CHAPTER - II

TALES FROM FIROZSHA BAAG: A DOCUMENT OF DECAYING PARSİ VALUES

Man’s social life is the inexhaustible source of literature and art and is incomparably richer and livelier in content. No wonder that people have a craving for both the aspects - life and literature/art - the lived and reproduced and revealed. Revolutionary literature and art thus create a variety of characters out of real life and help the masses to propel history forward. Most of the Indo-Canadian writers keep going back to India for their writing material. Coming closer to their homeland is the literal meaning of diaspora. But Makarand Paranjape feels that Rohinton Mistry is different from other Indo-Canadian writers as “his two novels Such a Long Journey and A Fine Balance are elegiac, not nostalgic in tone. They do not celebrate the homeland but mourn its relentless and innumerable atrocities and tragedies (Paranjape 167).

Rohinton Mistry is successful in embracing the home and the Parsi community. Mistry presents real life situations in his stories and reveals the innermost psychology of his characters to reveal the social reality and cultural construct of the society. Majority of his characters, particularly the major ones are Parsis, who belong to lower middle class and middle class, and reside in Parsi apartments in Bombay. He describes in his stories the incidents of everyday life and through these common incidents he searches the cultural roots of this tiny religious community in the post independent India. He represents the position of Parsi individuals in Bombay on the basis of his childhood memories. His description is not restricted to culture and traditions of the Parsis but also encompasses the economic, political and social
changes. Though, all the major characters in his stories are Parsis, yet above all they are human beings and possess universalized human values. *Tales from Firozsha Baag* rejects this opinion that:

International Indian English writers live close to their market, in the comforts of the suburbia of advanced capital but draw their raw material from the inexhaustible imaginative resources of that messy and disorderly subcontinent that is India (Paranjape 167-168).

In 1983, Mistry wrote his first short-story ‘One Sunday’, which won Hart House prize for that year. Mavis Gallant remarked, ‘There is only one writer in this contest, but he’s a real writer’. His second story ‘Auspicious Occasion’ won the Hart House prize, the following year. “He has a natural sense of construction and language. Even when he speaks he speaks in elegant sentences too” (Wilson 2), says Alberto Manguel, his friend, the author and critic. He is less equanimous about photographers, particularly when they ask him to strike poses that offend his sense of dignity. “He has no ambition to be part of any scene, but it would be wrong to describe him as a recluse” (Wilson 2), says Ellen Seligman, editorial director of fiction at McClelland & Stewart. Mistry loves good conversation at a small dinner rather than chitchat at a big party, and he is an extremely gracious host with a dry, impish sense of humour. You should hear him sing Scottish songs from Brigadoon – it is lovely. Mistry was always grateful for the prizes, which he won, as the money makes life easier. To him to be able to write, to get published, to get reviewed, and to have people read his books is a heavenly experiences “He’s enormously disciplined” (Wilson 3), says Ellen Seligman. A different opinion about Mistry’s personality confirms that he understands life as a whole. The state of fame or state of oblivion does not matter to him. This is
the reason that he seems to be the most authentic voice of Indian diaspora abroad. To Mistry:

One of the beliefs is that good and evil exist in the universe in a constant struggle for supremacy, and the Wise Lord created human beings with the hope that we will choose the correct path and become soldiers for good. But the choice is ours whether to vanquish evil or let rule (Wilson 4).

The lines echo Eliot’s views:

The world turns and the world changes
But one thing does not change.
In all of my years, one thing does not change.
However you disguise it, this thing does not change:
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.

(T.S. Eliot The Rock)

The Parsis are considered an elite class in the social texture of India but the pangs of being a minority community emerge repeatedly in the conversations and speeches of his characters. The stories also suggest the voices of resentment against the burden of worthless customs and rituals. ‘Squatter’ ‘Lend me Your Light’ and ‘Swimming Lessons’ explore the immigrant experiences of Indian Parsis in their dreamlands where they are recognized as an Asian in spite of their Parsi identity and the rest of the stories creep on time and space. The characters of these stories feel alienated because voluntary exile hurts more than forced exile:

a mode of experience in which a person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does
not experience himself as the centre of his world, as the creator of his own acts. . . . The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, experienced things as these are experienced; with the senses and with common sense, but at the same time without getting related to oneself and the world outside productively (Fromm 111).

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

Understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one’s subjectivity, but as the placing of one-self within a process of tradition, in which past and present (self and other) are constantly fused (Gadamer 258).

Mistry is aware about the facts that their identity is moving towards extinction and the diminishing population is an alarming signal towards the survival of their identity and ethnicity. There are seventy thousand Parsis in India, according to 2001 census. Madhavankutty Pillai quotes the Parsi demographer Kersi Limathwala about the declining population of the community: “Though there are no definite figures available at present, a rough estimate is that in a year there are one thousand deaths and five hundred births” (Dodiya 16). Rohinton Mistry in one of his interviews said:
There are only 1,20,000 Parsees in the world. So it is not a threat or a delusion that they are on the verge of disappearance. What is 60,000 in a city [Bombay] of 12 million? And it is when anything disappears from this world, any a pity species, man, animal or insect (Bhrucha 43)

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

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

Some of the major characters make pungent comments upon the priests who are generally considered the spokesmen of religious knowledge. Tales from Firozsha Baag is a kind of mirror which reflects the changing attitude, habits and thinking of the Parsis residing in India and abroad. It also reveals that superstitions and disbelief towards their own religion which have crept in the Zoroastrianism. Mistry denies, but autobiographical elements in his stories cannot be overlooked. It is clearly noticeable that his characters grow up and the character that plays important role in one story reappears in supporting role in another story.

The story ‘Auspicious Occasion’ was written after ‘One Sunday’ which is his debut story. The title ‘Auspicious Occasion’ refers to Behram roje, the Parsi New Year. It also indicates cultural fragrance and piousness. The story is the representation of Parsi culture and tradition and the decaying of its essence. It represents the identity
construction among Parsi, ethnic fixity, Zoroastrian religious customs and rituals, their sartorial tastes, and food habits. Like other communities in India, arranged marriages are very common in Parsis resulting some times even in a mismatched marriage. That emphasizes the docility of a Parsi girl and dominance of Parsi male. The bliss of marriage is shown through this couple in a Parsi family where having the difference in their opinion and age both lead a happy life. It shows the strength of Indian family structure as well as the strength of Parsi family institution. It is also a worthy example of culture conditioning of Parsi but now the circumstances have changed with the passage of time as it has become the community that has the highest divorce rate in Indian society. It also makes a sarcastic remark on the incident when a girl who is only sixteen is married to a successful thirty six years old Bombay lawyer. It explores the status of women in Parsi society through the female character Mehroo who belongs to an orthodox Parsi family where she observes:

> All important days on the Parsi calendar, had the appropriate prayers and ceremonies performed at the fire-temple, and even set aside a room with an iron-frame bed and an iron stool for the women during their unclean time of the month (3-4).

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

Whenever the Parsi males and females go to fire temple they wear white dresses which symbolize purity. When Mehroo leaves for fire-temple, she is described as “radiant in her white sari, worn the Parsi way across the white shoulder and over the forehead….When she returned from the fire temple her sari would become the storage of the fragrance of sandalwood absorbed from the smoke of sacred fire” (12). On her way to fire-temple Mehroo took the H route bus. The various stops mentioned in the story reveal Mistry’s love for his native land. Whenever Mehroo thought of fire-temple she becomes nostalgic. She remembered how, as a child:

She would wait for her mother to return from the fire-temple so she could bury her face in her lap and breathe in the sandalwood smell. Her father’s *dugli* gave off the same perfume, but her mother’s white sari was better, it felt so soft. Then there was the ritual of *Chasni*: all the brothers and sisters wearing their prayer caps would eagerly sit around the dining-table to partake of the fruit and sweet blessed during the day’s prayers ceremonies (12).

When a Pan chewer releases a huge quantity of sticky vicious dark red stuff on Rustomji’s *dugli* people make fun of him. They taunt and tease him and he reacts with anger. “*Arre* you … ghatis, what are you laughing for? Have you no shame? *Saala Chootia spat paan* on my *dugli* and you think that is a fun?” (17). The people reply in tit for tat way and when the mob becomes furious all his anger vanishes away. He calls native people ‘ghatis’ but when they supersede him then he takes narrow escape. The scene makes a comment on the status of Parsis in the Indian society. They are called ‘bawaji’. The reaction of the people reflects humiliation and suffering of being
marginalized. His dress is his Parsi identity and its spoiling becomes the cause of his marginalization even within his own marginalized community. It is important to note that the actual cause of his sufferings on the occasion is not so much his Parsi identity but the rude behaviour of his own people. When Mehroo returns home, she compares his paan stained dugli with murdered Dastur Dhunjisha’s dugli.

Mehroo herself sweeps and mops because she would decorate the entrance of her flat with coloured chalk, hang up the tohrun and spread the fragrance of loban in her flat. But the maid does not come in time and she does not wish to change the order because she thinks it an ill omen to skip or change the order of these prescribed things to observe such festivals as Behram roje. She cooks dhandar-paatyo and saliboti special Parsi cuisine for the special occasion. For Mehroo Behram roje is a special day as:

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

For Mehroo it is desirable to celebrate Behram roje in this conventional way. But Rustomji has a different opinion because he thinks that all these customs are dead and meaningless. Even the children do not like the traditional Parsi foods. Mehroo, a firm believer of Parsism, has been visiting the fire temple from her school days. She used to offer a sandalwood stick and deposit it in the silver tray in the inner sanctuary of fire temple. Dastur Dhunjisha would treat her as his own daughter and always greet her with a hug and she also enjoyed the motherly touch. But on the other side
Rustomji blames him as a hypocrite who loves to touch and feel women and drive more pleasure in hugging and squeezing the younger and fleshier women. As if it is not enough, he also alleges him for exchanging lewd remarks between lines of prayer. Mistry seems to be engaged in an act of externalization and adjustment in the society:

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

It seems once again that Rustomji does not believe in his religion from the core of his heart and he observes the customs and rituals for the sake of formality. All these episodes support the view that religious devotion is decaying among the Parsis. Although, he prays to God yet he nurses the cheap and obscene desire to have a glimpse of the the breast nipples of Gajra, their maid servant. He asserts, “Dada Ormuzd, just once let me see them, only once” (10). The story reflects the inner struggle of the minority community in the Hindu dominated society whether to accept or reject the old system.

The sense of wee consciousness and brotherhood is highlighted at many stances in the story. When Mehroo requests to Baag trustees, “Bawa, you are a Parsi too, you know how very important Behram roje is’ and he said he understands, he
will have the WC repaired today” (11). The diminishing population may be the cause behind wee consciousness among Parsis. These are the reflections of ethnic enclosure in this small community. They have a specific attachment toward their hegemonic group. The reaction of Rustomji on Dastur Dhunjisa’s murder, “What is happening in the world I don’t know? Parsi killing Parsi … chasniwalla and dustoor…” (20). But the traits of human behaviour supersede this wee consciousness. The murder itself is a heinous crime and as Mehroo listened “….stabbed in the back…. ” (15), reveals the lack of mutual faith and symbolizes cheating and double cross even in a community which is considered true and honest. The place like fire temple has been changed into murder place and auspicious occasion of Behram roje has turned into mourning day as Dustoor Kotwal announced “All prayers and ceremonies scheduled for today have been cancelled, except the prayers for the dead” (14).

The author also focusses on the changing attitude and mentality of the Parsis. The proverb “Parsi, thy name is charity” has lost its meaning now because the protagonist of the story Rustomji has decided long ago, “…. that this was no country for sorrow or compassion or pity – these were worthless and, at best, inappropriate” (8). Mistry presents the realistic picture of changing attitude and psychology of people not only outwardly but at the inner level also. It becomes the true representation of day to day life in a particular city like Bombay in general and the true picture of decaying Parsi values. The story’s focus is on the various disasters that take place on Behram roje. The miserable state of Firozsha building, the stinking lavatory, and leaking ceiling, peeling paint and falling plasters are the indicators of the time present scheme where the chief male protagonist Rustomji:

picked up The Times of India and settled in his easy chair, waiting for the bath water to boil. Something would have to be done about the
peeling paint and plaster; in some places the erosion was so bad, red brick lay exposed (7).

The story moves back

these flats had been erected in an incredibly short time and with very little money. Cheap materials had been used, and sand carted from nearby Chaupatty beach had been mixed in abundance with substandard cement (7).

And again:

Now during the monsoon season beads of moisture trickled down the walls, like sweat down a coolie’s back, which considerably hastened the crumbling of paint and plaster(7).

The falling plaster symbolizes the decaying of the Parsi community. They are gradually losing their identity. As they have spread and scattered all over the world and are unable to follow their tradition, ritual and customs. The lack of unity is seen when tenants replastered and painted their flat excluding Rustomji. He refuses to pay his share for painting the exterior part of A Block: “The building had acquired an appalling patina of yellow and grey griminess” (6). The colour “yellow” and “grey” indicate death and decay. Thus the building becomes a symbol. With the help of Nariman Hansotia the building regained its identity, associated with the rebirth of Parsi identity.

“One Sunday” is the first story written by Mistry that was not intended to write as a part of the anthology Tales from Firozsaa Baag. He wrote this story for Canadian Hart House literary contest and won the first prize. Mistry highlights the
The story makes a commentary on middle class Parsi families and their way of living. It highlights the economic and social conditions of these people at one hand and the human behaviour on the other to portray life in its real terms. The author observes and depicts the absurdities and problems of daily life with marked realism. He deals with the problem of immigration artistically, that how the children migrate to get affluents leaving their elders behind to be on their own. It is a revelation of food habits and social mannerism of Indian Parsis along with their likes and dislikes. “One Sunday” projects their behaviour with other castes, classes and categories of people. It exposes the psychology of various characters with their inner as well as outer qualities. Francis is a Christian as the name suggests but the sole employment of Francis is to provide services to the inhabitants of Firozsha Baag. It is aptly suggested that professions are not based on religion and Christians are more alienated in Indian society.
The author peeps into the psychology of adolescent characters such as Dolly, Vera, Pesi, Percy Boyce, Kersi Boyce, and Jahangir, the Bulsara Bookworm. The story describes class discrimination not only in grown ups but children also in a very pathetic manner, “Fancis … Disappointed when Kersi did not notice him.” When Kersi and Percy Boyce go in Tar Gully behind Francis to catch him; some of the local residents pass hurting comment upon them, “Parsi bawa ji! Cricket at night? Parsi bawaji! What will you hit boundary or sixer?” (35). In this way, the series of incidents rip off the layers of human behaviour and reveal the painful reality of discrimination against the Parsi community. Francis symbolizes the position of the underdog of society, who has to struggle, as:

Struggle [which] is an essential counter part of political and economic struggle. Since cultural hegemony continues to play a invaluable role in the production of subjects who are compliant toward the economic and political domination of internal as well as external colonialism, and since it legitimates the acceptance of one mode of life and the exclusion-or extermination-of others, the function of cultural criticism and struggle is to contest continually the binary oppositions on which such legitimation is founded (Mohmmed 6).

The game of cricket has been associated with Parsi identity in India which symbolizes their elite status and gentlemanship. Kersi’s father teaches him how to play cricket and it become Kersi’s passion very soon. Here the ‘bat’ becomes powerful symbol of empirical game and eliteness. It becomes the hallmark of Parsism in modern time and close association to Company Raj. Thus, cricket, dresses, and foods are the signs and symbols of cultural construct.
The aroma of Parsi food pupeta-noo-goose and dhandar-paatyo appeals to the senses. The Boyce family eats beef and collects its weekly stock at one time. Tehmina’s fondness for “Chilled Lemonade” and “Scotch and Soda” reveals their taste and food habits. Refrigerator is used here as an apt symbol of community living and mutual co-operation among Parsis that fulfills the requirement of residents of Firozsha Baag. Najamai the sole owner of the refrigerator in the Baag indicates the economic condition of the Parsis. The author reveals ‘the give and take’ attitude of people in modern times through the behaviour of his characters. Mistry unearths the depth of human psychology to point out that necessity is an effective cause of social harmony.

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

Najamai’s daughters had gone abroad, they took with them the youthful sensuality that once filled the flat, and which could drive Kersi giddy with excitement on a day like this, with no one home, and all before him the prospect of exploring Vera and Dolly’s bedroom, examining their undies that invariably lay scattered around, running his hands through lacy frilly things, rubbing himself with these and, on
one occasion, barely rescuing them a sticky end. Now, exploration would yield nothing but Najamai’s huge underclothes (29).

Another erotic narration occurs, when Francis steals eighty rupees from Najamai’s flat and makes a narrow escape toward the Tar Gully. Kersi and Percy with their bat are in search of the culprit. They come across ghatis, who are waiting for the final Matka draw to decide their destinies. The ghatis are mentioned in ‘Auspicious Occasion’.

After seeing the cow in the Tar Gully Kersi’s erotic image swayed in front of him and he recollects how one morning:

When the daughter was milking the cow and a young man was standing behind her seated figure. He was bending over the girl, squeezing her breasts with both hands. . . .He thought of Najamai’s daughters, the rat in the bedroom, Vera’s near-nude body, his dispossessed fantasy (36).

Often the tumult arises out of a sexuality and eroticism only acknowledged by the male characters. The repressed sexual feelings in the minds of old male protagonist Rustomji, as well as adolescent Kersi are exploited freely, hence presents a bias in which women are neglected or deny their sexuality and only seems serving sexual and procreative needs of man though in fantasies.

“The Ghost of Firozsha Baag” is a multi-dimensional story, as it is a commentary on Parsi culture and social traditions made by a non-Parsi narrator, Jacqueline, the ayah. The narrator of the story, Jaakaylee as her name is mispronounced in the story narrates each and every incident in detail about the Parsi family in which she has been working as ayah for more than fifty years. She is a Catholic Christian who is wholeheartedly devoted to her religion and makes
observations about Parsi Zoroastrianism with objectivity and psychological detachment. She tells about the life of Parsis inside as well as outside the Parsi home. The story puts off one layer after another of human psychology and behaviour in the words of an illiterate ayah as a narrator who speaks in a straightforward manner about the different issues. The treatment of supernatural elements and superstitions among the Parsis is the major content of the story. Here Mistry also deals with the theme of displacement and exile within the country for people in search of employment. Living in exile is believed to be a great loss:

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

The narrator herself is a ghost seer and firm believer in the existence of ghosts from her very childhood. She recalls each and every incident about her childhood related to her father, Cajetan and ghosts of Goa. The narrator uses Hindi, Parsi and Konkani words in the story which give a realistic touch to it. According to some post-colonial critics language is power, power language. How the words change their pronunciation when they are used by the speakers of other languages ‘easy chair’, ‘igeechur’ French beans was ferach beech and Jacqueline became Jaaykalee. It is common in all old Parsis and they make their own private language. However, the narrator is an illiterate ayah even then she feels the pangs of displacement from Goa to Bombay. But she reconcile to all this with finding a job in Bombay. Diasporic writers use their native language in their writings. The characters speak in their mother tongue. There may be
frequent use of words, through which one come to know wherefrom has an individual shifted. Language is considered to be the identity of a person as Halliday defines:

Language creates reality and therefore its categories of content cannot be defined, since we could define them only by relating them to some pre-existing model of experience, and there is no model of experience until the linguistic categories are there to model it (Halliday 10).

Jacqueline’s first encounter with bhoot creates sensation and fear in the environment. But her employer and his wife do not believe in her story and called her “Crazy” which shows that they are non-believers in ghosts. The children of Firozsha Baag also make a fun of her by saying, “SEE TODAY, at APSARA CINEMA, R.K. ANAND’S NEW Fillum Bhoooot Bungla, starring JAAKAYLEE of BLOCK B!” (47). Pesi the notorious son of Dr. Mody wearing a white bed sheet plays the role of a ghost successfully to tease two modern girls of Firozsha Baag Vera and Dolly daughters of Najamai. In this way the story creates an environment blending fun, fear and supernatural element. The story also foregrounds that Parsis who have deep faith in Parsi Zoroastrianism firmly believe in secularism. Due to their humane attitude, the narrator appreciates their charity, secularism and non-conservatism. She makes a comment, “I was saying it was very lucky for me to become ayah in Parsi house, and never will I forget that” (46). But it does not mean that she is a blind supporter of Parsism as at the same time she reveals the superiority complex prevalent among Parsis:

Parsis prefer Mangloreans Catholics, they have light skin colour. For themselves also Parsis like light skin, and when Parsi baby is born that is the first and most important thing. If it is fair they say, O how nice light skin just like parents. But if it is dark skin they say, arre what is this ayah no chhokro, ayah’s child (46).
The ayah very honestly describes everything about Chartered Accountant and his family as an insider of Parsi house but at the same time being a Catholic Christian presents the Parsi culture and traditions with an artistic detachment and objectivity. She comments upon their thinking, viewpoints and opinions on various issues frankly. Another incident which reflects their sense of superiority complex is suggested when Parsi priest claims to have the most powerful prayers in comparison to Hindu priest. “….Parsi priest has most powerful prayers of all” (54). The ayah narrates the series of incidents how her Bai begins to believe in ghosts and organize a ritual called Jashan to tackle ghosts. The illiterate ayha narrates the event of performing Jashan and catches the greedy nature of the priest during this development. The ritual is performed with great devotion and piousness to control the ghosts:

Dustoorji was pleased, and he checked his Parsi calendar for a good day. On that morning I had to wash whole balcony floor specially, then dustoorji came, spread a white sheet, and put all prayer items on it, a silver thing in which he made fire with sandalwood and loban, a big silver dish, a lotta full of water, flowers and some fruit (54).

Besides the religious rituals, the narrator observes that the Parsi family is fond of goan curry. They give preference to hand made masala in curry for its original taste. The narrator tells the recipe of making curry and Basmati rice. Her way of describing recipes creates sensuousness. It also shows the changing dressing sense among Parsis. Though the conventional Parsi ladies wear saris but that has been replaced for ultra modern girls of Firozsha Baag who have started wearing “high heel shoes” and “mini skirt”, the narrator makes a comment “Very esskey-messkey, so short I don’t know how their mai-baap allowed it” (47).
The New Year’s Eve dances are very popular among the Parsis. They go to cinema to see movie. The modern girl Dolly and Vera do not hesitate to see the night show. The narrator, Jaaykalee makes an observation about the human behaviour when she says, “very rich people, my bai-seth. He is a Chartered Accountant. He has a nice motor car, just like A Block priest, and like the one Dr Mody used to drive... Bai says they should buy it from Mrs. Mody, she wants it to go shopping” (47). It reflects the economic condition of her employer but she further comments, “But a masala machine they will not buy.” (47). It seems that the ayah as a narrator is selected consciously because she appropriately fulfills the requirement of the author. The story reflects the features of not only Parsi Zoroastrianism but imparts information about Catholic Christians also. The characterization in the story is apt which helps in the portrayal of real life in fictional world. When Dustoorji performs jashan in the house of Chartered Accountant, he tells Jaaykalee to go inside because he thinks that Parsi prayers are so powerful, only a Parsi can listen to them. Every one else can be badly damaged inside their soul if they would listen. But when Bai the empoyer of Jaaykalee is haunted by bhoot and she starts to think that prayers did not work effectively that exposes the hollowness of such claims as made by the priest. So, she decides to involve the ayah, a non-Parsi woman in a “little magic” with Soopra and Scissors. She covers her head with a white mathoobanoo as the little magic require two Parsis. It shows that the fear of bhoot (ghost) shatters the difference of Parsi and non-Parsis in them and melts the borders of religion, race and class.

Mistry, undoubtedly reveals the life of Parsis, their culture and traditions, rituals, food habit, celebrations along with their fears and mysticism. He presents the views that human behaviour in all religions and faiths have some common features. Our mythology and ways of worship may be different but the core of all religions
remains unchanged still prevalent in Goa. Memory is again a powerful tool in the hand of Mistry to reveal reminiscences of his narrator. The story highlights the characteristics of Mistry’s writing style and carries his agenda to preserve the Parsi culture and traditions. The narrative of diaspora is a reproduction of ‘self’. It is an act of dispersal, a scattering, a flight and has to take root elsewhere and finally succeed to present a composite culture. All representations and reproductions of the homeland cannot be considered equally valid or invalid. Ethically, morally and literarily evaluations should be different and emancipated from global cultural politics. All the diasporic writers justify their diaspora and their writing as Rushdie puts it, “Literature is self-validating” (Rushdie 14). They construct the motherland “not as an area of darkness, confusion, violence, but hopeless and doomed country which much be rejected” (Paranjape 11). Consequently the narrative of cultural diaspora is trapped in politics:

Diasporic representations of India can be harmful and misleading in at least two related ways. First, they might end up usurping the space which native self-representations are striving to find in the international literary market place. Secondly, they may contribute to a continuing “colonization” of the Indian psyche by pandering to Western market-tastes which prefer to see India in a negative light. Both these dangers arise not necessarily from a design on the part of the expatriates to “sell” India, though the latter possibility cannot be dismissed too easily. Rather, they are born out of the peculiar cultural politics of the diaspora (Zedong 19).

“Condolence Visit” comments on the status of the followers of pre-Islamic religion. Mistry presents every view of life in his fiction that portrays the human life in its true
colours. His characterization and narrative technique is apt and suggestive according to the requirements of the story to present day to day activities of common Parsis and reflect their real position in society. The author reveals human psychology through the behaviour and actions of his characters. The old Parsi tradition is graphically depicted in the story. The word condolence symbolizes the solace and peace for the family members of demised, but it enhances the pain when people come without sympathy and just for the sake of formality. Daulat, widow to Minocher Mirza has to repeat the details of his illness. The traditions and rituals related to death in Parsi community are elaborated in the present story. The term dusmoo, tenth day after the funeral which is observed in fire temple and the ‘maosiso’ means a month after the last rite are elaborated with their worth in the story. However, the people come to the family of the demised person to share their grief and owe sympathy but here the story explores the inner feelings of widow whose husband has died recently after a long illness. She comments on condolence visits, “The worst of it would be the repetition of details for different visitors at different hours on different days” (60) that multiplies the sufferings of the family members.

Daulat Mirza does not show her insensitivity towards Minocher Mirza when she defies such pseudo sympathies. She very tenderly nursed him during his illness and when her nephew Sarosh, the Canadian immigrant brings her a portable cassette tape recorder from Canada, she refused to accept it saying that “Poor Minoher sick in bed, and I listen to music?”(60). But later on she repents upon her decision not to accept that portable cassette tape recorder and that exposes the irony of human situation. She realizes that how superficially people visit her in the name of condolence and she has to give full detail of Minocher’s illness like a mechanical tool.

The development of story shows her attachment for her dying husband Minocher. Here the situation is highlighted that she could not bear the visitors who
come propelled by “custom and conventions”. Here cassette recorder symbolizes the modern man and his insensitivity. The “R-button” shows his memory literally mean Rewind and rememorize and “FF button” means “Fast Forward” expresses the how people feel bored towards the sufferings of others. The button ‘P’ stands for “Pause”. If you wish to stop the expression of someone’s sufferings then stop with button-P. So the cassette recorder here becomes the powerful symbol of modern man who shows his condolences only for the sake of social formality. The widow Daulat Mirza wishes to leave Firozsha Baag to avoid these frequent condolence visits but she fears that it would generate virulent gossip in the society. These customary visits highlight the relative effect of pathos and sympathy for Daulat.

Najamai, another widow, resident of Firozsha Baag behaves like an authority on the subject of widowhood and gives instructions on various issues such as death and widowhood. Najamai objects why Daulat did not put off the lamp which should be blown up, raises the question of the relevance or hollowness of rituals and customs. She tells her that it is against customs but it is noteworthy that this lamp provides comfort to Daulat. So, she supplies oil to it and keeps it burning against the Parsi culture and tradition. The element of pathos and irony runs throughout the story that exposes the futility of customs and rituals in the society.

Mistry uses powerful symbols and images to handle the delicate situation. Minocher Mirza’s ‘Pugree’ becomes the powerful symbol of Parsi cultural heritage like many other Indian cultures. The Parsis used to wear pugree on the important occasion particularly on marriage. When Daulat decides to give it to a Parsi youngman after the day of Dushmoo, then Najamai and Moti oppose it by saying that it will disturb Minocher’s soul. In the changing times, the Parsi youth is leaving the customs and traditions but the Parsi youngman tells them, “we decided to do everything, all the ceremonies, the proper traditional way at our wedding in correct
Parsi dress and all” (73-74). It becomes a cause of satisfaction for them and Najamai responds, “Look here, bawa, it’s very nice to hear you want to do it the proper Parsi way. So many young men are doing in suits and ties… Like Dhobitalao Goan wedding of a Catholic it was looking” (74). Daulat once again violates the social norms of Parsi society when she gives Minocher’s pugree as a marriage gift. The situation reflects how Parsi youth is under the influence of change. They have to face its consequences also. Sarosh who is called Sid – being a Canadian immigrant rejects to wear the Parsi Pugree on the occasion of his marriage. Daulat recalls her childhood days and emphasizes her fondness for English music which is the common trait of Parsis in India due to their long association with the colonizer. They feel that they are very close to the English so they follow their habits and life style. Thus, the story touches the various aspects of Parsi life, their culture and customs particularly related to funeral and after funeral rites. Mistry highlights the hypocrisy and pretentious nature of people through the behaviour, actions and speeches of his characters. The story focusses upon the theme of belongingness and urge to break away.

Mistry, a keen observer of human psychology, deals with child and adolescent psychology in his story ‘The Collectors’. He delves into the psyche of his characters and reveals typical human nature and behaviour of the residents of Firozsha Baag. As the title indicates, it revolves around the hobby of stamps collection but reveals the various aspects of life. The story set in Firozsha Baag presents the view of Microcosm of Parsi world and reflects the behaviour of residents particularly Mody and Bulsara families. The writer foregrounds the psychology of adolescent boys in the Baag. It is also the revelation of the hollowness of human relationships and human wishes.

The story presents the ironical view of Dr. Mody who gets respect and has the reputation of a thorough gentleman, but has to face humiliation due to his son Pesi. No doubt, people respect him heartily but they cannot tolerate his son to spoil their
children and provoke them to do wrong deeds. They complain to Dr. Mody against his evil expedition to torment poor dumb and helpless creatures. Dr. Mody named him on the name on “Peshotan, in the Persian epic, *Shah-Nameh*” (82) who was a great lover of art, a noble general and a man of wise counsel. It also emphasizes that expectations sometimes prove so tragic and futile as Pesi grows up to be just the contrary of what his name suggests. Dr. Mody expects that his son:

> Would play the violin, acquire the best from the cultures of East and West, thrill to words of Tagore and Shakespeare, appreciate Mozart and Indian ragas; and one day, at the proper moment, he would introduce him to his dearest, activity, stamp - collecting (82).

The story reflects various colours of life with the keen observations of a story teller. Dr. Mody who was an educated person and had the elite status in Parsi community and outside his community also follows the practices of Parsism. He wears “White Payajama”, “Sudra” and “a huge pair of Sapaat” at home. Mrs. Bulsara with her *mathoobanoo* represents the conventional Parsi woman and believes in God to the core of her heart. She occasionally asserts the phrases *Khoedai salaamat raakhe* and *Khoedai* are great which reveals her deep faith in the existence of God and her religion. Mrs. Mody does not like the association of Dr. Mody and Jehangir Bulsara and intrigues them by stealing the important ‘dancing lady stamp’ successfully. She thinks Dr. Mody does not pay proper attention towards his own son Pesi. But it is the irony of the situation that ultimately she hands over all the stamp collection to Jehangir Bulsara who does not keep these valuable stamps properly. The stamps become the important symbol of faith during the story which ultimately turns into a heap of wastage, “It was doubtful of anything of value remained in trunk” (103). The episode of Eric D’Souza and Jehangir unearths the adolescent psychology. The
refined hobby of stamp collection provokes Jehangir to do such deeds which are not acceptable in the society. It pushes him towards homosexuality and theft of stamps from the Vendor outside the school. Another incident occurs when Mrs. Bulsara observes that her son is not paying proper attention towards the stamp collection handed over to him by Mrs. Modi “Do something Jehangoo, do some thing with them.” (102). The boy does not show any interest in this matter again because she was well aware about the adolescent psychology, “Jehangoo was at that difficult age… when boys automatically did the exact reverse of what their parents said” (102).

When Dr. Mody dies, his body is brought to Bombay from Ahmedabad for a proper Parsi funeral. When Dr. Mody first time came in the Baag he felt very happy to think that he would live amidst of his own community as reported by Mrs. Mody after his death. It is noteworthy that the Parsis follow their set traditions and rituals to the great extent. The story presents another ironical view in the story. When the dead body of Dr. Mody was brought, people talked, “Poor Dr. Mody never went a day without a bath and talcum powder in life” (99). The irony of life does not stop here but the story ends not on disappointment and lack of faith. Mrs. Mody hands over the most valuable stamp collection of Dr. Mody to Jehangir keeping the faith in his sincerity and interest but he does not keep her faith. The valuable collection of stamps turns into waste. Actually, it is not the destruction of stamps but faith also.

“Of White Hairs and Cricket” is an interesting story, narrated by a fourteen years old boy Kersi Boyce who is the narrator of many stories. It presents life from the eyes of a teenager who is an insider in the Firozsha Baag. The title of the story is very apt and suggestive and symbolizes health and joviality of life through white hairs and cricket. The game of cricket which was introduced by the Britishers and has now become the most popular game of the country is the favourite game of Parsis from the
older days. The white hairs reflect maturity along with growing age so undesired that these are called “the signposts of mortality” (107). The story presents the harsh realities of life with the powerful symbol and images in this competitive world.

The story deals with father-son relationship, expectations of parents and the sacrifices made by them for their children. The story revolves around the mundane life of a Parsi family and shows a sense of belongingness. It is presented in a very touching way how a father dreams about a successful future for his son. He desires his son to be always tough and applauds his son on performing well, “Today my son did a brave thing, as I would have done. A powerful shot was going to the boundary, like a cannon ball, and he blocked it with his bare shin” (108). The bright future or dream job thought by a father for his son as revealed in the story is to migrate to a Western country as Mr. Boyce says, “And one day, you must go, too, to America. No future here” (112). The assertion shows how much he was fed up with the corrupt system resulting in unemployment, adulteration and black marketing. It isn’t easy to meet the expenses of routine life for a lower middle class family but even then the father assures his son, “Somehow we’ll get the money to send you. I’ll find a way” (112). The tone of the narrative reveals the pathetic condition of narrator’s family which is actually the representation of a number of Indian families.

The people pass their time in positive hope and day dreaming which points out the vanity of human wishes along with their optimistic view of life. The father of the narrator boy checked classified pages of The Times of India Sunday edition for a suitable job and was very hopeful to find it. As he sees any advertisement, he feels that he will be selected for the same and their hard days will finish at once but the mother considers this a dream of a ‘Shaik-Chullee’. So, the life is presented as the blending of happiness and sorrows, hope and despair, and positive and negative
thoughts. The author touches many other points and analyses the characters like Mamaiji who is a superstitious lady and objects on white hairs removing session because she thinks it is unfortunate to perform, she says, “Sunday dawns and he makes the child do that duleendar thing again. It will only bring bad luck” (109). She further warns, “plucking out hair as if it was a slaughtered chicken. An ill-omened thing” (109). But the father rejects her conviction saying that if it is so ill-omened then how he may able to get good advertisement in Sunday classified. The conversation once again strikes the different opinions and generation gap. Mamaiji has her own mind set and ideas but Mr. Boyce considers all these opinions irrational. In this way, it becomes a constant struggle of tradition versus modernity and superstitions versus rationality. The game of cricket has a historical importance and symbolical significance in the story. The passion for cricket among Parsis is the symbol of their elitism and close ties with the Britishers. It reveals the cricket fixation among Parsis which has become very common now-a-days in India. The Parsi Gymkhana Club once defeated the cricket team of Bombay Gymkhana Club that is considered the landmark in the history of Indian cricket. In this way, like in other fields they are pioneers in the game of cricket in India.

The Parsi households make ‘Kusti’ at home having a grace of its own. The Parsi Calendar which contains no picture in it except “English and Parsi names of months and roje in Gujarati besides each date” (109) shows the cultural ties of the British, Gujaratis, and the Parsis. In this way, the story touches the various aspects of the Parsi household and familyhood. Mistry depicts very artistically how careful are the Parsis about their children and eager to teach them the art of business and social behaviour.

The writer explores some of the important Parsi customs and rituals directly and indirectly such as “Sacred Bhikha Behram Well” which symbolizes the value of
purity in Parsi public life. The narrator observes the orange glow of stove reminds him of “the glow in the fire temple afargaan”. It suggests how much the Parsi children are influenced by Parsi rituals and customs. The narrator makes a pertinent comment upon the way of Parsi worship, “there wasn’t a blazing fire because hardly any sandalwood offerings had been left in the silver thaali; most people came only at the holy days” (113). The people do not visit fire temples daily now. It reveals that the people have no time to go to fire temples. But even now the person who follows the Parsi traits gets respect in the society. Dr. Mody and Dr. Sidhwa are appreciated as ‘steadfast Parsis’ who are seen often at fire temples. Thus, the story gives an overview of struggling middle class society in a Parsi apartment. The narrator thinks about his friend’s family and then about his own mother, father and mamaiji and how much his elders struggle to earn a livelihood and run a family in this world of cut throat competition.

“The Paying Guest” highlights the problem of housing in the metro city like Bombay along with some other key issues such as theme of alienation, belongingness and growing insensitivity in the society. All the major characters in the story are Parsis; so, it provides a peep into the Parsi world to understand the outlook and attitude of Parsis in their own community. The story revolves around the paying guest and the problem related to the eviction of paying guests, law of tenancy and sub-tenancy. It also exposes the lengthy process of litigation and hypocritical nature of people. It examines human behaviour in relation to society.

When Khorshedbai started to throw onion skin, coconut shells and egg shells then Ardesar tries to persuade her not to behave in this way and says, “O Khotty my life, what have you done, that thing you threw. We will have to answer one day to the one up there. This must stop before…” (125-126). But Khorshedbai was adamant and
not ready to understand the situation of that innocent couple, and continues her mission to torture Boman and Kashmira; then Ardesar helplessly only prays to God to forgive her: “Dado Ormuzd, forgive her” (125). The described situation not only reveals the inner most psychology of the characters but also presents the relation of landlord and tenants.

The story also reveals the prejudiced opinion of people like Boman who neither like working women nor believe in equal status of woman in their family. The hints of gender discrimination may be commonly observed in Firozsha Baag that is the bitter and unhealthy trend nor for Parsis only but all. Boman who is a commerce graduate does not like that his wife, Kashmira should take up a job. He asserts, “no wife of his would go out to work while there was breath in his lungs” (127). It is not the opinion of Boman alone but represents the whole orthodox class of Indian society and it is important to note that only due to this discrimination Kashmira could not join the social service league even when she was interested in doing so. Thus, as a daughter and wife, she was expected to follow the set principles such as “charity begins at home, or; self help is the best help” (133) which were totally futile to her. In this way, kashmira represents the whole class of such women who have caliber and temper to do something creative for the welfare of the society but it remains unused or goes futile because of the prejudices and biased approach of masculine counterparts in the community. They are expected to perform odd jobs in their kitchen and household.

The snail pace process of litigation and typical tenancy and sub tenancy law is also exposed in the story. When Boman gets knowledge about the act of tenancy and sub-tenancy he feels frustrated and repents on his decision to choose the option of litigation for evacuation of his house. He asserts, “There are laws to protect the
poor….and laws to protect the rich. But middle-class people like us get the bamboo, all the way” (133). Here, Mistry depicts the position of middle class families in the Indian social set up. He also explores the self-centered and selfish nature of human behaviour when Boman needs evidence in his favour to evict his tenant. But it emerges as a shock that no body comes forward to support him. His most faithful Chartered Accountant defies him hypocritically, “there is one principle in my life, Boman dikra… Which I never transgress: three monkeys principle…” (137). This reflects the deconstructive approach of Gandhian philosophy and exposes how the well off people who do not want to involve in others sufferings. He claims that he is determined not to see evil, not to speak evil and not to listen evil. Rustomji who was his brother-in-law also gruffly dismissed Boman saying, “Sorry, but enough time I spend in court rooms, as it is” (138). The lady Najamai who keenly shows her interest in everyone’s matter also shows her helplessness saying, “I, a widow, living all alone…You will find to have someone else”(138). In the same way, rest of the people also make excuses and escape from the situation. Mrs. Modi is leading a “clustered life” and passes all her time in prayers. But it is interesting that someone in the Baag, who can speak in the court in his favour, is the Muslim who lives in the next flat. But the hegemonic feelings arouse in his heart that “he would not stoop to that, to ask him to testify against a fellow Parsi” (138). This attitude of human behaviour once again reinforces the idea of ethnic enclosure in Parsis.

Thus, the ethnic sensibility of this minority community is caught up and it is maintained even in such a crucial situation as expressed in the story. Mistry reconciles this selfish and hypocritical nature of Parsis in the end of the story when Khorshedbai encaged the newborn child of Boman and Kashmira in her Pestonji’s cage. The narrator observes: “…two kinds of Parsis in the Baag: the ones who had been
shameless enough to ignore the call for help and the ones who had responded” (141). Khors hedbai’s attachment for her parrot (Pestonji) who comes in her dreams and she follows the advice, with her own interpretations. The deserting attitude of her son, who migrated to Canada and who misbehaved with his parents when they went to live with him, may be responsible for her rude behaviour. It once again depicts the picture of society with the theme of alienation and belongingness. Ardesar’s emotional attachment with pigeons hints at his affectionate and caring nature which gives him solace and re-emphasizes and reconciles the unbelongingness. The question of fixation is explained when their own issues reject the parent and they shift their affection towards pets and birds. Khors hedbai tortures her owner too much and even then she is a firm believer in God when Ardesar was ready to quit the flat; Khors hedbai forbade him and said, “Prayerful people like us have nothing to fear” (133). She uses the only and one record Sukhi Sooraj, the fervent tribute to sunrise and lit sticks of agarbatti as a tool to make them troublesome. The problem of housing in Bombay, attitude of trustees and lengthy process of litigation is also highlighted in the story. It exposes the psychology of paying guests as well as owners in a balanced way. Thus it becomes the representation of Parsis and their routine life in Bombay in its true colour.

The story “Exercisers” begins with the confused state of mind of Mrs. and Mr. Bulsara about their son Jehangir and they seek the help of their family guru to convince Jehangir that his girlfriend is not a suitable match for him. It reflects another noticeable aspect of Parsi’s way of life i.e., Parsis have started to transgress their boundaries of religion and the influences of dominant religion have started influencing the Parsi way of life. The story breaks the myths that all the Parsis are elite and prosperous and also highlights that they believe in Parsi Zoroastrianism and
go to fire temples only for their prayers. The story gives a lot of information about the Parsi culture and social traditions and also reveals the gradual decay of their moral, social and ethical values. Mistry focusses the relation of parents and children in the story. When Jehangir returns home his mother examines him with skillfull questions and observes his face and dress. He feels awkward about the suspicious attitude of his mother. However, he might have ignored this kind of examination and observation but he responds, “You won’t see anything. Behroze never puts on make up, when we got kissie-koatie (217). Jehangir who appears a decent, docile and shy natured boy in the early stories; now reacts in a rude way which cannot be accepted by the parents easily. It was a new kind of experience for them. Mrs. Bulsara clutched her throat with both hands and said, “When a son speaks so shamelessly to his mother it is the end” (217). It is a well known fact that inter-faith marriages are prohibited in Parsism but the story unveils the situation that Parsi parents feel too insecure to accept even a Parsi girl of their son’s choice. It was not in the case of boy only; the girl’s parents were also very fussy about their relationship. When they think that break-up between boy and girl has taken place only then they leave her alone at home as Behroze tells, “…my parents think we’ve broken up, and they didn’t need to stick around to guard my virginity” (220). The instance reflects the fixity of Parsi parents about their children. The author reveals the inmost feelings of his characters and reflects the transformation in the personality of Jehangir Bulsara.

Mistry depicts the local train system in Bombay and exposes the hardships and absurdities of life. Everywhere paan-stained benches show the lack of manners in the common people and at the same time, it symbolizes the corrupt political system of the country also. Besides the filthy environment, he focusses upon power and water shortage everywhere and the rising price of kerosene, and thus foregrounds the picture of life in a metro city Bombay. Jehangir, the protagonist of the story feels the urge to
join the group of exercisers having a desire to be powerful young man. In some early stories he has the image of a bookworm and a docile boy. Due to an inferiority complex in his mind that he has “a skinny-armed, stoop-shouldered weakling” (219), he feels reluctant to join the group of exercisers. He is not a bold and straightforward boy and perhaps this is the reason that he finds himself in a trap which is due to his relation with his parents and his beloved Behroze. He was not able to break the thread of this trap not because he is physically weak but because of his indecisive nature. The story presents the realistic picture of a Parsi family where the parents are over conscious about their children and have a kind of fixation but their children do not like this security cover.

Mistry explores the continuous struggle between traditions and modernity, particularly under the influence of western exposure. Parsis who have been trying to keep their cultural heritages intact even since their expulsion from Iran. But in the modern times, it is pathetic and a matter of great concerns how they are transgressing their limits by shifting their loyalty to dominating Hindu religion. It raises a question on their identity and cultural construct. However, Mrs. Bulsara ties mathoobanoo and shows herself a true Parsi but her deepest devotion is centered on Bhagwan Baba, a Hindu religious man. She tries her best to convince Jehangir to visit Bhagwan Baba and tells him, “Your entire life’s happiness is at stake .... When Bhagwan Baba speaks your eyes will open, all will become clear” (197). Mrs. Bulsara is not thankful to Dada Ormuzd but a Hindu religious man and regards him as the benefactor of her family. She says, “after father lost job, who do you think helped, his friends, our relations, who? Bhagwan Baba and we have enough to eat and wear, thanks to him”(197). In this way, it also exposes the hollowness of friends and relatives. Mistry emphasizes the non-cooperation at hegemonic and ethnic levels.
It is a common belief that all the Parsis are rich and prosperous but the present story unearths the real picture of Parsi community in Bombay. The central character of the story Jehangir still remembers his days of poverty and thinks about, envelopes, labeled Rent, School fees, Ration, Kerosene, Light and water…. He also points out that due to weak financial position of his parents he could not study in a co-educational school - due to “exorbitant fees” which could not be paid by his parents. He could not go to cinema because he did not have enough money and his envelop for “Pocket Money” remained always empty. The ambivalent personality of Jehangir sustains strife throughout the story between Behroze and the parents. The volleyball symbolizes his life as, “volleyball in its flight over the net but not the boys who smacked it” (220-221). His self is divided into two parts the parents and Behroze but the end of the story reflects how he leaves his beloved for his parents but her mother does not accept him because he was late by some minutes for the time fixed for returning home. The hero of the story has no heroic qualities and only shows some grumblings and resentments against the prevailing system. In this way, through ironical stances the story reflects the conditions and struggle of life of Parsis in the postmodern era. The relationship between Parsis and mainstream Hindu is a motif shown in the story collection. Regarding the story ‘Auspicious Occasion’ Bharucha says that:

Most Parsis are rather isolationist and living in ethnic ghettos like Firozsha Baag only exacerbate this tendency. About the only contact most of them have had with their Hindu co-nationals, is through the domestic servants who work in their homes (Bharucha 75).

In an interview with Rohinton Mistry, Nancy Wigston asked, “what do you say to the people who ask when you’re going to write about Canada”? In reply Mistry said: ‘It’s not as I’ve made some sort of commitment that I’m never going to write
about Canada’. Though the question is asked after the publication of his third novel *Family Matters*, but his three stories namely ‘Squatter’, ‘Lend Me Your Light’, and Swimming Lessons, of *Tales from Firozsha baag*, have Canadian setting. These stories deal with problems of immigrant experiences. All the three stories are collectively discussed to show their connectivity they possess.

The narrative in the story ‘Squatter’ is a story within a story. The story advances smoothly by the narrator Nariman Hansotia, the famous story teller of Firozsha Baag, who in his 1932 Mercedez-Benz (he called it the apple of his eye) returned in the evening from the Cawasji Framji Memorial Library, tells stories to the boys. Nariman Hansotia narrates the story of famous cricketer Savukshaw who saved the Indian team being defeated in England tour, and, “his real secret was practice, lots of practice” (150). A biographical touch is given in the story as Mistry in his fifth standard wrote a story on - ‘The autobiography of a cricket bat’. Kersi also enjoyed playing cricket. Further narrating about Savukshaw, Nariman says After the MCC (Marylebone Cricket Club) match “he became a Champion bicyclist, the fastest human on two wheels” (150), and later, a “pole-vaulter” and finally became a “hunter” absolutely fearless and skilful. Though the stories are simple in narration they aroused the usual type of curiosity. The paragraphs describe the course of action in close consecutive temporal detail from hour to hour and day to day. When the storyteller narrates Savukshaw’s cooking expertise to his young listeners, he asks suddenly: “what do you think happened next?” (151), and the suspense and curiosity successfully arouses among the listeners and they shouts, “what, what, Nariman Uncle?” (151). The linguistic structure of this story is simple narrative, with no trace of suggestive, symbolic, ambiguity and complexity. Before starting the next story about Sarosh-Sid, he asks his listeners “what did you learn about Savukshaw, from
last week’s story?” (152). Someone says “he was a very talented man” and Viraf says “a very lucky man, to have so many talents”. After few moments the book-worm, stamp-flicker of ‘The Collectors’ and lover of ‘Exercisers’-Jehangir replies: “He was a man searching for happiness, by trying all kinds of different things” (153). The narrator goes ahead and simply concludes the half-finished story with a note:

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

The concluding lines of Savukshaw’s story and the opening lines of Sarosh-Sid’s story meet and intersect at the level of plot structure. Sarosh already being introduced in the story ‘Condolence Visit’, as a nephew of Daulat and Minocher, and three months after the wedding, Sarosh with his wife emigrated to Canada and they divorced a year later because “she did not like it in Canada”(68). The question why he had never gone back to Toronto is answered in detail in this story ‘Squatter’. Nariman wants Kersi, Viraf and Jehangir to hear the story as they are planning to go to America and Canada. He also tells about Najamai’s daughters Vera and Dolly who had settled there happily and a fellow named Sarosh also went abroad, to Toronto, “but did not find happiness there”(153). Sarosh calls himself Sid in Toronto but while narrating the story Nariman prefers calling him Sarosh as it is his ‘proper Parsi name’. Nariman makes an effort to reclaim Sarosh’s identity which he lost in Toronto by calling himself Sid, a western identity:

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

Living in an alien land Sarosh finds himself miserable and depressed because he could not adjust himself upon the white plastic oval of the toilet seat. “Ten years was the time Sarosh had set himself to achieve complete adaptation to the new country . . . dependent on the old ways, and this unalterable fact, strengthened afresh every morning of his in the new country, suffocated him” (154). Sarosh passed through the problematic relationship between inter-locking cultural landscapes, between an ethnic heritage and new life in the West and to put it slightly different, between what Rosemary Sullivan, in an article entitled “The Multicultural Divide”, simply calls there and here. In Sullivan’s words, “this is not a cheap polarity of eelgrass or snow, of a vapid idealized image of a past that is the focus only of nostalgia and a simplified alienating here. It is tougher than that. There and here are interlocked” (Sullivan 26). Canada seems a strange land even to Canadians. As Corall Ann Howells says:

Canadian writing has always been pervaded by an awareness of the wilderness, those vast areas of dark forests, endless prairies or trackless wastes of snow which are geographical facts and written into the history of Canada’s exploration and settlement (Howells 11).

Sarosh’s incapability of using day to day amenities presents and intrusion of external reality in the flow of the inner reality which is his problem of converting him into a permanent Canadian. This is the central theme throughout the story. Sarosh’s dilemma and the gradual change in his attitude towards Canada and a simultaneous
indication of the broadening of his understanding of things. Before leaving for Canada Sarosh claimed: “My dear family, my dear friends, if I do not become completely Canadian in exactly ten years from the time I had there, then I will come back. I promise” (154-155). Some of his friends consider it a smart decision, “that whole life would change for better” while others say, he is “making a mistake, emigration was all wrong” (154). After his announcement they also tell him “never to fear embarrassment; there was no shame if he decided to return to the country of his birth” (155). His mother knew he is going to an unknown land. She is afraid if she will be able to see him or not. She asks him to keep his hand upon the Avesta and swear that he will keep the promise. Further she advised him to live among the family and his friends “who love you and take care for you, than to be unhappy surrounded by vacuum cleaners and dishwashers and big shiny motor cars” (155). Through the stream-of-consciousness technique at this moment, the major change in Sarosh’s life shows what a distance he had travelled to understand Canada as his mother’s advice is going to be a reality. Sarosh is unable to acquire the Western process of squatting:

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

It is due to his squatting problem he often become late for work and warned by his supervisor. Sarosh tells that he is facing “immigration-related problem” and the supervisor advised him to go to Indian Immigrant Aid Society. He meets Mrs Maha-Lepate, who tells about Dr No-Ilaaz who has succeeded in solving various immigrants’ problems. “Besides, we have an information network with other third-words Immigrant
Aid Societies” (159). Dr No-Ilaaz could get rid of this problem if he implants small device called *Crappus Non Interruptus*, or CNI in the bowel and it is controlled by an external handheld transmitter similar to the ones used for automatic garage openers. Dr No-Ilaaz also tells its procedure and drawbacks. Sarosh is not interested in taking such a drastic step. His squatting failure means he found himself unable to adapt the western culture. He could not assimilate to the new surroundings. His task of assimilation and his inability to accomplish the desired transformation can only be seen as a sign of failure: “If he could not be westernized in all respects, he was nothing but a failure in this land – a failure not just in the washrooms of the nation but everywhere” (162). Robert Park, a sociologist says that the “moral dichotomy and conflict [which] is probably characteristic of every immigration 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” (Park 893). The transformation takes place and an individual wishes to separate from her/his roots:

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

Finally, Sarosh succeeded in his task during his return journey to his homeland. “He could not help wondering if success came before or after the ten year limit had expired”(166). It is the xenophobia and hostility made Sarosh’s adjustment more difficult in an alien land. Being an immigrant at Toronto, Sarosh faced two questions “who am I?” and “where is here?” Atwood remarks:
'Who am I?' is a question appropriate in countries where the environment, the ‘here’ is already well-defined, so well defined in fact that it may threaten to overwhelm the individual. In societies where everyone and everything has its place a person may have to struggle to separate himself from his social background, in order to keep from being just a function of the structure. ‘Where is here?’ is a different kind of question. It is what a man asks when he finds himself in unknown territory, and it implies several other questions where is this place in relation to other places? How do I find way around it? (Atwood 17).

After returning to his native land Sarosh finds himself “desperately searching for his old place in the pattern of life he had vacated ten years ago. . . .The old pattern was never found by Sarosh; he searched in vain. Patterns of life are selfish and unforgiving” (167). Sarosh narrates his failure story as an immigrant to Nariman so that he could narrate the story for the boys of Firozsha Baag, especially those who are planning to go abroad. Tell them, Sarosh said “that the world can be bewildering place, and dreams and ambitions are often paths to the most pernicious of traps” (168). It echoes Bhagwan Baba of ‘Exercisers’ when he said “life is a trap, full of webs” (213). Sarosh tells Nariman not to call him Sid, as that “name reminds me of all my troubles” (167). He is happy to regain his identity as Sarosh:

Tell them that in Toronto once there lived a Parsi boy as best as he could. Set you down this; and say, besides, that for some it was good for some it was bad, but for me life in the land of milk and honey was just a pain in the posterior (168).
To choose this particular morning event of squatting for the story, Mistry employed device to portray the condition of man against his environment, the fragmentation and dissolution of a multicultural Canada. The truth with a touch of humour is filtered through an art form, this masking reality is not to hide but symbolize the ‘Otherness’ in the foreign land. The basic truths in the life of an immigrant that rounded him too harsh to be assimilated, to be confronted face to face. One’s incapability to ignore these circumstances. Ultimately, Sarosh- the Indian has to forget Sid-the Canadian.

The story ‘Lend Me Your Light’ begins with an epigraph from Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali*:

. . .your light are all lit-then where do you go with your lamp?

My house is all dark and lonesome, lend me your light.

The story is nicely narrated and moves back and forth in time and space. It is a story of displacement and rootlessness. The words of Tagore could be analyzed in the context of the sense of guilt which most of the diasporic writers suffer. The plot of the story revolves around three characters Jamshed, Percy and Kersi. The first person narrative of the story suggests that the narrator is providing the first hand information about his Indian and Canadian experiences from his childhood days till his immigration. The story graphically describes his mental make up before and after immigration.

The narration moving forward and backward as the Kersi of ‘One Sunday’ running behind rat with his cricket bat, and in the story ‘Of White Hairs and Cricket’ indulge in picking hairs from his father’s head every Sunday finally finds himself in Canada in ‘Lend Me Your Light’, and visits Bombay infrequently. He, the narrator of the, story finds himself caught between two worlds, one which he left (Bombay) and the second which he adopted (Canada). The narration of Mistry
is unique, as one can trust both the tale and the teller, the way he narrates his
descriptions and incidents. As Salman Rushdie affirms, “the first and only rule of
the story teller is to hold his audience: if you hold them, they will get up and walk
away. So everything that the storyteller does is designed to keep the people
listening most intensely” (Mallak 125). He tries to adjust in Jamshedian space but
not accustomed to it. In fact, his life in Canada is a conflict with the primary space
because of the imperative change in system. He lives in Toronto with all the
confusion and contradictions of a sensitive immigrant and finds that he can never
be a part of Jamshedian space.

The author explores the duality of the minds of the immigrants who plan to
shift themselves to their dreamlands with high hopes but cannot forget their cultural
roots and childhood experiences of their native land. Majority of the Parsi characters
take immigration positively as an opportunity and blessings for bright future but not
all the Parsis react identically. Nariman Hansotia, Sarosh’s mother, and Percy Boyce
are some exceptions who do not give much importance to immigration. When Kersi
got confirmation of his immigration, all congratulate him as he has achieved a great
success in life. Najamai, Tehmina, Rustomji and the parents of Kersi feel proud.
Najamai wishes him a bright future as reported by Kersi, “put the garland round my
neck, made a large bright red teelo on my forehead and hugged me several times”
(180). These are the occasions which reflect the importance of immigration in the
minds of Parsi residents of Firozshaa Baag. But on this occasion Nariman instructs
and warns him, “Well, lead a good life, do nothing to bring shame to you or the Parsi
community” (179). Jamshed the representative of pro immigration category is a very
sophisticated child from his childhood and a good friend to Percy. He belongs to an
elite class and has low opinion about India. He talks in very embarrassing and
disparaging terms about India:
Absolutely no future in this stupid place… Bloody corruption everywhere. And you can’t buy any of the things you want, don’t even get to see a decent English movie. First chance I get, I’m going abroad, preferably the U.S. (178).

Jamshed re-emphasized his point on the occasion when Kersi’s parents share Kersi’s plan to shift to Canada. He at once responds, “but for the sake of his own future” (178), he also criticizes the efforts made by Percy for the poor farmers in distant village by his charitable agency. He has pessimistic opinion about Percy’s efforts as he expressed in his letter to Kersi, “…. All his efforts to help the farmers will be in vain. Nothing ever improves just too much corruption. It’s all part of the ghati mentality” (181). Percy has his own thinking and priorities and he does not bother about his criticism.

Jamshed condemned India fiercely for its lacunas such as corruption, sordidness, black marketing but he forgets that India is his motherland. On the other hand, Percy struggles hard to improve the condition of poor farmers but they do not cooperate with him whole heartedly and he has to lose one of his companions in his revolutionary movement against money lenders. He has the missionary zeal to change the faulty system. The money lender warns him and tries to kill him but he has indomitable courage to fulfill his ambition of social reform and he does not surrender. These two Parsi characters represent two extreme kinds of thinking among Parsis but between these two extreme ideologies is the third which one belongs to such people who cannot forget their childhood memories and cultural roots but get interested to migrate for the sake of bright future. Kersi belongs to this third category. He recalls each and everything about his childhood and native place. He recalls everything before he left India particularly the last night. He recalls:
I slept on my last night in Bombay a searing pain in my eyes woke me up. It was one O’clock. I bathed my eyes and tried to get back to sleep. Half-jokingly, I saw myself as someone out of a Greek tragedy, guilty of the sin of hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth, and paying the price in burnt-out eyes: I, Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto… (179-180).

The position of Kersi’s heart and mind is depicted through his thoughts when he compares his life with “Tiresias” hero of Greek tragedy. The mental strife is clearly shown in his expression but the temptation for the ‘land of milk and honey’ is unsurmountable. He gives each and every detail of his departure, as he observes through his dark-glasses. When he gets a letter from Jamshed from New York in which he reported his latest Bombay visit, he writes, “Bombay is horrible. Seems dirtier than ever, and the whole trip just made me sick” (181). David William says, “the childhood home is not so easily forgone, it would seem, it looms large within and without text…” (Williams 61). All temptations for Indian food, movie and other goods show the attachment of immigrants for the country of origin. The narrator feels happy with Indian milieu in Canada. Kersi wishes to make it clear that the country of his origin is not a source of suffering as the materialists curse but it is there - each and every moment in his mind - the memory of his childhood. The protagonist feels a special kind of attachment for India and Indian things. Percy as a child scolds ‘ghaton’ his mother proudly comments, “He has a temper just like Grandpa’s” (177) which reflects their sense of superiority. Jamshed’s statements about the other native people of Bombay re-emphasize their arrogance towards so called ‘ghatis’ as he believes that these people are not expected in the USA and Canada, “….Who would want these bloody ghatis to come charging into their fine land” (178). In this way, the Parsis think that they are refined human beings in comparison to other Indians. They
have a sense of racial discrimination but it does not mean that they do not love India. They think that they have a westernized background but at the same time they take a strong pride in their mother land.

‘Swimming Lessons’ is the last story in the anthology. It reflects the deep impact of immigration and nostalgia on the psyche of the protagonist. The reaction of Kersi’s parents shows the ‘self-reflexive’ element in the story. The incident related to ‘swimming classes’ shows the class and racial discrimination at the international level. Mistry widens the arc of his diasporic experience as a Parsi in Canada. He focusses upon the situation of Parsis in Canada where they are considered as a part of the Asian race. The confusion of being the most westernized community disappears in the swimming classes. It deals with the question of identity in the ‘mosaic’ of multiculture of a small community of India - the Parsis. It is notable that discrimination against Kersi in Canada is not as a member of small community or member of Parsi Diaspora but of the large Asian presence. Along with the diasporic consciousness, it also highlights the cultural attachment and longing for tradition in an alien land where he himself feels a complete stranger. The writer reveals the position of Parsis in relation to international categorization of human being in the high school swimming pool where water is used as a powerful symbol of life. Water has its significance universally whether it is Chaupatty beach in India or high-school swimming pool in Canada. The narrator Kersi mentions. “Water imagery in my life is recurring. Chaupatty beach, now the high-school swimming pool. The universal symbol of life and regeneration did nothing but frustrate me” (234). The elixir of life becomes the tool of racial hatred and discrimination for him when three young boys make a pungent comment. One of them nods simply and the second says, “Paki Paki, smell like curry” and the third says, “…pretty soon all the water’s going to taste of curry” (238). The situation of Kersi may be compared with Uma Parameswaran’s mythical interpretation as she uses an apt metaphor for immigrants, Trishanku, a king.
that floats between heaven and earth, but is accepted by none. She makes a comment upon the position of immigrant:

In the immigrant context, one might say that minorities, especially, have to fight for both the erasure of a negative identity pre-given by the power group and the forging of a positive identity. In the process, they are often transformed into an uneasy hybrid condition of non-belonging in both homelands (Parmeswaran 35).

The narrator reveals that he fearlessly enjoyed the splashing at Chauppatty but in Canada’s high-school swimming pool the water terrifies him. That reveals his discomfort in the context of the swimming pool. He further adds the sea has a very important place in their lives. “We used the sea, too, to deposit the left overs from Parsi religious ceremonies….Which could not be dumped with the regular garbage but had to be entrusted to the care of Avan Yazad, the guardian of the sea” (235). The sea is presented as the symbol of faith. How does the sea become polluted then? Here pollution is physical as well as moral and it shows the decaying moral and ethical values. It also emphasizes how deeply cultural and traditional values are rooted in the mind of Parsis.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The shifting change from Chaupatty to Canadian pool, the old man who died made him think of his Grandpa, the Portuguese woman remind him of Najamai, are the indication of instability in the life of immigrants. Mistry, especially, in this story uses the device of repetition effectively. The memory of the glorious past is an assurance of the assimilation of Parsi community in India. The alienation and displacement is over. The concluding lines of the collection puts faith of parents in their children at individual level but the collective consciousness of Parsis and their efforts for construction of identity in India as well as Canada is commendable. The stories such as ‘Lend Me Your Light’, ‘Squatter’ and ‘Swimming Lessons’ show struggle of life and the writer implied it in the use of images and illusions only.

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