Local and Universal Themes in Rohinton Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag*

By

G. Karthiga

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A thesis submitted to Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore – 641 043 in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master's Degree in English

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S. Kalaivani 28.04.2016

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Supervisor

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Indian English literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian Diaspora such as V. S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Agha Shahid Ali, Rohinton Mistry and Salman Rushdie, who are of Indian descent. This realm is also frequently referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. As a category, this production comes under the broader discipline of postcolonial literature- the production from previously colonized countries such as India.

Hindu literary traditions have dominated a large part of Indian culture. These traditions are well reflected in great works like Vedas and epics such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Treatises like *Vaastu Shastra* (Architecture), *Arthashastra* (Political science) are true reflections of the Indian literary excellence. Early Hindi literature, in dialects like Awadhi and Brai, grew along with religious and philosophical poetry in the medieval period. Saint Kabir and Tulsidas were the greatest exponents of the Hindi literature during this period. With the passage of time, the Khadiboli dialect became more prominent and saw a great upsurge which continues to this day.

During the medieval period, Muslim literary traditions dominated a large part of Indian literature and saw flourishing of Muslim literature. Muslim rule during the medieval times saw rapid growth and development of Persian and Urdu literature in India. A huge variety of literature spanning across history, culture and politics was written in this period.

As such, Indian English Literature has a relatively recent history; it is only one and a half centuries old. The first book written by an Indian in English was by Sake Dean Mahomet, titled *Travels of Dean Mahomet*; Mahomet's travel narrative was published in1793 in England. In its early stages Indian writing in English was influenced by the Western art form of the novel. Early Indian writers used English unadulterated by Indian words to convey an experience which was essentially Indian. Raja Rao (1908–2006), the Indian philosopher and writer, authored *Kanthapura* (1938) and *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) which are Indian in terms of their storytelling qualities. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) wrote in both Bengali and English and was responsible for the translations of his own work into English. Dhan Gopal Mukherjee was the first Indian author to win a literary award in the United States. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, a writer of non-fiction, is best known for his *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), where he relates his life experiences and influences.

P.Lal, a poet, translator, publisher and essayist, founded a press in the 1950s for Indian English writing, the Writers Workshop. Ram Nath Kak (1917–1993), a Kashmiri veterinarian wrote his autobiography *Autumn Leaves* (1985), one of the most vivid portraits of life in 20th century Kashmir, which has become a sort of a classic.With the coming of the British in India, works started to be written in English language. As more and more Indians became well versed with the English language, the number of works in English literature began to grow. During the contemporary times, numerous Indian authors have made their mark on the world English literature scene. Some of the most noted Indian born or Indian writers are R. K. Narayan, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Arundhathi Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri.

The growth of Indian English literature is divided into three important stages of its development. The first development came in the middle of the 1930's when big writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao appeared on the scene and made the real beginning of the Indian English novel. The mid 1950's and 1960's mark the second important stages when writers like Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Nayantara Sahgal came out with their work that changed the face of Indian English novel. For writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Bhabani Bhattacharya the focus was on the socio-cultural world of the characters, whereas for writers like Arun Joshi and Anita Desai, the internal world of their characters became equally, if not more, important. The appearance of women novelists added a new dimension to Indian English novel. They leaned more towards the feminine sensibilities and thus opened up a new vista of human and man- woman relationship. The political novels of Nayantara Sahgal established this genre in Indian English literature. The third important stage in the development of Indian English novel came in the beginning of the 1980's. It was then that Indian English writing received international recognition, mainly through writers of Indian origin who have settled in countries abroad. When Salman Rushdie won the Booker Prize for his novel *The Mid Night's Children* in 1981, a new landmark was created.

A new interesting feature was added to the scene when in 1993 Vikram Seth was given a fabulous amount as advance against royalty for his novel *A Suitable Boy*. Thus he became India's first millionaire novelist. The most significant outcome of this development is that Indian English writers are now writing with a new confidence. A few writers like R.K. Narayan had earned admiration from writers like Graham Greene as well as critics abroad. Thus in the last two decades of the 20th century Indian English fiction has witnessed the introduction of new themes and

technique. With their new found confidence Indian English writers have boldly experimented with language and technique. Vikram Seth went even to the extent of experimenting with the form in the verse of his novel *The Golden Gate* published in 1986.

Indian writers, especially novelists, have made innovative experiments in the form and narrative techniques. The fascination of Indian writing in English lies more in the phenomenon of literary creativity in a language other than the surrounding mother tongue and in the documentation of Indian life with all its socio-cultural aspects. This contribution of India has been made chiefly through Indian writing in English.

Indian writing in English has contributed in the field of both English fiction and poetry. In the recent years, Indian fictional writers have been widely recognized by the West. Indian writing in English has come quite a long way from the mere use of English language to the authentic tool for expressing one's ideas, thoughts, concept and imagination. It has attained maturity, but it is not that it suddenly emerged from nowhere it has its phases of development. Indian writing in English has made the most significant contribution to the field of the novel. Bankim Chandra Chaterjee's *Raj Mohan's Wife* (1864) was considered to be the first novel, but the real Indian English novel was flourishing with Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, who tried to provide a true picture of Indian society during an era of transition from slavery to independence. They gave the real Indian tradition of creative writers in English, by exposing the exclusive problems such as untouchability, illiteracy, urbanization and discrimination of the society on the basis of sex and the caste.

Indian writing in English has gained considerable international acceptance and recognition. Indian English has in fact become a new form of Indian culture and voice

in which the Indian speaks. While the Indian authors, poets, novelists, essayists, dramatists have been making significant contribution to the world literature since pre-Independent era, the past few years have seen a massive flourishing of Indian writing in the international market. The works of Indian authors writing in English are soaring on the best seller list and they are also receiving a great deal of critical acclaim. Starting from Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan, Anita Desai, Toru Dutt to Salman Rushdie, Allen Sally, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chithra Banerjee Divakaruni, Arundhathi Roy, Anita Nair, Vikram Chandra etc. the parade of fine Indian writers is long and lengthening.

Indian writing in English has come of age. It has travelled a long journey and is now fully matured. It has made a tremendous progress, to the extent that it is now recognized by the entire world. Having become undeniably one of the many modern Indian literatures, Indian English literature is an endeavour to showcase showing the rare gems of Indian writing in English. As such, the revival interest in Indian English literature is a direct offshoot of the Indian English fiction. The tradition of Indian English writing is comparatively a new stream. Still it has become a potent voice of Indian culture and civilization at the global level from being a curious native explosion.

Indian writing in English in recent years has thus achieved a great significance both in India and abroad as a consequence of the development; today it enjoys a unique reputation, prestige and responsibility in the world of English studies. Talking about the popular genres, in the recent years, fiction has become a powerful form of literary experience and it has attained a place of pride in the form of literature. Indian English fiction forms the bulk of Indian English literature from the later part of the nineteenth century to the present day. One of the important objectives of Indian

writers of fiction has been the creative interpretations of Indian culture and the formulation and projection of the Indian image.

The effective presence of the British in India made Indian writing in English possible, when enterprising Indians started writing in English. One can perceive different rhythms and patterns from colonial subjection to political independence, covering a long period. The trauma of conquest, a stage of demoralization and mute acceptance of the alien rule became shock. Then came the period of slow awakening, the sense of hurt and shame and resentment and also the despair to imitate the rulers and adopt their language, their manner and even their religion. Then followed the slow stirrings of dissert and the deep volleys, of revolt, eventually independence but at the cost of partition of the country. English literature became a means of Indian as well as giving and utterance to the hope and despairs, the enthusiasm and apathy, the thrill of joy and the stab of pain, in the nation's history as it moves from slavery to revolution, from revolution to independence and again from independence to the task reconstruction involving further experience of success and elation or futility and failure.

During the period from 1857 to 1920 the Indian ethos gradually underwent a sea-change from the shock of defeated and frustration and the trauma of inferioty to a new-found, self-awareness and self-confidence. The last decades from the post-independence generation there are two brilliant novels from Arun Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) and *The City and the River* (1990). *The Last Labyrinth* is a powerful story of loneliness, love and rivalry. The story also presents man's search of peace within himself, with the outside world and ultimately with God. Arun Joshi effectively used the image of labyrinth in the novel to project the complexity of life

and death. In *The City and the River* Joshi adopted the mode of myth to present an account of the struggle for power and supremacy through the story of a city-state.

During early 1960's another important Indian English novelist Anita Desi emerged on the scene and occupied a very important place. She was in limelight once again when her last novel *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) got a surprise nomination for the Booker Prize in 2000, ahead of the latest books of both Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth. In her novels she brings her sensitive insight into her characters, particularly the female characters and her brilliant use of language to picturize the inner world of her characters. The novelists of the older generation like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Bhabani Bhattacharya have referred to sex merely obliquely in their novels, novelist of the middle generation like Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya and some others have also not indulged in titillating descriptions of sexual act, though they have not shied away from sex.

Some of the novels worth mentioning in Indian writing in English are Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1935), *Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937), R.K. Narayan's *Swami and friends* (1935), *The Dark Room* (1938), Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope (1960), The Cow of the Barricades* (1940) and Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *A Silence of Desire* (1961). These novels also usually depicted the Indian society, especially the common man rather than the elite and the sophisticated, preferred the familiar to the fancied, explored the lanes of the outcaste, peasants and the working people. Not many of them cared to produce realistic or naturalistic fiction.

Raja Rao is most conscious of the problems of expression through an alien medium. He is aware of the fact that English is the language of the intellectual make-up of India, but the Indo-Anglian novelist has to use it to make vocal the complex

structures of emotions, ideas and sentiments. Raja Rao stresses the universality of his themes by parading the contemporary and remotely historical or mythological together. He uses a linguistic medium which marries sound and sense and which makes vocal the different areas of the narrative.

Mulk Raj Anand's contribution to the Indian English fiction of social realism is incontrovertibly great. His perspective of the Indian society is unparalleled by any other Indian English novelist. His depiction of north Indian rural and feudal society, especially that of the Punjab is as authentic as history. He should be remembered for the creation of a number of characters, which are indigenous to Indian society. But it is unfortunate that his novels have not received the critical attention very much deserved from Indian critics. The transition of Indian society in all its dimensions from decade to decade in the early part of the twentieth century has been known for the captured by Mulk Raj Anand microscopically and beautifully.

Mulk Raj Anand has been known for the creation of many memorable characters among which the male outnumber the female. He always articulated his sympathy for the oppressed and the exploited classes of Indian society. His tragedy is multi-dimensional and therefore deserves artistic depiction by a masterly mind. *Gauri* (1976), formerly entitled *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), deals with the life of the eponymous heroine. It was specially remembered by the Indian readers that Mulk Raj Anand has paid his artistic homage to the Indian women in this novel long before the feminist or woman's liberation movement became fashionable in our country. Women in the Indian society have always had to play the traditional roles like a submissive wife, procreative agent or an incarnation of sacrifice and so on.

After the era of writer who wrote about the pain of partition and joy of independence arrived a host of new writers. This was the era of immigrants who left

their land to explore new horizons. Writers like V.S Naipaul, Bharathi Mukherjee, Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to this category; the major theme in their works is the experience of the Indian immigrants are in a dilemma between the new world. Some of the problems that they deal with are suppression, frustration, anger, identity crisis and moral dilemmas. The dilemmas would not end with the first generation.

Bharathi Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of Our World* (1993), *Desirable Daughters* (2002), *The Tree Bride* (2004), Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006)and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) all belong to this category. Modern Indian English fiction is conspicuous for its realism. The novelist with observant eyes and understanding hearts have pried deeper and deeper into the varied multitudinous social life of India; both urban and rural areas have been fully explored. The image of India as represented by Anglo-Indian novelists like Taylor, Rudyard Kipling, and John Master and E. M. Forster's are far from realistic. The Anglo-Indian has missed the soul of India, the deeper currents of Indian politics and the passionate yearnings of her people.

Indian fiction in English is a living and evolving literary genre, although it is a late development. Actually the novel as a form was new to India. The earliest works of fiction in Indian English were translations and other propagandistic pamphlets. Fiction, being the most characteristic and powerful form of literary expression, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English literature properly known as Indian writing in English. It is generally agreed that in India, the novel is the most acceptable way of embodying experiences and ideas in the context of our time. Fiction, as a form of art, mirrors the social fabric and reflects the thought of an age. Many good English

novels and short stories have demonstrated the feasibility of Indian fiction writing. In fact, after writers like Manohar Malgonkar, Khuswant Singh and Babani Bhattacharya wrote about the theme of partition the patriotic impulse became the subject for many other writers.

Novelists like Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Nayantara Sahgal changed through their works the face of Indian English novel and their works contain seeds of further development. Anita Desai is one of India's leading author. Most of Desai's novels reveal the breakdown of relationships. She deals with the psychological aspects of her characters. Anita Desai explored the inner climate, the climate of sensibility in her novel and added a new dimension to the achievement of Indian women writers in English fiction.

The novelists of the second generation keep bringing out remarkable novels from time to time. The contribution of Kamala Markandaya, Manohar Malgonkar and others has already been recognized outside India. Beginning with Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, known for engaging comedies of north Indian urban middle class life, the women novelist have displayed not only authenticity but also brought a freshness to their works. Writers like Kamala Markandaya actually take the readers to the heart of south Indian villages where life has apparently not changed for centuries. She depicted rustic and urban realism in her work. Another writer Nayantara Sahgal, with her work *Rich Like Us* (1980) has shown a very charming way of storytelling and Kamala Das with her autobiographic and bold works treated the paths hitherto unknown for Indian English-Novelists.

Among the contemporary writers, Amitav Ghosh has shown his genius in the Indian English fiction his two novels *The Circle of Reason* (1986) and *The Shadow Lines* (1988) established Ghosh as the finest writer who were born out of the Post-

midnight children revolution in the Indo-Anglian fiction. Vikram Seth attained a dizzy height of success with *The Golden Gate* (1986) and *A Suitable Boy* (1993), with which he stunned the literary world. Upmanyu Chaterjee with his novel *English August* (1988) got the greatest success. His tone was ironic and he hit all the foibles of the Indian bureaucracy. Upmanyu Chaterjee brilliantly used the Indian English novel form. His contemporary Shashi Tharoor achieved greater achievements of Indian English fiction.

After 1980, and in the recent years, the tone of fiction is more vigorous than it has ever been before. In both theme and style, feeling and form, the modern novel heralds new visions and thoughts. In this perpetual poetic sensibility of their own places them in a manner that sometimes excels their British counterparts. Thus, it seems that the English literature in India was clogged and jammed for a long time and a just vigour has started producing a flood of remarkable Indian English literature. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a new spirit of revolution and transformation of thematic, linguistic and structural aspects of Indian English fiction. During this period the Indian English novelists started using vernacular forms of Indian English. It is on these favourable premises, in 1990, Rohinton Mistry emerged as a significant novelist.

The Indian English novelists have touched the various facts of Indian social life and have realistically exposed the buried evils which have been eating into the dynamic social and national life with a view to reforming the existing order. An Important offshoot of realism is the novelists' concern with the theme of humanism and its sufferings.

It is an existing trend that diasporic writers depict their suffering while talking about their experience in a new land. But writers like Shashi Tharoor, V.S Naipaul

and Rohinton Mistry have portrayed homeland India and review the homeland history from an immigrant's point of view. The diasporic Indians in this have been performing the important role of imaging India to the world. It is their sensitiveness to history-personal, racial and nation- that made them to respond to history. Many of the diasporic writers have set their novels in the background of historical events. They either re-narrate the history or mix the historical facts with fiction.

The earlier generation of diasporic writers have had continuous relationship with the land of their ancestors. The most recent diasporic writers are Salmon Rushdie, Vassanji, Bharathi Mukherjees and Rohinton Mistry. They have portrayed their ancestral land and it does not mean that they look back on the world they left behind. But there is only despair when they look forward to life in the cold, inhospitable world.

The renowned writer V.S Naipaul is considered as a leading novelist of the English speaking Caribbean. His writing deals with the cultural confusion of the third world and the problem of an outsider, a characteristic of his own experience as in Indian language, he had often heard the stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, so for him India became a fairy land to be cherished in memory.

Naipaul also becomes controversial because of his criticism on India. His novels like *Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Evira* (1958), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), and *A Bend in the River (1979),* were notable for his style and portrayal of homeland. One more writer who has the ability to portray the history of partition of India is Bapsi Sidhwa. She established herself as Pakistan's leading English novelist. Her notable works are the *Crow Eaters* (1992), and *An American Brat* (1998), novels that can be considered as a revisionist history of partition from a Pakistani's perspective. She portrays a realistic account of the India-Pakistan partition.

Salman Rushdie, one of the most celebrated writers of recent times, has more than a dozen of fictional and non-fictional works to this credit. He emerged on the literary horizon with the publication of *Grimus* (1975), which is a science fiction. He achieved fame with his second novel *The Midnight's Children* (1981) and won the booker prize. In this book he portrayed the period between 1910 and the emergency veritably blending history and fiction. Rushdie's views on Indian literatures other than English are none too flattering for Indians especially for those living in India. His works were superior in themes, narratology, imagery, aesthetic sensibility, vision or the world view because they write in English and writing in English itself gives a person a privileged position in this postcolonial world. He did not write only in English but also tries it by using words and expressions from Indian languages, translated into English or untranslated, not only exploiting the third-world themes but also the skin-deep love of the West for Indian languages. It is from these voices that the West learns some frequently used words, phrases and expressions in Hindi, Bangla, and Punjabi and so on.

Most of the diasporic novelists have portrayed their homeland political history and real incidents. Their portrayal focuses on the emergency period of India, the Indo-Pak- Bangladesh, war with allusion to all the leaders living or dead. Rushdie launched his attack against Indira Gandhi, Zia and Bhutto; similarly, Shashi Tharoor against Gandhi, Nehru, Indira and Menon. Mistry portrays the identity quest, he writes on the struggle of the Parsis. Living in a so-called multicultural society, diasporic writer Goldberg observers in his *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader* that identity and difference have framed the theoretical structure for the contests around multiculturalism.

> Vigorous attention has been given to defining identity; to analysing why identities are important generally and academically; to the implications of proliferating identities and situated subjects for putatively universal concepts of value and rationality; and to nations of homogeneity that supposedly unite us all. Hegemonic or dominant identities and the exclusions they purport to license have been challenged in terms of difference, of local or particular identities. (12)

Affected by such hegemonic and dominant identities, he wants to show that dominance of the native people throw the diasporic or exiled persons into the margin. This thing Mistry also wants to imply in his own community and through his writings, particularly in *Such a Long Journey*, he illustrates this theory.

Talking about his lineage, Rohinton Mistry was born into the Parsi community of Bombay on 3 July 1952. He was the second of four children, three boys and a girl. His younger brother, Cyrus, went on to be a respected playwright in Bombay. Rohinton's father was an advertising account executive, and he recalls his mother, happy in the role of nurturer, doing what all mothers perform of making what was barely enough seem like abundance.

He was educated at St Xavier's college, Bombay, a Jesuit-run institution with a heavily anglicized curriculum, having already, like many of his own young creations, been weaned on the children's books of Enid Blyton and Richmal Crompton. In the school library he discovered more English fiction: works by Agatha Christie and Leslie Charters, stories about the ace aviator Biggles and the canonical English literature, including Shakespeare, Dickens and the Victorian poets. Recollecting the shape of this curriculum years later, Mistry valued its breadth, but also recognized the mismatch of a colonial education in a postcolonial environment.

Mistry seems to be describing the same predicament that Salman Rushdie has seen as typical of the Bombay middle class of his generation, everywhere surrounded by images of a dream England. As an Arts degree with literature was thought to be an indulgence for boys then he got enrolled in a more worthwhile course in Mathematics and he completed his degree in Science in 1974.

By this time Mistry was already involved in the music scene in Bombay, gave performances and was seriously contemplating a career as a musical folk singer. Freny, who was not as competitively trained with Mistry's distractions, had decided a year earlier after her graduation to migrate to Canada, where she had her relations; one year later he also followed her. In 1975, he married Freny Elavia, who also graduated from St. Xavier's college, Bombay. That year Polydor released a disc *Ronnie Mistry* on which he sang his own compositions and folk songs. He had initially wanted to become a star in the musical world in Canada. But that was not to be. He turns up to another direction as a clerk and accountant in the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce from 1975-1985. He and Freny lived in a Toronto suburb Brampton for twenty years, having a materialistically comfortable life. To make an exclusive comment, Mistry is known to be a very private and a reticent man, fond of a quiet existence. He has lived thus even after his novels have gained international recognition and he has received prestigious awards.

In 1978, Mistry and his wife Freny took up evening courses at the University of Toronto. He studied English Literature and philosophy and got a second Bachelor's degree in1982. It was in the year 1983 in which he wrote his first short story *One Sunday* which won him the Hart House prize. He got the same award for another story *Lend me your Light*. In 1985 Auspicious Occasion won the Contributor's Award of Canadian Fiction. These awards resulted in Mistry's collection of short stories. The

ultimate was the publication of *Tales from Firozsha Baag* in 1987, set in a Parsi housing estate in Bombay; this book was brought out later in Britain and U.S.A. under a modified title, *Swimming Lessons and other Stories from Firozsha Baag*. The book was shortlisted for the Canadian Governor General's Award. Later on *Such a Long Journey* (1991) was short-listed for the Trillium Award, won the Governor General's Award and the Commonwealth writers' Prize for the best book. Mistry was propelled into a hugely successful career which has seen him publish a collection of short stories titled, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) and three novels: *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995) and *Family Matters* (2002), which received a host of literary prize; he thus achieved recognition as one of the most important contemporary writers of postcolonial literature. According to Morey, as he has mentioned in his *Rohinton Mistry: Contemporary World Writers,*

> Mistry's writing subverts colonial categories with subtlety in his power of description, his naming, the paradoxes and injustices his characters face in the quotidian dramas of his realist fiction. His literary style borrows from traditions from Persia, the West, and South Asia in his frequent use of storytelling, European literary allusions, and Indian dialects all brought to bear on his perspective of exile. (145)

Mistry is a fine story-teller and an absorbing writer of human experience and its complexities, for fictionalizing which he occasionally uses postmodernist technique and fantasy that shape his fictional universe. His life and writing highlights the futility of categories and also attempts to categories the challenge. He mentioned in an interview to The Hindu Newspaper in 2001, that he migrated because it seemed to be the trend. He also stated in the same interview that he shifted from music to literature.

In Canada his needs to survive forced him into the boring routine of a bank job, from which he sought to escape by studying part-time in the evenings for a degree in English and Philosophy.

Mistry's novel *Such a Long Journey* and *Family Matters* represent the Parsis, a minority community and its sense of unbalancing, mental as well as spatial, through the lives of the characters of the novel, their psychology, distinct nature, and their longing for belonging. This study attempts to focus on this longing for home, reflecting and studying the novel against the background of Parsi culture, highlighting the character of Nariman, the protagonist and all the other characters.

Mistry is a contemporary writer who writes back from the place of migration critically about India, Indian political scenario, minorities, regional identities, history, environment, cultural pluralism and gender, among others. He himself belongs to a minority community in India and he has lived through many complex variants of Parsi culture and history and has a deep nostalgia about the past of Parsi with all its richness and intellectual qualities and its elegance and sophistication. Srivastava, in his famous article *Pidgin English or Pigeon Indian? Journal of Postcolonial Writing* discusses;

> Babu English as an Indian English that imitates British English to the point of absurdity, divorced from its own context, unable to convey adequately the contours and connotations of Indian life. This derogatory term brings up issues of authenticity and power within an Indian context. (115)

Much of Mistry's work is both informed and influenced by his situation as a younger generation Parsi in India and the issues related with Parsi background, culture, history, identity and experience. In order to have an estimate of Mistry's work, art and imagination, it is therefore imperative to focus upon some of the above

related preoccupations as they surface as themes and narratives in Mistry's fiction. It may be pointed out that Mistry belongs to a much older Parsi diaspora beyond his status as a contemporary diasporic writer situated in Canada. The British colonization of India, sometimes forcibly and at others voluntarily, displaced people throughout the British Empire. Indians were transported to the West Indies, Fiji, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and other places to work as indentured work force on plantations, agricultural sites and so forth. Indentured labour was a kind of semi-slave situation, though minus the great oppression and brutality in the slave-system.

Mistry resides in Canada as a writer of Indian diaspora. Mistry is also a member of sub-cultural Indian diaspora - he is a Parsi Zoroastrian, whose ancestors were forced into exile by the Islamic conquest of Iran, who ultimately landed on the western coast of India centuries back. Thus, it must be understood that the Parsi background in India and elsewhere is one of multiple displacements. *Such a Long Journey*, for instance, is prefaced with three epigraphs that evoke a mystical quest motif resembling the Holy Grail. The Parsi quest for place, roots, past and heritage is fore grounded, like the other ones from *Gitanjali* (1910) and Eliot's *Journey of the Magi* (1927). Mistry is too mush conscious of this dislocated sense of belonging and its presence in multi-ethnic and multi-regional India, to be oblivious of his own roots and those of his ancestors. Hence a collective memory of his community radiated into the present marks Mistry's keen sense of observation towards nations and modernity, the vast difference between past and contemporary experience.

The language spoken by Parsis today is Gujarati, but its etymology is much older Gujarati. So the Gujarati dialect spoken by Parsis is different from the standard Gujarati. The Parsi diaspora in India thus predates European colonialism, being a direct result of the outgoing influences of Islam much easier than the former was

anywhere close to India. The importance given to Parsi life in literature is however, belated and is related to their feeling of insecurity in the post-colonial India when Indian democratic structure began to shape its own course, giving prominence to Hindi language and regional identities. The need for a Parsi writer to assert the Parsi identity, religion and culture in its uniqueness and separateness, in an attempt to oppose the merging and evaporation, gradually of marginal groups and cultural identities into the Indian mainstream religion and politics. Thus there was this sudden prominence of the Parsi fictional sub-genes in the hands of writers like Bapsi Sidhwa, Farrukh Dhoudy, Rohinton Mistry, Firdans Kanga, Boman Desai and others. All these writers have been engaged in retrieving bits and parts of the Parsi past en route its superiority and elegance.

As such, Parsis have been quite used in religious fundamentalism, oppression and threat be it the Arabs in Persia or the Mughals in India from the partition in post-colonial India. A connected subject and one that is significant for understanding Mistry's point of view is the Parsi mind set and attitude towards life and the idea of survival as a minority community. In the post-independence era, with the ever growing and colliding regional cultures in India, the minority communities, including Sikhs have constantly been under threat of subordination and intimidation. Bill Ashcroft, in his very famous book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, states that

> The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place. There are two distinct processes by which it does this. The first, the abrogation or denial of the privilege of "English" involves a

> rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. The second, the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege. (38)

In Mistry's fiction, as one might expect, these strategies of language-use overlap and interlock in a way which makes it difficult to distinguish agency from response, cause from effect. He is a writer with a great honesty of imagination. He does not attempt to follow fads and fashions. His writing suggests both sensitivity to the beauty and the fragmentations, the failings and the cruelties of his world. Most of his fictions are humanistic premise that the universal lies in the ordinary. This is the trajectory he has chalked out for himself in the course of his brief but meteoric literary career. From the first story, he explores the two poles of the world he knows, the Canada of the new migrant people and the middle-class of Bombay Parsi and he moves on to an elaboration of the various shades of the world of the Parsi community and their problematic positioning within India in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*.

His next novel *Such a Long Journey* sums up the life and career of the migrant writer belonging to a people who had wandered a long time ago. The multiple spaces Mistry inhabits-the Parsi, the Indian and the Canadian-raise important questions about the identity, ethnicity, migrancy, diaspora, nation and multiculturalism that have been central to the various posts like poststructuralism, postmodernism and postcolonialism. Articulations of difference connects the variegated discourses of otherness like feminism, postcolonialism and subalternity as differences of gender, class, ethnicity, religion and caste negotiate with the same for space recognition. The relationship of difference with the same has been of particular concern to postcolonial theory. The most explicit model of difference in postcolonial theory has been Homi

Bhabha's model of cultural difference, which he juxtaposes against the older model of cultural diversity on which the nation state has been predicated.

Mistry has responded to the ecological relationship between Man and Nature around them differently. D.G. Jones mentions that the difference of outlook and treatment between the English and the French Canadian writers is conditioned by their respective cultural and historical development; he writes,

> Compared to their English Canadian counterparts, many French Canadian writers have themselves been more deeply infected by the garrison mentality and that mentality has been reinforced by the weapons of Western culture that French Canada has traditionally emphasized for use against a hostile world, namely, the spiritual weapons of mortification and renunciation. English – Canadian culture has generally placed more emphasis on the material weapons for transforming the world, on technology and scientific technique. (*Butterfly in the Rock* 9)

Both the English and the French Canadian literature tend to be sterile due to their extremity of attitude and have been criticised by writers like Leonard Cohen in his *Beautiful Losers* (1966).

A *Fine Balance* (1995) was a novel that truly established Mistry as a notable writer, and the one comparable to other diasporic writers who have made India their subject-matter; India looked at from a distance by a writer who recollects his memories and close observations. A *Fine Balance* in its range and panoramic quality is comparable with Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) and Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989).

In his novel Mistry reinvents so much detail to cover almost every aspect of human experience. Mistry's view is poignant and humane, with a decisive concern, sympathy for the subaltern, variety or position in terms of caste, class, profession or gender. There must be at least two dozen major and minor characters in the novel, each of them having to perform some or the other role towards a collective vision behind the narrative, which in turn is not always easy to pin-point. Likewise locales and sites kept altering in the story, to give the impression of various journeys of people, unrelated, but criss-crossing each other in terms of the mysterious ways of destiny. And the way these people are brought together in Bombay explains how cosmopolitanism of Bombay becomes the centre of experience, a kind of competitive cauldron of fates and destinies, jostling for place and balance. The stories of each of these small and major figures have a chequered background but not always happy, which foreground the general message behind the lone narrative that one has to strike *A Fine Balance* between negatives and positives, defeats and triumphs, happiness and tragedy in order to go along with a life full of uncertainties and contradiction. Truly, Mistry achieved in *A Fine Balance* which few writers at his age could have hoped in terms of maturity, knowledge, technical skill and world-view that placed him finally in the category of front-ranking contemporary writers.

A notable feature of this novel is Mistry's widening the scope of his theme and preoccupations. While *Tales from Firozsha Baag* and *Such a Long Journey* focus on the Parsi inner life and its imponderables, *A Fine Balance* in its portrayal of India of the 1970s extends the focus to include other non-Parsi minorities as they confront the post-colonial order or disorder. Mistry concentrates his attention in this novel on the criminalization of politics as it began with the Emergency in 1975. The lower castes,

villagers and minorities in particular were the helpless, powerless victims of the suppleness thus unleashed.

A Fine Balance is a record of this shameful episode that is rendered with remarkable poignancy and honesty. For Mistry this was another important time in contemporary Indian history. Mistry also intended to reveal the diverse and complex realities of India, to include people from several streams and occupations who reveal a collective pattern of the hybrid Indian panorama. Although the novel opens with Dina Dalal, a Parsi woman and her story in Bombay, it soon enlarges its scope to include her lodger Maneck Kohlah, a boy from a hill station in the North and a little later, Ishvar and Omprakash, her apprentice tailors, who came from central India and are charmers by caste. The narrative then opens up to include a number of identity less than common folk like ragpickers, beggars, thieves, shopkeepers, workers, presented obviously as victims and people at the receiving end in power politics.

A Fine Balance provides a scathing indictment on the power of the elite and the moneyed, in which the marginalized and the powerless had no role whatsoever. Yet, most of these people have maintained a precarious fine balance between life and death-like existence, in short, exercised tolerance and patience to pass through the impossible ordeal of life, the supreme example being of Dina Dalal herself, another power-gender victim at the hands of her brother Nuswan, and then many others. But she is the one who stands up for herself, her dignity and freedom, unlike many others. Those who are not able to maintain the balance, for instance, Maneck and his friend Avinash, are murdered brutally or committed suicide. On the other hand, those like Ishvar and Om who passes through the extreme violence handed over to them which nearly destroys them and leaves them deformed and destitute. So, at the end of the novel Dina Dalal has grown old, lost her prized independence which reduces her to a

state of dependency. Om Prakash's castration, points to the symbolic impotence of the populace. Ishvar is crippled by the loss of both his legs and is reduced to begging on the streets of a changed Bombay, with Om carrying him in a little trolley for begging.

A Fine Balance, which was published in 1995, had it been written in India's regional languages, might have become a classic of Dalit literature, The three broad issues confronted in the narrative details are gender, caste and power oppression. In addition, the pathetic rape of Ishvar and Narayan's mother Roopa in exchange for a ripe mango by the lascivious watchman of the orchard, bring to the fore the age-old sexual exploitation in India. There is a particularly moving aspect of the story when one looks back at the background of Om and Ishvar, who were never destined to be tailors in the first place, being charmers. It is Dukhi, their father who took cudgels against convention to release his sons from caste stigma to make them tailors. The way their brother is burnt alive, their house put to flames speaks of the power of the high caste people not to allow the lower caste to cross but they are supposed to live in. In the same way the disillusionment of Maneck with the denudation of hills in Himalayas, and the so-called multinational interest, is foregrounded by his strained relations with his father.

Knowledge, in other works, is itself something dangerous. The murder of the dynamic student leader Avinash is a murder of the representative voice, which is silenced before it can effect a positive change in Maneck's Jews about contemporary reality. Interestingly, the novel ends, close on the heels of the Gandhi's assassination by her own Sikhs as a dog is run over by a vehicle on the Delhi road; this sickness is indicative of the larger dehumanized state to which man is condemned, as the novel illustrates.

Mistry's most recent novel *Family Matter* (2002) can be called a retreat into the Bombay Parsi world and all the pressing concerns related with it. But, as the title indicates, this novel is much personalized, being tied to a relatively smaller group of characters, as compared with the nation-wide canvass in A *Fine Balance*. Mistry, has travelled to the realities of the recent times in India. The city has been renamed Mumbai, though it holds its old cosmopolitan, hybrid character. However, no one who lived through the 1992-1993 period of bomb blast can help think about the change brought over by communal politics. Secondly the focus in *Family Matters* is more personal than political effect does leave an impact upon the life and profession of Yezard Chinoy, one of the central figures, and another minor figure.

In this novel a child, nine year old Jehangir Chinoy, younger son of Roxana and Yezad, plays the main role. On the other entrance is the patriarchal figure of Nariman Vakkel, Jehangir's paternal grandfather. It is through these figures that the reader is made aware of much of the action or family politics. The chief motif of the story is the way the child tries to understand the quarrels and the puzzles of the family and wishes hard to coherence, harmony and happiness. But this is abortive as the elders fail to come together and disharmony causes splits and lack of happiness. Yezad had once dreamt of immigrating to Canada but his hopes were dashed by unfair interview procedures at the Canadian High Commission. The third is the narrative technique of flashbacks that point to Nariman Vakil's guilt-ridden past.

Mistry has dealt with the aspect of ecological and environmental crisis in his works. In comparison to their English and French counterparts, the South Asian Canadian writers have treated man-nature relationship in their works from a completely different perspective. Particularly, writers hailing from a warm country like India, the Nature in the mountains region is considered to be more human-

friendly than in the arid and desert region, As such the Eastern attitude toward Nature is based more on caring and sharing. But the influence of the Western culture especially their emphasis on technology and development has become the chief cause for the environmental degradation and ecological crisis in a country like India. Such ecological crisis in the South-Asian countries demands an altogether different approach with a view to dealing with the destructive effect of modernism based on consumerism and industrialisation and the consequent existential crisis. Mistry stands out as another spokesperson of the ecological movement.

The shadow of the Western racial superiority, the celebrated history of the Whites, made all colonials feel ashamed of their unimportance and inferiority. But this intellectually colonized state did manage to free itself from this feeling, so that writers and poets not only managed to write about people and places back home in the erstwhile colonies, but also won acclaim as authentic versions of experiences which were not given due place in literature and history. Hence, Mistry's decision to write about the subterranean, enclosed Parsi life in Bombay can be seen to have its own justification. Mistry's decision to turn to writing was his avoidance of the Musical Medias' glare turned out to be yet another of his reserved nature. This made Rohinton Mistry an international celebrity, but he can still enjoy the aloofness and the poise of a serious writer.

Mistry's sensitive rendering and interrogation of human life involved or trapped in forces not always helpful or in control of an ordinary man or woman. Hence, Mistry's novelistic appeal cuts across several links of barriers of caste, class, community, nationality or gender to focus a powerful humanistic vision of the contemporary life at its crossroads. His works are equipped with rich symbols, powerful images and appropriate, fertile metaphors; he rarely tells a disconnected or

discontinued narrative requiring the first deconstructed and then reconstructed, in the vein of a Rushdie or Shashi Tharoor. Rather, his narratives draw their richness from their closeness to contemporary facts and a sensitive understanding of felt life.

This disillusionments undergo the hopes of survival or betterment to engage in two of his best works, *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* stand ample testimony to this argument; these are both novels which highlight either middle or lower middle class life in cities, or the plight of the subaltern, suppressed human being in a world full of violence and corruption. Another reason is that Mistry has identified himself with a specific cultural or national preoccupation, in this case, South-east Asian communities not like Naipaul, Rushdie or Bharathi Mukherji, have drifted into wider areas of interest, beyond their place of birth, upbringing or the western life they have chosen after their migration. Mistry has certainly imbibed or learnta lot from his Parsi background, their history, exile, pre and postcolonial experience andconfusing in which the Parsis find themselves in India now, but he has not written anything on Canadian life, culture, history or environment, considering that he has been living there for a long time.

The cultural world of the realist novel, according to Philippe Hamon, is a celebration of the stability of the bourgeois European self, represented by the main protagonist who is well integrated within his community. Mistry's as works had been accepted by critics as those by an Indian with sufficient knowledge and experience of the local life. S. Ramaswamy has put in *Commentaries on Canadian Literature* as follows:

> Rohinton Mistry is an insider to Firozsha Baag, Bombay and his vignettes are naturally totally authentic. Ironically perhaps he is able to achieve this authenticity as he has distanced himself by immigrating to

> Canada so that he can produce the effect of an insider/outsider to a scene every detail of which is etched and engraved in his mind. Remembering, re-enacting, re-creating that place-time-people with accuracy, understanding and inside is the vision of Rohinton Mistry. (54)

In *The fiction of Rohinton Mistry* edited by Jaydipsinh Dodiya in 1999, there are three articles that deal with *Tales from Firozsha Baag.* All these studies consider the stories of Mistry, which are instances of intense experiences dealing with post-colonial and diaspora issues. In the second volume of *Paris Fiction,* Novy Kapadiya states that "there are a number of studies on Mistry's short fiction, focusing on transcultural discourses and diasporic dilemma" (43). Nilufer Bharucha presents many aspects of the Parsi existence in India in a systematic way. Bharucha, herself being a Parsi, provides a lot of authentic information in this book, and also analyses Mistry's oeuvre in the light of post-colonial, feminist, minority and diaspora discourses. She considered his *Family Matters* as a work that declare his coming of age as a novelist *Rohinton Mistry: Ethnic Enclosures and Transcultural Spaces*:

> The compassion for the dalits and the other unfortunates first centre-staged in *A Fine Balance* has come to ripeness in *Family Matters* making it till date Mistry's finest novel… Mistry has transcended both the self and the others. The self being the persona of the writer and also his Parsi self; the other being the wide world. Here all three have come together in an epiphanic moment that speaks across national, ethnic and gender boundaries, with a voice that cannot be denied. (209)

The above statement is evident enough that the young storyteller presented in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* has come a long way. He was not only concerned about the

Parsi Community and its scattered existence in India and abroad but his relationship through the way the world perceived his community to various other cultural sets.

Mistry occupies a space as a writer in the diasporic literature and his identity for literary purposes is transnational and as such he writes from an angle of postmodern imagination from a distance. The whole idea of home and belonging is problematized in this space in the sense that the elision of national boundaries and identities poses a question mark. While most writers underline to refine their relation to native space and narrative against western hegemony, those who belong to marginalized groups and minorities have to further take up the matter of dominant national ideologies geared to race, class and religious fundamentalism. The role of English language likewise is no less crucial to making the world audience aware of its indigenization in the hands of the post-colonial writer, his race or linguistic background. It involves a re-writing of histories and reality, as there have been maximum violence and suppression.

In this sense, Mistry's writing effects understood the reality and suppressed histories of communities such as those of Parsis. Mistry's another aspect of writing concerned with the same facts is the way it becomes an ethnic discourse within the post-colonial theoretical and critical space. There are different writers in Canada, belongs to different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and those from India are no exception. Some writers write with an awareness of being Punjabis, Gujaratis, Maharashtrians, Muslims and so on. It is a different matter though, that several diasporic writers have chosen to merge their identity with the Western place of their immigration.

Mistry's major theme that emerges in his writing from *Tales from Firozsha Baag* to *Family Matters* is the Parsi life and its varied contours, especially in the

context of post-colonial or post-independence India. Mistry highlights two or three related aspects in his works. In *Tales from Firozsha Baag* he dealt with the level of selecting ordinary characters in all their comic, eccentric and poignant traits but with humour, irony and invention to provide local colour. In his short story *Tales from Firozsha Baag* writes about not only communal life of Parsis in Bombay but also the childhood memories.

The second related theme in Mistry's works is the growing sense of disillusionment with the Indian Post-colonialism, the domination by the major Hindu race, the marginalized status of minorities and the general unease of the Parsis having reduced to unimportance and inconsequential existence. The chief source of thematic strain emerges from *Such a Long Journey.* Relation between public and private lives is another theme in Mistry's works. While *Tales from Firozsha Baag* tentatively touches upon this problem, it is in *Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters* that the theme is really tackled with intensity and seriousness. Gushad Noble's family is constantly interfered with, is distributed and problematized by outside events and he has to strike a balance between his dreams, aspirations, personal and domestic peace and the intrusions that threaten to disintegrate it.

The whole novel shows that in the character of Gushad attempt to maintain his inner nobility, tolerance and restrain against the distributing events that are basically evil andviolent in the character. *A Fine Balance* too shows the dreams and desires of Dina Dalal, Om, Ishvar and Maneck getting thwarted by external agencies and political changes. The canvas of *A Fine Balance* naturally necessities a wider treatment of the theme of conflicts between the public and the private, in the sense that Parsi and other characters in the story undergo inhuman attacks on their identity and physical self, leaving them destitute and paralyzed. In *A Fine Balance* there is

little hope for the individual to effectively and positively carve out a personal destiny in the face of the politics of revenge, violence and caste-class divide. In *Family Matters* though the personal life-world is more pronounced and protective and the novel deals with filial complications, yet public and impersonal events do obtrude and influence human lives. It is the Parsi world-view and the point of view as minority that dominates the question of human existence in a world beset with conflicts, revenge and violence.

Another major theme that Rohinton Mistry uses in his work is the treatment of subalterns, poor and the suppression he undergoes in the social hierarchy. In most of Mistry's works he uses as major characters ordinary people, who do not possess much power or money, and are thus dependent on small means to lead life under a variety of pressures. Many figures in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* are less than ordinary – servants, ayahs, shopkeepers, vagabonds, rogues, and slum dwellers – who have to depend on others to make life liveable. In *Such a long Journey,* though, Gushad is a clerk in a bank. Khodabad building – ramshackle dilapidated, crumbling, old – is itself a symbol of decay and neglect. Those who live in it are also without importance or power or a side to protect them. In fact the wall of Khodabad building which is urinated upon by passers-by the stands for the inhuman and unhealthy attacks on privacy and decency. Gushad Noble, the survivor of the once elegant Parsi family, is reduced to subalternity as a means. There are real subalterns in the society as well – Miss Kutpitia and Tehmul, to name only two. A *Fine Balance* is a novel full of such figures – Dina Dalal, Om Ishvar, the lesser beggars, rogues, working class people – all stands for subalternity in its different forms, that of gender, class, caste, economy etc. In *Family Matters,* though subalternity is not present to this extent, yet Parsis are themselves at the receiving end, being unprotected and politically week. Nariman's

ex-girlfriend in his youth, Lucy, is ultimately reduced to poverty and dependence. From this one can judge that Mistry has a deep-rooted concern for the poor, week, politically exploited, economically dependent, and generally powerless individual as a strong aspect of humanism. This also exposes, directly and indirectly, the villainy, evil, corruption and rapacious practices of those in power, others who hold the economic strings, or those who dominate and oppress the ordinary people on the basis of caste-religion superiority or dominance.

Lastly, one can say that Mistry is basically a writer of urban/city setting. This is natural, for he was born and he grew up in Bombay, in a mixed, interracial atmosphere. It is known that a writer can write best about what he has known intimately. As such, Mistry possesses the keen observation to recreate in his fiction the compulsions, tensions and contradictions of urban life – but as to how these effect and change ordinary lives of ordinary peoples. City life, in its crowded, varied, humorous and tragic aspects, is something that has given Mistry the great opportunity to exploit his talent to create panoramic portraits of life caught between various bulls and pressures, yet there is an urge to make life look somewhat bearable.

In each of his works he uses narrative techniques using chronology, characters and description. He balances the demands of linear narrative chronology with the parallel realities and an alternative time frame to co-exist. The characters in the fictional world of Mistry are far from heroic, in the classical sense of the term. They are cranky and their stories consist of apparently unheroic struggles to make ends meet and maintain domestic happiness despite serious material difficulties. He also uses the interaction between character and environment productively to introduce the important themes of the nature of faith and belonging both in group as well as national. The theme of the nature of faith is seen mostly through his depiction of

productive opposition. That takes them beyond the power of choice. The detailed description allows the social backgrounds to be created and function as detailed tapestries against which the characters evolve. Mistry is never hasty in his descriptions, whether in moments of relative peace or in moments of unbearable anguish.

Mistry's writing, especially in the short story collection, *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, admirably captures. In this volume, the central protagonist replicates Mistry's movement from the tight-knit and reasonably self-sufficient Bombay Parsi community to the unknown and potentially hostile spaces of Canada. Both here, and in the later works, where the thorny relationship between the Parsis and majority of social formations becomes the focal point, there is a pervasive sense of an art springing not from one culture alone, but from the tension between overlapping cultures and contexts.

There is often also a contradictory set of impulses at work: both attractions to the new society, and at the same time a fear of such total assimilation that the old coordinates of identity may be lost. This manifests itself, in the later stories in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, in a tension between the desire to belong in the new host society and the urge to hold onto something of the old one. Sometimes involuntary or even subconscious, such ambivalence appears to be at work in Kersi in *Lend Me Your Light*, whose desire to settle into his new Canadian home is tempered by a need to cross-refer his experiences to the known and familiar structures and relationships of Bombay. Mistry's novels are truly polyphonic affairs. His tone captures both the rhythms, colloquialisms, hesitations and digressions of oral storytelling, and the social sweep and measured ironies of the novel. In this respect, he is one of those writers who complicate the sanctified critical categories which govern our language when we

seek to classify literature. Words such as realism, modernism, postmodernism and so on do not adequately describe the feel of Mistry's novels. This generic hybridity can be seen as the direct result of the migrations in both cultural and the Parsi experience of the last thousand or so years and personal in Mistry's own long journey, which has been allowed the fermentation of those ingredients outlined above. The degree, Mistry's perennial subject is loss, memory and the possibilities for new beginnings, is evidenced in his uncollected story, *The More Important Things*, which appeared in the *Canadian Fiction Magazine* in 1989 as a trailer for an as yet unfinished second volume of short stories.

Rohinton Mistry uses the local and universal themes in his novel and short stories. In his short stories *Tales from Firozsha Baag* he uses both local as well as universal themes as in the form of Canada. Many local colour stories share an antipathy to change and a certain degree of nostalgia for an always-past golden age. A celebration of community and acceptance in the face of adversity characterizes women's local colour fiction. Thematic tension or conflict between urban ways and old-fashioned rural values is often symbolized by the intrusion of an outsider or interloper who seeks something from the community. In *Tales from Firozsha Baag,* local colour focuses on the characters, dialect, customs, topography and some other features, particularly in region. This was shown in the few lines of *Swimming Lessons*:

> Mother and Father read the first five stories, and she was very sad after reading some of them, he 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

> and everything he left behind, because if he likes it over there why would he not write stories about that, there must be so many new ideas that his new life could give him. (243)

Frequently, a work of his fiction implies a few ideas about the nature of all men and women or about the relationship of human beings to each other or to the universe. Positions on the lack of humanity on human beings, confrontation with nature and society, individual struggle toward understanding, awareness and spiritual enlightenment, conflict between passion and responsibility, ideal from past on the present shown as the Universal theme in *Tales from Firozsha Baag.*

In the end, considering a writer migrant, local, national or universal does not really matter, since from a modern or better still a postmodern and postcolonial perspective, all writers nowadays belong to Anglo-Saxon critics called World Literature, a much broader and more inclusive concept than Goethe's Welthliteratur, which served as the prototype for a universal conception of culture where exclusion was, in fact, the norm.

This thesis concentrates on the local and universal themes used by Rohinton Mistry, as they are evident from his collection of short stories *Tales from Firozsha Baag.* The thesis is divided into five chapters including the introduction and conclusion.

The First chapter introduces Indian writing in English and some of the Indian writers like R.K. Narayanan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Das, Vikram Seth and Rohinton Mistry. Rohinton Mistry as a diasporic writer and his works like *Such a Long Journey, A Fine Balance*, *Family Matters* and his short story *Tales from Firozsha Baag.* And this chapter mainly focuses on the local and universal theme in his short story *Tales from Firozsha Baag.*

The second chapter deals with the idea of nostalgia of the past in the many ways of life. It is occasionally manifested in the idealization of religious rituals which are seen as a way to preserve the past and prevent the disintegration of the family and the community. It also takes the form of reminiscing about childhood which is seen as more stable and reassuring world than the present. These reminiscences, presented in this story of various characters in both the short stories and the novels, are linked to the changed circumstances of the Parsi community following Independence. This politico-culturalnostalgia helps to create a sense of loss about the changed circumstances of the characters in both domestic and public spheres.

The third chapter deals with the ideas of imagination of migration is dichotomous by nature, looked on the horns of a dilemma, neither affiliated with the old root culture, nor fully fitting with the new adopted one. This also brings almost sorrow than joy. One cannot blame his country but he/she can do the best at the native land in alienation.

The fourth chapter deals with the idea of age in Mistry's short stories, it consists of the world of the women, age and the angst of generation. Women dominate the private realm with their nurturing attention and the hard labour through which the stability of the family is endured. Age is a central theme in Mistry's stories; and relationships between and across generations is a major concern whenever Mistry discusses the private realm of the family and the household. The private world here is the space of home and family, inhabited mostly by women and children.

The fifth chapter consolidates the observations and inferences made in the preceding chapters, concentrating on Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag* as a well-structured imaginative story collection which portrays the realm of dramatizing this Parsi world. The burden of these tales is to dramatize the conflict and adaptability of

the Parsi community to the fast changing milieu in India and abroad. In any case, the Parsis are immigrants, be it in India or Canada, their alienation is relative yet fruitful. Nevertheless, this chapter concludes one thing as certain, that is, whether it is the East or the West, they have maintained their identity, values and tradition.

Chapter 2

Tradition and Nostalgia

Nostalgia is one of the main themes in Mistry's fiction. This nostalgia is generally a longing for a past way of life that is forever lost in the main characters. It is occasionally manifest in the idealization of religious rituals which are seen as a way to preserve the past and prevent the disintegration of the family and the community. It also takes the form of reminiscing about childhood which is seen as a more stable and reassuring world than the present. These reminiscences, presented in the stories, are linked to the Parsi community following Independence. This Politico-cultural nostalgia helps to create a sense of loss about the changed circumstances of the characters in both domestic and public spheres.

In *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, Rohinton Mistry creates a fictional Parsi enclave, Firozsha Baag, in metropolitan Bombay. With richness of detail and subtle irony, he evokes a Parsi world with its customs and traditions, conventions and food habits. With deftness, he displays the Parsi mentality of remaining confined to themselves and with wit and humours their erotic, cultural, as well as scatological details. The stories are incongruent and yet interwoven. They share the same Parsi locale and mood, yet each distinctly unfolds different aspects of Parsi specificity. Rohinton Mistry uses a number of Parsi terms in every story and refers profusely to Parsi customs, beliefs, superstitions and religious rituals. As Uma Parameswaran points out in his book *Literature of the Indian Diaspora in Canada* that, "Mistry has bolstered the India-in-Canada reality by confidently using Parsi words without either glossary or textual explanations such as resorted to by earlier writers of Commonwealth Literature". (21)

There is a supposed tradition among the Parsis that suggests that their prophet lived and taught as far back as 5000 to 6000 BC. There is no historical evidence to support it though. Eckehard Kulke pointed out that, this belief "is of enormous psychological relevancy because it helps the Parsees [sic] to that feeling of religious exclusivity necessary for the existence and survival of the community". (*The Parsi in India: A Minority as an Agent of Social Change* 47)

Local colour in short story focuses on the characters, dialect, customs, topography and some other features, particularly in religion. The characters in the stories concerted with district or religion rather than with the individual characters it may become character types, sometimes quaint or stereotypical. The characters are marked by their adherence to the old ways, by dialect and by particular personality traits central to the region. In women's local colour fiction, the heroines are often unmarried women or young girls. Local writers demonstrate the exploitation of condescension toward their subjects that the local colour.

Rohinton Mistry, as an insider from Firozsha Baag, Bombay, and his vignettes are thus authentic. Ironically, by immigrating to Canada he is able to achieve this authenticity as he has distanced and so that he can produce the effect of an insider as well as outsider to a scene every detail of which is etched and engraved in his mind. The vision in Mistry is to remember that, to re-enact and to recreate that place-time-people with accuracy, understanding and insight. Mistry in this collection is concentrated on five stories briefly they are: *Auspicious Occasion, One Sunday, The Ghost of Firozsha Baag, Of White Hairs and Cricket* and *Swimming Lessons.*

In the horizon of Firozsha Baag is a new locale that takes shape to stroke in each story. With the skill of a miniature painter, Mistry peels off layer after layer off the residents of the Baag just as from the walls of Baag in Block A: "Something

would have to be done about peeling paint and plaster; in some places the erosion was so bad, red brick lay exposed" (8). The residents of the Baag totally lies exposed in an excellent Baag. For detail, Mistry has an eye and vignettes are executed with a deft hand where the local colour is totally authentic.

Each story in this collection is complete in itself. This story also forms a pattern of inter-references that creates an impression of familiarity as the reader gradually gets a sense of a close-knit community. Mistry ways to clear any nostalgia for the great ancestry of the legends that form the community's sense of identity. He did not choose about the story of any successful businessman or industrialist, preferring to write about the life of the ordinary Parsi community in relation to its lived existence, away from myths. Most of his characters are drawn with a sense of realism.

The nostalgia for bygone days is echoed by many characters in the stories. That was first seen in Tehmina from *One Sunday* in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. It seems that at this stage in his writing, Mistry is still ironical about this attitude. Though Tehmina is presented as a victim of circumstances, she is also a political caricature with her cataract, her sloppy duster-coat and her irrational fears. She is one of the compound dwellers who enjoy the luxury of using the fridge of her better-off neighbour Najamai.

Despite her sloppy appearance and her straitened circumstances, Tehmina has retained habits of luxury from earlier times. She needs the ice because to mix it with scotch. When she hears music coming from the Boyces' flat, she rejoices that it is Strauss' "Blue Danube" (32). That was also seen in Western music being cultivated in *Lend Me Your Light* in the character of Jamshed who listens only to western soundtracks, imported or smuggled into the country by his relatives who travel

abroad. He learns to revere everything western and to loathe everything Indian. Percy and Jamshed develop their own Jargon to talk about the Ghatons, the non-Parsis who are now everywhere. The peak of Jamshed's alienation from his immediate reality comes in the form of his flight from the country to the USA. The main narrator of the story feels torn between home and somewhere else, when Jamshed comes back to India it is to rail at the country, people, services, etc.

In *Auspicious Occasions* Behram Roje, the Parsee community of Bombay focus attention between husband and wife Rustomji and Mehroo are analysed with keen insight. The husband, twenty years older than his wife, after many years of marriage and in spite of his toothless mouth glances salaciously at the young charwoman Gajra surreptitiously peeking from behind the newspaper, "The Times of India" (9), which serves a useful purpose hoping for his wife to be away so that he can be a little more bold or little less adventurous at home. In the title of the story *Auspicious Occasion* Mehroo who goes to the prayer meeting discovers that the old man has been murdered and returns home. Meanwhile, Rustomji's shirt sees gleaming white red "... starchy whiteness aroused in him feelings of resplendence and invincibility, and he had no objection to the viewing of his progress by the street" (19). This is short lived as he receives his full quota of betel nut juice aimed at him from the upper deck passenger in the Bombay bus. This shows the local theme in red colour.

> On the upper deck sat fate in the form of a mouth chewing tobacco and betel nut, a mouth with a surfeit of juice and aching jaws crying for relief. And when the bus halted at Marine Lines, fate leaned out of the window to release a generous quantity of sticky, viscous, dark red

> stuff… The squirt of tobacco juice caught him between the shoulder blades: blood red on sparkling white. (16-17)

The red colour in the white shirt on the Rustomji body and the blood red pan on the dugli of Rustomji are connected in an interesting juxtaposition. The quarrel that ensues between the enraged Rustomji and the irate mob that provides a funny situation where very native choice misuses are hurled about contributing to local colour and an increase in the Indo-English vocabulary. Throughout the story Mistry uses the native words but it is not just Indian but also specifically Parsi whose life at the Firozsha Baag is being authentically recreated.

The story opens with the problem of Rustomji and his leaking toilet roof. It lays emphasis on the comic elements in the plight of Rustomji, who will later come across as a surly resident of the Baag, avoided by the children. He is both a victim and an oppressor and he is far from likeable character. Rustomji's paradoxical character conveys some of the concern of Parsi community. Like in all traditional societies, Rustomji performs a balancing act between the desire to embrace modernity and the need for the perpetuation of ancestral customs. Mistry separate both the character of Mehroo and Rustomji because of the assassination of the Parsi priest, temple inmate the awareness of that crime does not reside outside it does not exist in the Parsi community. This story is presented as a tragic comic fool, community, its pattern of beliefs, its way of life, domestic rituals, contradiction and its relationship in groups belonging. It also introduces the themes that are elaborated through the entire collection.

The second story in this collection *One Sunday* introduces a few characters connected with Firozsha Baag and to the neighbouring Tar Gully life. The characters in this story are multiple viewpoints: Najamai, Tehmina, Silloo Boyce, Percy and

Francis. In this manner despite their feelings, pettiness or weakness, the narrative comes close to understanding the humanity of the characters instead of caricaturing the characters in the story. Najamai is a grumpy old woman. She was emigrated from her children and she allows two other families to share the luxury of her fridge. It also introduces the several Parsi characters as subalterns, but seen as elites in the Indian social order Parsi as is generally minority. Somalatha has commented that in her famous article as follows:

> Though the Parsi community fruitfully adapted in India their 'Chosen Land', the westernized Parsi continues to regard themselves as aliens, representing the 'other'. A strong feeling that they are 'marginalized' in the Indian society pervades the life of the westernized Parsi community. (*History, Expatriation and the Parsee World-View: A study of Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey and Tales from Firozsha Baag*, 116)

They do not have access to upper middle class domestic conveniences like refrigerators. This is particularly true of 1960s and 1970s, the period in which Mistry has set his tales. Some interesting characters in this story are connected with the neighbouring Tar Gully life, apart from the boys named Kersi, Percy and Francis. Najamai's Sunday outing from the Baag to visit her sister's family at Bandra proves quite eventful. The neighbours of the Baag, Tehmina and the Boyces add to the furthering of the local colour. The eroticism that runs through the narratives of Mistry appears here too:

> When 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 doll's bedroom examining their undies that invariably lay scattered around… Now, exploration would yield nothing but Najamai's huge underclothes. (29)

Najamai leaves her flat under the care of others like Tehmina and the Boyce family members on the other hand make good use of the fridge for their needs, like Hindus. In returns Najamai borrows newspapers from the Boyces, while Percy and Kersi at their command, rid her flat of rats by swinging their cricket bats. One day as Najamai did not lock the flat properly, the outsider Francis slip in, to do some odd thievery but fearing Najamai's return, hides behind a door, farcical than serious, with the Boyces boys going after Francis to thrash him. After a few kicks and blows Francis is let off and crowd disperses. Najamai discovers a pool of urine behind the door. At the end one could say that Tar Gully, the abode of the destitute, appears as a counterpoint to Firozsha Baag, which means that relation between different classes among Parsis is a problem. The evocation of the surrounding of the Tar Gully is the counterpoint to the life of Firozsha Baag; the thief Francis' pursuit down the Tar Gully provides the racy conclusion to this *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. Sunday in Firozsha Baag is looked in terms of the other residents and reinforcing the local colour.

Tales from Firozsha Baag is full of diversity in the story, *The Ghost of Firozsha Baag* provides the view point of the lower members of the family and society. *Squatter* brings the sense of humour, *Of White Hairs and Cricket* did not give the entertainment to remember the content, *The Playing Guest* provides the horror movements throughout the story by intentionally or unintentionally. Somalatha says about *The Paying Guests* in her famous article,"Mistry depicts the quandary of the middle class Parsis. His treatment is both original and sympathetic high

degree"(*History, Expatriation and the Parsee World-View: A study of Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey and Tales from Firozsha Baag*, 118). *Of White Hairs and Cricket* and *The Ghost of Firozsha Baag* are in the form of narrative technique. These two tales are especially interesting. *Of White Hairs and Cricket* is an autobiographical story from boyhood. Narrator, fourteen year old boy remembers his father, mother and grandmother. This story is a form of recollection but not entirely in tranquillity. The technique in the last three stories becomes increasingly complex and self-referential. *One Sunday* and *Of White Chairs and Cricket* is one which conscious of the double disjunction in his life and his inability to choose the paralysed as he is between two choices. The maturing of the narrator implies a consequently more sophisticated imagination, using literary images to look at himself and his world as seen in his description of travelling by Bombay's public transport: "As if enacting a scene for my benefit with all the subtlety of a sixteenth- century morality play, a crowed clawed its four ways into a local train. All the players were there: Fate and Reality, and latter's offspring, the new Reality, and also Poverty and Hunger, Virtue and Vice, Apathy and Corruption". (112)

Of White Hairs and Cricket is one of the stories with several recurring motifs in the collection. Of cricket standing for nation, the valour and manliness inducted by the British into Parsis, in turn leads to immigration to the West. This immigration of the young and the loneliness of Parsis of India are lack of acceptance of Parsis in the West. The story opens with the young Kersi pulling out with grey hairs from his father's head. Kersi's father plays cricket with the Baag boys on Chowpatty beach on Sunday. Kersi wishes that his father could cling a little longer to the illusion of his youth. But his grandmother's view is that Kersi is committing a sin, for Parsis believed that hair was an evil thing and was used for purposes of black magic. Though

his delight, his stomach gives him a trouble, Kersi sticks his views on his father. Kersi's father loses interest in playing cricket because too many windows are smashed with the ball in the Baag so it becomes rare. Kersi has to ultimately reconcile with the change and the idea of honour and the way Viraf, Kersis friend changes his mind. Kersi has to regret the shattered dream about his father's ageing.

In *Of White Hairs and Cricket*, Mistry chooses to unify his narrative through the sensitive emotional vision of his young narrator Kersi. This story is the exploration of realizing the transience of bonds, emotions, growing up, people and moments in time. This emotional response to loss is clearly visible in the narrator's actions at the end:

> For the way (he) had treated Viraf, and his stick father with the long, cold needle in his arm and his rasping breath; for Mamaji and her tired, dark eyes spinning thread for our kustis, and for Mummy growing old in the dingy kitchen smelling of kerosene, where the primus roared and her dreams were extinguished; I wanted to weep for myself, for not being able to hug Daddy when I wanted to, and for not ever saying thank you for cricket in the morning and pigeons and bicycles and dreams; and for all the white hairs that I was powerless to stop. (120)

This story deals with the emotionally sensitive narrator who gently discovers the beauty of life in the ordinariness of the world around him. The sensitivity of the young narrator describes the members of his family in their daily activities, caught in unguarded moments of day dreaming, fighting and planning for the future, reveals the flux of human existence.

The Ghost of Firozsha Baag is generally considered a triumph in narrative technique, it being effective and powerful. The native of Jacqueline allows the

narrative to make use of her objective descriptions such as the treatment she receives at her employer's hands, without explicit reaction from her. But the second layer of narration implicitly criticizes the employers' dominating, oppressive, near racist behaviour. The story is narrated by a simple minded man, Ayah from Goa, an outsider from the Parsi world and a devout catholic. The life of Firozsha Baag is here observed from an outsider's point of view, a simple, honest, uneducated outsider. For several readers *The Ghost of Firozsha Baag* has emerged as a favourite. The narrator is Jacqueline known as Jaykalee to her Parsi bosses. It was almost regular for the Parsis to employ Goanese women as their ayahs for infants and children, a part of their colonial hangover. Ayahs like Jacqueline had to perform multiple duties like cooking delicious Goanese curries, doing domestic chores etc. While Jacqueline's dishes wipe up heat and sensuality it has obvious sexual overtones in the life of Seth and his wife loving sensuality and satiation. She became dull and by grinding, cooking and sleeping on the floor very much like a subaltern, the story is suddenly spiced by the appearance of the ghost. Jacqueline is always believed in ghost and sees them as a little child in her father's small field in Goa.

The narrative technique shows the individualistic language and style of an ayah in Goa. Mistry, as an outsider, focuses on simple, honest likes and dislikes prejudices and essential unsophisticated honesty and innocence. These narrations remain the use of West Indian dialect in Samuel Selvon's stories, especially in Brackley and the Bed. In the aspect of commonwealth writing it is interesting in the creative use of an authentic dialect, different from the Standard English. The half serious, half mocking, ironic tone and the utter simplicity of the narrator's narrative technique constitute a triumph in creating the local colour of the apartment Parsi community.

> After reaching first floor I stopped to rest. My breath was coming Fast-fast, like it does nowadays when I grind curry *masala* on the stone. Jaakaylee, my *bai* calls out, Jaakaylee, is *masala* ready? Thinks, sixty-three-year-old ayah can make *masala* as quick as she was fifteen. Yes, fifteen. The day after my fourteenth birthday I came by bus from Goa to Bombay.... Now it has been forty-nine years in this house as ayah, believe or don't believe. Fort-nine years in Firozsha Baag's B block and they still don't say my name right. Is it so difficult to say Jacqueline? But they always say, Jaakaylee. Or worse, Jaakayl. (44)

Jacqueline's ghost story is special among other stories. This is one most connubial ghost with different activities. Ayah always believed in ghosts. But the Bombay ghost was different; it comes once a week and always on a Friday. The ghost appears on Christmas Eve, when Jacqueline returned from the midnight mass. She is afraid and rolled down the stairs outside the flat by the ghost. She decides to wake them up, though she invites both their anger and hilarity. She ironically tells about the bhoot and makes her life more difficult, adding colour prejudice by others to her black skin. She keeps quiet and bears ridicule stoically till the ghost makes its reappearance on Easter. Children in the C block and the neighbouring girls invent lusty tales about the bhoot to tease Jacqueline. The adults banned the bhoot games and this also makes her less trouble. Jacqueline decides to make a confession to the priest in her church about the ghost and that ghost disappears. In the end of the story Jacqueline herself is mistaken for a ghost by her employer, Bai, at around 2 a.m. when Jacqueline felt cold and she covered herself completely in her white bedsheet. She covered her eyes and head and went out on the balcony when Bai and her husband came out; Bai saw the ghost, after that incident in Firozsha Baag people started to believe ghost including

Dustoorji of Block A, who came one day and taught prayer to Bai. Jacqueline enjoys the freshness of the night. This leads to a frenzied exorcism through rituals and prayers at the fire temple. Mistry perhaps intends to the women's motives for performing the exorcism. This meditation on religious rituals and respect for traditions and it is brought to the fore in the next story *Condolence Visit*.

Condolence Visit deals with the death and coping with memories after the loss of loved ones. Daulat Mirza, newly widow, silently disagrees with Najamai, who decrees that all rituals have to be followed to the letter if the departed soul is to be happy. In her husband's room Daulat secretly leaves the lamp. It shows the presence comforting of the light that she seeks to cope with her new solitude and her memories. She dreads the artificiality of the customary *Condolence Visits* that are sure to befall her. But in her very personalized manner of coping with the loss, she sorts out her recently dead husband's clothes to give away to an orphanage and decides to give away his beautifully crafted pugree to a young man. Despite the disapproval of her visiting relatives and Najamai, Daulat is firm and she gives the pugree away to embarrass young man. She finally blows out the lamp and takes stock of the dark flat. This story underlines the trauma of loss and explores the cope of loss. The assertion of independence often takes the form of drastic emotional gesture, as in Daulat's giving away of her associations and the removal of objects with traumatic associations might very well be a mode of coping with loss. The pugree of Minocher connects the past and the present.

> Among the items she sorts out is Minocher's pugree, the tall, black hat worn by Parsi men on ceremonial occasions such as weddings and navjotes. Minocher's pugree was a particularly splendid specimen and well-preserved. Young Parsi men no long wore pugrees at their

> wedding and new ones were thus not manufactured any more. This made Minocher's pugree an antique piece and rather valuable (88-89).

The next story *The Exercises* deals with the Hindu tradition on Bhagwan Baba, who introduced into the text an element of alien to Zoroastrianism which does not allow mediation between the believer and his God. Some of the dominant community beliefs have leaked into the Parsi way of life. Jehangir Bulsara was described in *The Collectors* as a bookworm, a silent, perceptive boy who remains as the observer of the drama unfolding at Firozsha Baag, Jehangir, who had a homosexual experience as a school boy an experience which, the present story gives us to understand and remains a complication in sorting out his adult relationship. Jehangir, being a good boy accepts his mother's overwhelming care for his health but adolescence brings the acquaintance of a young girl, who does not meet his mother's expectations. Mother's overreaction and his expectations are understood that was dictated by jealousy and fear of losing her baby. Jehangir seeks peace and comfort in the Hanging Gardens and the temporary excitement of watching the ripple muscles of the exercises. Bharucha in his book, *Rohinton Mistry: Ethnic Enclosures and Transcultural Spaces,* he states that, "The story *The Exercises* opens with Mr. and Mrs. Bulsara seeking the aid of their family guru, Bhawgwan Baba, to convince Jehangir of how unsuitable the girl was for him". (100)

This story suggests that the constraints of the conservative family milieu in monitoring girl-boy acquaintances result in unpredictable side effects. Jehangir loses out both counts. When his girlfriend is alone in the flat she challenges him. Jehangir, given the choice between mother and girlfriend, opts to return to his mother. He abandons his incredulous girlfriend and rushes to his home, running in the rain to get back to his mother before 8.00 p.m. He reaches home one minute late and his mother

refuses to get him in. He falls before the door and that night he waits outside of the home with his wet clothes.

In his *Swimming Lesson*, Mistry allows himself a generalization on the Parsi community:

> Mummy used to take good care of Grandpa, too, till things became complicated and he was moved to the Parsi General Hospital. Parkinsonism and orteoporosis laid him low. The doctor explained that Grandpa's hip did not break because he fell, but he fell because the hip, gradually growing brittle, snapped on that fatal day. That's what orteoporosis does, hollows out the bones and turns effect into cause. It has an unusually high incidence in the Parsi community, he said, but did not say why just one of those mysterious things. We are the chosen people where orteoporosis is concerned. And divorce. The Parsi community had the highest divorce rate in India, which is the result of the other? Confusion again of cause and effect. (230)

This was the last story in this collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag*; *Swimming Lessons* is exceptional in the sense that we get a glimpse of Firozsha Baag from the outside, from the distance of Canada. In this story the narration is full of imagery and symbolisms are brought. In this story *Swimming Lessons*, Firozsha Baag and Canada are brought together.

> When images and symbols abound in this manner, sprawling or rolling across the page without guile and artifice, one is prone to say, how obvious, how skill-less; symbols, after all, should be still and gentle as dew drops, tiny, yet shinning with a world of meaning. But what happens when, on the page of life style itself, all-engirdling sprawl of

> the filthy sea? Dew drops and oceans both have their rightful places; Nariman Hansotia certainly knew that when he told his stories to the boys of Firozsha Baag. (234)

Mistry's reminiscence takes him back to their Bombay and of his memories of his parents. This forms an interesting contrast to his parents living in the apartment in Toronto. It is the kind of literary subsequent to the main narrative technique it was particularly interesting to his parents. This introduces the complex network of relationship with the writing of the story made apparent as the parent comment on the technique of narration in the text. The story is around the building and the old men, his grandfather and the paralysed old man in the building. The loving family of immigrants in Canada; the sanitized cleanliness of the swimming pool contrasted with the multiform chaotic dirt of Chaupatty beach. Mistry's attempt in *Swimming Lessons* is the experiences of migration and the consequent of memories. The normal ties of human socializing bring the memories of existences acquire relevance in contrast. The paralysed old man in Canada brings to his mind the image of his grandfather sufferings from palsy.

The *Swimming Lessons* in Brampton, Canada bring the failed attempts at swimming in Bombay. This serves further to unravel social complexities as perceived by the double perspective of the mature narrator of the present and the younger narrator of the past. It throws into relief aspects of life in the Bombay of his childhood, the role of Parsi middle class is trying to fit the swimming abilities as an index of social class, lack of access to swimming pools, the dirt of the sea as lower-middle class children and mothers attempt to keep up with their richer counterparts, etc. But at the same time the narrative brings the sea in Canada into the world of Bombay and its larger world beyond the frame of the Parsi community with the ritual

processions of Ganesh Chaturthi, Coconut day, etc. Mistry explore in the sense of Parsis in Khodadad Building, it is also permeated by the sense of wider social existence in Bombay and in the larger India.

The sense of insecurity that parents in modern day India experience is revealed the mother feels that she cannot tell anything to the postman because of Shiv Sena agitations, threatening strikes and insecurity in the city. In the contrast to the rich human tapestry have grown expect from the Mistry's work, this story is very controlled structure that represent the facts of new reality of the immigrant, the silence of new life and the relationships that need to be forged. The world of Bombay and the world of childhood are characterized by the chaotic complexity of human relationships and emotions which mark the landscape of his memories.

Rohinton Mistry, therefore, successfully evokes a sense of loss and nostalgia in the immigrant's experience and the alienation of Parsis in India. Through the characters' sufferings, Mistry portrays the progress of meaningless protagonists attached only by their own self towards a realization of humanity and responsibility.

This chapter introduces the idea of nostalgia of the past in the way of life shown through the main characters of Firozsha Baag. It shows the idealization of religious rituals that are seen in the past and ways to prevent disintegration of family and the Parsi community too. The following chapter deals with the acquisition of faith and immigration, as hooked on the horns of a dilemma, neither affiliated with the old root culture, nor fully fitting with the newly adopted one, a condition that brings almost both sorrow and joy in *Tales from Firozsha Baag.*

Chapter 3

Faith and Migration

Rohinton Mistry, an Indian of Parsi origin residing in Canada is a writer of the Indian diaspora. Diasporic existence results in loneliness and a sense of exile often leading to severe identity crisis. *Tales from Firozsha Baag* deals with the Parsi residents in apartment complex Firozsha Baag in Mumbai. Mistry narrates the day to day joys and sorrows, trials and tribulations of the Parsis. *Squatters*, *Lend Me Your Light* and *Swimming Lessons* sharply focus on the identity crisis of the Parsi. It also contains the two Hart House Prize-winning stories, *Auspicious Occasion* and *One Sunday*. But also in retrospect can be seen to have introduced the themes, symbols and technique that recur in his later writings. These include topics such as families and their often pointed internal politics, a sense of entrapment and the desire for escape, memory and the pull of the past, the body and its functions and inevitable decay, connections between individuals and often unsuccessful attempts at communication, the search for balance amidst life's unsettled elements, use of parallel characters, the slipperiness of language and the redemptive power of storytelling. Although many of these interests were to receive a more extended treatment in his subsequent novels, they can all be seen at work in the lives of the characters that inhabit the eponymous Bombay apartment block. Mistry's style is subtle but increasingly sophisticated and insistent, enabling an exploration of characters and their motivations and of the intricate tangle of cause and effect on both personal and national levels.

Mistry's characteristic tone is even and engaging, detached but sympathetic, finding wry humour in serious situations, even managing to trace the lineaments of the absurd in the tragic, but also drawing profound lessons from apparently trivial incidents and encounters. A distinctive feature of Mistry's style is his deployment of

irony. The gentle humour he extracts from characters' foibles and the absurdity of the situations in which they frequently find themselves at times recalls the other Indian master storyteller R. K. Narayan. In *Tales from Firozsha Baag* irony takes the form either of a knowing relationship between characters as the older boys in the Baag appreciate the serious message of Nariman's stories which goes over the heads of his younger listeners or a conscious invocation of literary heritage. Moreover, one can trace a political dynamic in the ironic register. Forrest L. Ingram, a pioneering critic of the genre, defines in *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Studies in a Literary Genre,* as

> a set of stories linked to each other in such a way as to maintain a balance between the individuality of each of the stories and the necessities of the larger unit… [and where] the reader's successive experience of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts. (2)

Mistry focuses on the internal conflict of the characters with the cultural, spiritual and psychological crisis. The main concern includes issues like poverty, violence and family disintegration. He also emphasizes on human isolation, alienation and personal trauma that arise out of male-female relationship and individual conflicts with social institutions. His main concerns are the declining Parsi population, late marriages, inter-caste marriages, urbanization, alienation, modernist as well as traditionalist attitude towards their religion. He records this bitter experience in his fiction.

Canadian literature has established marginalized non-white writers by categorizing their writings as immigrant literature. Rohinton Mistry initiates the readers into the perceptions about immigrant literature. *Tales from Firozsha Baag* is

in the form of a collection of stories. All the stories except *Lend Me Your Light* and *Squatter* take the reader inside the apartment and into the lives of the occupants of Firozsha Baag. Mistry anticipates the type of reaction a work by an immigrant is likely to generate.

Re-creation of homeland is considered to be one of the preoccupations of the immigrant writer. *Tales from Firozsha Baag* consists of stories of Parsi families facing social isolation both in India and Canada. While most of the stories are based on religious orthodoxy and ethnic exclusivity of the Parsi community, some of them deal with the immigrant experience of Parsi individuals in the West.

Nilufer Bharucha has explored the multiple aspects of Mistry's works, his search for identity, his need for roots and the desire for location in history. Parsis in India feel insecure, experience identity crisis and feel threatened by possible submersion into the Hindu culture. The Parsi people, a minority group has found the economy and the living conditions in India not favourable to them. So they migrate to other countries thinking that their new country would be more favourable to them. This sudden emigration to an alien land leads to identity crisis. Neither have they had their former identity, nor do they have a new one. Mistry himself had left for Canada seeking good fortune. Savita Goel comments in his works *Diasporic Consciousness and Sense of Displacement in the Selected Works of Rohinton Mistry,*

> As a Parsi and then as an immigrant in Canada, he (Mistry) sees himself as a symbol of double displacement and this sense of doubled is placement is a recurrent theme in his literary works. His historical situation involves construction of a new identity in the nation to which he has emigrated and a complex relationship with the political and cultural history of the nation he has left behind. (119)

He generally deals with the Parsi women characters' journey of life in multiple facets of society. He lets his women characters travel from the minute events to major events. He attendants in micro the macro space male-controlled gender politics and marginalization of women. His basic intention is to examine the theme of politics of women. As Sherry B. Ortner has put it, "the secondary status of women in society is one of the true universal, a pan-cultural fact" (5). All his stories comprise the quotidian of Parsi life. Parsi tradition, religion, alienation, modernity, family are the major themes around which the story revolves. Women are the chief exponents to knit the story and facilitating the family matters ahead. Mistry does not develop the rounded character of women in *Tales from Firozsha Baag.*

Auspicious Occasion, the first story of *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, projects the eccentric side of the Parsi identity. Even the title of the story is highly evocative. It depicts the Parsi notion of racial superiority and the resultant arrogance. The Parsi community of Bombay is focus the attention of husband and wife, Rustomji and Mehroo are analysed with keen insight. Rustomji's language is generally peppered with Gujarati Phrases and especially abusive. This typical attitude of the Parsis could easily be put in the realms of farcical. Such stock characters of the abusive, comic Parsi are to be found in the Parsi theatre and Hindi cinema.

In *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, Mistry deals with the imagination of migration through the characters. This brings sorrow than joy in the story. Mistry suggests the great sensitivity that is typical of migration. Most of his works are thus with the humanistic premise that the universal lines are ordinary. So to say, an immigrant writer finds a restrictive force which curtails his or her creative talents. That sets definite parameters to which they are supposed to conform. The excessive insistence on the immigrant elements turns the reader's attention away from the artistic and

aesthetic quality of their works. Arnold Itwaru remarks the term immigrant in his book *The Invention of Canada: Literary Text and the Immigrant Imaginary*, as

> The stranger categorized in liable immigrant is already invented as immigrant, a distinctiveness which is also anonymous, upon his arrival. This person is no longer the only bearer of another history, but has now become a particular other; the bearer of a label invented by the host, this person has become the immigrant- this term of depersonalization which will brand him or her the rest of their lives in the country of their adoption. (13-14)

His migration is a pre-ordained trajectory that he undertakes, not out of enthusiasm but because it has to be. In essence, there is a kind of doubleness at the heart of the immigrant experience, which Mistry's writing, especially in the short story collection, *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, admirably captures. In this volume, the central protagonist replicates Mistry's movement from the tight-knit and reasonably self-sufficient Bombay Parsi community to the unknown and potentially hostile spaces of Canada. Both here and in the later works, where the thorny relationship between the Parsis and majority social formations becomes the focal point, there is a pervasive sense of an art springing not from one culture alone, but from the tension between overlapping cultures and contexts. As Amin Malak has said that in his book *The Shahrazadic Tradition: Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey and the Art of Storytelling*, that

> The immigrant imagination is dichotomous by nature, locked on the horns of a dilemma, neither affiliated with the old root culture, nor fully fitting with the new adopted one. Accordingly, writers negotiating and articulating such an experience have to inhabit an

> alternative world, a third world: a world of their imagination, their memory, their nostalgia. (19-20)

There is often also a contradictory set of impulses at work both attractions to the new society, and at the same time a fear of such total assimilation that the old coordinates of identity may be lost. This manifests itself, in the later stories in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, in a tension between the desire to belong in the new host society and the urge to hold onto something of the old one. Sometimes involuntary or even subconscious, such ambivalence appears to be at work in Kersi in *Lend Me Your Light*, whose desire to settle into his new Canadian home is tempered by a need to cross-refer his experiences to the known and familiar structures and relationships of Bombay.

In *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, the stories *Squatter, Lend Me Your Light, Exercisers* and *Swimming Lessons* explore feelings of entrapment by replaying the ambiguous attempts to escape of various characters at differentpoints in time. Eschewing the comforts of linearity and neater solutions, short story cycles make demands on the reader, requiring that he or she look for unifying elements between stories and across the volume as whole, elements the writermay have left implicit. The stories in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* describe a sequence of events, mediated through a shuttling temporally.The sequences which occur are takenplace over the space of several years in the 1960s. The main recurring protagonist, Kersi Boyce also turns out to be the narrator and who assembles the stories effectively.

Squatter is the one story with a difference. It somewhat follows the Chinese box structure when Mistry makes Kersi write a story in which Nariman Hansotia tells the children of Firozsha Baag, another story about Sarosh, an immigrant in Canada, in which the Immigrant officers tell Sarosh other stories about the immigrants in

Canada. This story is narrated to Nariman by Sarosh himself. Considering its narrative technique Linda Hutcheon says in *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fiction:*

> If Kersi's story is the diegesis, the other stories may be considered as a belonging to the hypo-diegetic or hypo-hypo-diegetic worlds. But this type of narration is no experimental technique consciously employed by Mistry, who is comfortable with traditional story-telling pattern (83).

This narrative level gives Mistry the freedom to talk even of his own immediate experiences maintaining a safe distance, or an emotional detachment. Nariman ends his story by quoting Sarosh's words, which ends his story with a parody of Othello – "I pray you in your stories," (since Sarosh knows that Nariman is a master story-teller) "when you shall these unlucky deeds relate, speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate…" (168).This last line strips the entire story told by Nariman and Kersi is just a casual listener. Nariman addresses the story especially to Kersi is since he plans to leave for Canada soon. Thus Mistry keeps himself in the distant background of this story *Tales from Firozsha Baag*.

The artistic distance and the emotional detachment which Father speaks of are evident in the tone of narration. Mistry's narrative works at four levels, when he makes Kersi Boyce, the author, the character, the narrator and a listener. "He was a resident of the C block of the Firozsha Baag apartment complex- from C Block stone steps I could observe the entire length of the compound, up to A Block at the far end" (115) writes Kersi. Maybe this vantage point helped him observe people and events around him which he records years later. However, there is no bitterness, rancour or animosity anywhere in his writings. There is an irony and sarcasm, which is possible

only for a person with a detached outlook and this, is no prerogative of an immigrant psyche.

The art of reading itself often becomes thematised parts of the narrative situation. When Kersi's parents are presented as readers, Mistry incorporates his own readers into the text and anticipates their responses through the Mother and his own rejoinders through the Father. As Mistry puts himself as "The father wants to know his son through the mind: he thinks he will reach his heart through his mind. But the mother takes a more heart-to-heart approach with her son" (260) andhence the difference in their perspectives. The parents'commentary gives Mistry the scope to take up each of the arguments which an immigrant writing is likely to generate its stereotypical preoccupation with the recreation of homeland, authenticity of memory, verisimilitude, obsession with the past etc. in order to underscore the point that these are no mere immigrant concerns but universal literary staple.

From the title of the paper Mistry finds its origin in a short story called *Squatter,* whichfocuses on the character of Sarosh, an Indian from a Parsi community in Bombay who decides to immigrate to Canada.Before Sarosh leaves his native India, a party is held in his honour and at this party, his friends and family debate the relative merits and demerits of Sarosh's decision to go abroad. Some of his friends commend Sarosh, suggesting that, by emigrating, "he is doing a wonderful thing; his whole life, they feel, is going to change for the better" (154).Ten years later Sarosh changed his name as Sid. Now Sid got completely changed into Westernized in every aspect that he is unable to use Indian toilets "At the point where our story commences, Sarosh had been living in Toronto for ten years. We find him depressed and miserable, perched on top of the toilet, crouching on his haunches, feet planted firmly

for balance upon the white plastic oval of the toilet seat" (153). Later Sarosh in the privacy of his own home is able to squat barefoot.

> If he had to go with his shoes on, he would carefully cover the seat with toilet paperbefore climbing up. He learnt to do this after the first time, when his shoes had left tell-tale footprints on the seat. He had had to clean it with a wet paper towel. Luckily, no one had seen him. The world of washrooms is private and at the same time very public. The absence of feet below the stall door, the smell of faeces, the rustle of paper, glimpses caught through the narrow crack between stall door and jamb- all these added up to only one thing: a foreign presence in the stall, not doing things in the conventional way. And if the one outside could receive the fetor of Sarosh's business wafting through the door, poor unhappy Sarosh too could detect something malodorous in the air: the presence of xenophobia and hostility. (156)

Sarosh is unable to pass stools in a Western style toilet by sitting on the toilet seat; he repeatedly finds himself climbing up onto the seat and simulating the squat of Indian Latrines in order to achieve the desired catharsis. This story is consideredto be the social and culture ramifications of his inability. This seems to offer rather a conventional or an incommodious in the readers' point of view.

Throughout the story Sarosh's cheap polarity is evinced in various ways. Sarosh's life in Canada is offered by Nariman, the storyteller, as only one instance of immigrant experiences. His story of Sarosh significantly begins with the counter example of Vera and Dolly who went to abroad for studies. They settled happily there. They never came to the native place. Vera and Dolly serve as a convenient entrance into Nariman's story of Sarosh. It more suggestively functions as a reminder

that different individuals have had varying degrees of success in negotiating their identity regarding a new system of cultural referents.

However, Sarosh's predicament is something that might be symptomatic of the immigrant experience. His inability to use Western toilets becomes, in his mind, a sign of his failure to adapt to a new culture. The discomfort occasioned by his perceived failure is played out through two overlapping areas of alienation: personal unease and social displacement. On a personal level, Sarosh's tale is a kind of narrative of failed conversion he senses that he has failed because he has not become completely Canadian. On a social level, Sarosh's wash room habits seem to give rise to an increased sense of hostility and xenophobia. Upondetecting that things in the stall are not, as it were, being done in the conventional way, others, at least as Sarosh sees it will simply reject him as a foreign and intrusive presence. Mistry situates the story of Sarosh's failed immigrant experience within the context of a narrative framed by a storyteller.

The figure of Nariman, the storyteller, is important for our understanding not only of this particular story, but of Mistry's fiction in general precisely because he, like Sarosh, inhabits the interstices of culture. Despite using the inserted tale of Sarosh as a warning for future generations of Indians who plan to seek happiness and success abroad, Nariman's own patterns of behaviour implicitly work to undermine the impact of his story.

If the example of Sarosh seems to point up the dangers inherent in the process of ethnic interaction and to argue for a returnto one's place of origin, Nariman himself contradicts the lesson which he seeks to impart to his listeners. He does this by revealing the extent to which he relies on and is steeped in Western cultural practices. In addition to his fondness for introducing new English words into his stories, for

exposing "young minds to as shimmering and varied a vocabulary as possible" (146), Nariman, we are told, owns a Mercedes Benz, a Western symbol of success and affluence, has cultivated the moustache of a Western movie star and likes to whistle a march from a Western film. Though they may initially appear to have little, if anything, to do with the story of Sarosh, these allusions to Western popular culture are important for the subtle and intriguing ways in which they remind us that post-colonial identity is always already a hybridized formation.

Mistry, then, frames Sarosh's story within Nariman's in order more effectively to explore the consequences of migration. Rather than simply proceeding on the basis of an opposition between the new world and the old world, Mistry interrogates the relationship between diverse cultural groups and dismantles traditional structures of authority which privilege an essential cultural purity. Moreover, Mistry employs the story-within-a-story technique in *Squatter* as a kind of structural analogue for the very process which Sarosh undergoes the activity of re-forming the self in a new culture. The shift from a familiar frame of reference to a strange and foreign one becomes a structural enactment of Sarosh's experience of cultural displacement. The effect which Nariman's story has on his listeners reinforces this point: the fact that they are unable to determine whether this is a comic or a serious tale forces us to recognize the extent to which notions of purity and structures of authoritarian discourse are being undermined,

> Some of the boys struggled hard to keep straight faces. They suspected that Nariman was not telling just a funny story, because if he intended them to laugh there was always some unmistakable way to let them know. Only the thought of displeasing Nariman and prematurely

> terminating the story kept their paroxysms of mirth from bursting forth unchecked. (186)

The story itself, like Sarosh, like Nariman the storyteller, is hybrid: at the junctureof the strange and the familiar, the serious and the funny, without ever purely being any one of these things. The story *Squatters* deals with the problem of the immigrant in Canada's multicultural mosaic, Mistry chooses to combine the rationalrealistic with the surrealist postmodern to deal with issues for which there have been a surfeit of both fictional and non-fictional narratives.

The story of Sarosh's evacuation problems in his host country is deliberately absurd and is meant to be read against the numerous narratives of immigration of a factual, official and fictional nature. The story of crisis is embedded within the realist perspective, in the respectable character of Nariman Hansotia. Nariman Hansotia is narratinghis story to the children of the area. It is against such a background that the comically absurd and tragic story of Sarosh's Canadian experiences is made possible.

Sarosh's problem is a promise to return if he is unable to adapt to Canada successfully. This promise causes a real fear of mal-adaptation, which in turn causes his health problems to last unrealistic ten years. The focus on this surreal problem allow to do with contrasting cultural habits and recreate the madness of Canadian multicultural policies with its armada of societies, help-centre doctors, counsellors, monstrous in their presents, an ironic perspective on the hypocrisy of the idealized immigrant society with its newly acquired tastes and misplaced snobbery towards its country of origin.

The stories are so designed that they appear to be an insider's narration. However, keeping the parents observations as a theoretical background, the rest of the stories are analysed from different angles, the revealing of an immigrant's point of

view. Kersi is actually indulged in an act of the Firozsha Baag apartment complex are vividly captured in the recreation of homeland. The vignettes of life of the residents of Firozsha Baag apartment complex are vividly captured. The distant view of his home does not lend a halo to the picture, making it seem romantic and idyllic. Mistry highlights the primitive and unhealthy living conditions, shifting family relationships, lack of privacy, poverty, superstitions, squalor etc., that make life miserable.

In the next story *Lend Me Your Light* the transformation of the immigration dream into a nightmare, from *Squatters,* is analysed in all its existential anguish. It also considers in depth the question of the ethnic identity of immigrants. Its central concern is the dilemma of an immigrant who is caught between belonging and alienation, the characters from the earlier stories Kersi and his brother Percy. Kersi is torn between the desires to emigrate to new pastures and the dim awareness of betraying his land. He migrates but remains unconvincedof the reasonableness or justification. He feels alienated from the diasporic communities meets there he gets confused, unformulated commitment to his family and their preoccupations remains. His eye problem on the journey to Toronto adds a modern tragedy to his situation. Jamshed, thoroughly westernized since his cosseted childhood, holds out the lure of a better life for his less fortunate friend and his brother Percy, the former childhood friends, become involved in social work in a remote village and lives out his socialist Marxist concern for the upliftment of the poor of his country at times endangering his own existence.Mistry mentioned Percy as a great friend and class mate of Jamshed. Jamshed himself concerned that there is no absolutely change in his character and his condemnation of India which started before he goes abroad he get confirmed and hardened after he migrates to the United States.

> Jamshed showed a very superficial interest in what little he knew about Percy's activities. Each time they met, he would start with how he was trying his best to get out of the country. "Absolutely no future in this stupid place," he said. "Bloody corruption everywhere. And you can't buy any of the thing you want, don't even get to see a decent English movie. First chance I get. I'm going abroad. Preferably the U.S." (177-78)

In this way he tries to show off when he returns to India from the U.S. on a short visit. He advertises the fact that he is very rich now and he can go to places which ordinary Indians are afraid to go five stars Taj Mahal Hotel. "We were supposed to be impressed by his performance, for we were in an expensive restaurant where only foreign tourists eat on the strength of their U.S. dollars. And hear was one of our own, not intimidated within the walls of the five-star Taj Majal Hotel" (185). Thus, the stories describe and enact the sometimes uncomfortablejourney from innocence to experience, as well as, in thelater tales, from Firozsha Baag to Canada. In true short storycycle fashion the volume is constructed in such a way as to showhow the lives of the Baag residents are connected beyond theindividual narratives in which they may be personally involved. Each tale contains references to other characters and theirexperiences in other stories in the volume. This addsresonance and contributes to that sense of a larger, unifyingpattern, which the attentive reader will recognise on completingthe text.

Characters such as Najamai, Rustomji the curmudgeonand Jehangir Bulsara seem to stroll through each other's storiesas easily as if they were strolling through the apartment blockitself. There is a mix of first and third person narration andcharacters often throw the light of personal reflection overevents narrated,

sometimes by others in other stories. In effect, the series of linked stories which, taken together,create a kind of novelistic superstructure, and although individualtales can be and have been, extracted and anthologised, noindividual story is 100 percent freestanding. Kersi, both about his experiences as a resident in Firozsha Baag, are in the form of first person narrative, as well as an immigrant in Canada. In *One Sunday*, Kersi appears as a teenage boy enjoying erotic dreams in private and displaying heroic valour in public. Kersi's cricketing ambitions are in theprocess of yielding to a more adolescent set of concerns and urges, and childish pleasures have given way to teenage ennui. For Kersi, the deadening emptiness of Sunday routine is suddenly interrupted by Najamai's frantic cries for help and bat in hand, he rushes to her aid, stimulated by heroic fantasies.He recollects his boyhood days in the story *Of White Hairs and Cricket*, and that intimacy he enjoyed with his friend while he conscientiously plucked the white hairs off his head, as though to stop the process of ageing. In *Swimming Lessons*, Kersi settled in Don Mills in Canada, narrates his unsuccessful attempt to master swimming in the Chaupatty Beach of Bombay. The apartment in Don Mills is just another Firozsha Baag, but with the difference that the elevator is always working here, technicians are always available, ambulances are always ready and swimming pools are crystal clear. But Kersi feels that the old man in the wheel chair is just like his grandpa back home and the Portuguese woman is just another, though sophisticated, version of Najamai of Firozsha Baag.

Kersi clearly works out the different stages of an immigrant psyche, the feelings of guilt and apprehension before migration, the process of adaptation to the new land, the terrible disappointment at the inability to identify himself with the home crowd during his brief return visit to India. He acquires conjunctivitis on the last day of his stay in Bombay and leaves India wearing dark glasses. When he comes back to

India, he is hopeful that he may see everything in a halo of brightness, unlike his friend Jamshed, who is full of scorn and disgust for his homeland. But, unfortunately, Bombay seemed dirtier than ever.

By recreating the story of his minority ethnic community, Mistry is consciously defying the established literary canons which demanded that there should be a Canadian identity thing in their writing to be considered part of mainstream writing. He did not want to go universal at the expense of his own experiences.

> There are enough points of experience in common with all peoples around the world… The Parsi characters in my stories, and their dreams, ambitions and fears are as accessible to the Western readers as the Indian reader. The universalities of the story are sufficient. (144)

This is what Mistry asserts through Kersi's Father that even by writing about their community and be universal.

In the migration stories in *Tales from Firozsha Baag,* Mistry through a series of interlocking discursive formations, articulates the ambivalent space between the old culture of India and the new culture of Canada. Caught between there and here, his characters and narratorsand sometimes in spite of themselvesare engaged in the activity of defining andtheir own hybridity. Like them, Mistry himself is someone, who as a South-Asian-Canadian Negotiates between different cultural traditions and his fiction powerfully attests the needfor the Canadian literary landscape to open up to include a new kind of critical activity. Indeed, the emergence in Canada of writers like Mistry, Joy Kogawa, Dionne Brand and Tomson Highway indicates the necessity of moving beyond a nationalist critical methodology to a cross-cultural exploration of the discourse of hybridity as it is played out both within and beyond our national borders.Immigration brings almost sorrow than joy.

Mistry creates a character, which shares his own immigrant status and makes him a writer. And when Kersi applies Mistry's own yardsticks to re-create his homeland, it is only natural that the readers relate the immigrant persona in Mistry to Kersi with Nariman Hansotia than the Kersi. In all the stories where Kersi is the protagonist narrator, the tone of narration is emotionally charged. Mistry cautions his readers against a sentimental reading of his stories, which makes them look for autobiographical elements in the stories. The importance of his work is virtues of humanity, universal solidarity and transcultural understanding of the caste, culture and nationality.

This chapter presents Mistry's narrations that are suggestive of the sensitivity on migration. From the first story, he explores the two poles of the world, the Canada of the new migrant and the middle-class Bombay Parsi family. He moves on to an elaboration of various shades of the world of the Parsi community and their problematic positioning within India in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. This chapter also presents Mistry's concentration on the women characters in his works. In this story he brings out the problems of the old and young women. The content of discussion in the following chapter therefore includes the domination of women in the private realm - with their nurturing attention and hard labour - ensuring the stability of the family, the age as a strong decisive factor in relationships and the dilemma of different generations.

Chapter 4

Women, Age and the Angst of Generations

Mistry's fiction is comprised of the world of the old and the young. Women dominate the private realm with their nurturing attention and labour through which the stability of the family is ensured. Age is a central theme in Mistry's fiction and relationships between and across generations is a major concern whenever Mistry discusses the private realm of the family and the household. The old people in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* were struck by the sense of decreasing choices of livelihood. The women characters in his *Tales from Firozsha Baag* are both old and young.

Within this framework of sympathies, the main characters of Mistry's short stories as well as the novels co-exist with a series of minor characters from poorer quarters. Their trajectories overlap at some stage in the story. Some of these characters are the poor handyman Francis in *One Sunday,* the impoverished and destitute tenants in *The Playing Guest* and the oppressed villagers whom Percy tries to help in *Lend Me Your Light*. Mistry's women characters did not enjoy the same generosity of imagination as the other subalterns in his texts. His women characters are often visible, silent or presented within the framework of stereotypes. The only experimentation with an independent, self-willed woman is through the figure of the young and rebellious.

In this story most of the old women characters were absent and the young women in the stories are Mehroo in *Auspicious Occasion,* Daulat Mirza in *Condolence Visit* and Kashmira in *The Playing Guests*. Daulat Mirza shows some spirit in fighting against tradition and Kashmira is seen as an essentially vulnerable young women characters. Few of the women characters surpass the boundary of patriarchy and tradition and rectify them. Some characters accept the patriarchy and

always help to make its grip stronger. Mistry generally deals with Parsi women character's journey of life in the society. His women characters travel from minute events to major events. Where the family gathers is the private world. Women in every age, society, faith and religion have been subverted, marginalized and thrown back to the veil. In majority, they are circumscribed to household works, since time immemorial. Basically women are marginalized by men in every field, be it familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. All his stories comprise the quotidian of Parsi life. Parsi tradition, religion, alienation, modernity and family are the major themes around which the story revolves. Women are the chief exponents to knit the story and facilitate the family matters ahead. He does not develop the rounded character of women in the *Tales from Firozsha Baag.*

The first story *Auspicious Occasion* starts with Rustomji and Mehroo. Rustomji is a paradoxical character who hangs between tradition and modernity. He always behaves like owner of Mehroo as he orders and shows his anger on Mehroo. As the story opens, one finds that she is cooking, making children ready to go to school, preparing for agiary. Mehroo is shown as a domestic lady, always ready to serve her husband; she is emotional and believes in rituals, social norms. She is sixteen years old while her husband is thirty six years old. Rustomji is a successful lawyer, so he is considered a fine catch by her parents. Mehroo also belongs to a very orthodoxical family and carries traditional orthodoxy with her: "Mehroo came, her slippers flopping in time-ploof ploof-one two" (3).

The second story *One Sunday* deals with the female characters like Najamai, Tehmina and Sillo Boyce. Najamai is hardly a poor old woman who evokes pity. Her daughters Dolly and Veera have gone abroad for studies. It is on the basis of that erroneous perception that the whole compound comes out to look for Francis, the

supposed burglar.Najamai lives all alone and uses fridge as a connecting medium to her neighbours. She remains fearful to the outsiders and intruders. They are marginalized in the society as they are never exposed to the celebrations at public places.The third story *The Ghost of Firozsha Baag* circulates around Jacqueline change of perspective and leads to an external perspective on the Parsi of Firozsha Baag. Jacquelinefelt that she was lucky to have been accepted by a Parsi household as they normally preferred lighter-skinned ayahs from Manglore. She says,

> It was saying, it was very lucky for me to become ayah in Parsi house, and never will I forget that. Especially because I'm Goan Catholic and very dark skin colour. 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… But if it is dark skin they say, arre what is this ayah no Chhokro, ayah's child. (52-53)

She is presented as an ayah to a Parsi family and she feels proud in it. She is yet another woman character who is appreciated for her womanly qualities as for cooking and humiliated by both male and female due to her colour. Once again Mistry shows women to be fearful and trapped in magic, superstition and ghosts.

At firstJacqueline's reports of ghost are dismissed by the Baag residents as the ramblings of an old woman from a backward part of the country where everyone believes in such things. However, the interpretation is guided by a blend of Cholicism, sexuality and repression, woven into her narrative. The ghost first appears early on Christmas morning when Jacqueline returns from midnight mass. Another young ayah went somewhere with their boyfriends. Her Mistress and master, Bai and Seth react with their unnerved ayah. Bai is angry but Seth responds with good humour.

Jacqueline is soonable to account for: the audible creaking of their bed carries the sounds of intimacy, as the household settles down again. The next spectral visit occurs at Easter. This time the brazen apparition materialises in Jacqueline's bed, "sitting on my chest and bouncing up and down" (46).

The ghost's antics spark acopycat incident in which Dr Mody's wayward son, Pesi, terrorises the nubile sisters Vera and Dolly by probing under their mini-skirts with the light from his clearly phallic torch. They also remind Jacquelineof a childhood acquaintance called Cajetan – named after a local saint, but rather more of a sinner himself – whose shameless advances to the young Jacqueline had culminated in an incident at the beach. Her account is replete with sexual imagery:

> He rolled up his pants over the knees and I pulled up myskirt, and we went in deeper. Then a big wave made everything wet. We ran out and sat on the beach for myskirt to dry … Sitting on the sand he made all funny eyes at me, like Hindi film hero, and put his hand on my thigh. I told him to stop or I would tell my father who would give him a solid pasting … But he didn't stop. Not until the fishermen came. Sheeh, what a boy that was. (149)

The insistence of such circumstances is likely to alert the readerto the possibility of some form of repression at work. While there is no countervailing narrative to cast doubt on Jacqueline's account, the nature of the ghost's activities. The haunted ayah of Firozsha Baag thus becomes the initiator of a long line of storytelling characters in Mistry's work, and offers the first example of Mistry's faith in the redemptive, communicative power of storytelling.

Mistry shows women to be fearful and trapped in magic, superstition and ghosts. Daulat Mirza, a newly widowed in *Condolence Visit* is the character who

defies the tradition and patriarchy and she follows the Parsi tradition, when "Dusmoo prayers were prayed at the fire temple" (69). The well-wisher visited her home. Daulat Mirza became very worried that she has to "and to gratify them with answers" (69). She pines and regrets for not accepting the tape-recorder offered as a gift by Sarosh.

The story recounts the cultural and ritualistic aspects of the Parsi identity. Daulat Mirza was truly tragic and dignified in its tone as its main protagonist. Following the Parsi custom, friends and relations were expected to pay a *Condolence Visit* to the bereaved family. These visits in the time-honoured manner would begin after the Dusmoo or the tenth day ceremonies in honour of the departed soul. Some more tactful persons would hold back till after theirlove or the first month anniversary. However, the majority would start streaming in after the Dusmoo. So Daulat, in a very pragmatic fashion, begins to prepare for this influx. Daulat's neighbour Najamai offers to help out by lending her chairs and glasses to cope with the flow of visitors. Najamai, like several ageing Parsis in Bombay, had children who lived abroad and rarely visited home. Bharucha states about the story *Condolence Visit,*in his book:

> Another common trope deals with the question of superstition and blind dogma that besets the Parsi Zoroastrian community. This matter had been considered within the context of the supernatural in this story. The main focus is on superstitions and rituals connected with death and funeral rites. Daulat Mirza in spite of her grief-stricken condition stands up bravely to the demands made upon her by dogma and ritual prescribed by 'concerned' relations and neighbours. According to Parsi orthodoxy, the lamp should be extinguished after the fourth day –

> Charam ceremonies. This would enable the soul to sever ties with this world and go quickly to the Next World. (88)

Najamai's crankiness is used as a means to represent old-fashioned but inoffensive orthodox. Daulat, who still has to learn to cope with grief, resents Najamai's nosiness and orthodox advice at first. But in her rebellion, Daulat sees Najamai as a partial ally. Najamai makes the *Condolence Visits* more bearable with her harmless, inoffensive prattle. This harmlessness is turned into a catalyst of positive action in *The Playing Guest.*

Mistry in *The Playing Guest* dwells upon two types of women characters; emotional, submissive, young and newly married. The story begins towards the end of the events it narrates and loops backwards to fill in the history of the dispute between the young couple, Boman and Kashmira, who need some extra money and the unstable tenants who take on the partitioned section of their corner apartment. It follows the progress of Khorshedbai dirty protest - littering the shared veranda with banana skins, orange rind, potato peelings, pendulous gobbets of gristle, strips of newspaper and dog faeces - and the disruption of the old, peaceable way of life by the ligation set in train by Boman in his attempt to reclaim the rooms for his growing family. Khorshedbai is compulsive and superstitious. She takes Parsitraditions to an extreme, insisting that Kashmira remain in confinement during her menses and waking up at 5 a.m. for her morning prayer. The sole record in her possession, a paean to the rising sun, becomes a weapon in the feud and is cranked up at all hours to disturb the neighbouring couple to the maximum.

Finally the young couple get help when Najamai calls upon Kashmira, offering to help with the shopping. It is at that precise moment that Khorshedbai picks up in a parrot cage. The shock and horror of the scene moves all of Firozsha Baag to

be on the side of the young couple and Khorshedbai is forced to leave. Khorshedbai often disturbs and makes Kashmira's life miserable. Through this story, Mistry points out the problem faced by women. Khorshedbai's son has gone abroad, never takes care of her, so she is in penury and bound to live as a paying guest. Mistry is of the view that women are not always emotional, kind hearted and submissive. The harsh aspect of women is observed in Khorshedbai who gets chance and closes Kashmira's infant baby in a parrot cage. Kashmira is breathless and searches throughout the whole building and weeps bitterly:

> Inside, Khorshedbai was leaning over the locked parrot cage. She seemed to have noticed no part of the commotion. The neighbours looked with curiosity that turned to horror as soon as their eyes adjusted to Khorshedbai's dim room. There was a lull in the noise and confusion, a stunned silence for moments, during which the bangles on Khorshedbai's writhes could be heard tinkling. Ardesar sat on a chair with his face hidden in his hands. He was shaking visibly. The baby, liberated from the swaddling clothes, was inside the cage. (172)

Khorshedbhai and Ardesar are the figures who represent the old and the destitute in the collection. But they are at the extreme end of the social scale. Kashmira feels compassion for the lonely Khorshedbhai. Their past remains mysterious. It is Najamai's nosiness that uncovers rumours about their past, ranging from the tale of a family feud to adultery and the ingratitude of children. Here, the story of filial ingratitude shows the thin line between middle-class balance and destitution. Alongside this interest in the fate of old people, a new theme is also introduced, that of migration. It is suggested that Khorshedbai and Ardesar's son could have migrated to Canada. Mistry places much of the emphasis on the

psychological effects of the battle on both sides. Boman is rattled but imperious when his wife fears that the stand-off may never end and Khorshedbai rejoices over her temporary court victory as Ardesar retreats in his thoughts to Chaupatty Beach where he feeds the pigeons.

However, Mistry shows that breakdowns can also occur independent of migration. The character of Middle-aged Dr Mody in *The Collectors* illustrates a state of paralysis, stasis and inability to transmit memories to either natural offspring or surrogate ones. Dr Mody's gentleness, curiosity and passion for collecting stamps are not appreciated by either his wife or so. Pesi is a cause of shame to Dr Mody and when he needs to reform, Dr Mody chooses to send him to boarding school rather than undertake to discipline him. Dr Mody passion for collecting stamps is his wife points out, the source of all their troubles. The stamps become the symbol of the breakdown of links between Pesi and his father: "when he talked about the stamps, Pesi laughed and mocked his beloved hobby" (107). Dr. Mody's passion fades and finds no heirs. He finds a temporary disciple in Jehangir, who could have readily fallen in not for Mrs. Mody's manipulation. When Dr Mody dies, the early estrangement between Jehangir and him results in such an absolute breakdown that the inheritance, the stamp collection that had once fired Jehangir's imagination, can only evoke breakdown. The stamps are left unattached and are eventually eaten by cockroaches. Robert Park rightly states that,

> Moral dichotomy and conflict [which] is probably characteristic of every immigrant during the period of transition, when old habits are being discarded and new ones are not yet formed. It is inevitably a period of inner turmoil and intense self-consciousness. (*Human*

Migration and the Marginal Man. The American Journal of Sociology 893)

The stability and comfort in the world of Najamai Senior and the children is an important counterpoint to the indecisiveness, imbalance and instability in the world of Sarosh. Old and wealthy, Nariman forms an interesting contrast to all the other middle-aged men in the compound. He is old, but is neither reclusive nor boorish and still maintains interesting bonds with the children of the compound through his storytelling.

The play on the word *Squatter*, in the story of that title,draws our attention not simply to its use in relation to an unwelcome intruder in a property or, as here, an unassimilated immigrant in a new country, but also to the only position in which the central character, Sarosh-Sid, can effectively evacuate his bowels. And, just as the title has a double meaning, so, too, the story as a whole displays a twofold concern. It is not merely about the disorientating experience of emigration, but also the power of language to encode these experiences in different story-types - heroic, epic, tragicomic and so on – and the role of listeners and readers in creating meaning.

Intergenerational communication is rarely seen in the Baag. Though Mehroo thinks of his children, Rustomji never interacts with his children. Jehangir's over possessive mother nearly destroys her son. Otherwise, it is only in the recurring stories involving Percy Boyce and his family- *One Sunday, Of White Hairs and Cricket, Lend me Your Light*and *Swimming Lessons*that were the normal family, with intergenerational interaction. This is especially obvious in *Of White Hairs and Cricket*.

Mistry explores the dilemma of the Parsi youth in the form of the angst of the youth who are confronted with limited opportunities, doubtful local role models and

pushed to embrace the existential complexities of migration. The varying fates of the young men in the stories of migration are a natural consequence of the conditions of their childhood. They represent the dilemma of young people, caught in the mire of duty and expectations. Their identities are moulded by the demands, expectations and limitations of the social world where they live.

The old women presented in the story are all victims of a mixture of circumstances and their own natures. They offer little by way of hope to aspiring young people like Kersi Boyce in *One Sunday*, Pesi Padmaroo and Jehangir Bulsara in *The Collectors* and also in*The Exercisers*, Percy, Jamshed and the unnamed narrator who could be Kersi Boyce in *Lend Me Your Light*, etc., The young people in the first four stories *One Sunday, The Collectors, Of White Hairs and Cricket*and *Lend me Your Light* shows an unconsciousexistential anguish, squeezed between the limited opportunities and the frustrating ambitions of their localized social space, which lend to the idealization of immigration as the only desirable solution. The father in *Of white Hairs and Cricket* tells his son: "And one day, you must go, too, to America. No future here. His eyes fixed on mine urgently. Somehow we'll get the money to send you. I'll find a way" (136).However, the treatment of the joys and possibilities of immigration, as presented in the complex experiences of the last three stories of the collection are far from being glorious.

Kersi Boyce could be seen as the unifying consciousness that links the four stories: *One Sunday, Of white Hairs and Cricket, Lend me Your Light* and *Swimming Lessons*. Each story shows Kersi Boyce, at a new stage of consciousness and they constitute an interesting commentary on the relationship between the individual and the structure of values of his world. Kersi Boyce has a strong desire to play cricket but his dreams are thwarted by the neighbours who vociferously complain about his

practice sessions with his father. Finally, he resorts to killing rats with his bat. As a normal young boy Kersi excited about exploring Najamai's flat. He was excited by the forbidden femininity to Vera and Dolly, Najamai's two daughters before they left Firozsha Baag.

Excitement and leisure activities are minimal for the children of Firozsha Baag. And a sad sign of the limitedness of this world is the excitement and energy evoked by Pesi Padmaroo's cruel games with cats and people. Kersi thinks that Jehangir's reclusive habits and love of books are effeminate and treats him as a sissy. He himself is a sporty type. Through friendship with an outsider, Francis, the non-Parsi from Tar Gully, Kersi develops new interests. Francis teaches him to fly kites, spin tops and shoot marbles. Whether this is reality or prejudice, Francis is seen as "no better than a homeless beggar" (30) by the inhabitants of the compound.And later, Kersi watches the unnecessary cruelty of the beating; Francis receives:

> The ritualistic cry of 'Chor!Chor!' had rendered Francis into fair game in Tar Gully. Kersi was horrified. This was not the way he had wanted it to end when he'd emerged with his bat. He had watched in terror as Francis was slapped and kicked, had his arms twisted and his hair pulled and was abused and spat upon. He looked away when their eyes met. (43)

The consequence of all this is that Kersi is disgusted and ends up destroying the bat with which he had entered Tar Gully.

Jehangir is another interesting character. He isolates himself from the other boys by preferring to read in solitude rather than enjoying the boisterous and rowdy boys' games in the manner of Pesi Padmaroo. However, both Dr Mody and Nariman Hansotia realize the potential of the boy. Dr Mody responds to his sensitive and

intelligent nature and bonds with him in the first instance through his love of books until he shares his love of stamps and his collection with him. Nariman Hansotia is reluctant to start narrating stories until Jehangir has joined the crowed of his listeners. Thus the boy thinks of him in the compound: "Jehangir was still unliked by the boys in the Baag, though they had come to accept his aloofness and respect his knowledge and intellect" (147).

Nariman Hansotia, the communal storyteller who beguilesthe boys of Firozsha Baag with his tales, is especially adept at encoding experience in narrative form. After a ritual which involves tooting his car horn and polishing the Mercedes star on the bonnet to alert the boys, he launches into one of his amazing stories. His most sensitive listener Jehangir, also known as Bulsara Bookworm, admires the style and structure of Nariman's stories. In certain respects he may be seen as a kind of ideal reader/listener every writer/story teller has in mind. He describes Nariman's technique in terms that might also be applicable to Mistry:

> Unpredictability was the brush he used to paint his tales with, and ambiguity the palette he mixed his colours in … Nariman sometimes told a funny incident in a very serious way, or expressed a significant matter in a light and playful manner. And these were only two rough divisions, in between were lots of subtle gradations of tone and texture. Which, then, was the funny story and which the serious? Their opinions were divided, but ultimately, saidJehangir, it was up to the listener to decide. (147–148)

This active engagement with interpretation is just one feature of the traditions of oral narrative invoked here. Listeners have an active role to play in the storytelling circuit. As an oral narrator, Nariman relies on a close relationship with his listeners.

Nariman Hansotia thinks of Jehangir as the "quite Bulsara boy, the intelligent one" (152). That story already hints at the over protectiveness of Jehangir's mother, who fails to respect Jehangir's life outside and refuses to grant him the right to an outside existence. She imposes a curfew on him; he has to be at the door by eight o'clock. His mother calls him by baby names in front of his friends. Jehangir's reaction is to "state at his feet in embarrassment" (157) and to feel utter mortification. This hint of a private dilemma in the life of Jehangir will be fully explored in another story wholly devoted to Jehangir, *The Exercisers*. In the latter story, Jehangir, the brilliant and sensitive young man is seen to be overpowered by the overprotective attention of his mother. To be 'good' allows no form of deviation and Jehangir's love story is denied by his mother for no apparent reason.

Kersi Boyce, the troubled young boy of *One Sunday* reappears in *Of White Hairs and Cricket* and in later stories. If one is to look for a conventional theme in *Of White Hairs and Cricket*, it can be linked to a moment of realization and awakening about the transience and impermanence of existence in seeing the ageing of loved ones. Kersi comes to understand the transience of life and the precious quality of adult presence when he discovers that his best friend's father is seriously ill. This story gives the very gloomy perspective between remembrance and regret on the opportunities both, the present and the future, offered to the young boy. In the present he can only waver between the opposing attitudes of his grandmother and his parents. His unemployed father, perpetually looking for jobs, gives him hope only for a future abroad.

It is this Kersi who will eventually migrate to Canada in *Lend Me Your Light*. Malieckal (2004) and Barucha (2003) argue that migration to the West has been seen as the necessary and inevitable future of the young Parsi. His migration is a pre-

ordained trajectory that he undertakes, not out of enthusiasm but because it has to be. His is the indecisiveness of sensitivity and the lucidity of understanding which culminates in the curiously layered, double narratives of *Swimming Lessons.* However, his fate is far better than that of Sarosh, doomed to re-enact the double failure of expectation and adaptation, doomed to experience the failure of self-projection – the failure of not living up to expectations.

Kersi in *Swimming Lessons* took another process of adaptation, without losing his roots, because as Margaret Atwood puts it,"Refusing to acknowledge where you come from is an act of amputation you may become… a citizen of the world… but only at the cost of arms, legs or heart" (113).Kersi attempts to yoke the realities of existence in Bombay and Toronto and discover the true essence of human existence, which was the same everywhere, beneath superficial differences of colour, race and nationality. Kersi while working as a clerk in the insurance company enrols himself for swimming lessons in the high school behind his apartment. The Chowpatty Beach near his house in Bombay is too dirty to arouse such passion in him.

The disposal of coconuts and clay gods and goddesses by the Hindus, ashes of the sacred sandalwood fire and the leftovers of the dead men by the Parsis in the sea reflects the Indian cultural practices and the squalid sea water contrasts the clear blue water of the high school swimming pool in Toronto. The women, sees sunbathing from her upper floor window, upon closer inspection, turn out to be rather unattractive with "wrinkled skin, ageing hands, sagging bottoms, varicose veins. The lustrous trick of sun and lotion and distance has ended" (233). This was the true of the lust of the West as it was of these sunbathing women. The next disillusionment for the immigrant comes when the woman in the swimming pool reveals her pubic hair only to hide them during subsequent encounters.

Themesof connection and disconnection between past and present, and past and present selves, along with storytelling and types of journey, are explored. The more sophisticated narrative voice of the first person narrator, Kersi – older and more conscious of the pitfalls of literary convention – takes us back over the events of his adolescence and migration to Canada. As narrator, Kersi shares Nariman's love of words and consciousness of their power: he looks back in shame on his complacent boyhood use of the term 'ghati' for Indian menials, and the arrogance it expressed. This sense of superiority is taken to extremes byJamshed, a friend of his brother Percy, whom Kersi initiallyadmires. Jamshed's family lived in a luxury tenth-floor apartment block with a lift. His lunch is brought to school in a "'chauffeur-driven', 'air-conditioned', 'leather-upholstered' car, and he devours it in what Kersi describes as 'this collection of hyphenated lavishness'" (174). However, as a young Parsi susceptible to the lure of the West and destined to emigrate a year after his privileged compatriot, Kersi, too, might be said to be one of those 'hyphenated subjectivities' of the new 'border' Indian diasporas, described by Vijay Mishra, who keep in touch with the old country through family ties, and make occasional return visits.

Craig Tapping has offered an excellent synopsis of *Tales from Firozsha Baag*'s aims and themes. He says that in his book *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora:*

> …an exemplary postmodern, postcolonial literary collection.It stages the translation of oral cultures into literature witha commentary on the traditional society from which suchpractices derive; it reflects on textually and on the growingconsciousness and literary abilities of its protagonist author, it mocks well-meaning Anglo-Saxon liberalism through satire; and it appropriates the inherited narratives of the

> imperial canon in parody which opens our understanding of such figural systems. (35)

One might add that, in its rigorous structural integrity, which yet allows for a fluid investigation of universally recognisable but specifically grounded experiences, it can also be seen as an apprenticeship for the ambitious novels that were to follow.

This chapter deals with the old and the dilemmas of the young characters in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. Age is a central theme in Mistry's stories; and relationships between and across generations is a major concern whenever Mistry discusses the private realm of the family and the household. The private world is the space of home and family, inhabited mostly by women and children. The following chapter concludes with a summing up of the local and the universal themes in Mistry's short story *Tales from Firozsha Baag*.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Rohinton Mistry successfully evokes a sense of loss and nostalgia in the immigrant's experience and the alienation of Parsis in India. Through the characters' sufferings Mistry portrays the progress of meaningless protagonists attached only by their own self towards a realization of humanity and responsibility. In all his stories Rohinton Mistry invariably records Parsis social circumstances, sense of isolation, and rootlessness, tie them together and make them forge a bond of understanding as they struggle to survive. Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag* is a well-structured imaginative story collection, portrays the realm of dramatizing this Parsi world view. The burden of these tales is to dramatize the conflict and adaptability of the Parsi community to the fast-changing background in India and abroad. In any case, the Parsis are immigrants in India, Canada or Britain, their alienation is relative yet fruitful. But it was certain whether it is the East or west, they have maintained their identity, values and traditions. Thus, in Mistry's works,the Zoroastrian world-view ultimately acts as a propelling force and provides an excellent medium for adaptability. Sunil Khilnani says that in his book *The Idea of India* that Mistry was an international man of stories and he says that,

> Twentieth-century Indians … have voyaged widely in search of livelihoods and ideas, and they have discovered themselves through the clarities, oversights and yearnings that distance induces. The exact character of the homelands they have journeyed from has proved elusive, and often imaginary. Where in the world is India? (198)

Rohinton Mistry has produced fictions characterised by a style that is at once unobtrusive and apparently direct but contains symbolic complexity. He has deployed

the seductive dynamic combination of simplicity and sophistication to analyse characters coming to terms with social and political circumstances. In *Tales from Firozsha Baag* he encodes the belongingness of migration and identity in a text at the same time testing the boundaries and mimicking and rejecting the literary consolation.

Mistry, like other influential members of the second generation of postcolonial Indian writers in English, Salman Rushdie, Bapsi Sidhwa and Amitav Ghosh, interrogates and often challenges the complacencies and orthodoxies of the nation and seeks to shape in their own image of secular and religious. Bruce King has argued that about these writers in his work, *The Commonwealth Writer in Exile*:

> They are deconstructionists, not out of the logic that led others from structuralism to post-structuralism, but from the experience of divided, uprooted, unassimilated lives; but they are also reconstructionists in that for those genuinely threatened by chaos the logic of survival requires some new order, even if only provisional. (42)

This explains Mistry's fascination with pattern. His characters seek patterns and shapes in the chaos of everyday lives slowly falling apart, sometimes by raiding fond memories or by reversion to the primal consolations of religious and ethnic identifications and by sifting valuable in the past and filtering out prejudices. His style appears to have evolved its characteristic features measured clarity of the European novel leavened by the dialogic energy of eastern storytelling traditions that deal with the multiple interpellations of conflictual ideologies. Tanya Luhrmann state in his book *The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society*:"Identity in a modern postcolonial context is less a self-characterising narrative with a mirroring world than a sense of command over narrative complexity" (210-211). Thus, despite being aware of the limitations of realism, Mistry does not concede that

linguistic systems are purely self-reflexive. He recognises that part of the storyteller's role is to find forms appropriate to the overlapping identities like Canadian, Zoroastrian, and Indian and so on.

Mistry's writing raises ethical questions which while he played out through the characters to resolve in the sense of all narrative. However, the recurring trope of the instinctive desire for communication stymied by a divisive and authoritarian political hierarchy, common to Mistry's works. Perhaps Richard Kearney quoted that Mistry indirectly provides one of the most recognisable accounts of the experience of reading his novel. He claims that the strategy of persuasion undertaken by the narrator of any given novel:

> is aimed at giving the reader a vision of the world that is never ethically neutral, but rather implicitly or explicitly induces a new evaluation of the world and of the reader as induces a new evaluation of the world and of the reader as well. In this sense, narrative already belongs to the ethical field in virtue of its claim- inseparable from its narration – to ethical justice. Still, it belongs to the reader, now an agent, an initiator of action, to choose among the multiple proposals of ethical justice brought forth by the reading. (*On Stories* 6)

Mistry in his short story *Tales from Firozsha Baag,* deals with immigrant experience, they suggest a parallel to Rohinton Mistry. As an immigrant writer he develops his themes from his past experiences in India and his immigrant experiences in Canada. In the first three stories, *Auspicious Occasion*, *One Sunday* and *The Ghost of Firozsha Baag* each deal with kinds of isolation from surrounding environments and are to do with vulnerability and outsider status; *Condolence Visit, The Collectors* and *Of White Hairs and Cricket* introduce the inevitability of death and attempts to

come to terms with change and loss; *The Paying Guests* and *Squatter* focus on belonging and the spaces protagonists would call home but, for one reason or another, are unable to; and the final triptych, comprising *Lend Me Your Light, Exercisers* and *Swimming Lessons*, interrogate the experiences of migration, exile, return and unsuccessful attempts at escape. It would be certainly possible to make a strong case for *Squatter* belonging in the last category too, but as there are specific issues regarding narrative and cultural influence through this story, it seemed preferable to place it in another category.

In the stories from Firozsha Baag, Mistry depicts the life and customs of the Parsi Community where female characters are exposed to several atrocities and the gloomy conditions of modern Indian Women. In one short story entitled *Auspicious Occasion* a fifty year old Rustomji is married to a sixteen year old young girl Mehroo. Mehroo is in her adolescence, while Rustomji in his dotage is not physically appealing at all. To hide his weakness he treats his wife like a servant shouting at her all the time. Rustomji has amorous intentions for Gajra, a new servant in his house. In his doddering even he has fantasy about Gajra's naked body; beautify breasts and gossamer sari and blouse. In a certain way Gajra represents an ideal woman for a man like Rustomji, he even secretly dreams of seducing her. Here the writer delineates the physical as well as mental incongruence and incompatibility between the couple due to age difference. The couple is spending their days monotonously treating one another either as elder brother and sister or as father and daughter as no mention has ever been made in the novel about their sexual life.

Rohinton Mistry's novels are a perfect blend of love, intrigues, begrudges, politics, friendship and lewdness. There is also humour with lewd jokes, intentions and pretentions. There is fledgling democracy and the hopelessness of defunct civic

system. It is emphatically clear that the above novels of Rohinton Mistry explore socio-cultural and political realities of India between 1960 and 1990. They closely examine the social, political and economic problems of people arising out of emergency, exploitation, social evils and wars.

With the class analysis of Mistry's women characters, it becomes quite clear that women are marginalised and dragged powerless in every aspect of society. Knowingly or unknowingly, Mistry himself does not let any female character develop thoroughly. We may say that the women are not marginalised only in life but in short stories too. Except one or two, all of the female characters are stereotyped and chained strongly in it; and those who are Exceptions are not portrayed as courageous as men characters. In *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, Mistry hangs between stereotyped and overpowering women but he remains intact to stereotype.

Mistry uses literature to hold the mirror up to the society. Societies are always structured unequally and individuals are born with differences and deprivations. India has earned the sobriquet sub-continent because of its variety and neatly divided castes and classes. Religion and language of course divide the people. According to Mistry, the untouchables and the suppression of the untouchables in the name of religion are inhuman and bestial. Nostalgia and a mood of reminiscence mark the pages as recalls and relive his childhood and adolescent years of Parsi in Firozsha Baag. Mistry's works shows that how human problems require human solutions.

Mistry has an extraordinary sensibility and he has a soft corner for the downtrodden and innocent people. He exposes the evil of exploitation of the people in his works. Though he belongs to different religion and culture, he has experiences in his works. He expresses their personal feelings over sufferings heroes. He satirises vehemently the exploitation of the powerful people over the poor and downtrodden.

He uses his works as a weapon against the exploiters. He also conveys better solutions to those social inequalities and evils through his works. His works made tremendous changes in their respective society. It enables the readers to respects to respect his feelings. Mistry is much worried about the criteria of materialism with which everyman was valued at the time of stage of emergency. He gives his voice in support of those who are affected by the political unrest.

Mistry's short story *Tales from Firozsha Baag*isa well-structured imaginative story collection which portrays the realm of dramatizing the Parsi world. The burden of these tales is to dramatize the conflict and adaptability of the Parsi community to the fast changing milieu in India and abroad. Thus, Mistry deals with local and universal content in his work. In the local theme he deals with the tradition and the memories of past is shown in the stories of *Auspicious Occasion, One Sunday, The Ghost of Firozsha Baag, Of White Hairs and Cricket and Swimming Lessons.*

Mistry's idea of age in his short stories *Lend Me Your Light*, *Condolence Visits, Exercisers, The Playing Guest, The Collectors* and *Squatter* consist the world of the old and the problems of young women. This shows the domination of the women in the private realm with their nurturing attention and the hard labour ensuring stability of the family. He also deals with the migration imagination by nature in the native land of Firozsha Baag. It also brings the sorrow than joy for the women characters. It is thus clearly understandable that Mistry pictures broken human personalities under the socio-economic cultural pressures and stimulates the human individual to develop an intimate growth and adopt himself to the respective social milieu. As such, with all substantiation, it can be argued that all the themes dealt with by Mistry appeal to the audience either as a local theme or as a universal theme.

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