



The Precarious Balance: Cultural Dilemma of Acculturation in Rohinton Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag*

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Abstract

Cultural identity and challenges of faith have constituted as well as created conflicts while reckoning with the forces of ethnic homogeneity for a stable society. A constant struggle to maintain faith in the light of religious doubt and formidable dangers of dislocation from one's chosen place in a community problematizes an individual's position while adjusting to the trends of progress. One such is being the Parsee community after their exodus in 7th century AD in the wake of Muslim onslaught. Often considered one of the most enterprising among minority communities, the Parsees have internalized a hybrid existence. Living between constant economic and political changes, conflicting philosophy of life and faith, they have displayed a strange acclimatization, both within the societies they have migrated to and simultaneously away from it. Like many Parsee writers, Rohinton Mistry's nostalgic fiction addresses and seeks a preservation of this dubious positioning of an ethnic identity for his community. He has done it primarily through the effective medium of memory and imagination, remaining quite aware of the discernable drawbacks of living in Canada while basing his stories in Mumbai, where he spent a significant part of his youth. While cherishing the partial memories of his country (India), Mistry keeps on smoothening his inner self by writing about his community that forms the bridge between his own imagined motherland and the contemporary. These aspects have given rise to an amalgamation where one's identity has become a product of divergent forces seeking reconciliation not only between past and present but with growing sentiments of religious doubts and otherness. Thus, this paper attempts a literary analysis for exploring these themes through his collection of short stories, comparing it with his other works, to find a closure to such unsettling stances.

Keywords

Ethnicity, identity, hybridity, cultural assimilation, transcultural

Introduction: Mistry and his Vanishing World

Cyrus Mistry once said that “Rohinton’s novels are about Parsees, he is chronicling a vanishing world. His picture is accurate” (Lambert 15). With less than one lakh population in India and a little more than twelve thousand in Mumbai, the Parsees are on the verge of getting erased. Along with them their small world, their history and stories crumble away. He often mentioned in various interviews that his Bombay or Mumbai has disappeared. Mistry stated, “Today when I go back I feel like a marathon runner who’s no longer in training” (Lambert 15). On one hand there are non-negotiable changes wrought by time, and on the other there are changes which are internal, within the community itself. A community deeply religious, at the same time westernized in their approach or lifestyle. There seems to be an implicit struggle to place themselves within and at the same time outside the Indian cultural milieu. In *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (first published 1987), Rohinton Mistry creates a picture of the minutely detailed community life of the Parsees. These are stories about unending corruption of the government, religious discrimination and suspicion, where steaming pressure cookers full of curries activates starving imaginations, where people fantasize about an imaginary England that fails to exist. The eleven short stories poignantly reveal the beauty and agony of a minority group leaving in a strange land in stranger times. Nilufer E. Bharucha, an authority on Mistry describes the Parsees as “an assimilative people who have over the centuries perfected the difficult art of being both global and local at one and at the same time something that the rest of the world is beginning to talk about only recently” (Bharucha 42). However, this statement confirms the problematic positioning of the Parsees in India. They have the sense of non-belonging and anxiety towards a place where they have been born and nurtured. The anxiety is thus a search for place and its borderline existence, the mediatory moment between a culture’s ontology and its displacement, the tryst between phantasm of rootedness and the memory of dissemination. The narration of the history of the country and Mistry’s community depicts consciousness of anxiety and aspiration, perils and problems of existence of individual, religious doubts, communal and national issues along with a constant reminiscent of past and present world.

The conflict between religious tradition and personal fluidity creates tension in many of his works, however more noticeable in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. Parsees had for centuries perceived Persia as their motherland, their *Urhaimat*, and Irani Zoroastrianism as their religio-cultural model. The rise of British hegemony in pre-

independent India and the special place that the Raj reserved for their Parsee subjects had lend an air spun notion of westernized progressiveness with the community. There was also an ability within the community to re-appropriate cultural practices due to years of co-existence, forming a hybrid cultural life for them. Dadabhai Naoroji wrote, “Just as the influence of English education has operated on their mental condition, the example of English modes of life and domestic habits and arrangements has worked a revolution in their social condition. These changes, however, both mental and social, are confined to certain portions, though exercising more or less influence upon the general body of the people” (*Manners and Customs* 4). Rohinton Mistry, responding to Naoroji stated, “Part of the tragedy of the educated middle classes in Bombay was this yearning for something unattainable that came from what they read. Would that sense of a future elsewhere have been avoided if we had concentrated on an Indian literary canon? I don’t know” (Lambert 15). Mistry’s historical situation involves construction of new identity in the nation to which he has migrated and a complex relationship with the cultural history of the nation, he has left behind. It was his own choice to leave India for better perspectives but at the same time, being a Parsee, the historical factor of double displacement is imbibed within the author’s sense of identification. He dramatizes the pangs of alienation. Nostalgia and a mood of reminiscent marked the pages of the short story collection. Mistry recollected and relived his childhood and adolescent years in the Parsee “Baag” revealing them through his writing. This colours how his Parsee protagonist Kerai, look back at his past days in the “Baag”. There was a seamless coexistence of orthodox decorum and a westernized notion for progressive living working hand in hand. However, the falling apart of the religious practices would only add to making the community life of the Parsees more mundane. It would lead to an eventual wiping out of the familiar chores of livelihood. But a conflict between religious tradition and personal fluidity creates tension that permeates Mistry’s fiction. This has therefore formed the ambiguous zone of placing oneself on the verge of a disparity between belief on the orthodox way of life, guided by religion and simple living against the ever-pressing hour for mechanization providing a lucrative alternative for easy luxurious living. It doesn’t mean that one can only exist when supplemented by the other, but rather unfolds a way which leads to a survival where disparities become an unavoidable part of existence. These religious beliefs and the sharing of common cultural practices became the bond on which their community thrived. The dichotomy had its own usual fixing and balancing. The change brought with the help of English education had not seen a homogenous acceptance from within the community,

as otherwise generally believed. Naoroji stated, “The educated, not having arrived at their present knowledge by the gradual process of self-made progress, with struggles and amidst difficulties, and by efforts watched and sympathised with by the whole community; not having earned, but inherited the treasure; a large and sudden chasm separates them from the uneducated in their sentiments, ideas, habits of thought, opinions, and customs” (*Manners and Customs* 1). The fissure within was perhaps most scathingly felt by the fraction that always got stuck between two extremes – the middle class. Distracted by the double pull of strong prejudices and deep-rooted beliefs on the one side, and of the apparent reasonableness of the arguments addressed to them by the educated on the other, the middle class resided in a condition of mind which was difficult to describe.

Parsees: Their Presence and Assimilation in India

There are several important questions which have remained unanswered regarding the Zoroastrian exodus from Persia to India. Fictions as well as non-fictions have struggled to answer this, but without the presence of reliable facts, in the absence of accurate historical evidence, it has always been difficult. *Kisseh-i-Sanjan*, compiled by Dastur Behman Kaikobad Sanjana of Navsari in 1600 A.D is usually taken as the first account of stories about Parsee settlement in Gujrat which was recorded almost a thousand years after the first refugees landed at Sanjan. Another text being the *Kisseh-i-Zartushtian-i-Hendustan* by Shapurji Maneckji in Navsari between 1765 and 1805. However, both these texts were heavily criticised for mixing facts, but still remain the starting point from which Parsee immigration to India is traced. In Bombay (now Mumbai) their settlement began to be recorded with the time when the arrival of European merchant companies in India, and in particular the British came for the purpose of trade. Parsees assumed an economic pre-eminence among the Indian communities during that time. They formed some of the first inhabitants of Bombay from the seventeenth century, establishing the moral and material foundations of their society in a new setting. They formed a new class called the *shetias* which had enough influence on the internal governance of the country. It is noted from whatever little is known, that the history of the Parsees in India is of their attempt to maintain a Zoroastrian identity in the midst of accommodating to the Indian milieu. Jeese Palsetia wrote, “The traditional narratives of the Parsees relate the process of assimilation and acculturation that had begun with their integration into their Indian setting. Parsee tradition holds that on

arriving in India, the Parsees were hesitantly welcomed by the local Hindu ruler of Gujrat, identified as Jadi Rana. Conditions were attached to the Parsees' settlement in the territory of the local rajah. These conditions included the Parsees forsaking their weapons and becoming peaceful subjects of the rajah, adopting the local language and the dress, and observing the performance of their marriage ceremonies after sunset, or in general observing their ceremonies in the manner of the locals. In addition, the Parsees were asked to explain their religion to the rajah and his subjects. The conditions the Zoroastrians were asked to comply with describe the cultural assimilation of the Parsees in India. The justification of the Parsees' cultural assimilation to the Indian setting, as the conditional to their compact made in Sanjan, forms part of their historical aetiology of the community. With the exception of their religion, the Parsees believed their assimilation to the Indian cultural milieu as conditional to their acceptance and safe existence in India" (Palsetia 6). This bears evidence to their cultural dilemma of mixing in while trying to preserve what they can to prevent a dilution that was necessary for their survival. The *Atash Bahram* (highest grade of fire placed in a fire temple) which the Parsees consecrated in Bombay with ritual objects brought from Iran during their exodus, remains the burning example of the Parsees' strive against non-identity. Religious preservation, which earlier made them flee their land on the wake of Muslim onslaught, functions as a hinge on which the community centred life fixates its unity. With barely a million Parsees worldwide, they are on the verge of being extinct, their culture forgotten with their practices. The Bombay Parsees act on the principle of working in unity with a distinct feeling of self-consciousness while adapting to the new realities. For them maintaining ethnic purity is a huge factor in the face of changing social cultural spectrum. In the famous Parsee Panchayat case in 1908, Justice Beaman perceptively suggested that, in India the Parsees function like a caste. But at the same time, they are more westernised due to British influence unlike the Iranian Parsees claiming to follow the faith in a pure form devoid of Hindu or Muslim cultural practices bearing a hand. Both these trends play a part in shaping Mistry's fiction and showcase the changing dynamics or of the extent to which the community is ready to alter or resist external forces.

The Parsees and Nationalistic Politics

The political eminence enjoyed by the Parsees under the British rule also made its entry in the Parliament when Dadabhai Naoroji became the first Indian to be elected in Westminster. In his maiden speech it was made clear that his election would be sought as

an opportunity to foster ties between Britain and India. As the president of Indian National Congress, Naoroji stated that his first allegiance would always lie with India as an Indian and as a member of the greater Indian Community. His opinion was also shared by Pherozshah M. Mehta and D.E Wacha, where they voiced their concern that Indian nationalism should likewise identify with the concerns of all Indians. They helped the Indian nationalist movement to have a non-communal character. The Parsees as a community had undergone the process of educational, social and religious reforms alongside and yet separate from other Indian communities. Having separate reforms alongside common essential changes for Indians as a whole was advocated by Naoroji, Mehta and Wacha. This was referred to as secular nationalism within the Indian nationalist movement, where a parallel process of social reform within communities and broad cooperation over issues of national character and interest by all Indians was advocated. M.K Gandhi's philosophy was also in accordance with the acceptance of multiplicity of Indian identities within the country for democratizing the process. Gandhi, like Parsee nationalist leaders believed that an individual's religious identity or a communal identity as focused by B G. Tilak, who more and more identified in being a Hindu with one's identity as an Indian, could be no bar to one's nationalist commitment. Pherozshah Mehta in his Presidential Address to the Sixth Congress of 1890 in Calcutta articulated the aspirations of a minority community while shaping the form of Indian nationalism, so that a compatibility of community identity could be sought hand in hand with a nationalist identity. He stated, "In speaking of myself as a native of this country, I am not unaware, that incredible, as it may seem, Parsis have been both called and invited to call themselves, foreigners ... To my mind, a Parsi is better and truer Parsi, as a Mahomedan or a Hindu, is a better and truer Mahomedan or Hindu, the more he is attached to the land which gave him his birth, the more he is bound in brotherly relations and affections to all the children of the soil, the more he recognizes the fraternity of all the native communities of the country, and the immutable bond which binds them together in the pursuit of common gains and objects under a common government ... The birthright, therefore, Gentlemen, which the Parsis thus possess of so indefeasible and glorious a character, they have refused and will always refuse to sell for any mess of pottage, however fragrant and tempting" (Palsetia 300). Though Mehta's speech strongly voiced the necessity of national identification, the majority of Parsee public opinion did not support the consequence of allegiance the nationalist movement would have on their interest and identity. This ambivalence is revealed in the lack of mass participation of the

Parsees in the movement. However, both Mehta and Wacha's reaction towards those Parsees who resisted the nationalist movement reveal their own ambiguous stance and the incongruity of the task they knowingly undertook. It only made it clear that the nationalist couldn't talk in behalf of their community amidst their own distancing from community-interest politics. These strands run parallel in the portrayal of the Parsee Baag in Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, where the Baag itself upholds all the dilemma of cultural appropriation which had its beginning from the long line of seeking refuge to the political struggle for a minority identity.

Parsee Association with the Idea of Urbanity

Michael Ignatieff in his work *The Need of Strangers* (1984) discusses the link between material security and human needs. The coming together of the idea of need with the idea of duty and obligation binds human beings beyond rituals, customs, habits and historical inheritances. He writes, "The language of human being is a basic way of speaking about this idea of a natural human identity ... A society in which strangers would feel common belonging and mutual responsibility to each other depends on trust, and trust reposes in turn on the idea that beneath differences there is identity" (Ignatieff 27). Mistry's fiction has consciously emphasized on the upholding of community and not individuals as the protagonist. The inhabiting of the Parsees in Bombay was a part of the complex pattern of welfare, support and maintenance practised among the community. They were early to appear but took time to settle in the city permanently which happened only in the latter half of the eighteenth century. They settled in the city alongside the British which created the urban social elite culture. The settlement pattern of the Parsees in the city reaffirm social and community ties, along with obligation they voluntarily took to serve. It also shows a new sense of identity they had created for themselves or wanted to be a part of based on their loyalty to the physical geography of Bombay whose development as a city was the manifestation of their influence in the new setting. So, the duties and the obligation felt by the Parsees to the concept of community were evidently transferred to the more demanding confines of the urban setting. Thus, the economics of community foundation was largely based on the notion of need as focused by Ignatieff to create a surrounding conducive for their survival, which required them to form a close association along with their dependence on the physical geography to aid it. *Firozsha Baag* provides the familial physical space where the community could inhabit in Mistry's fiction inside the city space of Bombay. The fictitious, insulated space of the Baag acts as

the locale where a partly segregated group, within the larger Indian community could find expression, to balance their own little insecurities of belonging and simultaneous non-belonging. It happened within a cultural spectrum whose lines have become blurred due to constant adaption of one community from another, and due to rapid changes within the community centred lifestyle that relied on certain pre-fixed parameters of conduct. This is seen when Najamai, the only owner of a refrigerator in Firozsha Baag makes everybody's life dependent on her freeze box which ultimately disrupts an innocent bond between Kersi and Francis. The refrigerator becomes the personified re-representer of a modern life force to which the residents of the colony are yet to reconcile with. But it does not stop their fascination for the new discovery where they no longer have to pass through the dreaded Tar Gully with people spitting on the Parsee residents due to envy of their higher financial status. This dread of Tar Gully residents or the fear of stepping outside the safe zone of the Baag is also the result of a fear from outside forces of infiltration, cultural homogenising, and the supposed fear of non-acceptance.

Forces of Infiltration, Religion and the fear of Cultural Dilution

The liberal nationalist such as Wacha and Naoroji themselves feared infiltrating forces which often translated in their writing. Naoroji had explicitly stated in his essay on Parsee religious customs, "Parsees at present, to some extent, fatalists; but this was one of the corruptions which had crept in through the Hindoos. They were monogamous; and their sacred books did not degrade woman below man, though it was only lately that their women had been allowed to mix in society" ("Parsee Religion" 31). Thus, on one hand we see the working of a susceptible notion of being aware of their status in a nation which considers them as interlopers, and on the other, a clear urge to maintain cultural singularity is sought for survival of community ethics. This brings with itself, as we see in several characters a longing for the past where such dichotomies were not as pressing. The Baag's residents saw Francis with a suspicion as he becomes the symbolic representation of such an infiltrating force existing within the close-knit community life. Rustomji, in the very first story of the collection, "Auspicious Occasion", faces a similar dichotomy where he is stuck between his nostalgic happy days as a volunteer in Social Service League and his imminent present where he is forced to align himself according to market and societal dictates due to his minority position. On Dustoor Dunjisha's demise, Rustomji though not sharing his wife's ardour in practising religious ceremonies heaved a mournful sign for a world that they are becoming more unfamiliar with each passing day.

Dadabhai Naoroji mentions in his book, *The Parsee Religion*, the importance of priests in a community centred dwelling. The essay in some parts is a staunch criticism of such religious practices where education and knowledge when taken as criteria make the priest unfit for dictating social lives of people. He writes, “The Parsees have, therefore, no pulpit at present. Far from being the teachers of the true doctrines and duties of their religion, the priests are generally the most bigoted and superstitious and exercise much injurious influence over the women especially, who, until lately, received no education at all” (“Parsee Religion” 2). A distrust for the class of priests were immediately registered in Mistry’s story alongside Mehroo’s deep devotion, to suggest the cunning ways by which such priests function to take advantage of all-trusting, naïve women. But nonetheless the story establishes that religion forms the hinge on which the seemingly insignificant lives in Mistry’s work find their succour. In his novel *Family Matters* (2002), Mistry uses a timeframe which is recognized as one of the most turbulent times in the history of Bombay. There was mindless violence following the demolition of the Babri Masjid and this was the novel’s backdrop. All these had a deep impact on Mistry and his fiction, fragmented and robbed of its essential multicultural nature. With the re-emergence of the Sangh-Parivar when the Bharatiya Jananta Party (BJP) came to power in 1998 as the leading party after the coalition government formation, a fanatic Hindu nationalism was seen in its growth. The religio-political dynamics within the nation deeply influenced his writing of *Family Matters*. Thus, the lives of Yezad Chenoy, Vikram Kapur, Husain, Nariman Vakeel and Lucy seemed an attempt to tell the story of a secular India at large which was threatened by such upheavals. The Parsees were not the target victim of the 1992-1993 riots around which the novel is based. But as a numerical minority with less than sixty thousand residing in Bombay during that period, the existing community received violent threats, at least theoretically, from the political conditions of 1990s. It was and is still recognized as a city which has become the symbolic homeland of Parsees scattered across the globe which was in the danger of losing its essential identity. However, there could be no denying that Mistry took religion as a grappling force that tends to leave a mark. Rustomji’s wife Mehroo longed to see her children crave for the “chasni” (sweet offerings) as she did and was familiarized to from her childhood. The “chasni” for her was a highly coveted object for which all the family members gathered to partake of the fruit and sweets wearing their prayer caps. Religious rituals were a daily part of life without which even memories would fall apart. Mistry in *A Fine Balance* (first published 1995) has undoubtedly portrayed Nusswan’s acts of devotion

with slight mockery, turning him into a caricature. However, his routine visits show the way of life which he was accustomed with from the very beginning. It defined his sense of being and guided his familial responsibilities. If these were to be taken away from Nusswan he'll cease to be a functioning being. The acts form a thread connecting identity, a sense of history, faith and childhood memories that even religiously neutral people like Mrs Shroff or Maneck Kohla couldn't brush aside completely. Both Dina Shroff from *A Fine Balance* and Daulat in the fourth story of the collection are characters with relative religious neutrality. Rooted in the same orthodox background, they deliberately chose acts to focus on their non-conformity when it came to following strictures for the sake of complacent belonging in their respective surrounding. For Daulat, giving away, Minocher's, her husband's *pugree* (headwear) during the first month, *maaiso*, after his departure was not intentionally an act of rebellion to break away from time agreed norms. Rather, it was an attempt to prolong his presence by helping out others in need. It was similar to Daulat's desire to keep the lamp burning in her husband's room. The two acts simultaneously emerged as a protest registered against expectations that shook the time-honoured norms in favour of personal exigency. Dina's strong sense of community, in *A Fine Balance*, was expressed without much adherence to ceremonial practices or regarding timely visits to the Fire temple. She depended more on memory to establish a connection with the past unlike Nusswan, her brother, who sought it through physical and spiritual motivation. This break might have resulted from her brother's burdening her to observe the rituals when all she felt was void after her husband's demise. Perhaps it was the resistance to Nusswan's ways which made Dina assume a religious neutrality similar to Daulat. Spiritual assistance could not substitute physical proximity in her case. But amidst this conflict of opinions regarding customs, the mutuality of concern for an identity underlies their action. The orthodox and reformist sections of the community each claim a part of the definition of what is it called to be a Parsee. While the orthodox are forced to realize the changes that are inevitable when the community is placed between changing times and dynamics of social interaction, the reformers on the other hand can no less abandon the heritage passed down to them. The risk and ironies implicit in such an enterprise marks the cultural dilemma of the minority community. Nusswan's activities were strongly disciplined by the teachings of Zoroaster, "you shall receive according to what you do." However, Dina in the latter half of the novel mixes more freely and sheds away much of her prejudices becoming as Dadabhai Naoroji says in his essay "Almost as Hindu as Hindus themselves." Handling such a risky subject as religious

beliefs and practices could have proved disastrous for Mistry himself although he sidesteps it through his subtle humour along with the ironic and sympathetic treatment of the motley assortment in his fiction. Each portrayal turns into a miniature portrait, precise and accurate so that the dwellers represent Parsees in discord with both their religious belief and larger community. But the question arises, would this intermixing further dilute their indigenous culture and contaminate what Dadabhai Naoroji phrased as “pure thought, pure word and pure deed”? According to Wolfgang Welsch, the first feature of the traditional concept of culture refers to the effect of social homogenization that culture is supposed to achieve. Second, culture is regarded as the basis of ethnic consolidation, representing the spirit of particular people. Third, the classical concept of culture implies a delimitation towards the outside, promoting hostile attitudes to what is regarded as different. In *Such a Long Journey* (first published 1991), Mistry focuses on transcultural strategies for surviving in a multicultural space like the setting in many of his works and in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. In his fiction Mistry showcased feelings that vacillate between bitter humour, social exclusion, and lack of perspectives. Choosing an appropriate life partner according to the family’s liking was a point of dispute in both *A Fine Balance* and *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. For Dina Shroff falling in love with Rustom was going against her very domineering brother who provided her financial support. It was a step she took willingly risking the renouncement of communal safety. The Parsees do not over emphasize the concept of arrange marriage; however acceptance from both side of the party is generally implied. For Jehangir Bulsara choosing a girl who wears heavy makeup was highly disapproved by a family for whom tradition was primary. But the point of objection was not merely the use of excess make up and short shirts. It was the apparent negation of the importance of tradition. Jehangir’s mother observed the wearing of *mathoobanoo*, a piece of cloth covering the head. For her son it was embarrassment, for Mrs Bulsara it again formed the link to the way she was brought up and also a symbolic gesture of showing respect. In *Firozsha Baag*, the *mathoobanoo* was her identity. Jehangir’s girlfriend was a resistance in observance of the life they were accustomed with. The desire to resist unfamiliarity was again strong and Jehangir himself was obedient to these unsaid clauses. But at the same time his desire to melt with the dark bodies of the exercisers in Hanging Gardens coexisted with his routine Parsee life. The unusual balance might be the result of his repressed desires cumulated with the fantasy to explore the unknown borders which his family so vehemently restricted. On the other hand, we see in *A Fine Balance*, by refusing to return to the brother’s house, Dina decided

to remain in her flat and support herself, a defiant and independent act for a young Parsee widow. Her decision was disrespectful for Nusswan whose ideals for family governance was in contradiction with her choice. He hoped a life of self-retirement for Dina as was usual and as he has seen been done by his mother willingly. Both Jehangir and Dina rebelled against tradition but these acts of self-justification were subverted by Mistry with Dina's ultimately landing in Nusswan's house at the end and by Jehangir's timely return to his home. They have shown the growing restlessness and yearning for striving for a future if not comfortable or safe, but definitely a work of their own carving, putting their personal choice before obligations. They aspired in a changing society to transcend the constraints of birth, caste, or sex in a modern, urban world where anything seems possible. But a far more complex bearing of cultural force, the knowledge of their minority status and the changing world order were also at work for developing such disjunctive views by the characters. According to Dina's brother Nusswan, the liberty which she enjoyed was a perk of belonging to the Parsee community. This has obvious traces of communal superiority, a hint of liberalism, conservatism and a fear of minority position. On the other hand, we see Mehroo in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, whose life revolves around the ceremonial occasion of Behram Roje and her increasing concern about her children's dwindling interest in observing customs that had for years signified their lifestyle. In another story in the collection, Jacqueline or Jaakaylee mentioned that it was fortunate enough for her to find work in a Parsee household where a light skin colour bore importance. Due to the westernized notion of lighter skin colour signifying superiority Jaykaylee stated, "They thought they were like British only, ruling India side by side." While her hot, bubbling Goan curries made her assimilated in the household, where no meal was prepared without her special Goan masala, but at the same time she was just an outsider. As a Goan Christian Jaykaylee could never fit in. This strict form of segregation on the basis of faith is a constant reminder that a tight ethnic boundary has been superimposed over the religious one. It might be supposed that one minority group would feel empathic when similar circumstantial situation arises for the other minority groups, such as a Goan Catholic living in a Parsee residential colony for years. But such notions fall apart for social, cultural and economic rigidity that thrive side by side. The Parsees of Bombay nurture both breeds of "liberal" and "conservative" along with a new combination as seen in Jaykaylee's new employer for whom taking sides is no longer possible. With this cultural ascendancy prevails a constant awareness of their small number trying to maintain a deliberate isolation. Their complex history being placed

between the orthodoxy of Iranian Zoroastrianism and at a same time the considerable influence of the colonial rule makes it difficult for them to seek an alignment. As Tehmina swings her body to the strains of ‘The Blue Danube’, relieved from the blaring “senseless and monotonous Hindi film songs” a sense of nostalgia overtakes her to recreate a bygone past. Maneck Kohla is nicknamed Mac in *A Fine Balance*, and this forming a constant point of irritation for him as he refuses to be acknowledged by it. This nickname creates an unknown entity out of him which he can’t relate to, like an isotope perhaps, sharing dissimilarity within a known or given body of general acceptability. On the other hand, Sarosh, who began calling himself Sid in Toronto, having every intention of adapting to the new country had but one limitation -not being able to use the western toilet unless he simulated the squat of the Indian ones.

Conclusion: Mistry and the Present-day Parsee

The twenty first century Parsee still debates the balance of tradition, change and their identity. Their response to the plurality of thought over social and religious issues continues to be shaped by the process of acculturation and adaption to their environment, and more in the case of overseas Parsee communities to their new environment. Perhaps the wish to preserve what is essentially Parsee or essentially familiar to oneself, comes forward to a greater extent when memories of past and present state of being merge in his fiction as distinctly seen in “Squatter”, “Lend Me Your Light” and “Swimming Lessons”. There is a realization that they are partially or wholly misfits everywhere and relays the trauma of belonging to a minority group in India or in their chosen land. We see a violent urge to fit in when Sid (Sarosh) was ready to try the CNI (Crappus Non-Interruptus) to solve his defecating problem in Canada. But he ultimately understands that the operation could only help him modify his squatting habit and does not make any difference to create ease in his sense of belonging. Even though he takes up the name Sid instead of Sarosh, to successfully identify himself as a Canadian, his failure to adopt to the habits of his chosen land alienates him, causing further displacement. It thus becomes the story of a man who lost his identity in a new land. The desire for a complete internal and external change is here thwarted where Sarosh could no longer equal himself with his self-built image of a true Canadian citizen. The story “Lend Me Your Light” explores in depth the problems faced by the Indian diaspora and those who are doubly displaced from their own land of birth and their chosen land. We see Kersi willingly alienating himself from all things India when he shifts to Canada. Expatriation was a painful process with the

severing of ties with his homeland and with the memories attached. It found its reflection in the letters that Kersi posted for his family that meandered around vagueness to complete indifference. Canada, the chosen land, promising success and material benefits cannot bring content to the inner chaos brought by constant, perennial adjustments as an outsider in every land. These characters are caught between two worlds – the one they have willingly forsaken and the other which have failed them despite initial promise. The inability to find solace in the chosen land and the inability to discard the old world leads to tension. The American melting pot doesn't help to form the cultural bond that was severed long ago, even before he left for Canada. This was developed as a process of voluntary with-holding to prevent the danger of complete homogenisation, so that the Persian roots of ancestry is not lost along with the fear of non-acceptance from the community at large. Though Kersi realizes in the last story of the collection "Swimming Lessons", that the true essence of human existence with all its self-deprecating dilemmas is same everywhere beneath the superficial differences, the mere fact of realization doesn't make the toil easier. Kersi's inhibition or fear of water streams from his fear of adjusting to a new surrounding when there was an ever-present guilt of individual or communal failure of assimilation within their chosen place of refuge. He tries to balance the irreconcilable conflicts, which radiates from his birthplace, to places of residence, work, family and community. In the eleven interconnected tales Mistry dramatized this miniature Parsee world in relation to assimilation, westernization, the impact of expatriation, with the passionate search for a self in a world divided between one's chosen and the native land.

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