CHAPTER - V

AN IMMIGRANT’S STRUGGLE TO ADOPT HIS NEW WORLD AND
YARNING FOR THE PAST IN MISTRY’S TALES FROM FIROZSHA BAAG

The world outside the water I have seen a lot of, it is now to see what is inside. (TFB, 249)

Rohinton Mistry has emerged as a strong voice of the Diaspora and his extraordinary creative talent finds sufficient proofs in his fictional works. He has addressed all issues of common life that confronts as a Diaspora writer with clarity and sharpness. His fiction is a proof of the author’s identity with constantly being integral part of his artistic consciousness. Mistry encounters the sense of loss and experiences of sadness torn away from his native.

Rohinton Mistry’s first major work, the collection of short stories Tales from Firozsha Baag is set in India. The residents of Firozsha Baag are mostly Parsis. In fact, the setting of Tales from Firozsha Baag reverses the situation of Parsi community in modern India. It presents with a search for personal and communal identity through the recollections of a homeland and responses to the immigrant’s new world. Author explores both Canadian and Indian identities in the stories and then he pictures how these are created and destroyed, how they overlap and blend.
The complicated process of assimilation is the hidden theme of each of the stories and the unifying theme of the collection. Tales from Firozsha Baag includes significant topics such as families and their often spiky internal politics. First, a sense of entrapment and the desire for escape. Second, their memories of the past in which they are pushed into their own identities in native land. Third is the body, its functions and inevitable decay in the new environment or circumstance. Fourth, connection between individuals and often unsuccessful attempts at communication are in the new world. Fifth is the search for balance among life’s turbulent elements. The use of parallel characters with the redemptive power of storytelling is the last one. As Craig Tapping has pointed out,

Mistry’s historical situation emplots his relation to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, to the consequent political histories of newly created nations and the nationalities which the writers have variously left, and to the construction once again of even newer identities in the countries to which they have immigrated. (Craig, 35)

Mistry’s stories ultimately convert the cultures of the old world into the consciousness of its protagonist’s New World. Salman Rushdie’s Imaginary Homelands sheds light on the complexity of the creation of understanding Mistry’s stories. Rushdie claims, “deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (Rushdie, 11).
In particular, it is fragmentary nature of these memories and the incomplete truths. They contain the partial explanations that make them particularly reminiscent for the transplanted writer. Mistry has experiences in both postcolonial and immigration in which the exiled voice committed to struggle with identities. According to Rushdie, Mistry has access to second tradition apart from his racial and cultural background.

the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group. (Rushdie, 20)

He is one of the economically and politically displaced immigrants of the twentieth century. Moreover, Mistry has access to two cultures, that of post colonialism and that of immigration. His fiction explores the Indian character and history of his community as a reflection of both his displacement and his search for self. In this manner, the text itself becomes the mechanism for recreating personal and collective identity.

In Tales from Firozsha Baag, irony takes the form of a conscious invocation of literary legacy as the narrator distances himself from his characters. Characters and their motivations are intricate tangle of cause and effect which directs events on both personal and national levels. Yet, such moments are darker and more serious than mere dream. Therefore, Mistry appears to have adopted one of the most successful and appropriate forms for an exploration of fragmented identities. Forrest L. Ingram, a critic who defines the short story series as,
a set of stories linked to each other in such a way as to maintain a balance between the individuality of each of the stories and the necessities of the larger unit... the reader’s successive experience of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts. (Forrest, 15-19)

The series of stories sometimes traces the psychological and intellectual development of a particular character from childhood to adulthood. Finally, time is often portrayed with repetition and variation of situations that allows expanding the perspective on themes.

In Tales from Firozsha Baag, the stories “Squatter”, “Lend Me Your Light”, “Exercisers” and “Swimming Lessons” explore feelings of denial by replaying the ambiguous attempts to escape of various characters at different points in time. The stories describe a sequence of events, in which the main protagonist Kersi Boyce who also turns out to be the narrator. Sometimes, the stories describe and perform painful journey from innocence to experience as well as from Firozsha Baag to Canada.

The short story volume is built in such a way that the life of the Baag residents are connected beyond the individual narratives in which they may be personally involved. Each tale contains references to other characters and their experiences in other stories in the volume. Characters such as Najamai, Rustomji and Jehangir Bulsara appear to stroll through each other’s stories in the apartment block itself. Here, the volume is a blend of first and third person narration and characters often throw the light of personal reflection over events, sometimes by others in other stories.
Although, individual tales have been extracted and no individual story with freestanding. Yet, the volume repeats a notion of community that is also able to clarify the darker corners of life and with in full view of the neighbourhood. The loving personal memories of Daulat Mirza, that comes to terms with the loss of her husband and the communal pressures to observe the Parsi ritual in “Condolence Visit”. Then, Jehangir struggles to reconcile his own sexuality with the expectations and stifling attentions of his mother in “Exercisers”.

Mistry pictures the surpluse of Parsi exclusivity in stories such as “Auspicious Occasion” with its protagonist Rustomji by an encounter with the India from which he has tried to cut himself off, and “The Paying Guests”, where Boman’s communal pride prevents him from asking the Baag’s sole Muslim tenant to testify against his fellow Parsi “squatter”.

The whole volume, past and present are blended in more and more complicated ways. It reflects the growing personal and literary awareness of the writer-protagonist, Kersi. The storyteller is highlighted from Nariman Hansotia’s dishonestly in “Squatter” to Kersi’s suspicious awareness of the easy attraction in “Lend Me Your Light”. Gerald Kennedy notes that,

Small clusters of three or more stories may give special attention to a particular idea… may be yoked by formal or thematic features so that they comment explicitly upon each other. (Kennedy, 16-17)

However, it is possible to break the series down into the following manageable units.
The first three stories, “Auspicious Occasion”, “One Sunday” and “The Ghost of Firozsha Baag” each deal with kinds of separation from close environments. Then, “Condolence Visit”, “The Collectors” and “Of White Hairs and Cricket” introduce the unavoidability of death that attempts to come to terms with change and loss. Likewise, “The Paying Guests” and “Squatter” focus on the spaces protagonists would call home but for one reason or another. Finally, “Lend Me Your Light”, “Exercisers” and “Swimming Lessons” interrogate the experiences of migration and unsuccessful attempts at escape.

The short story series make it appropriate form for narratives of memory that articulate quest for an identity and a relationship with a homeland. The basic structure of the volume emerges from the interaction of the diverse elements within the relatively independent components. On the one hand, there are the individual stories which mainly enact personal dramas of identity. There is the discovery of imaginative recollections that serves to shift homeland.

The volume is also well suited to the concerns of Canadian writer’s intent on portraying a particular community’s history, characters and communal concerns. As Gerald Lynch points out,

Canadian writers who are inspired to compose something more unified than the miscellaneous collection of stories and who do not wish to forego the documentary function of the realistic novel, but who are wary of the traditional novel’s grander ambitions, often find in the story cycle a form that allows for a
new kind of unity in disunity and a more accurate representation of modern sensibility. (Gerald, 93)

On different levels, Mistry’s short story series projects a desire to come to terms with a past that is both individual and communal. Tales from Firozsha Baag attempts to understand and further the phenomenon of this double perception. The stories explore the creation of culture and the invention of identities.

Mistry incorporates into his work as suggestion of the doubleness of human experience itself. As Geoffrey Kain points out,

Mistry plays with the complex, multifaceted nature of the theme of self as Other. He invites readers to peer into the experiences of characters who are necessarily Other for both author and reader, and who themselves struggle with the perplexities of what it means to be Other in a new culture a process which also distances as Other the native culture and its previously hyper-familiar fixtures usually against the will of the immigrant. (Kain, 64)

Mistry makes a conscious attempt to try to be exact in his descriptions:

I think it’s something I owe to the place where I grew up. Honesty, truth and accuracy is the least I owe to that place. The most I owe it is never to forget. The most and the least then combine, I don’t want to forget anything about Bombay. The life, the places, the people... (Hancock, 146-47)
The author’s involvement with place is evident in his descriptions which makes the themes of place in this series. Mistry details in the different stories that localize Firozsha Baag as a well constructed place. Firozsha Baag is an apartment building in the middle of Bombay. Beside, the Baag are the impoverished apartment blocks of Tar Gully an Irani restaurant.

In effect, Mistry invokes up not only simply Firozsha Baag but also a great region of the world where Parsi families live and die. In the later stories, he introduces a consequence to Firozsha Baag an apartment building in Toronto with its own residents and stories. The writer perceives similarities in both apartment buildings occasion stories. Those are not so different after all and contribute to the creation of identity through place. The final story continues the plotting out of the space and history of Firozsha Baag.

Three out of the collection of eleven stories is concerned with the immigration experience of Parsis who have previously lived in Bombay’s Firozsha Baag. In particular, the three stories discussed in this chapter, “Squatter,” “Lend Me Your Light” and “Swimming Lessons,” reflect individual and complex attitudes towards cultural difference and struggle. Then, three stories are structured to accommodate narrative move between India and Canada. They produce the clashes between Oriental and Western cultures and articulate the play of doubleness. These moves provide thematic variety and blend the central themes combine the various stories in the collection.
Mistry’s efficiency illustrates of immorality by focussing on his deployment of the image of the Indian in his short story “Squatter.” Nariman Hansotia tells the local boys two stories, one about Savukshaw the great cricketer and another one about Parsi immigrant Sarosh to Canada the “squatter.” The two stories work in cycle to make statements about squatting.

“Squatter”, begins with immigrant anxiety of protagonist who gives self assurance himself ten years to become a Canadian or return to Bombay. In “Squatter”, Sarosh who decides to emigrate and leaves Bombay for Toronto. The story focuses on the significances of migration and then the continuity of old patterns is questioned by Sarosh in Canada. The frame of the story remains within an Indian setting as well as within a Non-Western tradition. The narrative emphasizes struggles to adjust as a tool for cultural survival. It is not the negative sides of cultural difference but highlights the positive effects of difference on existing.

Sarosh promises his mother and himself that he will fully adapt to Canadian life within ten years or return to Bombay. He tries to succeed in his adaptation in every way. At last, he fails to adapt Canada and returns to Bombay. Sarosh’s identity failure in Canada is clearly linked to discourses that regulate Indian bodies and Indian space. Appropriately, the story begins with Sarosh in a compromised position. The boys discover him,
depressed and miserable, perched on top of the toilet, crouching on his haunches, feet planted firmly for balance upon the white plastic oval of the toilet seat. (TFB, 153)

He suffers this position,

no choice but to climb up and simulate the squat of our Indian latrines. If he sat down, no amount of exertion could produce success. (TFB, 153)

Sarosh is an apparent figure of transcultural anxiety. His attitude does not fit with the space even in his own apartment. Sarosh’s inability produces more anxiety to fit into his adopted space when he uses public toilets. Unfortunately, the immigrant Sarosh’s struggles with the toilet seat and inability to perform his natural body functions cannot be overcome until he takes off back to India. His sense of displacement begins to reveal them:

In his own apartment Sarosh squatted barefoot. Elsewhere, if he had to go with his shoes on, he would carefully cover the seat with toilet paper before climbing up. He learnt to do this after the first time, when his shoes had left telltale footprints on the seat. He had had to clean it with a wet paper towel. Luckily, no one had seen him. (TFB, 155-56)

Sarosh can only crouch like an Indian once he feels the urge to relieve himself on an uncomfortable toilet seat. Of course, when Sarosh learns to avoid leaving footprints
on the toilet seat, he is determined by signs of otherness that violates the privacy of the toilet stall:

But there was not much he could keep secret about his ways. The world of washrooms is private and at the same time very public. The absence of feet below the stall door, the smell of faeces, the rustle of paper, glimpses caught through the narrow crack between stall door and jamb - all these added up to only one thing: a foreign presence in the stall, not doing things in the conventional way. And if the one outside could receive the fetor of Sarosh’s business wafting through the door, poor unhappy Sarosh too could detect something malodorous in the air: the presence of xenophobia and hostility. (TFB, 156)

For Sarosh, the toilet stall is an explainable space that can be surveyed through sights and smells. The signs senses are interpreted to distinguish between the foreign and domestic. The signs identify him as a squatter that raises the figure of the squatting Indian in need of regulation. His attempt to this new nation, they identify him as a squatter on Canadian territory.

Although, Mistry’s literary techniques look like postcolonial approaches. Sarosh, a Parsi who changes his name to Sid once he arrives in Toronto where cannot use a Western toilet in the usual way. This is reflected in the connection of old toilet habits as well as Sarosh’s failure to change his name to Sid. In “Squatter,” names seem example of different cultures in the same way as toilet habits. Sarosh desires to become a name of Sid that signifies a desire to become as a Canadian to erase the traces of his
cultural difference. A similar event can be made with respect to toilet habits for Sarosh that a failure to defecate Western style is equivalent to a failed immigration process. A new name also defecates Sarosh’s longing to die a symbolic death as an Indian as well as reborn as a Canadian.

The processes of altering name and toilet habits are not equally easily achieved. Eventually, “Squatter” represents both names and toilet habits as valid indicators of identity. Sarosh’s problem is part of misjudges that effects of renaming and its dangers. By renaming, Sarosh guesses himself that he has made progress in his adaptation to Canada but the new name Sid is rejected in Canada.

The storyteller of “Squatter” Nariman refuses to accept Sarosh’s new identity and continues to call him as Sarosh:

This Sarosh began calling himself Sid after living in Toronto for a few months, but in our story he will be Sarosh and nothing but Sarosh, for that is his proper Parsi name. (TFB, 153)

Nariman is connected with a different time and place of identity. Sarosh wants to hold his old identity because he considers a change of identity as a requirement for getting ahead in Canada. But his identity is unsuccessful that results alienation and isolation. He is culturally alienated from the old because he cannot able to adapt to the new. This is emphasised once again by toilet habits.
There had been a time when it was perfectly natural to squat. Now it seemed a grotesquely aberrant thing to do. (TFB, 162)

The regular failures to use a toilet seat results in feelings of shame and guilt.

Wherever he went he was reminded of the ignominy of his way. If he could not be westernized in all respects, he was nothing but a failure. (TFB, 162)

Shame and guiltiness also point out in “Lend Me Your Light,” that Sarosh’s cultural difference is not an imagination but an encumbrance.

He remained dependent on the old way, and this unalterable fact, strengthened afresh every morning of his life in the new country, suffocated him. (TFB, 154)

However, “Squatter” does not rule out the possibility of perspective on differences but challenge the fate of its protagonist.

In other words, multiculturalism does not insist Sarosh has to remove his old identity to become as Canadian. Sarosh discovers through his Immigrant Aid Society that his plight could be resolved. As Dr. No-Illaaz explains,

A small device, *Crappus Non Interruptus*, or CNI as we call it, is implanted in the bowel. The device is controlled by an external handheld transmitter similar to the ones used for automatic garage door openers - you may have seen them in hardware stores.’ ...You can encode the handheld transmitter with a personal ten-digit code. Then all you do is position yourself on the toilet seat and activate your
transmitter. Just like a garage door, you bowel will open without pushing or grunting. (TFB, 160)

Significantly, the Canadian Dr No-Ilaaz has not felt the necessity to change his name on arriving in Canada. He does not recommend the process of name changing because he knows that the CNI will not turn the Sarosh into a Sid. Although, the CNI can help Sarosh modify his toilet habits, it does not make him less different only on the surface level. As Dr No-Ilaaz puts it,

You will be permanently different from your family and friends because of this basic internal modification. In fact, in this country or that, it will set you apart from your fellow countrymen. (TFB, 161)

But, Identity is not predicated by cultural difference because every character is misunderstood by the protagonist. Eventually, this time “Squatter” describes Sarosh’s emigration again from Toronto to Bombay. At end of the story, Sarosh has called himself Sid in Canada and wants to be Sarosh again in India. But, the narrator comments that a return is impossible.

The old pattern was never found by Sarosh; he searched in vain. Patterns of life are selfish and unforgiving. (TFB, 167)

Although Sarosh has not become a Sid that he has unlearned to be an Indian Sarosh. Amin Malak statements through his work ‘Images of India,’
Forsaking India with the hope of finding a new home, Sarosh/Sid has favoured assimilation over adaptation. This is a mistake he pays for dearly by becoming permanently Other, unable to turn any environment into home. (Malak, 102)

Instead, the solution to his problem is located in a space that is neither Canada nor India. Mistry also suggests that Sarosh has responsibility for his failure to make it in Canada as well as in India. The story, “Squatter” is not a realistic description of the immigrant experience that displays allegorical features of common man.

Nariman is not only the narrator but also the author of Sarosh’s story. Nariman tells for a moralistic purpose of Sarosh. “the sad but instructive chronicle of his recent life” (TFB, 153). He wants to convey the central insight to Kersi, Viraf and Jehangir. They eager to emigrate but it does not concern to the impossibility of finding happiness abroad. It concerns cultural variations as the plight of the immigrant. It is expressed through the story’s protagonist. Indeed, tragic is only attempt to lose the sight of one’s individual conflict in a new land. Sarosh has tried to erase his identity as a Parsi. According to Ajay Heble, his cultural memory differs from Sarosh’s in an important aspect.

Sarosh seems to want to forget his ethnic past, to efface his origins, and to lose his sense of identity by immersing himself in the Western hegemonic culture. (Heble, 54)

Nariman tells the stories to boys in the Baag that he addresses Parsi anxieties about displacement and desires for emplacement. His story of the greatest Indian
cricketer, Savukshaw defeats a famous British team when interrupted by rain. It operates within national and cultural discourses to emplace Parsi pride and underscore. The national discourse manifests itself through an oppositional framework that sets India up against Britain in a cricket match. It symbolically enacts the national struggle for independence.

Sarosh’s story operates within a comparable set of discourses tie together Parsi fears of displacement to adjust emigration. As a Parsi, he is a squatter on Indian Territory and he identifies himself as an Indian squatter on Canadian Territory. Several discourses combine to determine his identity and to further his sense of displacement. His emigration is determined by the cultural discourse concerning success in Savukshaw’s story. Sarosh seems unable to achieve the ideal of Parsi within an independent India. He is caught in a historical and national discourse that signifies him as cultural other.

In Canada, he is caught within an inherited colonial discourse. Finally, when he returns with frustration to Bombay and to the comfort of the local, he finds himself in state of displacement. Through this example, Sarosh thus signifies the dangers of emigration and the importance of native place. Sarosh’s problems bespeak uneasiness and the result of problematic relationship between an ethnic tradition and a new life in the West. The story of Sarosh alludes directly to Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina, “unhappy families are unhappy in their own fashion” (TFB, 158). Then, Mistry undermines the Shakespearean classic of “Othello”. The last speech of “Othello” is Sarosh’s ironic
outline of his immigrant experiences that is ‘Moor’ remained alien to the confusing values of Venice. By the way, Sarosh remains unfit for the explosive world of Toronto.

I pray you, in your stories... ‘When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice: 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 and for some it was bad, but for me life in the land of milk and honey was just a pain in the posterior. (TFB, 168)

Mistry allows the stories themselves and the connections between them to convey the complexity of his message. The story breaks the rules of modesty and he himself has established over his years as storyteller. Clearly, there are a few ways of understanding his failure. If he is going to convince the boys in the Baag to stay in India to preserve the community, he is going to have to attend to transcultural failures. However, the story itself suggests that Sarosh’s failure lies in his own self conception, rather than in a failure to live up to external conventions. Indeed, Sarosh’s compromised position at the beginning which is the end of the story.

Sarosh is depressed while he squats on the plastic oval of the toilet. He cannot see beyond the dominant conventions of interpretation in this space to read the signs of his success. He allows those dominant conventions to override the success of his plan. Ajay Heble suggests that,

Sarosh not in terms of alienation, discomfort and failure, but rather in terms of a resistance to hegemonic practices. (Heble, 54)
Sarosh is not failing to adapt, but he is resisting on some unconscious level the discourses. In “Squatter,” the storyteller Nariman is important figure to understand not only of this particular story but also of Mistry’s fiction precisely in general. Jehangir, one of Nariman’s most passionate listeners and he comments on the storyteller’s narrative strategy:

unpredictability was the brush he used to paint his tales with, and ambiguity the palette he mixed his colours in... Nariman sometimes told a funny incident in a very serious way, or expressed a significant matter in a light and playful manner. And these were only two rough divisions, in between were lots of subtle gradations of tone and texture. Which, then, was the funny story and which the serious? Their opinions were divided, but ultimately, said Jehangir, it was up to the listener to decide. (TFB, 147-48)

Sarosh’s tale is as a warning for future generations of Indians who plan to seek happiness and success abroad. Nariman’s own patterns of behaviour totally work to undermine the impact of his story. Sarosh seems to point to the dangers of ethnic interaction and to argue for a return to one’s place of origin.

Mistry’s the way of life is almost a mirror image of Sarosh except Nariman who is not displaced. Doubleness of identity and of culture is the basis of the experience of both post colonialism and immigration for anyone and anywhere. As a Diasporic writer, Linda Hutcheon points out,
irony is one way of coming to terms with this kind of duplicity, for it is the trope that incarnates doubleness, and it does so in ways that are particularly useful to the “other”: irony allows the “other” to address the dominant culture from within that culture’s own set of values and modes of understanding, without being co-opted by it and without sacrificing the right to dissent, contradict, and resist. (Hutcheon, 49)

Nariman ends this tale of the transcultural toilet and the boys screams for more stories. He signals his own understanding of his achievement. He agrees to tell another story that reveals Nariman’s own understanding of his story’s regenerative potential. Mistry’s other stories describe the details of immigrant experience in Canada that is treated in a different way.

Rohinton Mistry’s the collected stories create a complex record of a past Bombay life from childhood. The stories introduce the dwellers of Firozsha Baag through the details in the life of each of the residents and Parsi families. Firozsha Baag is a microcosm of Indian life that has managed to keep its own customs and religion together. As Geoffrey Kain points out,

the brief exposure we have to the experience of these characters, especially through the narrative voice of the sensitive and perceptive Kersi, provides us with poignant insight into the immigrant experience into what is seen as not just the impact of emigration on the émigré himself, not only the effects of departure on those who are left at a distance, but the complex and slowly changing web of
consciousness that, taken together, defines the immigrant experience in Mistry’s fiction. (Kain, 64)

From this way, the story of “Lend Me Your Light” is too concerned with isolation.

“Lend Me Your Light” moves from India to Canada and focuses on the uncertain position of the narrator Kersi. The Parsis Jamshed, Percy Boyce and his brother Kersi are close friends until Kersi and Jamshed immigrate to North America. Kersi is caught between two basically opposed attitudes. First is his brother Percy who chooses to help poor peasants against the exploitation of the villagers. Second is upper class friend Jamshed who dislikes India’s backwardness and leaves for his American dreamland. But, Kersi leaves India for Canada, yet keeps his cultural identity as an Indian, and maintains contact with Parsi community of Toronto.

“Lend Me Your Light” details a more liberal scope of ways to act in a new land. More precisely, the story explores a range of three ways of dealing with experience. In the words of Ajay Heble.

Jamshed, who, scornful of his native India, leaves for the Promised Land of America, and Percy, who adamantly stays in India to help villagers in their fight against exploitation, the story finds its focus in Kersi, the narrator, who comes to represent struggle between the two extreme positions. (Heble, 57)

Jamshed absorbs America easily that he is already alienated from India while living there. He thinks that India is a backward country ridden by corruption and crime
and unable to change for the better. It is his strong belief that problems of India are connected with the country’s so-called ‘Ghati mentality.’ Jamshed talks about Ghatis, the members of a lower caste that the disorder associates with them. It hints his suspicious fear of an ensuing class struggle.

ghatis were always flooding places, they never just went there. Ghatis were flooding the banks, desecrating the sanctity of institutions, and taking up all the coveted jobs. Ghatis were even flooding the colleges and universities, a thing unheard of. Wherever you turned, the bloody ghatis were flooding the place.

(TFB, 176)

By this way, Kersi suggests that the upper-class Jamshed associates the social other with intention of his riches. The same way, the individual is overwhelmed in the mass, and then they are threatened by lower castes or the working classes. Jamshed adapts to America so smoothly because he is afraid of caste and class. He continuously accuses India and its backwardness. Kersi observes the arrogance of Jamshed’s expression about India. But Percy commits himself to challenging social injustice within India.

Percy Boyce is not only the most courageous character in the story but also practices the harmony towards his fellow human beings. It indicates in the story’s epitaph by Tagore.

... your lights are all lit–then where do you go with your lamp? My house is all dark and lonesome, - lend me your light... (TFB, 173)
Both Jamshed and Percy want to erase conflict in their life but they set up them differently. The clash between Jamshed’s pessimism and Percy’s optimism is mirrored in the conflict of values within Kersi. In “Lend Me Your Light” the protagonist experiences in emigration as sources of guilt. His situation compares to his brother, he reflects with a bad conscience.

There you were, my brother, waging battles against corruption and evil, while I was watching sitcoms on my rented... (TFB, 184)

Kersi’s migration has resulted in separation from his brother whose policy contrasts favourable to Kersi. Apart from a bad conscience due to his acceptance, Kersi also experiences a feeling of guilt towards the culture that he has left behind. A result of his guilt, Kersi tries to associate with the new country merely that imitates his behaviour in the old. He is in-between cultures in a situation but he does not experience as liberating: “Kersi sees his hybridized identity as the site of struggle between opposing sets of cultural values” (Heble, 57). Kersi wants Nariman Hansotia to place his life for him and turning the disorder of emigration into a coherent story. But, the emigration does not offer a new vision to him.

The narrator’s conflicting visions are skilfully expressed in eye imagery and allusions to the figure of Tiresias from T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land.

But as 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... (TFB, 179-80)

The story concludes tragically with the village usurers murdering one of Percy’s
fellow workers that lead to the collapse of the humanism. Jamshed seems to victory in
his worldly wisdom. Again, light imagery becomes an apt comment on the cruelty of this
mercenary. Kersi asks, “What would it take to light the lantern of his soul?” (TFB, 190).
As Amin Malak shows,

the story offers two parallels of conflict: an external one between the critical
Jamshed and the idealist Percy and their conflicting views on staying or leaving,
and its internalized version within the narrator between his roots and his new
Western life style. (Malak, 194)

Ironically, when Kersi returns to visit India, he sees himself as a tourist in his
own country. The years of separation from India in Bombay that has led to his cultural
and spiritual alienation: “It was disconcerting to discover that I’d become unused to it”
(TFB, 187). Yet, he fears the thought of becoming like Jamshed.

It was puzzling that he could express so much disdain and discontentment even
when he was no longer living under those conditions. Was it himself he was
angry with, for not being able to come to terms with matters as Percy had? Was it
because of the powerlessness that all of us experience who, mistaking weakness
for strength, walk away from one thing or another? (TFB, 181)
The dual oppositions evidenced in “Squatter,” “Lend Me Your Light,” and “Swimming Lessons,” where characters drift between the place of the past and the place of the present. On the other hand, Nariman’s manner of narration shows the quest for total absorption can become ridiculous. The subsequent effort to return home is often undermined by the original choice to leave. Then, the quest of native becomes a mental conception through the anxieties of absence. As immigrant, Kain describes,

thus finds himself faced with the difficult task of having to redefine home, and to craft a new relationship between a modified self and a revised misunderstanding of location. (Kain, 70)

Yet, he wants to keep alive his attachment to his home and all that implies,

Kersi thus embodies and gives expression to the tension between the emotional poles of indigenousness or cultural immersion and attachment (manifest in Percy) and cultural rejection or the quest for full assimilation (manifest in Jamshed), and is left unsure of his place or even of the strength of his conflicting inclinations. (Kain, 69)

Before leaving for Toronto, Kersi suffers from conjunctives and compares himself to the blind visionary as Tiresias: “I, Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto” (TFB, 180).

However, the end of the story, his discourse has become more pessimistic and particularly bleaker. Kersi moves uneasily from one side to another in quest of a place
to belong. Eventually, he characterises himself in the following way: “I Tiresias, throbbing between two life, humbled by the ambiguities and dichotomies confronting me...” (TFB, 192). The narration reflects Kersi’s failure to adapt with a conflict of values in the Canada. Although, Kersi Boyce leads two life that the result is not a double vision and failure to adapt with blindness.

The final story, “Swimming Lessons,” incorporates and offers solutions to the writer’s awareness of dual oppositions. It is the most complex story of Rohinton Mistry’s Tales from Firozsha Baag. “Swimming Lessons” discusses the experience of cultural separation, the painful parent and child gap that is created by immigration. It also decisively unites the story collection both thematically and structurally.

Here, Kersi Boyce appears again in the new land and he is characterised by his connection with the old. Kersi is living in Toronto but Bombay is yet always on his mind. However, this duality sets the structure of the story. As an immigrant, Kersi realises the cultural changes and possesses with the memories of the past. He makes a conscious effort to come to terms with the social reality of Canada. Therefore, Rohinton Mistry explores multiculturalism that is as microcosm of Canadian society at large.

“Swimming Lessons” is set in a block of flats in Toronto that matches Bombay’s Firozsha Baag. Both buildings are occupied by a variety of ethnicities. In Bombay, Parsis live among Muslims, Goans and other religions. In Toronto Scottish, Slavic and Indian Parsi immigrants live together. However, their co-existence and peaceful is not free from clash. As McElwain points out,
His multicultural neighbours symbolize Canada’s multiculturalism, and his distance from them symbolizes his distance from his adopted country... His failure to get to know his neighbours reflects his failure to get to know Canada. (McElwain, 18)

Kersi’s image of Canada is reductive that is also confirmed by the following passage in which he imagines:

a gorgeous woman in the class for non-swimmers, at whose sight I will be instantly aroused, and she, spying the shape of my desire, will look me straight in the eye with her intentions; she will come home with me, to taste the pleasures of my delectable Asian brown body whose strangeness has intrigued her and unleashed uncontrollable surges of passion inside her throughout the duration of the swimming lesson. (TFB, 235-36)

Here, Kersi’s sexual fantasy is not connected to love or desire but is related to deception. The following passage, two women are observed by Kersi from a relatively great disturbance.

Two women are sunbathing on the stretch of patchy lawn at the periphery of the parking lot. I can see them clearly from my kitchen. They’re wearing bikinis and I’d love to take a closer look. But I have no binoculars. Nor do I have a car to saunter out to and pretend to look under the hood. They’re both luscious and gleaming. From time to time they smear lotion over their skin, on the bellies, on the inside of the thighs, on the shoulders. Then one of them gets the other to undo
the strings of her top and spread some there. She lies on her stomach with the
straps undone. I wait. I pray that the heat and haze make her forget, when it’s
time to turn over, that the straps are undone. (TFB, 232)

Generally, it is an object of his desire that generates another fantasy in his mind.
Kersi imagines himself as sexually strong that reflects his inferiority complex of fantasy.
His sexual fantasy displays traits of problem because his self-image is distorted.

This instructor is an irresponsible person. Or he does not value the life of non-
white immigrants. I remember the three teenagers. Maybe the swimming-pool is
the hangout of some racist group, bent on eliminating all non-white swimmers, to
keep their waters pure and their white sisters unogled. (TFB, 239)

Symbolically, Kersi’s fear to adapt to Canada figures as fear of water. This tale
offers Kersi’s decision to learn to swim with italicized episodes set in Firozsha Baag.
However, the instructor is blamed by Kersi for his own failure to adapt to Canada. As
McElwain points out,

Swimming is a metaphor for assimilating in the story, and both his fear of water
and his dwindling efforts in his lessons symbolize his unwillingness and inability
to commit to Canada. (McElwain, 20)

On the other hand, the narrator commences when seeing an old man from his
building window, he wonders what he is thinking,
For me, it is already too late for snowmen and snowball fights, and all I will have is thoughts about childhood thoughts and dreams, built around snowscapes and winter-wonderlands on the Christmas cards so popular in Bombay, my snowmen and snowball fights and Christmas trees are in the pages of Enid Blyton’s books. (TFB, 244)

Kersi remembers his past and struggles to define himself. He wants to preserve the memories of his past but everything goes back to India. He recalls confirm his Indianness: “My snowflakes are even less forgettable than the old man’s, for they never melt” (TFB, 244). His snowflakes will never melt because he will save them in his work.

“Swimming Lessons” mirrors Kersi’s continuing relationship to India. While Kersi in Toronto, his parents in Bombay worry about him because they fear that he will separate from his own cultural roots. Then, Kersi’s parents wait for his letters. Eventually, they receive stories of letters that conveys Kersi’s experience in Canada. He lays strongly with nostalgic of homeland with past memories. Kersi has not yet adapted to Canada and he does not fully belong to either the new or the old world. It is only memories that connect him to the past, his native land.

“Swimming Lessons” is Mistry’s most complex narrative of traditional work and becomes an autobiographical story. Kersi’s parents receive a collection of short stories from him that turns out to be Tales from Firozsha Baag. Therefore, Kersi is identified as a narrator with Rohinton Mistry. Both Kersi and Mistry come to terms with the past by writing about it because writing is an important activity in “Swimming Lessons.” It is
crucial for Kersi as a writer who has not to lose his cultural difference. According to his father,

The last story they liked the best of all because it had the most in it about Canada, and now they felt they knew at least a little bit, even if it was a very little bit, about his day-to-day life in his apartment; and Father said if he continues to write about such things he will become popular because I am sure they are interested there in reading about life through the eyes of an immigrant, it provides a different viewpoint; the only danger is if he changes and becomes so much like them that he will write like one of them and lose the important difference. (TFB, 248)

“Swimming Lessons” involves Kersi’s changed attitude towards Canada that results through his past imaginatively. Finally, Mistry merges in the different modes of awareness and his solution to problem of blending disparate subjects. His perception of Canada and India is conveyed in charged images that reflects the interaction of distance and belonging: “The world outside the water I have seen a lot of, it is now time to see what is inside” (TFB, 249). “Swimming lessons” is symbolic of Mistry’s choice to plunge himself in that world and describe it from inside.

Yet, unlike Jamshed, Kersi will not turn away from India to become Canadian. His Indianness will serve as the channel for the occupation of a new identity. He realizes his new perspective on India and Canada who writes nostalgically about India, while his view of Canada is free of false illusion. Paradoxically, he must separate himself from
past and place that reconnect himself to it and put down roots. Interestingly, the writer’s art of narration is judged in this case from another double perspective.

Kersi’s parents reach contrasting conclusions in their attempt to understand his purpose in writing about his Bombay past:

because if he likes it over there why would he not write stories about that, there must be so many new ideas that his new life could give him. But Father did not agree with this, he said... all writers worked in the same way, they used their memories and experiences and made stories out of them, changing some things, adding some, imagining some, all writers were very good at remembering details of their lives. Mother said, how you can be sure that he is remembering because he is a writer, or whether he started to write because he is unhappy and thinks of his past and wants to save it all by making stories of it. (TFB, 243)

Finally, Kersi’s Father and Mother read the collection of stories at the end, entitled Tales from Firozsha Baag. It articulates the discourse of the postcolonial immigrant who is forced to come to terms with the dualities.