Parsi entrepreneurs. The first Indian cotton mill, ‘The Bombay Spinning Mill’ was founded in 1854 in Bombay by Cowasji Nanabhai Davar to which he added ‘The Throstle Mill’ in 1857. The Petit family then followed with the establishment of three factories between 1858 and 1860. By 1870, fifteen cotton mills were established of which nine belonged to the Parsis. Sir Jamsetji Jeejibhoy, Sir Dinshaw Manekji Petit and Sir Cowasji Jahangir also made notable contribution in the development of cotton industry in India.

Similar to the cotton industry another important industrial sector in India – the steel industry – owes its origin to the initiative of a Parsi namely, Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata (1839-1904). He was educated at Elphinstone College, Bombay. Joining his father’s trading firm in 1858 and aided by a powerful imagination, he entered on an outstanding career that contributed massively to India’s industrial development. He was the first to recognize the importance and implications of the industrial revolution for India. Nani A. Palkhivala says:

Beyond the question, he was the most important pioneer entrepreneur in all of India. Jamsetji Tata, single-handed, repaid to India many times over, the debt which the Parsis owed to this fabulous country a thousand years earlier when their forefathers were given shelter and refuge on the shores of Western India.\(^{12}\)
He organized cotton mills in Bombay and Nagpur; founded the Tata Iron and Steel company, one of the largest integrated steel works in the world; and planned the use of hydroelectric energy resulting in the formation, after his death, of the Tata Power companies, which supply electricity to Bombay city and the surrounding areas. He introduced sericulture into India; founded the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore; applied the findings of science to the cultivation of cotton and other crops; built the Taj Mahal hotel; and established an endowment for the advanced professional and technical training of Indians abroad. A man of high social ideals, he was a pioneer in his attitude to labour, and devoted an overwhelming proportion of his firm’s profits to practical philanthropy. He stood close to the Indian National Congress through his personal contacts with Dadabhai Naoroji and D. E. Wacha, but he did not take any active part in Indian politics. He was of the opinion that the political independence of India would be meaningless without corresponding economic independence. F. R. Harris writes:

He never made himself prominent as a politician, leaving public affairs and speech making to others; but he held strong views, and was intensely patriotic.\(^{13}\)

His sons Sir Dorabji J. Tata (1859-1932) and Sir Ratanji Tata (1871-1918) inherited both his fortune and his traditions. Under their guidance the firm expanded into a group of associated companies, covering industries. Sir Ratanji founded Department of Social Science and Administration at the London School of Economics, and financed certain social studies at the University of London. Sir Dorabji established a trust for international research into leukemia and endowed a hospital for cancer research in Bombay. In 1932, on the death of Sir Dorabji, Sir Naoroji Saklatvala, one of the founder’s nephews, became chairman of the group. On his death in 1938, J.R.D. Tata (1904-1993), whose father R.D. Tata was a cousin and partner of the founder, became chairman. For decades, he directed the Tata Group of Companies. J.R.D. Tata got the first pilot license issued in India, and became
known as the father of Indian civil aviation. He founded India’s first commercial airlines, the Tata Air Lines in 1932 and Air India International in 1948. Both these companies were nationalized in 1953, and renamed as Indian Air Lines and Air India Ltd. respectively. He was awarded the ‘Bharat Ratna’ for his service to commerce and industry in the country. As a result of his tireless efforts by the late 1950s, the group controlled the largest single aggregation of Indian industry, including among its interests not only textiles, steel and electric power, but also agriculture equipment, locomotives, diesel trucks, chemicals, cement, vegetable oils, soap and toilet products, insurance, radios and industrial investment. Eighty five per cent of the capital of the parent company, Tata Sons Private Limited, was held by the various charitable trusts endowed by the family. Even today the Tatas are closely associated with the Government of India in their functioning.

Next to the Tata group of Companies, Godrej Ltd. is the second largest industrial organization run by the Parsis. Ardashir Burjorji Godrej gave up his legal profession and set up Godrej & Boyce Manufacturing Co. in 1897, to manufacture locks. The corporation actually had its beginning in India’s freedom struggle. Its founder, Ardeshir Godrej, was a staunch nationalist and believed that the country’s economic degradation was even worse than its political subjugation, and that freedom could not be won unless it became self-reliant. Beginning with security equipments, the group diversified into a wide variety of consumer goods and services and became the first Indian manufacturers to displace well-established foreign brands from the market. In 1930, Godrej became the first company in the world to develop the technology to manufacture soap with vegetable oils. In 1958, they launched in market the first Indian made refrigerator. Today, companies operating under the group umbrella are involved in a wide range of business – from locks and safes to typewriters and word processors, from refrigerators and furniture to machine tools and process equipments, from engineering workstations to cosmetics and detergents, from edible oils and chemicals to agro products. The group has more recently entered the real estate and information
technology sectors also. Commenting upon the economic interests of the Parsis, Eckehard Kulke says:

The Position of the Parsi community in Indian society is determined basically by its economic interests and activities, and, moreover, becomes most obvious in the economic sphere. In spite of their infinitesimally small number, the Parsis succeeded in placing their mark upon the economic development of Bombay and India in such a way that they can be termed as an ‘Idealtypus’ of a “business community”.  

To what extent individual Parsis were motivated in their economic thinking by dynamic entrepreneurial attitudes may be exemplified by a quotation from a letter by Jamsetji Jeejibhoy, the first great Parsi entrepreneur:

We cannot give up business and remain in a state of monotonous lethargy. Our habits and our early education have been such that the bustle of commerce and the excitement of business are essential to us.

Economically and politically successful Parsis also played an important role in the field of social reforms in India. Their role as mediators, the Englishmen’s growing need for Indian employees, economic agents and interpreters, the lack of socio-religious taboos, their willingness to acquire linguistic and techno-organizational tools and especially their visits to England accelerated the process of modernization among the Parsis. The most effective agent of the socio-cultural change proved to be the educational system, both for India as a whole and also, to a greater extent, for the Parsis. The English educational system was, very soon regarded by the Parsis as
‘one of the greatest boons and blessings conferred by England upon India’. In 1848, a group of young Parsi reformers ‘Young Bombay’, under the leadership of Dadabhai Naoroji started the ‘Students’ Literary and Scientific Society’. The principal aim of this was to raise the educational standards of the population by providing school facilities. In 1851, the reformers, again under the guidance of Dadabhai, published the Gujarati newspaper ‘Rast Goftar’ (Herald of Truth). In 1852, the first political organization in Bombay, the ‘Bombay Association’ was founded, which provided the platform for the reform movement towards the British government. Although the Parsis of Bombay were dominant in all of these reform activities, these efforts were in no way limited to their community alone but were in the benefit of the whole community. The initiators of all these reform activities were, Dadabhai Naoroji, Naoroji Furdoonji, S. S. Bengali, K. N. Cama and Ardeshir Framji Moos and Behramji M. Malabari. Dadabhai Naoroji writes:

The six or seven years before I eventually came to England in 1855 … were full of all sorts of reforms, social, educational, political, religious … Female education, free association of women with men at public, social and other gatherings, infant schools, the ‘Students’ Literary and Scientific Society’, Societies for the ‘Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in the Vernacular, Parsi reform, abolition of child marriages, remarriage of widows among Hindus, and Parsi Religious Reform Society, were some of the problems tackled, movements set on foot, and institutions inaugurated by a hand of young men fresh from (Elphinstone) College…

The most successful and the most prominent Parsi reformer was Behramji M. Malabari (1853-1912). He devoted his life entirely to improving the lot of the Indian women who had been degraded by social traditions. His reform agitations were concentrated especially on child marriages and the
early permanent widowhood practiced in the Hindu society. His ‘Notes on Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood’, of which 4,000 copies were sent to all leading Englishmen and Hindus in India in 1884, made him one of the most influential social reformers of his time. From 1884 to 1891; Malabari led a crusade for the introduction of a social reform legislation with his newspaper ‘The Indian Spectator’. He was of the opinion that in India, social reforms would have to be a precondition for a political emancipation. Malabari’s efforts had its success in 1891, when the ‘Age of Consent Bill’ was passed in which the minimal marital age for the girls was raised from 10 to 12 years. After reaching this goal, Malabari retired largely from public life. Malabari’s work is so remarkable because he, as a member of a marginal group of the Indian society and, therefore, not directly involved in their socio-cultural traditions, worked, as an outsider towards a change in a social abuses in the dominant group of the Indian society.

Immensely valuing education, the Parsis not only established schools but also a press to enlarge public awareness through the medium of newspapers. The Parsi press proved to be one of the essential forerunners and agents of social change in the community. Before the first Marathi newspaper, ‘Dig-Dursan’ appeared in 1837 and the first Hindu-Gujarati newspaper ‘Vartaman’ in Ahmedabad in 1849, there were already four and six Parsi-Gujarati newspapers in circulation respectively in 1937 and 1849 namely ‘Bombay Samachar’ (1822- ), ‘Bombay Vartaman’ (1830-43), ‘Jam-e-Jamshed’ (1832- ), ‘Bombayna Chabuk’ (1832-50), ‘Samachar Darpan’ (1844-52), ‘Chitranjan Darpan’ (1845-46). An open discussion on different social issues, through these newspapers helped the Parsis to directly promote the social reformatory ideas. An early purely English newspaper founded by a Parsi in 1876 was the ‘Indian Spectator’, devoted often to the Parsi initiated social reforms among the Hindus. The progressive Parsis also published a newspaper called ‘Rast-Goftar’, mainly for their religio-social reformist propaganda. The weekly ‘Kaiser-I-Hind’ founded in 1882 as the mouthpiece of a political party allied to the Congress had remained the most
out-spoken on socio-political themes and had a wide circulation among Gujarati Hindus and Parsis until very recent times.

Despite the reducing Parsi population, large numbers of contemporary Parsis have gained eminence as pioneers in novel fields of modern day innovations. A random sampling of a few names is considered adequate here because the aim is simply to point out that there is continuation of the progressive trend of the Parsis at all levels and it inevitably influences the contemporary India.

The fields of law and medicine have been particular favourites among the professional Parsis. The prominent among them in the field of law were, Sir Dinesh Mulla, Justice Sir D. Davar, Advocate General H. Seervai, Sardar Davar T. Modi, S. D. Vimadalal Bar-at-Law and D. H. Patit. Among the contemporary lawyers Nani A. Palkhivala was outstanding. He wrote *The Law and Practice of Income-Tax, The Highest Taxed Nation, Our Constitution Defaced and Defiled, Taxation in India, India's Priceless Heritage, We, the Nation, We, the People*, etc. He was a member of the first and the second Law Commission of India. He was also an honorary member of the Academy of Political Science, New York, India’s Ambassador to the U.S.A., and senior director of Tata Sons Ltd. After Palkhivala, Fali S. Nariman and Attorney General Soli J. Sorabji also made their presence felt nationally and internationally. Among the medical men whose names have been famous are Dr. R. J. Vakil, the internationally acclaimed cardiologist, J. C. Paymaster the cancer specialist, D. J. Jussawala the founder of the Indian Cancer Society, Dr. Khorshed R. Ginwala known for her services to the Durban Indian Child Welfare, Dr. N. K. Jungalwala whose name is associated with the founding of the National Institute of Health Education and Miss Tehmina K. Adranvala whose name has been on the W.H.O. expert committee on nursing.

Many Parsis have been associated with another national activity, namely defence. Field Marshal S. P. Manekshaw, the Naval Chief of Staff
Admiral J. Cursetji, Air Chief Marshal Aspi Engineer are some of the names linked with the Indian Army.

There have been a large number of famous Parsi names in the field of sports also. Some great names in cricket have been R. Mody, F. Engineer, N. Contractor, R. Surti and P. Umrigar. Some famous names are associated with badminton, hockey and athletics also, but many more expert names are of bridge and chess players such as Dr. Hathiiram, N. D. Kanga and B. Kartak and F. K. Mody. Some famous names connected with the Indian film industry are, Sohrab Mody, J.S. Bhavnagri, Freny Variava and Khurshid Minocher-Homji.

**Parsis’ contribution to Gujarati Arts and Literature:**

The most consistent Hindu influence has been from the Gujarati Hindus from whom the Parsis have acquired the language, a manner of dressing and minor traditions and celebration practices. They also adopted an authority-structure called the Panchayat in 1642, which exemplifies the assimilation of traditional Hindu elements. The learning of Gujarati language has opened up a mine of information and interests as well as avenues of cultural entertainment in the way of poetry, drama, singing and ring-dance or ‘Garba’. The Gujarati wedding and folk-songs are also very popular among the Parsi women. The Parsis have made notable contribution to Gujarati literature. They mixed up Persian language into Gujarati in their daily use with an intention to maintain their identity as a distinct community, and experimented in creating Gujarati literature in Gujarati language with a Persian shade. Although a Parsi-Gujarati poet Ardashir Framji belonging to the Pandit Age provided an ideal example for the Parsi poets to write in pure Gujarati language, most of them wrote poetry in Persian-Gujarati only. Among the Parsi poets Baheramji Mervanji Malabari has the credit of being the first Parsi-Gujarati poet. Six anthologies of his poetry were published including Wilson Virah, Anubhavika, Sansarika, and Niti Vinod. The recurring subject matters of his poetry are social reforms and patriotism. Besides Malabari,
Jahangir Taliarkhan (1847-1923), Kavi Palanji Barjorji Desai (1851-1934), Adalji Taraporwala (1852-1914), Kavi Jamsetji Nousharwan Petit (1858-1886), Kavi Jahangir Nousharwanji Patel, Jahangir Manekji Desai (1898-1870) and Parsi women poetess like Aalibai Palamkot, Dhanbai Wadia and Khorshed Kapadia etc. have made noteworthy contribution to Gujarati poetry.

In the early nineteenth century Baheramji Fardunji Mezan translated Persian short stories into Gujarati. Other Parsis like Dadi Taraporwala, Jahangir Taliarkhan and Kekhushro Kabraji too either translated or transcreated English novels into Gujarati during this period. Besides translations these writers also wrote original novels. Kekhushro Kabraji (1842-1904) wrote *Dukhiyari Bachu* in which he expressed his reformative ideas and criticized the Parsis for their blind imitation of the English style and manners. Jahangir Taliyarkhan (1847-1923) wrote two novels titled *Ratnalaxmi* and *Mudra and Kulin*. Jahanjir Murzban (1848-1920) translated colonel Medoz’s novel *Tara-a-Tale* into Gujarati as *Tarabai* in which he used pure literary Gujarati instead of Parsi-Gujarati. He also wrote a novel titled *Akkal Na Samundar* –a comedy. Dadi Taraporwala (1852-1914) intermingled comic element with serious ideas of social reforms in his two novels, *Shirin Ni Kahani* and *Pativrata Baydi No Vahemi Bhardar*. In 1862, Sohrabshah Dadabhai Munsafana translated a French novel from its English version titled as *Indian Cottage* into Gujarati as *Hindustan Madhye Nu Zunpadu*. This novel appeared exactly four years before the publication of the first original Gujarati novel *Karan Ghelo* by Nandshankar Mehta in 1866. This is how the Parsi novelists paved the way for the novel genre in Gujarati literature.

The credit of pioneering theater activities in the same century in Gujarat also goes to the Parsis. They formed commercial as well as non-commercial drama companies in Gujarat and Maharashtra, particularly in Bombay. Bhavai was the only form of drama, popular among the people of Gujarat at that time. But the educated and cultured class was averse to it because they found this form of drama very coarse and vulgar. The Parsis, at that point of time started writing and transformed the drama form. They
succeeded immediately, for the writers, actors and promoters; all were Parsis. In 1853, the first Parsi drama company called ‘Parsi Natak Mandali’ was established with support and inspiration from Dadabhai Naoroji and other leading Parsis like Nasarwanji Majgaonwala, Khosretji Kama, Ardashtir Framji Moos and Jahangir Barjorji. This company produced the first play called *Rustam Jabuli Sohram* in the same year. The Parsis reformed the drama form and once again attracted the cultured class towards it. Kekhushru Kabraji, the editor of ‘Rust Goftar’ wrote articles in his newspaper criticizing the class of people indifferent to the vernacular drama. Between 1853 and 1869 about twenty Parsi drama companies were established and Framji Dalal, Kuwarji Najar, Adalji Khor, Dadabhai Patel, Ranchhodhaji Udayram, Vinayak Shankar Sheth, Nanabhai Rania, Kawasji Kohidur etc. contributed to the development of drama in Gujarat. Other prominent Parsi drama companies at that time were ‘Victoria Natak Mandali’ and ‘Alfred Natak Mandali’. Kekhushro Kabraji who wrote plays like *Jamshed, Bejan, Manijeh*, and *Faredun* established the ‘Victoria Natak Mandali’ in 1869. He also wrote many plays based on the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. In 1870, Nasarwanji Sohrabji wrote first Gujarati opera, *Rustam-E-Sohrab*, which was based on great Persian poet Firdausi’s *Shahnama*. The Parsis also laid foundation of Urdu drama. Baheramji Fardunji Murzban translated into Urdu a Gujarati play, *Sonana Mulni Ni Khoshed*, written by Edalji Khor, and it was produced on 7-10-1871 in Bombay. Adi Patel produced first Urdu opera named *Benzir Badre Munir* written by Nasarwanji Merwanji Khansaheb. The direct or indirect influences of the Parsi theater have been felt on almost entire Indian theater. Almost all the Parsi drama companies began with the production of Gujarati drama but later these dramas were reproduced in Hindi, Urdu and even in English. These drama companies glorified Hindu religion in their historical and mythical drama and made great efforts to remove the feelings of disappointment, pessimism, dejection and distrust prevalent among the people during the British rule. It promoted a feeling of reforms and rejuvenation and also provided a new direction and force to India’s struggle for independence.
What factors have promoted the Parsis’ commercial success and their many excellent qualities? Perhaps partly the fact that only the strongest or ablest families survived the many centuries of hardship under Hindu and then Muslim domination, and also because of their practice of always marrying within their own community kept the wealth intact within the family. Furthermore, their religion did not dissuade them from enjoying worldly goods. Another important factor is that Zoroastrianism fosters a feeling of social solidarity by virtue of its fundamental command to help the good and fight the wicked. At all times the Parsis feel that he and his community are engaged in a vast enterprise which is concerned with both the greatest forces in the universe and the humblest labours of daily life and which is under the guardianship of a good and just good.

The Parsis are a peace loving community. The minority-majority relationship has remained remarkably without conflict although Parsis had achieved a dominating position in the economic sphere. Over the centuries there has been little friction in spite of an altogether differing views of life in the Zoroastrian religion, mainly because of the commendable tolerance of the Hindus and the amicable nature of the Parsis. On the contrary, the personable and generous Parsis have won over the populace in India. They have felt neither as step-children nor as unwanted foreigners.

The Parsis believe that wealth is fundamentally positive. This attitude, motivated by their religion, however, brings certain social obligations along with it. The Parsis, landing in India already pointed out this basic attitude to king Jadhav Rana, the ruler of Sanjan. The fifth of the sixteen Sanskrit slokas in which the Dastur explained the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism runs thus:

In whose house thee is the giving away (in charity) of food etc. which sweet and full of pleasant taste; who do charitable acts as the building of lakes, wells, reservoirs and bridges on rivers (lit. waters);
who always give presents of money, clothes etc. to deserving petitioners; -- those are we Parsis…

The Parsis have always been distinguished for their beneficence as well as for their wealth. They have founded and maintained hospitals, schools and other institutions, their liberality extending to others as well as to their own people. The Parsis have many exemplary qualities like diligence, optimism, keeping of contract, honesty, purity, charity and social services etc. The next generations of the Tata, Wadia, Petit, Readymoney, Godrej, Ness and such well to do families have continued to extend a helping hand to the beneficiaries. N.P. Sharma observes:

Parsis have been in India now for more than one thousand years. To say that they have not assimilated with the mainstream is readily and easily belied by appearances of things. They have repaid the cost of the home India gave them many times over, by playing very important roles in every crucial development of life -- Politics (Dadabhai Naoroji and Sir Phirozeshah Mehta), Industry (Jamshedji Tata), Science (Homi Bhabha), Law (Nani A. Palkhivalla) and music (Zubin Mehta).

The Parsis have contributed to the all-round development of India. Jamshedji Tata is called the ‘Father of Indian Industry’. Homi Bhabha is the pioneer of Atomic Energy in India and JRD Tata put India on the aviation map of the world. Sam Manekshaw is the first Field Marshal of India. The first Indian bank, the first Indian newspaper, the first ship were all pioneered by Parsis. In virtually every field from engineering to commerce and banking to law and medicine to defence to even education, music, theatre and sports, the Parsis are the proud pioneers. About the loyalty and patriotism of the Parsis, Jer D. Randeria Says:
As regards loyalty of the Parsis, ample proofs has been provided since the time the Parsis gave their lives fighting for their king when Sanjan was attacked, their role in India’s political struggle, in the industrial revolution of India, and in general by their progressive nationalistic outlook and support of the cultural renaissance since independence. The anxiety over the community’s future in the immediate pre-independence era, which had seen a burst of Parsi-communalistic associations, was removed in the independent India, the Parsis having been accepted without having to justify themselves, as Indians. With the return of group-identity and elite-consciousness in the economic sphere, the Parsis have enthusiastically continued to contribute and participate in the magnificent cultural renaissance of the Indian society.19

Thus the Parsis have revolutionized in India, the economic field through all-India Industrialization, the social field through social reforms, the political field through the Indian National Congress and the educational field through starting schools and colleges and have set an ideal example how immigrants turn out to be deep-rooted natives in a foreign land.

**The Parsis’ contribution to Literature in English:**

Business and industry have undoubtedly been the forte of Parsis, but their contribution to literature, has been quite considerable. The Parsi writers have produced a significant body of literary writing, which now forms an important component in the Indian literature in English. Parsi writing falls into two phases: the early phase of British colonialism; which includes the pre-1950 writing, and the second phase, comprising works written after Indian independence, which may be termed as post-colonial period.
Poetry:

In the early phase, Parsi writers showed a preference for poetic forms. The poet Behramji Malabari was one of the earliest Indians to write poetry in English. His long verse autobiography, *The Indian Muse in English Garb* (1876), was hailed as the first book of the first Parsi poet. A great deal of religious poetry was also written in this period. Manekji B. Pithawala’s *Afternoons with Ahura Mazda* (1919) and *Links with the Past* (1933) sing of the Divine power and ideals of the sacred books of the Parsis. D. M. Gorwala, in *The Light of Iran or the Coming of Zarathushtra* (1935) narrates the life of the prophet. Khabardar Ardashir Framji wrote 101 religious sonnets collected under the title *Zarathurashtra, the First Prophet of the World*. A number of Parsi poets also wrote eulogistic poetry showing their loyalty to the British Raj. Rustam B. Paymaster wrote *The Nazarana or India’s Offerings to Her King Emperor on His Coronation* (1902) and *Sunset and Sunrise Being Odes on the Death of Queen Victoria* (1917) paying tributes to the rulers. There was a small band of Parsi poets who wrote nationalist poetry. Rustam B. Paymaster wrote *Navroziana or the Dawn of the New Era* (1917), a tribute to Dadabhai Naoroji. F. J. Karaka celebrated sacrifices of the freedom fighters in *The Fight for Freedom* (1940).

To the post-colonial period belong Parsi poets like K. N. Daruwala, Adil Jussawala, Kersey Kartak and Geive Patel, popularly known as the Parsi Quartet.

Born in 1937 in Lahore, Keki N. Daruwala is the most prolific and accomplished of the Parsi poets of this phase. His first collection of poems *Under Orion* was published in 1970. His other poetry collections are *Apparition in April* (1971), *Crossing of Rivers* (1976), *Winter Poems* (1980), *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982), which won the poet the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1985, and *Landscape* (1987). His collection of short stories *Sword and Abyss* was published in 1979. He has edited *Two Decades of Indian Poetry* (1960-80), which is one of the most significant anthologies of Indian poetry in English.
The significant feature of his poetry is realistic portrayal of contemporary sociopolitical situations. He was a police officer by profession and this fact is not without significance in understanding his response to men and matters. His poetic mode is generally of description and narration. His poetry covers a wide range of subjects, including poverty, crime and corruption, disease and death, riots and curfew, love and self-betrayal etc. Daruwala is a great master of irony, and he has written a number of poems which are satirical and which are intended to expose the evils and the malpractices prevalent in our country. . M. K. Naik observes:

He (Daruwala) is determined to avoid the ‘maudlin mud’ of sentimentality, but deprivation and misery, disease and death move him acutely, often making his satire ‘drip with bile acid’. Daruwala brings a combination of these attitudes to bear on his view of the rioting mob, the tubthumping politician, ‘Evangelical Eva’ and ‘Rotarian Renu’, the Maulvi who dies of tongue cancer, the leper at the Taj, the ledge-walker, the epileptic woman, the bandit chief and many others. His view of religion—whether his own, the Zoroastrian, or Hindu—is characterized by a modern skepticism tempered by a lively human curiosity as in his vignettes of Banaras, ‘the octopus city’ in ‘The Water Front’. Daruwala’s favourite images are those of violence (the gun goes off on many pages), disease (e.g. The Taj is ‘domed leprosy’, rain is ‘arthritic’ and the river ‘dark as gangrene’) and fire (a by-product of his Parsi heritage, after all?). In his latest work, Daruwala appears to be moving from acute perception of the social scene to a more inward kind of poetry, which, however, is yet to take on the incisiveness of his earlier verse.20
Adil Jussawalla, born in 1940 in Bombay, lived in England for about one and half decade. The recurrent theme of his poetry is exile and alienation. Jussawalla does admit that in the poems written abroad:

I have tried to show the effect of living in lands I can neither leave nor love nor properly belong to.\textsuperscript{21}

His first collection of poetry, *Land’s End* (1962) contains poems written in England and some parts of Europe. His second anthology is titled *The Missing Person* (1976). ‘The missing person’ in this anthology is largely the poet himself who is trying to relocate himself in his own, but no longer familiar, social milieu.

Born in 1940 in Bombay, Gieve Patel shares common concern with Daruwala and places his poetry firmly within the social matrix. Being a doctor by profession, Gieve Patel is familiar with pain, disease and death, which are recurrent themes of his poetry. His first two collections, *Poems* (1966) and *How Do You withstand, Body?* (1977) deal with the suffering of humans in a dehumanizing environment. His poetry is mostly situational. He begins with a concrete real life situation, which triggers off his personal response. In a most recent collection, *Mirror, Mirroring* (1991), the poet moves into the postmodernist phase, calling into question the observing self in his poetry.

These Parsi Poets occupy an important position in post-independence period of Indian English poetry. They reveal a vitality and variety that is in keeping with the kaleidoscopic experience of modern man. Indira Nityanandam says:

(The Parsi poets) ... constantly observe and examine the microcosm of many cultural and spiritual contradictions that are seen in India. They do not reveal or possess a fractured identity, a
unhappiness at being in India or a desire to be somewhere else. They seek no Utopia and are not bitter about the life around them. They do not look to the past for inspiration or succour. The present is what they are acutely aware of, and in spite of its attendant problems, it is not dystopia. They are able to detach themselves from a scene and observe it with all its intricacies. Using irony as their chief vehicle, they attempt no complexity of expression or convoluted images.²²

Kersy D. Katrak is different from the other three of the Parsi poets. He avoids the serious tone and chooses the comic vein. His subject matter of course remains the social situation. His first two anthologies, *A Journal by the Way* (1968) and *Diversions by the Wayside* (1969), contain a number of personal poems addressed to his friends, to his wife and to his child. In his later works, *Underworld* (1979) and *Purgatory: Songs from the Holy Planet* (1984) he uses a variety of new devices such as parody, pastiche, collage and intertextuality. Katrak makes fun of everything and everyone including religion, God, priests, poets and himself in his poetry.

The Parsi poets share a common heritage and poetic concerns of the mainstream Indian English poets in which ethnicity plays no significant role. It is the ‘Indianness’, which lie at the heart of their poetry. They are more interested in writing a real poem than any obsession with one’s ethnic or religious identity. Manish Chand observes:

… Parsi poets write within mainstream tradition of Indian poetry in English except for occasional allusions to their ethnic identity or community. There are very few poems on exclusively Parsi themes, and practically none that concern their
problematic status as a minority, or their alienation from Indian cultural complex.\textsuperscript{23}

However there are some references of Parsi life and Zoroastrianism in the poems like Daruwala’s *Keeper of the Dead* or Gieve Patel’s *The Ambiguous Fate of Gieve Patel, He Being neither Muslim nor Hindu in India*, these poets cannot be categorized as ‘Minority Poets’, as they certainly belong to the mainstream of Indian English Poetry.

**Prose:**

There was very little Parsi fiction in the pre-independence era. D. F. Karaka is the most important novelist of this phase who published three novels between 1940 and 1944. His first novel, *Just Flesh* (1940) deals with ideological conflicts between two generations of Englishmen through the clash between a conservative father and his socialist son. Set in Bombay, *There Lay the City* (1942) delineates the impact of World War II on the lives of the city dwellers. *We Never Die* (194) is a political novel, which deals with the subject of the struggle for independence in a small village of northern India. Besides Karaka, Kaikhusrau Edalji Ghamat’s *My Friend, the Barrister* (1908), Ardeshir F. J. Chinoy and Dinbai A. J. Chinoy’s *Pootli, A Story of Life in Bombay* (1915), D. M. Gorwala’s Saarda the *Tale of a Rajput Maid* (1931) are some of the important novels published during this period.

The Parsi novel in English made quick progress in terms of both quality and quantity in the post-independence period. Perin Bharucha’s *The Fire Worshippers* (1968) is the first significant work of fiction in this period. The novel has greater historical and sociological value than literary interest. It also gives a comprehensive account of Parsi life and culture. The novel deals with the issues of identity and inter-caste marriage. Novy Kapadia says:

The dilemma of interfaith marriages was first tackled by Perin Bharucha in her novel *The Fire*
Bharucha’s novel, using the fictional discourse, provides details of the class based structure of Parsi society in Bombay. It also shows certain mental fixations in the community. At one level, it deals with the story of the idealistic Nari who startles his middle-class parents Pestonji and Jerbanoo Kanchwalla by stating that he wants to marry an Anglo-Indian girl, Portia. The father Pestonji’s reactions reflect the Parsi concerns about interfaith marriages in the 1960s. During that phase, it was ethnic pride, which led to Pestonji’s objections to his son Nari’s marriage to Portia Roy. She is described as being “intelligent, educated and not the least bit bigoted.” One of the reasons for Pestonji’s objections to the marriage is that such mixed marriages will herald the disintegration of the community. The objections of the father reflect the author’s views. Perin Bharucha was quite clairvoyant. In the 1960s, the trend of mixed marriages amongst the Parsis was a trickle but as the author subtly hints, it could become a deluge. Within the space of three decades, the trend of inter-faith marriages has increased rapidly amongst the Parsi community. So in the novel, we find Pestonji objecting to his son’s marriage because he felt it would become a trendsetter.

The last two decades of the twentieth century have been particularly fruitful in the field of Parsi fiction. A large number of Parsi novelists – Rohinton Mistry, Saros Cowasjee, Farrukh Dhondy, Firdaus Kanga, Dina Mehta, Bapsi Sidhwa, Boman Desai, Ardashir Vakil, Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, most of them settled abroad, have published their first novels during this period. They may well be described as expatriate writers. The writers,
despite being expatriate, write about Indian-Parsi life in Bombay, which has always been the epicenter of Parsi culture.

Bapsi Sidhwa, presently living in Houston, Texas, is Pakistan's leading diasporic writer. She has produced four novels in English – *The Crow Eaters, The Pakistani Bride, Ice-Candy Man* (US edition *Cracking India*) and *An American Brat*, that reflect her personal experience of the Indian subcontinent's partition, abuse against women, immigration to the US, and membership in the Parsi-Zoroastrian community. Born on August 11, 1938 in Karachi, Pakistan, and migrating shortly thereafter to Lahore, Bapsi Sidhwa witnessed the bloody partition of the Indian subcontinent as a young child in 1947.

Sidhwa had no real English language literary ancestor in Pakistan, nor did Pakistani English writing offer any literary precedent to the bawdy humour of her novel *The Crow Eaters*. Its ribaldry too was rare for South Asian English fiction at the time. The focus on the Parsee community was most unusual too, and preceded the work of other major South Asian English writers of Parsee origin. In that sense she had been a trendsetter for later Parsi novelists, because before Sidhwa, only Nargis Dalal in *The Sisters* (1973) and Perin Bharucha in *The Fire Worshippers* (1968) had dealt with the themes and issues related to the Parsi life. In an interview Sidhwa says:

*The Crow Eaters* was self-published in Lahore in 1978, in India by Orient Longman in 1979, and in Britain by Cape in 1980. It was widely reviewed and liked for its irreverence and its uninhibited sexual and scatological humor. It was the first major novel about the Parsis. Faiz called it a ‘tour-de-force’. After *The Crow Eaters*, other authors like Rushdie, Chandra, etc., were able to introduce Parsi characters more naturally; and it influenced not only a new crop of Parsi writers, but many Indian and Pakistani writers. I think the parents in
The Crow Eaters influenced Rushdie’s presentation of the parents in Midnight’s Children, its bawdy humor perhaps providing a sort of subliminal permission to express his own brand of humor. We shared the same editor at Cape, and I know Rushdie had read the manuscript.  

After receiving countless rejections for her first and second novels, The Pakistani Bride and The Crow Eaters, she decided to publish The Crow Eaters privately. Since then, she has received numerous awards and honorary professorships for these first two works and her two most recent novels, Ice-Candy Man and An American Brat. These include the Pakistan National honors of the Patras Bokhri award for The Pakistani Bride in 1985 and the highest honor in the arts, the Sitari-I-Imtiaz in 1991. Her third novel, Cracking India was awarded the German Literaturepreis and a nomination for Notable Book of the Year from the American Library Association, and was mentioned as a “New York Times’ Notable Book of the Year,” in 1991. A Bunting Fellowship from Harvard and a National Endowment of the Arts grant in 1986 and 1987 supported the completion of Cracking India. Most recently she was awarded a $100,000 grant as the recipient of the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award in 1993. Her works have now been translated into Russian, French and German. She is currently working on collections of short stories and essays, while fulfilling her duties as Writer-in-Residence and English professor at Mt. Holyoke College. She has also taught college-level English courses at St. Thomas University, Rice University, and The University of Texas, all in Houston, as well as at the graduate level at Columbia University, New York.

In her third novel, Ice-Candy-Man, Bapsi Sidhwa delicately threads the story of an 8-year-old girl named Lenny with the din of violence ready to crash around her world as the Partition moves from political planning into reality. The story is told in the present tense as the events unfold before the young girl's eyes, though moments of an older Lenny looking back are apparent. Like Sidhwa, Lenny is stricken with polio, lives in Lahore, and is a Parsi. She
is clever and extremely observant narrator, though many times her understanding is limited by her young age. This naivety is apparent when she ponders if the earth will bleed when the adults "crack" India. The historical scene of the Partition is integrated well into the novel through Lenny's young eyes, though Sidhwa is criticized by some critics for making Lenny's character too intelligent for her age.

In *Ice- Candy Man*, Sidhwa captures the turmoil of the times, with a brilliant combination of individual growing-up pains and the collective anguish of a newly independent but divided country. The dehumanizing effects of communalism she movingly reveals in this novel is painfully relevant to our present day India.

Sidhwa' fourth novel *An American Brat* explores issues of migration to the West and cultural differences between Pakistan and America. The plot revolves around the misadventures and metamorphosis of a young Parsee girl, Feroza. She arrives in America as a naive, over-protected and privileged young girl from Lahore. She is entrusted to the care of her young uncle – a student at MIT – but Feroza soon starts to find her own identity. She joins college, falls in love, develops new interests and acquires a new sense of self as an American.

Boman Desai is an Indian expatriate writer with Parsi background. He was honoured with an Illinois Arts Council Award for a short-story *Under the Moon* and a Stand Magazine Award for another short-story *A Fine Madness*. Boman Desai’s first novel, *The Memory of Elephants*; his second novel, *Asylum, USA*; and his third novel *A Woman Madly in Love* – all deal with, in some way or another, the Parsi community at large. The evocation of both the characters and the community are done in fine detail, both beautifully painted and poignantly fleshed out. In his novels he mostly deals with the themes of nostalgia, of a world lost or altered, the crucial element of memory and the concept of transnationalism. The key ingredients to the making of Boman Desai’s novels successful are yearning, love, sadness, marriage, friendship
and all the supporting formulae that accompany them. Desai’s first novel *The Memory of Elephants* was published in 1988. Hormus Seervai, the central character of the novel, is a young Parsi scientist doing research in an American university. He makes a memory machine or monoscan to study how memories become encoded in the brain. The problem starts when Homi uses this machine to relieve the intensity of a sexual experience he has had with his girlfriend. As Homi repeats this reply experiment, the machine malfunctions, and he slips from his personal memory into the collective consciousness. Homi collapses into a coma physically, while his consciousness becomes a voyeur to the history of his family and race as well, and a marvelous spectacle of Parsi life unfolds. The novel gives detailed account of Parsi characters, their customs/rituals and history of their origin.

Indira Bhatt says:

Through the characters of Bapaiji and Granny, Desai has depicted the powerful women of the Parsi community. They have all types – the home-loving and docile like Dhunmai, out-going, bold and public-life-lover Bapaiji, a strong-willed global trotter like Granny. The male characters of yester-years are used as backdrops to these powerful portrayals of the women. The Parsi customs of marriage, navjote, kusti, navar are all fully and interestingly described. One feels that Desai is anxious to record the Parsi way of life fully in great detail lest they be lost with the Parsi youth glob-trotting all over the world twice removed from the land of their origin. Through the device of memoscan Desai makes Homi witness the entire history of his origin. To use Salman Rushdie’s words in *Midnight’s Children*, ‘shackled to history’, one cannot escape the past history unless it is consciously bought back and squarely faced.
Parsis’ defeat at the hands of the Musalmans/Arabs the death of the warriors and conversion to Islam, and exodus to India and their merging with the Indian way of life- all are seen in proper perspective.26

In his novel, *A Woman Madly in Love*, Desai deals with the theme of relationship between Farida Cooper, an older woman and a younger man named Darius, with the treachery of her Joycean scholar husband as a third strand. The story shuttles between Chicago and Mumbai, ‘spanning the years between World War II to the eighties’. An interesting device that Boman Desai employs in this novel is the use of epistolary technique.

Firdaus Kanga, another expatriate Indian novelist in English and performer, was born into a middle-class Parsi family in 1960. He presently lives in London, UK. He spent most of his life in Bombay, the city in which he was educated and grew up, and aspects of which are wonderfully evoked in his semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow*. In 1997, this novel was turned into the award-winning film *Sixth Happiness* directed by Waris Hussein, for which he not only wrote screenplay but also played the lead role. The novel is built around the painful experience of a physically handicapped boy, Daryus Kotwal, in trying to grow into adulthood. The flowering of the adolescent sensibility is unrevealed against the background of the close-knit Parsi family of the Kotwals.

Kanga has also presented a number of documentaries on the themes of disability, such as *Double the Trouble*, and *Twice the Fun*, a provocative documentary drama that explored sex between gay men and lesbians who have disabilities.

Farrukh Dhondy, a novelist, short-story writer, screenplay writer and journalist was born in Poona, India in 1944 in a Parsi family. He obtained a Bachelor of Science degree from the Poona University in 1964 and soon after
was awarded a scholarship to read English at Cambridge from whence he moved to Leicester University for his Master’s degree. He has been living in England since 1964. He taught English at several schools in England from 1968 to 1978. Later, from 1984 to 1997, over a period of thirteen years, Dhondy worked as Commissioning Editor, Multimedia Programming, for channel 4 TV, UK. From 1997 to 2002, Dhondy worked as a freelance journalist and writer, contributing articles to Indian newspapers and magazines like The Pioneer, Asian Age and India Today. In 2002, he joined a film company based in India, Kaleidoscope International and has written scripts for the films like The Rising, Red Mercury, Take Three Girls, Exit and American Day Light.

Dhondy’s first three books of children’s fiction, East End at Your Feet (1976), Siege of Babylon (1977) and Come to Mecca (1978) were published in quick succession. Of these, the first and the third one won the Other Award. His next book, Poona Company (1980) is a series of nine loosely connected short stories that together constitute a lively depiction of an Indian boyhood and early youth in the town of Poona. The narrator-protagonist, who grows up in Parsi community, is constantly in the grip of intrigues and dramatic upheavals. After another short-story collection Trip Trap (1984), Dhondy’s first novel Bombay Duck (1990) was shortlisted for the Whitbread first novel award. Here the two central characters – Gerald Blossom, a British-Caribbean actor and Xerxes Xavaxa, a Parsi teacher are shown to be engaged in a struggle for survival. They change names, religion and identity in their search for lucrative jobs. They try their hands at different trades including baby-smuggling, and their struggle is portrayed against multicultural settings, including India, Britain and America. Dhondy attacks religious fundamentalism and portrays the multiethnic reality of our times in all its complexity.

His most recent novel Run came out in 2002. Although it is published in a collection for children, it is moving narrative that could well hold the attention of a reader of any age. Narrated in first person by the fourteen-year-old protagonist Rashid Rashid in ten concise chapters, it touches on key
postcolonial themes from an inclusive compassionate perspective. Racial differences the difficulty of belonging, tussles with the authorities, illegal immigrants, homosexual relationships, drug peddling, prostitution, surviving on meagre earnings from odd jobs, not having identity papers, tracking down a lost grandfather in prison, abandonment by and reunion with a white Jewish dancer mother, an absent Bangladeshi father, the status of a mixed-race person are some of the problems faced by the adolescent Rashid Rashid. Dhondy has also published two volumes of stage plays – *The Bride and Other Plays*, and *Vigilantes*, and contributed to writing the scenarios of several TV serials and screenplays.

Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay, India, on July 3, 1952. A member of the Parsi religious community in India, he completed an undergraduate degree in mathematics and economics at the University of Bombay. In 1975 he moved to Canada, where he lived in Toronto and worked for a bank. Mistry eventually returned to university, finishing a degree in English and Philosophy in 1984 at the University of Toronto. It was while he was a university student in Canada that he began to write and publish fiction. His first two published short stories won the Hart House Literary Prize (1983 and 1984), and another story won the Canadian Fiction Magazine contributor’s prize in 1985. These three stories, with eight others, comprise his first book, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987). This collection of linked short stories gives portraits of the lives of the inhabitants of a fictitious apartment Firozsha Baag in Bombay. The stories describe the characteristics of middle-class Parsi life, and show the characters’ struggles between modernity and tradition. The characters represent Parsis at odds with their religious beliefs and the larger community, and also convey the common human issues of spiritual questions, alienation, fear of death, family problems and economic hardships. The two best stories in the collection, *Squatter*, and *Swimming Lessons*, both reveal what happens when Parsi desires for emigration are realized. *Squatter* is a hilariously self-reflexive narrative about the Parsi community’s anxieties over emigration. Baag storyteller Nariman Hansotia tells a cautionary tale about Sarosh, a man who promised his mother he would completely assimilate into Canada within
ten years or return to Bombay. Sarosh is successful in all but one-way: he
cannot evacuate while sitting on a Canadian toilet and must instead squat to
achieve his desired catharsis. The story’s clever association of evacuation
practices with territorial issues reveals the extremity of Parsi
disenfranchisement: as a Parsi, Sarosh is a squatter on Indian territory and
he identifies himself as an Indian squatter on Canadian territory because he
evacuates in the Indian way. The last story of the collection, Swimming Lessons,
suggests self-reflexively how stories, writing itself, might be a way of dealing
with Parsi anxieties. The unnamed migrant narrator of this story learns to
survive – to swim literally and metaphorically – in Canada, but he does so by
writing about his home, renegotiating his relationship to the Parsi culture he
has left behind through his narrative. The stories of Firozsha Baag, along with
the ensuing novels, might well be read as Mistry’s renegotiations of his own
relationship to Parsi culture.

Mistry’s first novel, Such a Long Journey (1991), both creates a vivid
picture of Indian family life and culture and tells a story rich in subject matter,
characterization and symbolism. The novel is set in 1971 Bombay, when India
and Pakistan went to war over the liberation of East Pakistan, or Bangladesh.
This is the political context for the unfortunate events that disrupt the personal
lives of the kindhearted Parsi man, Gustad Noble, and his family and friends.
Mistry skillfully parallels public events, involving Indira Gandhi, with the
novel’s principal characters. The story’s private dimensions are not merely
weighed against political circumstances; they are revealed as the personal
manifestations of the same reality, as the lives of his characters become
entangled in the virulent corruption and incompetence of the government. In
Canada the book won Governor General’s Award for Fiction and the W.H.
Smith Books in Canada First Novel Award. It also won the Commonwealth
Writers Prize for Best Book and was a finalist for Britain’s Booker Prize. In
1998 Such a Long Journey was made into a feature film by Sooni Taraporevala
(screenplay) and Sturla Gunnarsson (director).
Mistry’s second novel, *A Fine Balance* (1995), is set in India in 1975, during Indira Gandhi’s declared State of Emergency. The novel focuses on four disenfranchised characters: Dina, a Parsi woman who tries to maintain her financial independence from her family; Maneck, a Parsi student sent to the city by his parents to study engineering, against his own inclinations; and Ishvar and Omprakash, two untouchable Hindu leatherworker-cum-tailors who try to escape the caste system by moving to the city. Hardship brings this unlikely group together under Dina’s roof, and the same hardship eventually tears them apart. However, the bonds of love that grow while they rely on each other for survival endure when the combined brutality of the caste, economic, and political systems separates them. Those bonds allow Dina and the tailors – if not Maneck, who commits suicide – to survive the brutish circumstances in which they ultimately live, Dina as a servant to her domineering brother and sister-in-law, and Ishvar and Omprakash as crippled beggars. Though the novel ends tragically, it also ends by celebrating the basic humanity of characters who can get beyond cultural constraints to imagine and create new communities outside established boundaries. The book won Canada’s Giller Prize, the Commonwealth Writers Award, and the Los Angeles Times Book Award. It was nominated for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and was a finalist for the Booker Prize.

Mistry’s next novel, *Family Matters* (2002) describes the members of a blended family who are trying to cope with the failing health of their father. In the meantime, the father relives his past, a past beset by thwarted love and crushing social strictures. *Family Matters* won the Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book Prize for Fiction, the Canadian Authors Association's MOSAID Technologies Inc. Award for Fiction, and the Regional Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book. It was nominated for the Booker Prize and shortlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.

Mistry’s fiction deploys a precise writing style and a sensitivity to the humour and horror of life to communicate deep compassion for human beings. His writing concerns people who try to find self-worth while dealing
with painful family dynamics and difficult social and political constraints. His works also address immigration, especially immigration to Canada, and the difficulty immigrants face in a society that recognizes their cultural differences and yet cannot embrace those differences as being part of itself.

Dina Mehta is another well-known Parsi novelist writing in English. She has written short stories, plays and a novel, And Some Take a Lover (1992). She is the recipient of international award from the BBC for her play The Brides Are Not for Burning, and her The Other Woman and Other Stories is a major accomplishment in Indian short story in English.

Her novel, And Some Take a Lover is set against the backdrop of the Quit India Movement. The novel records the responses of a Parsi girl, Roshni Wadia, to Gandhism and the Indian national movement. Roshni has all the admiration for Gandhi and his way of life, but she feels like an outsider in the Gandhian scheme of things. Her response typifies the ambivalent attitude of Parsi to the Gandhian movement.

The Indian Parsi novelists including Perin Bharucha, Bapsi Sidhwa, Boman Desai, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga, Dina Mehta, Ardashir Vakil and others have thrown significant light on the way of life of their community. The Parsi novelists have also now and again projected the preferences and priorities, problems and eccentricities of their community in their novels. The texts of these Parsi novelists have given them and their community an identity within the dominant culture of the Indian context. In writing community-centric novels, the Parsi novelists have fulfilled an essential role of, to use the words of M. G. Vassanji, 'the writer as a preserver of collective tradition, a folk historian and myth maker'. V.L.V.N. Narendrakumar writes:

"Parsee novel in English, i.e. novel portraying Parsee life, is a potent index of the Zoroastrian ethos. It voices the ambivalence, the nostalgia and"
the dilemma of the endangered Parsee community. In Parsee novel in English, the 'operative sensibility' is Zoroastrian. The Parsee novelists have forged a dialect, which has a distinct ethnic character. The tempo of Parsee life is fused into their English expression just as the tempo of Jewish life has gone into the best work of Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud. The triumph of the Parsee novelists in the use of English language is largely due to westernization and exposure to English culture. Their prose is interspersed with Persian words and Gujarati expressions. Besides being innovative, the Parsee novelists describe in detail, the esoteric rituals and the Zoroastrian customs such as Navjote. Thus Parsee novel in English gives us a peep into the turbulent Parsee mind of today.\textsuperscript{28}

In short, most of the works of the Parsi writers depict the concerns like ethnic anxieties, insecurity and identity crises of the modern-day Parsis. Besides these, other ethnic issues like declining population, late marriages, low birth rate, high rate of divorce, urbanization and alienation etc. also find expression in the post-colonial Parsi writing in English. A. K. Singh writes:

Their works exhibit consciousness of their community in such a way that the community emerges as a protagonist from their works though on the surface these works deal with their human protagonists.\textsuperscript{29}

All these Parsi writers show an intimate knowledge of the life they portray and a firm control over fictional form. Their contribution to post-independence Indian English novel demands special attention because a
good number of Parsi Indian English novelists like Rohinton Mistry, Farrukh Dhondy, Firdaus Kanga, Boman Desai, and Dina Mehta, Ardashir Vakil and Farishta Murzban Dinshaw emerged in the Post-Rushdien period and played a significant role in the emergence of the new Indo-English novel.

Despite the contribution of Parsi novelists like Firdaus Kanga, Rohinton Mistry, Saros Cowasjee, Farrukh Dhondy and Bapsi Sidhwa, Ardashir Vakil and Farishta Murzban Dinshaw to Indian English novel, their works have not been studied comprehensively and methodically though there are a few articles published in some journals and anthologies. Keeping this in view, my humble endeavour in this dissertation would be to study the novels of the three important Parsi novelists from the Indian sub-continent in the light of their thematic preoccupation, characterization, plot-construction and narrative technique in particular. It would further aim at examining the contribution of these novelists to Indian English novel in particular and to the world novel in general and in the process proves that all of them put together, serve as a vital link between the Indian and world literature.
References:


10. Cited in Nani A. Palkhivala, We the Nation: The Lost Decades, p. 320.


14. Eckehard Kulke, The Parsis in India: A Minority as Agent of Social Change, p. 120.


CHAPTER – 2

A CRITICAL STUDY OF SAROS COWASJEE’S GOODBYE TO
ELSA AND SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

I

Novelist, short story writer, editor and critic, Saros Dara Cowasjee was born on 12th July, 1931 in Secunderabad, India to parents Dara and Meher Cowasjee. He has one sister named Sabar and one brother named Shyam. Cowasjee was educated at St. John’s College in Agra, where he completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1951 and a Master of Arts degree in English literature in 1955 from the Agra University; his Ph.D. was obtained in 1960 from the University of Leeds in England. Sean O’Casey, the Irish play-writer was the topic for his thesis and the renowned Shakespearean scholar, G. Wilson Knight, his supervisor. After the completion of his Ph. D. thesis Cowasjee travelled to Bombay, and was the Assistant Editor at the Times of India Press for two years from 1961-1963. He writes:

I learnt a lot about writing from being a journalist and therefore I look forward with enthusiasm to a School of Journalism in Regina. It taught me to express myself intelligibly and to meet deadlines.¹

In 1963, Cowasjee came to Regina to assume the post of Instructor of English at the University of Saskatchewan Regina Campus, forerunner to University of Regina. In 1971 Cowasjee attained the status of Professor and in 1995 on retirement was appointed Professor Emeritus. Cowasjee, during these years, was also a guest lecturer at a number of universities and has lectured extensively abroad. He spoke to the Soviet Writers’ Union in Moscow in April 1971, and since then he has lectured at the following Universities: Leeds and Stirling in the U. K., Aarhus and Copenhagen in Denmark,
Sorbonne and Nanrerre in Paris, University of Normandie in Roune, University of Queensland in Brisbane and the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. He has also presented papers at Commonwealth Literature conferences in Toronto, Stirling, Delhi and Brisbane.

Cowasjee has received many awards and honours like J. N. Tata Scholarship to study for Ph. D. degree at University of Leeds during 1957-59; Canada Council and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Leave Fellowships in the years 1968-69, 1974-75, 1978-79, and 1986-87; Canada Council Humanities research grants in 1970-71 and 1974-75 and President’s Research Fund special grant in 1974-75.

Cowasjee began his career as a writer with his two books on Sean O’Casey: *Sean O’Casey the Man Behind the Plays* (1963) and *O’Casey* (1966). In the first book Cowasjee shows how far O’Casey revealed himself in his plays and gives detailed attention to works up to 1960. The second book is wider in scope than the first book, covering all of O’Casey’s plays as well as autobiographical and prose works. In some ways it is meant to supplement the first book. Both titles were first published in the U. K. and then in the United States. Cowasjee began by writing critical works and later moved to fiction. Mary Seiferling writes:

His first book Sean O’Casey himself attacked as “all fiction, full of lies, gossip and fantasy.” In a tone of sly amusement, Cowasjee’s response is: “this accusation persuaded me that I was a born novelist.”

Since then Cowasjee has written and edited some twenty-five books, and today he is better known for his work on the Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand and for his own fiction. His most successful – and the one most satisfying to him – has been his first work of fiction; a novel titled *Goodbye to Elsa*, first published by the Bodley Head, London in 1974 and subsequently by New Press and then by General Publishing Company in Toronto, and by
Orient Paperbacks in New Delhi. It has been described by his Indian publishers as one of the fastest selling books. Marcel Guay writes:

Interest abroad is important to the Canadian writers because there isn’t enough of a market internally to support the literary community. Cowasjee himself is well aware of the problem of the Canadian writer abroad because he has had a number of books published and sold in countries other than Canada. His successful book, *Goodbye to Elsa*, is selling well in India and Britain although it did rather poorly in Canada. In order to get it published he had to take it abroad, simply because it did not deal with a totally Canadian topic and was refused by the Canadian publishing business. Still, he had to be fairly persistent and tried 21 publishers before one finally agreed to gamble on the book. A British firm first published it and, after turning it down twice, so did an Indian firm.¹

The novel is into its seventh imprint in paperback in India. The central theme of the novel is Tristan’s search for love, and his loneliness when in the presence of others, which is associated with his divided Anglo-Indianness. His other works of fiction are short story collections titled *Stories and Sketches* (1970) and *Nude Therapy* (1978), and a second novel, *Suffer Little Children* (1982), a sequel to *Goodbye to Elsa*, set fully in Saskatchewan. Apart from Tristan, his Anglo-Indian hero, all other characters are Canadian. Tristan, in this novel, falls in love with Maura at a nude-therapy session and comes to believe that in an era of women’s liberation her year-old daughter is a Messiah whom he attempts to kidnap after his being rejected by the mother. The unexpected directions his novels take reflect a sense of life as comically absurd.
To complete his fictional sequence Cowasjee had planned a third novel set in India. “The half-mad Tristan is thrown out of Canada, returns to India and joins a political party. All his mad enthusiasm leads to the defeat of the party.” This book was intended as a political and social satire on modern India. But the plan did not materialize for reasons unknown.

Cowasjee is an internationally known critic of Mulk Raj Anand and has written two books on him, ‘Coolie’: An Assessment (1976) and So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand (1977) and also several articles on him. Cowasjee’s own fiction originated from his work on Anand. Cowasjee says:

Reading his fiction, analyzing it, and taking Anand’s advice, “Why don’t you write yourself instead of trying to correct mine?”, led me to write Goodbye to Elsa. Its reception in India and England encouraged to continue.4

He has written forwards and introductions to five novels by Mulk Raj Anand: Private Life of an Indian Prince, Seven Summers, Untouchable, Coolie and The Big Heart. He has also edited a book titled Author to Critic: The Letters of Mulk Raj Anand to Saros Cowasjee (1973) and has written a screenplay, The Last of the Maharajas (1980), based on a Mulk Raj Anand novel (The Private Life of an Indian Prince published in 1953). Mary Seiferling writes:

Cowasjee says, “In long run, my contribution to literature may hang as much in re-introducing J. R. Ackerley’s Hindoo Holiday (Borealis Press, 1980) and Mulk Raj Anand’s novels, as in my own fiction.” Private Life was first published by Anand in 1953, and flopped. It was re-introduced with an introduction by Cowasjee in 1970. Since then it has been considered Anand’s finest work. The author himself has recognized Cowasjee in several
of his letters, and once addressed him with the charge: “You’ve saved me from oblivion!” Cowasjee’s critical analysis of the work, and his editing of Anand’s letters, have prompted critics to alter their opinion. Reviewers have favoured his introductions. Cowasjee is particularly pleased with *Private Life* because it started a new wave of appreciation for Anand abroad.⁵

Criticism helped Cowasjee launch his career as a writer, but fiction remains his true love. He says:

“I started out as a critic. After four books of criticism, then I went into criticism; it was good discipline for fiction writing. … One of the reasons university professors don’t write fiction is that they are far too critical. If one is too critical and is constantly tearing things apart, he’ll never write anything of his own.” Fiction’s value, then, is that it’s entirely your own.“ Whatever you produce is your work. Even though it may not be first-rate, it’s yours.”⁶

Cowasjee has also edited anthologies like *Modern Indian Fiction* (1980, with Vasant Shahane) and *Modern Indian Short Stories* (1982, with Shiv K. Kumar). He is equally well-known for his Raj anthologies: *Stories from the Raj* (1982), *More Stories from the Raj* (1986), *The Raj and After* (1987), *When the British Left* (1987, with K. S. Duggal), and *Women Writers of the Raj: Short Fiction* (1990). Cowasjee has been also appointed General Editor of Arnold-Heinemann’s ‘Literature of the Raj’ series, which, since 1984, under his editorship has republished many books, chief among them are Flora Annie Steele’s *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), Captain Meadows Taylor’s *Confessions of a Thug* (1840), Philip Mason’s *Call the Next Witness* (1945) and Christine Weston’s *Indigo* (1944). The chief aim of this series is to bring to the
reader selected works of Anglo-Indian writers which have been out of print or otherwise difficult to obtain. Saros Cowasjee is an interesting, amusing and committed writer of fiction. He has a strong sense of being different. He says, writes Mary Seiferling:

… one should write not because he has to tell a story, but because he has a story to tell. Compulsion … is very important. Not just passion. If you really have something to say, then technique, style, and so on, are subsidiary. One always finds the right words. … Some write in drafts, others write page by page. I once re-typed a page 76 times, and will very often revise 20 times before I move on. Such types of writers are known as bleeders.  

II

In his first novel Goodbye to Elsa, Saros Cowasjee delineates the predicament of an Anglo-Indian exile. It is a tale of an individual’s struggle to come to terms with society and the tragic aftermath of his failure and resultant loneliness and alienation. Tristan Elliott, the central figure of the novel is the product of a mixed marriage. This fact straightway establishes his rootlessness. Tristan is the representative of a highly marginalized community and serves as the mouthpiece of the agonized and alienated community.

Tristan has a very miserable childhood. He loses his father at a very young age and finds his mother chasing other men ‘to enliven her evenings’. As he is too young, he fails to understand the demands of the flesh and expects total love from his mother.

… I was afraid Mother might leave me and go away like Daddy. And then what would I do? I
couldn’t live alone, … I begged Mummy not to leave me alone and go away.\textsuperscript{8}

However age brings knowledge and he realizes the realities of life. He loses all sympathy for his mother and begins to view her with detachment:

I felt sorry for her, for I had learnt to sense her loneliness. As I grew older, I realized how idle my fears had been: Mother could never have left me. And then I saw the need to leave her and let her live her own life.\textsuperscript{9}

Tristan’s search for love, compassion and contentment commences at this point. His journey begins on an optimistic note and he falls in love with a beautiful girl named Nellie. But his plans to marry her are torn to pieces when she loses her legs in an accident. ‘She was getting on to the train when she slipped, and the wheels went over her legs.’ When he comes forward to kiss her she pushes him away with her arms. Tristan realizes that Nellie’s perception of love and outlook of life has undergone total transformation. He goes out and runs into the streets like a mad man. He says:

There were no people-nothing but grinning faces; rows and rows of horrible grinning faces. I ran faster. I turned here and there, but wherever I went there were more faces – Just senseless, endless, jeering faces. … on the pavement at least there were at last people who were not laughing at me. They were all huddled together, and they all looked alike. They were the blind, the armless and the legless; there were lepers who had raked up their sores to bleed for human sympathy. They were all begging, but there was one who did not beg. He lay as if asleep, his hands clutching on to his bowl. I threw a coin at him.
Another beggar, with a bemused expression on his face, shook his head. "You should have given him yesterday, then, my Master."
"Why?"
"He is dead. He has found release."
"Dead?"\textsuperscript{10}

This confrontation of the death of a beggar makes Tristan aware of the fact that there is sorrow in the world. He comes to the beach where children are making castles in the sand. He sits down and watches the children and then joins them in their play. This act of building sandcastles can be taken as a symbol of his attempts to come to terms with the realities of life, which are often as transient as these sand castles.

A month after Nellie loses her legs, Tristan leaves India and comes to Dublin. He meets a girl named Julie there who is a couple of years older to him and falls in love with her. But his love affair with Julie ends in a fiasco for she is a God-fearing Puritan who is forced to make a choice between Tristan and God. Tristan ponders:

Never before had I faced such a stiff competition.
Julie left me, and I missed her a lot. I was lonely again, drinking and feeling sick every night.\textsuperscript{11}

Julie leaves him and as a result he is engulfed by loneliness again. Dublin offers him nothing and therefore he leaves it one September morning. It was no different from the morning he had arrived. It was wet and miserable. And once again he was leaving nothing behind him. He arrives at his uncle’s place in Leeds for further studies at the university. Uncle Kenneth and aunt Judith receive him warmly, which makes him feel at home, the way he never did in India. He hopes to be English if he is given time, for he is already ‘three-quarters English’ to begin with. He expresses his plans to get married and settle down in England. But his uncle says:
You must not be like the other Indians, and if you take my advice, son, keep away from them. We've done all we can for India, and it is now up to you to bring progress to your country. As for mixed marriages, they don't work, and it is not simply a question of colour. Apart from colour there is culture, and a lot of other things that go to make a community. I feel sorry for the Indians who come here, creating problems for themselves and for us. Look at the slums they have built! And the jobs they have taken from us! Why should they be porters and plumbers here when they could be administrators back home?\textsuperscript{12}

His uncle's views about the Indians disillusion him immediately and enlarge his vision of his plight. Tristan thinks that it would be difficult to explain to his uncle the fact that he isn't really an Indian but his own brother's son. He ponders:

Did they realise that the Anglo-Indian community was their creation, which they discarded when they had no further use of it. And because we allowed ourselves to be used to keep their trains and their trams running, the Hindus suspected us of disloyalty. I belonged somewhere – even if I did not belong to them.\textsuperscript{13}

The basic problem of Tristan Elliott is his sense of rootlessness. Throughout the novel he searches for roots. His alienation is not confined to the geographical boundaries for he feels alien equally in India as well as in England. His alienation is more psychological than physical.
Alone in Leeds, Tristan comes in contact with Mr. Rajeshwar Dayal, President of the India Association. Dayal is pursuing his Ph.D. in Sociology and has been in residence at the university longer than any other Indian student. He pictures himself as another Gandhi and invites Tristan to join the association for it is formed to safeguard the vital interests of the Indian students. Dayal warns Tristan of some ‘fifth element’ who is trying to wreck the association and his efforts to make a success of the Dipwali celebrations. Dayal also tells him about an open letter that he is going to write to all the members of the association exposing the traitors. Dayal’s letter, written in typical ‘Indian-English’ to association members arrives. The President’s letter is answered by an even more ridiculous letter, signed with Tristan’s name. And as a result he is expelled from the association. Dayal abuses Tristan, bringing the position of the Anglo-Indian community into a clearer focus:

We know the truth about you Anglo-Indians. You are all traitors, blackguards, knaves and time-servers. If it were not for you people, we would have had swaraj (freedom) fifty years ago, and there would have been peace and prosperity in the land. But you, with two drops of British blood in you, sold us to the Imperialists.  

Partly as a result of his isolation he meets Heather, a British girl and falls in love with her. She becomes Tristan’s first real lover and their relationship becomes sexual too, though she is never really faithful to him. Tristan ponders:

Though she was promiscuous, selfish and unreliable, she was capable of immense love. And not with her body only. When I was ill for two weeks, she nursed me more affectionately than my mother ever did. She was with me morning, evening, and night for those two weeks: feeding me, watching over me, giving me company. Not
once did she date during my period of illness, even though I begged her to go out for an evening.¹⁵

Tristan’s agony is the result of his encounter with society. He neither belongs to the East nor the West. Tristan’s strange behaviour many a time puzzles Heather and she asks him why he behaves so. She suspects that there is something in his past, which makes him act in the strange way. In a letter to Tristan, Heather writes:

I feel you have a grudge against the world - and against yourself. You must have had a very unhappy childhood. Also, I feel at times that you are not a normal person – from the things you do!

... I believe that the urge to be ‘immoral’ or ‘unconventional’ (choose a hundred alternative words for the same meaning) springs from a laziness of mind, and a lack of will to face the demands of life.¹⁶

Though Tristan loves Heather, he is just frightened by the idea of passing his entire life with her, for except love and sex there is very little in common between them. Tristan does not remember her ever saying an intelligent thing. She laughs at wrong moments and does not have a sense of humour. Besides, she does not show any interest in his research work.

When Tristan is facing the dilemma regarding his relationship with Heather, he meets Elsa at the British Council reading room. She is an au pair, looking after the children of a Jewish doctor and studying English. His intimacy with Elsa leads to a moral crisis in his life. Though he is in love with Elsa, Tristan strongly feels that he belongs to Heather and to no other woman. He feels taken over by her ‘power of the flesh: potent, earthy, immediate’. Thoughts of Heather haunt him and he makes up his mind to make love to another woman and thus find out his true feelings for Heather:
The question which weighed most heavily on my mind was marriage to Heather. Did I really love her? Or was it merely the flesh that I had mistaken for love? She satisfied my entire being, every pore of my body. But with what? That remained to be answered. If it was plain sex, then it would be unwise to marry Heather. And only by making love to another woman could I find out my true feelings for Heather.17

Tristan’s unsuccessful attempts of making love to a prostitute named Lily, opens a new panorama of understanding. He becomes sure of his feelings for Heather and thinks her to be his life and soul. He returns to Leeds but much to his dejection, finds Heather with a Syrian in bed. Tristan slaps Heather on her face and when she begs forgiveness, he says:

It is good, for not the truth but the disgust shall make us free. To forget you, I must learn to hate you.

…

‘Heather, there is no forgiveness in this world, for there is no honesty. There is only God’s grim justice.18

Tristan’s courtship with Heather is an ultimate attempt to overcome loneliness. They come closer not out of love but sympathy. Eventually Heather goes mad. Tristan admits:

Heather went mad because, in spite of her promiscuity, she was basically honest; I was comparatively more faithful to her, but less honest.19
Rejected by Heather in favour of Moustafa Sadat, a Syrian, Tristan falls in love with Elsa. Elsa, before accepting the proposal of Tristan, tells him the story of her love affair with a young man named Wilhelm. They had known each other for nine years and had planned to get married. But Wilhelm accidentally becomes impotent after being attacked by a wild boar and commits suicide. Tristan compares Wilhelm with his beloved Nellie and says:

> It is strange but Nellie and Wilhelm were alike in some ways. Misfortune had placed them in another world and they didn’t want our sympathy or our sacrifice.\(^{20}\)

Thus, the marriage between Tristan and Elsa is finalized. Meditating on Wilhelm, a dead man and Nellie, a crippled girl, Tristan is consigned to a life with a woman he never loves. Elsa catches him in an unguarded moment. However, marriage does bring about a significant change in his life. Tristan accepts a teaching post with a university in Canada and moves there with Elsa and his PhD degree and subsequently Elsa becomes pregnant. The responsibilities of fatherhood, instead of giving him joy, add to his wretchedness:

> I nailed the cross to the ceiling of my study, I tore my robe into shreds, I shaved off my beard. I was not only a sinner, but a begetter of sins. Myself lost, I was bringing into the world my facsimile who must re-enact the human drama, suffer like me, and through copulation pass on affliction and wretchedness to others. With my death, only I would die; the evil in me would live on.\(^{21}\)

On the birth of his son Tristan loses his faith in Christ. He had read Hermann Hesse’s *Sidhartha* and had been captivated by the saga of Gautama. He urges men to renounce the world and to preach the doctrine of non-violence to the world. He also wants to go to Indo-China border and walk
the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail, imparting to all the ‘noble eight-fold path’. He is near making this momentous decision and shaving his head, when he is struck blind in his left eye.

Tristan’s disillusionment is complete with the arrival of his son and blindness in the left eye. He realises that he has failed to establish a meaningful relationship with his wife. Elsa is very simplistic in her notion about life and the world, and it is this Tristan cannot now tolerate. He understands that knowing a person has very little to do with love. The inevitable break with Elsa leads him to near insanity. He begins to ponder suicide and plans to live away from his wife and his son.

Tristan promises Elsa that he would come back in six months and leaves the house. He then contacts a friend, and rents his farm-house named Mountain View on a hillside overlooking Corwind. It is at this time that he meets a Canadian girl, Marie, who brings him back again to the world with her love. She gives him support and encouragement. She tells Tristan that suicide is not the ultimate solution of his misery and it takes more courage to live than to die. Marie says:

But I want you to understand once and for all that the choice before you is not between life and death, but between the things life has to offer. That means Elsa and me. And as you say, you cannot go back to Elsa. You will have to come and live with me. Do you get that?22

Tristan now regains his balance of mind. At this time Marie resumes her other life by going away to marry her old lover named Joe. As a result Tristan becomes desperate and in a strange mental condition, which is neither pure insanity nor sanity, he attempts to shoot Marion, Marie’s twin sister thrice. At this moment he who had once thought of renouncing the world like a Buddha, imagines he is a Saviour and babbles before Marion:
Deliver us. Deliver us. In all the streets in all the cities they are crying: Deliver us. The hapless, the homeless, the blind and the maimed: they are all crying the same thing. Now is the time to deliver mankind. Let God create another world, let Him water another garden, fashion another Adam, take another rib, devise another snake. Till then, let there be peace. Till then, let not our sins visit our children. It is only a beginning. We can do no more.23

Tristan’s mad effort to kill Marion fails and he too is prevented from committing suicide. As the novel ends, Tristan is confined in a lunatic asylum.

Thus, Goodbye to Elsa deals with the agonies of a frustrated intellectual who turns almost mad at the end of the novel. It is a tragic tale of Tristan’s unsuccessful attempts to come to terms with three different societies in three different countries namely India, England and Canada. He has several bitter experiences in India, England and Canada. Frustrated in India, in love and life, he goes for higher studies to England, and later, goes to Canada for a job. In all three countries, he fails to accept the norms of the society and tries to shape his own destiny, but in this too he fails. But G. P. Sharma looks at the novel in a slightly different manner. He observes:

The theme, in spite of this, is not however, one of rejection of society and the world. In the supreme crises of his life, when he shoots at Marion in his hatred for her sister Marie and the world, Tristan seeks Elsa for help, though he had been rejecting her so far and though it was she alone who was the normal and wise person in the world. Thus the author’s attitude to the world is not negative.24
Besides the theme of loneliness of an individual trying to relate himself to his fellowmen, *Goodbye to Elsa* also deals with one of the major problems faced by the Indian nation after independence: the status of Anglo-Indians as citizens of India. This community occupies a peculiar position in Indian society with their half-British and half-Indian blood. The novel particularly deals with the problem of divided loyalty generally imputed to the Anglo-Indian community. Tristan is the son of a British father and an Anglo-Indian mother. He thus thinks that he is three-quarters English and one-quarter Indian. But while in India he is not accepted as a pure Indian, in Britain he is completely rejected.

As a young Indian, Tristan gets impressed by Colonel Melvin Rose’s talk of smart salutes, care of arms, leaves, pay arrears, mess, uniforms and ceremonies and joins the Defence Academy at Dehra Dun. But he is disillusioned in a short period of time by the hell-like atmosphere of the academy. His comrades-in-arms make his life impossible with their hate, malice and vulgarity. He is not looked upon by other Indian cadets as a normal Indian or as a normal social being. Tristan writes:

They all wanted to know if I had a sister to whom I would introduce them during the summer holidays. I told them I had nobody but an old mother, but they wouldn’t believe me. The Hindus have a strange notion that Anglo-Indian girls are an easy catch.  

Ultimately he fails to acclimatize himself to the atmosphere of the academy, resigns from it and leaves for Britain for higher studies as well as for settling there if possible. But when his uncle hears of Tristan’s intention to settle in Britain he identifies Tristan as an Indian and says:

Look at the mess the Indians have made, and now they are coming in shiploads to mess up life in England. We gave a sound administration, roads,
railways, justice, law and order. And all you gave yourselves were another 50 million mouths to feed, and now you ask us feed them!

...

You must not be like the other Indians, and if you take my advice, son, keep away from them. We've done all we can for India, and it is now up to you to bring progress to your country. As for mixed marriages, they don't work, and it is not simply a question of colour. Apart from colour there is culture, and a lot of other things that go to make a community.  

Tristan ultimately realizes the cause of this unwillingness to accept the Anglo-Indians as British and ascribes it to the bad impression created by the Indians of themselves in Britain.

I was an Anglo-Indian — a race for which neither the English nor the Indians had any use. ... But Indians had a bad reputation in England, and I feared that even the three-fourths English blood in me wasn't sufficient to wipe off the stain of the one-fourth Indian.  

Goodbye to Elsa thus deals with the problem of identity of this Anglo-Indian community. At the same time it also delineates British prejudice against Indians. Cowasjee is objective and dispassionate in discussing the failings of Indians in Britain, and the outlook of the British towards them. He shows very well how the Indians themselves have invited dislike to them while describing equally well how this British aversion to Indians is mostly based on colour prejudice. On the whole, in theme as well as in art, Saros Cowasjee's Goodbye to Elsa is one of the most notable contribution to post-independence Indo-Anglian fiction. V. L. V. N. Narendra Kumar observes:
Cowasjee’s *Goodbye to Elsa* was obviously written under the influence of Coleridge. The protagonist in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is a wounded survivor who passes through a trauma, and the poet, in placing the old sailor on the stage of human heart moves from the particular to the universal. He with his ‘long grey beard and glittering eye’ becomes a symbol eventually, his life denoting Sadhana. His ship journey symbolises the progression of the human spirit from disgust to love. It is a spiritual pilgrimage which assumes ecumenical validity. The metamorphosis of a sinner into a ‘holy vagabond’ is slow and gradual but convincing and his gospel of universal love acquires the force of a prophecy. In *Goodbye to Elsa* too, a voyage is depicted but it is not one of self-discovery. It is a reverse odyssey from order to chaos, certitude to uncertainty and freedom to frustration. Tristan’s misery is self-made, an outcome of his tragic flow. Even a perceptive critic like Dr. Iyenger misses the point when he says: “It is an unpleasant and rather unconvincing tale of the hapless grousing of a gloomy one-eyed Don.”

The protagonist is a stranger in a strange land, possessing abnormal consciousness and his trauma is central to the design of the novel. By connecting Tristan’s neurosis to marriage, the novelist transforms the story into a study of an exile’s psyche.28

The novel *Goodbye to Elsa* is set in three countries – India, England and Canada. The time of the novel is post-independence period of India. The novel opens in Canada when Tristan leaves his wife and son and occupies a deserted cottage in a farm-house on a hillside overlooking Corwind with the
intention of killing himself. Then his mind travels through Bombay and Delhi in India, Dublin and Leeds in England and Erigon and Corwind in Canada. Tristan thus narrates the incidents of his past life in the form of memoirs. The shifting locale helps the novelist to indicate the fractured identity of the protagonist. Oscillating, physically or mentally, between varying geographical as well as physical and mental spaces, Tristan’s lack of rootlessness gets reiterated.

Of different characters in the novel Tristan is the central character and the novel revolves around his endeavours to come to terms with society, his failure in his efforts and its aftermath. He is an intricate character, a bundle of contradictions. The feeling of rootlessness surrounds him throughout the novel, which makes him lonely among the crowd. Tristan says:

I had thought to be lonesome was to be alone. I discovered that to be lonesome was to be with people one did not love. And I liked no one around me.  

Tristan is an Anglo-Indian. He has a number of harsh experiences in India, England and Canada. He fails to get love in India and goes to England for higher studies, and later to Canada for a job. In all three countries, his failure to accept the social norms makes him feel lonely. At the same time he does not feel welcome or even accepted in any of these places. He searches for a meaning and a cause for commitment in life but finds none. His reference to Christ and damnation are significant:

And it was from this understanding of damnation that an all-embracing Christ-like compassion took possession of me. I was as old Christ, I had suffered like Christ, and I must be crucified like Christ. I ordered a life-size cross for myself and stood it against the wall of my basement study. Under it I would stand for hours with my arms
stretched and my head slouched, while Elsa was out shopping or gossiping. I donned a beard; I ordered a red rob.  

To drive out loneliness he seeks love and marriage. But in these too he fails and ultimately decides to commit suicide. He leaves his wife and son in order to execute the idea of committing suicide. Marie enters in his life at this point of time as a messenger of new hope and life. Tristan thinks of making a fresh start in life with her but he is haunted by his past all the time:

A fresh start in life is delusion. Life is not jumping off one train and climbing on to another. It is like a train to which wagons are hooked with each passing year, and you pull them along wherever you go. Do you see what I mean? My future can never be wholly freed from my past.  

Though Tristan believes that one has only one life to live and one should live it as one feels best, his conscience troubles him and forces him to go back to Elsa:

I married her thinking only of myself, and when I found that she was not what I wanted – I discarded her like an old garment.

Tristan tries to shape his own destiny. He is always interested in proving himself right and as a result people sometimes suffer unjustly on his behalf. He calls himself a ‘perfectionist’ who never ‘makes mistakes’. But the fact of the matter is nothing happens in his life according to his planning. V. L. V. N. Narendra Kumar observes:

He (Tristan) is honest and cunning, sympathetic and ruthless, humble and conceited. In short, he is Hamlet and Epicure Mammon rolled into one. He
lacks the moral strength to face life ego squarely and his inability to make a choice in life plunges him into anguish. He realises that to ‘live truly’ is more difficult than to end one’s life. Fear is his condition and his life becomes a combat of shadows. *Goodbye to Elsa* is a story of persecution and Tristan’s sense of persecution alienates him from society.33

Tristan’s suffering almost becomes an archetype of man’s quandary. By the time he completes unfolding the past, Tristan slips over the cerebral precipice. In his attempt of killing Marion, Marie’s twin, he imagines that he is performing a symbolic act of destroying the womb and thus ending the cycle of pain.

A number of other characters, in *Goodbye to Elsa*, had earlier appeared in *Stories and Sketches*. Two or three of these are: the sketch of his landlord, Mr. Dixon, and his wife; the speaker at Hyde Park who tries to establish the sex of God. *Goodbye to Elsa* presents a galaxy of characters including Elsa Harbaur, Nellie, Heather Malleson, Marie Germain, Jane, Julie, Marion, Lily, Mr. Rejeshwar Dayal, Santosh Kumar, Shituloo Raman, Prof. Dunlop, Dr. Horace Peabody, Cursetjee, Dr. Adams, the speakers at the Hyde Park, wives of the professors of History Department, Wilhelm, Moustafa Sadat, the Company Officer at the Defence Academy, Colonel Melvin Ross, Marie’s mother, John- Marie’s father, Mr. Dixon and his wife, Robert, Belton and others. All these characters represent different professions, countries, creeds and colours. Some of these characters are graphically portrayed with considerable fullness of detail; others are touched with a few felicitous strokes. Still we feel that Cowasjee knows everything there is to know about his characters even though he may give us no more than glimpses of them. Except the character of Tristan, he does not delineate the mental processes of his other characters, but makes them reveal themselves through their actions and conversation and most of the time through the narration of the
protagonist. Most of them are episodic in the sense that they appear only once in the course of Tristan’s journey.

In Cowasjee’s view, the story develops with the characters, and as the characters grow, so does the story. Through scene after scene Cowasjee offers us glimpses of Tristan Elliott in various stages of his life. But these scenes are neither chronological nor woven into a well-knit plot. The tale is at once picaresque and candid. In an interview with O. P. Mathur, Cowasjee says:

One should not tie down one’s self to a plot. To start a novel, a direction is all one needs. When I begin I say to myself, “I shall write a story of love, or a story of hate, or of persecution.” I leave my characters free to chart out the events. When I began Goodbye to Elsa, all I had in mind was that mine will be a story of persecution – there will be no laughter in it. But as the story progressed, the comedy of life broke through, and the novel took a very different turn from what I had planned. One has to be true to character – not to preconceived events.34

The novel is narrated in first person. Tristan Elliott, the protagonist of the novel narrates the entire story. The narrative is not chronological but apparently jumbled and concentric. The story begins in medias res and then Tristan narrates the incidents from his past – his life in India, his stay in Dublin, his visit to his uncle at Leeds who politely turns him out of his house, his misunderstanding with the Indian students in England, his many sexual encounters, his experience as a cadet in the National Defence Academy and his experiences as a Professor of history at a university in Canada. The novel is a loosely constructed narrative. The narrative avoiding the linear mode moves between the past and the present. The unifying factor of the novel is that the entire narration is by Tristan Elliott, the protagonist of the novel.
Cowasjee intermingles comedy and pathos in his narration. He has the ability to see humour in the most serious situations and in the unlikeliest places, whether it is a prostitute who refuses to stop smoking during intercourse or the description of the activities of the professors of department of History at a university in Canada. Tristan narrates:

Being a simple girl, who had never entered the portals of learning, Marie could not appreciate our concern for scholarship. She did not know how we all endowed ourselves with a short-term and a long-term project. The short-term project was generally a book review, and here a time limit was imposed by the editor: the book had to be reviewed in the early years of its publication. But it was the long-term project which mattered, and to complete it within one’s academic life was considered extremely unprofessional. Only one person completed his long-term project (in ten years, I think), and he immediately earned the loathing of his colleagues.\textsuperscript{35}

We have another example of a serious situation with a touch of humour when after his intimacy with Marie, Tristan once goes to her store to meet her. But instead of Marie, he meets Marion the twin sister of Marie and by mistake takes her to be Marie who outright denies any acquaintance with him. Much disappointed and desperate, Tristan decides to commit suicide:

I stumbled. I placed the order, paid the bill, and hastened back home. I put the barrel of the gun into my mouth and pushed it as far back as it would go. I should have applied some lubricant to it for it irritated my throat and set me coughing.\textsuperscript{36}
But the novel is not basically comic. It is distinct in the sense that Cowasjee has unfolded the tragic theme in a light-hearted vein throughout. But in fact it deals with the misery of an alienated spirit attempting to win love through sex. G. P. Sharma observes:

But what lends distinction to this theme of common human experience is that this essentially tragic theme has been unfolded here in a light-hearted vein throughout. But it is not that the narrator-hero of the story takes everything with a smile; it is rather the other way round. In his repeated failure to identify himself with the society he comes to live in, he finds it insane until at last he grows desperate and himself turns mad. The serious undertone of the novel is obvious though the treatment is all along comic, like G. V. Desani’s work.\(^{37}\)

In fact satire and irony are very much part of Cowasjee’s humour and he lashes out in all directions, some times at the cost of his plot. Cowasjee in this novel satirises British and Canadian racism, Indian pretension, the academic scene at a university in Canada and sexual mores. Cowasjee’s satire is corrective. He corrects the human follies, weaknesses and pretensions by holding up to ridicule a person or an institution. He seems to falsify things to ridicule it and works towards moral regeneration through distortion. The novel is much appreciated for its academic satire. Cowasjee believes that his satire on the university is justified:

Why should the academics be spared any more than the politicians and the businessmen? … Look at their pretenses, their illusions, their self deceptions!\(^{38}\)
At times Cowasjee’s narrative tends to be bizarre, as is evident in the following account in which Tristan ponders over the amputated legs of Nellie, which she lost in a train accident:

Nellie, my love, my life. What did they do with your legs? Did they bury them? Or did thy give them to the medicos to cut them up? One leg in deep freeze: the big toe, the long toe, the middle toe – 1 2 3 4 5. I hope the stumps will go brown, the colour of your skin. I didn’t like the raw, red look. The doctor should have trimmed them even, one seemed a little longer to me.39

Cowasjee’s novels are often criticized on the grounds that they are corrupting and immoral. Before the publications of his novels in India, Cowasjee says:

They (Indian publishers) will look upon my book (Goodbye to Elsa) as pornography. The fact is the book is not interested in sex for its own sake.40

Goodbye to Elsa was rejected twice by the same publisher who eventually accepted it. They thought the sexual passages were very strong and likely to offend Indian sensibility.

Cowasjee stresses that Goodbye to Elsa is not autobiographical. In an interview when Cowasjee was asked how much of his novel is autobiographical, he replied:

Very little. Because my hero, Tristan, is born in India, educated in England and finishes up in Canada – just like me – some might feel I have portrayed myself in Tristan. This is not so. For my setting I have chosen places I am familiar with.
Corwind, for instance, is based on Lumsden; and the farmhouse where my hero hides I visited twice to get the feel of the place and the surrounding countryside. A professor on this campus thinks that Tristan is based on him, though I can assure you I did not have him in mind when I wrote this novel. The only autobiographical part in this book is the army chapter, but here, too, things are not narrated as they actually took place.\(^{41}\)

In *Goodbye to Elsa* Cowasjee uses simple and natural English. It is conversational and almost colloquial. At one point in the course of the novel Cowasjee himself seems to be giving a critical opinion about his language. It is when Tristan reads the account of his career as an Army officer written by him, which comprises chapter 25 of the novel, Marie says:

> It’s too simple – babyish. Even a Grade Nine student could understand it. And you keep using the same words. At one place you used the word “thought” three times! Why not use other words like “cogitate”?\(^{42}\)

But though Cowasjee’s language is simple, it suits the background and character of the narrator and it also helps to make him sound authentic. Cowasjee uses some abusive terms in *Goodbye to Elsa*. For example Tristan narrates his experience at the National Defence Academy:

> My company officer, a Gentleman Cadet in his final term of training, kicked at my door at 5 a.m. and got me ready for parade within minutes. He spoke in English but abused in Hindi, and there was always more Hindi than English in his orders. Mather-chod (rape-mother), bahin-chod (rape-sister), bati-chod (rape-daughter), ghada-ka-lund
(penis of a donkey) were a few of the names he had time to call me the first morning, for he had to look after the welfare of thirty other cadets as well.\textsuperscript{43}

The words used in the above passage and other abusive terms in the novel can be easily categorized as obscene words for a cultured society. But Cowasjee has used these terms to portray the vulgar and inhuman conditions at the Academy. It shows Cowasjee’s exceptional ability in giving language appropriate to the characters concerned.

Besides this, Cowasjee uses a number of Indian words like \textit{dhoti}, \textit{yar}, \textit{pakaros}, \textit{swaraj} and \textit{bania} etc. and phrases like \textit{Gandhi ki jai} and \textit{Bharat-mata ki jai} freely in his narrative and gives literal translation of these words into brackets. These words create within English a sub-linguistic system.

III

Saros Cowasjee’s second novel \textit{Suffer Little Children} is a sequel to his first novel \textit{Goodbye to Elsa}. In this novel, Tristan after two years in a mental institution emerges with a new personality. In \textit{Goodbye to Elsa}, the half-mad Tristan believed the world could be saved by the destruction of the womb. His psychiatrist in the present novel convinces him that he can try to save the world through love. Set entirely in Saskatchewan, Canada, this novel carries on Tristan’s tale as he redirects his hatred for women into an all-consuming love for a child named Clare, the daughter of Maura Hawkins, whom he perceives as Messianic figure.

Tristan meets Maura Hawkins for the first time at a nude marathon in Corwind, organized by a psychologist named Julien Wolfe. The marathon was funded by National Research Council and the psychologist wanted to study the effects of physical nudity on group interaction. Tristan is recommended as a ‘unique phenomenon’ to participate in the marathon by his psychiatrist Dr.
Clifford Enright. Another professor, Horace Peabody, also accompanies Tristan in this marathon. The participants are asked to form pairs with one of the participants of the opposite sex and lay bare souls to their partners, for the sole purpose of the marathon is to ‘take off social masks, stop playing games and start interacting authentically and transparently’. Julien Wolfe says:

> We have assembled here to help each other, to find answers to our individual problems. Our problems may differ, in fact they do differ, but not the source. The truth is that our problems lie in our betrayal of the primeval state of man. We wrap ourselves in a tower of clothes which lead to personal isolation, estrangement, fantasies, and emotional upheavals of many kinds. Clothes are the world’s number one evil today. If a participant disrobed physically he might, by this gesture, acquire the freedom to disrobe emotionally.\(^{44}\)

Tristan and Maura, by mutual consent, select each other as partners. Tristan in no time falls in love with her. Maura unburdens her soul by telling her story to Tristan. She is the wife of a carpenter named Ralph who is a ‘saliromaniac’ and does not earn much. They are separated but Maura continues to live on the ground floor of the house and Ralph lives upstairs. They have a daughter named Clare. Their marital life was all right until the birth of the baby but after that Ralph started hating her and started going out with other girls. He even said that Clare was not his daughter. Maura is also a patient of Dr. Enright who advised her to participate in the marathon.

Eventually Tristan and Maura realise that Julien Wolfe is a Peeping Tom and they are trapped among ‘fetishists, frotteurs, homosexuals, and prostitutes’. They leave the place unclothed, without informing Julien Wolfe, and come to the apartment of Tristan.
Next morning Tristan goes to buy clothes for Maura. When he returns home, he finds that Maura has already left. He is not ready to believe his eyes and fears that he might have been hallucinating. Suddenly he goes to the toilet and finds a turd floating in it. As a result he becomes sure that Maura had visited his apartment and he photographs the turd as proof of his sanity.

He waits for Maura’s phone call for four days and tired of waiting, takes an appointment with Dr. Clifford Enright. Tristan narrates to him what happened at the nude therapy session and afterwards asks the doctor to give him Maura’s phone number as he is in love with her. Dr. Enright considers that Tristan’s running away naked from the session, trying a lady’s dress at the store and photographing the turd are all abnormal activities. The doctor asks him for an explanation. Tristan does not have satisfactory explanations for his first two actions and readily accepts that his actions were impulsive but he vehemently argues that photographing the turd was his only evidence that Maura had been with him and that he was not dreaming. At this point the doctor does not have a logical point to support his assertion and he asks Tristan to take an appointment from his secretary and come next Thursday.

Tristan’s meeting with Dr. Enright produces the desired result. As he reaches home he gets a phone call from Maura who calls him up on the suggestion of Dr. Enright and invites Tristan home. Maura is a liberated soul and staunch feminist activist. She hates her good-for-nothing husband. When Tristan visits her, she shares her feminist views with him. She says:

Must a man always be husband, and every woman a wife? Can’t we change roles for a while? Do cats and dogs have husbands and wives? Why should I be denied my individuality – an individuality that God has given to the female of every species? Couldn’t he be Ralph for a day without being my husband?45
Maura complains that her husband does not pay her allowance regularly nor does he pay rent of the house. There is no food in the house and no money even to buy diapers for her daughter. And it is very difficult for her to get a job in a man’s world. Tristan gifts her a beautiful dress and says that from now onwards her troubles are over, as he will look after her and her daughter Clare. He particularly feels drawn towards Clare as he has never felt towards any other child.

During a dinner session Tristan talks about his past to Maura. As we learn in *Goodbye to Elsa*, here also in synopsis we are told that Tristan is Indian-born, son of an Indian mother and a British pilot-father whom he lost in a wartime plane crash in his early childhood. After Nellie, his first ideal love, loses both legs in a train accident Tristan goes to England and takes a degree in history at Leeds. He meets Heather, an English girl who becomes his first real lover. But rejected by Heather in favour of a Syrian, Moustafa Sadat, he falls in love with Elsa, a fat German girl working in England, quickly marries her, and accepts a teaching assignment with a University in Canada. Shortly after their son’s birth, Tristan becomes estranged from the stolid, 180-pound Elsa; simultaneously he loses vision in his left eye and, upon leaving the hospital, deserts Elsa with the intention of committing suicide so that Elsa can collect his insurance.

He moves to an isolated house near Corwind, a small town not far from Erigon. He meets Marie, the storekeeper’s daughter there. Eventually Marie also leaves him for her old boy friend. In despair, Tristan invites Marion, Marie’s twin sister home and attempts to shoot her in a mad effort to ‘destroy to womb’ and end his cycle of pain. Tristan’s doctor testifies in the court that he is not a murderer and two other psychiatrists also agree with him. As a result the court only charges him for ‘attempted manslaughter’ and rules out that Tristan will not possess firearms for five years and he should be admitted in a hospital for observation. Maura at this point of time also does not miss a chance to express her feminist ideology. The word ‘manslaughter’ infuriates her and she says:
Manslaughter? It was a woman you tried to kill! …
Even if you kill one of us, it is manslaughter. Tristan, we have a long fight ahead of us these with male chauvinist pigs.⁴⁶

During the two years Tristan spends in a hospital in Kamsack, the doctors explain to him that if he were a true saviour, he should save the world through love and life and not hate and murder. Since then he has never touched a gun or thought of killing anybody. Hearing this Maura again says:

I do not agree with the doctors. … It’s all very good to talk about love, but there are some who can only be reformed by a shotgun. Do you think you could change Ralph with love? Or that policeman of yours who would deny us our identity?⁴⁷

Tristan perceives Clare as a mighty prophet. For him she is ‘a picture of calmness and serenity, outdoing Diogenes himself in his earthen tub’. Tristan narrates:

I felt I was in the presence of a mighty soul. I fell prostrate at her feet and touched them to my forehead. She accepted the homage like a pontiff, tapping me several times on the head with her left hand.⁴⁸

In the absence of Maura, Tristan takes care of Clare and performs the role of a mother. He would change her diaper, clean her vomit and feed her. He at once realises that what the baby wants is not milk but human kindness. He applies some of the marinara sauce that Maura has made to his nipple, sprinkles salt and pepper on it, and puts it in her mouth. Clare like an ‘eager beaver’ sucks and falls asleep. Tristan learns from this experience that what a child needs is not milk but love, and though there is a substitute for mother’s milk, there is no substitute for the human breast. This experience with Clare
makes him think of his own unhappy childhood and the millions of children of the world who are not breast-fed:

I was lying awake on her bed, thinking what I could do to bring some joy and happiness into Clare’s life. I thought of my own frightened childhood after my father’s death and the terrible fear that mother might leave me and go away with another man. I thought of my boy who would be three now and how fat Elsa had deprived him of a father’s loving care. And I thought of the millions of children in the world who had never known parental love and who must grow up to hate and despise everything around them. Surely, something could be done.49

In the company of Maura and Clare, Tristan’s life falls into a pattern and he is happier than he has been for a long time. He sleeps in his own apartment, but during daytime he stays at Maura’s place to share her household work. He gives her a hand with gardening, dusting and vacuuming, washing clothes, buying groceries, peeling potatoes, chopping onions, throwing garbage out, washing dishes and taking Clare out to give Maura time to read, and write letters. In short Tristan agrees to support Maura’s feminist principles financially, morally, and sexually. Their lovemaking usually takes the form of Maura’s mounting Tristan, a morally acceptable but physically unsuccessful position.

Tristan is a strong advocate of breast-feeding. In his ‘crazy’ attempt to breast-feed Clare, he thinks he spreads love and happiness. Tristan says:

The greatest single argument in favour of breast feeding is that it creates an emotional tie between mother and child for which there is no substitute in my experience. It satisfies the child’s natural
instinct to suck, and sucking is the only instinct with which we are born.\textsuperscript{50}

He even feels that had he been breast fed, he would have become the Chairman of the History Department by now. Being a staunch feminist, Maura objects to Tristan’s telling the story of the creation to Clare and strictly forbids him to tell her how God created woman. She calls the Bible a fairy tale written by a bunch of male chauvinists to subjugate women:

I don’t agree that God created man first. It doesn’t make sense. Why should He create man first when man thereafter must be born of woman. Why would God put the cart before the horse? No, God made woman first, but man made the myth that woman was created out of Adam’s rib so that he could boss her.\textsuperscript{51}

Ralph, Maura’s former husband, requests Tristan to leave his wife and daughter. At this point, Tristan describes his relation with Maura as ‘religious liaison’, ‘innocent and pure love’, and a ‘spiritual experience’. So Ralph uses threats to tell Tristan’s principal about Tristan’s relation with his wife. But when he finds that Tristan fears only God and no one else, he changes his tactics and pleads on compassionate grounds. Tristan toys with the idea of deserting Maura and Clare but ultimately comes to the conclusion that it is impossible for him to live without them:

Sure I could walk out on Maura and Clare, but where would I go? Whose laundry would I wash? Whose house would I clean? For whom would I buy groceries? And what would I do with the breast shield in my pocket? I’d be completely lost without Maura and Clare. I might temporarily survive without Maura, but I couldn’t live without Clare. There is something so sublime, so mystical,
so other-worldly about her that I cannot give shape
to it in words, but I can feel her divine presence.\textsuperscript{52}

Tristan compares Clare with Jesus Christ and feels that may be she is
the Messiah promised in the Old Testament for if God were to send
somebody to save the world; it is more likely he would send his daughter this
time. Tristan, in due course, proposes to Maura. But she discards his proposal
of marriage because she thinks marriage is odious, exploitation, slavery, rape
and everything but what it should be. She says:

Elsa, too, is my sister. Have you asked her if she
wants a divorce? You'll divorce her and marry me!
What next? You'll divorce me and marry someone
else. What are we women? Objects you men can
marry and divorce at will?
...
You people have exercised for too long a brutal
power over us in the name of marriage. You
propose marriage to us as if it were your birthright.
Why is it frowned upon for girls to propose
marriage? Why can't I propose marriage to you?
...
I didn't pick Women's Lib from out of a hat. I saw
that women must unite if they are to protect
themselves.\textsuperscript{53}

She asks Tristan to stand beside her and show the world that women
are not alone in this struggle, but every intelligent and right-minded man is
with them:

I want you to stand beside me – I want you to fight
for the liberation of my sisters. I want you to fight
against male chauvinism and for the equality of the
sexes. Women have been exploited as sex
objects, breeders, domestic servants and cheap labour. We are considered inferior human beings whose sole purpose is to enhance men’s lives. Our humanity is denied to us; stereotyped roles are forced on us by threats of physical violence. Male supremacy is the oldest and most basic form of domination. …

Tristan shows his readiness to stand by her and takes up the sole responsibility for the arrangement of the annual meeting of the Women’s Lib. He takes complete charge of publicity, renting the hall, advertising in the newspapers, preparing handbills and posters, inviting the press and arranging the seating for five thousand people. But the annual meeting turns out to be a total fiasco. Not a single representative of the Press turns up and the total audience numbers not more than sixty. Maura blames the poor turn out on male conspiracy against their Movement. Cowasjee, probably, in his description of the annual meet of the feminist activists, presents a caricature of the feminist movement of the seventies. The whole picture of the annual meet is farcical. Cowasjee ridicules the mannerism and ideology of the feminist activitists. The names given to different women’s organization are derogatory. We have members from different organizations like SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men), WITCH (Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell), NOW (National Organisation for Women), and DOB (Daughters of Bilitis). In the annual meet, all the representatives of these organizations present their strong feminist views on different subjects and issues related to female discrimination. Strident voices without actual commitment is doomed to failure – is the conclusion Cowasjee suggests.

Barbara, the Vice-President of DOB talks about sexual emancipation and advantages of being a lesbian. Lesbianism, according to her, frees a woman from the fear of unwanted pregnancy and the pain of childbirth and the drudgery of the child rearing. Tristan objects to her ideas regarding child rearing but he is not allowed to speak. Much disappointed he thinks:
What sort of justice was one to expect from these women if they ever got into power? They who talk about their rights and deny me mine!

Vanessa, the Commander of SCUM, is fiercer in her speech than her other ‘sisters’. Her prophylactic for all the drudgeries of women is to eliminate man altogether and take complete control of the country. The next speaker, Matilda of NOW, brings forth a number of charges against men and institutions. She presents a series of demands and statistics on female exploitation. When Tristan starts taking down notes of the data, Sandy, another feminist activist says that the information is at least a hundred years old. Roxanne, an alluring and tough leader of SCUM, then challenges the strongest and bravest man of all present in the hall to attack her. Tristan is the only male to rise to the challenge of Roxanne. He goes on the dais and for his pains he finds himself karate-chopped and flung on the floor by Roxanne.

Tristan and Maura then meet Martell, when they are celebrating Tristan’s birthday in a hotel. Martell is a moon painter who occupies a bed in the mental asylum at Kamsack on a permanent basis and is released from the hospital on rare occasions only. Tristan makes unsuccessful attempts to keep Maura away from him. Maura, on his invitation, goes with Martell in a plane to have a close look at the full moon. She comes back very late that night and a quarrel takes place between Tristan and Maura, at the end of which Maura throws Tristan out of her home:

‘Don’t shout,’ I (Tristan) shouted back. ‘You go out with a loony on my birthday and then shout at me.’
‘I will go with whomever I want.’
‘No you won’t. Not when you are mine.’
‘I am not yours. I am my own boss - you get that straight.’
‘You are not your own boss. The Lord hath said, “Thy desire shall be thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”

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‘You are not my husband.’

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife. …” What say you to that?’

‘Just this: you get out of my house.’

‘Now?’

‘Right now. Get out, get out …’ she yelled at the top of her voice.\(^{56}\)

Ralph gives shelter to Tristan in his house, upstairs. He also promises Tristan help in keeping Martell away from Maura. But Martell soon gets a phone call from the doctor from the hospital and he has to go to Kamsack to regain his sanity. As a result Maura is much disappointed and Tristan once again becomes the victim of her anger. She refuses Tristan’s advances towards her and says:

I’d better off without your love. … I don’t love you.
I’ve never loved you – you believe me; I’ve never loved you. You forced yourself upon me. Now get out for God’s sake.\(^{57}\)

Tristan feels that he cannot forget Maura. And even if he forgets her it is not possible for him to forget Clare for to forget her would be a ‘sacrilege’. In the next meeting, Dr. Enright refers to Tristan’s love for Clare as unnatural and advises him to leave the mother and the child. But Tristan calls Clare ‘an extraordinary being’ and says that there is a great difference, both physically and mentally, between the mother and the child. Upon this, the doctor advises him that he should not expend all his love on Maura and Clare alone but bestow it liberally on other women and children. Dr. Enright concludes by comparing Tristan’s love with pollution:
… - dangerous in its concentrated form, but relatively harmless when diffused or absorbed into the atmosphere.\textsuperscript{58}

Thus Tristan loses Maura to Martell and transfers his affections to Clare, to whom he has given suck, sweetening his nipples with jam. Deprived of Clare at her mother’s insistence, Tristan leads a ‘Mothers and Children’ movement relying on both Biblical discourse and mock speeches. Getting up on the pedestal at the Speaker’s Corner he starts delivering lectures on various subjects related to child rearing. On the first day, about five hundred people turn out to hear him. He tells the audience that he is not interested in politics and does not seek honour and glory, but love for these little children and the mothers who bare them. When he is called a stranger, he says:

Stranger? … Mother, Jesus was also a stranger and still is to a few hundred hearts.

…

Mother, your boy’s father too was a stranger until you met him. Let us break this barrier, let us love and share our love.\textsuperscript{59}

Tristan speaks on varied subjects like diarrhoea, bowel movement, constipation, enemas, suppositories, diaper rashes and so on. In the middle of his speeches Tristan also has visions. In one of such visions he visualises:

All of a sudden it got dark and I saw before me a vast concourse of children sucking at their mothers’ breasts. They all looked alike: black, pot-bellied, their arms and legs thin as reeds. Then, like a well-rehearsed drill, they all at once left their mother’s breasts and turned their gaze at me. These children had no mouths; there was nothing in their faces save the white of their eyes.\textsuperscript{60}
Finally, Tristan’s teaching position seems to be in jeopardy as a result of this crusade. The Dean of the faculty reads about Tristan’s mothers and children movement in the newspaper and declares him unfit for the job. At the same time Ralph informs him that Maura is going to Chicago to study Women Power. On the way to the park, Tristan meets Martell, who is painting the walls of the shops to collect money to support Maura for her study tour to Chicago – a sure sign of separation for Tristan. The weatherman on the radio and the yellow leaves of the trees in the park give a sign of the arrival of winter making the possibilities to meet the mothers and the children meager for him. In the park he is informed that his favourite child Lianne is sick. Disappointed from all the sides, Tristan decides to save Clare:

Lianne gone today! Who tomorrow? I asked. Clare! The answer flashed on my mind. A shiver ran down my spine. God had spoken. He had spoken as He always does through His silences. Lianne was God’s messenger then, and those relentless eyes forever fixed on me were God’s own. Clare! I must make sure I don’t lose Clare. I must take Clare away with me. But where? Where can I go? With God beside me I didn’t have to think. I again saw the vision I once noticed: I saw a million black faces quit sucking their mothers’ breasts and turn their gaze on me. But there was a difference now – they all had mouths and they were smiling and beckoning to me. And so to India. I would have preferred Bethlehem, but I go where the Lord sends me.\(^{61}\)

Tristan carries out the ‘rescue’ of Clare from her mother’s shopping cart. He brings her to his apartment. He plans to secure safe passage to India to raise her as a holy woman on the bank of the Ganges. Tristan thinks:
She (Tristan’s mother) will be glad to see Clare. She is sure to ask me if that’s my boy. ‘No it’s God’s daughter,’ I’ll say. We’ll stay in Delhi for two days. … The following morning we shall leave by train for the holy city of Varanasi. In the train I shall tell Clare the story of mother Ganges: how the river was once confined to the celestial regions; how it came down to the earth as a reward for the austerities observed by a sage; and how it would have flooded the earth, had not Lord Shiva allowed it to flow through his hair to break its mighty torrent. When we reach Varanasi we shall, along with the thousands of other pilgrims, bathe and purify ourselves in the crystal waters of the Ganges. We shall stand on one leg in the water and pray to God to forgive the Canadians all their sins. Then I shall buy a small sail-boat. Clare will sit at the bow, dressed in a white frock with her hair done up with a red ribbon. I shall sit at the stern and steer the boat. We shall sail up-stream towards the ice cave of Gangotri – the very source of the river eleven thousand feet high. On our way Clare will paddle her hands in the water and pick up the marigolds as they float past us. Sadhus and mahatmas in their hundreds, clad in their flowing saffron robes and their faces smeared with holy ashes, will line the river bank. And as we sail by, they will make obeisance to Clare with joined palms.

On reaching Gangotri, we shall put up in the V.I.P. suite of the temple while I build a small mud hut for Clare and myself. I shall plaster it with cow dung. I shall purchase a goat, and Clare will live on goat milk and fruits till she is eighteen years old. Then
the two of us will descend to the plains and announce a new dispensation.\textsuperscript{62}

But his schemes are defeated by Sandy, Maura’s young babysitter, and even greater martial arts expert than Roxanne. She enters into the apartment of Tristan to deliver him diapers, which he needs for Clare. As Tristan is about to take the diapers, she lets it go, grabs his hand, punches him in the head, sweeps his feet from under him and kicks him in the groin. Two policemen in plain clothes follow her and take Clare away from Tristan. Tristan is hospitalized for indeterminate injuries to his head. Under guard at the hospital, he lives in the hope that the ‘kidnappers’, the plainclothesmen who grabbed Clare will be brought to justice.

Cowasjee’s novel \textit{Suffer Little Children} reflects a hilarious but often deeply pathetic view of the Anglo-Canadian section of the Indian diaspora in the 1960s and 70s. He recognises the urge of the Western world – not only ‘Procreant’ but also messiah-hungry. His extended satire of 1960s culture supplies both wants in the person of a ‘perfect’ Indian intellectual in exile – the logical and insane extension of the world into which he has entered.

\textit{Suffer Little Children}, the second novel of Cowasjee is set fully in Saskatchewan. The imaginary cities mentioned in the novel, where the action takes place, are Corwind and Erigon. Apart from Tristan, its Anglo-Indian hero, all other characters are Canadian. Mary Seiferling writes:

When asked if this was his attempt to be noticed in Canada, his whimsical reply was, “One has to survive.” He has better hopes for this novel because of its “Canadian content.”\textsuperscript{63}

Saros Cowasjee’s two novels \textit{Goodbye to Elsa} and \textit{Suffer Little Children} present the extended confession-autobiography of Tristan Elliott. Both these novels deal with the agonies of the protagonist who is racially mixed, a foreigner, a lapsed, intellectual, sexually frustrated and half-mad. Tristan
Elliott is the central character of *Suffer Little Children* who, unlike in *Goodbye to Elsa*, tries to win the world with love and life. In the present novel, Tristan after two years in a mental institution emerges with a new personality. In *Goodbye to Elsa*, the half-mad Tristan believed the world could be saved by destruction of the womb. His psychiatrist in the present novel convinces him that he can try to save the world through love.

He is mentally unstable and a victim of hallucinations which deters him from resuming the job and he has to survive on salary continuance. He meets Maura Hawkins, the ‘liberated’ housewife at the nude marathon and immediately falls in love with her. He agrees to support her feminist principles morally, financially and sexually. He particularly feels drawn towards Maura’s daughter Clare. Tristan is a lonely soul. His wife Elsa and his son have deserted him and have gone to Germany. He is unable to get back to teaching due to his mental instability. At this point of time Maura and Clare enter into his life as a ray of hope and he dreams to make a fresh start in life. He tells Maura:

> When the world turns ugly, our dreams become more beautiful.\(^{64}\)

His love for Maura and Clare is symbolic of his love for the world. He assumes them to be an instrument for spreading love in the world. He cherishes a vision to spread his love and save the world by establishing Clare as a Messiah. But his confrontation with Ralph, Maura’s former husband, makes him contemplative. He asks himself whether the road he has taken is leading him anywhere:

I wish he hadn’t spoken to me. I thought of his words and felt frightened and lonely. Had I indeed lost my way? What was I doing here with another man’s wife, another man’s child? Memories of my past stormed my mind in a terrifying bid to scare me. But I brushed them aside. I had not lost my
way. I had taken a road. That road led to another, and that to yet another. And wherever I may now be, I am a step closer to heaven than I was before. Clare and I, ... would grace God’s presence one day, ...  

Finally, when he loses Maura to Martell and finds his job in jeopardy, he carries out the rescue of Clare. He plans to take her to India where he can raise her as holy woman. When Maura asks him to return her child, he says:

Ask for anything and I’ll give it to you. Ask for a kingdom and I’ll give it to you – but don’t ask for Clare. Clare belongs to neither you nor me – she belongs to the universe. Come with me to India: we shall look after Clare together. Tell the policeman you are coming with me – ask for a safe conduct. Tell them. ...  

He again says to the police officer:

I’m rescuing her from duffers like you. I’m rescuing her from a society that is sick – a society that has deprived me of my wife, my son and my job and has put me on salary continuance insurance. I’m rescuing her from a society which has failed to exploit my potentials and refuses to recognise Clare’s.  

Tristan’s attempt to rescue Clare can be interpreted in various ways. Perhaps, he feels that the West is not an appropriate place to rear the next generation. The spiritual vision of Tristan might also mean that the East or the mystic India has solutions to the spiritual crises of the West. It is also an attempt of an Anglo-Indian exile to go back to his roots.
Tristan is insane, unrealistic and impractical. He is a total failure at work and family. He confuses the possible and impossible or improbable. He is an indicative of inability to assimilate social mores and culture. He has great vision to save the world. But this is a vision of a man suffering from hallucination. As a result he falls short and the delusions of grandeur are shattered.

Maura is the central female character of the novel. She is a divorcee and has a daughter named Clare. She is a staunch feminist activist. She joins the Movement as a result of her unhappy family life and to fight against her husband’s discrimination. She holds Ralph, her husband, responsible for her plight. For Maura, her liberty is above everything in her life. But in emotional state she confesses to Tristan that she wants nothing in life but love:

I don’t want anything … I only want to be loved. I don’t want to fight men … I don’t care what happens to other women. I am so unhappy. I only want. …

Ralph, too, admits that Maura has her good points and is a kind of woman whom one can love. He says to Tristan:

Maura is like a musical instrument. She is, you might say, like the saxophone. You get the most beautiful music out of her if you know how to play her stops.

But unfortunately both Ralph and Tristan fail to attain this. And Ralph blames the feminist movement for his troubled family life. Before she became the active member of the Movement, she was an ideal wife. She used to cook for Ralph, wash for him and adore him. But then everything went wrong. Ralph says:
The Women’s Lib. Roxanne and Vanessa and the whole bloody lot of them. They ruined her. She forgot her religion, she forgot the Bible. She wanted her rights! The home went to the dogs! If only I could meet Roxanne when she’s alone I’d rape her.\textsuperscript{70}

Thus, through the character of Maura Cowasjee throws light on the feminist movement in Canada during 1960s and 70s.

Ralph, Maura’s husband, is another important character of the novel. He is a carpenter who does not earn much. He is a drunkard and drug addict and does not pay Maura her allowance regularly. He suffers from a rare disease called saliromania. Maura pictures him all wrong and holds him responsible for all her plight. But Tristan in the due course understands him:

Ralph had his failings, no doubt, but they were not because he lacked character, but because he lacked education. Had he gone to Leeds like me, he too would have been different. He was too direct and forthright and did not know the right terminology for many of the things he said.\textsuperscript{71}

It is Ralph who gives shelter to Tristan when Maura throws him out of her home. He also manages to bring Clare to the apartment of Tristan when Maura is away from home. He dreams to lead a happy family life and asks Tristan to bring an Indian woman for him whenever he goes to India:

I don’t want a western woman. I want love, affection, … You get me a woman from India. I want an Indian. I want to be loved, I want to be worshipped. I want a home.\textsuperscript{72}
Throughout the novel Cowasjee does not establish any sort of relationship between Ralph and Clare. It is only once, when Ralph is talking to Tristan, the author hints at Ralph’s love for Clare:

Isn’t she lovely, … Just like her father. I wish, though, she had a better mother. If only you could have been her mother, Tristan, this girl would have had a future. I do my best for her. I work and slog the whole and spend every penny I have on her. But a child needs a mother just as much as it needs a father.\(^73\)

These words of Ralph are a proof of the fact that he is not altogether an indifferent and careless father. But his poor financial condition makes him a misfit as husband and father.

Other minor characters of the novel include Julien Wolfe, Dr. Clifford Enright, Horace Peabody, Professor Dunlop, Miss Brenda Mortimer and Martell. All these characters are at an angle to normalcy and Cowasjee has presented them as caricatures. They are the main source of laughter in the novel. The description of Horace Peabody is a perfect example of lampoon:

He was pacing the floor with a pipe in his mouth and a pencil and a scroll in his hands. Behind his ear stuck a goose-quill pen. He shrugged me off, saying, ‘Get thee hence to thy wedded one,’ and twisting his handle-bar moustache he ambled away in is peculiar, shuffling gait.\(^74\)

Again when Tristan goes to meet Peabody in his office, he narrates:

He was standing behind his huge new desk. He was wearing his doctoral gown of many colours as was his habit when writing poetry. But today, foe
the first time, I saw him donning a mortarboard as well. It had a maple leaf painted on the top, and there was a long tassel which fell over his left ear. 

Almost all the characters in the novel are flat, static and one-dimensional.

The novel running into 162 pages has twenty-two chapters in it. The plot of the novel grows out of characters, and the characters turn their stories into plot by the little twists they give to them. The plot actually etches out into prominence through the mental conditions and the aspirations of the characters employed by the novelist.

The meeting between Tristan and Maura paves the way for the exposition of the plot. We learn here about the background of the novel like it’s setting, characters and important events occurred before the story proper. The novel is set in Corwind and Erigon, Canada. Tristan’s hatred towards the participants of the nude marathon and the Canadians in general sets the mood of the novel. He is an Anglo-Indian exile who feels lonely and alienated in this foreign land. It also tells about the unhappy family life of Maura and Tristan.

The complication in the novel arises out of Tristan’s unstable mental condition and as a result his inability to retain his teaching position; and the conflict between his futile attempt to win the world with love and life in the form of his love towards Maura and her daughter Clare and Maura’s feminist ideology which prevents her to accept Tristan’s love. Tristan’s perception of Clare as a mighty soul serves as foreshadowing in the novel. In the world of loneliness Clare seems to be his only hope. Tristan compares Clare with Jesus Christ and feels that may be she is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament for if God were to send somebody to save the world; it is more likely he would send his daughter this time.
Eventually Tristan loses Maura to Martell, a mad painter and his teaching position also seems to be in jeopardy as a result of his mothers-and children movement. These incidents shatters last hopes of Tristan and operate as exciting force leading the plot towards the climax. Author’s concerns like problems of alienation, rootlessness, displacement and cultural loss also reach to culmination at this point in the novel. Tristan, as a last hope, carries out the rescue of Clare from her mother’s shopping cart with an intention to take her to India where he dreams to nurture her as a holy woman on the banks of the Ganges. But his rescue plan is defeated by Sandy, the babysitter and under guard Tristan is sent in the mental hospital; he lives in the hope that the kidnappers of Clare – the policemen in plain clothes will be brought to justice. The end of the novel has a twist-ending and it also functions as anti-climax for Tristan’s plans are defeated by a trivial trick.

The plot of the novel lacks action in the sense that the novel ends at the point it had started. Some plots aim at tragic effect; some laughter and comedy; some romance and satire. Cowasjee incorporates almost everything in his novel. *Suffer Little Children* deals with the predicament of the central character Tristan Elliott and he narrates the tragic incidents of his life self-mockingingly. Cowasjee has also satirised racism, politics in the university and the feminist movement. But at the end, the novel fails to derive change in the fortunes of any of the characters. Little action can be found in Tristan’s futile attempts to win the world with love and life and Maura’s efforts to fight male chauvinism. But at the end of the novel Tristan ends up in the mental hospital from where he had come out in the beginning of the novel and there is no substantial change in Maura’s predicament. But for Cowasjee, probably, no change in the fortunes of the characters is greater tragedy than the death of the central character or a tragic incident occurring at the end of the novel.

In Saros Cowasjee’s *Suffer Little Children* the narrative is a series of witty accounts progressing from one page to the next. Cowasjee is breezy, bustling and energetic in his narrative. Though the novel deals with serious problems like alienation, loneliness and family-discord, Cowasjee narrates it with grim humour and in lightest vein. His narrative is full of humour, wit,
bathos, satire, sarcasm, irreverent blasphemy, sexual innuendos resulting in a hilarious but often pathetic vision of the Anglo-Canadian section of the Indian diaspora. The following narrative, in which Tristan goes to a store to buy household things for Maura’s home, is a superb example of bathos:

The list Maura gave me wasn’t long, but it had things on it I had never heard of before – things like abalone, succotash, kumquats, zucchini, and calamari. The shop assistants sent me wheeling my grocery cart forwards and backwards through every aisle in the store. I was quite happy, though, for it made me feel like a responsible family man and I could look the fat housewives in the face. But when I finished shopping, I saw that all I had brought could be got into one large paper bag. Hardly an image befitting a man on the threshold of a new life! So I bought two hundred-pound bags of Windsor Crystal salt.\(^{76}\)

Cowasjee’s narrative is pithy and condensed. He narrates with precision. But occasionally he seems to be tempted to insert humour in the narrative at the cost of plot. The following is one such example in which Cowasjee narrates the billing system at a restaurant, which is frequently visited by Tristan and Maura:

We got to Sandra’s. ... Before it became Sandra’s, it was Doyle’s, Fryer’s, Roma’s, Martha’s and half a dozen others. Every owner of the restaurant lost money, and some their wives or husbands, until Sandra came along. Sandra had ideas. She got two sets of bills printed: one in red and the other in blue. Red bills were presented to patrons who were single, separated or divorced, and they were entitled to a twenty per cent discount on the total
price. Blue bills were for married couples only, and they got no discount. Both the singles and the marrieds flocked to Sandra’s: the singles to take advantage of the discount, the marrieds to assert that they would need more than a twenty per cent discount before they parted from their loved ones. The singles formed a club known as the Red Billers, and the marrieds a club called the Blue Billers. ... there were some folks who kept alternating between red and blue bills. They did not make good patrons and generally finished up in hospitals where, under the provincial health scheme, they got their meals free.  

Though this narrative does not have direct bearing upon the plot of the novel, it throws light on the fake and fickle relationship existing in the society. Tristan calls this society sick and he and Maura are the victims of this sickness of the society. This is how this narrative highlights one of the major themes of marital discord in the novel. Humorous situations are found throughout the novel. The Parsis are gifted with an extraordinary sense of humour and Saros Cowasjee is no exception. His deep-rooted sense of humour is reflected in his novel.

As the novel is a confession-autobiography of the protagonist, it is narrated in the first person. But the novel is dramatic in form and contains a good deal of skillfully managed dialogues. There is an excellent combination of first person narration and dialogues. Cowasjee switches between the two effortlessly and with ease.

The narrator-protagonist does not miss any opportunity to satirise the Canadians. His comments on the Canadians are full of disdain and racial prejudice. In a store where he goes to buy a dress for Maura, a middle-aged female assistant gives him strange look. At this time Tristan thinks:
She gave me an ugly look – quite effortlessly. She was probably one of those Canadian bitches who wants to keep Canada white, though I with three-fourths British blood in me had a better title to this land than the continental porridge that she was.\textsuperscript{78}

Again when Dr. Clifford Enright asks him why he ran away from the nude marathon, he replies:

\begin{quote}
I think it was my loathing at everything that was taking place there. It was the beastliness and vulgarity of the Canadians.\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

Cowasjee’s language is simple, natural and well suited to all purposes of the author. He can use satire, humour, wit and earnestness whenever required with equal mastery. In his work there is unique blending of the serious and the mocking, of the low and the high, of the comic and the tragic. His special achievement is his handling of dialogue in his novel. He employs precision, brevity and economy in his language, and he achieves these qualities in his writing by hard work. Cowasjee says:

\begin{quote}
I write line by line, paragraph by paragraph, page by page. I once retyped a page 76 times before I moved on to the next page. Once I have got the page right, I immediately destroy all existing copies so that there is no turning back. People of my type are known as “bleeders”.\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

He usually varies his language to suit his characters. The words and style used in the speeches given by Dr. Julien Wolfe addressing the participants of the nude marathon, the feminist activists during the annual meet and Tristan in the park suit to their roles and purpose. Tristan being a professor, an intellectual and scholar uses a lot of aphorisms in his speeches and dialogues. The other university professors are addicted to high-flown
language and inflated style. Maura is most of the time busy in expressing her feminist ideology and her words are full of vain rhetoric and conceit. The vulgar Ralph is also provided with speech and language appropriate to him.

Cowasjee’s *Goodbye to Elsa* and *Suffer Little Children* have helped him in earning a distinct place in the annals of the post-independence Indian English novel. Like D. F. Karaka, he is a novelist whose sensibilities are conditioned by the East-West confrontation. His eminence as a novelist lies in his endeavours to unmask all pretensions – pretensions which weave their way into love, marriage, friendship, army life, life among overseas scholars, life in universities and feminist movement. Like the existentialists, he lays bare the insanity and spiritual barrenness of life in the twentieth century through the numerous tragic-comic characters in his novels.
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CHAPTER – 3

A CRITICAL STUDY OF ARDASHIR VAKIL’S BEACH BOY AND ONE DAY

I

Ardashir Vakil was born in Mumbai in 1962. He finished his schooling at The Doon School in India. He presently lives in London with his wife Georgia and daughters Tara and Natasha. He teaches English at Hornsey School for Girls and Creative Writing at Goldsmith’s University. He has taught Creative Writing at Middlesex and Roehampton universities. His first novel Beach Boy was published in 1997 and won a Betty Trask Award the same year. The novel was also shortlisted for the Whitbread Prize for a First Novel in the United Kingdom. Before the publication of this novel Vakil had published only the occasional essays in a student literary journal at the Pimlico Comprehensive School in London where he taught English.

Vakil showed a few pages of a first draft of Beach Boy to an editor at Penguin and was commissioned at once to complete the novel. Salman Rushdie selected an excerpt of Beach Boy for inclusion in Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writing 1947–1997, the anthology he co-edited to commemorate the anniversary of Indian independence. His second novel One Day was published in 2003 and was shortlisted for the Encore Award. In addition, Vakil’s short stories have been anthologised in short story collections titled Mosaic published by British Council in 1998 and Rites of Spring published by Fourth Estate in 1999. In 2004 his story, Soft Boy, was broadcast by Radio 4 and BBC World.
The Indo-Anglian novelists of the post-Rushdien era touch upon issues frequently associated with postcolonial studies like nationalism or the impact of colonialism on gender roles; and the issues surrounding historiography. In the case of Ardashir Vakil, one can add to this list the problem of juvenile disorientation and subsequent identity crises, which shape his first novel *Beach Boy*.

In this novel, set in Bombay in the early 1970s, Cyrus Readymoney, the eight-year-old son of a successful businessman father and a beautiful former tennis star mother, introduces us to his magical world of movies and mischief, sex and varieties of food, tennis tournaments and absenteeism from school. His mind is filled with daydreams of becoming a grown-up; but with the collapse of his parents’ marriage and his father’s sudden death, Cyrus finds himself caught between the innocence of youth and the responsibilities of adulthood. The novel is a bildungsroman or “novel of education” dealing with the growth of its protagonist Cyrus Readymoney. According to M. H. Abrams the subject of a “novel of education” or a “novel of formation” is:

... the development of the protagonist’s mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences – and often through a spiritual crises – into maturity and the recognition of his or her identity and role in the world.¹

Innocence lost, promise revealed; these are the central elements of Vakil’s bildungsroman. The protagonist of the novel *Beach Boy* is Cyrus Readymoney, son of a well-to-do, well-educated family of Iranian descent living in a glass house in Juhu, a suburb of Bombay by the Arabian Sea. Cyrus enjoys a carefree childhood. The fact of the matter is nobody really cares for him. His father is a globe-trotting, unpredictable businessman who is
seldom at home. His mother is an individualist who lives her life in her own way and they allow their child a free rein.

Cyrus’s parents are liberal and unconventional and should be the dream of every child, but he yearns for a bit of guidance and discipline in life. He is rarely at home with his brothers and sisters. He lives most of the time in the houses of his neighbours and finds an ideal father in one of his neighbours Mr. Krishnan, a sales executive:

His life is resolutely simple. I always know what is happening at the Krishnan household. Back from work at five, running time, bath time, meal time, homework time, bedtime. Weekends are given over to rest. Twice a year, on a Sunday afternoon, the family and I pack into their Ford De Soto and Mr Krishnan drives us cautiously into town. We take a walk by the Gateway of India, followed by lunch at the Nanking, where Mr Krishnan, after careful study of the menu, orders four ‘American Chopsueys’ and two bowls of fried rice. The Krishnans’ existence is happily circumscribed. I like the routine in their lives – the order it offers, as compared to the chaotic freedoms of my own home.2

On weekends, he gets up before dawn to run with Mr. Krishnan and his three sons on the beach and follows his strict orders willingly. Otherwise, Cyrus is an indifferent student. He always comes thirty-ninth out of forty students in his class at St. Mary’s. He seems to actually take pleasure in the beatings he receives from his school principal for his misbehaviour.

At times Cyrus is reminded that he does have indifferent parents with troubles of their own. They seem satisfied with guest appearances in his life, mainly to pour scorn on him on the tennis court in his mother’s case or to
make vague reassurances of their love in the case of his father. His parents’ troubled marriage provides constant background noise, but, distant as they are from Cyrus’s everyday life, the parents’ battles seem not to affect him. When they finally separate, he has no clue of the ominous event, like the death of his father, to follow.

Cyrus is obsessed with films, food and sex. These three passions fuel his young life. When it comes to eating, Cyrus is very resourceful. He visits the houses of his neighbours and friends in a certain order so that he can eat several meals, one after the other. The Krishnans, the Vermas, the Hussains, the Erikssons, the Maharani, all sometimes grudgingly, sometimes lovingly make space for him at their dinner table. They belong to different Indian states and cultures and he enjoys their respective cuisines:

If I went to the Krishnans’ at twelve, the Vermas’ at one-thirty and the Maharani’s at two-thirty, I could manage to have a bite at three houses. ... mutton korma, thick gravy full of cardamom, poppy seeds, tender slow-cooked meat, mangoes, onion uttapams, cheese toasts with tomato and garlic, shriveled baby brinjals that look like mice, aloo parathas flaky with ghee, mint chutney, cool milky curds.³

Cyrus is smart, silver-tongued and without shame. Most of the time he has his dinner with either the Krishnan family or the Verma family, and he is never missed at home by his own family members. He is regarded as a free boarder. Mrs. Krishnan at times blames his mother for not feeding Cyrus properly. But he swallows the insults of Mrs. Krishnan very often. He confesses:

References to my mother’s not feeding me enough, sometimes overt, sometimes snide, had a currency amongst the neighbours at whose
houses I often ate. I considered these insults a fee
one had to pay for eating their food, for demanding
their friendship, for sleeping in their beds,
partaking of their quarrels, sharing their holidays,
walking their dogs, making love to them, even
sharing in their dreams. Generosity is often spiked.
Hospitality has its limits.\textsuperscript{4}

Cyrus enjoys the hesitant generosity of his neighbours to receive their
attention, which he fails to get at home. The gluttonous Cyrus refers to the last
supper of Jesus Christ and interprets it with his childish innocence. He
compares himself with Jesus who also, he thinks, could not resist the
temptation of food. He even wonders why at his last meal Jesus did not ask
for something more delicious than plain bread. He says of his neighbours:

My neighbours were like Jesus. They liked to give,
they wanted to share, but they couldn’t resist the
temptation to make me feel ashamed of my family,
to pretend that I was a deprived child to whom they
provide succour.\textsuperscript{5}

Cyrus learns from aunt Zenobia that Jesus was aware of the fact that
one of the disciples present at the last supper was a liar and another one a
traitor, and he wanted them to drink the wine as if it were his blood and eat
the bread as if it were his body. For Judas and Peter, the last supper was not
a feast but a ‘guilt-ridden’ meal. But unlike Judas and Peter, Cyrus enjoys
several ‘guilt-ridden’ meals at the houses of his neighbours.

On holiday in Kerala, Cyrus goes with the Krishnans to the forest to
shoot birds. He is given the task of carrying his party’s packed lunch prepared
by Mr. Krishnan’s mother. Trailing behind the party members and totally
exhausted, he spends the morning in an agony of anticipation of when the
time would come for them to eat lunch and what it would taste like. When the
lunch finally arrives he narrates:
We sat on the rocks, munching, lost in the lovely tastes of coriander, coconut and curry leaves, fresh curry leaves with waxy yellow potatoes, dotted with black mustard seeds. Smoky, spicy, nutty, scented potatoes. The taste of curry leaves made me appreciate the dark canopy of leaves above, the heat of the afternoon offset by the cool aweat brought on by the spices. Sat there in the forest, I realized how important food was in my life but also how much the thought of it tormented me. The thought of having it, of not having it, the taut expectation of its delights, and the sweet torture of eating it.

Cyrus not only loves eating but also likes to note down the details of the delicacies that he had savoured in past. In one of the diary entries he narrates graphically how his cook prepared hilsa, a kind of fish found only in the holy waters of Calcutta’s Hooghly River, which Bengalies consider a great delicacy:

The cook stokes the fire, throws some raw sugar over the fish. He wants smoke, not flames. The fish must retain their firmness. He turns them over a few times, then brings them, still smoking, on a marble-topped surface in the kitchen. His back is bent with care over the hilsa. He cuts horizontally across the length of its soft belly, lifting away the top half on the blade of his knife, deftly aided by his fingers. The open interior reveals a cobweb of bones, many of which are invisible to the unpractised eye. This skein of treacherous katas is the reason why most people don’t bother eating hilsa. The cook runs his blade up and down the
body lifting up the needle-like bones, feeling with his fingers for a lurking transparent offender, body, hand and eye straining to the pleasure of his intense work. I take one of the bones in my hand and test it on my finger. Sharp as a porcupine’s quill.⁷

There are certainly a lot of such evocative descriptions of meals in the novel. Much of the book, and its most vivid descriptions, are concerned with food. It can be said that more than a quarter of the novel is dedicated to food. Cyrus is constantly juggling the money he has in his pocket to see what treat he can afford from a sweet stall or bhel puri vendor. Even during a film show he constantly thinks of food:

My anxiety about eats in the interval increased. I had sixty paise in the pocket of my shorts, perhaps just enough to get me a small packet of popcorn. My eyes were on the screen, but my head was filling up with Punjabi samosas, Five Star chocolate, chutney sandwiches, Smarties, peanuts, mangolas, …⁸

In one memorable scene, Cyrus and his friends watch a snack seller mixing bhel puri in paper cones as Vakil lingers lovingly over each detail, from the squeezing of limes and chopping of green mango to the mixing of the chutneys: ‘a red one with chillis and garlic, a brown one with tamarind, and a green one with chillis and coriander.’

Cyrus is not only a voracious eater. He at times becomes contemplative and is harassed by philosophical thoughts on how to appreciate food:

Observing the preparation of food, in the kitchen or on the street, is a lesson in patience. … I couldn’t
cook anything myself and knew nothing of the pleasure a cook gains from seeing someone tucking into their handiwork. But I often wondered whether a certain sadness might not accompany the eating. To be appreciated, unlike a book, a film or a painting, food has to be destroyed, consumed, transformed into waste.⁹

Cyrus’s worst obstacle is his own imagination. His preoccupation with food takes on metaphoric dimensions, as if he is trying to take in all the experiential delicacies the world has to offer: visual, emotional, musical, athletic, sexual, and of course culinary. Certain feasts fulfill expectations; others turn out to be better in anticipation than in attainment.

Another great love of Cyrus’s is Hindi cinema. He regularly escapes to Bombay’s theatres and loses himself in the stories of love and war since they provide an escape route from bitter realities of domestic life. Hindi films, particularly those of Rajesh Khanna, a well-known Indian film star, are young Cyrus’s favourite. The description of an outing with the Verma family to see one such film is one of the best in the book. Films constitute an illusion for Cyrus. While watching a film for three hours, he could stop thinking about the poor marks he got in the examination, his parents’ fighting, the lies that blighted his existence or the tennis matches that he should have won. He feels fully engrossed in the twisting plots of the films, the double roles, the comic interludes, the classic dialogues and the thrilling fight sequences at the end of a film. Being an ardent lover of films, he observes every scene in a film with acute concentration. While watching a film, Cyrus narrates:

Momentarily, I worried about the popcorn and masala chips in the interval, then I allowed all thoughts, sound, even smell, to seep steadily away from my screen-fixed consciousness. My head settled, as in a comfortable vice, my eyes swam from image to image. The dialogue, the scenery,
the minor characters, the clothes, the different voices — I followed them all with painful concentration.\textsuperscript{10}

The cinemas, with its distinct warmth and semidarkness, have become his second home. There he admires actresses on the screen wearing heavy make-up and pink saris. The humid atmosphere of the cinema, the smell of the bidis the men spectators smoke, the whisper of women spectators, and the cries of the babies silenced by soft breasts of mothers give a sort of calmness to his senses. He knows all about Hindi films from movie magazines like \textit{Stardust}, from song programmes broadcast on the radio, from the hoardings dotted around the city and from listening to filmy gossips. He steals money and sells things to buy tickets and bunks off school to go to the movies. The dream world of films often crosses over into his real life. He says:

\ldots this world, the world on our doorstep, the world on the street, the world on the hundreds of billboard advertisements around the city, was as alien and as repellent as the underworld of rats in the sewers of the city.\textsuperscript{11}

He spends most of his days angling for entry to the nearby cinema, where his observations of passing time make for some of the book’s most lyrical passages. Standing outside the cinema hall waiting for the film to begin, he would indulge in a fed popular amongst some of the boys in his school of rolling a rubber solution ball. Once, after his failed attempt to make a ball, he says to himself:

I gave up. But there was something in the process of making that ball that I never forgot. An acknowledgement, perhaps, of the futility of human endeavour. Hours spent waiting for what you want, occupying yourself with activities that amounted to no more than a fraction of a millimetre added to
the surface of a sphere. For the first time, while rolling that glue and waiting for the film to begin, I understood the meaning of time passing, of time wasted, of being left behind by time.\textsuperscript{12}

But such aberrations are momentary in the life of Cyrus: ‘Until, of course, the lovely face of the actress, Sharmila Tagore, robbed him of all such morose thoughts’. Movies are Cyrus’s asylum from reality and he steps into his fantasy by acting like Rajesh Khanna and propagating a misunderstanding that he is Junior Mehmood, a child star. He narrates:

I walked with my shoulders slightly hunched, leant to one side and dragged my feet. I delivered normal speech as if I were handing out an ultimatum. I tried to re-create the rhythms of Rajesh Khanna’s speech in English and stroked my cheek as if I were sunk in melancholy thought. This imitation was not confined to Rajesh. After seeing \textit{Zanjeer} and \textit{Deewar}, I took on the sonorous lilt of Amitabh Bachan’s serious lines; after seeing \textit{Bobby}, the playful sing-song syllables of Rishi Kapoor. This dream world crossed over into real life when people mistook me for Junior Mehmood.\textsuperscript{13}

While Cyrus may be precocious, there are moments too unbelievable, even for him. His experience at the shooting of Dev Anand’s film \textit{Heera Panna} leaves a permanent impression on his mind and proves to be an eye-opener. It brings him the revelation of the difference between the ‘reel life’ and he ‘real life’:

… it all seemed so fake, … When Dev Anand appeared, his face all made up, he looked so much more bloated in real life, standing there with
the two huge silver reflectors on either side, the camera right up in his face, I couldn’t imagine what he was doing. ... Going to see a picture was so much better than all this shooting nonsense. It was the opposite kind of experience. 

Cyrus’s fantasy life thus injects both humour and pathos in Vakil’s portrait. The author’s consistent use of cinema imagery is excellent for illustrating the watchful eye of the character and the tableau of the life around him. The protagonist is even able to ‘replay’ scenes that he wishes to relive and to see the approaching future:

Lying there on my bed, I thought of my friends at the school, who could still go home to their fathers. I summoned images of my father as if I were watching a flashback in a Hindi film: the night he stroked me as I slept, the time he chased me round the table at the flat, his Pantene-smelling hair and Braun electric shaver, his rough cheek when he kissed me at the end of a long day, the night we had spoken on the telephone, when the trip to Hamburg fell through. I tried to remember the last time I saw his face. I rewound various incidents, very fast, then very slowly, like a private eye hunting for clues in a library tomes. ... I could remember him coming to see us at the flat in town, but couldn’t separate the various visits. Confusingly, I had all these imaginary shots of him in a hospital bed to sieve through.

In the final scene, the imagery is complete as an accidental death of his father reveals that Cyrus has actually been observing his own life while he thought he had been observing others.
Another theme of the novel is the awakening sexuality of a prepubescent boy. When not at the movies, Cyrus explores sex, both through glimpses of adult women and through furtive foray with other children. Cyrus discovers his own body in the way of ‘learning by doing’ and some secrets of the female one by ‘observation and deduction’. There is, for instance, a scene early in the novel in which Cyrus is seduced by his brother’s friend named Darab. Cyrus describes the experience in a captivating way:

Marvel arose in me … Darab seemed to relax his body in the confidence that I had got into a reassuring rhythm with my hand … Uncontrollable, unrecognizable sensations, like hunger for food I had never tasted, coursed through my stomach and legs.16

Cyrus says: “Darab will be round again next weekend luring me into the bathroom.”17 This utterance of Cyrus implies that the event is not an isolated one. In fact, this scene constitutes the only sex scene in the early part of the novel. It is only in the final pages of the novel, Cyrus secretly observes through a window Mrs. Krishnan lying on the bed half-naked and spends a night in the bed with Meera, the adopted daughter of the Maharani. The late heterosexual awakening seems superimposed over a hidden, and perhaps more original, homosexual narrative.

Later in the novel Cyrus recalls how he and Ajay, son of Mr. Krishnan, once, hiding in a corner, observed a couple making love on the beach near his home. He narrates this episode in his diary leaving nothing to the imagination. He lies to Ajay about his knowledge of sex. Next we see him with his school friends locking themselves in a cubicle and looking at “each other’s smooth bums”. Boasting about his knowledge of sex he writes in his diary:

I know what sex is. I have watched people do it on the beach. I frig but nothing comes out. I have read a porno magazine. I have seen a girl naked. That
time with Sofie Eriksson when I was beaten by Tangama.\textsuperscript{18}

Older women also preoccupy Cyrus and he frequently fantasizes sexually about them. His neighbours, the Krishnans take him on a holiday to their home in Kerala. While having lunch one afternoon, he glances slyly at Mrs. Krishnan. He observes voluptuously her fat fleshy calves, he knees and her dress pulled tightly around her thighs. Later when all retire to their respective resting-places, he peeps through the bedroom window of the couple and finds them sleeping together in bed, the wife half-naked:

Mrs. Krishnan was lying alongside her husband, one arm drawn across her eyes, the other resting on her stomach. Her left knee was bent up towards her pillow almost at right angles to the rest of her body. I couldn’t believe she could be comfortable with her hip contorted so, like a Kathakali dancer squatting on one leg, frozen in repose. Her housecoat had been unbuttoned to let in some air and fell open about her waist. I could see the inside of her thighs, the lines made by her bottom, and a huge area of black hair growing between. For a second I couldn’t make sense of what I was seeing.\textsuperscript{19}

Cyrus thinks that this image especially would be one he would try to fix in his thoughts. And surprisingly, the image remains with him and haunts him throughout. Then there is a detailed and graphic description of Cyrus’s sexual encounter with Meera, the adopted daughter of Maharani in the twenty-third chapter of the novel. He spends a night with her, undoing her bra, fondling and stroking her but not being allowed to go any further. Commenting on such passages in the novel, having sexual descriptions Rahul Singh writes:
Sections like these may probably shock many Indian readers but are really par for the course in the West. Yet although a current of bawdiness runs through *Beach Boy*, what might have degenerated into crudity otherwise is saved by verbal dexterity and loads of humour.

Since Mehroo, Cyrus’s mother is a former national tennis player; Cyrus is also made to play the game. All the members of Cyrus’s family, his father apart, play tennis every day of the week except Sunday. “We were a family obsessed with tennis”, he relates. They have played tennis on the courts of almost all the clubs and gyms of Bombay. Cyrus and his mother have watched, followed and played in tournaments all around the country. They scan the sports pages of the *Times of India* for news from the grand slam tournaments around the world. During the Wimbledon they would stick to the radio following the progress of international tennis players like Margaret Court, Billie Jean King, Rod Laver, John Newcombe, Stan Smith and Ilie Nastase.

In her younger days, Cyrus’s mother was trained at the Queen’s Club in London to try and qualify to play at Wimbledon. She was seeded second in the All India rankings of the day. But her had to cut short her training, as she could not bear separation from her two-year-old son Cyrus. Commenting on the influence of the game of tennis over his family relationships, Cyrus says:

So much in our family revolved around the game. My mother’s life, her relationship with my father, and her relationship with me, all these could be decoded and deciphered through backhands, forehands, volleys, lobs and serves. Particular shots decided the fate of future relationships, long and bitter debates ensued about who was better than who: matches that were won left one with a high for weeks to come; matches lost were cause
for days of introspection and post-mortem
depression.\textsuperscript{21}

Yet for such an ardent aficionado, the writer gets his tennis facts a little
incorrect. He describes the celebrated semi-final Davis Cup tie in which the
famous Indian tennis player Ramanathan Krishnan defeated Thomas Koch in
the final match, to give India victory. However, Koch is identified as an
Australian, whereas he was actually from Brazil.

Then there is the theme of how to cope with grief. Vakil beautifully
incorporates Cyrus’s juvenile growing pains in the vivacious Indian metropolis
of Bombay with the simple description of his daily life and his love for food and
film. He focuses on the fact that the society Cyrus inhabits is drifting towards a
state of disorientation. Cyrus’s part in it and his growing disorientation are told
in playful, lightly narrated episodes.

Cyrus’s parents who are members of the Parsi elite have a troubled
marriage life. Mehroo, Cyrus’s mother comes to know about her husband’s
affair with an air hostess and as a result, ten years of successful marriage
comes to an end. She, in reprisal, starts a relationship with a prosperous man
named Naresh. A sort of disturbing coldness enters Cyrus’s home and he
sees his parents argue more frequently. Cyrus narrates:

\begin{quote}
… it was all cracking open in the late hours of the
night. There were screams from my parents’
bedroom. Screams only a wife could utter. There
were other noises. Noises of objects being broken.
Crouched outside their door with my mouth open, I
heard it all.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Cyrus tries to fathom the situation by overhearing telephone calls and
placing his ears against the doors. Innocence thus makes way for experience.
He is caught between innocence and the responsibilities that await him.
Finally, Mehroo leaves the house taking the children with her and starts living
in a city apartment. Cyrus’s father Minoo, continuous to live in the marvelous family home. Cyrus still tries to keep his ties to his old neighbourhood. He tries to make the best of it, setting of eagerly on a summer holiday to Kerala with one of his neighbours, the Krishnans, but sadly, more suffering awaits. Minoo suddenly suffers from a heart attack and dies a few days later in a hospital in Chicago. Maharani informs him about his father’s death. But to her surprise Cyrus remains unmoved on hearing the news. He ponders:

I was making them uneasy. My stillness, my lack of reaction. What could I do? I didn’t feel anything. A little discomfited to have them all standing there looking at me, waiting for me to do something. … I felt like an actor who was refusing to perform before his audience. … unable to act my part, lying on the bed incapable of transforming myself into the Niagara Falls and weeping for the death of my father. I wished I could be like my mother, brave enough to speak her mind, regardless of embarrassment. … Instead, I lay prostate on my stomach, looking at the cream bedspread, daylight blocked out, thinking of nothing except the strangeness of this situation.23

Cyrus’s footloose ways are thus interrupted by the separation of his parents and then by his father’s ill health and subsequent death. Sadness and loss shadow Cyrus, but he retains his uncommon charm and insight. It seems that any outside agency even reality in the form of death, when it compels him to do anything he resists. Cyrus’s passage from a carefree boyhood to a sobered adolescence comes through a wrenching loss, but a gentle lesson taught to him by the Maharani inculcates him that he can survive life’s cruel surprises. V.L.V.N. Narendra Kumar observes:

In Beach Boy too, as in Trying to Grow, the conflict between Good and Evil is internalized. From a
child who is at the mercy of the generous neighbours, Cyrus grows into a self-reliant being. His new-found confidence is reflected in the words of Maharani: “Never mind, Cyrus, you will survive. These things happen.” Maharani covertly refers to the setbacks, disappointments and heartburns which are part of adult life. Thus *Beach Boy* ends on a note of affirmation with Cyrus adapting himself to the new clime, which is the result of his father’s death.24

Thus the novel becomes a tale of domestication in which teenage emotions and adolescent feelings are suppressed and that a cultivation of carefree and lively youngster on the verge of becoming an adult is under process. Sensuality and callousness, material abundance and dissolution, security and apathy are juxtaposed in Cyrus’s life. He drifts in his life helplessly, without being accountable for his actions, and without any aim.

The setting of the novel is India in the 1970s, a place where Cyrus enjoys an elite existence in a beach home in Juhu, a suburb of Bombay by the Arabian Sea, filled with servants and frequently absent, indulgent parents. The novel is energetic and filled with brilliant observations. Vakil has a knack for sweeping up details, and he narrates everything vividly. Cyrus, the narrator of the novel, sets out to explore Bombay, one of the biggest cities of India, full of unforgettable sights and smells. Vakil beautifully captures the visual aspects of Bombay and its people. He succeeds in painting the city of Bombay in the early ‘70s, with its street dwellers and movie stars, its colonial hangers-on and hungry immigrants; its food stalls and littered beaches, its many movie houses and giant middle-class apartment complexes. Vakil snatches the true flavour of the Bombay dialect, in dialogues like this when the boys rally about the snack vendor:

I asked Raju once, ‘But why does the bhaiya come all the way from UP to sell bhel puri in Bombay?’
‘Arre, what are you talking? They are specialists, no. They know all the secret ways to make the chutney and cut the kanda and all.’
That’s true. Your bhaiya’s tikha chutney is superb, yah, makes my eyes water, man.25

Though Vakil depicts Bombayisms through such language, they are not always adequate translations. A reader unfamiliar with Hindi language may discern the meaning from context, but the full essence of the dialogue will be missed.

Ardashir Vakil provides a lush painting of life in India in this novel. He mixes different Indian cultures in a very artistic manner, complete with their languages and codes of behaviour. Cyrus belongs to a Zoroastrian family, his family cook and butler are Hindu villagers, he attends a Roman Catholic school and his friends, Horace Lilywhite, Karl and Glen are all Anglo-Indians. Cyrus’s neighbours – the Krishnans are from Kerala, the Verma are from Delhi, the Hussains are from Agra, and the Maharani is from Bharatnagar. They all represent different Indian states and cultures and constitute miniature India granting the novel access to a multi-layered vision of Indian society. Vakil’s India is a refreshing departure from the depictions of dusty village streets and rag-clad rogues that have locked India in stereotype for so long. Cyrus sings along with Elton John and the Rolling Stones and reads Archie comics, and his abiding passion is the larger-than-life world of Hindi cinema.

If we take the real central character of Beach Boy to be not Cyrus Readymoney but India itself, Vakil has succeeded admirably. Few recent works of Indian fiction have taken the reader into the betel-strewn theater pathway, glass-walled living rooms and smoky kitchens of contemporary India with so much closeness and so little sloppiness. Vakil packs an enormous amount of information and commentary about layers of Indian life into his 211 pages. Some of the parts are perfunctorily sketched, but, on the whole, this is a rich portrait, with telling insights into the characteristics of the different
communities, which make up the modern Indian middle class. Herald Leusmann observes:

Although Vakil seems to have difficulties upholding his easy-flowing prose towards the end of the novel, and most of the main figures have revealed their secrets before one reaches the final pages, *Beach Boy* is a pleasure to read. The author’s strengths lie in the graciously arranged pictures, the fugitive pieces of observations, and the episodes he can draft with lighting speed. The snapshots of Bombay are like colorful remembrances in a photo album. The descriptions of Cyrus’s first childlike and nearly unconscious, but also triumphant, erotic flicker and the almost incestuous initiation into sexual terrain through the sisterly friend belong to the more virtuoso manifestations of Vakil’s narrative ability. Vakil proves to be a skilled representative of the younger generation of Indian writers …

Cyrus Readymoney is the protagonist of the novel. As the novel opens, he is interacting ardently with a film he is viewing at a Bombay cinema. We then accompany him during the next two-years as he continues to play the part of voyeur and sideline participant, much like his portrayal in the beginning scene. Vakil paints Cyrus as a boy with an insatiable curiosity about life and a craving for adult experiences, one who endlessly observes and fantasizes. Cyrus is perceptive and bright but a thorough hedonist. His passions are food, Hindi films, and fantasizing about sex. He lives in the moment and for the pleasures the day brings his way. He is mischievous at home and in school. He visits exotic places, dines on sumptuous foods, catches glimpses of naked bodies, experiments, and exults in all new experiences.
Cyrus refuses to give in to any kind of ceremonious socialization. He is driven by his senses and knows all the tricks to avoid school. School is of no importance for him. He rather does what his heart desires. Throughout the day, he would hang out with friends, roam the beaches, visit the cinemas and find out the best places for food. Cyrus has a voyeur’s eye and a roving hand. On the brink of adolescence, he greedily consumes every taste and experience that life has to offer in Bombay; from the seductive pleasures of food and the spectacle of Hindi cinema to the inevitable first discoveries of sex, lies and death. Cyrus is sensitive, observant and a very sharp analytic. He keeps a diary in an effort to hold on to his experiences. The style and the content of the excerpts quoted from his diary are suggestive of the fact that he is an enormously precocious child and he seems to be aware of that fact. One of such entries in Cyrus’ diary runs thus:

I want to be older than I am. I have read Kafka’s Diaries, edited by Max Brod, the first fifteen pages at least. I have read Keats’s poems and I have copied passages from Will Durant’s The Story of Civilization. My cousin has told me about Freud and Spinoza. He says he has read Spinoza’s Ethics. I know little boys want to have sex with their mothers and little girls with their fathers. I travel the trains and buses of the city and go to films all by myself. … I have written three poems: ‘Sea Breeze’, ‘Dog’ and ‘Horse’. The last one is accompanied by a drawing. I am writing bits of my life story in this notebook. I have drunk half a bottle of rum and I smoked twenty 555 cigarettes the other day. I have stolen money, killed cockroaches and pigeons, and hung around with people who are older than me … I know what sex is. I have watched people do it on the beach. I frig but nothing comes out. I have read a porno magazine, I have seen a girl naked.27
Cyrus is a problematic character. He is meant to be a rascal, but his boyish bravado and naivety keep the reader at a cool distance. Cyrus’s descriptions of family life often employ the passive voice:

When our emotions got the better of us there was violence, bloodletting, and tears. Food was overturned, chairs thrown back, cutlery flung. Once a placatory kiss my mother tried to plant on Adi’s cheek turned into a vicious bite, the marks lasting for months.  

He begins to realize at a very early stage in life that people look at him as if he were an odd boy, ‘like a turtle amongst antelopes’. His long hair, out of sync clothes and foreign features give him a very uncommon personality. But he is cognizant of the fact that his oddities are advantageous and focus of influence and power:

Sometimes, though, being the odd one out, the bed egg, the rotten apple, the black sheep or the white sheep, had its advantages. These became my focus of influence and power. The embarrassment of being on display turned into the egotism of showing off, of procuring things I wouldn’t otherwise be able to get, of providing myself worth of recognition, especially by those older than me, while pretending to play the joker.

Frequently Cyrus gives himself the opportunity to tear off the mask of showing off and talk to himself. He feeds himself with dreams and tinker with fantasies of sports and sex. He enters into imaginary dialogue with another voice that acts as a kind of friendly interlocutor. But his dreams often turn out to be futile. “So, often these plans I made with the help of my inner voice came to nothing. This was another sad aspect of my life,” he relates. Cyrus’s
mother knows very well the factor responsible for this failure. After his defeat in a tennis match she tells Cyrus:

The problem with you, Cyrus, is the same in tennis as with other things on your life. You just don't have the staying power, the perseverance. One minute you want this, then you don't like it and you want something else.\textsuperscript{31}

Cyrus too, seems to be aware of his limitations. Like most pubescents, he is keen to grow up. But somehow he changes his mind and loses interest in the activity. He confesses honestly, “That’s what I'm like. I think of a good reason to do something, and then I don’t do it.”\textsuperscript{32}

Mr. Krishnan, the Maharani and D’Mello, the Vice-Principal of Cyrus’s school are strict disciplinarians. They are at times merciless and love to beat children. Cyrus precisely assesses these adults:

It seems to me that all these adults were after was tears and sadness. Tothing away at their hearts was a sadness of their own which they dare not admit to, a pain they could expiate only by flogging someone. There was one lesson to be learnt by the victim: display the correct emotion at the right time. Say thank you when someone gives you a present, cry when you are beaten.\textsuperscript{33}

Mr. Krishnan’s children and the adopted daughters of the Maharani display the correct emotion when they are beaten, whereas Cyrus accepts the thrashing of the Vice-Principal with ‘witless stoicism’. He seems not ready to become the ‘victim’. His emotional growth is thus stunted in normal real life situation. Obviously he has an emotional world he lives in; the celluloid world, but in normal circumstances he is stubborn.
Cyrus is a dynamic character. In spite of his limitations, he makes every possible effort to grow. The death of his father makes him a lonely figure. However, the last utterances of the Maharani imply that he will try to adjust himself with the surroundings.

Besides the character of Cyrus, *Beach Boy* has a cast of characters as wonderfully diverse as India itself. The big, athletic Krishnan family having a thundering but lovable Communist Mr. Krishnan as the patriarch; the eccentric Maharani, a holdover from the imperial regime and her seductive daughter Meera; Minoo and Mehroo Readymoney – Cyrus’s cosmopolitan and self-involved parents, the household servant Bhagwan, imperious and brusque Aunty Zenobia, Mrs. Verma of the hundred different smile – Ardashir Vakil portrays them all with impish passion.

Minoo, Cyrus’s father, and Mr. Krishnan, his Keralite neighbour, are juxtaposed in a very artistic manner. Mr. Krishnan is a straightforward and diligent man. His house is a small box like cottage with two rooms upstairs and down, right behind Cyrus’s house. He is employed by Voltas Air-Conditioning Company as a sales executive. He is a Marxist. He owns an old Ford De Soto. He has rippling muscles, which he uses to beat his sons and when his wife gets in the way he beats her too. He does not have friends. He passes every weekend with his family in a ritualistic manner. He has black oiled-back hair and bitter chocolate coloured skin. He is a man of self-respect. When Cyrus invites his family for lunch at his home, he strongly importunes that Cyrus’s father should invite him personally. His statement to the world is:

I may be a simple man, with a small house, an average job and not a lot of money, but I know what I say is right and I won’t let anyone cross me.\(^{34}\)

Mr. Krishnan’s actions are always filled with a sense of righteous pride. Nothing could overturn his confidence in the temple he has constructed out of
his ideals and principles. Everything he does is endowed with a moral tone. His indulgences are small but he takes a heavy delight in them.

Minoo, Cyrus’s father is rich and patrician. He is a partner in a firm called Readymoney & Company. He organizes the import and export of goods in large container ships. He goes on business trips overseas twice a year. He has thick brows and dark handsome eyes. His chin is broad and his cheeks are large. His smile is warm, exuberant, brimming with confidence. People admire him for being well-dressed and charming. He has large collections of suits, ties and shoes. But there is no organization in his life. Cyrus notes in his diary:

Sitting down to enjoy the emptiness of a moment is a comfort my father never affords himself. There is never any chance of a break in his life because he is habitually unpunctual. His business associates like to poke fun at him by calling him ‘the late Mr. Readymoney’. He regularly misses flights, arrives at the end of meetings and loses important business deals because of his inability to keep time. His unpunctuality is like a natural defect, a sixth figure uncovered at birth.35

Mr. Krishnan is a fatherly figure for Cyrus. He likes the routine in the lives of the Krishnans – the order it offers, as compared to the chaotic freedoms of his own home. Cyrus’s parents have troubled marriage life and ultimately get separated. The Krishnans, on the other hand, continue to live together happily. He tries to get love and affection from the Krishnans, which he fails to get from his parents.

The emotional bond between Cyrus and his mother is very strong. At the same time Cyrus is also very much loved by his father. But the Oedipal urge in him is so powerful that it leads to a crisis of allegiance in his being. He and his father are kindred spirits. Pointing out the similarity, he notes:
There was something special between him and me. He recognized a similar vagabond, vulnerable spirit in his son, a recklessness rushing towards ruin.\textsuperscript{36}

Cyrus begins to understand his father’s unhappiness, solitude and disappointment:

There was trouble in my father’s life. For years his past had lurked underground. Now it was beginning to claw its way to the surface. An old ugliness was dragging him down, forcing him to revisit his former lives: the death of his father at the age of nine, the years spent in an orphanage in Poona, the poverty of his mother, his unsuccessful marriage, his deceptions, his affairs, \textellipsis \textsuperscript{37}

After having a massive heart attack and lying on the deathbed in a hospital in Chicago, Cyrus’s father realizes that he has done injustice to his wife and his family. His last words are full of remorse and very well reflect his sense of guilt. Mehroo, re-narrating those words to Cyrus, says:

I just want you to remember your father’s last words before he went into the operating theatre. “By doing what I did,” he said, “I was hurting myself.” \textellipsis Even your father, who was a very proud man, recognized that when you behave badly, you do no one more harm than yourself.\textsuperscript{38}

Thus, Minoo, is a failed romantic. He is a loving father but an impractical and unsuccessful husband.
In the character of Mehroo, Cyrus’s mother, Vakil has portrayed a very strong Parsi woman. She has a perfect set of pearly teeth, lovely skin, rich black hair, and beautiful hands. She is someone who could command attention on the North Pole. Impatience is one of her chief characteristics and she is given to not finishing her sentences. When she comes to know about her husband’s liaison with an air-hostess, she starts a relation with a wealthy business in reprisal. When her husband comes to know about her extra marital relationship, she does not try to hide anything but bravely calls it an act of retaliation:

I told you what would happen, … I told you that if you went on behaving the way you were, then some day I would also have to go and find someone else. What can I do? What do want me do? … I’m not one of those servile wives who is just going to sit at home and wait for you to finish your affairs and still be smiling at the end.39

After the final quarrel with her husband, she at once packs her bags, takes all the five children with her and starts living in a flat in Bandra. But she stands by her husband when he has a heart attack and even takes him to America for better treatment. She faces her husband’s death with courage and makes all the arrangements by herself. She retrieves her position of assurance and control in the family. She very calmly narrates to Cyrus her last dialogues with her husband. Cyrus, who has not shed a single tear since the news of his father’s death, at this moment realizes the need for crying:

I couldn’t remember when last I had cried noisily, with sobs and halted breaths. And now I was beginning to feel the need to cry, not just for the world outside but for myself. To maintain my sanity, to be able to say something to someone, to be able to say something to myself.40
When Mehroo realizes that it will be very expensive to fly her husband’s dead body back to India, she sensibly decides to finish up the last rites in Chicago in the presence of some American friends of her husband. Instead of offering her husband’s body to the vultures in the Tower of Silence, as per the Parsi religious tradition, she cremates him according to the Hindu religious tradition and also arranges a Christian ceremony in a small church with hymns and beautiful flowers. She feels it convenient to have the ashes of her husband enclosed in a nice marble urn and fly back to India. She also decides to fulfill her husband’s last wish to sprinkle his ashes over the sea, as he loved the sea.

Except for these incidents showing her strong personality, Mehroo, remains to be an inexplicable figure hovering on the edges of her son’s life. This well might be because the author makes us observe the character of Mehroo through the eyes of Cyrus. In the rest of the part of the novel Vakil demonstrates how a child would perceive a glamorous mother caught up in status-conscious socializing and the concerns of an increasingly troubled marriage. But as a device, it leaves a void at the heart of the story. When Cyrus’s family falls on troubled times, we don’t have an adult’s perceptions, the perceptions of his mother, to help balance the limited view of the child.

Another interesting character of the novel is the Maharani of Bharatnagar. She is a mysterious figure, a sedentary queen, a solitary divorcee cocooned in her crumbling mention in the neighbourhood of Cyrus’s house on Juhu beach. Her husband has left her and she has adopted five young girls from villages in Rajasthan. She is a strict disciplinarian and frequently beats her adopted daughters. Cyrus is very keen to befriend the Maharani and her one of the adopted daughters Meera. He says:

I had an urge to meet this Maharani. Like the Hindi movies that had me in their thrall, this woman’s life represented a hidden world outside my own, a world in which I might play a part.\textsuperscript{41}
The Maharani is thus a mystery to many but Cyrus finds her accessible. She invites Cyrus to her home. During their conversation she answers all the questions of Cyrus with interest and shows genuine enthusiasm for their exchanges. She shows him two albums of her childhood photographs and reveals her past life to Cyrus. Vakil narrates:

... she ... when eight years old was playfully nuzzled by a leopard who lived in the palace. Her response was to grab its ear and bite a chunk off the end. She knew about insouciance, she knew about daring. She had shot big game and flown small-sized planes. She had been to school in Switzerland and knew how to race down mountains on a pair of skis. ... This woman ... had once been the queen of a vast domain.42

The Maharani is a souvenir of the Raj. She leads a very stylish and grand life, which is out of harmony with the realism of Indian life in the post-Independence milieu. She shows interest in Cyrus’s talks. She even teaches him to look at life from a different point of view. She is the only person who treats him like a grown-up. The words of assurance uttered by her at the end of the novel give Cyrus confidence and hope to fight the realities of life.

Thus, what makes the novel special is the colorful characters Vakil creates – all vividly presented through the eyes of Cyrus. We learn a great deal about their appearances and quirky personalities but little about their motivations. The novel gives us a feel of the very varied people who inhabit Mumbai, but it fails to offer meaningful insights and thoughtful commentary in the vein of Rohinton Mistry.

The plot of Beach Boy, to the extent there is a plot, revolves around Cyrus’s involvement in his parents’ stormy relationship and near-divorce crisis. The novel is essentially a sequence of vignettes through which the narrator reveals his playful sensibility and explores his native city, a place that
turns out to be at once familiar and exotic, accessible and unknowable, like Cyrus Readymoney himself. The novel is richly descriptive and poignant, but it disappoints only because it lacks a compelling story line.

The problem with Vakil’s loosely woven narrative is that his characters’ relations do not develop as the story progresses. Cyrus’s father, a handsome philanderer unprepared for the consequences of his infidelities; and Cyrus’s mother, a former tennis star and a fierce, free spirit; are recalled, like so much of this novel, through a distant lens of memory. The couple’s passion, their separation, and the tragedy that reunites them are never immediate enough to constitute drama.

*Beach Boy* is not as much a focused story as a year in the life of Cyrus Readymoney, an affluent Parsi kid who prefers the life of a vagabond. The novel is lucid, imaginative and anecdotal. But where it actually lacks the touch-of-class is the abrupt winding up. The ending totally leaves you hanging and there is no sense of closure at all. When the author decides on not having a real plot in the novel, he is faced with the problem of how to end it. Vakil ends the novel abruptly like ‘coitus interruptus’, and the ending is not quite conclusive. Paul Kafka comments:

Cyrus’s uneasy excursions from the beaches of childhood into the crowded cities of adulthood take us back to our own teenage years. Yet there is a lack of finished form to this first novel that mars our appreciation of its fine parts. The work does not, in the end, cohere in a satisfying way. *Beach Boy* is like one of Cyrus’s wandering dinners, each dish in each house a delight, but the meal itself elusive. This seems less a choice of the author than a faltering of a powerful creative imagination in its encounter with the imperious commands of memory.
Beach Boy is a coming-of-age novel. The novel is told from Cyrus’s point of view in a series of sketches. Vakil lets the story unfold through characters and incidents and not through a formal plot. The author slips into that role and does it well. The story is told convincingly and events are just described but not often interpreted. Cyrus, the young protagonist observes everything with awareness, but he often does not understand the meaning of the things going on around him.

Ardashir Vakil uses a lot of words and expressions from Indian languages, particularly from Hindi language, in his narrative. He employs three different methods: firstly he uses Indian expressions followed by English translations. For instance:

‘Arre, Cyrus baba, kahan ja rahe ho? Where are you off to?’

‘... the airy puffed rice, mamra, the crispy yellow vermicelli, sev, and the tiny brown biscuits, puris.’

‘Kasam khau, swear on your mother, Cyrus, that you won’t say anything to anyone.’

‘Ai badhu khuda nu hath ma che. It’s all in the hands of God.’

Secondly, he uses Indian words in an English sentence as if they were English words. For example:

Straightening the pallu of her sari, with a jingle of her bangles, like a graceless Kathakali dancer, Mrs Verma turned to me …

‘Hey, Cyrus, chul yaar, the bhaiya will have come. Let’s run and get some bhel.’
Thirdly, he just uses sentences in Hindi language. For instance:

‘Chulo bhai, jaldi karo na, film start hone vala hai,’ I called out. ... ‘Heeey chokra, kya kar raha hai? Chulo, neeche chulo.’

‘Arre, budha, wo makhan kahan rakha hai tune.’

‘Hey, akal ka dushman, jara dekh ke chalao gadi.’

It is obvious that the author wants to create local colour, and he succeeds in it to an extent.

The details of Vakil’s life help us in understanding and appreciating the novel better. The author, Ardashir Vakil was born in Bombay in 1962. He is the son of a Parsi lady named Jeroo Mango. He lost his father at a very young age when he was only eleven years old. His mother later married Tony Mango, a Greek who has worked and lived in India for several decades. Jeroo used to be ranked India’s number two in tennis. She is also a tournament bridge player. She runs a bookshop and lives in Mumbai suburban resort of Juhu, on the beach, facing the Arabian Sea.

On the basis of these minute details we might assume that Vakil has described his own childhood in his novel as many of the short chapters seem semi-autobiographical, and many of the events read like personal experiences, not fiction. But even if Vakil’s own adolescence did not so closely parallel Cyrus’s, the luxurious sensory detail of the story would reveal the author’s teeming memory of the sights, sounds, and, most of all, tastes of his setting. Rahul Singh observes:

... though called a novel, *Beach Boy* is clearly something of a memoir of the young Ardashir, from the earliest days that he can recall, to his father’s
death. Thus there is a Salingeresque *Catcher in the Rye* quality to *Beach Boy*. As in *Catcher*, the chief protagonist, Cyrus Readymoney, looks at life and at the adults who surround him sardonically, with a mixture of irreverence and humour.\(^{53}\)

In *Beach Boy* Ardashir Vakil has very skillfully brought to life the Parsi community of Bombay. The novel describes the adolescence of an elite Parsi boy in Bombay. But at the same time the novelist also focuses on the Parsi community and culture through the young boy’s relationships with his parents and grandparents and especially through their family structure. The ethnic identity of the protagonist is established in the very beginning of the novel:

> The Readymoneys. Yes, that was my father’s name, the name my great-grandfather earned for himself when he took on the trade of moneylender ninety years ago on the docks of Bombay. We are Zoroastrians, like the Topiwalas, the Bottleopenerwalas, the Batliwalas, the Lawyers (or Vakils), the Boxwalas, and the Ghaswalas, who are all named after the vocation of their ancestors. We pray at agiarys – temples where the same flame has been kept burning for hundreds of years. We have pictures of Queen Victoria on our walls. ‘B for Bawa, B for British,’ my non-Parsi friends liked to tease. We offer up our dead to the vultures on the top of Malabar Hill in huge stadium-sized wells called the Tower of Silence. We come from Iran, even though my grandmother hates to admit it. We drink cows’ urine to purify our bodies, wear a sacred thread around our waists and a muslin vest with a tiny pocket of wisdom sewn in its breast. People often talk of us as being honest.
We build ships and colonies – baghs where poor Parsis can lead a decent existence.\textsuperscript{54}

Ardashir Vakil being a Parsi writer was in diaspora in India as he is now in England. For him, like other Parsis, India is the adopted land for shelter because of the religious persecution of their community by the Muslims in Iran. Vakil very beautifully touches upon this historical detail when Cyrus visualizes how his ancestors sailed their boats to the coast of western India:

I can see them all those hundreds of years ago, docking their battered boats on the beach, not far from our house, to the amazement of the Koli fishermen who would have been dragging in their fish-laden nets first thing in the morning. I can see their tired, hungry Persian faces, their tattered tunics and turbans, their straggling beards, their eyes half mad with fervour and thirst. I can see the head priest, the dustoorji, wading out in front of his flock, nursing a silver goblet with candle-like flame flickering inside. The flame he has been cradling all the way from his desert home. Out of the water they come, bowing politely to their naked dark-skinned hosts, kneeling down on the wet sand, kissing the ground and joining their hands in prayer to Ahura Mazda.\textsuperscript{55}

The above narrative reminds us of a similar description in the novel, \textit{The Memory of Elephants} written by Boman Desai. In this novel also, Desai marvellously gives fictional account of this historical event. Besides these passages throwing light on the ethnic identity of the protagonist, the novelist also refers to several Parsi-Zoroastrian tenets, customs and traditions in this novel.
The Parsis are a charitable community. They have always been distinguished for their beneficence as well as for their wealth. They have founded and maintained hospitals, schools and other institutions, their liberality extending to others as well as to their own people. In Beach Boy, Vakil refers to the aspect of charity. Once while going to his grandmother’s place, Cyrus finds a five-rupee note lying on the road. He picks it up and later tells about it to his grandmother. She takes it from him and tells him that she would give it to charity. Cyrus, at that time honestly confesses:

I wasn’t sure what charity meant, but I didn’t think twice about it and went into the back room, lay on my bed and continued with my favourite Phantom comic from old copies of the Illustrated Weekly of India.⁵⁶

In yet another incident, when his friend Horace takes his bag and keeps it, Cyrus fails to show generosity. He struggles to get it back for about seven months and succeeds eventually. But he realizes the importance of charity only after his father’s sudden death. When Cyrus shows a rifle to Bhagwan, the servant; the rifle which he always wanted to possess and that which his father had just ordered before his death, Bhagwan responds:

See what a kind man your father was, even on his deathbed he was thinking of you. He left everyone something, you know. He left me a lot, Cyrus.⁵⁷

Vakil also narrates the images from Parsi-Zoroastrian way of life en passant. He refers to some customs and rituals like worship of fire, daily saying of religious prayers, Navjote ceremony as well as culture specific terms like Tower of Silence, Fire Temple, and the religious raiment like Sudra and Kusti, related with the Parsi community. The Parsis worship fire. Fire is the creation of Ahura Mazda and has been held sacred from the pre-Zoroastrian era. Though fire is held sacred in all religions, it has a special significance for
the Zoroastrians. Cyrus graphically narrates how his aunt Zenobia says her daily prayers and worships fire at her home:

A devout Zoroastrian, she said her prayers four times a day, waking at three in the morning for the first session. When evening descended quietly on the prosperous trees of this exclusive hill, Zenobia’s Gujarati servants wafted urns of burning sandalwood and frankincense around the flat, perfumed smoke which bars the evil spirits from our lives and purifies the soul. She was to be seen standing on the balcony, saying her prayers, looking out at the Parsi Towers of Silence and the vultures, well fed on the remains of the dead, circling above.⁵⁸

The above narrative throws light on the importance of daily prayers in the life of staunch Zoroastrians and how they worship fire – a source of light, warmth and life; as well as on their exclusiveness in the sense that they are the quickly dwindling ethno-religious minority in India who mostly lives in their colonies only and they have exclusive tradition of disposing of the dead body in the Tower of Silence by exposing it to the vultures.

In Zoroastrian religion the priests are highly regarded. They are the embodiment of purity, the keepers of secret knowledge and the mediators between God and men. In past, they were the lawgivers and enjoyed a very prominent status. But their status has deteriorated since the establishment of the Parsi Panchayat – a governing body dominated by laymen. With the passing of time, the Parsi laity has been progressing educationally, occupationally and culturally whereas the priestly families have lagged behind in the socio-economic spheres and their role has remained limited to ritual tasks only. Vakil also refers to this fading image of the priests and pokes fun at them in the novel. Sitting in the Fire Temple, Cyrus watches the priests performing the last rites of his father and ponders:
Watching them chant for the safe journey of my father’s soul, like auctioneers, or like commentators at a racetrack, I couldn't help thinking of the cruel jokes my Parsi friends at school used to direct at these custodians of our faith. We poked fun at their fat Rolex watches, always visible at the edge of their tunic sleeves, their sex-starved ravings – there was no such thing as a woman dusturji and they weren't allowed to marry – and the absurd figure they cut, roaming the Parsi colonies to wag their fingers at naughty boys whose pert bottoms were of more interest to them than their moral welfare.  

There is a point of view in medical science that the mental health of the offspring of people who marry among close relatives progressively decreases. The Parsis do not convert or accept people from other faiths. They are also not allowed to intermarry with people of other faiths. The intention behind such practice is to retain their ethnic culture and values as well as the family’s monetary legacy. As a result, they marry mostly among close relatives. But due to such intra-family marriages, diseases related with mental disorder or madness is prevalent among the Parsis. In this connection R. S. Pathak observes:

The Parsis do not allow conversions or mixed marriages and maintain their exclusive identity. ... This kind of claustrophobic exclusiveness may be responsible for slow-thinking persons and archetypal cranks.  

Vakil is also aware of association of perennial madness among the Parsis due to exclusive breeding and touches upon this issue in the novel. One night after dinner, the Readymoneys discuss their plan to go to Panvel
for picnic. During the discussion Adi, Cyrus’s elder brother refers to his younger sister Shenaz’s travel-sickness and asks his parents to remember to carry travel pills for her. As a result a quarrel takes place between the two. The suggestion infuriates Shenaz and she angrily shouts:

Shut up. You stupid boy. You’re the one who needs pills. You’re the one who takes those brain tablets every morning.⁶¹

As the quarrel prolongs, she again says:

Brain pills, brain pills, mad boy, brain pills, …⁶²

The concern for Parsi community figures prominently in the works of some of the Parsi writers. For instance, Rohinton Mistry’s Tales from Firozshah Baag and Such A Long Journey foreground the heterogeneity of identity within Parsi community and the dynamic nature of Parsi community itself. There are some other Parsi novelists also whose works centralize their community. Firdaus Kanga in his Trying To Grow, Farrukh Dhondy in Bombay Duck, Bapsi Sidhwa in The Crow Eaters and An American Brat reflect Parsi Community in varied shades. Their works exhibit consciousness of their community in a way that the community emerges as a protagonist demoting human protagonists to the backdrop. Some of the Parsi writers are also concerned with the preservation of the ethnic identity of their community.

In Beach Boy, Zoroastrianism and other issues and problems related with the Parsi community do not form a part of thematic concerns of the novel. Though the novel revolves around a young Parsi boy and his family, it does not discuss issues related with Parsi community like problems of inter-caste marriage and demographic decline, ethnic identity and the various anxieties felt by this ethno-religious minority community. Vakil takes a skeptical stance and keeps himself away from such sensitive issues. Cyrus, the protagonist of the novel, remains to be an isolated spectator on the side-line, though he is a Parsi.
*Beach Boy* is very well written, even-toned debut which presents, in short vignettes, a turbulent year in the life of Cyrus, an elite Parsi boy living in Bombay in the ‘70s. The novel is idiosyncratic, unique in writing style and extemporaneous in feel. Vakil uses another language unfamiliar to his readers but it enhances the atmosphere of Bombay in particular and the novel in general. His language is simple but it slowly seduces us and we get sucked in by his innocence, charm and wit.

III

Ardashir Vakil’s second novel, *One Day* published in 2003, is a radical departure from his first novel *Beach Boy*, which tells the story of a Parsi adolescent, set in the Bombay of the ‘70s. In his second novel, Vakil explores the unexotic locale of a London suburb. When Vakil was asked in an interview, why it took him so long to write his second novel, he replied:

A writer is like a filter. The world has to go through you. They are your recipients. I have set high standards for myself. As far as this book is concerned, the theme was always there since *Beach Boy*. The story was always there but it has been a much harder book to write. I am a more confident writer now. I know what I can handle. This novel is the story of one day, 24 hours across 24 chapters in the lives of an ordinary couple in a mixed marriage about to celebrate the birthday of their son. They are going their own ways but have to stick together for the sake of their son and society. It derives from the basic triangle of humanity – man, woman and child. It has life in all its aspects – happy moments, sad moments.
One Day is the story of one eventful day, 15th March 1999, to be exact in the life of Ben Tennyson, secondary school teacher and aspirant Indian-fusion cookbook writer, and Priya Patnaik, his Indian wife and BBC radio announcer. It happens to be the birthday of their son Arjun, nicknamed as Whacka. The novel is a chronicle of a twenty-four hour journey into the troubled marriage of this couple and the attempts both make to patch up their differences. As they get ready for their son’s birthday party, Vakil drags the skeletons out of their closet as he loops back through their time together, disclosing the fact that Priya had an adulterous side to her nature. This fact provides a certain amount of tension in what might otherwise be a happy and ethnically challenging suburban life.

The central theme of the novel is marital discord resulting from the complexities of an inter-racial marriage. As the novel opens at a quarter past midnight, on 15th March 1999, Ben lies in bed in their North London home reading a book titled The Inner Game of Tennis, while Priya masturbates. The scene sets the mood for the rest of the book about this detached couple and their equally out-of-touch friends. Their little boy, Whacka, sleeps in the room next door. He will be three tomorrow. As they discuss their plans for his birthday party, each ponders over the crevice, which has split their marriage over the last year, trying to gather the energy to gloss over their problems and put on a show for family and friends the next day. Much later in the novel, Jocelyn, one of the invitees at Whacka’s birthday party comments:

What I can’t be doing with are novels about the trials and tribunals of middle-class north London couples. We’ve had enough of those to last us fifty years. Whingeing double-income liberal parents, please let us have no more of their banal utterances.

The reader who has reached this far in the novel will at once make out that it is a perfect description of One Day. This description might bewilder him also, because the author himself condemns a class of novel of which the
novel itself is a part. But at the end of the novel he would discover to his relief that it was really a satire of itself and therefore a beautiful piece of literature. The above observation is self-reflexive and only a brilliant author can attempt such an uphill task. The novel still becomes not only interesting but also thought provoking, though the author works around a familiar plot – a twice told tedious tale – almost a cliché.

The novel begins with a scene of masturbation. The arresting thing about the scene is that the act of masturbation is set within the parameters of a marriage, which seems to have turned bitter. Again the act of sexual pleasure works to emphasize the distance between the husband and wife as they both lie on the same bed. The act also focuses on the irresistible sexuality of the Indian wife, as her English husband lies beside her worrying about a lost game of tennis, searching for answers in a manual on the game. The narrative unfurls from this point into several different strings and merges many issues here: impotence – physical and psychological, sex and power play, fragility of an inter-racial marriage, the undermining of gender stereotyping and the memory of a lost loving union. It nevertheless unites into the importance of the underlying significance of Whacka’s birthday. Commenting on the opening scene of the novel, Rebecca Abrams observes:

Marriage as teamwork; marriage as conquest; marriage as fulfilment; marriage as self-discovery: Ardashir Vakil explores these ideas with a good deal of subtlety and intelligence. While Priya ‘reads’ the world through her body, Ben searches for coherence in outward signs. They are, like so many couples, locked into a conversation that each conducts in a different language.65

Ben is a secondary school teacher and unsuccessful cookbook writer. He feels desperately blocked in his efforts to write a follow-up to his first successful book. His frustrations find a vent in his weekly game of tennis, and a half-hearted flirtation with Helen, a colleague from school. His infidelity is in
retaliation to his wife’s extra-marital relationships. The impulsiveness and obsession that Ben finds himself powerless to resist in his wife, have led her to betray him again and again. On the day of the party, Ardashir Vakil explores the heart of this marriage in crisis, examining why this couple that love each other can succeed in hurting each other so much. He brings to light many factors which have dragged this marriage to breaking point: Priya’s domestic incompetence, money worries, Ben’s career at a standstill, the innate racism of Ben’s parents, and, finally the stark fact, which haunts them both, that Priya has undermined her husband by her infidelity.

Like many other novels that are based on the East-West divide, in this novel also a great part of the stress and strain on the marriage comes from the complexities of an inter-racial union. Furthermore, the complexities and confusions are mounted on the canvas of sexual desire. And then, of course, there is ‘the secret’ about the origin of Whacka, which seems to be tearing this fragile relationship. Rebecca Abrams observes:

Their cultural and personal differences – English, public-school-educated, cautious Ben; spontaneous, ambitious, Indian Priya – are poured into the rift, used by each in turn to vilify and condemn the other. The overt wound, it turns out somewhat unsurprisingly, is sexual infidelity. Vakil explores unflinchingly the difficulty of moving on from this kind of attack on trust. But ultimately the real (and paradoxical) enemy of happiness is shown to be the challenge of intimacy itself.66

Vakil has given here room for one of the modern issues of need for intimacy in conjugal life; though the complexities of inter-racial marriage, infidelity in marital relationship and the question of parentage in a family are the core issues which construct the plot of the novel. Whacka is the physical embodiment of these complexities. But the novel ends optimistically; at least without doing any damage to Whacka as Ben ultimately decides not to leave
him and accepts him as his son. After a furious quarrel with Priya, Ben realises that the clouds of doubt have cleared. As Ben and Priya lie on their bed, huddled together, Ben understands that comfort and security, the warmth of the bed and familiar smells of his house are enough to make life go on smoothly. Thus by ending his novel positively Vakil perhaps wants to show that life survives against every kind of complexity resulting from multi-racial confluence and confrontation. With changing time morals have also changed. The ideas of fidelity and parentage in family are becoming out of date in the present world with its single-parent family concept. The noticeable point here is that the author allows the dialectics of problems to work themselves out without authorial interference.

The world Vakil portrays is authentically multi-racial – from the multinational and suave circle of friends of Ben and Priya, to the kids in Ben’s school with their slang and practical point of view, whose multi-ethnic character makes teaching them a minefield of political correctness. And then there is Priya and Ben themselves, cuddled together ‘white brother, brown sister, like a swivel of layered chocolate, dark and white’. But there is something muddled in this cheerful white and brown twirl that refuses to melt. Ben’s class is full of multiethnic students like Raz who is a mixture of Turkish Cypriot and East End, Lucy, a mixture of Caribbean father and white mother and Luke, a half Brazilian. Ben narrates:

Most classes split along roughly racial lines round years 8 and 9. The black boys sat together, the Bengali girls sat together, so did the white boys, the Chinese girls, the middle-class boys. The danger was that these separate groups became self-sufficient splinters.67

One such student of Ben named Luke is a member of Combat 18’s youth brigade. He hands out leaflets at the tube station and had persuaded Ben to attend one of their meetings. He once comes to Ben and asks some
key questions which throws light on the problem of unemployment faced by the British citizens. He asks:

‘Is it true that the Indians and the blacks are taking all the jobs in Britain? Isn’t that why there is so much unemployment? I just want to know, sir, if – just say – if all the black and Asian people who were not born here were sent back to their countries, wouldn’t that mean that all the unemployed would be able to get back their jobs? What do you think, sir? Do you not think they have a point, sir?’

Though Luke is a young boy, he is well aware of the problem and its complexities. But being a half Brazilian, he is also a part of the people whom he holds responsible for the problem.

Then there is reference to an organization called Southhall Black Sisters on which Priya is preparing a report for BBC. The organization was started by three Asian women in a small house on a quite street in west London. It grew out of the collective fear experienced by the Asian community in Southhall, during violent disturbances in the late seventies, fomented by the National Front, which culminated in the murder of a school teacher from New Zealand. The aim of this organization is:

… to support women in the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities who were suffering from domestic violence and its related problems: homelessness, loss of benefits, difficulties with immigration status.

This is how Vakil refers to the racial problems faced by the women immigrants in England. Priya too actively participates in the activities of the organization and she had also helped them organize a march by women
supporting the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Southhall Black Sisters have summoned some of the most public campaigns in defence of women jailed for murdering their violent spouses. ‘When Kiranjit Ahluwalia had her sentence reduced from murder to manslaughter and was released from prison in 1992, it was the Southhall Black Sisters that she thanked first of all,’ relates Sadaf, a member-activist. Thus Vakil has interwoven two real incidents: the publication and ban on *The Satanic Verses* and the Kiranjit Ahluwalia case, having a tinge of racism, in his narrative.

Vakil portrays two different incidents in the novel in which Priya too becomes a victim of racial prejudice. The first occasion is when she visits London for the first time, with her mother, at the age of sixteen. Once when she is in a phone box, she finds two white teenager girls horsing round outside, waiting for her to finish. Then suddenly one of them shouts, ‘It’s a Paki!’ and they both crack up. Priya at that time feels as if she were a weird animal in a cage. Again there is a scene in which Ben recalls his early days with Priya at Oxford, and a subsequent lunch at his parents’ Amersham home. During the lunch when Ben expresses his desire to marry Priya, his father says:

> You mustn’t get the wrong end of the stick, Ben. I’ve always been good friends with old Faz. I have nothing against Asians. However … however it’s a quite different matter when my only son, my only son … wants to marry a non-Christian and my grandchildren are going to be half-Pakistan.\(^{70}\)

From a British point of view all Asians are persona non grata. And Ben’s father disapproves of Priya as a match for Ben on the ground of her being a non-Christian. So there is hate within hate – wheel within wheels. The author treats the whole gamut right from xenophobia to religious enmity in his narrative. Regarding the character of Priya, Anita Roy observes:
Then there’s the whole way in which the racial card is played out in Priya. She is chaotic, irrepressible and beautiful – a liberated strumpet with a heart of gold and firebrand political convictions. She is also, according to her husband who is anything but dispassionate in these matters, ‘a cesspit of lust’. Now, call me politically incorrect, but I find something distinctly fishy going on there. Upright, control freak = white man: sexuality gone wild = brown woman? I can’t help but wonder if these kinds of stereotypes would have been so uncritically accepted had the writer of this book had an Anglo-Saxon name.\textsuperscript{71}

Again, the four writers in the novel – Mohini Patnaik, Priya’s mother; a sensitive Bengali writer called Arun Sengupta; a suave and celebrated friend of Priya called Jehan; and Ben himself who is a cookbook writer – all represent different race, culture, class and country.

Ben is an ardent tennis player and a year back, before the tearing apart had started in his family, he had won almost all the matches he played against Mauro, his long-time friend and opponent and Welsh, his fellow teacher. But since then this kind of form has had never returned in his game. So he fishes out the book, \textit{The Inner Game of Tennis} looking for some advice on the mental side of the game from it. He is eagerly longing for a couple of wins over Mauro and wants to take revenge for the humiliating defeat he had suffered last week at the hands of Welsh. On reading the tennis manual Ben is convinced that there is some piece of advice in it that he could pick up and reabsorb, something that might change his life, not just his game of tennis. He is well aware of the fact that effort, commitment, and discipline are necessary for this vital task and the crevasse of self-doubt must be filled with hard work.

Effort, commitment, and discipline are vital in the game of tennis as well as in a happy family life. Ben’s efforts here are not only a search for some
advice in the tennis manual to improve his game but it is also an endeavor to reset the missing rhythm in his conjugal life. The game of tennis, which Ben has been losing, symbolizes the troubled marital life of the couple as it is actually played by a disharmonious mixed double team. Ben’s search for a solution does not remain confined to the game of tennis, which is a physical world, but is extended into his dream world too:

In his daydreams, he saw himself having finished the job, smoothing over the cracks, patting the mud, proud of his immense dedication and sacrifice, administering the last cursory dabs and prods. After that, he could see himself walking away from his great work, as if he were watching the movie of his life, walking away towards satisfaction for the rest of his days.72

Thus Ben is in constant search of a solution. He feels that somewhere, there is something or someone, a book or a person which would provide him the missing piece and stop the constant sense of souring inside him. Ben’s instruction manual says that the common complaint of sportsmen is: “It’s not that I don’t know what to do, it’s that I don’t do what I know!”73 And it is quite true in the case of Ben too. When things heat up in his tennis games, he is not sure which bit of advice to follow. In real life too when he is faced by a critical situation, he fails to cope with it.

Ben and Priya have totally different points of view regarding spending money. Ben comes from a middle class family. He has been brought up with an advice from his parents to live within his means. Before marriage, Ben had kept one current account, which usually had money left in it at the end of the month. Priya had had two or three current and savings accounts, and while she was hugely overdrawn in one she saved money in another. After marriage, they started a ledger on Ben’s suggestion in which they were meant to write what each of them had spent in the month. Priya called it the ‘divorce
book’, because they always argued about the sums. Priya would accuse Ben of being petty; he would accuse her of being wasteful:

He believed that she was overspending, while she thought she was making savings and resented his accusation. Ben tried his best to stop worrying about it and responds to Priya’s views that there was nothing worse than seeing oneself behave like a miser. Fretting about who was going to buy the next round in the pub. Like his father, counting the pennies and putting them in neat piles to buy the papers on Sundays.  

Priya has grand ideals, grand ambitions and grand plans for her life. She has desires and dreams beyond her means. Ben believes that celebrating Whacka’s birthday in a grand way means more money spent from their mushrooming overdrafts. But she spends a lot of money on absurd amounts of food, lavish party bags, clothes ordered from catalogues, too many presents for Whacka and new plants:

Priya, who was always fighting off the influence of her mother’s family, was nevertheless steeped in their world view. They saw themselves as philosophers and thinkers. Money should not be talked about. It was vulgar. And yet no expense should be spared to procure what the heart desired. Financial troubles could always be sorted out at a later date by someone else.

Ben is organized, disciplined and a great lover of food whereas Priya is a mess, irresponsible and emotional. She is not cut out to be a cook. As she finishes cooking, all the kitchen surfaces are always cluttered with dirty pots and other paraphernalia:
For her, making porridge required six packets of oats, three pans, four pints of milk and six ladles. It was almost as if she despised the kitchen and its utilities, and they bore her a reciprocal grudge. Like a sensitive horse tiring of an inadequate rider, the kitchen lurched and frothed and fumed at her as she flailed hopelessly at its unyielding rump. If Ben dared enter this war zone to give a little advice or help, Priya would erupt. A dish was being massacred, but he was meant to turn away and ignore the scene. Equally, he would get it in the neck if she asked for assistance and he didn’t immediately find a solution for some curdled undertaking.\textsuperscript{76}

Ben has inherited love for tidiness from his mother. Whenever he looks at his flat, he would think that the level of untidiness and mess has reached epic proportions. This would remind him of his mother’s neat piles of washing, sorted and trussed socks, colour-coded handkerchiefs and towels. Yet his love for tidiness is as much true as his inability to live without Priya. Once when Priya left him for Marcus, her boyfriend, Ben had cleared the flat of all the mess and had made it free from ‘the Patnaik oppression’. But soon after that he had longed for Priya along with the mess:

He sobbed like a toddler then – like Whacka, when he laid face down on the floorboards, weeping inconsolably for his departing mother. He wanted all that tidiness to be flushed down the drain, wanted Priya and all her mess back, and somebody to cook for and complain at.\textsuperscript{77}

In \textit{One Day} Vakil presents before us a story of one eventful day, 15\textsuperscript{th} March 1999, in the life of Ben Tennyson and Priya Patnaik: a run-of-the-mill day, in which time limps along much more at a snail’s pace, in an ordinary
marriage with its trivial quarrels, daily grind, minor exasperations and routine hopes and fears. The day is like a container into which tired parents hurl their child’s scattered belongings at the end of the day, the characters and events are put down into the fixed period of time, the whole thing carefully sealed at the each end by midnight. The day becomes special for this couple only because it is the third birthday of their son Whacka. As they discuss their plans for his birthday party, each ponders over the crevice, which have split their marriage over the last year, trying to gather the energy to gloss over their problems and put on a show for family and friends the next day. They sleep together, each dreaming their own coded dreams. In the morning, Ben drives of to work at an inner-city comprehensive school while Priya gets Whacka ready and off to his Montessori nursery. She then takes the tube to BBC Broadcasting House where she works as a radio announcer-researcher. In the evening they meet again after a break at the house for Whacka’s birthday party in which the kids play, adults chat and the clown plays all sorts of pranks around. Then some serious talks go on by the remaining adults, which include a group of London professionals – writers, a therapist, a barrister and Ben’s parents. And then finally at the end of the day, exhausted husband and wife have the grand finale of the fight where all the bubbling bitterness of the past twenty-one chapters boil over and ‘the whole thing goes nuclear’. The sparkle that finally burst into flames is the fact that Whacka is not Ben’s biological son, but the result of extra marital relations between Priya and their also-married best friend Leo. Ben had found out something about ‘the secret’ a year before the books opens. Priya and Leo had breached the marital contract while the two couples – Ben-Priya and Leo-Jan were enjoying their holidays in Wales during the summer of 1995. Vakil graphically describes Priya’s sexual encounter with Leo, which takes place on a moonlit night. Ben and Jan had retired to bed. Priya suggested to Leo that they go out for a walk in the moonlight. Then they had sex in the fields. The sex with Leo had been very intense, exciting and illicit. Priya could not forget it and still remembers the intense experience. Leo had said afterwards that he never had expected it to happen. But Priya had confessed to Leo that though she had not planned such a thing, she had thought about its possibility, as the four of them had always been so close friends. Later She even imagines in a different life
herself and Leo together but much harassed by the notion of fidelity in marital life discards the option:

It wouldn’t work. She didn’t want it. She felt ashamed of herself for thinking about it. She wished Leo would leave her to her thoughts. … Would her face betray her when Ben woke? … Why did it have to be so fucking complicated? Why was there this overriding need for sexual fidelity between couples? Why couldn’t she just throw the shame aside and go on living? 

She feels that there is something utterly irrational about her relation with Leo, something disruptive and self-destructive that she is unable to understand. She thinks of the entire episode a result of an aberration. She realises that during that moment she was just betrayed by her body and had entered the forbidden chamber. Now she wants to lock the room and throw the key away. Priya and Leo call it an experience, a mistake and decide to bury it in Welsh ground where it had happened. But it happens again instead in the workshop of Leo where Priya goes to tell him that she is pregnant. When she looks at him she feels intoxicated by a sudden desire to hold him in her mouth the way she had seized him under a tree in Wales. She wants to experience the same kind of forgetfulness and abandonment. Once again Priya and Leo have sex in the workshop but this time it is an unpleasant experience for Priya. She thinks of Leo as some sort of goat she has to get away from. At the same time She is tempted to compare Leo’s sexual act with that of Ben. She thinks at times she felt uninspired and her sexual experiences with Ben were briefer than a spring shower, but she never experienced revulsion as she experienced with Leo. Vakil dwells in detail on the two sexual experiences of Priya with Leo.

But in April, 1998, a month after Whacka’s second birthday Ben comes to know about the entire episode from a letter, which Priya had preserved in the pages of Bhagavad Gita, written to her by Leo renouncing his claim to
Whacka. It is an irony that Ben discovers the cause of Arjun’s (Whacka’s original name) birth from the pages of Bhagavad Gita. Perhaps Priya had kept the letter there so that Ben might find it. Ben demands to know what the secret that Leo has mentioned in the letter is. He wants to hear the truth from her. Priya tells him about her sexual encounter with Leo. Priya says to Ben that she had thought that he would know that Whacka is not his son as his fingers, the colour of his hair and the shape of his mouth are completely different from his. Ben phones Leo and asks him to come over, as he wants to hear the truth from his mouth. Leo appears and sits there without uttering a single word. Ben looks as if he is going to hit Leo or ‘explode or implode’. But Ben smashes his forehead against the table instead and it starts bleeding. When Leo gets up to leave Ben says:

Time to leave – time to leave, is it? Time to go back to your bijou house and your sex-crazed wife? You think I’m going to hit you? But I’ll not do that, I’ll not stoop so low, I won’t demean myself. You think you can just walk away from this? Stay where you are! It’s my blood on the floor and it’s because of you that it got spilt.79

Since that moment, Ben’s reaction has been brave and complicated. He has remained loyal to Whacka and his idea of the family. Though at times he is enraged by Priya’s attempts to ruin their marriage, their relationship goes on. But Ben’s frustrations in conjugal life find a vent in his half-hearted flirtation with Helen, a colleague from school. His infidelity is in retaliation to his wife’s extra-marital relations. He thinks he has every right to take this chance and does not have to feel any guilt. “Vengeance is mine, ... How could Priya object after all she’d put him through?”,80 he relates. Helen often looks to him for the word of advice on how to handle the difficult kids at school. They often talk about their mutual problems and try to help each other. Ben often conjures himself touching and caressing the curves of her breasts. He even imagines of having sex with her. However, his desire to have sex with Helen remains only on the level of imagination. His Victorian morality and
middle class upbringing always prevents him from taking up such a course. His sense of responsibility and moderation in life also puts him through moral dilemma:

Be controlled, be vigilant, his dad used to remind him. He would have liked to have sex with Helen, but it wasn’t the correct thing to do. He worried that his impulse was spiked with the desire to get even with Priya. And what be wrong with that? Was there some sort of eternal damnation waiting for him if he transgressed the vows of marriage? Why did his fantasies torture him so? Was he scared of appearing to be the wrong-doer? At Haylesbury he might sneak off with his friends to smoke a cigarette, but when it came to taking drugs he always declined. He didn’t feel his marriage could support the strain of more infidelity.81

Priya and Ben think that they have spent too many nights over the ‘whys and wherefores and the where-to-go-from-heres.’ They determine that on the day of their son’s birthday they will remain calm and try not to allow the things come on the surface. Vakil describes Whacka’s birthday party in great details. Many guests, friends and relatives are invited to the party. The children are enjoying games and cartoon shows on TV. The guests discuss different subjects like tennis, painting, art, religion and writing etc. A guest named Mary remarks that one could learn everything about life from a game of tennis. Ben responds that a loser learns more than the winner. Jehan, another guest at the party is a successful writer. He is in the process of finishing his fourth book. He has been a great success in America and he is much sought after and interviewed. His wife Rebecca is a psychotherapist. Jehan is presently surrounded by admirers. Vakil contrasts Jehan’s success with Ben’s failure as a writer. Even Ben has to admit that Jehan is a sharp writer especially in reviewing some new books and movies. Jehan’s work has reached a wider audience and he has achieved both success and wealth
through writing. During their conversation the guests talk about various subjects. Jan mentions Buddhism. She says that she was taken to a lecture at a Buddhist center by a friend and that lecture has changed her life. She adds that for last three months she has been meditating twenty minutes everyday. Priya does not believe in meditation and such spiritual taboos. She thinks that it is nothing but an illusion. She says that she is anti-religion and anti-any god. According to her religion has caused more bloodshed, pain, war and indoctrination. She is more interested in the social side of the religion. She remarks that she does not approve of westerners or westernized Indians ignoring the political problems of the world.

The birthday party ends around midnight. All the guests leave for their homes. Whacka is already asleep in his broken cot. Priya and Ben are left alone. They resume the postmortem of the party. They say that Whacka had a wonderful time. Just then the fight breaks out between Ben and Priya. Priya says that Jehan was quite popular among all guests. Ben angrily replies that he is a pompous bastard who has advised Ben to stop writing. Priya too approves of Jehan’s advice and accuses Ben of being jealous of him. At this moment she also mentions Leo by saying that: ‘And everyone looks at Leo, when he walks into the room.’ This remark infuriates Ben and he asks Priya what she wants to say and adds that she is a coward. Priya could not tolerate her family being insulted. Blood begins to boil in her veins. She rises like a warrior, her eyes flashing with anger and says:

The truth is … you’re the one who is shit-scared – you’re shit-scared to own your son, to love him, to make love to me, to look Leo in the eye, to compare yourself with Jehan. You’re like a weed when you’re talking to Jehan. A pathetic weed. Afterwards it’s all talk about how he’s bastard, but when he’s there you would never dream of contradicting him. 82
Priya accuses Ben that he could not bear to leave his family and home because it might give Whacka and her the opportunity to make something of their lives. He could not let them off the hook. He could not stop making them feel guilty. Ben calls Priya a whore with lustful cesspit of a sex-crazed body. Priya replies that she is not a whore and she is not ashamed of having sex with Leo:

There is nothing wrong with what I did. I just had to pretend to have regretted it to keep this hollow marriage together, just for Arjun’s sake. Hear this now. I’ve kept it in too long. I am not sex-crazed, depraved or anything. I didn’t grow up like you in a hell-hole of suburban Victorian hypocrisy and repression. My family were not ashamed of their feelings.\(^3\)

Here Priya makes a bitter attack on suburban Victorian hypocrisy of Ben’s family who has tried to cover up the reasons for the death of fourteen-year-old sister of Ben. Priya adds, banging the table, that she is not a saint and she had sex with Leo twice. She admits that it was a mistake but she is not ashamed of admitting it. She becomes hysterical and shouts loudly. Ben tries to stop her and starts going out of the house. Priya stands in his way and Ben smashes at the glass pane behind her. He breaks the red pane cutting his knuckles. His face is frozen with anger and fury. He tells Priya that he is leaving her forever. At such a juncture Priya asks a very crucial question:

Fine, go. But before you go, just tell me one thing. Do you really think that when one person in a marriage is unfaithful, do you really imagine all the blame lies with that person? Do you really think – just do me the favour of answering the question honestly – do you really think that it is all one person’s fault? Do you not think that the other person in the couple had a part to play? Did you
have nothing to do with what happened between us?\textsuperscript{84}

Priya replies that she is a cesspit of lust that awakened him to sexual enjoyment. Ben shouts angrily and says that he wants to get out of the house. Priya calls him bastard and says that he actually wants to get out of his responsibilities. She asks him if he has not committed mental infidelity. She tells Ben that thought he did not have sex with Helen; his notebooks are full of such filthy fantasies. Ben tries to defend himself by saying that thinking is not a crime. But Priya makes a verbal assault on him and says:

The difference is that you want to do it to Helen, but you don't have the courage to follow your instincts. You're a dithering gentleman form Amersham who can't make up his mind which phrase to use and you will always be that. Hypocritical, afraid and self-righteous. Your parents don't even bother to go to church any more but they act like saintly fucking Christians and you, you are the product of that same double-standard lot. I loathe you, I loathe the place you come from, and the only mistake I made was to think that whatever happened I loved you. ... I don't love Leo, or even fancy him any more. ... For a year I've been trying to get you to stop, stop persecuting me ...\textsuperscript{85}

Here Priya indignantly comments on Ben's middle class morality. She says that he follows morality not because of his inner convictions but because of what other people would say about him. Here we can see the two different viewpoint regarding morality. At last when Ben decides to go out Priya sobs, howls and gives out a loud cry, which stops Ben from going out. He thinks that he should not leave Priya like that. He sits down beside Priya and touches her gently. He wants to comfort her and touch her. Ben decides to stay with Priya
realizing that he is home with the body he knows best in the world. Priya moans loudly and Ben tries to comfort her. They make peace and reconciliation through tears. Vakil, very poignantly, narrates:

Relief, like rain, like tears, comes over them. Something is being washed. Tears that allay fears. He joins his magical tennis hands on her shoulder blades and rubs in small eddies all the way, very slowly. She allows a big exhalation. As if to join her he lays his head in the small of her curved back, brings his hands down round the backs of her thighs and stays there breathing lightly. From the street a fresh breeze blows in through the open door.\(^86\)

The fresh breeze that blows through the open door symbolizes the new understanding and reconciliation between husband and wife. Open door suggests generosity, acceptance and love. In the last chapter Vakil concludes the novel with the philosophy of the ‘Golden Mean’. Ben and Priya admit their mistakes and decide to live accepting each other’s weaknesses. Ben tells Priya that it was easier for him to pretend that it was her fault or someone else’s fault. The philosophy of the ‘Golden Mean’ comes through the reflection of Priya:

‘Sometimes’, she said, ‘we behave as if there are two columns: “Right” and “Wrong”, “Fault” and “Faultless”. When I was at school I had to put everything in one or the other. One gets used to it.’ What’s in the middle? Priya wondered to herself. Maybe that’s what she should be exploring, even fighting for. The space between right and wrong. She turned to look at him. ‘I can’t remember what I said, but I’m sorry.’\(^87\)
Ben says that he does not want to think any more but just wants to sit there next to her. Priya admits that she had never seen him so angry. Ben replies that he had never seen her so sad. In pure harmony and love they decide to sit silently without fixing anything. Very often it is better not to think and analyze but just to watch and witness. Lying next to Priya Ben feels that his doubts have dissolved like sugar. He asks himself if it is comfort and security, the warm bed, the familiar smell that made him to stay and was it flight from the inconvenience and embarrassment. Now in the last hour of his son’s birthday he feels that the clouds has cleared and revealed the whole spread of the city that he had been searching for. Priya also feels that she needs him; his gentleness, his pedantry his humming of silly tunes and his anger and his differences. In spite of her infidelities, she feels that Ben is her last solace and shelter. Her mind is pricked by a new thought. It is the thought of the Middle Path. All her life she had detested of this idea thinking that it is mediocrity and boredom. But now she feels that it is her own discovery. She thinks that one should paddle one’s boat in the middle of the river where the currents are the weakest and one could see more of the landscape from the middle. She realizes that turbulence is not always necessary. Vakil concludes the novel with a message for the modern man that one should choose the Middle Path. Here we are reminded of the great Chinese philosopher LaoTzu who in his Tao-Te-Ching says that the Middle Path is the only path that leads to salvation from all miseries. The novel ends with the sounds of London streets and retreating clouds. Vakil sums up with the following words:

Love that sound. The way it rips at the glass, tears at the sill, sucking up stains and drenching the moaning sorrows of London sleepers. Love the sound of raindrop. Love the sound of rushing car. Love the sound of brushing wind and water slipping by. Love the sound of people sleeping. The great intake and the outtake, the yes, the no, the sad yesterday and the maybe tomorrow.
Vakil brings home the message that acceptance of ‘what is’ is more important and worthwhile than what ‘should be’. Happiness and harmony lie not in expecting this and that but in choosing the space between the two. This is the message of non-duality.

One Day, set in London somewhere north of Islington, is a fin de siecle story of true depth and confirms the author’s status as one of the country’s brightest young writers. Vakil, by setting the action of the novel in the course of one day like James Joyce’s Ulysses, achieves unity of time and attains unity of place by setting the novel at single place namely London which emerges as a character in the novel. The stimulating blend of old and new, the buzz of the city, the tranquility of its many open spaces, and the amazingly diverse cultural scenes all make London unique. British people, and the people from different countries and cultures who call Britain home, interact to make London a vibrant and lively city. Immediately after independence, a large number of people from India migrated to London. The novel is a tale of one such Indian-Londoner named Priya Patnaik and her English husband, Ben Tennyson. At the very beginning of the novel the spirit of this great metropolis is evoked:

Start high above this city. Descend in a slow circle. Through a window in the gray clouds what do you see? Neat straight lines of houses. A snaking ribbon of silver river, steeples, a long flat roof, the famous clock, squares, crescents, playing fields, stadiums, thin lines of dinky cars. A great expanse of red brick, patches of green, banks of gray. Rows and rows of identical houses, some joined together like Siamese twins; other packed tomes on a shelf leaning against each other. In one of these – a turn-of-the-century house in the north of this city – side by side, in their basement bedroom, lie husband and wife, Ben Tennyson and Priya
Patnaik. Whacka their little boy, sleeps in the room
next door.

For Priya’s Polish neighbour Rosa, London is a place full of ‘derrtty, feelthy peepplle, robberrs, creemeenaals, derrty feelthy houses, horrriible wehzerr’. But Priya thinks, though not of England, but of this city as her home, as a part of her. Once the scene is established, the topographical details sketched, the city makes it presence felt through its notorious weather. There is an old adage that ‘London does not have a climate, it has weather’. This refers to the fickleness of the atmospheric conditions in the region. Plan a picnic in a park in the morning and it will be raining by noon; go to a film to escape a wet and dreary afternoon, and you will emerge to bright sunshine in a blue, cloudless sky. London is world famous for its fog and notorious drizzle. Vakil very beautifully describes this mysterious and mystifying atmosphere that the London drizzle creates during a certain pre-dawn hour:

The drizzle has turned into a more concerted shower. For an hour – the quietest hour in the cycle of day and night – the city almost sleeps. Apart from the solitary driver snagged at a red light, people are rarely to be seen. This is the hour when the weekday clubbers have straggled home, the sweepers are not yet out, the nightshift workers are still finishing …

The above description reminds us of Wordsworth’s famous sonnet Upon Westminster Bridge, though a very different piece of writing, written in a very different context. In this poem, the poet sings of the beauty of the London morning, which is silent and bare. Here there is the scene of night where the city of London lay fast asleep and the sounds of ‘klaxons, sirens and birdsongs, wait their hours of toil’. The sonnet reveals the beauty of London with its ships, towers, domes, theatres, temples unspoiled and the houses that seem asleep. Whereas here Vakil describes a London road, where the rain has washed out the ‘tired tarmac’, and has lightened it of its load and the city
has, like a man, returned to bed, contemplating its dark places. Across the city of London, the river Thames once ‘glideth at his own sweet will’, now it flows with its ‘vast accumulations, its consuming fires and wide arc of influence, swollen with corporeal detritus’ dividing the city into northern and southern halves.

Vakil presents each aspect of London city realistically and graphically. On reading the novel, one gets the feeling that one is on a guided tour of the city. For example, the organised public transport system. It is well known that London’s public transport is organized into zones, central London being Zone 1 with the zone numbers rising as one moves out from the center. The city is also divided into boroughs which are individually run by councils. There are at present 32 London boroughs plus the City of London. The protagonist of the novel crosses the heart of London every day and fancies himself a master of the London maze:

But now, when crossed the heart of London every day, he could feel the pulse of things: farmers marching, miners striking, anti-Gulf-War rallies, the flags outside the embassy after Brazil won the ‘94 World Cup. The City mile closed to traffic because of IRA bombs, forcing him to deviate from his old short cut through King Street and Queen Street. He could take several routes through the centre of London. He fancied himself a master of the London maze.\textsuperscript{91}

Here, the hustle and bustle of everyday London is reflected in the hectic, almost feverish activity. The farmer’s march, the miner’s strike, the anti-war rallies, the football passion of World Cup, the IRA terrorization define London as nothing else can. These incidents indicated in the above passage are social, economic and political landmarks. Ben, an ordinary Londoner, is like a mouse trying to reach a goal which is hazy like London fog. The Queen is no more the centre of Britain and Britain is no more the centre of the world.
So the native British has to take a detour from short cuts like the rest of the world to reach a goal – the cheese at the end of the maze.

The Underground or the Tube defines the very life of London. It is an all-electronic railway system that covers much of Greater London and some neighbouring areas. It is the world’s oldest underground system, and is one of the largest in terms of route length. The ‘London maze’ mentioned earlier can be mastered easily when once you get to know the various ‘lines’ – the routes of the tube:

She (Priya) changed to the Piccadilly Line at King’s Cross and got on to a westbound train. At Russell Square, a suave square Raj-type got on, sporting Harris tweeds and a brown felt hat. Priya, in novelist mode now, made notes in her head. Stubby but delicately balanced fingers. Sits slightly forward on the seat, so as not to crease his clothes. Bulldog face, well-polished black shoes, trousers with turn-ups, half-moon gold-rimmed specs, reads the paper with his arms spread wide, licks his thumbs as he turns pages, flaring nostrils, big uppity nose … fat creased up like a scarf round his neck, smug gold band on his wedding finger.92

People of all ages and backgrounds flock to London for many different reasons like better work prospects, better earnings, a higher standard of living and the motivation of living in a lively conurbation. The London Tube is the best place where one can see all London types. In the above passage one of the types is described very precisely. Priya consciously takes on the ‘novelist mode’ may be because of the inherent talent acquired from her novelist mother. Vakil here portrays only a native London type but London is also thronged by varieties of immigrant Londoners – Asian, African, European, Australian, American, Latin American and Caribbean etc. – men and women of all shapes, sizes, ages and occupation. London offers a fantastic diversity
of population and supports a myriad of different lifestyles. In the 2001 census, 71.15% of these seven and a half million people classed their ethnic group as white, 12.09% as Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or “Other Asian”, 10.91% as Black, 3.15% as mixed race, 1.12% as Chinese and 1.58% as other, mostly Filipino, Japanese and Vietnamese. Due to its multiculturalism London is also vulnerable to racial strife. Racism has been a long-standing problem in Britain. There have been several prominent instances of hate-crime activity in Britain in recent years. In April 1999, two bombings rocked communities of colour in London. A neo-Nazi group called Combat 18 claimed responsibility for both incidents. Vakil has interwoven many such incidents of racism in his narrative. He narrates:

With her next link Priya introduced an academic from Birkbeck. ‘In 1979, there were clashes in Southall between anti-racist groups – gathered there to protest against neo-Nazi marches through this most famous of Indian communities in Britain ...

In spite of such problems, London’s long-standing ethnic diversity has remained an important factor in its popularity with settlers from overseas. London has absorbed multiculturalism with its remarkable tolerance. That is why Vakil ends the novel with a message to love the sound of raindrop, rushing car, brushing wind and water slipping by, the sound of people sleeping which is part and parcel of this great city.

One Day is the urban tragedy of Ben Tennyson and Priya Patnaik; their irreproachable three-year-old son Whacka is the embodiment of hamartia. It is restrained character study of two immensely sympathetic, though blemished people. They are typically contrasting partners in a failing marriage. They are a combination of the opposites: loving and reserved, selfish and generous, cold and passionate. The characters and situations are almost banal in their familiarity. Ben, the male protagonist of the novel, is a mild, thrifty, culturally enlightened but conservative Londoner. He is an ordinary British
schoolteacher. He is always under pressure to find a way out of the muddle of teaching at a school. He is a food lover with three chapters of an unfinished cookbook. Though unsuccessful on conjugal and creative writing front, he is full of dreams:

... he had had dreams of a perfect family, of being a famous writer, a TV presenter, a household name. Dreams of the mixing of cultures. Love, respect, trust, all those clichés that Priya had trashed.94

He cooks biriyani far better than his Indian-born wife. He is organized and disciplined but ultimately incapable to cope on his own. His background is not fully described. His father is a kind of man who thinks all subcontinents are Pakistan. His sister Sarah died mysteriously.

Priya is outspoken, extravagant, successful, enormously unskilled in the kitchen and adulterous. She is a voluptuary brought up in the best traditions of liberal, educated, cultured, upper class India. She has lived in London so long that Delhi now feels alien to her. She is enigmatic and wild by nature. She is a mess, irresponsible and emotional but better able to cope. She has inherent beauty:

She smelt so lovely. Like a baby. That was something she had inherited from her mother and passed on to her son. Whatever time of day or night Priya’s breath was without odour, and her skin gave of a smell like unsalted butter.95

Her antecedents are more clearly described. On her mother’s side, she came from a well-established Hindu family who had been leading figures in the struggle for Indian independence. Politics, law and writing were in their blood. Her grandfather had been jailed during the freedom struggle, his brother had been Finance Minister in the first Indian government and her
other relatives had continued serving the Congress Party until recently. Her mother is one of the pre-eminent writers of post-independence India. After coming to England at the age of seventeen, she had returned to live in India for two short periods only. She has found her family history cumbersome and has been always fighting off the influence of her mother’s family:

The widespread net of influences and assumptions that came from her mother’s background in India seemed to find her out wherever she went. In England she felt she had made her own life. The fierce independence of mind and the self-reliance she had inherited from her mother had helped her in her adopted home. In Priya there beat the heart of a dissenting radical. 

People praise Priya for her boundless resourcefulness: mother, host, broadcaster, political activist and party organizer. She is a person who could never be forced to sit back if something unjust is going on in her presence. But though she likes to thinks of herself as a doer, she is, like her family, most at home in the world of ideas. She has an irrepressible natural intelligence. There is a dark side of her character. She is subject to violent mood swings. If a discussion starts in a room, she would enter the argument at the right moment and sear her way to the crux:

This Ben loved to watch. The way she could seem lazy, even shabby, distracted, while her brain leapt into action with the clarity of a first-rate barrister. She wasn’t one of those who looked to put others down with a caustic remark or show off the knowledge she had of Gramsci, Marx, Freud or Fanon. Hers was a questioning kind of intelligence.
Arjun Tennyson aka Whacka is a spoiled, ‘brattish badly behaved’ toddler. His parents, as a couple, form ‘a voluptuous swirl, a multicultural lolly’ in impending threat of dissolving into nonbeing. The half-secret about his parentage threatens to break up the conjugal union of his parents; but Whacka provides the adhesive that holds the marriage together. The character of Whacka can be examined as the result of confluence or/and conflict between man and woman from two different cultures, races, countries and classes. The impact is (going to be) obviously multiple:

Whacka was a kicker, a screamer, a street-fighter, a spear-carrier, a banshee all rolled into one. He came tumbling out of the womb and in his black eyes, as Priya said to her friends, into which she was the first to look, there was a green smouldering. Whoever you were, you couldn’t help but marvel at the pugnacious energy that radiated from the toddler. Ben was no sportsman, his games of tennis apart. Priya had an intellectual’s interest in sporting behaviour – for the actual games she showed no concern … But Whacka was already sport-obsessed. … nothing made him happier than kicking or hitting a ball round the garden or the park. His parents watched with growing fascination the foreign proclivities of their descendant.98

Besides the central characters, One Day presents a galaxy of characters including Mauro, Ben’s long-time friend and opponent in the game of tennis; Welsh, his fellow teacher; Steven, a writer-activist; Anouchka, Ben and Priya’s therapist; Brenda, owner of school canteen; Leigh, a novelist; Anil and Sunil, Ben’s wealthy and food loving Indian friends; Sarah, Ben’s sister; Carol and Mick, Scottish neighbours of Ben and Priya; Rosa, their Polish neighbour; Mohini, Priya’s novelist mother; Marcus, studio manager and Priya’s ex-lover; Helen, Ben’s colleague; Leo, a student of Oriental and
African Studies turned frame-maker; Jocelyn and Martin, his parents; Alice, his sister; Jan, his wife; Arun Sengupta, another Indian novelist; Fran Talkington, owner and head teacher of Whacka’s Montessori school; Ferida, Whacka’s teacher; Jehan, another successful novelist; Rebecca, his psychotherapist wife and so on. All these characters represent different professions, castes, creeds and colours and it becomes difficult to categorize these characters with enormous varieties. The writer presents a worldview of different problems and affairs through all these characters. Commenting on Vakil’s art of characterization Rebecca Abrams observes:

Praise for Ardashir Vakil’s first novel, *Beach Boy*, was fulsome. Salman Rushdie and John Updike, no less, saluted its skilful, sensuous portrayal of growing up in India, its delicate balancing of the child’s with the adult’s perception of events. It won a deserved Betty Trask Award and was shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel Award. His second novel, however, is less sure-footed. The ideas are interesting and important, but their embodiment in these particular characters and events is never entirely convincing. Set in London somewhere north of Islington, the novel relies too much on our familiarity with the urban, middle-class world of coffee shops, children’s parties, the search for the right kind of chillis, and the juggling of childcare and career. ... Ben and Priya, and their various friends and relations, never quite escape the feeling of being ciphers, never quite emerge as full-blown literary creations. Nor does it help that the precedents for this kind of life-in-the-day-of novel are *Mrs Dalloway*, *Ulysses* and *Seize the Day*.99
The unities of time, place and action have always been accepted as classical tenets of drama as a literary genre. However, the novel as a form did never have to contend with this. But with the coming of the Stream of Consciousness Novel in the twentieth century, the novel too seems to be drawn into the context of this classical concept of unities. Ardashir Vakil has, in fact consciously given the title and attempted something similar in *One Day*. The novel also resembles theater in more than just this acceptance of the classical unities of time and place: the climax of the novel is built on suspense-filled tension with only the two main characters present on what one can easily visualize as a stage. Commenting on the plot of the novel, Vakil says:

> I wanted a concentrated period, wanted to get inside the heads of the characters through one day. This book is about the fragility of marriage, the difficulties of staying faithful to your spouse. Since I am a teacher, I have drawn quite a lot of my real life experience for this book. 100

In *One Day* Vakil attempts to do for contemporary, multicultural London what Virginia Woolf did in *Mrs Dalloway* in the preceding age. The chief device Vakil employs, like his predecessor, is that a day in the life of an individual can be all-revealing and that the author can tell the story of a character, a family or a city even in the span of twenty four hours. At one point in the novel, Priya contemplates:

> It’s almost as if one day equals a lifetime. As if everything important that’s ever happened to you finds its way into some recess of the brain where it reverberates for the rest of your days. The mind never forgets. If your sister committed suicide, or your father died when you were seven, or you were raped, or even the good things that have happened, like passing an important exam, your
first sexual experience, these things, it’s accepted, 
stay with you all your life, they are never going to 
go away.101

Mulk Raj Anand, an important member of the trinity of Indian fiction in English, has successfully done the same in his first novel The Untouchable. The travails on a single day of Bakha, a young sweeper boy in a small town in India in the mid-twenties, are graphically portrayed in this famous trail-blazing novel. One Day is a twenty-four-hour journey into the lives and minds of Ben Tennyson, his wife Priya Patnaik, and their small boy, nicknamed Whacka. Something has gone wrong with Ben’s marriage of eight years to Priya. In the course of the day – which happens to be Whacka’s third birthday – we learn about a crisis that has brought turbulence in their marriage.

As the day unfolds, Vakil presents before us the couple on the verge of marital breach. Then there is the tension-filled scene of one of London’s schools where Ben serves as a teacher. Afterwards the focus shifts to Priya who serves in BBC as a radio announcer and is busy preparing a radio programme on the Southhall Black Sisters. Simultaneously the couple is shown busy preparing for their son’s birthday party. Next, comes the scene of birthday party celebration, which leads up to the final scene, intended to be climatic and cathartic. In this final scene, the tensions in the serious conversations of the party guests boil over into a violent domestic argument that leaves Ben and Priya together once more.

Although the main plot line of the novel goes forward within the confines of a single 24-hour period, Ardashir Vakil flips back and forth in time to fill in background we are missing, accomplished through dreams, reminiscences and secondary characters asking leading questions, etc.

Ardashir Vakil uses the third person narration in One Day. He paints an unforgettable picture of the fin de siècle in one of the great cities of the world. The novel is comic, ironic and deep. It holds up a mirror to our lives, our cities, our relationships, our personal histories and our children. Vakil is sardonic
and insightful by turns in his narrative. He probes right into his characters’ thought processes, past the trivialities of their everyday lives, to the story of how this couple are both held together and driven apart. He takes us directly into the minds of his characters, and shows the chaotic stream of ideas, sensations and impressions, and in this way he brings us closer to their psyche, than can ever be possible by the use of conventional methods of characterization. He does not give us merely the externals of character, but renders the very souls of his personages with intensity and immediacy. *One Day* is, to use a popular media term, like reality television show with an inside-the-mind camera. We follow the movements, thoughts, memories, fears and desires of Ben Tennyson and Priya Patnaik in its utmost detail for whole one day. There is a double movement in time, inner time and outer time, and Vakil has manipulated the both very tactfully by way of using dreams and reminiscences. The present moment is seen in relationship with the past, and the past is constantly woven with the present in the mind of the characters. The past lives on in the present, in memory and in its consequences, and in this way it also shapes the future. It is against the background of past and passing time that we see the reaction of Vakil’s characters to the present moment. The more they try to escape from the past memories the more they are haunted by it. Vakil narrates:

For a while she (Priya) savoured the darkness beneath her eyelids. Then, as happens to those who try to escape from their own thoughts, Priya found that wherever she ran, the words and the pictures from the past would follow her. She tried to distract herself with memories from the dinner party they had been at, but her mind played a subtle trick, allowing her temporary relief only to reel her in all the more strongly to the torturous place she was trying to dart away from.\(^{102}\)

Thus, for instance, when Ben observes Priya masturbating he is reminded of her extramarital relationship with Marcus and he repents for not
leaving her then. But a warning voice in his head asks him not to go there and continue with the book he is reading. Once as Ben passes by the office of *Enquirer*, he remembers how he was rejected by the interview panel for the job of food feature writing and how another writer named Leigh got the job. Priya while traveling in a train hears two schoolgirls talking about nipples which reminds her of her sexual encounter with Leo on the cool grass outside the Welsh cottage and as she walks by St. Catherine’s House where her marriage certificate lay, she starts thinking about the legal issues in relation to Whacka. While celebrating Whacka’s birthday at school his teacher Ferida gets engrossed into thoughts and cherishes past memories about her birth, schooling and celebration of one of her birthdays in Bombay. These and many such instances of the stream of consciousness flowing in the minds of the characters are much in the form of associative thinking. As we become adapted to the novelist’s exploration of the inner life of characters, we begin to understand that some moments are much more significant to individual characters than others. The moments are of utmost significance for a character’s understanding of life and the use of such moments is another way by which shape and meaning is given to the present.

The realism of the contemporary novel is nowhere seen to better advantage than in the treatment of sex. There is a frank and free treatment of the problems of love, sex and marriage. Sex both within marriage and outside marriage is a common theme of the novelist today. As a result of the teaching of modern psychology, man is no longer considered as self-responsible or rational in his behaviour. Sexual renunciation has ceased to be a theme of novel since long and interest in sex-perversion has grown. In *One Day* also there are some strong sexual narratives, which the eastern audience might find offensive and odious. In the opening scene of the novel, Priya Patnaik, the female protagonist is portrayed discovering the pleasures of her own body. The scene is described in unpleasant and unpoetic detail. In another scene Ben fancies having sex with a colleague named Helen on the desk in her head of year’s office. Besides, there are some other narratives describing Priya’s sexual encounter with her husband Ben and with her pre and post marriage lovers like Ralph, Marcus and Leo. All these encounters are
narrated graphically and with intricacy. Many critics and reviewers have criticized Vakil for such passages and have ironically declared him a strong contender for the next Bed Sex Award, if there is any such award.

But other than this, however, there are many delightful passages in Vakil's story of a marriage in crisis. Of course, there is an underlying grimness, an impending doom that never leaves the page. But, at the same time as we get inside the lives of Ben, his wife, Priya, and their son, Whacka, we feel that there is something oddly endearing about this dysfunctional family.

The strength of the novel does not lie only in Vakil's treatment of the theme of inter-racial marriage with its household concerns, which he works out with a familiar type of plot. Though Vakil has brilliantly dealt with the obsessive and self-reflexive mediations of Ben and Priya on the nature of their spoiled marriage, the moments of grace and beauty, of clear crisp prose also lie in Vakil's description of food. Thus, for instance, the long sections that are devoted to food and the exposition of Ben's failed efforts to be author of the fusion food book are important focal point of the novel as well. There are also some masterly sequences of food and the unconscious world of dreams that are rendered with a precision and intricacy that are not quite often there when dealing with the heterosexual relationship. Vakil finds his own true authorial voice when he works out the terrain of food and all its rituals in their social, sexual, and psychological contexts. Anjana Sharma, in this context, observes:

> Food thus becomes the charged descriptor of all that works or otherwise not only in Ben and Priya's marriage but also in the professional life of Ben. For, much as the novel is concerned with delineating the slow fragmentation and simultaneous cementing of a marriage, it is equally concerned like a good old-fashioned bildungsroman on the choice of a vocation or a profession. Hence, the hero's search to define
himself professionally – he is an English teacher of an inner city London school – becomes the search of an urban intellectual to reflect upon the nature of his professional choice and its social ramifications.

Vakil’s tone is in turns lyrical, ironic, satirical, banal and surreal. His economy with language gives sharpness to his characters and a wry edge to their troubled lives and this succeeds in making the novel a thoroughly engaging, even enjoyable to read, rather than a morbid one. Vakil’s language and style are well suited to his purpose. It is significant that the protagonists keep using abusive terms, particularly the ‘four-letter word’. It seems that pan-cultural realistic language is in operation here. From my personal experience of the Parsis I may say that they do not demur using vivid descriptive words in Gujarati in India either. Besides, Vakil uses terms that denote sex organs, while expressing his characters’ violent and hostile moods reflected in their thought process and dialogues. For instance, the following dialogues in which Priya charges Ben of being jealous of Jehan, contain such terms:

‘Me, jealous of Jehan? You’re right, I am jealous of Jehan. I’m jealous of his wife. I’d like to give her one.’

Priya smirked. ‘She’s got no tits, what would you hold on to?’

‘Now look who is jealous.’

‘And no arse.’

These and other such terms are sometimes the part of the sensuous descriptions or sometimes reflect the aggressive mood of the character. But at both the places they sound normal and fit in well with contemporary social semantics of the region.

Thus Vakil’s use of language is natural and he shows his exceptional ability in giving language to the characters concerned. For instance, we have
different varieties of language like Whacak’s childish babble, Brenda’s abusive and colloquial utterances and use of slang by Ben’s students. Hence one finds different shades of English in his fictional discourse, the moment the scene changes.

It is true that *One Day* does not conform to the climactic pattern of the development of a novel. But for that reason it cannot be said to be lacking form. Though Vakil is a master at setting the scene, he is a little less skillful at spoken dialogue or even internal monologue-sequence after sequence. As a result at times the novel looks slightly patchy and loose. But despite these limitations the novel does work as a readable novel because it is a truthful though at times strenuous attempt on the part of Ardashir Vakil to write about people he knows best and their struggle to keep pace with a world where ‘the centre very often does not hold’.

In the last decade or so, there has been a momentous growth in Indo-Anglian writing. With Arundhati Roy’s best selling *The God of Small Things* and Vikram Chandra’s wonderful *Love and Longing in Bombay*, Indian English literature seems to be entering a golden age. These writers are not writing for a western audience nor do they make allowances for western readers. Thus their writing is much more universal, though it has an Indian theme. With the publication of *Beach Boy* and *One Day* Ardashir Vakil is on the threshold of what could be a gilded career. These novels have been appreciated by American, British, and Indian critics alike for riding the summit of a new wave of Indian English fiction that is bringing us fresh voices and novel writing.
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CHAPTER – 4

A CRITICAL STUDY OF FARISHTA MURZBAN DINSHAW’S

DISCOVERING ASHAVAN

I

Farishta Murzban Dinshaw was born in 1963 in Karachi, Pakistan, and has ‘teaching in her genes’. Currently she works as a Community Development Worker, Family Violence Initiative at Family and Mental Health Centre, COSTI Immigrant Services, Toronto, Canada. She also served as a Research Assistant at Ryerson University, Toronto, during 2003-2004. She began to volunteer at The Friday School for Little Zarathustis (later The Sunday School) at the age of fifteen, and continued to write stories and organize activities for children till she left for Toronto in 2001. In 1993, she won the Eve Bunting Scholarship awarded by the Highlights Foundation for their Writing for Children Programme at Chautauqua, USA. She was the initiatory editor of Funline, Pakistan’s first English magazine for children. Although her primary interest lies in writing for children, she also writes on women’s issues, education and general topics for local newspapers and magazines. She has also contributed numerous articles to the publications serving the Zoroastrian community such as Hamaroz, published by World Zoroastrian Organization and Fazana Journal, published by Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America. Her biographical works include Daughters of Mashyani (2000), a commemorative compilation of biographies of twenty historical and contemporary Zoroastrian women, and Ahmed E.H. Jaffer and the Making of Pakistan (2001), which is the biography of Ahmed E.H. Jaffer, one of the leaders of the Pakistan Independence Movement. She has co-authored several handbooks for teachers like Khel Kahani (stories as a resource for activities) and Khel Khel Main (100 co-curricular activities) for UNICEF’s literacy initiatives, and has an Urdu story Thar Ki Ek Larki to her
credit. She has written three plays and numerous skits as fund-raisers for charity.

II

In her first novel, *Discovering Ashavan* (2000), Farishta Murzban Dinshaw deconstructs the quasi-myths and legends making a way for the spellbinding history encapsulated partly in realism and partly surrealism, to present a fascinating fictional account of the early life of the prophet Zarathushtra. The surface reading of the novel, without basic knowledge of Zoroastrian religion and history, might make it a story of two boys – a boy who searched for the Truth and another boy who becomes his friend. Zarathushtra is presented in the novel as a boy who is in search of the eternal Truth and befriends Ashavan, a young boy who is an orphan, lame and a social outcast. Ashavan, a stable boy disparaged by his peers because of his deformed leg, gets into a midnight brawl to save a dying dog about to litter. This impulsive act snowballs into an alarming chain of events as he fights to clear his name of charges of sorcery cast on him by a vindictive man and a fearful community. In the course of the story, we see how Zarathushtra, a boy who befriends him, gives him the courage to resolve the fears within himself and take a stand for what he believes. Thus, at the end *Discovering Ashavan* turns out to be a story of many layers having universal appeal. It tells a story that is true for all ages – a timeless tale of the battle between good and evil, of coming of age, of friendship and belonging, and of searching for one’s own self. *Discovering Ashavan* also vividly portrays the era of superstition and irrationality that pervaded the ancient Iran.

The author Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, in her author’s note explains the reason, which inspired her to write this story. She writes:

I wanted the people to see our prophet Asho Zarathushtra differently. For the few who have read the Gathas he is a visionary philosopher, but
for many of his followers he is simply a portrait on
the wall. I wanted people to recognize him for what
he really was – not a super-hero who overcome
evil demons with a single blow or a miracle worker
who could make moon come down, but a
remarkable man of integrity and insight. One of
Asho Zarathushtra’s most exceptional qualities
was his almost single-minded thirst for truth and for
what was right, and that is what ultimately
pervaded his reasoned doctrine and makes me so
incredibly proud to call myself a Zarathushti.¹

Farishta begins the novel with a very pathetic picture of the miserable
conditions of life for an orphan and lame boy Ashavan. He works as a stable
boy in the household of an eminent judge. He is initially depicted as a shy and
lonely fourteen year-old boy. The author states that the boy was different for
two reasons because he was an orphan and because he had a deformed leg.
Farishta writes:

In the fourteen summers of his life Ashavan had
mastered the art of paling into the background. In
a time when muscular strong bodies were prized,
his deformed leg left him open to taunts and blows.
There was no one to protect him. His family had
perished in a skirmish with the marauders who had
swooped down from the mountains when he had
been a nursling.²

Ashavan first gets into trouble when he attacks the foreman who had
kicked a bitch about to litter in the stable yard of the Judge. The stable yard
was in uproar, getting the horses ready, for the Judge was to leave in a
couple of days on a journey. The foreman was already in fouler mood as one
of the Judge’s favourite horses was suffering from colic, and another had
dropped a shoe, and at the same time a bitch with a swollen belly added into
the general chaotic situation in the stable yard. The foreman kicked the bitch to avoid the trouble, for the household of the Judge was honour bound to take care of any bitch who approached when her time was ready, and that the penalty for neglecting this duty was severe. The foreman is infuriated that he had been spotted by Ashavan and brusquely orders him to depart and carry the bitch away from the stable.

Ashavan cradles the whimpering bitch and departs from the settlement. He finally leaves the bitch to die on a stony ledge. Ashavan feels very lonely and alienated, and ponders over his destiny:

Finally, he muttered a prayer to Mazda, the highest god of the Mazdayasnis, asking him to forgive her (the bitch) any sins and look after her soul wherever it was. As he trudged away, he wondered if the same would happen to him one day. Would he too lie stiff on a stony edge, unloved and unmoved? ... More than anything Ashavan wished that he had someone to talk to – a friend with whom he could share what had happened that morning.⁴

Tired and dispirited Ashavan walks away in search of shelter. It is in this state of despair that he meets Zarathushtra, the camel-herder’s son who promptly befriends him and invites him home. This is the start of the unusual friendship between Ashavan and Zarathushtra. For Ashavan it is a relief that he now has food and shelter and the protection of an important household. Above all for him it is a psychological satisfaction, that he is being acknowledged and treated with respect by Zarathushtra and that his lame leg is not looked upon as a symbol of evil. The invitation to the house and Zarathushtra’s warmth provides solace to Ashavan and the utmost despair changes to rising hopes. While going to the house of Zarathushtra:
… Ashavan was grateful Zarathushtra shortened his own strides to match Ashavan’s limping gait. They did not say much to each other, but the silence was companionable and it gave Ashavan to think about what had just happened. In a space of a few minutes he had gone from utmost despair to rising hope … as he and Zarathushtra played with the dog, Ashavan forgot the differences between them.4

Ashavan narrates the tale to Zarathushtra’s parents Pourushaspa and Dughdova, of the kicking of the bitch by the foreman, which was about to litter, and why he left his job as a stable boy at the Judge’s house. After listening to the story, Pourushaspa at once reacts:

Ashavan, do you realise what you have said about the foreman is very serious? Ill-treating a bitch about to litter is a crime punishable by seven hundred strokes of a whip.”5

In those days crimes against animals were punishable by Law, and severe punishment for mistreating a bitch is stressed in the novel also. Farishta Dinshaw gives very comprehensive details about the different categories of Laws prevailing in the ancient Persia. In her author’s note she writes:

There were five categories of crime – crimes against morality such as adultery; crime against property such as theft or breach of contract; crimes against a person such as assault or murder; crimes against animals and crimes against public health. In those days, dogs were integral to a well-ordered and safe life, and rigorous punishment was prescribed to those who ill-treated dogs. A
man who would not give shelter to a bitch about to litter with the result that the young perished was liable to be punished for willful murder."

The dog plays a significant role in the rituals and ceremonies of the Parsis, particularly in the death ceremony. After a person is declared dead, the dead body is washed, wrapped in white clothes and laid on the floor. A dog is then brought to see the dead. In recent days it is just a custom but in ancient Iran this ceremony had sound ecological reasons. Explaining the motives of this ceremony Dastur Khurshed S. Dabu writes:

There are conjectures as to why the dog is thus shown the dead body: (1) The kind of dog prescribed, is called ‘four-eyed’. Perhaps it is one, that has ‘third sight’ or clairvoyance; and can ascertain that fact whether the body is really dead or under suspended animation. It is a precaution to avoid hasty disposal; and it is said that such a gifted dog would give a howl of terror, if the etheric body is under suspended animation and tremor. But we now employ any dog available. (2) It may be a relic of the very ancient system, when no towers were built, and when the body on the hill-top was offered to wild dogs, wolves and birds. In those days, perhaps wild dogs were shown a corpse so that they followed to the final place, where the body was to be deposited. (3) It may be merely a symbolic act, to remind the people (attending the funeral) of the time, when that embodiment of one’s past deeds Daena presented itself ‘with dogs’, at the bridge-head before crossing over. But the dog is shown not to the people, but to the corpse, and often enough. (4) The valid reason given in the scriptures is what we
do not properly understand. It is that a dog’s sight is capable of preventing the magnetic defilement, from spreading to the living. How this happens we do not know; but it is significant, that the presence of a dog or cat is objected to, at séances, by the ‘spirit’, declining to materialize. Perhaps the animal’s etheric sight produces some emotional storm, and insulates us from etheric defilement.⁷

Thus it can be seen that the foreman had committed a serious crime by kicking the pregnant bitch. Investigations proved that the foreman was guilty and he had to do penance for his sins. He expiated his wrong by feeding twice nine pious men with sumptuous food and drink.

But Ashavan’s joy does not last long. Pourushaspa considers that by carrying the corpse of the dying bitch Ashavan has committed a capital offence. Pourushaspa says:

“Do you (Ashavan) realize that by carrying the corpse alone you have committed a capital offence?” … You should not have come into the house before you were cleansed. Do you realise the enormity of the consequences of one impulsive step?” … As a result of what he did, his punishment, at the very least, will be four hundred stripes with two whips.”⁸

To carry the corpse of a dying bitch was an act of pollution, and in those days penalties for defiling any of the natural elements like wind, water or earth and endangering public health were severe. Explaining the scientific reason behind such Laws prevalent during those days Farishta Dinshaw writes in the author’s note:
Penalties for endangering public health by defiling arable land or water were also taken seriously and severely punished. This is understandable if one recalls that in those days a thoughtless act of pollution could cause epidemics that could wipe out whole settlement.  

Before entering the house of Pourushaspa, Ashavan was supposed to have cleansed himself and offered purification. He is taken to the Judge for the violation of the rules and being a possible threat to public health. But Ashavan is not given very severe punishment for his truthfulness and overall bravery and his honest revelation of the incident that took place in the stable yard. Ashavan is ordered bodily purification and the payment of one stallion to the cleanser. Then the court clerk explains the higher purification ritual to Ashavan. He says:

You must separate yourself for ten days in a secluded room in the temple, away from people, animals, fire, water and trees. On the passing of the third night, you bathe with bull’s urine and water, and once again retire into seclusion. You will do the same after the sixth and the ninth night. Thereafter, from the ninth day, you will be considered clean and free to mingle with your fellows.  

The detailed description of the bodily purification indicates the importance given to ritual in the daily lives of the Mazdayasnis. ‘Yaozdao mashyval aipi zahythem vahishta’ meaning ‘purity is the best from the very beginning of one’s life’ is oft-repeated saying in the Zoroastrian scriptures. Purification is held essential from the view-point of health as well as morals. As the mind is believed to receive some sympathetic aid from the purity of the body, and as cleanliness influences one’s moral character, purification of the body is invariably regarded as an emblem of purity of the mind. Even in the
modern times, Zoroastrianism gives much importance to the purity of words, thoughts and deeds, that is purity of body and mind. Purity being the basic of the ‘Good Religion’, any pollutant is evil. Regarding the concept of purity in the Zoroastrian religion, John R. Hinnells writes:

Purity, it has been said, is not next to godliness in Zoroastrianism, but part of it. According to the traditional teaching, death, in all its forms, is the weapon by which evil seeks to destroy the good creation of God. The greatest victory of evil, and consequently the major focus for its presence, is the death of a human being. Fundamentally, the essence of impurity is the presence of evil ... It is a human religious duty to preserve the natural purity of the creation, for God created it in a perfect and holy, i.e. pure, state. Zoroastrianism has, reasonably, been described as the world’s first ecological religion ... Most religions have a range of purity laws ... What distinguishes Zoroastrianism is the logic with which it elucidates those laws.\(^\text{11}\)

Ashavan is appreciated for his bravery and heroic act. The Judge, much impressed by his honest account of what happened in the stable yard and later, asks the court clerk to offer the cleanser a stallion from his stable. This appreciation works as a catalyst and Ashavan feels that he is being transformed into a better human being. Farishta Dinshaw writes:

Pourushaspa smiled at him (Ashavan) kindly. “It is forgiven and forgotten, but I hope you will not forget so easily how grim the consequences of unthinking action can be.” Ashavan cast his eyes down. “But do not feel too badly, young Ashavan. What you did may have been foolish and you must
pay your dues, but it was also heroic.” Ashavan’s eyes flew up to Pourushaspa’s face. “And I am not alone in thinking so. That is why the Judge has offered the stallion to the cleanser on your behalf.”

…

That night, Ashavan lay awake for a long time. The walls of the bare room enclosed him like a dark cocoon. I must not be afraid. I must imagine that I am like a caterpillar waiting to turn into a butterfly, he thought.12

Ashavan stays in Zarathushtra’s house and works as a helper with the camels. They soon become good friends and Ashavan turns out to be a sounding board for Zarathushtra for his questions and doubts on the universe, ethics and justice. Several philosophical questions are raised in the conversation between these two friends. Once Zarathushtra asks Ashavan:

“You know, things like who holds the earth and the sky? Who ordained that night should follow day? Who fashioned the colours and the patterns?”13

Ashavan too learns from Zarathushtra how to question things. But his mind is still filled with questions and doubts about the cause of his deformity and his miserable existence, for he knows that people still look on his deformed leg with disgust and even with fear. Ashavan says:

“Well, I was wondering if the same gods who made you made me as well.”

…”

“The foreman said that the gods only fathered men who were strong and walked upright. That I must be a creature of the Dark Forces from the North.”

…”

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“...There must be some truth in it. I've never had fever in all my life.”

But Zarathushtra teaches him to think over these questions in his own mind and to find out the answer on his own. Zarathushtra aptly replies to this query of Ashavan:

“I do not want you to say anything to me. I want you to examine in your own mind what you have already said. Weigh how much truth you expect in the angry words of a man cruel enough to kick a dying dog?..."

For a moment Ashavan finds it odd to question the accepted beliefs, and not to accept everything he is told. But ultimately he realizes the truth that the words of a sinful person like the foreman cannot be taken as the ultimate truth and not having fever is not a sign of evil but a sign of good health. He immediately realizes the truth and confesses that his misconceptions were as weak as winter’s first ice.

Thus Zarathushtra challenges such orthodoxy and rigid superstitions prevalent during that period. He makes Ashavan realise that such views are mere superstition, based on ignorance. He explains to Ashavan that never having fever is a sign of good health and not an indication of sorcery and witchcraft. In those days medical facilities were meagre so illness was considered as inevitable. Even though Ashavan roamed barefoot during the summer, he never had fever in his life. This was seen as evidence that he had links with the evil. Later in the novel, Zarathushtra’s cousin, Maidyomah also gives voice to the superstitious belief about Ashavan’s deformity when he says:

“...they say that Ashavan is not of the god’s making. That he is fashioned by the Forces of the North.”
But Zarathushtra challenges the view that deformity was a sign of divine displeasure. He cites examples from nature to show that differences are inevitable. He says:

“...but are you not different from me? Is not a grape different to look at from an apple? But are not both nourishing in their own way? And look at the leaves around you. No two are alike even when they are on the same stem? Does that make one better than the other?”

... “But I know that Mithra shines on him with as much warmth as he does on me. If he can do so without passing judgment, so can I.”

A coming of age philosopher, Zarathushtra thus provides solace to Ashavan by seeking an answer to philosophic questions, like the cause of suffering and the creation of universe.

Farishta Dinshaw, going back in history, analyses the possible valid reasons for the prevalence of irrationality and superstitions about deformity in ancient Iran. In her author’s note, she writes:

The Aryans were tall and fair people, and prized a vigorous body and swift movements. Deformities were abhorred as they were seen as the outcome of sin. If you think about the rugged terrain of the area and the hard lifestyle of those days, you can comprehend why a lame person would be at a disadvantage, and be considered less than favoured. The Aryans believed that if someone broke an oath, Mithra struck them with a disability like blindness or a limp. The fact that Ashavan was
born with a deformed leg would understandably multiply the superstitious fear attached to his disability.\textsuperscript{18}

But Zarathushtra plays the role of an iconoclast by raising questions against irrationality, superstitions and authority. He challenges the existing orthodox notion that all suffering is the result of one or the other sinful act. He makes Ashavan realise that deformity is not god’s punishment for the sinful act of past life. Novy Kapadia observes:

The global puzzle of the reason for suffering thus becomes one of the significant subsidiary themes of Farishta Dinshaw’s novel. In her presentation of the theme of suffering the author is similar to the questions and doubts raised by the biblical character Job, in the Old Testament, The Book of Job.\textsuperscript{19}

The bond of friendship between Zarathushtra and Ashavan is further strengthened during the celebration of the feast of Mithra. This festival fell on the occasion of the autumnal equinox and lasted for six days. It also celebrated King Thraetaona’s victory over the usurper king Dahaka. It was a great cause for celebration throughout the land.

Farishta also points out the growing intimacy between Zarathushtra and the young girl, Havovi during the feast. Zarathushtra’s mother is also well acquainted with the fact that Havovi, a childhood friend of Zarathushtra, has lately developed an interest in the higher branches of literature and law, and is keen to discuss the matters with Zarathushtra. She has also questioned the priest’s dictate that only men will know Paradise.

During this feast, comes the news of the possible danger of famine, as ‘the granaries have not been filled for the winter’. The rumours turn out to be true. There is not enough grain in the granaries to feed the villagers. The
famine affects both people and cattle equally. Farishta Dinshaw describes it in graphic detail:

The flakes fell early that year covering the countryside in a shroud of mourning. As the winter winds continued to howl and blow their frosty breath, men, women and children tightened their belts, and spoke less and less. A malingering silence hung over the settlement. The members of the Council went about with grave faces as they tried to apportion the diminishing hoards of grain among the hungry. News of sickness and death started trickling in, and people’s faces grew lined with worry. Smiles vanished from people’s faces.20

Zarathushtra, known to be one of the most even-tempered people, tries to maintain his serenity while moving amongst the people – helping, soothing and sharing. But ultimately he also loses his equanimity, at the sight of distress. We witness the generosity of Zarathushtra during this period of crises. He brings out the sacks full of oats from the backyards of his home and carries them to the temple where people are making gruel to give to the children. At first Ashavan, who has known hunger, expresses his apprehensions over Zarathushtra’s philanthropy and even laughs at him. Ashavan asks:

“But, Zarathushtra, … What will we have left for ourselves if you give our stores away?”

…

“… you’ve never been hungry before, … There is no pain worse than hunger gnawing your stomach. Not even the lash of a whip against your back. You forget that I have known what it is to go without meals.”21
But soon Ashavan realizes his mistake and understands the importance of helping people in need. He even feels ashamed of his thoughtless outburst towards Zarathushtra.

He (Ashavan) recalled how uplifted he had felt at Zarathushtra’s generosity when his friend had reached out a hand and pulled him out of despair. Was he now going to be incensed because Zarathushtra reached out a hand towards somebody else? Swallowing the bitter realization of his own selfishness, Ashavan made his way to the track his friend had taken.” 22

Ashavan had often stored uneaten dried apples and currants, ‘awaiting the day when food in the household ran short’. He shares his stocked food with Jarovanhu and his young friends, when he is told that they are unwell because they have nothing to eat. Ashavan again regrets that Zarathushtra is the only person who had offered him friendship, when people looked at him with fear and pity, and he had alienated that person by his own selfishness. His heart is filled with pity at the sight of the misery of the people and he joins Zarathushtra in organizing relief work. He offers suggestions to make the process of measuring and packing flour and grains into small parcels faster.

Later, Farishta constructs an important incident in such a way that Ashavan’s pragmatism and practicality is soundly fore-grounded. We are introduced to Ushtavaiti who is very much perplexed by her son who is constantly yelling out of hunger. She blames ‘inauspicious signs’ for it and has been to ‘every Diviner from here to eternity’ for the cure of her son but in vain. Suddenly the little child attaches himself to Ashavan and starts chewing the tassle of his belt and gradually stops crying. Ushtavaiti looks upon this act as an omen. However, the practical Ashavan says:

There was no magic involved in stopping that child from crying … It was obvious that the little boy is
teething. He will not cry as long as he has something soft like my leather tassel to chew on.\textsuperscript{23}

But Ushtavaiti and other women, gratified by this act of Ashavan, look at him as a man having some supernatural power. Vohu, a young girl asks Ashavan whether it is true that he has the gift of Yim Shaeta, and can talk to the animals. Ashavan replies that there is no magic but a lot of hard work involved in his ability to talk with the animals. Ashavan’s heart is filled with utter despair when he finds that people still look at him with doubts. He says:

People continue to talk to me of magic and I have seen some make the sign to ward of the demons when they see me approach. How am I to tell them that I do not feel dark inside, like I think those who have the Dark Forces inside them must feel? Why do they not just leave me alone?\textsuperscript{24}

But Zarathushtra tries to console him and says that he has many special gifts of head and heart. People have taken note of his kindness and bravery, his prowess at archery and his talent with animals and young children. Clarifying the real intents of the women Zarathushtra says to Ashavan:

Ushtavaiti and Vohu and the rest of the household do not see you as a force of evil. On the contrary, they think you have the powers of the good. Did not Vohu ask you if you had the gift of Yim Shaeta, the most glorious of our ancestors?\textsuperscript{25}

Ashavan, at this stage in his life, feels that he is finally integrated into the community and his deformity is no longer being seen as a sign of divine displeasure. He feels wanted and appreciated as a person who is honest, kind and brave.
However Ashavan’s days of happiness are short-lived and he is again throned by difficulties. Ashavan shares his stocked food with Jarovanhu and the other little children when they are hungry, but his act of generosity is misinterpreted. The young boy Jarovanhu falls ill and the foreman from the Judge’s stables and the law clerk grab this opportunity to slander him. They accuse Ashavan of sorcery. They state that:

Jarovanhu has been taken by seizure and high fever after eating the food you gave them. It is obvious to the townsmen that you have deliberately cast your evil spell upon him.  

The law clerk blames Ashavan of hypnotizing the young boys. The material he used to make cherry-wood whistles for them is also misinterpreted as ‘defiled bones’. The law clerk says:

I swear by all the gods that we hold holy that I myself saw him give defiled bones to the young children of our settlement. Since then those children have been blinded to all advice from their elders, and run to him at every opportunity. If that is not the work of witchcraft, what is?”

But Zarathushtra and his father Pourushaspa stand by Ashavan. Pourushaspa suggests to the foreman and the law clerk to take up this matter with the court. When Ashavan gives an honest account of what happened during the festival and afterwards, Pourushaspa says:

It seems to me a deliberate attempt to vilify you. Unfortunately, with the famine the men and women of the settlement are not in their best minds. I must speak to the priests before these shallow stories reach them. They will guide the people.
Ashavan becomes a victim of resentment and jealousy of his antagonists. They exploit Ashavan's helplessness and deformity to defame him in society. Farishta has subtly interwoven these incidents to illustrate the era of superstition and irrationality that pervaded ancient Iran four millennia ago.

Zarathushtra questions the credibility of the priests and expresses his anger for the needless harassment of his friend. Zarathushtra asks:

“How can the gods and priests who have given the world hatred, wrath and woe be good guides?”

…”

“At every turn, I see the mayhem caused by superstition and deceitful actions. Will there never be a saviour who will free us from this?”

These words of Zarathushtra are a bit ironic, as he has always stood by Ashavan as his saviour and he is himself going to be the saviour of the entire community in near future. But this time Ashavan decides to fight his battle without the support of Zarathushtra as he thinks that this particular battle is his alone. Maidyomah warns him not to go to the house of Jarovanhu alone, as the foreman and the Judge’s clerk have convinced the people that Ashavan is responsible for the famine and have instigated them against him. There is also a possibility that the crowd could be provoked to attack him. But Ashavan acts bravely and gets ready to face the trial at Jarovanhu’s house. He says to Maidyomah:

All my life people have looked on me with pity or fear. I accepted it because I could not fight it, and I did not expect anything more. But Jarovanhu and his friends gave me affection and respect without question. I cannot let people think I would harm them."
A Diviner from the King’s court and his son were journeying through the village and the Council had asked them to foretell the extent of the famine. When Ashavan reaches the house of Jarovanhu’s house he finds the Diviner there. Undistracted by the hostile crowd, Ashavan takes the oath by the fire of Mazda as a witness to his truth and good mind. The Diviner expresses his faith in Ashavan’s confession and for all time clears his name of any attachment to evil. The Diviner declares:

I have seen all that you have seen and much more that you have not. A hand of malice shapes these accusations. The purpose is to harm one, but the ripples of the act will harm many. You cannot throw mud at another without some of it dirtying your own hand. … Heavy retribution falls to the lot of the sinner who declares an innocent guilty. He turned a raised finger at the law clerk and the foreman. … Ashavan, servant of the household of Spitama, is absolved of guilt. Let the real culprits who spared mischief in order to destroy the harmony of the people be punished with utmost severity.31

Zarathushtra, his cousin Maidyomah and the girl Vohu give Ashavan full support and encouragement to act bravely and face the trial. But Ashavan fights out his last battle against superstitions, irrationality and the established authority single-handedly and turns out victorious at the end. Novy Kapadia observes:

The reason for such heroism is twofold. Firstly Zarathushtra had inspired in him a sense of righteousness and willingness to act against evil forces and superstition. Another reason is the affection and respect that Jarovanhu and his friends had given him.32
The triumph of Ashavan is seen as an allegorical victory for the forces of good over evil. Thus he lives by his name, Ashavan – doer of righteousness, the follower of the Path of Asha. Ashavan says:

My life changed today Maidyomah. I am ready to believe a lot of things I did not believe earlier. In the victory of good over evil. In myself. ... In others.\(^ {33} \)

Asha and Druj are among the chief religious concepts in Zoroastrianism. Asha is the Divine Plan or the Law or the Order, which rules the whole of the manifested creation. ‘There is but one Path, the Path of Asha, all other paths are false paths’. This Path of Asha is very clearly indicated in the last verse of the ‘Hoshbam’-the Dawn Hymn:

Through the best Asha, through the highest Asha, may we catch sight of Thee (Ahura), may we approach Thee, may we be in perfect union with Thee!\(^ {34} \)

By this righteous path, Spirit descends into matter and re-ascends. One aspect of Asha’s working is the eternal conflict between good and evil; another aspect is the Law of Action and Reaction known to India as the Law of Karma. Until man discovers the right path of reunion with God, he wanders and adopts the path of deceit and falsehood – Druj. After a lot of suffering during his wanderings, he recognizes the futilities of pleasures and decides to adopt the Path of Asha. The person who upholds Asha is therefore called Ashavan and is the ideal Zoroastrian. Being Ashavan includes offering due worship to Ahura Mazda and the Yazatas, as well as maintaining the specially ‘Ahuric’ virtues of justice, truthfulness and honesty. Zarathushtra advocated that men should freely choose to become righteous ‘Ashavans’ by practicing absolute purity in thoughts, words and deeds thus aligning themselves with the great attributes of Ahura Mazda.
Ashavan upholds the Path of Asha and follows the virtues of honesty, truthfulness and justice. Since the Diviner had delivered his affirmation, Ashavan seems to be more settled in life. There is a quiet assurance about him, a settled contentment that had been missing before. He walks straighter and joins in conversation more often and of his own accord. The uncertainty that surfaced now and again in the mind of Ashavan seems slowly fading away. Novy Kapadia observes:

Zarathushtra’s sense of righteousness had helped him (Ashavan) overcome the dogmatic beliefs and animosity of society. The triumph of Ashavan is thus seen allegorically as the triumph of good over evil and irrationality and of the search for one’s self.35

As soon as he learns that Zarathushtra is soon to be wedded to Havovi, he realizes that their ‘time for boyhood capers’ is over. He gets ready to leave the household of Zarathushtra to work as a foreman with stallions in the household of a Mazdayasni who is known to Doghdo’s father Frahimurva. He gets the job of his choice, working with the stallions, and there is again a new direction in the life of triumphant Ashavan.

The last meeting between Zarathushtra and Ashavan takes place at the same place, under the gnarled tree, where they had first met. They both recall the tumultuous days that had followed the Mehergan festival and Ashavan’s heart is filled with gratitude. He expresses his indebtedness towards Zarathushtra in the following words:

I will never forget all that you have done for me, Zarathushtra. You respected me when I did not even respect myself. From you I have learned honour and courage and generosity. With you I did not care that my leg dragged or that I stumbled because I could depend on you to give strength. …
But now I know that I have it in myself to be strong even when I am on my own. This, too, I have learnt from you, and I thank you for it. You may not realise it, but I will be a better person from having known you.\textsuperscript{36}

In the closing pages of the novel, there is a poignant scene when the two friends have to depart. Ashavan embraces Zarathushtra for the final time and makes his way down the hill. At the end of the path, he turns to look back at Zarathushtra for the final time, and Farishta writes:

Maybe it was the veil of tears that was responsible, or perhaps it was a trick of the light from the setting sun, but Ashavan saw Zarathushtra bathed in a radiant glow that spread and shimmered all around him. In that heartbeat, Ashavan knew for certain that Zarathushtra would one day find the answers he was seeking. And just Zarathushtra had touched his life and changed him, so would countless other lives be changed forever after.\textsuperscript{37}

Thus the novel has a prophetic ending. Throughout the novel Zarathushtra is presented as an adolescent, questioning the authorities, religious beliefs and dogmas, and searching for the ultimate truth. But at the end of the novel the writer insinuates that Zarathushtra will soon receive the divine spark and become a prophet. According to the Zoroastrian religious scriptures and legends, at the age of fifteen, when the youth of ancient Iran used to enter upon their worldly life, Zarathushtra’s four brothers, Ratushtar and Rangushtar, who were older than he, and Nodarigar and Nivetish, who were his younger, asked to divide their father’s properties – though we do not learn of Pourushaspa’s death. When it came to Zarathushtra’s turn to take his share, he choose the Sacred Girdle, and tied it on himself with religious vows and prayers, thus showing his intention of a religious life, instead of the ordinary life of a householder looking after fields and herds, and he went into
absolute seclusion to converse alone with god and to prepare for his great task. According to the *Vendidad*, xix, he was tempted by Angro-Mainyu, the Evil One. But Zarathushtra was firm and he replied: “No, I will not renounce the Good Religion of the Worshippers of Mazda, not though life and limb and soul should part as under.” This was the final test, which he passed successfully and revelation came to him at the age of thirty. For a considerable time his only disciple was Maidhyoi-Maongha, referred to in this novel as Maidyomah, the son of Pourushaspa’s brother Arasti. After about twelve years, Zarathushtra left his native province and went to the court of king Vishtaspa and held long discussions with the learned men there. After several setbacks the king was converted to the Zoroastrian faith along with the other members of the royal family and the court. From this time onwards the temporal power of Iran stood identified with the faith taught by Zarathushtra.

The basic theme of the novel *Discovering Ashavan* is the battle between good and evil. Besides, it also deals with the theme of alienation and friendship and the search for one’s own self. The Zoroastrian dictate to help the weak and the needy is also echoed in the novel. Bartholomae’s statement of this teaching may be quoted:

The victory of the world of Ahura over that of the Daevas is secured by the preponderance of good works over evil at the last account: the promised reward is secured for the individual by the preponderance of good in his own personal reckoning. Zarathushtra as ‘Overlord’ (ahu) takes care that none of the faithful man’s good works shall be lost, but entered in the account to his credit, and treasured up in Ahura’s ‘House’. As ‘Judge’ (ratu) he accomplishes the final enfeebling of the world of the Druj, and the final dominion of Ahura Mazdah.
There is a distinctive local colour in this novel, since the author describes an environment and situations which are characteristically ancient Iranian. These situations affect characters and action, and provide background to both. The description of setting builds up atmosphere by concentrating on the physical, social and moral environment. The setting of the novel is the pre-Zoroastrian area in ancient Iran, known as Persia, four millennia ago. Farishta writes in the authors note:

Scholars are still undecided about the birth date of Asho Zarathushtra and periods range from 4000 BC to 600 BC. I have chosen to place the story during the Kianian period (circa 2000 BC) in an unspecified area of ancient Iran then called Aryana Vaeja (Land of the Aryans).  

Its people were called Aryans. They were good people, sturdy and brave, but lived in a time when the fingers of dark ignorance held every household within their grip. The Aryan tribes discussed in the novel were the worshippers of their highest god Mazda, hence they were known as Mazdayasnis. The Mazdayasnis in those days were polytheistic and they worshipped other gods also. The chief among them were, Mithra, the sun god, Anahita, the goddess of water, Rashnu, the goddess of truth and Adar, the angel of fire. Farishta Dinshaw writes in her author’s note:

It is interesting to note that the beings that the Aryans deified reflect their priorities- wisdom, truth, warmth and water.

The English Romantic poet William Wordsworth, in one of his poems, gives poetic picture of the ancient Persian race and the way they worshipped the myriad gods. He writes:

The Persian - zealous to reject
Altar and image, and the inclusive walls
And roofs of temples built by human hands-
To loftiest heights ascending, from their tops,
With myrtle-wreathed tiara on his brow,
Presented sacrifice to moon and stars,
And to the winds and mother elements,
And the whole circle of the heavens, for him
A sensitive existence, and a god,
With lifted hands invoked, and songs of praise.\textsuperscript{42}

Thus, the sun, the stars, other planetary bodies and the elements of
nature exercised no small control over the minds of the Aryans. They believed
each to be a potent deity in itself that had power enough to heal human ills
and listen to the prayers of the earnest hearts. Moreover, polytheism has
never failed to breed corrupt ideas of demon-worship and the people of the
ancient time thus had imbibed very ungodly ways of worshipping the deity.
Farishta has very artistically portrayed the social, economic and religious
conditions of the ancient Iranian era in this novel. A similar picture can be
cited as a historical proof in the words of Duncan Greenlees:

\ldots struggling village communities reared cattle and
ploughed the fields with anxious care, hordes of
raiders swept over them from time to time, leaving
smouldering homesteads in their trail and bodies
of helpless peasants as prey to kites and vultures.
\ldots These people clung to their ancient Gods, to
Mithra, Anahita, and many others; they kept the
agricultural village festivals of their long-dead
ancestors, they had their wise men, the Magi, and
their sorcerers, the Karaps, who enjoyed great
power and influence, exploiting the ignorant
superstitions of the masses through their own
superior knowledge.\textsuperscript{43}
Later, Zarathushtra reformed the existing polytheistic beliefs of the ancient Persians. He singled out the highest and the wisest god, Mazda, as the only God, and established a new monotheistic religion, which was named after him as Zoroastrianism.

The picture of the famine created in the novel of course brings out the sympathetic nature of Zarathushtra and Ashavan, but it also is part of a strategy for indicating the significance of nature in determining the destiny of the people in the traditional agricultural society. For these farming people rain and draught, sunshine and lack of sunshine, heat and cold can be a matter of life and death. Farishta’s characters are well integrated in their milieu whether they are judges, diviners or ordinary villagers.

Most of the characters of the novel are based on Zoroastrian history, legends and myths. Farishta Murzban Dinshaw is the first Parsi novelist to use the Zoroastrian Prophet as a character in the work of fiction. Commenting on the characters of the novel, Farishta writes in the authors note:

Only Asho Zarathushtra his parents Dughdova and Pourushaspa, his cousin Maidyomah, his wife Havovi and Jamaspa are known to have existed.
All other characters, including Ashavan are fictitious.44

It is this use of early Zoroastrian history and Zarathushtra’s family as the main characters, which makes this novel quite unique. Though the main characters of the novel are based on Zoroastrian history and legends and bear proper names, their names have ontological significance also, hence, Pourushaspa means ‘with grey horses or plenty horses’, Dughdova means ‘milkmaid’, Zarathushtra means ‘one possessing a golden camel’, Havovi means ‘possessor of cattle’. These names all suggest very clearly the pastoral community in which they rose. Besides, Farishta has also made use of praise-names and title-names. The name Ashavan is more of a praise-name than a proper name. A praise-name describes the temperament of his bearer, thus
Ashavan means the follower of the path of Asha, the doer of the righteousness. In the case of some other characters, instead of proper names, title-names like the Judge, the Foreman, the Law Clerk, the Diviner are used.

Farishta employs brevity in the description of her characters. Formal description of characters as we find in Charles Dickens is almost non-existent in this novel. Only those characters who feature prominently in the action of the novel are described in detail. Except for the character of Ashavan and Zarathushtra, Farishta has spared little words to describe the peculiarities of the other characters. Thus, the Judge is described as ‘an austere unimaginative man’, Ahumstuto, the senior stable hand is ‘a few years older than Ashavan and too involved in his own looks to care about anyone else’s’, the Foreman is ‘a large man with a ruddy complexion and dark beetling brows that make him look as mean as he is’, Doghdova is ‘a slim woman’, the court clerk is ‘a younger man’ whose beard denotes that he is ‘a priest’, Pourushaspa is ‘a hard taskmaster’ and ‘not only a well-respected man of the community, but large in stature as well’, Vohu is ‘a slim girl with thick braids’ and the Diviner is ‘an old man with a long white beard’ whose face is ‘creased with wrinkles’ and has ‘penetrating black eyes’. Though the characters are described with brevity, Farishta vividly portrays their temperamental traits and physical peculiarities and with a single stroke of the pen she can bring a character to life, and make him or her vivid and real.

Farishta’s interest is mainly concentrated on Zarathushtra and Ashavan and the situations through which their personal qualities are revealed. Only these two characters are widely and deeply explored in their physical aspect, behaviour, temperament and psychological responses. The rest of the characters play a supplementary role and help to set them off. There are some characters like Vohu and Havovi with potential for development but they are not adequately explored. One general statement can be made about characters in the novel: the society and its affairs are not only background and a conditioning factor but cultural situation presented in the novel also
influences the creation of the characters. But in the end the characters stand or fall by their own designs and their individual will.

Of different characters in the novel Zarathushtra, is a central character. Farishta has portrayed Zarathushtra’s character artistically. The novel is in fact a fictional biography of the historical figure, the Prophet of the Zoroastrians, who is in his adolescent and developing stage of life. Farishta reveals in this novel Zarathushtra’s questioning mind, his loyalty to physically challenged friend Ashavan and his interest in metaphysical and philosophic matters. Zarathushtra questions the existing precepts and religious teachings. He is known throughout the novel as ‘the trouble maker who disturbs the priests with the questions’. Zarathushtra is presented in the novel as a young boy who yet does not possess answers to the spiritual questions and is in search of the divine truth. During a discussion he tells Ashavan:

“I do not have all the answers, Ashavan. All I have are a lot of questions.”

When Pourushaspa says that Ashavan will have to pass through purification ceremony for carrying a bitch about to litter, Zarathushtra challenges these prevalent religious norms and says that Ashavan’s intention was good and he should not be punished in the same manner as one who does willful wrong. He argues:

“But imposing rules blindly – without wisdom and compassion – is not justice … these rules are made by men, they can be changed by men.”

When Ashavan is blamed of sorcery, Pourushaspa sympathizes with him and says that the truth will be vindicated. But Zarathushtra does not have faith in the existing legal system. He asks:

“Truth according to whom? … The false judges? Or their false gods?”
Zarathushtra always tries to follow *arta*. By *arta* is meant the quest for what is ethically right or the path of righteousness. But the parents of Zarathushtra are anxious at what they consider as ‘the strange obsession for *arta* which consumes him’. When Ashavan asks him how does he know what *arta* is, he explains:

I know it sounds silly, but it is as if there is a spark inside me that becomes shiny and warm when I do what must be done.”

But the young boy Zarathushtra presented in the novel is in developing stage of his life who honestly confesses that he only knows what is right for him and not for others. Thus, though the novel deals with the early life of Zarathushtra - a historical and prophetic figure, his character is made accessible and human by his frankness, truthfulness, his friendship with Ashavan, his reaction against the irrationality and hypocrisy of the society and his questioning nature. History records that Zarathushtra grew up to be a compassionate, selfless and thoughtful boy. Duncan Greenlees notes:

He was a kindly lad, this Zarathushtra; *Zatsparam* tells us several old stories to show us this. One day he found an old woman on the bank of a swift river she could not cross; he at once went and brought her help; he himself saw her taken safely to the further side. Another time, when there was a famine in the land, he took some of his father’s own fodder, and with his own hands distributed that among the cattle of those in great need. Once again, he saw a starving bitch, with five small puppies, putting out her mouth piteously to ask for food from every passer-by. Zarathushtra ran to get her some bread, but the poor creature had died before he could return.
Throughout the novel Zarathushtra struggles against irrationality and the superstitions of his society. He is presented in the novel as an advocate of moral revolution in a world darkened by religious and social corruptions. His character is individualized and he is a voice calling for decency and humanity in the society. He is introduced largely in terms of his moral campaign and of public attitudes to him.

Ashavan is another central character of the novel and the novel revolves around his endeavour to grow and to be an independent being. Of course, his efforts are inspired by Zarathushtra and his family. The novelist beautifully portrays the development of Ashavan from a lame and vulnerable boy to a victor. The major problem with Ashavan is his physical deformity. He is ‘an ill-favoured weakling who sees demons in his own shadow’. He prefers to be away from the people who look on his twisted leg with disgust, and take every opportunity to taunt him.

Most people just pretended he did not exist, and when they did speak to him it was usually to bait him about his deformed leg or bark an order, more often that not, accompanied with a cuff on the ear.\textsuperscript{50}

But Ashavan’s physical weakness is compensated by some special strength like kindness, bravery, his prowess at archery and his talent with animals and young children. He is an excellent horse trainer and an ace archer. Doghdova says:

\textit{The grace the gods took from his legs, they gave in his arms.}\textsuperscript{51}

Ashavan’s love for animals, truth and the sufferers make him a true Zoroastrian. He is charged of sorcery and becomes a social outcast. But Zarathushtra’s strong will helps him in sustaining himself against the religious orthodoxies, irrationalities and superstitions. Zarathushtra teaches him
honour, courage and generosity. As a result he fights his last battle against the antagonistic forces single handedly and turns out to be a victor. His victory over the evil forces is an allegorical victory of good over evil.

The plot of Discovering Ashavan is coherent and well integrated. It has precision, simplicity and symmetry. There are no obtrusive characters, no digressive episodes, and no loose ends dangling in the end. The central theme of the novel is battle between good and evil and everything not related to that theme seems to be excluded. Successive events are logically connected with each other and as the action proceeds, it is seen to be the logical outcome of the characters concerned and those characters themselves are the result of their social environment. The characters, the setting and the social environment are well integrated. Curiosity is excited from the very beginning, the readers are eager to know the next step, and are fully involved in the fate of the central characters, and as the action proceeds we get an analysis, a presentation of the inner drama, the moral conflict, which goes on within the mind of the central characters. The plot of the novel is traditional in the sense that it has a beginning, a middle and an end. The main interest is focused on a small group of characters and the development of whole fortunes is laid out. They move towards a crises or tangle which is unravelled before the end, so that in the last chapter a denouement is reached.

The plot of the novel can be split up in five parts. The first part runs up to the third chapter and depicts how Ashavan an orphaned stable boy denigrated by the society because of his deformed leg, first gets into trouble when he attacks the foreman who had kicked and tried to kill a bitch about to litter in the stable yard of the Judge. The infuriated foreman orders him to depart and carry the bitch away from the stable. It is in this state of despair that he meets Zarathushtra, the camel-herder’s son who promptly befriends him and invites him home. This is the start of the unusual friendship between Ashavan and Zarathushtra. Then Ashavan is taken to the Judge for the violation of the rules of purity by carrying a dying bitch and being a possible threat to public health. But Ashavan is not given very severe punishment for his truthfulness and overall bravery and his honest revelation of the incident
took place in the stable yard. Ashavan is ordered bodily purification and the payment of one stallion to the cleanser.

The second part of the novel consisting of the next three chapters commences with Ashavan's entrance into Zarathushtra's family. He is given good food, clothes and job to look after the camels. Zarathushtra and Ashavan soon become good friends and Ashavan turns out to be a sounding board for Zarathushtra for his questions and doubts on the universe, ethics and justice. A coming of age philosopher, Zarathushtra also provides solace to Ashavan by seeking an answer to philosophic questions, like the cause of suffering and the creation of universe. People also take note of Ashavan's kindness and bravery, his prowess at archery and his talent with animals and young children. The bond of friendship between Zarathushtra and Ashavan is further strengthened during the celebration of feast of Mithra. The growing intimacy between Zarathushtra and the young girl, Havovi is also pointed out during the feast. The sixth chapter ends with the news of the possible danger of famine, as 'the granaries have not been filled for the winter'.

The third part consisting of chapter seven and eight focuses on the state of famine and its effect on the people. After initial clash of ideology, Zarathushtra and Ashavan join hand in hand to help the sufferers. The character of Ashavan develops considerably in this part and the author brings out qualities like humanity, skill of management, practicality and ability to deal with the children in the character of Ashavan. He feels accepted in the society and as a result he fights his last battle against the society single-handedly. This part ends with a hint of the climax of the novel.

The fourth part consisting of chapter nine and ten is the climax of the novel. Ashavan is charged of sorcery and held responsible for the ill health of the children and for the famine. Ashavan is given moral support by the family of Zarathushtra, Vohu and Maidyomah. But the righteous Ashavan fights his battle all-alone and turns out to be a victor. His victory over the antagonists and socio-religious superstitions and irrationalities is an allegorical victory of good over evil.
The last chapter of the novel is denouement in which Zarathushtra who fights against the religious superstitions and irrationalities throughout the novel is convinced to accept Sudreh and Kusti – the religious symbols of Zoroastrianism to remind him of his duty to fight evil's forces like a warrior fights the enemy. The author also indicates Zarathushtra’s marriage with Havovi and a possible marriage between Ashavan and Vohu. At the end of the novel Ashavan is given a new identity and he leaves the settlement to serve as a foreman in the stable yard of a good Mazdayasni.

In *Discovering Ashavan* myth and history are cleverly intermingled into a tension-filled story. The author by design makes use of history to present a fascinating story of the detested, outcast boy Ashavan and his friendship with the young Zarathushtra who befriends him. The novel has pacy narrative and spellbinding story line. Farishta has very artistically intermingled history and myth into a series of events to form a didactic, fable-like story. The locale is ancient Iran and the local atmosphere is very effectively captured. The author has tried to be as true to historical fact as possible while writing this story. Farishta has, in this novel, presented alternative history by narrating the social, religious and economic conditions of the Mazdayasnis of ancient Iran. We learn, for example, about their professions, manners, religious beliefs and rituals, sports, festivals and the roles of the judges and diviners who were the leaders of society. Farishta writes in her author’s note:

Although priests were held in high regard and were consulted on matters ranging from morality to law, there were certain situations that were considered beyond their human understanding. In such cases, diviners and astrologers were asked to interpret stars, omens and dreams. The configuration of the planets was often believed to forecast a calamity, and a diviner was considered indispensable at such times. Jamaspa, whom we see as a young boy in this story, became renowned for his wisdom.
in the court of King Vishtaspa. Although the Aryans were extremely superstitious and believed in magic spells, sorcery or casting of evil spells was denounced as a crime and the penalty was death.\textsuperscript{52}

The marauding tribes known as Devayasnis from the North often attacked the Mazdayasnis and caused death and destruction. As a result a belief was established among the Iranians that the hell and the demons were always in the North. Ashavan, because of his lameness, is believed to be fashioned by the Forces of the North whose parents had died in one such attack of the marauders. These references convey some important historical facts and beliefs of the Mazdayasnis. Historical reference-points of this nature become temporal and historical yardsticks for measuring related events in the life of the community.

In Discovering Ashavan events follow events in a quick succession. The narrative is in a linear mode, straightforward and chronological and there is no backward and forward movement as in a stream of consciousness novel. Farishta’s technique of narrating the story is undoubtedly gripping and arresting reader’s attention all the time.

The novel is narrated in third person. But Farishta has intermingled narrative with dramatic scenes and her novel contains a great deal of dialogues. The novelist employs dialogues in the way the dramatist does in a play. Farishta makes the situation highly interesting through the dialogues. She uses dialogues to reveal the essential qualities which make up the inner nature of her characters. For instance:

Pourushaspa let out a sigh. “It is a serious matter and will surely have to be dealt with, but there is another matter which is graver in nature. Do you realise that by carrying the corpse alone you have committed a capital offence?” The sternness in
Pourushaspa’s voice was apparent. “You should not have come into the house before you were cleansed. Do you realise the enormity of the consequences of one impulsive step?”

…

Before Ashavan could reply, Zarathushtra plunged in. “But it was I who invited who invited him into the house.”

“That may be so, but he should have told you where he had been so you could have offered purification. As a result of what he did, his punishment, at the very least, will be four hundred stripes with two whips.”

“But Father, Ashavan’s intentions were good. Why should he be punished in the same manner as one who does willful wrong?” defended Zarathushtra.

“The elders make these rules so that justice is served,” Pourushaspa explained.

“But imposing rules blindly – without wisdom and compassion – is not justice, Father.”

“Zarathushtra, the rules are made for the maximum good of the people.”

“But Father, these rules are made by men, they can be changed by men.”

“We will not discuss this further, Zarathushtra’s. You speak of things of which you have little understanding.”

“One day I will understand.”

evident in the narrative of Farishta. This reiteration gives concreteness and immediacy to the narration.

Farishta has fine knack of giving pictures in a few words. She narrates everything precisely. She at times gives vivid, detailed and picturesque description of different human emotions in a very effective manner. For instance, Farishta narrates when Ashavan goes to the house of Jarovanhu:

Ashavan looked down at where Jarovanhu lay, the flames of the hearth casting ghostly shadows on his still form. He looked at the faces in the crowd – Jarovanhu’s mother bowed with grief, Maiyomah’s deeply disturbed one, the foreman’s face closed to expression but eye’s glittering with hate, the law-clerk’s face gloating with triumph. One face was missing. The one face from which he could have drawn strength. It seemed as if he would have to traverse this path of thorns without Zarathushtra.\(^54\)

The writer also uses the direct method of narration while discussing some traditional custom or religious ceremony:

The eight priests, in their flowing white tunics and white turbans, conducted the consecrations, each one entrusted with a special role. The sraoshavarez supervised the ritual, and under his guidance the fraberetar and aberetar carried and brought the ceremonial utensils and the asnatar conducted the cleansing. The zaotar offered the sacrifice, the havanan pounded the sacred Haoma plant to draw the juice and the atra vakhsh tended the fire. The raethwishakra, the auxiliary priest aided the rest. Thankfulness was offered to Mithra,
the lord of vast and bountiful pastures, for blessing
the people with the gift of wheat.\textsuperscript{55}

This narrative vividly portrays the consecration ceremony, various
items taken into use in this ceremony, the hierarchy of the priests who
perform this ritual and the specific task allocated to each of them.

Farishta’s concerns are moral and philosophical and her novel is
characterized by a moral earnestness. It is essentially a dramatization of
moral conflict. Hence we would not expect much humour in her novel. But to
the contrary there are quite a few instances though Farishta’s humour is not at
all sharp and sarcastic. Her humour tickles us but does not send us to
guffaws. Sometimes it is so light that it goes unnoticed. For instance, in
chapter four Pourushaspa lightly makes fun of Zarathushtra’s habit of asking
questions to his teachers:

“He’ll soon be better at it than me, and then you’ll
wonder why you sent me to learn my lessons.”
“I already know why we sent you to learn your
lessons”, said Pourushaspa with a mischievous
twinkle in his eyes. “It was so that you could give
your teachers apoplexy.”\textsuperscript{56}

Zarathushtra and Ashavan do not have high regard for the priests.
They at times make humorous statements about them, sometimes with a
slight touch of satire. For instance:

He (Zarathushtra) gave a playful slap on his
cousin’s shoulder. “Come, let us go and find
something to eat. I do not want to get trapped in an
endless deliberation about what every word
means.”
“Yes”, said Ashavan with a cheeky grin. “There are
enough priests for that.”\textsuperscript{57}
Again Ashavan makes fun of the facial expressions of a priest when he says:

“Is it my imagination or is the sraoshavarez (head priest) weeping into his beard more than usual?”  

At one place the author herself make fun of the gloomy and lifeless faces of the priests when she narrates:

“What are you thinking of my friend, that you look like our revered sraoshavarez?”

Ashavan smiled, immediately proving the comparison false. 

Farishta employs simple English to narrate the story for the reason that her novel is more of a mission than a pure piece of literature. She writes in her authors note:

I wanted people to recognize him (Zarathushtra) for what he really was – not a super-hero who overcame evil demons with a single blow or a miracle worker who could make moon come down, but a remarkable man of integrity and insight. 

And this message can reach ‘unto this last’ only through a simple and easy language that everyone can comprehend.

Farishta uses culture specific terms like aethra paiti, arta, daevas, haoma, havishta, hura, kusti, saokenta, shraoshvarez, sudreh, vitasti, yuįyast, frequently and repeatedly form the Iranian language directly in English without any translation or modification. Further she appended the glossary at the end of the novel. So it demands a kind of readiness form the side of the readers to comprehend the sentences having local terms. Even though, a word like
‘yujyast’ is explained as ‘unit of measurement of distance’ gives a vague idea. But these words are used not only for the sake of clarity but also to give a touch of antiquity to the novel.

The indigenous flavour comes out of the use of figures of speech and terms of reference used by Farishta. The following sentences taken from *Discovering Ashavan* illustrates this point:

The cock was yet to flap its wings and herald a new day.\(^1\)

The foreman returned out of the darkness, towering over the fallen Ashavan like a menacing *dev* that he had heard about in the exploits of the mighty Rustom.\(^2\)

“Like all market stories, it is based on fact the thickness of a beard’s hair and stretched to the length of *vitasti*.”\(^3\)

The important point in these instances is not that the expressions used are literal translations, but that they serve their purpose in their context, and they are more vivid than any other accepted English expressions that might have been used in their place.

Farishta also uses historical and mythical references in her novel. For instance:

“Remember Minochecher’s archer? The one who shot the arrow to partition the borders with Turan? Well, watch me put him to shame.”\(^4\)

“You look finer than King Thraetaona,” she said fondly.\(^5\)
“Ashavan, servant to the household of Spitama, why have you come here? Do you not know that Takhma Uripi, a king much before our time, has broken the power of those who practise evil craft? I have the power to smite you down.”

The famous warrior Kavi Haosravah had also sworn with his face turned towards the fire.

These references are used by the writer to give force to her language as well as to the expressions of her characters.

Besides, Farishta has also made use of aphorisms in her novel. For instance:

Once words are spoken they cannot be recalled.

Act well your part, honour lies only in that.

A king could not win battles without his warriors.

You cannot throw mud at another without some of it dirtying your own hand.

As regards subject matter and theme, Farishta Murzban Dinshaw has treaded on a totally untrodden path. The prophet Zarathushtra and his era have not been used as a subject matter in Parsi fiction. Most of the Parsi novelists of the twentieth century deal with the contemporary issues like identity crises, the struggle to create their own space and the problems faced by the minority community like declining population, late marriages, alienation, urbanization, funeral rites and attitude to religion. But Farishta used the ancient legends for the first time in the work of fiction. Her novel is unprecedented in the sense that she for the first time used the early
Zoroastrian history and Zarathushtra’s family as the main characters in a work of fiction. So the author Farishta Murzban Dinshaw is a trend-setter in this respect.
References:


2. Ibid., P. 2.

3. Ibid., P. 6.

4. Ibid., P. 10-11.

5. Ibid., p. 11.


13. Ibid., p. 27.


15. Ibid., p. 28.

16. Ibid., p. 34.

17. Ibid., p. 35.

18. Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, “Author’s Note”, Discovering Ashavan, p. 84.


20. Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, Discovering Ashavan, p. 45.
21. Ibid., p. 46.
22. Ibid., p. 47.
23. Ibid., p. 54.
24. Ibid., p. 56.
25. Ibid., p. 56.
26. Ibid., p. 59.
27. Ibid., p. 60.
28. Ibid., p. 60.
29. Ibid., p. 60-61.
30. Ibid., p. 68.
31. Ibid., p. 70.
33. Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, *Discovering Ashavan*, p. 73.
37. Ibid., p. 82.
41. Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, “Author’s Note”, *Discovering Ashavan*, p. 84.


44. Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, *Discovering Ashavan*, p. 86.

45. Ibid., p. 16.

46. Ibid., p. 12.

47. Ibid., p. 61.

48. Ibid., p. 16.


51. Ibid., p. 24.

52. Ibid., p. 85.

53. Ibid., p. 12.

54. Ibid., p. 69.

55. Ibid., p. 40.

56. Ibid., p. 25.

57. Ibid., p. 34.

58. Ibid., p. 41.


60. Ibid., p. 83.

61. Ibid., p. 4.

62. Ibid., p. 5.

63. Ibid., p. 25.

64. Ibid., p. 32.
65. Ibid., p. 38.
66. Ibid., p. 68.
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69. Ibid., p. 61.
70. Ibid., p. 61.
71. Ibid., p. 70.
CHAPTER – 5

CONCLUSION

It is beyond doubt that the Parsi novelists have made remarkable contribution to creative literature. There are noteworthy Parsi novelists like Rohinton Mistry, Bapsi Sidhwa, Firdaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy, Boman Desai, Dina Mehta, Saros Cowasjee, Ardashir Vakil, and Farishta Murzban Dinshaw etc. The Parsi fiction has left an impressive record in comparison to other forms of literature. However, the poet and critic Keki N. Daruwala does not approve of the term Parsi Literature. He considers the Parsis as the part of Indian ethos. It is true that the Parsis came from outside and settled in India, but they have made India their home. Keki N. Daruwala says that his father who had remained in England from 1914 to 1921 took out his children from an English school and put them in ‘The Arya School’. They used to listen to Indian classical music and bhajan singers. They spoke English and Hindustani at home. This shows that the Parsis have been multicultural like any urban middle class family. Daruwala does not approve of labeling literature. He suggests that the literature produced by the Parsis should be judged mainly in the context of modern literature in English. However, it must be admitted that the Parsi writers have a distinct voice, which make them the members of the modern urban society with pluralistic and multicultural experience. Pluralism maintains that all human beings are unique persons and race is not a very important attribute. Multiculturalism holds that people should be taken as the representatives of their groups and that their race plays a crucial role. The Parsi writers should be understood from the perspective of pluralism rather than multiculturalism.

The novels under our study are Goodbye to Elsa and Suffer Little Children by Saros Cowasjee, Beach Boy and One Day by Ardashir Vakil and Discovering Ashavan by Farishta Murzban Dinshaw. All these novels have certain

similarities as well as dissimilarities though they are dealt with separately on different lines like thematic preoccupations, characterization, plot-structure, narrative techniques and use of language.

All these writers, as is apparent from their names, are Parsis. They were born around the period of the Indian independence. Cowasjee was born in pre-independence period whereas the other two writers were born in post-partition period. The Parsi novelists writing in English fall into two different categories: stay-at-home writers and expatriate writers. B. K. Karanjia and Dina Mehta are stay-at-home Parsi novelists whereas Farrukh Dhondy, Firdaus Kanga, Rohinton Mistry, Saros Cowasjee and Ardashir Vakil are expatriate writers. Bapsi Sidhwa and Farishta Murzban Dinshaw were born in Pakistan who divide their time between their native country and America and Canada respectively.

_Discovering Ashavan_ by Farishta Murzban Dinshaw is the only novel, which presents Zoroastrian worldview based on myths and quasi-myths of Zoroastrianism. It focuses on the myths that surround the early life of Zarathushtra. In _Beach Boy_ by Ardashir Vakil, Zoroastrianism and other issues related with Parsi community do not directly form a part of thematic concerns of the novel. The novel evolves around a young Parsi boy and his family. As a backdrop the novelist refers to several Parsi-Zoroastrian tenets, customs and traditions in the novel. But on the whole these novels should be viewed as the novels depicting themes of alienation, search for roots, belongingness, search for one’s own self, the problems of coming of age or juvenal problems, the problems of expatriates and migrants, the battle between good and evil and marital discord. One or sometimes more than one of the above mentioned themes form the part of the thematic concerns of the novels under consideration. These themes are the prevalent themes of modern literature. Thus, these novels should be examined as the novels depicting the problems related to urbanized society, modern stressful life and the issues related to human adjustment.
Saros Cowasjee’s *Goodbye to Elsa* delineates the predicament of an Anglo-Indian named Tristan Eliott. It is a tale of an individual’s struggle to come to terms with society and the tragic outcome of his failure resulting in loneliness and alienation. Tristan is the product of a mixed marriage who suffers from rootlessness and marginalization. He is the mouthpiece of the agonized and alienated community. His search for love, compassion and contentment results in repeated failures and disillusionment. This theme is the common theme, which often reoccurs in modern novels. Alienation and rootlessness are the issues, which a modern man faces particularly those who have migrated to other countries and live there as expatriates. Like Rushdie’s migrant protagonists, Tristan is accepted neither as an Indian in India nor as a British in England. Tristan’s agony is the result of his encounter with the society that does not accept his identity either as an Indian or as an Englishman. He loses faith in religion and his disillusionment makes him mentally deranged. In a moment of desperation he attempts to kill Marion, the twin sister of Mary with whom he is in love and who had deserted him. His mad effort to kill Marion fails and he is also prevented from committing suicide. At the end of the novel he is confined in a lunatic asylum.

The other novel under scrutiny is *Suffer Little Children* by Saros Cowasjee. It is a sequel to his first novel *Goodbye to Elsa*. Tristan, in this novel, after two years in asylum comes out with a new understanding. In *Goodbye to Elsa* Tristan believed that the world could be saved by the destruction of the womb, which is the cause of all the unhappiness and miseries in the world. But now he realises that he must try to save the world through love. He redirects his hatred for women into an all-consuming love for a child named Clare, the daughter of Maura Hawkins whom he considers as a Messianic figure. When Maura leaves Tristan for her feminist ideology, he decides to take Clare to India and raise her as a holy woman on the bank of the river Ganges. He plans to take her to Varanasi and then to Gangotri. He dreams of building a small mud hut for Clare and for himself. He thinks of Clare living on goat milk and fruits till she is seventeen years old. Here we are reminded of Mahatma Gandhi’s emphasis on simplicity and austerity. Saros Cowasjee probably suggests that the remedies of eastern ills and evils lie in renouncing
worldly pleasures and in living simple austere and spiritual life. However, Tristan’s plan fails and he is hospitalized for head injuries due to his collision with policemen. Clare is taken away from him. His effort to take Clare to India is an attempt born out of the vision of a deranged man. This novel reflects a hilarious and at the same time pathetic view of the Anglo-Canadian section of the Indian diaspora during the sixties and seventies. He recognizes the urge of the western world for the Messiah. This novel can be viewed as a satire on the Messiah hungry intellectual living abroad.

Ardashir Vakil’s first novel Beach Boy falls into the category of a bildungsroman that focuses on the growth of the protagonist. It deals with the problem of juvenile disorientation and resultant identity crisis. Innocence lost, promise revealed; these are the central elements of Vakil’s bildungsroman. The theme of marital discord resulting from modern life style and extreme individualism also form the part of the thematic concerns of the novel. Cyrus, the protagonist of the novel is obsessed with films, food and sex. These three passions fuel his young life and he leads carefree life. But his foot loose ways are interrupted by the separation of his parents and subsequent death of his father. Cyrus retains his uncommon charm and insight in spite of sadness and loss. In Beach Boy there is a conflict between god and evil. Cyrus grows into a self-reliant person who had lived at the mercy of the generous neighbours. His confidence is reflected in the words of one of the neighbours, the Maharani: “never mind, Cyrus, you will survive, these things happen.” The novel ends with a note of affirmation that survival is a necessity and what happens in life has to be accepted.

Vakil’s second novel One Day deals with the theme of marital discord resulting from the complexities of an inter-racial marriage between Priya Patnaik, an Indian and Ben Tennyson, an English. Again the complexities and confusions of interracial marriage are mounted on the canvas of sexual desire. And then there is ‘the secret’ about the origin of Whacka, son of Ben Priya which seems to be tearing this fragile relationship. The truth behind the secret is that Whacka is not the biological son Ben, but a result of Priya’s infidel sexual relation with also-married family friend Leo. After a bitter quarrel
between Ben and Priya, Ben gives up his plan to leave his home and accepts Whacka as his son. At the end of the novel Vakil brings home the message that acceptance of ‘what is’ is more important and worthwhile than what ‘should be’. Happiness and harmony lie not in expecting this and that but in choosing the space between the two.

In Discovering Ashavan Farishta Murzban Dinshaw deconstructs the quasi-myths and legends making a way for the spellbinding history encapsulated partly in realism and partly surrealism, to present a fascinating fictional account of the early life of the prophet Zarathushtra. As regards subject matter and theme, Dinshaw has treaded on a totally untrodden path and she can be considered as a trend-setter. The prophet Zarathushtra and his era have not been used as a subject matter in Parsi fiction. The novel on the surface looks like a simple story of friendship between two adolescents but at the end it turns out to be a story of many layers having universal appeal. It tells a story that is true for all ages – a timeless tale of the battle between good and evil, of coming of age, of friendship and belonging, and of searching for one’s own self.

Thus, the Parsi community and Zoroastrian world view figure in the works of Vakil and Dinshaw but on the whole these novelists do not remain confined to their community and its concerns like declining population, brain-drain, late marriages, interfaith marriages, funeral rites, attitude to the girl child, modernist vs. traditionalist attitude to religion and ethnic anxieties. From thematic point of view these writers are more concerned with issues and problems faced by the modern man like alienation, search for roots, belongingness, search for one’s own self, the problems of coming of age or juvenal problems, expatriate experience, class conflict, racism, the battle between good and evil, the problems of middle-class families and marital discord. But whatever be the range of their anxiety, they are ultimately concerned with humanity – its existential predicaments and weaknesses and strengths of human beings in the moment of crisis.
The novels of Cowasjee, Vakil and Dinshaw vary in its thematic concerns as well as settings. Cowasjee’s *Goodbye to Elsa* is set in three countries – India, England and Canada. The time of the novel is post independence period of India. His second novel *Suffer Little Children* is set fully in Canada and deals with the Anglo-Canadian section of the Indian diaspora in the 1960s and ‘70s. Like most of the Parsi novelists, Bombay is the centre of action of Vakil’s *Beach Boy*. Set in early 1970s, the novel depicts the adventures of a young boy from the Parsi elite class of Bombay. Vakil produces here every distinct smell and sound of Bombay’s streets. His second novel *One Day* is quite different from his first one and in this novel he explores the unexotic locale of London suburb. In *One Day*, Vakil paints an unforgettable picture of the fin de siècle in one of the greatest cities of the world. The setting of Farishta Murzban Dinshaw’s *Discovering Ashavan* is the pre-Zoroastrian area in ancient Iran, known as Persia, four millennia ago. There is a distinctive local colour in this novel, since the author describes an environment and situations which are characteristically ancient Iranian. Thus, these novelists differ from other Parsi novelists like Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga and Farrukh Dhondy in whose novels Bombay is mostly the locus of action where most of the Indian Parsis live.

The plot structure of all the novels under study, including Dinshaw’s *Discovering Ashavan* if its fairy-tale element is excluded, resembles the plot structure of the realistic novels. All these novels have uni-plots and there is no intermingling of sub-plots or digressions with the main plot. The story of Cowasjee’s *Goodbye to Elsa* is neither chronological nor woven into a well-knit plot. According to Saros Cowasjee in this novel the story develops with the characters and as the characters grow the story also develops. In this novel Cowasjee had planned to write a story of love, or a story of hate or a story of persecution. But as the story progressed the comedy of life came into it and the novel took a different direction from what he had planned. Unlike *Goodbye to Elsa*, his second novel *Suffer Little Children* is more coherent, chronological and well-knit. It is a novel running into twenty-two chapters with 162 pages. The plot grows out of characters very coherently. *Suffer Little Children* has a definite design of a perfect plot having exposition, complication, climax, falling
action and catastrophe. The novel has a twist ending which functions as an anti-climax. Though the plot lacks action in the sense that the novel ends at the point where it had started, there is a logical growth of action not on the external level but at the internal level.

There is almost a thread-bear plot in *Beach Boy* by Vakil. The novel is just a sequence of vignettes through which the author explores the world of an adolescent Parsi boy who comes to terms with life through the death of his father. The novel is anecdotal, imaginative and rich in description though it lacks a compelling story-line. Vakil’s second novel *One Day* can be termed as psychological novel in which the author attempts to explore the psyche of the central characters. The novel is a story of twenty-four hours in the life of a couple – Priya Patnaik and Ben Tennyson. The novel deals with the inner currents of the minds of husband and wife. Vakil has packed twenty-four hours’ journey of these turbulent minds into twenty-four chapters. Though there is no logical sequence, the plot of the novel is quite interesting and arresting. There are episodes and events which overlap and diverge. In this novel a single day is an organizing principle.

The plot of *Discovering Ashavan* is coherent and well integrated. It has precision, simplicity and symmetry. There are no digressions or loose end dangling at the end. The plot of the novel resembles the plot of a full-length play and it can be split up in five parts. The first part runs up to the third chapter, the second part consists of the next three chapters and the third part consists of chapter seven and eight. The fourth part consists of chapter nine and ten that forms the climax of the novel. In these chapters Ashavan fights his battle all alone to attain victory. It indicates the triumph of good over evil. The last chapter of the novel is denouement in which the growth of Ashavan attains fulfillment and there is an indication of possible marriage between Ashavan and Vohu. Marriage and a new identity are the marks of fulfillment.

All these novelists share some similarities in portrayal of characters. For instance the major characters like Tristan William Elliott, Cyrus Readymoney, Ben Tennyson, Priya Patnaik, Ashavan and Zarathushtra
among others are dynamic characters. During the course of the novels all these characters change in some important way and the kind and quality of the change of these characters often reflect the theme of the novels. Some minor characters who do not act and remain unchanged throughout in these novels discussed here are static. For instance, Maura Hawkins, Prof. Horace Peabody and Prof. Dunlop in *Suffer Little Children* and Mr. Krishnan in *Beach Boy* are such static characters among others.

Saros Cowasjee’s two novels *Goodbye to Elsa* and *Suffer Little Children* present the extended confession-autobiography of Tristan. Both these novels deal with the agonies of the protagonist who is racially mixed, foreigner, intellectual, sexually frustrated and half-mad. In both these novels the character of Tristan progresses but in reverse order – from order to chaos, certitude to uncertainty and freedom to frustration. The other characters, which fill Cowasjee’s picture gallery in *Goodbye to Elsa*, are Elsa Harbaur, Neillie, Heather Malleson, Marie Germain, Jane, Julie, Marion, Lily, Mr. Rajeshwar Dayal, Santosh Kumar, Shituloo Raman, Prof. Dunlop, Prof. Horace Peabody and so on. These minor characters are episodic and they appear only once in the course of the novel. In *Suffer Little Children*, which is set in Canada, apart from Tristan, all the other characters are Canadian. Besides the character of Tristan another important character in the novel is Maura. She is a staunch feminist activist. Through her character Cowasjee throws light on the feminist movement in Canada during 1960s and ‘70s. The minor characters of the novel include Julien Wolfe, Dr. Clifford Enright, Horace Peabody and others. All these characters are eccentric in some or the other way and Cowasjee has pictured them as caricatures. They are the main source of laughter in the novel.

Vakil in his *Beach Boy* depicts the adventures of a young boy named Cyrus from a Parsi elite class of Bombay. Cyrus is an ardent lover of films and food and his mind is filled with daydreams of becoming a grown-up. But with the collapse of his parents’ marriage and his father's sudden death, he finds himself caught between the innocence of youth and the responsibilities of adulthood. At the end of the novel Cyrus grows emotionally and
psychologically though not physically. Besides the character of Cyrus, Beach Boy has a cast of characters – the Krishnans, the Verma, the Hussains, the Maharani of Bharatnagar – as wonderfully diverse as India itself. Vakil draws a number of characters from different countries, communities and races in One Day. The novel deals with the theme of marital discord resulting from inter racial marriage between Ben Tennyson, a British and his Indian wife Priya Patnaik. The world Vakil portrays is truly multi-racial – from the multinational circle of friends and relatives of Ben and Priya, to the kids in Ben’s school and the central characters themselves ‘white brother and brown sister’ cuddled together ‘like a swivel of layered chocolate, dark and white’. The novel is also an interesting study in role reversal: Ben is mild, culturally enlightened but conservative Londoner who is always under pressure to find a way out of the muddle of teaching at school and struggling to finish a cookbook on Indian food. Priya is outspoken, extravagant, liberal and successful. Ben, a citizen of a rich country is a middle class man whereas Priya who is originally form a developing third world country is from a rich family. Ben is a food lover and cooks biriyani far better than his Indian born wife; Priya is incompetent at cooking. She is liberal and adulterous and dos not have regrets for her extramarital relations with Leo, which has resulted into Whacka’s birth while Ben suffers from a sense of guilt for his halfhearted flirtation with Helen, his colleague.

In Farishta Murzban Dinshaw’s Discovering Ashavan most of the characters are based on Zoroastrian history, legends and myths. She is the first Parsi novelist to use the Zoroastrian Prophet as a character in the work of fiction. Of different characters in the novel Zarathushtra, is a central character. The novel is in fact a fictional biography of the Prophet who is in his adolescent and developing stage of life. He is presented in the novel as an advocate of moral revolution in a world darkened by religious and social corruptions. His character is individualized and he is a voice calling for decency and humanity in the society. Ashavan is another central character of the novel and the novel revolves around his endeavour to grow and to be an independent being. The novelist beautifully portrays the development of Ashavan from a lame and vulnerable boy to a victor. Only these two
characters are widely and deeply explored. The rest of the characters in the novel play a supplementary role. There are some characters like Vohu and Havovi with potential for development but they are not adequately explored.

Cowasjee, Vakil and Dinshaw use different narrative techniques including the first person narration, the third person narration, flashback and stream of consciousness techniques, irony, parody, letters and diary writing etc. Cowasjee’s *Goodbye to Elsa* is narrated in first person. The narrative is not chronological but apparently concentric. Cowasjee has ability to seen humour in the gravest situations and he intermingles comedy and pathos in his narration. Satire and irony are also integral part of Cowasjee’s narrative. The first person narration is found in Cowasjee’s second novel *Suffer Little Children* also. Though the novel deals with serious problems, the writer narrates them with grim humour and in a lighter vain. The entire narrative is full of humour, wit, bathos, satire, sarcasm, and irreverent blasphemy. Cowasjee’s narrative is pithy and condensed but occasionally he seems to be tempted to insert humorous situations at the cost of plot. Cowasjee’s novels are often criticized on the grounds of being corrupting and immoral for his free and frank description of sex. But the author himself has clarified in one of the interviews that his novels are not interested in sex for its own sake.

Ardashir Vakil in *Beach Boy* uses the first person narration. The novel is told from Cyrus’s point of view in a series of sketches. The novel is energetic and filled with brilliant observations. Vakil has a knack for sweeping up details and he narrates everything vividly. Vakil’s strength lies in his arrangement of pictures, observation and the episodes he can portray with lighting speed. Vakil beautifully captures the visual aspect of the city of Bombay and its people and also provides a lush painting of life in India in this novel. The third person narration is used in Vakil’s *One Day*. Vakil is sarcastic and insightful by turns in his narrative. He probes right into his characters’ thought process, past the trivialities of their every day lives. He takes us directly into the minds of his characters and shows their chaotic stream of ideas, sensations and impressions. Vakil has very tactfully manipulated the inner time and the outer time by way of using dream sequences and reminiscences. The writer vividly
portrays the city of London which emerges here as a living phenomenon. In both these novels of Vakil there are long sections devoted to food and its preparations.

Farishta Murzban Dinshaw in *Discovering Ashavan* employs third person narrative. The writer had cleverly intermingled myth and history into a tension-filled story. The locale is ancient Iran and the local atmosphere is very effectively captured. The narrative is in linear mode, straightforward and chronological. Again the situations are made highly interesting through the use of dialogues, which also revels the essential qualities of the characters. Though the author’s concerns are moral and philosophical, there are quite a few instances of humorous narratives in the novel.

Cowasjee, Vakil and Dinshaw, though basically Indian subcontinent writers, handle the English language quite confidently. These novelists are not self-conscious in using a foreign language as a medium to express their creativity. These novelists are quite at home with the English language and that is the sign of confidence of the new generation of Parsi fiction writers. In addition to that they make use of culture specific terms and native words, phrases and sentences in their narratives. By doing so they add a new linguistic sub-system to the already existing systems. Dinshaw has given glossary of Avesta terms, Avesta names with their meanings, and popular names of Persian kings and heroes at the end of her novel. But Cowasjee and Vakil do not give such glossaries. The native terms and words used by these writers add to the affluence of English vocabulary. In fact, English being the most assorted language, is enriched further by the addition of these words.

Parsi fiction is often treated as the part of the fiction written by the Parsis in India, Pakistan and those who have settled in western countries. As they write in English it forms the part of English writing written by the colonized countries. As Indian writing reflects post-colonial anomaly, the Parsi fiction also projects the same experiences which a migrant expatriate experiences. It is true that the Parsis have tried to retain their ethnic identity in India and in other countries also. But they have also faced the sense of
alienation, displacement and rootlessness particularly those who have settled in western countries. According to V. L. V. N. Narendra Kumar⁴ there are two concerns operating in Parsi fiction viz. Westernization and Expatriation. In the novels under our study Cowasjee’s two novels directly deal with the dilemma of an expatriate who experiences rootlessness in western countries. Many Parsis fail to adjust themselves abroad and they look back to India for peace and salvation. Like many other Indian writers living abroad Parsi writers also experience alienation in the West and they experience uncontrollable desire to return to India. Not only that the protagonist in Saros Cowasjee’s *Suffer Little Children* Tristan wants to return to India with Clare so that she could be rescued from the material West and grow up as a spiritual and saintly person. This desire of the Parsi writers for India suggests that the Parsi writers also believe that India is their home in spite of the fact that the came from outside and settled here. They also believe that India offers spiritual panacea for the evils of modern western life.

In Vakil’s novels *Beach Boy* and *One Day*, individualism and western materialism are the two major causes that result in disturbing married life. Too much individualism results in marital discord both in the lives of Cyrus’ parents and Ben and Priya. However in both the novels Vakil suggests that acceptance of ‘what is’ is the solution to all the problems. Cyrus learns from the Maharani that whatever happens in life has to be accepted and one must survive in spite of the odds one has to face. In *One Day* Priya realises that one cannot find happiness in duality but in the Golden Mean. This philosophy indicates that the Parsi writers like Vakil are rooted in Indian sensibility. These characteristics of most of the Parsi writers make them both Indian writers as well as the modern writers writing today in the West.

If we take the three writers and their works in a sequence, Saros Cowasjee’s protagonist Tristan experiences alienation, rootlessness and rejection. He is a broken up man who fails to achieve a harmonious integrated

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individuality. He wants to come to India with Clare to find solution to the problems of western ills. But his plan is foiled. In Cowasjee’s novels there is a glimpse of some solution though illusory, but it does not materialize. The vision of Tristan is violent illusion of an insane person. His return to asylum at the end of the novels indicates that western life is a wasteland without any hope of redemption. In Vakil’s novels he suggests the Golden Mean or the Middle Path, which consists of avoiding the extreme and accepting life as it is. In Dinshaw’s Discovering Ashavan she suggests that inner integrity, spirituality and righteousness can conquer that deformities of life. In this novel the protagonist is physically deformed but his spiritual growth and continuous insistence on truth and righteousness bring about the true harmony and balance in life.

Thus Parsi fiction is not confined to ethnic enclosure but it exhibits Indianness as well as pluralistic awareness of this highly sensitive and educated community. The Parsi fiction also exhibits secular attitude of the Parsis and their sensitive understanding of the problems of modern life. It not only depicts the problems of modern man, but also suggests the spiritual remedy of acceptance, understanding and love.

With their writings and with their variety of thematic preoccupations and treatment, Saros Cowasjee, Ardashir Vakil and Farishta Murzban Dinshaw have made a noteworthy contribution to South-Asian fiction in English in particular and the world novel in general. Goodbye to Elsa and Suffer Little Children by Cowasjee, Beach Boy and One Day by Vakil and Discovering Ashavan by Dinshaw become an integral link between South-Asian fiction and world novel. In the process of doing so these writers serve as a bridge between South-Asian literature and world literature with their fictional contribution.
Dear Ketan,

I am attaching my answers to your queries. I am also sending by separate post some material which you might find relevant to your research. You might want to consult the following three books:


Good Luck,
Saros Cowasjee.

**Question:** To what extent is your picaroon Tristan autobiographical? Does he corroborate your own theories and principles when he supports Maura sexually, financially and morally or he is merely voicing Maura’s feminist liberalism?

**Answer:** There is some autobiography in every fiction, however fantastic. But whether a work is autobiographical or not has really no meaning. There is a lot to be said of the old adage, “Trust the tale, but never the teller.” As D H Lawrence put it, “It is the job of the critic to save the work from the artist who created it.”

In my two books on Sean O’Casey, I wasted a lot of time tracking down the autobiographical element to no good purpose. Besides,
authors keep changing their position: one day they will claim everything is factual, the next day they will deny it. It is the critic who stands to lose.

Question: Your sardonic view of the world reflects an expatriate's impulsive and wry indifference to the institutionalization and a cry against the politics of establishment. Am I right in my this observation? Whether "YES" or "NO", could you please elaborate on the major purposes behind your writing if there are any other purposes as such?

Answer: What I had in mind is not important; what you or the reader sees is important. My own purpose you will see in my essay “The Indian Writer in Exile” in Studies in Indian and Anglo-Indian fiction (HarperCollins, New Delhi, 1993).

Question: Your narrative is at once connotative of many literary devices – the grotesque, magic realism, allegory, black humour, satire and symbolism. Are there any literary projects at the back of your mind while incorporating these and a lot other literary credos in your writing? Do they come automatically or you attempt them deliberately in your fiction?

Answer: They come automatically—they have to or else the writing would be disjointed.

Question: Major portion of your fiction voices experiences of a long-term resident of the Indian diaspora. Your narrators are always aware of their exile entities and yet they headlong plunge into the milieus they are fraught in. May I relate your thematic concerns to those of Kierkegaard’s existentialist theory of "Dasse in" (that, "you are thrown in this world and you'll have to find your own world by yourself")?
Answer: I can’t answer this question, but you may find some sort of an answer in my essay on exile and in the material I am sending you separately.

Question: What are your other projects? I mean, other than writing fiction?

Answer: None at the moment.

Question: Do you have any particular community, say, for instance Parsis, when you are putting narrators like Tristan always voicing feelings of exiles?

Answer: Yes, I had the Parsi community in mind, for there is a lot common between the Parsis and the Anglo-Indians. Have you read my short story “Another Train to Pakistan” dealing with lack of roots and loyalties? You will find it in “Strange Meeting and Other Stories” which is being published by Vision Books, New Delhi. You might find the story “Strange Meeting” also relevant to your queries.

Question: I think, Tristan's pursuits of truth, justice and complete love resounds Gandhian philosophy of women empowerment, his search and experimentation with truth and civil disobedience. To what extent am I right when I pronounce that Gandhiji is at the back of your writing?

Answer: Gandhi is very much a part of Tristan’s make-up. See the concluding paragraphs of “Indian Writer in Exile”.

Question: How do you spare time after your retirement from your job at the University of Regina? Are you still involved at any institution with the job of teaching? Does it provide you raw materials for your fiction?
Answer: Plenty to read, and some writing as well, especially editing fiction for OUP and Penguin. Occasional lectures.

Question: How do you feel if I translate you in Gujarati language, as Parsis are inherently affiliated to Gujarat?

Answer: You may if you wish, but do clear the rights with me.

Question: Where do you find yourself in ten-fifteen years from now? I mean in the progress of your literary career.

Answer: In the grave, most certainly.

Question: Would you tell me about your experiences as an editor? You have been an editor to many anthologies. Have you ever edited other literary forms than short stories, essays, novels or criticism etc.? Could you please tell me about some principles that you keep in mind while doing the job of an editor?

Answer: When dealing with literary anthologies, the only principle I follow is to select works that are first and foremost of literary excellence. Message or the author’s purpose is to my mind of secondary importance. There is rarely anything new in the message. How it is conveyed is the real thing.

Question: It seems from your fiction that you emerge as a wry, detached and indifferent critic of the contemporary academic scenario. Don't you think it to be the duty of a teacher to take up a reformist’s stance to clear up the muddles? How can a teacher remain detached from what he is a part? Can you elaborate on your role as a reformist in your surroundings, whether on a small-scale or big-scale? Or, if you can't what
makes you indifferent to today's intelligentsia and academicia over there?

Answer: *Goodbye to Elsa* and *The Assistant Professor*, as well as many of the stories, are satires, and a satirist can never be an indifferent critic. But I am not a reformist—I am too small a man for that.

Online Interview Reference:

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Hi Ketan,

I wrote “Discovering Ashavan” in 1998. For your sake, I have tried to recall my motivation and my mindset while I was writing it, but I must confess that it is difficult to do so. You know what they say about new skin cells being continually formed at the lower level and moving up towards the surface every 28 days? It's been eight years since I wrote that story ... you do the math how many times I have changed since then. It's like it was another place in another lifetime.

What I wrote in my author’s note is probably the best indication of why I wrote the story. I was aware that there wasn’t enough information about Zarathushtra’s personal life to be able to do a docu-drama so I knew I would have to have a fictional main character through whose eyes I could reveal bit and pieces of Zarathushtra. I plotted the story line of a lame boy quite deliberately because I wanted obvious symbolism. What can I say? I was simplistic in those days.

Initially, I had imagined it as a short story. I was intending it for my group of students at the Friday School for Little Zarathushtris who were between 8 – 12 years. I was going to write a join the dots kind of six-pager.... boy has problem, boy meets Zarathushtra, Zarathushtra helps boy to solve the problem. The end.

In 1993, I had attended Writing for Children programme organized by the Highlights Foundation at Chautauqua, USA, and although obviously a lot of what I learned did not stick with me, one of the key points I internalized was that conflict must be solved by the characters involved and not by external circumstances. So I followed that rule and made Ashavan stand up to the
villagers. In hindsight, I find it delicious that a plot strategy can so powerfully echo Zarathushtra’s message of taking responsibility for your thoughts, words and actions.

I thought you may find it interesting to know that in the first draft of the story, Ashavan’s character was named Kurush. A friend, Dorab Patel, who read the draft pointed out that some readers may confuse the character with that of Kurush e Kabir or Cyrus the Great. So I changed it to Ashavan. I had always loved the meaning of the name, “Doer of Righteousness”, and had reserved it in the event I had a son. It seemed appropriate somehow to use it when I was looking for an Avestan name. Another friend, Khurshed Aga, who read the early draft shared that he did not think a boy (nearly a man in those days) would cry as much as the character did especially since he had been on his own for so long. So I went through the story again and wiped away quite a few tears and actually changed some scenes so that Ashavan showed more autonomy. Another “behind the scenes” snippet ….in an early draft, in the scene when Ahavan goes into the milking shed to make amends with Vohu, he said, “I would have conjured up some hot water for you, but I’m afraid I have not brought my book of spells with me.” In a subsequent reading I remembered that in that period of time writing was unknown so I changed it. Also, the working title of my story was “My Friend, Zarathushtra” but once Banu Mandal decided to publish it as a fundraiser, some people felt that it would be difficult to sell the book if it was seen as a religious story rather than a story-story. I toyed with the idea of “Divining Ashavan” before settling on “Discovering Ashavan”.

Hope this is helpful.

Farishta

**Question:** Your fiction deconstructs the quasi-myths and legends making a way for the spellbinding history encapsulated partly in realism and partly surrealism. How do you subscribe it if I term it as an extension of ‘magic realism’?
Answer: I am not a student of literature, and to be quite honest, I don’t even see myself as a novelist, so I had to read up about “magic realism” to make sense of this question. I am not sure where I would place “Discovering Ashavan” on the continuum of logical fiction to fantasy, especially as I am doing this after the fact. The last scene in which Ashavan has the intuition that Zarathushtra would go on to change the world could be seen as portraying a magical element, but when I wrote that ending I did it to pull together past and present. Introducing The Diviner was also intentional in order to free Ashavan from the self-doubt about his origins and his empathy with animals. You have to remember that one of the reasons why Zarathushtra was such a remarkable man was that he saw a spiritual world that was above the petty superstition prevalent in those days. I actually created the environment of superstition to showcase Zarathushtra as an expansive thinker (which was the purpose of the story), but then had to find ways of resolving Ashavan’s anguish so that the story could have a defined end. It has been interesting in my own personal journey to examine why I chose “magical” elements to do so. My conclusion is that it was an unconscious choice because it supports what I believe about there being more to heaven and earth than is dreamt of in quantifiable reality, and that one experience life-expanding insights or even events that are ultimately “sur-real”, or “more than real”.

Question: The fundamental thematic concerns of yearning for the roots, alienation and in consequence a sensible search for self-identity lurk in almost all Parsi Fitioneers in the post-modernistic era. Are you really nostalgic or it is merely a fictitious world you think would touch the sensibility of your overseas readers?

Answer: When I began writing the story, I thought I would read it to a group of perhaps 10-15 Zoroastrian children. By the time I finished it, the
Fleischman-Kincaid scale suggested it was appropriate for Grade 10 readers so I gave it to friends and family to read. I guess the motivation for that was just to have others read it. I never thought it would be published, much less that any non-Zoroastrian reader overseas would ever have access to it.

How much of Ashavan is me? Again, I would say that the themes that you identify are a manifestation of unconscious yearning, not deliberate plotting on my part. I grew up in Karachi, Pakistan as a member of an invisible religious minority. There is a dwindling group of approximately 2000 Zoroastrians in a country of 130 million people, 98% of them Muslim. We are considered “kafir” (non-believers) because we are not mentioned in the Quran; a notch below Jews and Christians who are “people of the book” and a notch above Hindus because we are monotheistic. There are laws that discriminate between Muslims and non-Muslims. Socially too it is everywhere you go. When I was in grade IV, a teacher told our class that only Muslims can go to Heaven. Being a woman in Pakistan exacerbated the feeling of being treated as “less than”. Therefore, I am not surprised that this search for self and belonging is part of the story, in fact there is a very Freudian give away in the title, but it was not a conscious decision.

**Question:** The narrative of a mythopoeic fiction involves incorporation of many things at a time. It is sometimes confusing as to what point of view your fiction sponsors. Do you have any particular point of view? If yes, what is it?

**Answer:** As I have mentioned before, my take on all this is after the fact, and I would probably never even have examined it if your dissertation had not nudged me into it. My particular point of view is summed up in the verse from the Ahunavaiti Gatha 33.13 mentioned in the beginning of the book. Joy and wisdom comes from realising one's inner self which comes through righteous and morally courageous lives.
Question: Do your 14-year-old orphaned and physically challenged persona Ashavan and his counterpart the inquisitive and contemplative Zarathushtra complement each other? Are they synonymous of the body and the mind or the mind and the soul?

Answer: Again, I did not plot them to be complementary characters, but if I had it would have been as mind and soul. In my take on life, body has little relevance except as a vessel for the mind and soul. In fact, I support dokhmanashini or, in its absence, cremation because I believe that there should be no memorials or markers where bodies are buried.

Question: Is it really difficult to read your novel Discovering Ashavan as an individual literary or aesthetic piece without the basic knowledge of Zoroastrianism?

Answer: In Canada, I have lent the book to some of my friends who are non-Zoroastrian and even non-Pakistani so do not have any conceptions or even misconceptions about Zoroastrianism. They read it as a coming of age novel, one with mythopoeic elements ala The Alchemist. And then they ask me questions about Zoroastrianism.

Question: What are your future projects as far as your fiction is concerned? Where do you find yourself in ten-fifteen years from now?

Answer: I toy from time to time with the idea of writing another story, but my assessment of my skills as a writer is more that of a feature writer or a commentator than a fiction writer. I am currently putting together an anthology of folktales and parables my grandparents used to tell us. It is a labour of love, as a legacy for my cousins and their children, and I do not know whether it will be published.
Ten years from now? Hmmm. I’ve learned that “plan” is a four-letter word and it is best to follow the clues that life shows you. But if I were to creatively visualize the future….We had a print copy run of 2000 for “Discovering Ashavan”, and I would love to see it in its tenth reprint, perhaps even translated into different languages.

**Question:** How do you react if your novel is translated in Gujarati? I mean, does it need any guideline?

**Answer:** I think it would be great if it was translated into other languages as long as the “magic realism” essence of it was captured. Ideally, I would like to be involved in the translation of the book into any language, but specially Gujarati as I speak it even though I do not read or write it.

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