

Name - Dr. Rekha Nagavshi
Guest Lecturer,
Shaheed Mahendra Karma University, Bastar, Jagdalpur Chhattisgarh
(India)

Address- Dr. Rekha Nagavshi
Shri Narayan Nagavashi,
Sonar Para, Ward no. 37. Dr. Pankaj Ki Gali Rajnandgaon
District - Rajnandgaon
State - Chhattisgarh (India)
Pin Code- 491441
Mo. No. - 9131505824
Email - drmaanyasoni@gmail.com

Tales from Firozsha Baag

Name- Dr. Rekha Nagavashi, Guest Lecturer, Shaheed Mahendra Karma University, Bastar, Jagdalpur Chhattisgarh (India)

AUTHOR'S MANIFESTO

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Tales from Firozsha Baag

Dr. Rekha Nagvanshi

India

In *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, Rohinton Mistry draws a make-believe Parsi world, Firozsha Baag, in the city of Bombay. He creates it with all its religion, customs, tradition, conventions, culture and even their food habits. The Parsis that resides in Firozsha Baag are different because of their religious practices and values. Set in an alien setting in Canada and at home in Bombay, stories present insight in dramatizing the Parsi world view, in relation to the levels of 'assimilation' and 'Westernization. These contain topics such as families and their often problematic internal politics: cultural difference, (ethnic/hybrid) identity, and separation, problems of assimilation, feeling of otherness, Parsi rituals, customs and community consciousness. Mistry gives a picture of the impact of Diaspora on the lives of young Parsi protagonists abroad. These stories set wholly or partially in Canada and display to the maximum extent the image of the Diasporic aspect. In these stories, Mistry transfers the experience from India to Canada and the Diasporic strain of belonging to a minority group (Parsi) in India as well as in Canada.

Rohinton Mistry, the immigrant writer who develops his writing and themes from his past experiences in India and his immigrant experiences in Canada. Mistry recalls and relives his childhood and teenager years in the Parsi 'Baag'. Among the leading Parsi writers, Rohinton Mistry pays more attention to the Portrayal of his own community and his fictional works are entire with several details of Parsi life and their culture and religion. Like all other Parsi writers, Mistry is anxious for the preservation of the ethnic identity of his community. He presents his community through the different narratives of his characters who consistently express their concerns for the community and the changes? That affects it. By focusing on their community in their narratives, they preserve and protect them and thus throw light on the existing reality.

For this reason, he attempts to record the story of the Parsi community and their ancient Zoroastrian faith. Thus, his works may truly be regarded as a commentary on the domestic and social life of Parsis. It explores an authentic account of their religion, rituals, customs & manners, their fire – temples, Priests, towers of silence and even their cuisine.

In *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, Mistry reveals the heartfelt experiences of his characters through which he projects the inner and outer strife of characters that how the community turn between the old ways of living and the new trends. There are many characters in these stories that reject the set norms of age old culture and traditions of Zoroastrianism. They exhibit their learning towards growing materialism and modernity along with various other themes. These stories show how Parsi cultural heritages or their love for

culture and social traditions is shifting its paradigm from culture centred people to lovers of modernity: “Understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one’s subjectivity, but as the placing of one-self within a process of tradition, in which past and present (self and other) are constantly fused (Gadamer 258).”

Mistry shows his concerns about the position of Parsis in the context to their glorious past, their position in India and now in western context. He has a committed agenda to elaborate the Parsi culture, traditions, customs and rituals through his works. In an interview with Lambert Angela says:

I’m not a practicing Parsi but the ceremonies are quite beautiful. As a child I observed [them] carefully in the same way as I did my homework, but it had no profound meaning for me Zoroastrianism is opposition of good and evil. For the triumph of good, we have to make a choice (Lambert 7).

Tales from Firozsha Baag is a kind of mirror which reflects the changing attitude, habits and thinking of the Parsis residing in India and abroad. It also reveals that superstitions and disbelief towards their own religion which have crept in the Zoroastrianism. The title ‘Auspicious Occasion’ refers to Behram roje, the Parsi New Year, it represents the Parsi culture, tradition, the Zoroastrian religious customs and rituals and their tastes and food habits. It also describes culture conditioning of Parsi but now the situations have changed with the trend. In this story, Mistry presents the incident when a girl who is only sixteen married to Rustomji, a successful thirty six years Bombay lawyer. Mehroo who belongs to an orthodox Parsi

family where she observes: “All important days on the Parsi calendar, had the appropriate prayers and ceremonies performed at the fire-temple, and even set aside a room with an iron-frame bed and an iron stool for the women during their unclean time of the month (TFB, 3).”

Mistry makes observations about Parsi tradition, an orthodox Parsi family where in the name of purity the women have to keep themselves apart from the family. But Rustomji allows Mehroo to follow all the orthodox customs of her parent’s family except staying in a separate room during unclean days. The story at one level shows the difference between orthodox Parsi family and a modern educated Parsi family but being an educated Parsi does not mean to be indifferent to Parsi culture and tradition. Rustomji who pretends to be apathetic to old age Parsi culture and rituals also enjoys all the important customs, rituals and prayers at Fire Temple. “He loved going to the fire-temple dressed up in his sparkling white *dugli*, starched white trousers, the carefully brushed *Pheytoe*...” (TFB,4).

The Parsi goes to fire Temple then they wear white dresses (males and females) which symbolize purity. Mistry presents Mehroo as ‘’ radiant in her white sari, worn the Parsi way across the white shoulder and over the forehead....When she returned from the fire temple her sari would become the storage of the fragrance of sandalwood absorbed from the smoke of sacred fire” (14). Whenever Mehroo thought of fire-temple she becomes nostalgic. She remembered how, as a child:

She would wait for her mother to return from the fire-temple so she could bury her face in her lap and breathe in the sandalwood smell. Her

father's *dugli* gave off the same perfume, but her mother's white sari was better, it felt so soft. Then there was the ritual of *Chasni*: all the brothers and sisters wearing their prayer caps would eagerly sit around the dining-table to partake of the fruit and sweet blessed during the day's prayers ceremonies (TFB, 14).

When Mehroo returns home, she compares his paan stained *dugli* with murdered Dastur Dhunjisha's *dugli*. Mehroo herself brush off and clean up because she would decorate the entrance of her flat with coloured chalk, hang up the tohrun and spread the fragrance of loban in her flat. But the maid does not come in the time and the occasion of festivals as Behram roje. She cooks dhandar-paatyo and saliboti special Parsi cuisine for the special occasion. For Mehroo *Behram roje* is a special day as:

... on *Behram roje* her mother had given birth to her at the Awabai Petit Parsi Lying-In Hospital; it was also the day her *Novjote* had been performed at the age of seven, when she was confirmed a Zoroastrian by the family priest, *Dustoor* Dhunjisha and finally, Rustomji had married her on *Behram roje* fourteen years ago, with feasting and celebration continuing into wee hours of the morning (TFB, 4)

Mehroo celebrates *Behram roje* in the expected way. But Rustomji has a different opinion because he thinks that all these customs are dead and meaningless. Even the children do not like the traditional Parsi foods. Mehroo, a firm believer of Parsism, has been visiting the fire temple from her school days. She used to offer a sandalwood stick and deposit it in the silver tray in the inner sanctuary of fire temple. Dastur Dhunjisha would treat her as his own

daughter and always greet her with a hug and she also enjoyed the motherly touch. But on the other side Rustomji loves to touch and feel women and derive more pleasure in hugging and squeezing the younger and fresh women. It is not enough, he also claim him for exchanging rude remarks between lines of prayer. Mistry gives the impression to be engaged in an act of externalization and adjustment in the society:

The artist [says Freud] is originally a man who turns from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demand for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction as it is first, made and who then in phantasy-life allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes. But he finds a way to return from this world of phantasy back to reality; with his special gifts, he moulds his phantasy into a new kind of reality, and men concede them as a justification as valuable reflections of actual life. Thus by a certain path he actually becomes the hero, king, creator, favourite he desired to be, without the circuitous path of creating real alteration in the outer world (Wellek 82).

It looks like once again that Rustomji does not believe in his religion from the centre of his heart and he observes the customs and rituals for the sake of formality. All these episodes support the view that religious devotion is decaying among the Parsis. Mistry focuses on the real pictures and royal life style of modern Parsi family, who changes their attitude and mentality according to the craze. The proverb “Parsi, thy name is charity” has lost its meaning now because the protagonist of the story Rustomji has decided long ago, “.... that this was no country for sorrow or compassion or pity – these

were worthless and, at best, inappropriate” (TFB,8). Mistry presents the realistic picture of changing attitude and psychology of people not only outwardly but at the inner level also. It becomes the true representation of day to day life in a particular city like Bombay in general and the true picture of decaying Parsi values.

The story focuses the various disasters on *Behram roje*. The miserable state of Firozsha building, the stinking lavatory, and leaking ceiling, peeling paint and falling plasters are the indicators of the time present scheme where the chief male protagonist Rustomji : “Picked up *The Times of India* and settled in his easy chair, waiting for the bath water to boil. Something would have to be done about the peeling paint and plaster; in some places the erosion was so bad, red brick lay exposed (TFB, 7).” The story moves back, “These flats had been erected in an incredibly short time and with very little money. Cheap materials had been used, and sand carted from nearby Chaupatty beach had been mixed in abundance with substandard cement (TFB, 8).” And again: “Now during the monsoon season beads of moisture trickled down the walls, like sweat down a coolie’s back, which considerably hastened the crumbling of paint and plaster(TFB,8).” The falling plaster symbolizes the decaying of the Parsi community. They are gradually losing their identity. As they have spread and scattered all over the world and are unable to follow their tradition, ritual and customs.

“One Sunday” is the first story written by Mistry which is the second story of the part of the anthology *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. He wrote this story for Canadian Hart House literary contest and won the first prize the main

theme of the story of is social and financial conditions of Parsi in India. Mistry presents the real pictures of Parsi families and their way of living, which is related to problems of daily life and their realism. In this story, Mistry describes various characters like Dolly, Vera, Pesi, Percy Boyce, Kersi Boyce, Jahangir Najamai etc. Mistry uses symbols of refrigerator used here as an apt symbol of community living and mutual co-operation among Parsis that fulfils the requirement of residents of Firozsha Baag. Najamai the sole owner of the refrigerator in the Baag indicates the economic condition of the Parsis. The story shows the Parsi co-operates their society in any ways. Mistry brings to light the depth of human psychology to point out that necessity is an effective cause of social unity.

The autobiographical touch is given to the story, where Kersi resemble Mistry and Percy resembles Mistry's younger brother, Cyrus. Kersi along with his father and Firozsha Baag friends play cricket at the Marine Drive *maidaan* on Sunday mornings. It is Rustomji, who does not allow boys to play in the compound. With the passage of time Percy loses interest in cricket and it is replaced by aeroplanes, model kits and Biggles books, Kersi used his bat for killing rats. It is because of Jahangir, The Bulsara Bookworm, Pesi *paadmaroo* is sent to boarding school. The characters of Jahangir and Pesi are elaborated in the coming tales, as the tales are inter-connected. Eroticism is the intrinsic part of the narrative:

Najamai's daughters had gone abroad, they took with them the youthful sensuality that once filled the flat, and which could drive Kersi giddy with excitement on a day like this, with no one home, and

all before him the prospect of exploring Vera and Dolly's bedroom, examining their undies that invariably lay scattered around, running his hands through lacy frilly things, rubbing himself with these and, on one occasion, barely rescuing them a sticky end. Now, exploration would yield nothing but Najamai's huge underclothes (TFB, 29).

Another erotic narration occurs, when Francis steals eighty rupees from Najamai's flat and makes a narrow escape toward the Tar Gully. Kersi and Percy with their bat are in search of the culprit. They come across *ghatis*, who are waiting for the final *Matka* draw to decide their destinies. The *ghatis* are mentioned in 'Auspicious Occasion'. After seeing the cow in the Tar Gully Kersi's erotic image swayed in front of him and he recollects how one morning:

When the daughter was milking the cow and a young man was standing behind her seated figure. He was bending over the girl, squeezing her breasts with both hands. . . .He thought of Najamai's daughters, the rat in the bedroom, Vera's near-nude body, his dispossessed fantasy (TFB, 42).

The retained sexual feelings in the minds of old male protagonist Rustomji, as well as adolescent Kersi are exploited freely, hence presents a unfairness in which women are neglected or refuse their sexuality and only seems serving sexual and procreative needs of man though in fantasies.

"The Ghost of Firozsha Baag" is a story of the Parsi culture and social traditions made by a non-Parsi narrator, Jacqueline, the ayah. She is a Catholic Christian who is wholeheartedly devoted to her religion and makes

observations about Parsi Zoroastrianism with objectivity and psychological lack of involvement. Narrator of the story, Jaakaylee as her name is mispronounced in the story narrates each and every incident in detail about the Parsi family in which she has been working as ayah for more than fifty years. She tells about the life of Parsis inside as well as outside the Parsi home. The story puts off one layer after another of human psychology and behaviour in the words of an illiterate ayah as a narrator who speaks in a straight forward manner about the different issues. The treatment of supernatural elements and superstitions among the Parsis is the major content of the story. Here Mistry also deals with the theme of displacement and exile within the country for people in search of employment. Living in exile is believed to be a great loss:

Exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from Indian almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost: that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India's of the mind (Rushdie 78).

The narrator herself is a ghost seer and firm believer in the existence of ghosts from her very childhood. She recalls each and every incident about her childhood related to her father, Cajetan and ghosts of Goa. The narrator uses Hindi, Parsi and Konkani words in the story which give a realistic touch to it. According to some post-colonial critics language is power, power language.

How the words change their pronunciation when they are used by the speakers of other languages ‘easy chair’, ‘*igeechur*’ French beans was *ferach beech* and Jacqueline became Jaaykalee. It is common in all old Parsis and they make their own private language. However, the narrator is an illiterate ayah even then she feels the pangs of displacement from Goa to Bombay. But she reconcile to all this with finding a job in Bombay.

Jacqueline’s first encounter with *bhoot* creates sensation and fear in the environment. But her employer and his wife do not believe in her story and called her “Crazy” which shows that they are non believers in ghosts. The children of Firozsha Baag also make a fun of her by saying, “SEE TODAY, at APSARA CINEMA, R.K. ANAND’S NEW Fillum *Bhooooot Bungla*, starring JAAKAYLEE of BLOCK B!” (TFB,53). the story also foregrounds that Parsis who have deep faith in Parsi Zoroastrianism firmly believe in secularism. Due to their humane attitude, the narrator appreciates their charity, secularism and non-conservatism. She makes a comment, “I was saying it was very lucky for me to become ayah in Parsi house, and never will I forget that” (TFB, 52). But it does not mean that she is a blind supporter of Parsism as at the same time she reveals the superiority complex prevalent among Parsis:

Parsis prefer Manglorean Catholics, they have light skin colour. For themselves also Parsis like light skin, and when Parsi baby is born that is the first and most important thing. If it is fair they say, O how nice light skin just like parents. But if it is dark skin they say, arre what is this ayah no chhokro, ayah’s child (TFB, 52-53).

Being a Catholic Christian presents the Parsi culture and traditions with an artistic detachment and objectivity. She comments upon their thinking, view points and opinions on various issues frankly. Another incident which reflects their sense of superiority complex is suggested when Parsi priest claims to have the most powerful prayers in comparison to Hindu priest. “....Parsi priest has most powerful prayers of all” (TFB,63). The ayah narrates the series of incidents how her *Bai* begins to believe in ghosts and organize a ritual called *Jashan* to tackle ghosts. The illiterate ayha narrates the event of performing *Jashan* and catches the greedy nature of the priest during this development. The ritual is performed with great devotion and piousness to control the ghosts:

Dustoorji was pleased, and he checked his Parsi calendar for a good day. On that morning I had to wash whole balcony floor specially, then *Dustoorji* came, spread a white sheet, and put all prayer items on it, a silver thing in which he made fire with sandalwood and *loban*, a big silver dish, a *lotta* full of water, flowers and some fruit (TFB,63).

Besides the religious rituals, the narrator also observes the changing dressing sense among Parsis. Though the conventional Parsi ladies wear saris but that has been replaced for ultra modern girls of Firozsha Baag who have started wearing “high heel shoes” and “mini skirt”, the narrator makes a comment “Very *esskey-messkey*, so short I don’t know how their *mai-baap* allowed it” (TFB,47).

The New Year’s Eve dances are very popular among the Parsis. They go to cinema to see movie. The modern girl Dolly and Vera do not hesitate to

see the night show. The narrator, Jaakaylee makes an observation about the human behaviour when she says, “*very rich people, my bai-seth. He is a Chartered Accountant. He has a nice motor car, just like A Block priest, and like the one Dr Mody used to drive... Bai says they should buy it from Mrs. Mody, she wants it to go shopping*”(TFB,47). The characterization in the story is apt which helps in the portrayal of real life in fictional world. When Dustoorji performs *Jashan* in the house of Chartered Accountant, he tells Jaaykalee to go inside because he thinks that Parsi prayers are so powerful, only a Parsi can listen to them. Everyone else can be badly damaged inside their soul if they would listen. But when *Bai* the employer of Jaaykalee is haunted by *bhoot* and she starts to think that prayers did not work effectively that exposes the hollowness of such claims as made by the priest. So, she decides to involve the ayah, a non-Parsi woman in a “little magic” with *Soopra* and Scissors. She covers her head with a white *mathoobanoo* as the little magic require two Parsis. It shows that the fear of *bhoot* (ghost) shatters the difference of Parsi and non-Parsis in them and melts the borders of religion, race and class.

Mistry, undoubtedly reveals the life of Parsis, their culture and traditions, rituals, food habit, celebrations along with their fears and mysticism. He presents the views that human behaviour in all religions and faiths have some common features. The story highlights the Parsi culture and traditions.

The story “Condolence Visit” presents the old Parsi tradition is graphically depicted in the story. The word condolence symbolizes the solace

and peace for the family members of demised, but it enhances the pain when people come without sympathy and just for the sake of formality. The traditions and rituals related to death in Parsi community are elaborated in the present story. The term *Dushmoo*, tenth day after the funeral which is observed in fire temple and the '*maosiso*' means a month after the last rite are elaborated with their worth in the story. Daulat, widow to Minocher Mirza has to repeat the details of his illness. However, the people come to the family of the demised person to share their grief and owe sympathy but here the story explores the inner feelings of widow whose husband has died recently after a long illness. She comments on condolence visits, "The worst of it would be the repetition of details for different visitors at different hours on different days" (60) that multiplies the sufferings of the family members.

The development of story shows her attachment for her dying husband Minocher. Here the situation is highlighted that she could not bear the visitors who come propelled by "custom and conventions". Sarosh, the Canadian immigrant brings her a portable cassette tape recorder from Canada, she refused to accept it saying that "Poor Minocher sick in bed, and I listen to music?"(TFB,71). Here cassette recorder symbolizes the modern man and his insensitivity. The "R-button" shows his memory literally mean Rewind and rememorize and "FF button" means "Fast Forward" expresses the how people feel bored towards the sufferings of others. The button 'P' stands for "Pause". If you wish to stop the expression of someone's sufferings then stop with button-P. So the cassette recorder here becomes the powerful symbol of modern man who shows his condolences only for the sake of social formality.

But later on she repents upon her decision not to accept that portable cassette tape recorder and that exposes the irony of human situation. She realizes that how superficially people visit her in the name of condolence and she has to give full detail of Minocher's illness like a mechanical tool. The widow Daulat Mirza wishes to leave Firozsha Baag to avoid these frequent condolence visits but she fears that it would generate virulent gossip in the society. These customary visits highlight the relative effect of pathos and sympathy for Daulat.

Mistry uses symbols and images according to the situation. The Parsis used to wear Pugree on the important occasion particularly on marriage. Minocher Mirza's 'Pugree' becomes the powerful symbol of Parsi cultural heritage like many other Indian cultures. Sarosh who is called Sid – being a Canadian immigrant rejects to wear the Parsi Pugree on the occasion of his marriage. Daulat recalls her childhood days and emphasizes her fondness for English music which is the common trait of Parsis in India due to their long association with the colonizer. They feel that they are very close to the English so they follow their habits and life style when Daulat decides to give it to a Parsi Youngman after the day of Dushmoo, and then Najamai and Moti oppose it by saying that it will disturb Minocher's soul. In the changing times, the Parsi youth is leaving the customs and traditions but the Parsi Youngman tells them, "we decided to do everything, all the ceremonies, the proper traditional way at our wedding in correct Parsi dress and all" (TFB,87). It becomes a cause of satisfaction for them and Najamai's responds, "Look here, bawa, it's very nice to hear you want to do it the proper Parsi way. So many

young men are doing in suits and ties... Like Dhobitalao Gaon wedding of a Catholic it was looking” (TFB,87-88). Daulat once again violates the social norms of Parsi society when she gives Minocher’s Pugree as a marriage gift. The situation reflects how Parsi youth is under the influence of change. They have to face its consequences also. Thus, the story touches the various aspects of Parsi life, their culture and customs particularly related to funeral and after funeral rites. Mistry highlights the hypocrisy and pretentious nature of people through the behaviour, actions and speeches of his characters. The story focuses upon the theme of belongingness and urge to break away.

Mistry, a keen observer of human psychology, deals with child and adolescent psychology in his story ‘The Collectors’. As the title indicates, it revolves around the hobby of stamps collection but reveals the various aspects of life. The story set in Firozsha Baag presents the view of Microcosm of Parsi world and reflects the behaviour of residents particularly Mody and Bulsara families. The story presents the ironical view of Dr. Mody who gets respect and has the reputation of a thorough gentleman, but has to face humiliation due to his son Pesi. No doubt, people respect him heartily but they cannot tolerate his son to spoil their children and provoke them to do wrong deeds.

The story reflects various colours of life with the keen observations of a story teller. Dr. Mody who was an educated person and had the elite status in Parsi community and outside his community also follows the practices of Parsism. He wears “White Payajama”, “Sudra” and “a huge pair of Sapaat” at home. Mrs. Bulsara with her *mathoobanoo* represents the conventional Parsi woman and believes in God to the core of her heart. She occasionally asserts

the phrases *Khoedai salaamat raakhe* and *Khoedai* are great which reveals her deep faith in the existence of God and her religion. Mrs. Mody does not like the association of Dr. Mody and Jehangir Bulsara and intrigues them by stealing the important ‘dancing lady stamp’ successfully. She thinks Dr. Mody does not pay proper attention towards his own son Pesi. But it is the irony of the situation that ultimately she hands over all the stamp collection to Jehangir Bulsara who does not keep these valuable stamps properly. The stamps become the important symbol of faith during the story which ultimately turns into a heap of wastage, “It was doubtful of anything of value remained in trunk” (TFB, 103). They complain to Dr. Mody against his evil expedition to torment poor dumb and helpless creatures. Dr. Mody named him on the name on “Peshotan, in the Persian epic, *Shah-Nameh*” (TFB, 98) who was a great lover of art, a noble general and a man of wise counsel. It also emphasizes that expectations sometimes prove so tragic and futile as Pesi grows up to be just the contrary of what his name suggests. Dr. Mody expects that his son: Would play the violin, acquire the best from the cultures of East and West, thrill to words of Tagore and Shakespeare, appreciate Mozart and Indian ragas; and one day, at the proper moment, he would introduce him to his dearest, activity, stamp - collecting (TFB,99). The refined hobby of stamp collection provokes Jehangir to do such deeds which are not acceptable in the society. It pushes him towards homosexuality and theft of stamps from the Vendor outside the school. Another incident occurs when Mrs. Bulsara observes that her son is not paying proper attention towards the stamp collection handed over to him by Mrs. Modi “Do something Jehangoo, do something with them.” (TFB,

102). The boy does not show any interest in this matter again because she was well aware about the adolescent psychology, “Jehangoo was at that difficult age... when boys automatically did the exact reverse of what their parents said” (TFB, 102). When Dr. Mody dies, his body is brought to Bombay from Ahmedabad for a proper Parsi funeral. When Dr. Mody first time came in the Baag he felt very happy to think that he would live amidst of his own community as reported by Mrs. Mody after his death. It is noteworthy that the Parsis follow their set traditions and rituals to the great extent. The story presents another ironical view in the story. When the dead body of Dr. Mody was brought, people talked, “Poor Dr. Mody never went a day without a bath and talcum powder in life” (TFB, 99). The irony of life does not stop here but the story ends not on disappointment and lack of faith. Mrs. Mody hands over the most valuable stamp collection of Dr. Mody to Jehangir keeping the faith in his sincerity and interest but he does not keep her faith. The valuable collection of stamps turns into waste. Actually, it is not the destruction of stamps but faith also.

“Of White Hair and Cricket” is an interesting story, narrated by a fourteen years old boy Kersi Boyce who is narrator of many stories. The title of the story symbolizes health and entertaining of life through white hairs and cricket. The game of cricket which was introduced by the Britishers and has now become a popular game of the country is the favourite game of Parsis from the older days. The white hairs reflect maturity along with growing age so undesired that these are called “the signposts of mortality”. (TFB, 129). The

story presents the realities of life with the powerful symbol and images in this world.

For example Kersi, in the story 'Of White Hairs and Cricket', in Firozsha Baag hero worships his father who used to play cricket with the boy from the Baag on Chowpatty beach every Sunday and quite happily pulls out the grey hairs from his father's head, so that the latter could cling a little longer to Illusion of youth. These hair-pulling activities are however a source of conflict between Kersi's father and his grandmother. The most Parsis were firmly assured that hair was a thing of evil and could be used for purpose of black-magic. This is the reason why most orthodox Parsis keep their heads covered with a white cloth (in the case of women) and with a cap (in the case of men). So by making the boy pull out his grey hairs, Kersi's father was in the eyes of his grandmother committing a sin: "Sunday dawns and he makes the child do that dullendar thing again. It will only bring bad luck." (TFB,131). Kersi's mamaji was not only superstitious about matters concerning hair, but was also a rather spiritual woman who spun wool for Kusti- the sacred thread worn by Parsi men and women around their waists and wove them herself. The story deals with father-son relationship, expectation of parents and sacrifices made by them for their children. The story around the life of a Parsi family and shows a sense of belongingness. It is presented how a father dreams about a successful future for his son. He desires his son to be always tough and congratulate his son on performing well, "today my son did a brave thing, as I would have done. A powerful shot was going to the boundary, like a canon ball, and he blocked it with his bare shin" (TFB,130) The bright future

or dream job thought by a father for his son as revealed in the story is to migrate to a western country as Mr. Boyce says, “And one day ,you must go, too, to America. No future here” (TFB,136). It isn’t easy to meet the expenses of routine life for a lower middle class family but even then the father promise his son,” Somehow we’ll get the money to send you. I’ll find a way” (TFB,136)

The father of the narrator boy checked pages of The Times of India edition for a suitable job and was very hopeful to find it. He feels that he will be selected and their hard days will finish at once but the mother conceded this a dream of ‘shaik-chullee’. So, the life is presented as the blending of happiness and sorrows, and positive and negative thoughts. The author analysis the characters like mamaji who is superstitious lady and objects on white hairs removing session because she thinks it is unfortunate to perform, she says, ‘’Sunday dawns and he makes the child do that dullendar thing again. It will only bring bad luck’’ (TFB,131). She further wars, ‘’plucking out hair as if it was a slaughtered chicken. An ill-omened thing’’ (TFB, 132). But the father rejects her conviction saying that if it is so ill-omened then how he may able to get good advertisement in Sunday. The conversation once again strikes the different opinions and generation gap. In this way, it becomes a constant struggle of tradition versus modernity.

The writer explores some of the important Parsi customs and rituals directly and indirectly such as Sacred “Bhikha Behram Well” which symbolizes the value of purity in Parsi public life. The narrator makes a pertinent comment upon the way of Parsi worship, “there wasn’t a blazing fire

because hardly any sandalwood offerings had been left in the silver thaali: most people came only at the holy days” (TFB, 113). The people do not visit fire temple daily now. It reveals that the people have no time to go to fire temples. But the person who follows the Parsi tradition gets respect in the society. The Parsi households make ‘Kusti’ at home having a grace of its own. In the story of white hairs and cricket, Mistry informs the readers that thread for Kusti, which is worn by every Parsi, is spun at home. In this story this job is done by mamaji. Thus, the story gives an overview of struggling middle class society in a Parsi apartment. The narrator thinks about his friend’s family and then about his own parents and mamaji and how much his elders struggle to earn a livelihood and run a family in this world.

“The Paying Guest” highlights the problem of housing in the metro city like Bombay as theme of insensitivity in the society. All the major characters in the story are Parsis; so, it provides a peep into the Parsi world to understand the outlook and attitude of Parsis in their own community. It also exposes the lengthy process of litigation and hypocritical nature of people. It examines human behaviour in relation to society.

The theme of loneliness and misery is highlighted in the story of paying guest. The elderly couple Ardesar and Khorshedbai is directly linked to their only son having migrated to Canada. The deserting attitude of her son, who misbehaved with his parents when they went to live with him, may be responsible for her rude behaviour. The parents in the story have had to option to becoming paying guests in the flat of the young couple Kashmira and Boman. The old people have nowhere to go and the younger ones cannot get

them to leave but must try to recover their room as they too have only that flat to call their own and cannot even hope to find another rented one.

The stories also expose the unfairness opinion of people like Boman who neither like working woman nor believe in equal status of woman in their family. The hints of gender discrimination may be commonly observed neither in Firozsha Baag that is the bitter and unhealthy trend nor for Parsis only but all. Boman who does not like that his wife, Kashmira should take a job. He asserts, ‘no wife of his would go out to work while there was breath in his lungs’ (TFB, 154). It is not the opinion of Boman alone but represents the whole orthodox class of Indian society and it is important to note that only due to this discrimination Kashmira could not join the social service league even when she was interested in doing so. Thus as a daughter and wife, she was expected to follow the set attitude such as ‘charity begins at home, of; self help is the best help’ (TFB, 133). In this way, Kashmira represents the whole class of such women who have ability and temper to do something creative for the welfare of society. They are expected to perform odd jobs their kitchen and household. He also looks at the self-cantered and selfish nature of human behaviour when Boman needs evidence in his favour to remove his renter. But it appears as a shock that nobody comes forward to support him. His most faithful Chartered Accountant defies him corruptly, “there is one principle in my life, Boman dikra... which I never transgress: three monkey’s principle...” (TFB, 167). This reflects the Gandhian philosophy and exposes how the well of people who do not want to involve in others sufferings. Mistry brings together the selfish nature of Parsis in the end of the story when Khorshedbai

locked in newborn child of Boman and Kashmira in her Pestonji's cage. Khorshedbai attachment for her parrot (Pestonji's) who comes in her dreams and she follows the advice. Khorshedbai sufferings her owner too much and even then she is a firm believer in god when Ardesar was ready to quit the flat; Khorshedbai forbade him and said, "Prayerful people like us have nothing to fear". She uses the only and one record Shukhi Sooraj, the keen tribute to sunrise and lit sticks of agarbatti as a tool to make them difficult. At last it exposes the psychology of paying guests as well as owners in a balanced way.

The story 'Exercisers' begins with the modern problem of the Parsi family of Mr. and Mrs. Bulsara about their son Jahangir and they search the help of their family guru to convince Jahangir that his girlfriend is not a suitable match for him. It reflects boundaries of religion and another aspect of Parsi way of life. According to Parsi tradition inter-faith marriages are prohibited in Parsism but the story expose the situation that Parsi parents feel too insecure to accept even a Parsi girl of their son's choice. It was not in the case of boy only; the girl's parents were also very particular about their relationship. The instance reflects the inner most feeling of Jahangir Bulsara. The story presents the realistic picture of a Parsi family where the parents are over conscious about their children but their children do not like security cover.

Mistry describes the continuous struggle between tradition and modernity, according to the western culture. Parsi who have trying to keep their cultural heritages infect since their persecution from Iran. But in the modern times, it is a matter of great apprehensions how they do wrong about

their customs and becomes modern under the superiority of western culture. It raises a question on cultural and identity of the whole Parsi community. However, Mrs. Bulsara ties mathoobanoo and shows herself a true Parsi but her deepest devotion is centred on Bhagwan Baba, a Hindu religious man. She tries her best to convince Jahangir to visit Bhagwan Baba and tells him, “your entire life’s happiness is at stake..... when Bhagwan Baba speaks your Eyes will open, all will become clear” (TFB, 197). Mrs. Bulsara is not thankful to Dada Ormuzd but a Hindu religious man and regards him as the supporter of her family. She says, “after father lost job, who do you think helped, his friends, our relations, who? Bhagwan Baba and we have enough to eat and wear, thanks to him”. (TFB, 197) in this way, it also exposes the hollowness of friends and relatives. The story breaks the myths that all the Parsis are prosperous and also highlights that they believe in Parsi Zoroastrianism and go to fire temples only for their prayers.

The story ‘Squatter’ is a story within a story, by the narrator Nariman Hansotia, the famous story teller of Firozsha Baag, who in his 1932 Mercedes-Benz (he called it the apple of his eye) returned in the evening from the Cawasji Framji Memorial Library, tells stories to the boys. Nariman Hansotia narrates the story of famous cricketer Savukshaw who saved the Indian team being defeated in England tour, and, “his real secret was practice, lots of practice” (TFB, 150). Before starting the next story about Sarosh-Sid, he asks his listeners “what did you learn about Savukshaw, from last week’s story?” (TFB, 152). Someone says “he was a very talented man” and Viraf says “a very lucky man, to have so many talents”. After few moments the book-worm,

stamp-flicker of ‘The Collectors’ and lover of ‘Exercisers’-Jahangir replies: “He was a man searching for happiness, by trying all kinds of different things” (TFB, 153). The narrator goes ahead and simply concludes the half-finished story with a note:

Exactly! And he never found it. He kept looking for new experiences, and though he was very successful at everything he attempted, it did not bring him happiness. Remember this; success alone does not bring happiness. Nor does failure have to bring unhappiness. Keep it in mind when you listen to today’s story (TFB,153).

Sarosh already being introduced in the story ‘Condolence Visit’, as a nephew of Daulat and Minocher’s, and three months after the wedding, Sarosh with his wife emigrated to Canada and they divorced a year later because “she did not like it in Canada”(TFB,68). Sarosh calls himself Sid in Toronto but while narrating the story Nariman prefers calling him Sarosh as it is his ‘proper Parsi name’. Nariman makes an effort to reclaim Sarosh’s identity which he lost in Toronto by calling himself Sid, a western identity:

Whatever else may be the influence of the British environment on the Indians, Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants and their children, their names will not be radically altered . . . Jagjit may become Jock or Sundri become Sandra, for ease of speech - but the essence will remain. This is likely to happen in the whole socio-cultural makeup of the Asian community (Hiro 132).

Sarosh finds him miserable and depressed because he could not adjust himself upon the white plastic oval of the toilet seat. “Ten years was the time

Sarosh had set himself to achieve complete adaptation to the new country . . . dependent on the old ways, and this unalterable fact, strengthened afresh every morning of his in the new country, suffocated him” (TFB,154). Sarosh passed through the problematic relationship between inter-locking cultural landscapes, between an ethnic heritage and new life in the West. Sarosh’s incapability of using day to day amenities presents and intrusion of external reality in the flow of the inner reality which is his problem of converting him into a permanent Canadian. Before leaving for Canada Sarosh claimed: “My dear family, my dear friends, if I do not become completely Canadian in exactly ten years from the time I had there, then I will come back. I promise” (TFB,154-155). Some of his friends consider it a smart decision, “that whole life would change for better” while others say, he is “making a mistake, emigration was all wrong” (TFB, 154). After his announcement they also tell him “never to fear embarrassment; there was no shame if he decided to return to the country of his birth” (TFB, 155). Sarosh is unable to acquire the Western process of squatting:

In his own apartment Sarosh squatted barefoot. Elsewhere, if he had to go with his shoes on, he would carefully cover the seat with toilet paper before climbing up. He learnt to do this after the first time, when his shoes had left telltale footprints on the seat. He had to clean it with wet paper towel. Luckily, no one had seen him (TFB,155-156).

It is due to his squatting problem he often become late for work and warned by his supervisor. Sarosh tells that he is facing “immigration-related problem” and the supervisor advised him to go to Indian Immigrant Aid

Society. Sarosh is not interested in taking such a drastic step. His squatting failure means he found himself unable to adapt the western culture. He could not assimilate to the new surroundings. His task of assimilation and his inability to accomplish the desired transformation can only be seen as a sign of failure: “If he could not be westernized in all respects, he was nothing but a failure in this land – a failure not just in the washrooms of the nation but everywhere” (TFB,162). The transformation takes place and an individual wishes to separate from her/his roots:

A new type of personality, namely a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of the distinct peoples; never quite willing to break . . . with his parts and his traditions, and quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in a society in which he [seek] to find a place (Park 892).

Finally, Sarosh succeeded in his task during his return journey to his homeland. After returning to his native land Sarosh finds himself “desperately searching for his old place in the pattern of life he had vacated ten years ago. . . .The old pattern was never found by Sarosh; he searched in vain, Patterns of life are selfish and unforgiving” (TFB,167). Sarosh narrates his failure story as an immigrant to Nariman so that he could narrate the story for the boys of Firozsha Baag, especially those who are planning to go abroad. Sarosh tells Nariman not to call him Sid, as that “name reminds me of all my troubles” (TFB,167). He is happy to regain his identity as Sarosh: “Tell them that in Toronto once there lived a Parsi boy as best as he could. Set you down this;

and say, besides, that for some it was good for some it was bad, but for me life in the land of milk and honey was just a pain in the posterior” (TFB,168).

Mistry portrays the condition of man against his environment, the fragmentation and dissolution of a multicultural Canada. The truth with a touch of humour is filtered through an art form, this masking reality is not to hide but symbolize the ‘Otherness’ in the foreign land. The basic truths in the life of an immigrant that rounded him too harsh to be assimilated, to be confronted face to face is one’s incapability to ignore these circumstances. Ultimately, Sarosh- the Indian has to forget Sid-the Canadian.

“Lend me Your Light” is one of the stories of short story based book *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. As the story’s name suggests, it is a philosophical enquiry into human existence the way writers like Rabindranath Tagore did, in a humanistic manner that tethered on concepts like universal brotherhood. In this story Kersi is a brooding youngster analyzing his decision to migrate to Canada. The other two major figures in the story are Percy, his brother and Jamshed, Percy’s friend. Percy decided to stay in India and dedicated his life to social work in Indian villages. Jamshed, who had already migrated to the U.S and made a good fortune there, is anti Indian to the core. Kersi is ambivalent regarding his relationship with India, but he cannot afford to hate India the way Jamshed does. He opts for the easier way out, to migrate to Canada, instead of toiling in Indian villages like Percy. The fact that Percy’s friend and co-worker Novjote gets killed by money lenders makes Jamshed disapprove of his work as futile, but Kersi is more concerned about the work his brother does and is disturbed better life in Canada. “My brother waging

battles against corruption and evil while I was watching sitcoms on my rented Granada TV.”

The story ‘Lend Me Your Light’ begins with an epigraph from Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali*: “. . .your light are all lit-then where do you go with your lamp? My house is all dark and lonesome, lend me your light.” The story revolves around three characters Jamshed, Percy and Kersi. The first person narrative of the story suggests that the narrator is providing the first hand information about his Indian and Canadian experiences from his childhood days till his immigration. The story graphically describes his mental makeup before and after immigration.

The author explores the duality of the minds of the immigrants who plan to shift themselves to their dreamlands with high hopes but cannot forget their cultural roots and childhood experiences of their native land. Majority of the Parsi characters take immigration positively as an opportunity and blessings for bright future but not all the Parsis react identically. Nariman Hansotia, Sarosh’s mother, and Percy Boyce are some exceptions who do not give much importance to immigration.

On the other hand, Percy struggles hard to improve the condition of poor farmers but they do not cooperate with him whole heartedly and he has to lose one of his companions in his revolutionary movement against money lenders. He has the missionary zeal to change the faulty system. These two Parsi characters represent two extreme kinds of thinking among Parsis but between these two extreme ideologies is the third which one belongs to such

people who cannot forget their childhood memories and cultural roots but get interested to migrate for the sake of bright future.

‘Swimming Lessons’ is the last story in the anthology. It reflects the deep impact of immigration and nostalgia on the psyche of the protagonist. The reaction of Kersi’s parents shows the ‘self-reflexive’ element in the story. The fact that it is printed in two types of prints i.e. Ordinary and italics. It is self-reflexive story not only in the sense of being somewhat autobiographical but also in the context of the process of creative writing itself, which gives it an auto-logical orientation. Mistry focuses upon the situation of Parsis in Canada where they are considered as a part of the Asian race. The confusion of being the most westernized community disappears in the swimming classes. It deals with the question of identity in the ‘mosaic’ of multicultural of a small community of India - the Parsis. It is notable that discrimination against Kersi in Canada is not as a member of small community or member of Parsi Diaspora but of the large Asian presence. Along with the Diasporic consciousness, it also highlights the cultural attachment and longing for tradition in an alien land where he himself feels a complete stranger. The writer reveals the position of Parsis in relation to international categorization of human being. The sea is presented as the symbol of faith. How does the sea become polluted then? Here pollution is physical as well as moral and it shows the decaying moral and ethical values. It also emphasizes how deeply cultural and traditional values are rooted in the mind of Parsis.

Water means regeneration only if it is pure and cleansing. Chowpatty was filthy, the pool was not. Failure to swim through filth must mean

something other than failure of rebirth-failure of symbolic death? Does that equal success of symbolic life? Death of a symbolic failure? Death of a symbol? What is the equation? (TFB,240).

The story is the presentation of mundane life of common Parsis of Firozsha Baag. It reveals their position in relation to other international communities. Though, they regard themselves, the most westernized community of India but when the protagonist Kersi goes to Canada which is considered the famous centre of Multiculturalism and land of honey and milk, he has to face racial hatred. Although, the narrator moves to Canada voluntarily, yet he feels himself a stranger in that culture. He recalls even the minutes thing about his childhood and India. He symbolizes water as the symbol of life which provides life force to humanity.

During his second visit, the postman delivered a parcel. His parents are happy to hear that their son has become a writer. *“He has written a book of stories, all these years in school and college he kept his talent hidden, making us think he was just like one of the boys in the Baag, shouting and playing the fool in the compound”*(TFB,241). After reading the first five stories mother is sad, she said:

He must be so unhappy there, all his stories are about Bombay, he remembers every little thing about his childhood, he is thinking about it all the time even though he is ten thousand miles away, my poor son, I think he misses his home and us everything he left behind, because if he likes it over these why would he not write stories about that, there must be so many new ideas that his new life could give him (TFB,243).

After reading Kersi's stories his father shows his disagreement:

But there should also have been something positive about Parsis, there was so much to be proud of: the great Tatas and their contribution to the steel industry. . .what would people reading these stories think, those who did not know about Parsis-that the whole community was full of cranky, bigoted people; and in reality it was the richest, most advanced and philanthropic community in India, he did not need to tell his own son that Parsi had a reputation for being generous and family-oriented (TFB,245).

Father explains mother about the artistic distance due to which their son is a writer. The last story they liked the most, as it is focussed on Canada. The last story is liked by mother as it is *"about Grandpa, where he wonders if Grandpa's spirit is really watching him and blessing him"* (TFB,250). Father said they are proud of him waiting for his next book. *"Leave a little space for me at the end; I want to write a few lines when I put the address on the envelope"* (TFB,250).

The memory of the glorious past is an assurance of the assimilation of Parsi community in India. The concluding lines of the collection puts faith of parents in their children at individual level but the collective consciousness of Parsis and their efforts for construction of identity in India as well as Canada is commendable. The stories such as 'Lend Me Your Light', 'Squatter' and 'Swimming Lessons' show struggle of life and the writer implied it in the use of images and illusions only.

The Parsis have strong patriotic feeling and ethnic bonds in their blood and behaviour. They have rich cultural and historical roots which are being preserved by them in one way or the other. In the twenty first century, they are confused about their ancient culture and traditions which clashes with modernity. The story reflects the experiences of the Parsi immigrant with penetrative vision and detailed powerful imagery and symbol to reveals the inner most feeling of temptation, attraction and charms of Western developed country which prove shallow and transitory on a close examination. In this story, Mistry also shows the position of Parsis in the international context. He also touches the sensitive human issues such as Diasporic consciousness, family values, ethical values and importance of culture and traditions and their decay in his stories. Mistry having the agenda to preserve the Parsi culture and tradition plays the role of whistle blower against the defects which are creeping in the Parsi culture and tradition.

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