

## A Critical Study of Common Facets in Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* and Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*

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### ABSTRACT

This research paper tries to record the shared facets between Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow*. Both are promising young Parsi writers whose novels are wrapped in thick coverings of Parsi ethnic identity. Today, the Parsi community is facing extinction, and it is crouching in its own sacrosanct and inviolable corners to existing as best as possible with a halo of a break but not bent sort of dignity and hauteur. It is feared that they are on their way to extinction. Unless and until something urgent is done to augment their fast-depleting numbers and revive their religion, they will undoubtedly face oblivion. All visionary Parsis have voiced this perception. This research paper reciprocates the concerns and comments on them in the light of the two novels.

**Keywords-** Parsi, Firdaus Kanga, Rohinton Mistry, facets, ethnicity, themes.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Parsis, generally known as Zoroastrians, are the last survivors of the Old Iranian Race. They habituated in India around the 8th century A.D. and bloomed into a significant economic force during the colonial period. The Muslim intruders expelled the Parsis from their motherland, Persia, in the 7th century. They are the followers of the ancient Persian religion Zoroastrianism and are presently scattered mostly over India, Iran, the U.S.A., Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, the Arab States of the Persian Gulf and Pakistan. In 2012, a demographic picture of Zoroastrians worldwide was featured in the FEZANA (Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America) Journal, which gives a global estimate of 111,691-121,962. According to the 2011 Census of India, 57,264 Parsis live in India, and the National Commission for Minorities underscores several factors, such as migration and sterility, responsible for this continual decrease in the populace of the Parsi community. The demographic flow

projects that these numbers of the Parsi population will be reduced to only 23,000 in the 2021 Census. The Parsi population in Pakistan was 1,092 in 2019, primarily residing in Karachi.

Thus, the Parsis are an immigrant community to India, and they have been in India for over one thousand years, almost confining themselves to the Indian economic capital, Bombay. They have contributed much to the development of the nation. Several luminaries among them have excelled in various fields of knowledge and trade. Apart from their contribution to creative writing and education, it is no less. They have in them a high patriotic spirit. Though marvellous, the Parsis are a moribund community, and about ninety per cent of the Parsi community have confined themselves to Bombay, the locale of the two novels under study.

Today, they are an endangered community crouching in their own sacrosanct and inviolable corners to exist as best as they can with a halo of a break but not bent sort of dignity and hauteur. It is feared that they are on their way to extinction. Unless something urgent is

done to augment their fast-depleting numbers and revive their religion, they will undoubtedly face oblivion. All visionary Parsis have voiced this perception. This research article reciprocates the concerns and comments upon them in the light of the two novels under study. On the surface, the two writers are walking along different and unmeeting routes. While Mistry sweeps over India through Bombay, Kanga is concentrated only on his novels, which is technically called reflection and repetition of the experiences and ideas of one writer in the other. A writer who belongs to a minority group is powerless, and thus, his writings are relatable only to the race, whereas an influential majority-group writer tends to individualise.

## II. PARSİ ETHNIC IDENTITY

Firdaus Kanga and Rohinton Mistry base their stories on the experiences of Parsi families living in India. The selection of their community shows these writers' concerns to expose them to the scrutinising gaze of the world. Both the writers try to depict their glorious history, ethnic values, the issues they faced being members of a minority community, and sincere efforts to maintain their traditions. Their works deal with the Parsi identities' fate, interests, and conflicting loyalties. These novels are about the issues of being and becoming through identity concerns and the character's ability to recognise change and acceptance in their lives.

## III. THE SENSE OF NOSTALGIA

Both these writers keep returning to the shreds and traces of the lived and hoary past, which even the extra-modern characters in the novels in vain fight against. They helplessly tried to what they are trying to disentangle themselves. They feel like they have fallen into the lake of fire with irretrievable heaven lost behind. They emote over their attachment to their daglis, lustis, sadras, shops, schools, charity shops, Tower of Silence and its vultures, the Davier where the most prosperous Parsis live, their immaculately clean houses with red-tiled roofs and so on. They consider it as their paradise. They long live and get lost in it rather than leave it. They are facing a grim be or not to be a crisis of existence.

The Parsis of Kanga's breed has grown close to the West, which constructs the modern Parsi self's external coating covering the profound Zoroastrianism and Hinduism. Like most Parsis, Sera and Sam, Brit's parents also live in an imaginary past, and only Brit makes them aware of the reality around now and again. Though he has grown with all the repugnances and false beliefs of the Parsi community, he can see the Parsi reputation's emptiness. The towering personalities, such as Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, the first Indian to be bestowed by the British government, remained the role model for the Parsi

community's future generations. However, the over-westernised Parsi community finds the twentieth century as the age of homunculus, such as Brit and tries hard to reposition itself in modern Indian society during the second half of the twentieth century.

## IV. RELIGION AND CULTURE

In his novel *Trying to Grow*, Kanga presents girls talking about what the priest has under his white muslin robe in the fire temple. In observing a generation gap, Kanga comments on these temporal affairs making inroads into the highest Parsi seat of spirituality; we Parsees do not take our religion too seriously; those who do are considered right dangerous and a little mad." However, the way Sam and Sera, the parents, behave in the novel only disapproves of this statement. Their valour in showing profound humanity to a son with permanently unworking legs, for which he dedicates the books to them, comes from religion.

All these rituals and ceremonies have played a significant role in creating ethnic identity and uniqueness. Even in the contemporary world, the Zoroastrians are known for their special rituals, which are not entirely practised. Most Parsi novels underscore the Parsi traditions, whereas Kanga does not detail the various Parsi ceremonies. However, there are some instances, like when Sam's fellow workers attend the ceremony of uthamna:

"The next day, we had the uthamna in the hall of the squat-domed fire temple that guarded the Parsee colony across the street like a fat white Buddha, which was sad because most of Sam's colleagues from the bank had to stand outside. They weren't Parsee. Their presence would have defiled the fire temple" (Kanga 196).

In the novel *Such a Long Journey*, Gustad comes under the soothing and gentle sway of the death time prayers and listens to them reverently, though he cannot understand them.

## V. THE TOWER OF SILENCE: A SYMBOL

The Tower of Silence is, in any way, the central symbol of the Parsi culture. The two novels reveal the double standard of the Parsi vision about it. Mistry calls it a ghoulish system. He says, "Such a ghoulish system...ill became a community with progressive reputation and forward-thinking attitude" (Mistry 124).

Kanga also states:

"What do you suggest? That we are burned to ashes, like those Hindus? Or chewed by worms like the English men? I prefer to be eaten by vultures" (Kanga 74).

Thus, the two writers converge and favour the Tower coming into existence in their picture of life and hardly seem to reject it.

## VI. DRIVE TOWARDS EXCLUSIVITY

A fond Parsi obsession and pursuit of going higher and higher in the higher intellectual echelons is a fond Parsi obsession and pursuit. In *Such a Long Journey*, Gustad's sense of lostness at his son's throwing over a chance of admission into I.I.T. is pathetic and even tragic. It was like taking the crutch from the disabled person. In the same way, Brit's heroic struggle to get educated in *Trying to Grow* and his parents' love and involvement in it are novel efforts to fight crippling misfortunes. All Parsis aspire to a higher standard of living, and to achieve it, they postpone their marriages. This has resulted in the diminution of their race and a depletion of their numbers, which is merely one lakh. It is time they reversed their priorities and produced more babies than books. Kanga's Brit himself symbolises the Parsi community that grows oversized brains on match stick bodies.

## VII. THE RELUCTANT INDIANS

There is no doubt that the Parsis are too refined, too sophisticated and too highly cultured. Thus, they are reluctant to merge seamlessly with the down-to-earth Indians. Kanga states in *Trying to Grow*, "We are reluctant Indians" (27), and he also says, "Anglophile, the Parsee disease." (28).

This is also a factor that alienates them from India. All three Indians so far elected as M.P.s in England were Parsis. This fact insinuates to us their foreignness. They are feeling rootlessness in India. Growing and rootlessness go ill together.

They feel uncomfortable in what is now their own home (Bombay) in the world, creating a sense of insecurity among them.

## VIII. THEME OF MARRIAGE

The argumentation among Brit's family members on the intermarriage of Dolly to a Muslim takes place in an environment of hatred but ultimately ends in approving the interracial marriage by considering it the need of the times. This debate indicates the flexibility of the modern Parsis to adapt according to the circumstances. One can firmly observe that all significant Parsi writers consider marriage as a central concern in their fiction. VLVN Narender Kumar also comments on the transformation in the approach of the Parsi community to intermarriages:

However, there has been a notable change in the attitude of the Parsees in recent times. Lunacy, which has resulted from in-breeding in the Zoroastrian community, and the absence of suitable boys and girls in the community are (sic) forcing Parsees to opt for mixed marriages. This problem is dealt with in Karnjia's *More of an Indian*. What Karanjia advocated is a synthesis, a fusion of the Hindu and the Zoroastrian cultures. The

narrative is an effective fictional rendering of a progressive Zoroastrian vision (122).

Irrespective of their high education, the Parsis cannot come out of their ancient beliefs, such as interracial marriage. It is one of the most significant factors in the community's downfall, which is on the verge of extinction. The low birth rate, late marriages, high infertility rate, and rigid social customs caused a rapid population decrease.

## IX. AGONY AND FATALITY

Agony and Fatality are the two most significant motifs in the selected novels. The central character of the book *Trying to Grow* suffers from a disease named Osteogenesis Imperfecta; he broke his bone eleven times during his infancy, was toothless, was never able to walk, crawled naked out of the bathroom till his adolescence period was over, had to make do with music and books, had no regular schooling, on puppetry became a sex maniac, was deserted by friends and left alone, losing sister by marriage and parents by death. Sufferings make him grow. He sees me as he and realises that loneliness is the ultimate human destiny: "No, Amy, I've got to be alone. I have to be Ostro Brit and not mind" (Kanga 233).

In Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, the notorious and cursed spinster Miss Kutputia lost her brother and his nephew and remained unmarried. All her tears dried long ago, and pain needed no unburdening because she accepted it as her part of life. Dinshawji is another character of *Such a Long Journey* to see life for its worth. The vultures are also in life are too many and too relentless. The corpses in the Tower of Silence are blessed since they experience suffering only once.

Thus, these central characters of life's calamity experience the ironies of life with the detachment of a yogi. They value love, and it sustains them. The centuries of pain, isolation and aloneness have brought the Parsi community to an idea of life where nothing is a miss, and perhaps this is how they are entirely ready even for their annihilation.

Mistry has carefully described the conflicts and anxieties the Parsis experienced in the post-independence era. In the novel *Such a Long Journey*, the protagonist, Gustad Noble, displays his fear of increasing communal violence:

No future for minorities with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America twice as good as the white men to get half as much. How could he make Sohrab understand this? (Mistry 55)

## X. SUMMING UP

Parsi writers like Bapsi Sidhwa, Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga, Dina Mehta, Nergis Dalal, Ardeshir Vakil, and Boman Desai are well aware of the deteriorating populace of their community in the entire

world. All of them are afraid of their existence. Kanga and Mistry's description of Parsi ceremonies is a cautious effort to iterate and create the deteriorating Parsi identity. Though it is not intentional on the part of the writers, the fact is that all of them try to represent the real life of the Parsi community. Consequently, what they portray are facts and only facts. Therefore, the Parsi community must mend themselves by carefully studying these texts. It is the need of the hour, and any delay in it worsens matters, and they may reach a point of no return. Hence, the Parsi community must act swiftly and rightly to save their race.

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