

I. Mistry's Engagement with Polyphonous Parsee Community in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*

This research is an attempt to study polyphony and heteroglossia in Rohinton Mistry's anthology of short fiction *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. In the imaginarily created setting of Firozsha Baag, Bombay, the writer has told the story from the points of view of the varieties of characters thereby rejecting to observe the single hero in action with certain closure in the book. He has depicted the Parsee characters that dwell in the tenements of the Firozsha Baag thereby bringing forth the cultural elements of the Parsee tradition that are communal rather than individualistic. In the stories, multiple perspectives and recurrent characters have been crucial. Rustomji, a middle-aged man, is the protagonist in the story "Auspicious Occasion" who brings forth polyvocal situations with varieties of perspectives without imposing one view upon another. He criticizes the dominant voice of the Parsee priest, the cultural authority while his wife supports the authoritative voice. In "The Ghost of Firozsha Baag", the harmony between an *aaya* i.e. maid and her Mistress is established because of their common belief in ghosts. In "The Collectors" Jehangir narrates the harmonious relation with him and Burjor uncle though they belong to two different generations because of their common hobby to collect the stamps. Time and again, the writer has shattered the authority of single voice or single domineering character.

Mistry has created an imaginary Parsee suburb Firozsha Baag and the Parsee families with multiple profession, age and interests are presented recurrently in the same setting. Mistry generates certain authority of particular voice and creates the hierarchic world; or facilitates the multiple voices and perspective bringing them into play denying stability to any perspective authority is the major focus of this research.

In his story collection, Mistry has depicted the characters with least or no

domination of a central, domineering voice, thereby rejecting the heroism to single person in these stories connecting the multiple perspectives of the multiple narrators and their voices upon commonly experienced events. Najamai's version of voice making Francis a thief in the story "One Sunday" is perceived differently by Kersee in another story "Of White Hairs and Cricket" thereby shattering any authority in particular voice.

Aamer Hussain has pointed to the novel-like feature of the anthology *Tales from Firozsha Baag* as he writes, "Characters and situations recur in the stories, creating the impression that Mistry is caught between the urge to write a novel and the desire to experiment with style and form in search of a distinctive personal voice" (1637). Since Mistry's urge is almost novel-like when he weaves the various tales from the Parsee community from various perspectives in the anthology, it is hypothesized that Bakhtin's theory of novel, the theory of dialogism and heteroglossia would be the appropriate methodology to examine the novel.

Even though Mistry belongs to Parsee community himself, he does not idealize the particular, single voice of the cultural and religious authorities of the community in his stories. In the first story of the anthology, "Auspicious Occasion", Mistry continually destabilizes the dominant religious voice of the Zoroastrian family priest *Dustoor* Dhunjisha and explores the dark sides of the dominant voice through the relatively weak voice of Rustomji. Rustomji's wife Mehroo blindly follows the monologic voice of the preacher Dhunjisha and idealizes his sermons in the Fire Temple but the auspicious occasion of *Behram roje* turns out to be the dark occasion when the preacher is killed by somebody in the Fire Temple itself. Such examples are important because they disrupt the dominant religious voices that religions are free of evils and valorize the relatively weak, skeptic voices and confirm the existence of the

polyvocal situation in the seeming unitariness of a strong voice.

There are eleven stories in the book *Tales from Firozsha Baag* among which each of the stories highlights one character or a family in the colony, but essentially all the stories are intertwined. This feature lends a lot of charm and uniqueness to the book. The author does not spend too much time with any character or any one particular story, so as a reader one is not really invested in any one person. In that sense, the book is episodic, offering a beautiful depiction of life. In the Bombay apartment area called Firozsha Baag, there are several colourful characters – and many of the anecdotes and incidents that the author narrates are familiar to anyone who has lived in a co-operative society.

Tales from Firozsha Baag is full of diversity—"The Ghost of Firozsha Baag" provides the viewpoint of one of the most minor members of the society, "Squatter" brings humor, while "The Paying Guests", intentionally or unintentionally, foreshadows horror throughout, leaving the reader with a surprising ending, if not a sheepish feeling of being cheated. Thus, the anthology brings forth various themes as well as perspectives to the fore always destabilizing the dominant, monologic voice.

Mistry's anthology of short fiction, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* has large numbers of criticism and a lot of praises since its publication. Large numbers of critics have read the story collection from numerous perspectives. One of the major critics of the book, Aamer Hussain has studied the writer in comparison to another writer Nirmal Verma and has praised the vivid prose style and the comic sense Mistry has used in the book:

Rohinton Mistry, who writes in English, has little but his Indian birth in common with Verma. Writing about his native Bombay, Mistry has an appealing sense of bawdy comedy and a vivid prose style. The

stories in his first collection, *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, are set in a middle-class Parsee suburb. (1637)

Hussain points to the common Indian birth in two writers, Mistry and Verma and asserts that the styles of expressions are completely different to each other in these two writers. Mistry has created his own personal voice reconstructing the Parsee community of his native Bombay. The characters and the situations are drawn from the same Parsee community living in Firozsha Baag in most of the stories that show his thought of novel-like plot and desire to experiment with form and style of the fiction.

Roshan G. Shahani, another scholar to discuss Mistry, has focused on the fictionality of Mistry's work. According to him, Mistry does not claim the authentic reality of Parsee community of Firozsha Baag in his fiction rather he has exaggerated them and fictionally recreated:

Fiction, even though it might give the illusion of authenticity, cannot be 'realistic' in the narrow sense of the term. Mistry, reacting to the insistence that Parsis be represented in a more flattering light, has stated that he was not reproducing a social document dealing with the Parsi community. (1251)

Shahani has clearly hinted that Mistry does not want his fiction as realistic documentation of the Parsee community rather he has recreated them fictionally, out of imagination and thus, there is the flattery and illusion rather than reality in his fiction.

Another critic, Robert L. Ross has pointed to the similarity among Mistry's works and Joyce and Chekhov's works and the conflict between religious tradition and personal fluidity:

The younger residents in Firozsha Baag rebel, and the older ones fear the encroachment of a changing world. This conflict between religious tradition and personal fluidity creates the tension in each of the stories. The collection has been compared to Joyce's *Dubliners* and to Chekhov's work - again, fiction that focuses on a limited company but manages to unfold into a larger world. (241)

Ross thus, praises Mistry unfolding the larger world even through the use of limited characters and actions in the small Parsee community.

It is clear that many of the critics have studied the novel from various perspectives but the issue of heteroglossia and polyvocality, the representation of the characters' voices and perspectives is not explored yet. So, this research proposes to study the novel from the light of Bakhtinian notion of heteroglossia and polyphony.

The theorists of heteroglossia and carnival-like plurality of the voices are drawn into the debate while analyzing the anthology. The theories of dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia and carnivalesque as propounded by Michael Bakhtin are brought into dialogue while discussing the characters and their perspectives that continually destabilize the authority of a monologic voice. So, the theories of heteroglossia and dialogism are the basis for the examination of the novel.

Bakhtin claims that the language of poetic discourse, i.e. lyric poetry, is unitary and monologic: only one voice, the poet's, he argues, is to be heard: his poetry, Bakhtin writes, is the "pure and direct expression of his own intention" (285). Moreover, a poem does not subsume several stylistic sub-unities. In short, lyric poetry is neither multiform in style nor there is the play of variety of voices. By contrast, Bakhtin contends, heteroglossia is the dominant characteristic of prose fiction. Bakhtin argues that most traditional critical approaches to the novel are oriented

towards the interpretation of poetry. As a result, they most often reduce the novel's ideological and stylistic diversity to the ideological monologism and stylistic unity of poetry.

Bakhtin argues that the novel does not fit into existing critical frameworks which are oriented towards the study of poetry because poetry ignores the fact of heteroglossia. From this point of view, any utterance, including the novel, takes shape "at a particular historical moment in a socially-specific environment" (276) and is an "active participant in social dialogue" (276). In Bakhtin's view, language is dialogical rather than monological in nature in that it is an arena in which the competing socio-linguistic points of view or fixes on reality that correspond to the several classes which comprise that society, as opposed to a single dominant perspective (the dominant ideology, that of the ruling class), struggle for ascendancy. Within a single, seemingly unified national language and the broad "socioideological conceptual horizon" (275) which it subtends, consequently, there are many class specific sub-languages and outlooks.

The notion that the novel is, like poetry, a monological utterance has predominated in literary criticism because historically it, to paraphrase Bakhtin, served the forces of centripetal unification in the verbal-ideological evolution of specific social groups. In other words, it facilitated the process of economic, political, social, and cultural centralization in the emergence of European nation-states and the rise to dominance of the middle class. This is why, by the nineteenth century, the novel had become the literary genre most favoured by the bourgeoisie. In fact, however, centripetal sociolinguistic forces in the form of a firm linguistic and ideological core of a common unitary language coexist and compete with centrifugal forces within what is in actuality a heteroglot national language. "Every concrete

utterance of a speaking subject" (272) is, accordingly, the locus in which these centripetal and centrifugal forces confront each other. Every utterance is, as such, both heteroglot and the "individualized embodiment of a speech-act" (272). In other words, every utterance is *both* "anonymous and social as language" (272) and "simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance" (272). Each utterance is, as such, necessarily "contradiction-ridden" (272) and "tension-filled" (272). This is as true of the novel as it is of any other utterance.

In short, literary criticism in general has long ignored the dialogic nature of language and the heteroglot nature of the novel, preferring to view the novel as a "hermetic and self-sufficient whole" (273), that is, as a "closed authorial monologue" (274). This ignorance of the ideologically-saturated nature of language and of the "multilingualness" (274) of any society has led critics to underprivilege those genres such as the novel which were carriers of the decentralizing tendencies of language or at the very least to read them wrongly. Where the 'high' genres such as poetry were undoubtedly integral to European cultural and national unification in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 'low' and unrespected genres such as the novel grew out of the ribald comedy of the fairs and the buffoon spectacles frequented by the lower classes that Bakhtin calls the carnivalesque folk humor of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. At those levels, Bakhtin argues in *Rabelais and his World* and elsewhere, there was no 'language centre,' no one dominant ideology, merely a playing with various official languages and versions of reality, none of which could lay claim to authenticity or absolute fidelity to the truth.

In Bakhtin, every language and genre represented in the text carries with it its own way of seeing and portraying reality, its own ideology and which together constitute a heteroglot artistic whole within the text. The objective with such analysis

is to identify the major voices or discourse types (i.e. uses of language) within the work and how they, by dialogizing with each other, create one artistic unity. Such approach allows to breach the gap between the strictly formal and the strictly ideological approach to the text, because each aspect of the represented discourse is both stylistically as well as ideologically different from other aspects of discourse.

Bakhtin has the firm belief that every literary genre and every epoch has perceived and represented time and space differently and that these can be seen in different historical works. For example, the epic past is an absolute and distant past as well as the image of an epic hero is equally distant, closed-off and irreproachable. To the epic genre Bakhtin opposes the novel that is grounded in actuality, in the zone of familiar present. The image of man in the novel is accordingly more open and subject to change and development. Different chronotopes thus reflect different historical times' relation to and representation of reality with the novelistic genre exhibiting a multiplicity of chronotopes due to its combination of many genres and languages (as opposed to epic that has one language, one point of view, one hero, etc.). Without any doubt, the chronotope is a very important and not the least most complex concept in Bakhtin's body of thought, but it addresses the nature of literature at a rather abstract, meta-level and therefore approaches literary analysis from a different perspective by exploring time/space dimension of the text. Along with the examination of the Rohinton Mistry's anthology *Tales from Firozsha Baag* with these various formulations of Bakhtin, valuable guidelines of the lecturers, library consultation, and internet research help further to shape the research.

The chief objective of the research is to explore the representation of the characters' voices and perspectives in Mistry's short fictions. To highlight the plurality, heterogeneity and heteroglossia of those voices and perspectives is the

objective of this research.

Even though this research basically studies the heteroglossia in Mistry's characters, the analysis is textual. Only the textual evidences are brought into the light in the analysis. The direct experiences of the people of real life are not incorporated due to the limitation of time and necessary resources to see them personally. This research is hoped to be a remarkable contribution for the study of heteroglossia and the representation of the voices and perspectives of the characters. To study the world created by the writer to question how the writer can disrupt a singularity of a particular voice is the major significance. This research analyzes the disruption of the single voice and the playfulness of multiple perspectives extensively that is very useful to help the other researchers to see through the issues of heteroglossia and polyphony.

The present research work has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter fundamentally deals with introductory outline of the present study. It introduces critical review and the characters in relation to their multiple perspectives and polyphonous voices. Thus it presents the bird's eye view of the entire research. The second chapter aims at providing the theoretical methodological reading of the text briefly with both the textual and theoretical evidences. It attempts to examine the heteroglossia, polyphony and the interplay among the multiple voices of the society without conforming to the dominant, single voice. On the basis of the theories of heteroglossia, dialogism, polyphony as coined by Michael Bakhtin, the characters and their circumstances are examined. This chapter further sorts out some extracts from the text to prove the hypothesis of the research. This part serves as the core of the present research. The third chapter concludes the ideas put forward in the earlier chapter, focusing on the outcome of the entire research. The various logical

conclusions have been summarized as the proof that the anthology is devoted to valorize the heteroglossia that exists in the small Parsee community in Firozsha Baag.

II. Heteroglossia and Polyvocal Situation in Mistry's Story Collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag*

This research is a study of polyphony and heteroglossia in Rohinton Mistry's story collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. The stories are set at Firozsha Baag, Bombay; the baag is the imaginarily created setting. The stories appear to be recalled by an immigrant from the multiple points of views of the multiple narrators residing in the tenements of Firozsha Baag. The writer has denied the voice of a single hero rather he has brought multiple voices and polyphonic situation. The writer has constructed the cultural elements of the Parsee tradition that are communal in nature rather than being individualistic. Heteroglossic, polyvocal condition is only possible in the communal situation.

In the stories, the characters repeat frequently and they contradict earlier voices and see the same proceedings around the Baag from different ways. Multiple perspectives and recurrent characters have been crucial in the book and they have given the book almost a novel-like feature. Rustomji, a middle-aged man is the protagonist in the story "Auspicious Occasion" who brings forth polyvocal situations with varieties of perspectives without imposing one view upon another. Heteroglossia and the tension among the voices are there throughout Mistry's stories. The authority, the religious voice of *Dustoor* Dhunjisha, the priest of the Parsee Fire Temple has been reduced to mockery by Rustomji in the opening story "Auspicious occasion" but his wife Mehroo is the staunch believer of the priest. There is tension between the two voices undermining the tyranny of a single voice:

Mehroo persisted in her loyalty to Dhunjisha. She paid no attention to the high dudgeon the A Block priest directed at her, or to Rustomji's charges.

Under the priestly garb of Dhunjisha, protested Rustomji, lurked a salacious old man taking advantage of his venerable image: “Loves to touch and feel women, the old goat – the younger and fleshier, the more fun he has hugging and squeezing them.” Mehroo did not believe it for a moment. She was always pleading with him not to say nasty things about such a holy figure. (14)

The tension between the two voices is evident in the quote. Mehroo is the staunch devout to the priest. So, she does not like her husband making fun of or degrading the *Dustoor* but Rustomji’s voice downplays her voice. Mehroo pleads not to say nasty things about the old holy man but Rustomji says the old person is greedy to touch the women’s body and hug them tightly. The priest, in the perception of Rustomji, is vulgar. He preaches looking at the women full of lusty eyes and frequently refers them as an example.

But this was not all. Rustomji swore that Dhunjisha and his ilk had been known to exchange lewd remarks between lines of prayer, to slip them in amidst scripture recitals, especially on days of ceremony when sleek nubile women in their colourful finery attended in large numbers. The oft-repeated *Ashem Vahoo* was his favourite example: *Ashem Vahoo*, See the tits on that chickie-boo . . . This version was a popular joke among the less religious, and Mehroo dismissed it as more of Rustomji’s irreverence. (14)

Rustomji berates the old preacher as a lewd person who exchanges lewd remarks in between the lines of prayer. He frequently uses vulgar references of the women which are mocked by the less religious people. Mehroo dismisses such nasty remarks as ludicrous and the result of the irreverence of Rustomji. The story ends with the death

of old *Dustoor* without closure. There is no dominant voice and conclusion in the story. The truth about Rustomji and Mehroo's voices remain uncertain and no voice wins at last rather the subject of the discussion itself passes away.

Mistry himself belongs to Parsee community but he does not idealize monolithic voice of the cultural and religious authorities of the community in his stories. "Auspicious Occasion", he has destabilized the dominant religious voice of the Zoroastrian family priest *Dustoor* Dhunjisha and has focused on the dark sides of such authoritative voice through the weak voice of Rustomji. On the other hand, Rustomji's wife Mehroo blindly follows authoritative voice of the preacher Dhunjisha and idealizes his sermons in the Fire Temple. The auspicious occasion of *Behram roje* turns out to be painful occasion when the preacher is killed by somebody in the Fire Temple. This way, the writer disrupts the dominant religious voices that religions are free of evils and valorizes the relatively weak, skeptic voices and confirms the existence of the polyvocal situation in the seeming unitariness of a strong voice.

According to Bakhtin's theory of the novel as a dialogic genre, which he describes as: "multiform in style and variform in speech and voice" (261), the reader of any novel becomes an investigator confronted with several heterogeneous unities, often located on different linguistic levels, and subject to different stylistic controls. The language of a novel is therefore the "system of its languages" (263), by means of which different themes are orchestrated. Aamer Hussain has observed the novel-like feature of the book as he writes, "Characters and situations recur in the stories, creating the impression that Mistry is caught between the urge to write a novel and the desire to experiment with style and form in search of a distinctive personal voice" (1637). Since Mistry's book is almost novel-like telling the tales from various perspectives in the anthology, Bakhtin's theory of novel, the theory of dialogism and

heteroglossia are present in the novel.

“The Ghost of Firozsha Baag” narrates a weird situation that is done by the boys taking advantage of the belief in ghost in the Baag. The boys intentionally pretend to be the ghosts and scare people of which the boy called Pesi is the major schemer:

How much teasing everyone was doing to me about the *bhoot*. It became a great game among boys, pretending to be ghosts. One who started it all was Dr. Mody’s son, from third floor of C Block. The one they call Pesi *paadmaroo* because he makes dirty wind all the time. Good thing he is in boarding-school now. That family came to Firozsha Baag only few years ago, he was doctor for animals, a really nice man. But what a terrible boy. Must have been so shameful for Dr. Mody. Such a kind man, what a shock everybody got when he died.

(65)

It is evident that the strangeness of Pesi lies in his enjoyment in the farting habit. He farts everywhere but instead of being ashamed of it he enjoys it which is almost like the carnival Bakhtin deciphers in his studies. In the story, the fostered belief in ghosts is celebrated by Pesi *paadmaroo* in strange way pretending to be a ghost which is similar in its proceedings like the Bakhtinian concept of carnival:

Bakhtin makes the transition from popular — festive life to the writing of Rabelais via some interesting key notions in his book, which are at once aesthetic notions—that is, they can be used to describe aspects of writing — but which are also rooted in the tumultuous institution of the carnival. The most important of these linking categories is the notion of *grotesque realism*, a luminous conception which alludes to those

aspects of Rabelais' writing (but not only his) which emphasize the material and the bodily. Rabelais is famous, after all, as the writer who celebrates the body which eats, digests, copulates, and defecates, but who does so in a wild, exaggerated and grotesque way. (64-65)

According to the Bakhtinian concept of carnival, the festive moment is sought to celebrate. The celebration is bizarre, grotesque and bodily enjoyment. It is a material pleasure enjoying the bodily actions gratifying physical senses in any way possible. The narration of the story "The Ghost of Firozsha Baag" narrates similar situation in which to satisfy the sense of looking the smart girls and their private organs the boy, Pesi pretends to be a ghost and scares Vera and Dolly:

Vera and Dolly, the two fashionable sisters from C Block's first floor, went to nightshow at Eros Cinema, and Pesi knew. After nightshow was over, tock-tock they came in their high-heel shoes. It was when mini-skirts had just come out, and that is what they were wearing. Very *esskey-messkey*, so short I don't know how their *maibaap* allowed it. They said their daughters were going to foreign for studies, so maybe this kind of dressing was practice for over there. Anyway, they started up, the stairs were very dark. Then Pesi, wearing a white bedsheet and waiting under the staircase, jumped out shouting *bowe ré*. Vera and Dolly screamed so loudly, I'm telling you, and they started running. (65-66)

The narrator narrates the story of Pesi's mischief and looking at the private parts of the two fashionable girls in the Baag. Pesi waits for night time when the girls return from show and scares them in the disguise under the veil of bed sheet pretending to be a ghost. The girls scream and run but he follows them:

Then Pesi did a really shameful thing. God knows where he got the idea from. Inside his sheet he had a torch, and he took it out and shined up into the girls' mini-skirts. Yes! He ran after them with his big torch shining in their skirts. And when Vera and Dolly reached the top they tripped and fell. That shameless boy just stood there with his light shining between their legs, seeing undies and everything, I'm telling you. (66)

In this mischievous work of pretending to be a ghost, we see the intention of Pesi is no other than to enjoy the private parts of the girls. Thereby he satisfies his bodily desire to see the girls as they fall down. He flashes the light upon their panties and gratifies his desire that is almost like the carnival, enjoying the body in grotesque way. Another story, "One Sunday" instead of depicting Pesi as a bad person credits him for bringing life to the Baag, "Everything in Firozsha Baag was so dull since Pesi *paadmaroo* had been sent away to boarding school. And all because of that sissy Jehangir, the Bulsara Bookworm (39). It shows that, carnival-like situations are necessary to keep a community active and moving. In "The Collectors" two different generations Jehangir and Burjor Uncle have harmonious relation and similar hobbies. There is no hierarchy among the generations. By presenting the stories in that way, the writer has subverted and even unsettled the authority of single voice or single domineering character.

Doing weird and grotesque things to gratify the body is repeated in the story "The Collectors". Eric, the classmate of Jehangir makes him fondle his penis and give him sexual pleasure from masturbation in visual classes every Thursday in an exchange of the stamps Jehangir collects is portrayed. Eric steals the stamps from a shopkeeper to provide them to Jehangir. Jehangir hates this but in the craze of the

stamp collecting habits he agrees and he makes him satisfied:

Jehangir and Eric finally got acquainted one day when the class filed out for games period. Eric had been made to kneel down by the door for coming late and disturbing the class, and Jehangir found himself next to him as he stood in line. From his kneeling position Eric observed the smooth thighs emerging from the half-pants (half-pants was the school uniform requirement), winked at him and, unhindered by his underwear, inserted a pencil up the pant leg. He tickled Jehangir's genitals seductively with the eraser end, expertly, then withdrew it. Jehangir feigned a giggle, too shocked to say anything. The line started to move for the playground. (110)

This instance of masturbation in classroom and gratifying the bodily desire is the instance of carnival-like situation.

In the anthology, Mistry has depicted the Parsee families with varieties of profession, age and interests are presented recurrently in the same setting. Mistry never generates certain authority of certain voice. He does not create the hierarchic world rather he facilitates the multiple voices and perspective bringing them into play denying stability to any perspective authority in the stories. In this anthology of the stories, Mistry has depicted the characters with least or no domination of a central, domineering voice, there by rejecting the heroism to single person in these stories connecting the multiple perspectives of the multiple narrators and their voices upon commonly experienced events.

For Bakhtin, literary voices or novelistic voices reflect all the characteristics — ideology, style and genre — of the elements in our first aspect of complexity. Thus, reading the literary voice does not necessarily equate to a literary reading,

though the two operations are very similar in many ways. Literary reading mainly focuses on aesthetic and rhetoric effect; but reading the literary voice inclines more towards an ideological exploration. Furthermore, if we recast the diverse elements of a text into ‘voices’, we can see the tension between them differently. To understand how tensions arise between voices, we must first appreciate the important concept of ‘heteroglossia’.

In his discussion of novelistic discourse, Bakhtin uses the term ‘heteroglossia’ to describe the phenomenon of multi-voicedness and ‘dialogized heteroglossia’ the interaction of these voices in the novel. Multivoicedness in Bakhtin’s mind is an essential feature of novel, and it never means simply the multiplicity of language. Bakhtin believes that the voices in heteroglossia in any discourse are always in tension: the centripetal forces of language, ‘the forces that serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world’ (270), and the centrifugal forces of language, ‘the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification’ (272), are always working against each other. For Bakhtin, the traditional study of linguistics and stylistics creates the system of a *unitary language* (269); but a real utterance by a social and historical person, rather than a linguistically and theoretically abstract expression, is always being stratified into *languages* — heteroglossia. If we can recognise the stratification or heteroglossia, we can see the dynamics of how language works.

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject, according to Bakhtin, serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces come into play. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance. The utterance does not only answer the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it also answers the requirements of

heteroglossia as well. It is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity. And this active participation of every utterance in living heteroglossia determines the linguistic character and style of the utterance to larger degree than its inclusion in a normative-centralizing system of a unitary language. In other words, “[e]very utterance participates in the “unitary language” (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)” (272). Heteroglossia, the Bakhtinian perspective on scriptural complexity will turn the tension within it into a dialogue in which we can participate. To quote Bakhtin once again:

It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language...The authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance. (272)

This dialogue within such ‘dialogized heteroglossia’, ‘the dialogic nature of language, which was a struggle among socio-linguistic points of view’ (273), are used as a global concept for us to appreciate Bakhtin’s fascinating conceptual understanding of languages.

The concept of voice of in Bakhtin’s writing is summarized in the glossary of the translation of his essays *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*:

Voice [golos, -glas]: This is the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness. A voice always has a will or desire behind it, its own timbre and overtones. SINGLE-VOICED DISCOURSE

[edinogolosnoe slovo] is the dream of poets; DOUBLE-VOICED DISCOURSE [dvugolosnoe slovo] the realm of the novel. (152)

Bakhtin's notion of voice has been clarified in the quote. Bakhtin has separated between the single-voiced and double voiced discourses. The poets use the single –voiced discourse while double or multi-voiced discourse is the realm of novel. The translator furthers:

At several points Bakhtin illustrates the difference between these categories by moving language-units from one plane to the other—for example, shifting a trope from the plane of poetry to the plane of prose: both poetic and prose tropes are ambiguous [in Russian, dvusmyslennyi, literally “double meaninged”] but a poetic trope, while meaning more than one thing, is always only single-voiced. Prose tropes by contrast always contain more than one voice, and are therefore dialogised. (152-53)

From this concept, we see that the voice is not only a person or a character rather the consciousness of the character is also important. The poems contain the consciousness of the poet and they have the single voiced discourse while double-voiced discourse or the play among the multiple voices is possible only in the realm of novel.

Dialogism is the plurality of the voice that destabilizes the dominant voice of a character or the writer frequently. We see this happening in many of the instances in the anthology. First two sentences of the glossary, indicate that, for Bakhtin, voice is phenomenologically linked with the personality and consciousness of a subject, who through the speaking of the voice embodies the intentionality and ideology of the (social-)person. For Bakhtin, voice is neither a reflection of psychological emotion nor a personal choice of style. In Bakhtin's conception, voice is always a

representation/embodiment of the historical and social dimension plus an ideological force within the consciousness of a person. In other words, the Bakhtinian notion of voice attributes more philosophical and profound meaning to the word ‘voice’.

Najamai’s version of voice making Francis a thief in the story “One Sunday” is perceived differently by Kersi in another story “Of White Hairs and Cricket” thereby shattering any authority in particular voice. In the story “One Sunday”, hungry Francis, a part time errand servant to Najamai, waits for her to get some work and something to eat at Najamai’s block when she is out one Sunday. But he is charged as a thief by Najamai when she returns in her flat. Kersi and his bother are regarded as the heroes for catching the poor boy and beating him with their cricket bat. He is the thief according to Najamai’s voice and the crowd gathered there when he is caught, slapped and humiliated; “At the slap, the gathering started to move in for a fresh round of thrashing. But Najamai screamed and the crowd froze. Francis threw himself at her feet, weeping. “Bai,” he begged, “you hit me, you kick me, do whatever you want to me. But please don’t let them, please!” (48). But the readers see that he has not taken anything rather Najamai’s psychological need of a permanent, residential servant had caused it. The voice of Najamai is destabilized when Kersi shows doubt over Najamai’s accusation to Francis in “Of White Hairs and Cricket”:

It had been such a long time since we last played cricket. Flying kites had also become a thing of the past. One by one, the things I held dear were leaving my life, I thought gloomily. And Francis. What about poor Francis? Where was he now, I wondered. I wished he was still working in the Baag. That awful thrashing he got in Tar Gully was the fault of Najamai and Tehmina, those stupid old women. And Najamai saying he stole eighty rupees was nonsense, in my opinion; the absent-

minded cow must have forgotten where she left the money. (160)

This narration clearly cancels the authority of Najamai's voice and establishes that Francis is actually victimized by the stupidity of the women. Kersi is not that brave as the women suggest to catch and bat a thief rather he is a sensible and ordinary man.

There are eleven stories in the book *Tales from Firozsha Baag* among which each of the stories highlights one character or a family in the colony, but essentially all the stories are intertwined. This feature lends a lot of charm and uniqueness to the book. The author does not spend too much time with any character or any one particular story, so as a reader we are not really invested in any one person. In that sense, the book is episodic, offering a beautiful depiction of life. In the Bombay apartment area called Firozsha Baag, there are several colorful characters – and many of the anecdotes and incidents that the author narrates are familiar to anyone who has lived in a co-operative, communal society.

Tales from Firozsha Baag is full of diversity and multiplicity —"The Ghost of Firozsha Baag" provides the viewpoint one of the lower members of the society, "Squatter" brings humor, while "The Paying Guests", intentionally or unintentionally, foreshadows horror throughout, leaving the reader with a surprising ending, if not a sheepish feeling of being cheated. Thus, the anthology brings forth various themes as well as perspectives to the fore always destabilizing the dominant, monologic voice.

Mistry, as an immigrant writer, needs to make the fictional journey home to Bombay even though it appears 'brown, weary and unhappy' to his fictional persona (18). More specifically, he needs to return and to retrieve through his fiction the minuscule Parsee community of Bombay, the minuscule 'city' within the city which is the Parsee baug. For this dwindling, ethnic minority, the 'baag' becomes a communal refuge, a cultural bulwark against the fast-changing, 'menacing' city. For the author,

both the 'baag' and the city become a fictional refuge, a means of rooting himself anew in the host country by digging in the soil of his old homeland. Not that Mistry, necessarily, endorses the 'baag' mentality or as Northrop Frye might have termed it, 'the garrison mentality' (35). In fact, Mistry problematizes his community's dilemma by examining the deadening effects of its culture. Inheritors of much of the colonial legacy, the Parsee community finds itself trapped in the past, unable to flow on with the onward currents of the city, even though Bombay has been its home for generations.

By fictionalizing the Parsee community of Bombay, Mistry is not so much, attempting, to retrieve a diminishing community and its 'quaint' ways, but to retrieve, through it, his own sense of self. The immigrant's cultural confusion, the experience of 'falling between two stools' gives way in this fashion to a 'straddling of two cultures' (Rushdie 68). Mistry's return to the communal 'baag' could indicate the immigrant's need for community and identification, a need that is further intensified in the western culture where the sense of individuation is greatly accentuated. Simultaneously, the Parsee community's own sense of exile also becomes a symbol for the larger sense of exile, experienced by the writer who is an immigrant. The narrators are both from overseas and inside the Baag this gives the collection difference in point of views and diversity.

Bombay becomes a metaphor for two antithetical states of mind – for both exile and communication. The exiled psyche finds its corresponding state in this self-exiled Parsee community; yet locating the particular and the unique experience of life in a Parsee 'baag' gives a sense of community to the immigrant writer. It is not surprising that Mistry continues his metaphoric journeyings indefinitely and indefatigably. Such a Long Journey, his second piece of fiction, is located in Bombay

and the novel he is currently working on is also centred on Bombay: The impetus/insistence of the Canadian mosaic model that one writes out of one's ethnic roots might also have pushed Mistry to cast long, lingering looks homeward. This perspective has at times led to an element of the quaint and the exotic in Mistry's fiction.

At the end of Rohinton Mistry's story, "Swimming Lessons," the protagonist, an Indian who has emigrated to Canada, sends the manuscript of a collection of stories he has written while in his new land to his parents back home in Bombay. Although delighted with the work, his father nonetheless anticipates a problem. These stories about his son's boyhood in India, about the apartment complex he grew up in and the eccentric people who reside there, will, his father thinks, "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." What Kersi's father is invoking here is not only the immigrant's anxieties about being completely absorbed into an adopted culture, but also the writer's nightmare of losing the "important difference" which makes her/his work distinctive, individual, original. At a time when more fiction is being published than at any other period in history, when there are more forms of media turning out more competing narratives than has ever previously been the case; at a time when psychology and literature conspire to undermine the distinction between the artist and the average woman at such a time it is perhaps the hardest thing of all, the most presumptuous as well, for writers to unequivocally affirm that this narrative is different; it matters, it makes a difference. And yet any fiction which doesn't attempt to make any such claim for itself simply isn't going to be able to compete the blurbs from famous writers

won't be forthcoming, and an early relegation to the remainder table and bargain books circular will be its fate. In such a climate, against such odds, are fiction writers writing fiction today, tilting against reality's windmills in proclaiming the higher truth of the aesthetically-shaped lie, registering their romantic protests of difference and distinctiveness in the forms of stories and novels. Each of the four works of fiction considered here makes its own claim to originality and distinctiveness, chooses among a number of competing themes, styles and techniques whose aggregate constitutes its attempt at creating and enacting different viewpoints.

Voice according to Bakhtin is also the voice and viewpoint of the writer. Mistry's story collection is not without its writer's self-consciousness. The manuscript *Kersi* has sent his parents closely resembling *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories* from Firozsha Baag. Mistry's literary self-consciousness expands rather than undermines the reality of his book. The early stories in Mistry's collection are highly traditional narratives detailing the lives of characters inhabiting Firozsha Baag, a Bombay apartment complex. Through the voice of an all-knowing, distinctly judgmental narrator who speaks in the accents of the residents and shares their Indian English lexicon Rustomji, a comically anal-retentive miser; Mehroo, his wife, whose own private key to the universe exists in the fire-temple, the central flame of which somehow makes less frightening the notions of eternity and infinity; Jaakaylee, a servant whose village roots allow her to perceive the ghost (bhoot) of Firozsha Baag to which her citified employers are oblivious; Daulat, a widow struggling to reconcile her personal sense of loss with Parsee mourning rituals; Dr. Burjor Mody, who shares his stamp collection with a neighbor's boy in preference to his own delinquent son; and Jehangir, a young man poised between his parents' repressiveness and his own sexual initiation.

There is certain authority on the part of the writer. The sense of authority which permeates these stories derives from two sources: the accumulated weight of the mimetic tradition in Anglo-Indian literature which the collection extends, and the nearly boundless sympathy for and understanding of his characters which Mistry demonstrates on the book's every page. In their density of detail and patient depiction of the not-very communal community of Firozsha Baag, these stories make a mimetically-rendered place seem exotic, legendary, and mythic.

Interspersed among these tales of Firozsha Baag life and customs are stories which establish the book's counter-movement, stories which anticipate and ultimately describe characters that leave Bombay for the West. The most striking of these is "The Squatter," a story which conveys the impossibility of the emigrant's ever completely accommodating himself to his new culture through the example of Sarosh who becomes Sid upon arriving in Canada and his utter inability to defecate when seated upon Western toilets. The other stories dealing with the ambiguities of emigration follow Kersi from his childhood disillusionments with the Firozsha Baag residents through his move to Toronto, the dynamic of the collection moving the action progressively away from Bombay to Canada.

By the closing story, "Swimming Lessons," Firozsha Baag has been replaced by the grim "Don Mills, Ontario, Canada" apartment building where Kersi lives among strangers, watching alien snowflakes fall and indulging himself in sexual fantasies about the women taking swimming lessons with him at an indoor high school pool. The exotic, densely-consonated Indian words which lent such strangeness to the early stories have given way to the "gutang-khutang" sound the building's elevator makes, and Bombay exists only as a truncated echo in Kersi's parents' letters, which admonish him to "say prayers and do kusti at least twice a day,

(280)" and which comment on the very stories the reader has come to the end. Kersi must be "so unhappy there, (282)" his mother concludes, because:

. . . all his stories are about Bombay, he remembers every little thing about his child hood, he is thinking about it all the time even though he is ten thousand miles away, my poor son, I think he misses his home and us and everything he left behind, because if he likes it over there why would he not write stories about that, there must be so many new ideas that his new life could give him. (282)

"Swimming Lessons" movingly dramatizes both the truth and error of Kersi's mother's opinion; swimming lessons from Firozsha Baag anatomizes the process which has left Kersi dreaming of one culture, living in another, and feeling himself a citizen of neither. In this collection, Mistry manages to epitomize the "important difference" necessary to render fiction individual, distinctive, even as it affectingly enacts the protagonist/ author surrendering up that different viewpoints and heteroglossia. His book renders simultaneously what is saved and what is lost. The different viewpoints work in Mistry's anthology to make it heteroglossic and polyvocal.

In the story "Condolence Visit" various dominating voices have been brought to the conversation and many of the rigid voices that appear in various stories are cancelled. The central and authoritarian voice of cultural practice of condolence visit and lighting the lamp in the room of the dead person are shattered by the personal, minor voice of Daulat. Daulat's husband, Minocher has died in the story and the people visit her for the condolence visit as a cultural practice. Daulat hates the condolence visits because those visits aggravate and renew her suffering of the death of her husband. Her voice questions the dominant voice of the Parsee cultural practices:

Minocher had passed away in his sleep after six days spent in an inexplicable state of grace and tranquillity. Daulat had cried for the briefest period; she felt it would be sinful to show anything but gladness when he had been so fortunate in his final days.

Now, however, the inescapable condolence visits would make her regurgitate months of endless pain, nights spent sleeplessly, while she listened for his breath, his sighs, his groans, his vocalization of the agony within. For bearers of condolences and sympathies she would have to answer questions about the illness, about doctors and hospitals, about nurses and medicines, about X-rays and blood reports. (62)

The death of Minocher and its consequences are described in the quote. Minocher dies after a brief period of recovery and dies a peaceful death. Daulat cries for sometime but she cannot express her happiness in the peaceful death of her husband because of the cultural norms. The condolence visits, that are also the parts of cultural norms, stretch her pain of death to the long time. She cannot sleep because of them. The cultural voice dominates her voice and her way of life.

Daulat has to relate the visitors about all the proceedings that led her husband to the death. Her voice is helplessly constrained and the voice of cultural practices dominates:

She would be requested (tenderly but tenaciously, as though it was their rightful entitlement) to recreate the hell her beloved Minocher had suffered, instead of being allowed to hold on to the memory of those final blessed six days. The worst of it would be the repetition of details for different visitors at different hours on different days, until that intensely emotional time she had been through with Minocher would

be reduced to a dry and dull lesson learned from a textbook which she would parrot like a schoolgirl. (62)

It is clear that Daulat has been requested to relate the sufferings of her husband tenderly but the demand is such that the visitors regard it to be their rights to know. They control the voice of Daulat and the monologic voice of the cultural norms prevails over her feeble voice. She starts to resist such a miserable loss of her autonomous voice by letting the repetition of the painful proceeding of her husband's death by a tape recorder, a voice of machinery:

When they held out their right hands in the condolence-handshake position (fingertips of left hand tragically supporting right elbow, as though the right arm, overcome with grief, could not make it on its own) she could thrust towards them the cassette and recorder: "You have come to ask about my life, my suffering, my sorrow? Here, take and listen. Listen on the machine, everything is on tape. How my Minocher fell sick, where it started to pain, how much it hurt, what doctor said, what specialist said, what happened in hospital. (63)

The writer has sarcastically presented the resistance of the monologic cultural voice opening up the possibility of the dialogic voices. Daulat starts showing the tape recorder to the condolence visitors to relate the painful memories of her husband that would be torturous for her to repeat the same thing again and again. She violently rejects to be tortured and makes the visitors listen to the proceedings – how her husband falls sick, what the nature of pain was and the proceedings of the hospital and the advance towards death. For this, she has just to teach the visitor to play the tape recorder and the functions of the buttons on it. It shows how monologic and totalitarian the cultural voice is. It wants the mechanization of the individual voice

like Daulat's:

This R button? Is for Rewind. Some part you like, you can hear it again, hear it ten times if you want: how nurse gave wrong medicine but my Minocher, sharp even in sickness, noticed different colour of pills and told her to check; how wardboy always handled the bedpan savagely, shoving it underneath as if doing sick people a big favour; how Minocher was afraid when time came for sponge bath, they were so careless and rough – felt like number three sandpaper on his bedsores, my brave Minocher would joke. What? The FF button? Means Fast Forward. (63)

The writer hits the monologic voice of the culture with the mechanization of the voice the cultural values prefer. Daulat shows the visitors that repeating the same voice all the time is totalitarian. She gives just the pleasant details of her husband such as his joke or his ability to recognize medicines. Thus, she revolts the monologism rather she opens up the possibility of heteroglossic voices of the visitors – the possibility of multiple perspectives and reactions from the visitors.

Furthermore, there is a democratic process that they can stop listening the time they feel the record of the proceedings towards death irritating or painful. Daulat teaches this option to the visitors recalling the need of friends while her husband was very sick:

I changed dressings four times a day using sulfa ointment, and in two weeks bedsores were almost gone; how, as time went by and he got worse, his friends stopped coming when he needed them most, friends like you, now listening to this tape. Huh? This letter P? Stands for Pause. Press it if you want to shut off machine, if you cannot bear to

hear more of your friend Minocher's suffering..." (64)

This democratic process of listening and stopping establishes the heteroglossic situation even bolstering the helpless and painful voice of Daulat making her voice stronger. This shows the novelistic character of the story. The voices come into conflict time and again and the dominant voices are shattered in the story.

Najamai's voice, as a monologic cultural voice appears in the story when she visits Daulat, a near neighbor, after her husband's death. There she teaches Daulat the cultural and ethical codes about the possession of her late husband, a pugree. The pugree and its cultural value have been narrated:

It truly was an elegant piece of headgear, and many years ago Minocher had purchased a glass display case for it. Daulat had brought it out into the living-room this morning.

Najamai continued: "You know, pugrees are so hard to find these days, this one would bring a lot of money. But you must never sell it. Never. It is your Minocher's, so always keep it." With these exhortatory words she prepared to leave. Her eyes wandered around the flat for a last minute scrutiny, the sort that evoked mild dislike for her in Daulat. (66)

Daulat has brought the pugree to the living room in a morning when Najamai visits her. She gives her a lecture about the value of pugree. She warns Daulat not to sell it and she scrutinizes the flat as if she is looking for any wrong doings from the perspective of the cultural codes. Najamai's ethics and monolithic cultural voice has been ironized in the story. Najamai virtually stands before her as if she is her savior and she can do anything as a neighbor as she is mourning and a helpless creature, an object of mercy; "“You must be very busy today, so I'll –" Najamai turned towards

Minocher's bedroom and halted in mid-sentence, in consternation: "O *baap ré!* The lamp is still burning! Beside Minocher's bed – that's wrong, very wrong!" (66).

Najamai shows pity to Daulat and asserts that she can help her if she is busy. But soon enough, she notices a wrongdoing; a culturally restricted process going on in Daulat's flat to torture her. There is a lamp burning beside the bed of her late husband's bed. It should have been already gone off according to the cultural norms but Daulat has let it burn as it gives her solace and comfort.

Daulat has to pretend that she has let the lamp burn ignorantly. Her voice has been hushed by the cultural, monologic voice because there is no way she can speak that she needs the lamp burning so that she could feel comfortable and strong. She has to thank her despite she hates her cultural totalitarian voice and has to be submissive in expense of her wishes to keep the lamp burning.

"Oh, I forgot all about it," lied Daulat, feigning dismay. "I was so busy. Thanks for reminding, I'll put it out."

But she had no such intention. When Minocher had breathed his last, the *dustoorji* from A Block had been summoned and had given her careful instructions on what was expected of her. The first and most important thing, the *dustoorji* had said, was to light a small oil lamp at the head of Minocher's bed; this lamp, he said, must burn for four days and nights while prayers were performed at the Towers Of Silence. But the little oil lamp became a source of comfort in a house grown quiet and empty for the lack of one silent feeble man, one shadow. Daulat kept the lamp lit past the prescribed four days, replenishing it constantly with coconut oil. (66)

Daulat, even after being adamant to the cultural requirement, listens to her own voice

and keeps the lamp burning even after the four days allocated by the cultural codes. Dustoorji or the Parsee priest, the cultural authority has instructed her to keep the lamp burning for four days and night; the dictate of the monologic cultural voice burning the lamp, replenishing its oil further than the dictated time as per the voice of her own heart. Thus, the monologism has been shattered in the story time and again and the possibility of heteroglossia or polyvocal situation has been opened up. Daulat's resistance to the dictator cultural voice is seen as she shows her dismay over the cultural codes even if she agrees to put out the lamp; "Nothing can confuse my Minocher, thought Daulat, he will go where he has to go. Aloud she said, "Yes, I'll put it out right away"" (67). The voice of Daulat has thus presented in the resistance to the cultural, dominating voice and the existence of multiple, heteroglossic and subjective positions is valorized.

The most important observations in the story are the emergence of Bakhtinian notion of culture and cross examination of Najamai's ethics in the story. Bakhtinian notion of culture has been discussed in "Dialogism in the Novel and Bakhtin's Theory of Culture" by Maria Shevtsova as the folk culture grounded on the verbal art:

Bakhtin's theory of culture is . . . a theory of popular culture-people's culture or folk culture. Given that this theory is concentrated on verbal art, it is impossible to ignore the langue-culture nexus in Bakhtin. Language, for Bakhtin, is speech. It is first and foremost an oral form. Its most dynamic, corporal, or bodily form is to be found in popular speech. When this particular speech is the very spine and structure of the novel- as is the case, Bakhtin explains, in Rabelais-the "high art" of the novel maximizes oral, popular culture and achieves its greatest potential not only as a "high art" genre, but as a genre per se. (749)

Bakhtin has presented the langue-culture nexus as his cultural theory. He has favored the popular culture or the folk culture which is attained by Mistry in his novel.

Naajamai's reference to "dustoorji" and her "O baap re!" to express her surprise help Mistry to create the folk culture of Parsee community. The popular speech has been valorized in the stories as per the Bakhtinian notion of culture and thus he is able to create the Parsee culture artfully.

Najamai's ethics and cultural correctness of her voice is cross examined in the story. Najamai is a character that appears time and again in different lights in different stories like "One Sunday", "Of White Hairs and Cricket" and "Condolence Visit." Her voice accusing a helpless boy in "One Sunday" of theft is questioned by Kersi in "Of White Hairs and Cricket" and her monologic position is opened up for the dialogic enquiry. Even her ethical correctness is thrown into doubt as Kersi shows strong disbelief on her position when she charged the boy of theft; he doubts on her memory, her forgetfulness of her money and making the helpless boy a victim of the accusation. In the story "Condolence Visit", she appears to be staunch cultural voice, ethically sound to the Parsee customs but the readers tend to doubt her ethical ground as she is not ethically correct and her voice is not universal. She refers to dustoorji and suggests Daulat to put out the oil lamp but the strength of her monologic voice is opened up for the dialogic criticism to the readers:

"Didn't *dustoorji* tell you?" asked Najamai. "For the first four days the soul comes to visit here. The lamp is there to welcome the soul. But after four days prayers are all complete, you know, and the soul must now quickly-quickly go to the Next World. With the lamp still burning the soul will be attracted to two different places: here, and the Next World. So you must put it out, you are confusing the soul," Najamai

earnestly concluded. (67)

Najamai's voice matches to the monolithic voice of dustoorji, the Parsee cultural authority that one should burn the oil lamp in the bed of the dead person only for four days. But the readers tend to doubt her ethical viewpoint as her monologic voice is criticized and doubted in other stories of the *Tales from Firozsha Baag*.

To sum up, Mistry has unsettled the monolithic voice in the story collection, opened up the possibility of the polyvocal, heteroglossic enquiry and has given his story collection a novelistic, democratic feature.

III. Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag* as a Heteroglossic, Novelistic Anthology of Short Fiction

This research has examined Rohinton Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag* from Bakhtinian notion of polyvocality, heteroglossia and his notion of culture. In the course of examination, this research reached to the conclusion that the story collection destabilizes the monolithic, totalitarian, epic-like voice time and again and leads the reader into the heteroglossic, novel-like, democratic enquiry. No voice is presented as heroic, no hero is valorized rather the voice of a particular character come into scrutiny in different circumstances in different stories of the anthology.

The stories of the anthology are set at Firozsha Baag, Bombay. Imaginarily created baag full of the Parsee residents has been made the setting letting the perspectives and voices of multiple numbers of different tenants of the baag come into interplay and no ruling, authoritarian voice or perspective is found. The stories are narrated by an immigrant from the multiple points of views of the multiple narrators residing in the tenements of Firozsha Baag. The writer has frequently denied the authoritarian, monolithic voice of a single hero rather he has made multiple voices contradict each other and polyphonic, carnival-like situation emerge in many of the stories. The writer has constructed the cultural elements of the Parsee tradition that are communal, popular culture in nature rather than being individualistic. Heteroglossic, polyvocal condition is made possible in such a communal condition that is impossible otherwise.

The characters with different viewpoints on the single incident repeat frequently in the anthology and they contradict the established voices and viewpoints to see the same proceedings around the Baag. Multiple points of views of the recurrent characters have been central to the anthology and they have given it a novel-

like feature. Rustomji, a middle-aged character in the story “Auspicious Occasion” brings forth the different perspective to look at the sacred shrine of Parsee community called Fire Temple and its *dustoorji*, the priest and cultural authority. His voice contradicts his wife Mehroo’s staunch faith and blind following of the cultural norms. Heteroglossia and the tension are found throughout the Mistry’s stories. Tension between the voice of Mehroo and Rustomji in “Auspicious Occasion”, the tension between Parsee cultural voice and the poor, mourning woman’s voice in “Condolence Visit” are some of the examples. The authoritarian, totalitarian voice of *Dustoor* Dhunjisha, the priest Fire Temple has been mocked by Rustomji in the story “Auspicious occasion” while his wife favors the monolithic cultural voice.

Though the writer himself belongs to Parsee community but he does not idealize monolithic voice of the cultural and religious authorities of the community in his stories. He has destabilized the dominant religious voice of the Zoroastrian family priest *Dustoor* Dhunjisha in “Auspicious Occasion” mocking his conduct while the custom of condolence visit after the death of the people of the community has been discarded in “Condolence Visit.” He has instead focused on the dark sides of such authoritative voice through the weak voice of Rustomji and Daulat. On the other hand, Rustomji’s wife Mehroo and Najamai blindly follow authoritative voice of the *dustoor* Dhunjisha and idealize his sermons and cultural instructions. The auspicious occasion of *Behram roje* turns to be a painful occasion when the preacher is killed by some criminal in the Fire Temple. The writer has thus, discarded the dominant religious and cultural voices that religions are free of evils and valorized relatively weak, skeptic voices and has paved way for the existence of the polyvocal situation in the apparent unitariness of a strong voice.

Carnival is the notion that refers to the attainment of bodily pleasure in the

weird and grotesque conduct of the characters. Weird and grotesque things to gratify the body is repeated in the story “The Collectors” and “The Ghost of Firozsha Baag” in different ways. Jehangir is made to fondle Eric’s penis and give him sexual pleasure from masturbation in visual classes every Thursday in an exchange of the stamps. Jehangir gratifies his need getting the stamps stolen by Eric and Eric gets the sexual pleasure for it in the public, the classroom that would go quite dark in visual classes. Bakhtinian concept of carnival is an attempt to see the festive moment sought to celebrate. The celebration can be bizarre, grotesque and bodily enjoyment. In “The Ghost of Firozsha Baag” narrates in which character satisfies the physical desire of looking at the smart girls and their private organs. Pesi uses the night occasion to gratify his bodily needs to see the private organs of the smart girls chasing Vera and Dolly disguised as a ghost. He scares Vera and Dolly, they run and fall down scared and he flashes the torch on their panties.

Najamai’s perspective that regards Francis a thief in the story “One Sunday” is perceived differently by Kersi in another story “Of White Hairs and Cricket”; her ethical stance and memory is doubted. In the story, hungry Francis, an errand running part-time servant to Najamai, waits for her when she is out in the hope that he could get a work after her return. But her return shatters his hope as Najamai charges him of the theft that might be only a foolish act that is voiced by Kersi in “Of White Hairs and Cricket” though he believed Najamai’s version of accusation in “One Sunday.” In the story “Condolence Visit” dominating cultural voices have been brought to the conversation they are criticized. The authoritarian voice of cultural practice of condolence visit and lighting the lamp in the room of the dead person are shattered by the personal, minor voice of Daulat. She hates the condolence visits after her husband’s death as they increase her suffering and pain but the cultural norms are

authoritarian. Her voice contradicts and resists the dominant voice of the Parsee cultural practices.

Bakhtin presents the langue and culture nexus in his cultural theory. He favors the popular or the folk culture which is attained by Mistry in his novel. Najamai's reference to the cultural language as "dustoorji" and her "O baap re!" to express her surprise help Mistry to create the folk culture of Parsee community. The popular speech has been valorized and Bakhtinian notion of culture is recreated in the novel-like, democratic story-telling. Heteroglossic, and polyvocal situation prevail throughout the anthology.

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