

Portrayal Of Marginalization In Rohinton Mistry's Tales From Ferozsha Baag

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Stories in the *Tales From Ferozsha Baag* primarily deal with Parsi lower middle class who reside within the four walls of Ferozsha Baag. This has been used by Mistry as the microcosm of the middle class of India. The stories reflect on the changing social life of the Parsi community and their relationship with other communities. The Ferozsha Baag apartment is home to a cross-section of the middle class of the Parsis of Bombay/ Mumbai in the late twentieth century. Each story of the collection deals with some unique aspect of the characters and their survival in the prevailing norms of the society particularly in the light of their belonging to the marginalized minority community of Parsis. The social reality a minority community which gets marginalized in the aggressive atmosphere of Bombay forms the very fulcrum around which other minor themes revolve. Ajay Heble looks at the theme of emigration in *Tales from Ferozsha Baag* from the perspective of hybridity located in the complex incline of personal identity, cultural dislocation and difficulties of emigration (Heble 3). The marginalization operates in these stories at multiple levels. The fact that these characters are Indians, howsoever modernized they may be, and thus Asian /oriental backward in the white/occidental Canada. Mistry uses it as a trope in his short stories to create a semantic field where varied forms of marginalizations could be explored, particularly against the pluralities of Indian culture.

In the stories of *tales from Ferozsha Baag*, people communicate with each other in their own ways and from the vantage points of their different perspectives. A marginalized community is invariably perceived by the majority community as a community characterized by a very high amount of shared understanding of its members. Other minorities perceive it distinctly different albeit analogous to themselves. Mechanics and dynamics of the interface of these perceptions of the majority and minorities create a peculiar artistic and cultural space of India that helps diasporic writers like Mistry weave narratives of anthropologically sensitive cultural realities. Society is transforming in the long run as a more complex structure with a communication system with supporting ideas and values, which can be revealed through a sensitive and in-depth reading. The society, here, continues to be reorganized and rebuilt with changing times.

Mistry is highly worried about the existence of Parsis who are continuously getting marginalized and are finding it difficult to cope with the onslaught of the practices and values new age which has been vividly represented in the narrative of the *Tales* by highlighting the instances of old age marriages, non recognition of the inter caste marriages, falling rate of birth

as against a high death rate, control on the size of the family, generation gap and many more issues. The stories elaborately describe the slow but steady decline of the Parsi race. They also create a plan or formulate a strategy which can be executed to prevent further extinction of the Parsi race. In a way the stories propagate the exalted state of the Parsi religion. As put very aptly by Genetsch: “a Parsi family that Mistry is ultimately interested in but the family of man” (Genetsch 187).

Thus Mistry’s *Tales* will always be an encouragement and will inspire the future Parsis generations and protect their identity in future. The narrative of Mistry seems to be a perennial struggle with the changing times and the neo-culture in order to save the cultural heritage the age old customs and traditions, forgotten rituals and ethical values along with the language which are likely to teach the future generations to understand the Parsi ethos. This theme has significant implications for the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural Indian readership. “The microscopic Parsi community of in the *Tales of Ferozsha Baag* is a miniature India and macro humanity rendered artistically into a finely woven tale of universal import by the novelist” (Myles 123).

Tales of Firozsha Baag (1987) has eleven stories in its collection written explicitly by Kersi Boyce - the 'avatar' of Mistry’s mythology. Mistry highlights Kersi’s personality by making him a resident of the Firozsha Baag apartment in Bombay. A number of stories in this collection have been read as myths. This anonymous character gives Mistry a psychological level in order to reproduce the complex social realities of the marginalized Parsi society. Crispus beautifully illustrates the life of the Parsi community of this apartment. All these stories except “Lend Your Light” and “Squatter” bring the reader into the house and acquaint him with the real life of the characters. The final story, “Swimming Lessons” has its background in Canada. Kersi sent the subject matter to his parents' home to which they respond with comments. The expected reaction of some immigrants and the parent's reaction are also part of the narrative of this story. All the stories in the collection are about Parsis in the Firozsha Baag, a walled community. This ‘wall’ represents the community’s efforts to maintain ownership by being physically, socially, psychologically, religiously, linguistically and culturally apart from each other and also brings forth the dilemma of being marginalized. The residents are aware of the threats that have been put up on the wall, threats about their small size compared to the vast majority. The Khodadad plot in, *Such a Long Journey*, a novel by Mistry is actually a mirror of Firozsha Baag.

The presence of Parsis in the vast majority of the Indian population remains very slim and causes fears and anxieties, which are very obvious. He incorporates private lives of Parsis against the existence of the majority community to explore the nuances of, and thus, the question of Parsi's existence in the other socio cultural groups. The parents' comments on the “Swimming Lessons” that make up the background serve as a key to the understanding of the story, however, the beginning is with Kersi's goals of re-creating the traditional world through

the lives of the residents of Firozsha Baag. Cyrus remains silent though he mourns the loss of his home does not present his house in a dignified manner nor does he show any love. Instead, it highlights unhygienic and unhealthy living conditions coupled with weak family relationships and superstition. All of this makes life miserable and in the first episode of "Happy Event" from the collection, 'such a beautiful day' turned out to be bad for Rustomji. One passenger spits red Paan residue on his white starchy stone, his wife going to the fire temple but finds that a priest had been killed. Daulati in "Condolence Visit" does not get time to sit alone with her deceased husband due to the influx of relatives. They were always full of suggestions and instructions which were not solicited. The "collector" surprisingly highlights the disagreement in Mrs. Mody's marriage that ends up ruining her stance of Spanish dance and above all, to force her husband to give up his lifestyle. Relations between Kashmira and Boman remain strained with their paying guests Ardesav and Khorshedbai over a petty rental dispute. Jahangir's "Exercise" looks at Bhagwan Baba who will decide the end of his relationship with Behroze.

The protagonist Kersi's adaptability to the new world is very weak as he is unable to adapt to a new environment and a new society. Kersi contracted conjunctivitis on the last day and had to travel to India wearing dark glasses, which served as a sign of his inability to see with his eyes or an attempt to hide his mixed emotions behind the darkness of the glasses. It also conveys the idea of cowardice of a person of a marginalized community. Viewed from a traditional social point of view, he can also be regarded as a traitor - out of the country with the knowledge and skills to add to the wealth of a foreign nation. The possibilities for reading this short passage that represent Kersi's feelings in one short story are great and shows that Mistry's complex of awareness. This attitude not only ties the story together but Mistry uses this forum again to reveal another ethical point of view of the author / character post-colonial mindset.

Kersi, hoping to see a changed Bombay on his return trip to India is very disappointed and in the "Squatter" he finds Bombay even more dirty and has much narrower outlook in respect of the minorities. In "Squatter" Mistry tells the story of Ferozeshah Baag's child about Sarosh, an immigrant to Canada. Nariman concludes his story by quoting Sarosh's word "I pray in your stories", At the time when you shall relate with me the not so good unfortunate relationships, "they speak to me as I am; nothing will pass "(Tales 168). This shows the inability of immigrants to adapt to the new world Nariman tells the story especially to Kersi, as he plans to travel to Canada soon. In this collection of stories, Mistry keeps himself in the background and makes Kersi a character, narrator, and public viewer of Firozsha Baag. Although Kersi noted in the concluding Tale of the stories, "Swimming Lessons" that the root of all the problems that affect the true outcome of existence of mankind are similar at all places and the differences are extremely superficial, the only fact of seeing does not make the effort easier. Though immigrated for greener pastures, the Parsis remain equally marginalized in the foreign land too. There is a feeling of failure of the individual or community to match the chosen safe haven. He tries to balance unresolved conflicts, ranging from his place of birth to the living space, work,

family and community. In eleven connected stories Mistry mimics this small country of Parsis in relation to analogy, western practice, the impact of emigration, and deep self-seeking in a world divided between human choice and traditional land becomes a representation within representation. Rohinton Mistry's mythical address is false and seeks to preserve this dubious imposition of racial identity in his community. He did so primarily through the use of an active memory and imagination, always aware of the tangible results of living in Canada while supporting his stories in Mumbai, where he spent most of his youth.

While enjoying some memories of India, Mistry continues to master plan by writing about his community, building a bridge between his imaginary country and the real Canadian era. These factors create a bond when personal identity becomes the product of different forces seeking reconciliation not only between the past and the present but also between conflicting ideas of growing religious doubts and so on. "Rohinton's stories and novels are about the Parsees, about the world that perishes. His picture is accurate" (Lambert 15).

With a population of less than one lakh in India and just over 12,000 in Mumbai, the Parsees are on the verge of extinction. With them, their little world, their history and stories will wither. Mistry has repeatedly said in various talks that his Bombay or Mumbai has disappeared. "Today when I go back, I feel like an untrained marathon runner" (Lambert 15). On the one hand, there are the negotiable changes that take place in time, and on the other hand, there are internal changes, within the community itself. Parsis are a very religious community and at the same time centered on the west in their way of life or way of life. There seems to be a clear struggle to position them internally at the same time outside of the Indian cultural context.

In *Tales From Firozsha Baag*, Mistry creates a picture of public life with little details of the Parsis. These are stories of Government corruption, religious discrimination and sectarianism, of people who dream of a false England. Eleven short stories tragically reveal the beauty and misery of a small marginalized group living in a strange land at unknown times.

Nilufer E. Bharucha, describes the Parsis as "the consummate people who have perfected the complex art of globalization and space at the same time and at the same time something the whole world is starting to talk about recently" (42). However, this statement confirms the problematic position of the Parsis in India. They have a sense of belonging and concern for the environment in which they were born and raised. The concern is, therefore, the search for a place and its existence of a boundary, a time of mediation between cultural ontology and its migration, an attempt between the phantasm of the roots and the memory of distribution. The narrative of the history of the world and the community of Mistry reflects the awareness of anxiety and desire, the dangers and problems of individual existence, religious doubts, social and national issues and the unchanging memory of the past and present world. The fight between religious principles and individual liberty creates a divide in his many works, yet it is

most evident in all the myths of Firozsha Baag. The Parsees had for centuries regarded Persia as their home, the Urhaimat, and the Iranian Zoroastrianism as their role model.

Mistry's historical context includes the formation of a new identity in the land to which he migrated as well as a not so simple and plain relationship with the traditional and cultural history of India, which he has left for the better place. It was his decision to leave India to get better ideas but at the same time, being a Parsi, the historical aspect of the double migration is rooted within the author's concept of identification. Mistry highlights the pain of separation; nostalgia and the state of memory complement the pages of this short story collection. Mistry remembers and recounts his childhood and adolescence in Parsi 'Baag' which he portrays in his writings. There is a lasting coexistence of orthodox truth and a western mind set on a progressive life. Deteriorating religious practices, however, contribute to the deteriorating existence of the Parsi society. The conflict between religious traditions and personal dynamics creates a tension which flows through Mistry's stories. Thus, it has created a vague circle along the difference between the orthodox, religious-oriented lifestyle and the simple lifestyle. It does not mean that one can only exist with the help of another, but it does point out the way to survival when inequality becomes an inevitable part of life. These religious beliefs and practices were common in his community. The dichotomy had its standard adjustments and measurements. Firozsha Baag provides a visual family space where the community can live in a Mistry's story within the Bombay city center. Baag's fictional, closed space serves as a place where a marginalized group, within a large Indian community can find security, balancing their little insecurity of being part and non-part of it at the same time. It occurs among a variety of cultures whose lines are blurred by the constant familiarity of one community with another, and by the rapid transitions between socially focused life based on specific established behaviors. This is evident when Najamai, the only refrigerator owner in Firozsha Baag makes everyone's life dependent on his frozen box which eventually disrupts the innocent relationship between Kersi and Francis. The refrigerator becomes a personalized presenter of a modern life force that the colonists are yet to reconcile with. But it does not stop their enthusiasm for the new discovery when they no longer need to pass the terrible Tar Gully and people spit on the citizens of Parsee for the envy of their high financial status. This fear of the citizens of Tar Gully or the fear of getting out of the safe area of Baag is also the result of fears arising out of envy, cultural colonization, and the perceived fear of rejection.

The power of racism, fear of religious identity and perversion of culture makes the people of Baag see Francis in suspicion as he becomes the symbolic representative of such incredible forces that exist in the midst of a united public life. Rustomji, in the first issue of the collection, "A Wonderful Event", faces a similar situation where he is caught between his happy days as a volunteer in the Social Service League and his close gift where he is forced to adapt to the market and public decisions due to his limited position. When Dustoor Dunjisha dies, Rustomji, although does not join in his wife's zeal in performing religious ceremonies, expresses deep sorrow in a world we are not so familiar with each passing day. The distrust of

the priestly class is enshrined in Mistry's story near Mehroo's deep devotion, proposing the cunning ways in which such priests work to benefit the irrational Parsi women. However, this story reveals that religion is a factor in which the seemingly insignificant ones in Mistry's work find their foundation.

Mistry focuses on the cultural diversity of living in a multicultural environment suggested in preparation for his many works including *Tales From Firozsha Baag*. In his mythology Mistry portrays mixed emotions between painful jokes, social isolation, and a lack of ideas. Choosing the right partner of life in line with family preferences is the subject of controversy in both *A Fine Balance* and *Tales From Firozsha Baag*, for example, Dina Shroff's, who loves Rustom, her arguments with her very dominant brother who supported her financially. For Jehangir Bulsara the choice of a girl wearing heavy makeup was strongly rejected by the family in which the culture was important. But the point of opposition was not just the use of excessive make up and short shirts. It became a clear denial of the importance of culture seen in the wearing of mathoobanoo, a cloth covering her head: to her son it was a shame, for Mrs. Bulsara it also created a link to her upbringing and the symbolic act of showing respect. At *Firozsha Baag*, mathoobanoo was her identity. Jehangir's daughter was opposed to respecting the life they were accustomed to. The extraordinary balance may have been the result of his suppressed desires accumulated and the myth of exploring unknown boundaries that his family had so severely limited.

Mistry in this unique way shows Ferozsha Baag residents that society is still debating the equality of culture, transformation and ownership. Their reaction to the plurality of thought in social and religious affairs continues to be shaped by the process of growing and adapting to their environment, and even more so in the case of overseas communities in their new environment. Geoffery Kain aptly puts it as "Mistry plays with the complex multi-faceted nature of the theme of the self as Other"(64) Perhaps the desire to preserve what Parsi is fundamentally occupies a large narrative space where the memories of the past and the present mingle as clearly reflected in "Squatter," "Lend Your Light" and "Swimming Lessons." There is awareness that they do not fit in partially or completely everywhere and convey the trauma of being in a small group in India or the country of their choice. We see a strong desire to get in when Sid (Sarosh) is ready to try CNI (*Crappus Non-Interruptus*) to solve his sewage problem in Canada. But he finally realizes that surgery can only help him change his squatting habit and does not make a difference to make it easier for him to be his own self. Although he replaced the name Sid with Sarosh, in order to establish himself as a Canadian, his failure to conform to the customs of his chosen country divides him, resulting in further emigration. So it becomes the narrative of a person who is in search of his identity in the new world. The desire for complete internal and external change is blocked here when Sarosh can no longer compare himself to his own image of a true Canadian citizen.

The story "Lend Me Your Light" takes a closer look at the problems that scattered Indians face and those who are twice displaced - from their homeland and their chosen country. We see Kersi voluntarily separating himself from all things in India when he switches to Canada. Moving to another country was a painful process to break up with one's homeland and the memories that accompanied it. It has found its manifestation in letters Cyrus sent to his family who wandered aimlessly to end indifference. Canada, the chosen country, promising success and material benefits cannot bring about the content of the internal turmoil brought about by continuous, unending change as a foreigner in all countries. The characters are caught between two worlds - the one they left voluntarily and the other unsuccessful despite the initial promise. Being unsuccessful in finding comfort in the land of his choice and the unsuccessful attempt to discard the old land creates tension. The American melting pot does not help to create a cultural bond that was broken long ago, before he went to Canada. This was developed as a voluntary holding procedure to prevent the risk of complete homogenization, so that the Persian roots of the ancestors would not be lost and the fear of rejection would be felt throughout society.

In the concluding tale of the book "Swimming Lessons" Kersi observes that the real core of human life and all the problems that afflict them are the same everywhere under the external differences, but the mere fact of seeing does not make the effort easier. Cries of hatred or fear of the flow of water for fear of adapting to a new environment in which there is a persistent feeling of failure of the individual or community to match the chosen safe haven. He tries to balance unresolved conflicts, emanating from her place of birth, residence, work, family and community. In eleven intertwined stories Mistry made a drama of the little world of Parsi in relation to simulation, western practice, the impact of emigration, with a deep personal search for a world divided between the elite and the traditional world.

The feeling of the basic isolation of Parsis in the surrounding area, however, is most evident in the use of white color. The ceremonially special outfits of the groom and the bride – his traditional dugli and her sari – are whitest of the white. White colour here stands for the stable traditional religious symbol of purity, but it is also a visible symbol of the effort to stay connected to the Bombay hustle and bustle. Rustomji especially enjoys the beauty of his white dugli, whose outward speed is an indication of his confidence. We find that enroute to the fire temple, "he decided to go past H-station and move on, to A-1 Express, passing Tar Gully with its dangerous mouth. His starchy whiteness aroused in him a sense of glory and invincibility, and he did not object to watching his progress on the road" (*Tales* 16). Armed Rustomji pushed the way forward on the bus lane. In fact, his calmness will not succeed. As he gets off the bus, chewing gum from the upper floor emits red juice that holds him "between his shoulders: red blood is very white", irritates him, and begins to "scream. pain like a knife in the back" (*Ferozsha Baag* 17). Rustomji vents his anger on an inquisitive crowd, drawn by his roar that criticizes him as a 'gecko'. In no time, the behavior of the crowd abruptly changes and ill treatment of Rustomji begins. He is shocked by the violence and realizes that his beautiful

festive things are beautiful only in a figurative sense. In the immediate danger of an angry mob hitting the only available escape route, he hits a stand that he is thought to have carefully dug in the morning. Like it used to happen in the school playground, so here the weak team avoids jokes and ridicule. He spat on his dentures, “The crooked mouth and cracked lips made everyone happy. A public meeting was held. Rustomji actor won. He had restored to him the security of the first spectacle of entertainment” (*Ferozsha Baag* 18).

“Auspicious Occasion” very potently brings to surface the inner feelings of the Parsis who perceive themselves as the backbone of a densely populated country, though forming a small fraction of it. The readers are also prepared to watch the drama of the latest struggles of the coming generation that intends to break free from the traps of an inactive and secret society the story projects this society to be. The security that comes with repetition and process is part of the following story, "One Sunday." A Sunday has some predictable happenings such as the visit of Najmai, a middle-aged widow, to the house of her sister and her family, assigning the care of her upper house to her neighbors, angered by allegations of stealing the amount of Rs eighty. However, the suspicion is on a strange local man, Francis, who has his night abode under the canopy of a nearby store always waiting to help Baag residents. Though the inmates of the society consider him “the best homeless beggar” (*Ferozsha Baag* 30). Mistry establishes Baag's public relations as he describes the dependence of Najamai and his neighbors. He allows neighbors Tehina and Boyces from the ground floor to use his refrigerator to store their much-needed meat and ice cream, while they get bread and milk in the morning and let him borrow their newspaper. However, here again, such as "Happy Time", quotidian symptoms of the habit are caused by unexpected fears. Francis is surprised when Najamai behaves strangely when he returns. She screams in panic and quickly enters the surrounding streets.

The international dimensions of this are explored perhaps by some of the most complex and satisfying stories, “The Squatter.” The Squatter, of the title with reference to its wider narrative and thematic context, zeros on to the core of the theme not only in he being an unwanted criminal in the area or, still better, “an unknown alien” in the new world, rather the only place where the protagonist, Sarosh-Sid, managed to dispose of his guts successfully. And, just as the title has a double meaning, likewise, the whole story shows a double concern. The structuring of the stories around the tragic experience of migration through the use of language as a powerful tool integrates these diverse musical stories and help the readers get at the semantic nuances. So, it takes us to the main concern of volume, as well as to the oeuvre of Mistry, as a whole. Nariman Hansotia, a fellow journalist who deceives Firozsha Baag's boys with his stories, is especially good at narrative. After a practice that involves removal of the horn from the car with a star on its hood warning the boys after polishing, he opens one of his amazing stories. Jehangir is his sympathetic audiencer, also known as the Bulsara Bookworm, adores the creativity of Nariman stories. Somehow, he may seem to be a good reader / listener of all the writers/follower he has in mind. His description of Nariman's approach in words also applies to Mistry:

The inability to predict was the brush he used to draw his fairy tales, and the ambiguity of the palette with which he mixed his colors ... Nariman sometimes told a comic story in a very delicate way, or presented an important story in a complex way. an easy and playful way. And these were only two difficult stages, in between there were many subtle variations of tone and texture. So what's the funny and most important story? Their views were divided, but in the end, Jehangir said, it was up to the listener to decide . (*Ferozsha Baag* 147–8)

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