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Author(s)	ヨリッセン, エンゲルベルト
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How to Cook a Good Tale — Three Stories from Rohinton Mistry's

Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag (1987)

Engelbert Jorissen

I An introductory note

On the following pages I want to concentrate on three stories from Rohinton Mistry's (1952—) *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag* (1987)*¹ The eleven stories of this collection are all placed in a Baag, or Baug, here in the meaning of "Parsi housing estate or 'colony'"*² in Bombay. They can be read independently from one another, however one of the charming points of the book is the fact that the different stories are intertwined by figures from certain stories which reappear in other ones. More important is the function of the concluding story in the book which combines them all.

Without confusing elementary narratological principles, that is mixing up figures, narrators and the author himself, in this case it will be possible to say, that the stories in the collection are reflecting most presumably experiences by the author. Rohinton Mistry*³ was born in a Parsi family in Bombay, in 1975 he emigrated to Canada, and studied at Toronto University. The main figure in the first story discussed here, *The Ghost of Firozsha Baag*, is a sixty-three-year old ayah ("nurse-maid", etc., L, p.55)*⁴ in one of the Parsi households. She is a Catholic from Goa and this enables her to see the Parsis from outside, more exactly, as will be seen, from below, because a main part of her living takes place on the

"floor" (p.45). This poses her into a picaro-like position, but picaro is used here of course only as a makeshift. In the second story *Squatter* the troubles of a young man from Firozsha Baag who emigrates to Canada are told. If not exactly parallel one can read this story as a mirror reflecting that of the ayah from Goa because now the Indian Parsi is in a position comparable to her's in the Parsi household. The narrator of this story being depicted in strange positions on the toilet can, thus, be seen too, at least in some moments, resembling a picaro with a queer position in society. The third story *Swimming Lessons* tells at the same time the story of one more emigrant from Firozsha Baag to Canada, his fixing down his memories in a book of short stories and his parents' reaction to this. The somewhat picaresque feature of the narrative character to be found especially in the two first mentioned stories and the concluding one is alluded there by the father when he expresses his feelings about *Squatter*, that the story "with a little bit about Toronto, where a man perches on top of the toilet, is shameful and disgusting, although it is funny at times and did make me laugh" (245-246)*⁵.

Just one word to the character of this paper, which belongs at the same time to two projects I am working on now. One of which concentrates on Indian literature in English, the other one on the problems involved in Goan identity. The first has, not intendedly from the beginning, brought up in three successive essays problems of Jews in India, and that meant, that the planned essay about the Parsi novelist R. Mistry could not stop at the level of writing about Indian authors writing in English, but should focus as well on the religious aspect. Pushing forward study on Mistry, there appeared his fascinating story about the

Catholic ayah from Goa in a Parsi household in Bombay, *The Ghost of Firozsha Baag*. The identity problem became, then, more virulent, and the following lines may be seen as a continuation of my modest beginnings to consider aspects of Goa identity at this place two years before. At the same time it should be understood as a preliminary essay to the other series, where more of the socio-religious aspects of Mistry's novels will be worked out, and which at the same time will be analysed more decidedly in a context of other contemporary Indian Parsi literature, and/or literature about/on Parsis in contemporary Indian literature in English.

More or less un/holy ghosts

The main figure of this story, the ayah Jacqueline, has come to Bombay when she was fourteen years old. Now she has spent forty-nine years in the baag, and is sixty-three-year-old (p.44). She has been taken her language, Konkani, she must have used in her Goan village. Still after arriving in Bombay she had sung Konkani songs for the seth, then a little child (p.45). She now speaks Parsi-Gujarati ("even with other ayahs", p.44, and the other Catholic ayahs from Goa in the baag, p.43), mixing it with some "bits of English", and so her own English sounds always slightly distorted. She herself feels that something has been taken from her when she asks if it is "so difficult to say Jacqueline"(p.44), that is to pronounce her name correctly, and not as usually distortedly by bai and seth as "Jaakaylee" She confesses that she has forgotten her (correctly pronounced) name, her language, and her songs (p.45). Later, there are introduced other words/concepts from

Parsi English, like "exkoriseesum ... some big English word like that" (p.54), and, this will be seen, below, as well in the context of Jaqueline's comment about the bai's ceremonies as "funny and scary" ceremonies of magic (p.55)*⁶

One day Jacqueline thinks to have met a ghost; neither from the direct contents of the story nor from the narratological strategy it becomes finally clear what has happened at that time. Interestingly, the ayah addresses the ghost in the baag on the first occasion in Hindi "*Kaun hai*" (who is it) and "*kya hai*" (what is it) (p.44). The ayah observes that people are getting used to "different colours" – but to languages? And "still not to ghosts" (p.46). Does this mean as well, they are still not used enough to the real difference of different people that is including their not forgotten past? In this context St. Greenblatt's considerations on ghosts in Shakespeares works*⁷, e.g., might become of interest. The seth (here perhaps: master, cf. L, p.213), when a child, had listened to the ayah's songs in Konkanki. Forgetting in his case, uninterestingly, is due to getting an adult, and he does not come into touch with ghosts, too. (p.45).

The ayah's life means "living close to floor", that is while working, eating and sleeping (p.45), because it is so arranged in the household. But the ayah assures that she has no reason for complaint; her losses are the price for getting a job, an aim which has forced her to immigrate (p.45). And she esteems herself as well happy for the fact that she works in a Parsi household despite her dark colour. In former times even 'low class' Marathi people teased her "Blackie, blackie" (p.46). With these features she is made here 'the' Konkani speaking Christian from Goa as

appears e.g. in Carmo de Souza's *Angela's Goan identity**⁸ as well in contrast to the Marathi speaking Hindus in Goa. For Jacqueline there are as well the more white "Manglolean Catholic[s]" who are usually preferred by the Parsis because of their 'more fare' skin (p.46).

This all means the Parsis have taken her language, and they make their own language, proudly, perhaps not being fully aware that they continue to set themselves apart as an own community with its own (linguistic) rules. But they themselves, much more in olden times, they "thought they were like British only, ruling India side by side" (p.46). And they continue to be proud of their skin colour, a dark baby becomes called "*ayah no chhokro, ayah's child*" (p.46).

More about the ghost and the "Holy Ghost"

There are repeatedly sexual allusions in R. Mistry's story, like the cracking sound of the bed of the seth and the bai ("lady", L, p.57) (p.45). This allusion still at the beginning of the story assumes a larger dimension in this case because seeing the ghost means for the ayah, thinking back to the somewhat mischievous Gajetan from Goa. And the ghost/Gajetan comes into her bed, and the struggle she has to put against his pressure, can only mean sexual arousing. Pointing in this direction of understanding the story is as well the fact that she is cured after having confessed. And, the ghost appears first on Christmas, when Jacqueline has to go home alone at two in the morning. Christmas eve, and the fact that the other ayahs go somewhere with their boyfriends (p.43) can and must have produced memories of Goa and her old boyfriend. The ghost comes the second time about Eastern when

Jacqueline is "fasting" as a "proper Catholic" (p.46); can this mean that she is physically more disposed to sexual dreams?! Additionally the ghost begins to show up on Friday nights, that is on those days, during which, as one may suppose, Jacqueline has fasted too. The ghost now shows himself to be a "ghost of mischief", entering her bed; and still she is not "scared", she just does matter that he 'chokes' her; could this mean embarrassingly caressing?! Perhaps not insignificant, the ghost vanishes at the sound of a WC (p.46). Gradually the ghost becomes resembling Cajetan, the boy who "was no saint" back in the old days in Old Goa (p.48). One time he had been so mischievous that Jacqueline had told him she would tell her "father who would ... throw him in the well where the *bhoot* would take care of him" (p.49). And she herself admits soon, "the ghost reminded me of Cajetan, whom I have not seen since I came to Bombay" (p.49), but whom she now, "forty-nine years" (p.49) later remembers all the more clearly, and obviously not only grudgingly. She notes e.g. a change for the better in the ghost when he stops bouncing upon her chest and just sits next to her or lies down beside her (p.48) - as Cajetan will have done in the old days. That is, she even seems to enjoy Cajetan's mischievousness; when, after her confession he does not reappear, she even thinks that he may have gone elsewhere - as he did turn from Jacqueline to continue his "fun" with Lily in Bom Jesus Church (p.49). And she does notice this unconscious desire herself, asking "do you really want the ghost to come sleep with you and touch you so shamefully?" (p.50), and these 'meetings' seem really to have been quite something, because after one year Jacqueline finds that the bed sheeting has been torn in a place "maybe from all pulling and pushing

with the ghost" (p.51). And still she reflects that he might come again on Christmas night (ibid.). She really seems to miss him, as becomes clear with the disappointment shining through her confession that he did not take her to the beach or cinema anymore after she had told her father about him - perhaps she thinks, he should have hold her back in Goa (p.50)!?

Forty nine means seven times seven, this leads to seven weeks, and of seven weeks consists the Catholic time of fasting before Eastern when the ghost does reappear (p.46). To this context belongs as well the confession, that the ghost continued to come on Fridays for almost a year and slept in Jacqueline's bed; the explanation that eating fish or vegetarian does not do any change even underlines the meaning of the timely aspect of Friday (p.49).

Still, the ayah is shocked by Pesi's (a boy from the baag) behaviour, when he shines with a torch between the mini-skirted legs of "*esskey-messkey*" Vera and Dolly (pp.47-48). Of, perhaps, more interest is the "pretending" behaviour of the men of the baag who use the incident for quickly hugging the obviously attractive girls.

In this context has to be read as well the scene in which the narrator of *Swimming Lessons* gets disappointed after his *Peeping Tom* exercise when he sees enter the 'real thing' going into to the apartment, "Under the flourescent glare in the elevator I see their wrinkled skin, aging hands, sagging bottoms, varicose veins. The lustrous trick of sun and lotion and distance has ended." (p.233). Here, perhaps, the key-word is *distance* ... "They don't seem as attractive as they did from the kitchen window" (p.233), could this means as well, the land of immigration does

not look so attractive any long when one has arrived?! The meaning of *Swimming lesson*, as may be mentioned already here, alludes as well to the fact that to swim means to move freely (pp.234-235), and here one may think of the possible function of auxiliary verb combinations like can swim, must swim, want to swim, and on the other hand on the painful thinking of the necessity "to conceal the exigencies of my swimming lesson fantasy: a gorgeous woman...." (p.235).

In the village (muluk) of the ayah ghosts are an almost natural phenomenon, everybody does not only believe in them, and confess this openly, but sees them; however nobody is scared (p.43, cf. as well p.45). These ghosts have their own existence as bhoot(s), and they can exist next to religion, in this case Catholic religion. At the end of the story the situation seems to have become inverted, if only partly because the ayah continues to believe in ghosts/bhoots. However, through the behaviour of the Parsi bai a layer of superstition of another dimension is uncovered in the depth of the seemingly so illuminated (e.g.p.45) Parsi society. The ayah resumes this: "Even in my village, where everyone knew so much about ghosts, magic with *soopra* and scissors was unknown" (p.56). Here one may take into consideration as well an episode which first seems to be no more than a retarding element before the story's countdown (even the clock sounds twelve times), i.e. when Jacqueline prepares herself to sleep on that New Year's eve and kills two cockroaches, this is most practically with her *chappal* (sandal..., L, p.82), so that she can call herself an "expert at cockroach-killing" while the sophisticated poison of "*seth* ... is really not doing much good" (p.51). And it is as well a reasonable act to use the white bed-sheet to warm herself, because

Jacqueline understands that there is no ghost causing her chill (something she remembers her father told her back in Goa) but only the chill of the morning (p.52). The bai and many others of the Parsis in the baag instead turn to believing in ghosts and to exorcisms including *dustoorji*, who teaches to bai a prayer "*saykasté saykasté sataan*" (p.53, more or less: 'satanas, leave!'). Ironically, *dustoorji* (a priest) even claims that his exorcism ["exkoriseesum ... some big English word like that" (p.54)] is stronger than Hindu one and that, as Jacqueline remembers, the Hindu "knew Parsi priest has most powerful prayers [*jashan*] of all" (p.54), which makes one think of the elitism the Parsis claim for themselves (and think perhaps even of the spoon of sugar stirred into the cup of milk). And most meticulously the *dustoorji* begins the ceremony of exorcising the ghost with showing up 'most impressing' Parsi tools as the "*loban*" ("incense", KM, p.325) and the "*lotta*" (p.54). The ayah is made to go inside during the ceremony because the Parsi prayers are so strong that any non-Parsi could "be badly damaged inside their soul if they listen" (p.54) which has a most ironic double meaning of course. The bai, who by now becomes mocked herself by people who do not want to believe in ghosts, even wishes the *jashan* would not have been too strong, for the ghost may dare coming one time more, so that everyone may see him (p.54).

Finally it is the ghost which brings bai and ayah closer, as Jacqueline says: "She does not treat me like servant all the time" (p.55). The bai admits, for the reader somewhat ambiguously, that "village people know more about such things [as ghosts] than city people" (p.55). And then the bai begins to mix it all up: "Jaakaylee, you don't think this is

that Holy Ghost your pray to, do you?" (p.55), and is corrected by the ayah from the village: "that Holy Ghost has a different meaning, it is not like the *bhoot* you and I saw" (pp.55). The bai goes even so far to include, 'ghost expert', Jacqueline in a ceremony of magic for Parsis: "It needs two Parsis, but I'll do it with you" (p.55). For Jacqueline the procedure of the ceremony, with both, bai and herself, a "white *mathoobanoo*" ("Mathabanu scarf-like headcover", KM, p.325) on their head, "looked funny and scary at the same time" (p.55). The bai explains that it will be a sign for the ghost coming again, if the soopra moves. However, while doing the ceremony, she asks Jacqueline not to look. This could mean that bai is going in/voluntarily, un/consciously making the soopra move, provoking its movement, and this may be taken e.g. from her contentment about the soopra's final movement, which confirms her in her ghost-vision and gives her hope to show it as well to the other members of the, so enlightened, Parsi community.

The countdown of the ghosts of the Catholic Jacqueline and that of the Parsi bai sets the final stage of the story (pp.51ss). While Jacqueline is lying sleepless in bed from twelve to two o'clock on New Year's becoming morning, one learns some details about her childhood. Her family must have been in better conditions ("before all the money went"), they used to make a New Year's party, than that which forced her, come to Bombay, some time. And here enters as well for the first time a Portuguese word, "*taverna*", and the Portuguese rule is mentioned, (p.52)*⁹ when Jacqueline remembers that there is a far distant country where, once, her grandfather went by ship.

However it is in that final scene that Jacqueline gains a position

which, if so faintly, has a fragrance of the picaro. When the bai screams she understands at once that bai has taken her, Jacqueline, for a/the ghost because of the sheet. But she pretends to know nothing and takes thus a position to console the bai (p.53. Here one may think as well of Jacqueline's knowingly comment on the body of "St Francis Xavier" and its history, events which she stirrs like her curry, i.e. the woman who "took a bite from toe of St Francis Xavier" (p.49), and the arm sent to the Pope (p.49). The ghost which appears to the bai, as Jacqueline knows, is no ghost at all but in reality she has not been cured, because she believes, that the ghost has disappeared with her confession. And still she is able to live in two worlds, that of her ancestors with the old ghost's and of a whatever new one which brought a so called 'Holy Ghost'. That means as well, comparing the worlds of the Parsis and that of Jaqueline, there is a competition establishing oneself in 'the world' by remembering old things and adopting to new ones.

The Art of story telling as seen in *Squatter*- the threefold start of the telling

When opening this story it is made clear that there are certain conditions to tell a good story, the narrator's narrator Nariman Hansiata has, first of all, to be in a good mood, and after several preeminations the boys will know when "Nariman was ready ... to tell a story" (p.145). Jehangir, already a fixed person as a "Bookworm", takes here, further, the role of an interpreter, when he says here, "that Nariman sometimes told a funny incident in a very serious way, or expressed a significant matter in a light and playful manner" (p.147). These criteria may be

applied as well to the stories in Mistry's own collection. Of importance is, that it is "up to the listener to decide" (p.148) to which category they do belong. When it comes to some piquant details of Sarosh's private toilet-life some of the boys begin to laugh but are stopped by Nariman's raising his eyebrows (p.160). This gives one more insight into the narrator's (author's) technique, who makes the reader believe it might be just some light story, but which soon shows that it contains most important messages. In this case one of these messages is, that the tragedy of the immigrant can show itself in most trivial matters of daily life. Further, that a 'solution' of some matters may demand quite big prices, like loosing much of his / her own private identity (p.161). The motif of the decision, finally left to the listener / reader is varied in Sarosh's words about immigration: "for some it was good and for some it was bad, but for me life in the land of milk and honey was just a pain in the posterior" (p.168), which, as will be shown, takes quite a deep meaning too.

The reader has to decide whether to be eager to hear again about Savukshaw, the hero of the story started to be told but, strategically, not finished, as most of the boys, or to take Jehangir's position for whom Sarosh's story remains the best one (pp.168-169). Nariman takes certain didactic points into consideration, he is eager to transmit to his listeners words he finds during his hours spent in the library, like "*aficionados*", that means for once he is transmitting findings in a new territory (p.146). And he asks the boys what they have learnt from his stories, and, becoming already here visible as a leitmotif, in the case of Savukshaw this means, that he kept "searching for happiness", but "never found it" (p.153). The importance of this motif, which will be

combined with the fate of the man in exile, is underlined by the fact that the story of Savukshaw is divided into two, that is that of the cricketeer, and that of the hunter. The story of the squatter, then, is again shown as the main one because Jehangir senses at once its taste, he knows this will become one of those stories, the words of which he will repeat to himself "enjoying again the beauty of their sounds" (p.155).

As the story of Savukshaw as well Sarosh's story is divided into two parts, however it is underlined that the one about Sarosh is Nariman's longest story up to that time (p.159). The fact that both stories are structured similarly (but at the same time differently as well) challenge the reader to seek for comparisons and contrasts. And how can and must appear Sarosh if seen beside Savukshaw with his "many talents" (p.152) and his never giving up "trying all kinds of different things" (p.153) - for example when desperate Sarosh visits the Immigrant Aid Society! For a moment he takes new hope and can throw back the anxieties developed during ten years in Canada (159), but in his case the second part seems to show only and complete defeat. However is it really defeat?

Nariman the narrator really wants to be heard at his second start of his telling by those boys who will be going abroad in the future (p.152). Here again appears the consciousness of the exile. The exile is criticised by the mother who tells Sarosh that it "is better to live in want among your family and your friends, who love you and care for you, than to be unhappy surrounded by vacuum cleaners and dishwashers and big shiny motor cars" (p.155). Putting aside 'sickness', what is the real reason that ten years later the homecoming party is not held in Firozsha Baag? Does Nariman, the narrator get some advantage? Anyway, back in India,

Bombay, Sarosh finds out many changes (pp.166-167). And he himself has changed, he cannot find "his old place in the pattern of life he had vacated ten years ago", people he sees at familiar place are strangers, "Patterns of life are selfish and unforgiving" (p.167) - is there a point in mentioning the "distinct stench of human excrement" at Marine Drive?

To the framing of the story belongs as well the mentioning of Nariman's Mercedes Benz as the "apple of his eye" (pp.145, 167), when it is mentioned a second time we learn how Nariman got to know Sarosh's story, so as motif it frames a story in a story.

A central scene, not only for this one story but as well for the whole collection, is that depicting a desperate Sarosh trying in vain to get used to a Western toilet. Sarosh's behaviour which literally smells of 'foreign' draws attention to "a foreign presence in the stall, not doing things in the conventional way", and the response which smells of "xenophobia and hostility" The meaning of every single word in this outspoken metaphor can and has to be read in a quite more general sense, e.g. the "stall" becomes the too narrow community which does not want to accept people/ things from outside, and "xenophobia and hostility" themselves take on the smell of "faeces" (p.156). And this again is all, too, put into a/ the context of 'cooking the story', that is the taste of words: "What a feast, thought Jehangir" (p.156); if for him it will be Nariman's finest story ever heard, it may be as well the one which should draw most attention. At the end of the story again only Jehangir has understood the real quality of that "masterpiece" (p.166).

Further irony is put into the story when one learns that Sarosh becomes an "expert at balancing" but all the same "effortlessly" (p.156),

which shows as well the struggle of balance of the exile man in an unknown society. Ambiguous appear the various "Immigrant Aid Societ[ies]", which are suggested so easily by those inside, but are, even if run by 'compatriots' without much meaning for those always remaining outside perhaps even more because of those societies themselves. One may take it as a serious advice and as new punch, when it is suggested that Sarosh should have practised the Western toilet in the familiar surroundings of Bombay where in many offices and hotels there are "both options in their bathrooms" - at least in the latter phrase cannot be overlooked a whatever small hint at the multicultural on small but most important level (p.157). The Society which Sarosh frequents is promoting various kinds of becoming gradually used to a new cultural surrounding, including the dubious method of diluting Coca-Cola more and more with water until one is able to swallow the quality of a new 'natural' water (pp.158-159). And there they explain that such problems of accomodation are not to be linked with "retention of original citizenship (p.159).

After Mrs Maha-Lepate*¹⁰ Sarosh continues to see the doctor of the Society, who explains the functioning of a certain operation to him. With a somewhat unnatural surgery effect Sarosh will be able to disembowel in Western style, however the price he will have to pay is quite high. It would mean for once never to be able to return to a natural way of functioning (and because disembowelment is involved this implies a most important life function), and second he will be alienated from his "fellow countrymen". Dr No-Ilaaz, however, gives Sarosh as well some insights into the background of such an operation when he tells him

frankly that "mosaic and melting pot are both nonsense, and ethnic is a polite way of saying bloody foreigner" (p.160), and with this he lays free the hypocritical attitude of the Canadian society, the favourite word of which is "a mosaic of cultures" (p.160). By the explanation of the *solar system* of the "CNI" it may be suggested that just natural behaviour can lead to a solution (can there be a further hint of Indian vs. Non-Indian behaviour by the fact that the CNI demands only ten percent of the body to be free and no "strip" (pp.160-161)? Different from that hypocrite attitude Dr No-Ilaaz even seems to dissuade Sarosh from an operation he himself has explained just some minutes before.

His hint to think about the at that moment non understood consequences for the next generations should be put into a context with Jumpa Lahiri's stories from *The Interpreter of Maladies*, especially with *The Third and Last Continent* and *Mrs' Sen's*. While the main figure/narrator of the first, and in that collection the final, story mentioned here may be understood as a successful immigrant, in this case to America, if still wondering himself at his luck but with a son "who attends Harvard University" and who only can wonder about his parents time of first experiences on the "new continent (pp.197-198), the narrated figure of the other story is represented almostly as a 'failure' only (pp.134-135)*¹¹.

Then, comparable to the episodical sequences in the novels by Antonio Tabucchi*¹², there appears Mr Rawana from the travel agency, who 'not minding his own business' tries to dissuade Indian people not to travel back but to struggle further for their integration in Toronto, Canada (pp.162-163). This is an episode which might be compared again

with the story of *Mrs. Sen's* in the mentioned collection of short stories by J. Lahiri. At the same time the story might be read as a counter version to the story of the woman who intentionally does not succeed to get her emigration papers in Rushdie's story *Good Advice Is Rarer Than Rubies* in his *East and West*.^{*13}

There is a contrast between the compassionate co-Indians, especially Mr Rawana who likes more counselling for the immigrants than travel business, and the mechanical attitude of the Canadians who just suggest counselling, but of quite different type (p.163).

Meanwhile the situation becomes absurd, Sarosh is explicitly called behaving like a "madman" (p.163). And then it turns to drama, with a cloud and rain overcast sky and lightning indicating that something is going to happen. In a tragically effort Sarosh finally can disembowel sitting, but then the plane is already starting. And ambiguously there the memories of ten years help him in his success; but these memories had been buried all the time. So that means, he is no failure, as he had been considering (p.162): but not because he finally can disembowel sitting, but because he has returned en-lightened by his past and identity, and this gives him "newfound strength" (p.165). And after a moment of uncertainty Sarosh indeed finds back to his calmness, lost ten years before (p.166). Does this mean, when back at his identity, any mode of disembowelment, for example, does not matter any more? Of interest are his considerations about his status as an immigrant, and his own conclusion that they are finally mere academic musings (p.166). A fine narratological point is the weather changing from tempest to sunshine together with Sarosh's way back in a literal and metaphorical way.

Anyway, living in turmoil in Canada, in India there are as well so many problems; one even cannot tell a decent story, as it seems, because of the disturbances of Rustomji (pp.156, p.164, [168]) by which are shown differences in that small Parsi society as well. And Rustomji involuntary hits a point when he infuriously shouts "this is not a squatters' colony" (p.164, and there is the disturbance by the dog, p.161).

Finally, the openness of the story, people who succeed and ones who don't

Of interest is as well that the story is one time more divided, because Jehangir, who enjoys it most and seems to understand it best, is 'called home'! by his mother (as Sarosh is by his mother?!). And of interest may be the reference to Othello. When Sarosh has, forced by his intestine problems, come back to Bombay he had "... deepened his voice for his favourite *Othello* lines" and asked him, as Nariman himself now reports to the boys: ""When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice ..."" (p.168). Up to this point these are exactly words by Othello in Shakespeare's play in the scene before stabbing himself to death (5.2.339-341)*¹⁴ The original Othello continues: "Then you must speak/ Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;/ Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,/ Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,/ Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away/ Richer than all his tribe ..." (5.2.341-346). Sarosh is made to transform this into: ""... tell them that in Toronto once their lived a Parsi boy as best as he could. Set you down this; and say, besides, that for some it was good and for some it was bad,

but for me life in the land of milk and honey was just a pain in the posterior."¹⁴ (p.168). However, I think this should not be taken only as a sadly comic and diverting variation, which it is of course, too. But, both, Othello and Sarosh are immigrants and they do fail despite their efforts. Of further interest can become the reference to the "base Indian" in Shakespeare's text which might have provoked Sarosh (and in this case one should as well think of the author R.Mistry himself) to attach a grotesquely self-critical note to his version — which again must have provoked among other elements the father of the narrator in *Swimming Lessons* to consider the story as "shameful and disgusting, although it is funny" (245). I do not want to forget to remind of the important role the Othello motif is given in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and this exactly in the context of immigration and exile^{*15}.

The Art of cookery and tale telling

Before turning to the concluding story I want to have a look at the process of narrating and cooking in the two stories presented up to here. If Amitav Ghosh, especially in his *The Circle of Reasons* s^{*16} is spinning a yarn of saris and stories, Rohinton Mistry combines here culinary techniques and telling (p.151). Already while telling the first part of Savukshaw's story the smell of Nariman's wife's cooking begins to tickle his 'nostrils' (p.149). When, on a second stage, it reaches his stomach, he cannot resist to turn to the second part of the story, that is Savukshaw as a hunter, because he can combine the smell with that of Savukshaw's "chicken-*dhansaak*" ("Coriander-flavoured ...", L, p.101). And this combination is made clear as well on a more abstract narratological

level, when one is told that the boys are waiting eagerly for the continuation of the story, because of fear that the "story would get cold" (p.151), that is to rot to a cold dish.

And the combination of cooking and story-telling is further linked to the Parsiness. The pomfret, Hirabai is frying that evening, is still a Bombayite theme, but its cooking process becomes more detailed as one is told that Hirabai is putting "tamarind and brinjal, coriander and cumin, cloves and cinnamon" (p.151) into her pots. Perhaps it will be of interest to compare the process of digesting with that of cooking in *The Ghost of Firozsha Baag*. Grinding spices into her masala Jackily is able to maintain at least a minimum part of her identity - in Sarosh's case there is not the least 'outcome'. One might, and must, ask of course, how far Hirabai's is typical Parsi-cooking; however, at the moment it seems to me a stimulating project to think more about the diaspora cooking of the Parsis too, as does Claudia Roden in her fascinating *The Book of Jewish Food* which again John Docker knowingly combines with literature in his 1492*¹⁷ The fact that Hirabai does not tell to other women the final secret of her cooking art may be seen in one context with the religious seclusion of the Parsis, as for their temple and their burials. The fact that Nariman likes to put in new words, like "aficionados" (p.146) into his stories can as well be compared to that of seasoning some dish. And as the boys don't want to become his stories to cold, he himself cannot bear that the juicy fish prepared by his wife with turmeric and cayenne should turn cold (p.151).

Jacqueline comments the development of the various ghost stories and the outcome of those events again, in/directly with her curry dish: "Secret

of good curry is not only what spices to put, but also what goes in first, what goes in second, and third, and so on. ..." (p.54).

The preparation of curry masala becomes as well a metaphor of Jacqueline grinding her story. And this story, like all stories, must be told personally, no machine can take this part as no machine can take that of preparing delicious curry but this is as well an observation of irony, bai-seth do not know this really, they just want to save money, so that Jacqueline/ Jaakaylee has to grind "till her arms fall out from shoulders" (p.47).

Now, one possibility is that the narrating time is that of Jacqueline preparing one dish of curry, while she is putting in the ingredients. Disturbed by the shoutings of the bai, she may be remembering her fate of "*forty-nine years*", a hint for this is the fact, that she is obviously telling the story after the whole events have already taken place: "If they only knew that in one week they would say I had been right" (p.51). So the story is as well about the act of *memory*, Jacqueline muses that it is "so strange that so much of your life you can remember if you think quietly in the darkness" (p.52) or think while preparing, undisturbed, curry masala it seems, because her next thought goes to the procedure of cooking again, which, as remembering and narrating, has to be most exactly (p.52).

And she has not burned the curry "*one time*" (p.48), this can mean, that this as well will be a fine story as the curry masala she is preparing, and "*good curry needs lots of stirring while boiling*" (p.49). And in seth-bai's household there is best quality rice, too, making "*such a lovely fragrance while cooking*" (p.50). The story, of course, ends with curry

masala, and Jacqueline explains that it is not only the spices but as well "*what goes in first, what goes in second ...*", what, not necessary to explain further, is as well true for a good narration. There is one more metaphor contained in the observation "*never cook curry with lid on pot, always leave it open, stir it often, stir it to urge the flavour to come out*" (p.54). The story concludes with an extended metaphor containing the observations: "They want more curry", that may be as well, more stories. "Whenever I make Goan curry, nothing is left over", the curry is good because Jacqueline has put her memories and what is left of her identity and/or has become her new identity into the curry, and bai-seth sense this. Seth uses to clean the pot with a piece of bread and they joke "no need today for washing pot", which points at the enjoyment and duty of the reader. At the same time Jacqueline, the narrator, is setting to "*steaming, stirring and stirring till it is ready to eat*" one time more and again (p.56). However these are not only memories by Jacqueline from the Goan village and past, these are also the narrators's (up to which point the author's?) memories in other stories of the Parsi village midst in Bombay; this one understands when looking at the 'extraordinary' scene of bai and Jacqueline sitting in the kitchen with *mathoobanoo* on there head trying hard to balance scissors and *soopra*. And, perhaps, what preparing curry masala means for the narrating Jacqueline, this is preparing tea for bai, when she, delighted, is listening to Jacqueline's story and pushing the ghost affair even further ahead (pp.55, 56).

Preparing the curry masala and her inner life coincide; the ghost vanishes with her confession, now she has overcome this disturbing part of history, and at the same time it goes, is grinded, into the masala. She

has cooked her dish and prepared her story.

By the way, Parsiness is, of course, not only transmitted by the cooking, it comes up most concretely when Sarosh will be called by this name, because this is "his proper Parsi name" (p.153). Before his mother he has to swear on the "*Avesta*" (p.155). Sarosh in his story is called a "polite Parsi boy" (p.158). This can lead to some more general and historical observations about the Parsis in India and their somewhat booming literature.

Recent studies of the Parsis in India and their contemporary literature — a short report

Nilufer E. Bharucha points out several important elements which mark the Parsi identity in modern India, and that is for historical reasons, especially in Bombay. The Parsi community accepted very early English education and thus it is no wonder that Indian literature in English included very early Parsi literature. Although this is so, Bharucha points out, this literature was not especially Parsi literature. Such a phenomenon can be observed only in the last decades (Bharucha, p.249)*¹⁸.

Bharucha criticizes sharply that this literature too is put in Europe and America into one box with labels like "Empire Writes Back"*¹⁹ (Bharucha, p.250): "The European nations invented at the same time their nationalisms and imperialism for the non European world. Now they suggest nationalism is out and the former colonies have to enter the global family, and must not outfashionedly cling to what they think should be their postcolonial national identity. But this is only a scheme

to monopolize, inside this so called globalization, their own labels, and to guard their markets. And still, while countries like England refuse to enter Europe fulheartedly, such 'escapades' are not allowed to "non-Euro American ears" (Bharucha, p.250). For the globalizers ethnicity has become a negative term, but this one time more robs non-Euro Americans of their ethnic identity, and the there included religious and gender identity. This is because, so Bharucha, when Narayan's text bear Dravidian Brahminical background, so does Rushdie's bear an Indo-Islamic one, and Mistry's that of Zoroastrian Parsiness and again woman Parsi writer like Dina Mehta differs in her voice from Mistry (Bharucha p.250).

Again Parsi literature must not be put into one postcolonial theorist's box of Indian literature in English, this would "smack of the old European malaise - Orientalism" (Bharucha p.251). The Parsis and their literature have to be seen as a minority with its characteristics and problems in a Hindu dominated India scene.' So far Bharucha.

A famous account of the arrival of the Parsis in India is contained in the *Qisse-ye Sanjan* written, in Persian language, about 1600. It tells the story of the Parsis' "exodus" from Persia to the region of the Gulf of Khambhat (Cambay, the region of the modern State Gujarath), that is first to Diu and from there to Sanjan^{*20}, seperated only few miles from Dam(m)an^{*21}. However, the importance of that account today lies not so much in its historical value but in being what Ph. G. Kreyenbroek and Sh. N. Munshi call "the collective memory of the Parsis of an early age" which has to be considered "the basis of modern Parsis' understanding of their own past"^{*22}

'The Parsis had come to India fleeing enforced conversion to Islam, and they were thus immigrants by force. There is one legend of a cup full of hot milk which was sent by the ruler to the Parsis indicating that there was not place for them. The Parsis are said to have sent it back, but with a cup of sugar added to this, indicating that the local culture would only gain by their, the Parsis' element. They could remain, but there were certain conditions, which must have casted for them a certain special community identity' (Bharucha, pp.251-252): "They would give up their arms and their right to proselytise. Also, they would not inter-marry with the local population. Their religious feasts and marriage ceremonies would be kept low-key; processions, if any, would be permitted only after dark. They also had to give up their language, costumes and costums and adopt those of their Hindu rulers." (Bharucha, p.252)

'These conditions made it possible that the Parsi community became a certain exclusiveness with it advantages and negatives. Their history, having come to India as immigrants, gives them a common history, and this is further coloured by their religion, Zoroastrism, which claims to be one of the first monotheistic ones (Parsi historians claim it to be older than it probably is, Bharucha, p.252); conversions to Zoroastrism is not allowed. Rules of, or better, against inter-marriage has let them remain with a racial identity (today there are as well of couples with marriages outside the community, whose children's faith is not accepted)' (Bharucha, pp.253-254).

'However, during the presence of Europeans in India, first Portuguese and Dutch, the Parsis functioned largely for them, what, if

one looks at the conditions as represented by Bharucha, might be seen as well as a reaction towards the ambiguous conditions up to then in their host land. During the British reign the Parsis sided almost with them. Accepting European education, including the ideas of a Macaulay, enabled them to take positions like "lawyers, doctors, teachers and creative writers" and as well as they earned much money like "industrialists and entrepreneurs" in steel and textile products. However this process, of at the same time being Westernized, alienated them from the other Indians, when Hindu and Muslim communities, more conservative did not follow the Parsi example (Bharucha, p.252). After the British rule, as a consequence, the Parsi communities became marginalized, and they had to reorientate themselves in the new society. Bharucha names two main possibilities, the one, "to assimilate themselves into the Indian mainstream", the other, to "escape this change of status, [and] move to the West" (Bharucha, p.252). Now, Indian Parsi literature, in the last decades, reflects the change of the Parsi position in India, and the ways to handle this, and the individual texts have to be seen as concrete attempts of answers to this. At the same time there are their Persian past, their presence in India - to which they added gifts from their Persian past, if following the episode of the milk-cup, and their attempts to be Westernized (Bharucha, cf.p.253). There arise new problems; to the ethnic feeling of exclusiveness there was added as well a certain elitism because of the special position during the 'raj', but that has alienated them again from other Indians. While exclusiveness in India means as well Parsis are looking "more Central Asian than Indian sub-continental" (Bharucha, p.253), this is

not so outside India' : as can be read as well most painfully in Mistry's stories, as in the title story *Swimming Lesson*. When the central figure, who is the narrator, enters the swimming school for his first lesson he runs into three boys, one of whom "holds his nose", another one hums "Paki Paki, smell like curry", and the third one expresses his fear the pool's water will "taste of curry" (238).

Following the brief historical synopsis by Kreyenbroek, it is possible to assume 'that one reason for today's crisis of identity in the Parsi community might be rooted back in the "discovery" of the Avesta by A.H. Anquetil Duperron in the 18th century. The academic study of this sacred text influenced the division between Parsis with a more Western orientated view, consequently relying more on the text and its understanding, and more traditional Paris, following more the teaching of their priests. When the English missionary Rev. John Wilson in the 19th century began denouncing Zoroastrism's religion basing himself on a translation of the Avesta most of the Parsis still were not prepared to react. "When Zoroastrian priests sought to refute his [J. Wilson's] views they achieved little more than an exposure of their own inadequacy as theologians in a Western sense"*²³. With the priests loosing some of their authorities and the coming up of different religious schools this can be seen as well as a chance for a refreshment. However, according as well to Kreyenbroek, Munshi, the crisis continues up to today' when the Parsi community did loose its "special status" in the Republic of India, and "many enterprising and progressive Parsis have emigrated ... leaving behind a community whose sense of pride and identity seems to some extent to have been eroded"*²⁴.

In his essay about the image of Akbar in texts by Gujarati authors Makrand Mehta hints at an attempt of evaluating and structuring the importance of Parsi existence in India in late nineteenth century Parsi literature. While at that time there were "school teachers, social reformers and national leaders" who contributed to the legend of Akbar, M. Mehta points out the importance of the Parsi contribution. He explains this with the possibility "that some of them wanted to preserve their community identity by highlighting the achievements of their ancestors"*²⁵. 'M. Mehta introduces especially two essays from 1901 and 1903 by Jivanji Jamshedji Modi in which Modi discusses the importance of the Parsi priest Meherji Rana who is said to have visited Akbar which contributed to the fact that "Akbar had a special inclination for Zoroaster religion". Evidently with the intention to stress the importance of these visits by Meherji Rana, not only as an episode in Parsi community history, but as well in the frame of general Indian cultural history, J.J. Modi cites a ballad about the meeting of Meherji Rana with Akbar and the resulting acceptance of the "Parsi prayer" and claims that is a ballad composed by Tansen (one of the important Indian musicians during the Mughal period). M. Mehta on his side is not so much interested in verifying or denying this claim but in pointing out the, in the 19th century, continuing popularity of that story*²⁶ M. Mehta cites an other example, a Parsi writing under the pseudonym 'ATHA' and cites Mahipatram Rupram, in the writings of whom it is said that the English learnt from Akbar, and while Akbar is praised for his rationality and tolerance he is criticized at the same time for not having introduced "parliamentary institutions in India" following foreign, Portuguese and

English, examples. By this, Mahipatram Rupram says, Akbar missed a chance to create a national consciousness which could have helped to overcome social division. The not further identified author 'ATHA' concludes his essay with the statement' that "[n]o Parsi family album should be without Akbar's photo in it"*27

In modern Parsi literature appears the contrast between "the nationalist Parsi and the Anglophile Parsi", as e.g. in Boman Desai's *Memory of Elephants* (cf. Bharucha, pp.254-255) or in Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (ibid., pp.259-260)*28. The partition brought an additional problem of identity, being a Parsi in India or Pakistan, this included the neutrality in the Hindu-Muslim conflict, as shown e.g. in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice-Candy-Man* (ibid., pp.255-257)*29.

Swimming Lessons

The "fat ayah Jaakaylee" appears as well in *Squatter* (p.150), which should not be neglected because of the narratological importance of that short story in *Swimming Lessons*. And, here, even *that* ghost is coming up too. Perhaps it may be said that the identity of the Parsis is mirrored, and criticized in the, as a distorted one, described of the Goan ayah 'Jaakaylee' in a Parsi household. Then, almost all the problems which Bharucha shows lying behind the creation of Parsi literature in English today, and this is inside and outside India, are coming up in *Squatter*, if indirectly. But they come more directly in the other stories. 'The collection as a whole shows the specific situation of the Parsis' in their voluntary exclusiveness, which leads to almost absurd situations and constellations in the baag, as in *The Collectors*. Religious exclusiveness is

theme of *Condolence Visit*; the end of the special position during the 'raj' is demonstrated in *Auspicious Occasion*, as indicated as well by Bharucha (p.258). And when the questionability of immigration is discussed in *Lend Me Your Light*, the painful experience of not being 'fare' but belonging to "the Brown races Asians" (Bharucha, p.254), is revealed again in *Swimming Lessons*' (cf. Bharucha, p.258). Of importance is now that the Parsis, Seth-bai, are dealing with their ayah in that very same way they themselves are dealt with in modern India/Bombay. They try to maintain, in front of her, that position they had during the raj, when, as Jacqueline says, they were ruling next to the British; and while they themselves suffer, most probably, outside the baag, they make Jaakaylee suffer these very same things, loss of name and language (p.44), being suspect of religion (ghost and Holy Ghost, p.55), becoming the underling (living on the floor, p.45), and the 'Blackie' (p.46). However, especially if seen from this angle, the finishing story *Swimming Lessons* deserves attention.

The above cited situation of immigration and being forced to build up a new identity is described with the narrator's real feelings and sobering experiences abroad in his letters home. In R. Mistry's *Swimming Lesson* it is then mirrored against the 'eroded pride and identity' of those who did not choose a second exodus, that are his parents. Despite their relatively miserable condition, as will be shown, they react with disappointment and slight anger on their son's view of the Parsis, and in a somewhat less grotesque than sad reaction want to remain aware of the great Parsi past.

In this story the narrator from a Parsi family without any wealth

("The devil was money, always scarce, and kept the private swimming clubs out of reach ...", p.234), a situation which enforces the family to leave the from parkinsonism suffering grandfather to the "male ward of Parsi General", because there "was no money for a private nursing home" (p.231), is musing about his lonely fate in Canada. He is 'trapped' between some homesickness, regretting e.g. not to have visited grandfather more often in the hospital (p.231), and his awareness of the somewhat disturbing existence in Bombay. This does concern not only the own family but as well the Parsi community as a whole. Thinking about the high rate of osteoporosis and the "highest divorce rate in India" in the Parsi community which calls herself "the most westernized community in India": "Which is the result of the other? Confusion again, of cause and effect" (p.230). (In the Parsi author F. Kanga's novel *Trying to Grow* the main character-narrator, Daryus or Brit, the latter standing for "brittle" as are his bones, and because is sounds so "rather English" (p.26), is born with "osteogenesis imperfecta" (p.24). Again, in Bapsi Sidhwa's, she too is a Parsi author, novel *Ice-Candy-Man* the main character-narrator has to grow up during her childhood in a wheel-chair and using callipers. Even considering the totally different situation of these handicapped characters from the figures in Mistry's novels, in cannot be overlooked that the symptoms of the disease, in both cases, are used to attribute the narrator respectively a point of view, which I call here, provisionally, a 'picaresque-like' one. (cf. here as well footnotes no.28 and no.29.) The same question comes up in another context (is it the dirty sea at Chaupatty beach which attracts the people or is it the peopel who make it dirty?) as "another instance of cause and effect

blurring and evading identification". Can this as well be related to the problem of identity?! That is, did he feel miserable in his days in Bombay, from where the remembrance of his grandfather follows him (pp.230-234), and/or does he feel miserable therefore now in Canada, which is not so attractive, as it seemed from Bombay (as the sun bathing women, p.233)?

The problem of deciding cause and effect comes up a third time when the heating breaks down and, at the same time, there is no hot water; does the water heat the radiators or is viceversa? At the end of the story a deeper meaning of this, seemingly so trivial, motif is revealed. The story, it must be repeated, is the story of an Indian immigrant, the narrator, who tries to get used to the Canadian way of life, and the difficulties of this process are compared to those involved in the attempt at learning to swim. This, by the way, again reminds of Jhumpa Lahiri's story *Mrs Sen's*³⁰ in which story Mrs Sen tries hard to learn to drive a car in order to get her car license, what in this story becomes equivalent to a kind of cultural residence permit. At the same time *Swimming Lessons* is a story about the whole book, including this, the book's closing story, as well. At certain intervals passages of conversations are inserted, marked visibly as written in italics, between the narrator's parents. In the first two of these especially the father complains about the few and unimportant information about Canada. At the third interruption the arrival of a parcel containing the very book, the reader holds in his hands, with the short stories written by the narrator is described. And on the following three occasions the parents discuss the stories on a meta-level. In addition, the narrator of the story

too comes back to various stories already told, e.g. when he remembers Nariman Hansotia's stories (p.234). This remembrance is as well of pure narratological importance because Nariman, when telling the story *Squatter* is made to say ""but I thought you would like to hear this story. Especially since some of you are planning to go abroad" (p.152). In another way important is that the narrator in *Swimming Lessons* mentions as well "the fat ayah Jaakaylee" from *The Ghost of Firozsha Baag* (p.230). There are other allusions of figures between the stories, and this means, too, that the reader does gradually get acquainted to the Parsi community in the baag. The memory of the ayah gets a special nuance, because in *Swimming Lessons* there appears a notoriously curious and gossiping "PM" (Portuguese woman).

The story begins on the first level, as hinted at above, with the narrator's remembering his grandfather's illness and death, and his mother's using "to say that the blessings of an old person were the most valuable and potent of all" and would last for the whole life (p.231). In the finishing conversation the mother tells the father that she likes this, last, story because of this passage. Her husband asks her critically whether she really can remember having told her son so, and reminds her of the fact that their son, as admitted by the mother herself before, was changing facts in the stories. Upon this the mother replies "*he says I told him and I believe now I told him, so even if I did not tell him then it does not matter now*" (p.250). This again makes the father, in all the conversations inclined to theorize, admonish her not to confuse fiction with facts, and claim that while "*fiction can come from facts*", "*fiction does not create facts*" (p.250). While, theoretically, the father may be

right there is truth as well in the saying of the mother, because the book, and each of its story has created a new world of facts, as she herself says, in the second talk about the stories "*and though he changed some of it [i.e. of the things remembered], and used his imagination, there was truth in it*" (p.245). Already in their first discussion the problem of the process of creating the stories is brought up, and this as a more basic question of cause and effect. There the father had claimed that it was not unhappiness that had made their son to nostalgically putting down his memories but that he was only, as "*all writers*" using his memories to make stories of them. Upon this the mother asks him how he could know "*that he is remembering because he is a writer, or whether he started to write because he is unhappy and thinks of the past, and wants to save it all by making stories of it*" (p.243).

In this context here the second conversation about the stories may be considered as the most important. There the father expresses his hope that his son will soon be able to write more about Canada than in "*the one with a little bit about Toronto, where a man perches on top of the toilet*", which of course is the here discussed *Squatter*. This story the father calls "*shameful and disgusting, although it is funny at times*" (pp.245-246). He wonders what would be "*the point of such a fantasy*" (p.246). In the same conversation he declares that he does not mind that the Parsis in the stories told are "poor or middle class", but for him it is disturbing that there might come up an image of "the whole community ... full of cranky, bigoted people". And he expresses his wish that there should have been written something about all those "wonderful facts" like the great history, that they are "descendants of Cyrus the Great",

and of course he misses mention of the "*Islamic persecution*", already mentioned here as an important element of the identity and homogeneity in the Parsi community. He further misses mention of the contribution in building up "*steel industry*" and "*textile industry*" in Bombay, the "*reputation for being generous and family orientated*", and of course he regrets that a name like that of Dadabhai Naoroji does not come up (p.245). Exactly his mentioning that name and his claim, and that the Parsis were the "*richest, most advanced and philanthropic community in India*" shows that R. Mistry uses his stories to give not only a critical insight into the Parsi community but a well to reflect about the problems of depicting them — as does Bharucha in his analyses, where Mistry's short stories, of course, are discussed too. Bharucha calls, together with Firozsha Mehta and Madame Bhikaiji Cama, Dadabhai Naoroji an exception when considering that "the majority of Parsis had distanced themselves from the Independence Movement" (p.254).

Mistry's narrator expresses his real feelings and sobering experiences abroad in his letters home. Thinking about his situation and that which has led him into the new one makes him remember Nariman Hansotia's stories and the knowledge contained in it (p.234). The reaction of his parents, who have been depicted in their relative miserable condition, is one of disappointment and slight anger. They want their son to be aware of the old Parsi tradition, a reaction which must become in a sad manner grotesque.

What they would have preferred, one probably might say, would have been a savoury and good tasting story about the Parsi community.

- *1 Rohinton Mistry, *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag* (1987), New York, Vintage, 1997; all citations from this and other stories from the same collection will, from here on, if not necessitated otherwise, be indicated in the running text only by the page number without further indication.
- *2 here cited from: Philip G. Kreyenbroek in collaboration with Sheznaz Neville Munshi, *Living Zoroastrianism. Urban Parsis Speak About Their Religion*, Cornwall, Curzon, 2001, p.323; as a second meaning for "Baug" is given there: "(2) area where Navjotes and weddings take place", "Navjote initiation as a member of the community", *ibidem*, p.326.
- *3 About Rohinton Mistry cf. Tim Woods, *Who's Who of Twentieth-Century Novelists*, London and New York, Routledge, 2001, pp.239-240.
- *4 All words from Hindi, Urdu etc. have been deliberately not written in italics, because as such they are part of the Indian English. For the English translation in brackets I have consulted the "Word List" in: Kreyenbroek, Munshi, *Living Zoroastrianism*, *op.cit.*, pp.321-328 = KM, and Ivor Lewis, *Sahibs, Nabobs and Boxwallahs. A Dictionary of the Words of Anglo-India*, Delhi, Calcutta, Chennai, Mumbai, Oxford UP, 1997 = L.
- *5 What I have called here for lack of a more proper terminology a picaresque feature may be seen as well in a context with a remark e.g. by Markand Mehta, that the "Parsis, as we know have a keen sense of humour", which is then illustrated by examples from 19th century Parsi literature, cf. M.M., "Akbar in Gujarati Historiography", in: Iqtidar Alam Khan, ed., *Akbar and his age*, Indian Council of Historical Research Monograph Series 5, New Delhi, Northern Book Centre, 1999, pp.260-266, here, p.264.
- *6 The motif of language may be put e.g. in a context with scenes from Anita Desai, *Baumgartners's Bombay*, (1988), London, Penguin, 1989; cf. here to, E.J., "Lemon trees bloom only in dream", in *The Integrated*

- Human Studies*, 1999, Vol. 6, pp.67-86. I think of those scenes in which the process of loosing the linguistic identity of the title figure is described. Of course one has to consider the totally different situation of the finally almost 'speechless' Jew Baumgartner who fled from Nazi-Germany, and a comparison can be made contrastingly and indirectly.
- *7 cf. Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Princeton UP, 2001.
- *8 cf. Carmo d'Souza, *Angela's Goan Identity*, Panaji, New Age Printers, 1984.
- *9 Portuguese colonialism in Goa endured from 1510 up to 1961. For the situation of Christians and Christian belief in Goa today cf. Rowena Robinson, *Conversion, Continuity and Change. Lived Christianity in Southern Goa*, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, Sage, 1998.
- *10 Lepate is used here in form of a word play. Some of the listening boys are amused when this name is introduced and seem to think that "there was more le pate in his [Nariman's] own stories than anywhere else (p.158).
- *11 Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Third and Final Continent* and *Mrs Sen's*, in: J.L., *Interpreter of Maladies. stories of bengal, boston and beyond*, London, Flamingo, 1999, pp.173-198, 111-135.
- *12 Here I think for example of A. Tabucchi's *Notturmo Indiano*. (1985), especially because its story is set in India and it is about travelling, A.T., *Notturmo Indiano*, Torino, SEI, 1996.
- *13 Salman Rushdie, *East, West* (1994), London, Vintage, 1995, pp.3-16.
- *14 cf. E.A.J. Honigmann, ed., *Othello*, The Arden Shakespeare, Walton-on-Thames Surrey (1997), 1998, p.330.
- *15 Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1995; Ania Loomba writes "Shakespeare's Othello ... haunts Rushdie's novel", A.L., *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p.209; cf. my discussion of Rushdie's novel, E.J., "Eeny Meeny Myney Moo(r) ... Searching the proper second line", in: *The Integrated Human Studies*, Faculty of Integrated Human Studies, Kyoto University,

2000, Vol. 7, pp.83-110.

- *16 Amitav Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason* (1986), London, Granta Books, 1998.
- *17 Claudia Roden, *The Book of Jewish Food*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1996; John Docker, *1492 The Poetics of Diaspora*, London and New York, Continuum, 2001.
- *18 Nilufer E. Bharucha, "Why All This Parsiness? An Assertion of Ethno-Religious Identity in Recent Novels written by Parsis", in: Nilufer E. Bharucha & Vrinda Nabar, eds., *Mapping Cultural Spaces. Postcolonial Indian Literature in English*, New Delhi·Bombay·Hyderabad, Vision Books, 1998, pp.249-261.
- *19 Bharucha is, of course, hinting at *The Empire Writes Back*, by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, London and New York, Routledge (1989), 1998; problems of this, it goes without saying important study, were addressed by Salman Rushdie in his critical review "The Empire Writes Back - From the Centre"
- *20 "*Kisseh-e-Sanjan*: Literally means 'Story or the History or Sanjan.'", Mlle. Delphine Menant (*Les Parsis*, 1898), *The Parsis*. Being an enlarged & copiously annotated up to date English edition by M.M.Murzban, vols.I-II (1917), Bombay, Danai, 1994, here, vol.I, p.41; this book is still of great value and I have used it here continuously together with more updated works of research.
- *21 Later, that is in 16th century, Diu (1511) and Damman (1530ies) were invaded and conquered by the Portuguese, events which must be considered in the context of the Parsis's attitude to and contacts with non-Indian occupators during the time of colonization in India. Cf. M.M. Murzban, ed., D. Menant, *The Parsis*, op.cit.
- *22 Kreyenbroek, *Living Zoroastrianism*, op.cit., p.44.
- *23 Kreyenbroek, Munshi, *Living Zoroastrianism*, op.cit., p.46.
- *24 Kreyenbroek, Munshi, *Living Zoroastrianism*, op.cit., p.46.
- *25 Makrand Mehta, "Akbar in Gujarati Historiography", op.cit., p.260.

- *26 M. Mehta, "Akbar in Gujarati Historiography", op.cit., pp.260-263.
- *27 M. Mehta, "Akbar in Gujarati Historiography", op.cit., pp.262-264.
- *28 Firdaus Kanga, *Trying to Grow*, Delhi, Ravi Dayal Publisher (1990), 2.1991. In F. Kanga's novel the mother Sera is one of the Anglophiles and contrasted against other figures more critical towards the English. However the situation can become complicated. An illustrative example is argument between Sera and her daughter Dolly who is going to marry a Muslim. "The Muslims are the traditional, nay, the historical enemies of the Parsees", Sera says, upon which Dolly answers: "The British conquered India and you worship them ...". Still, when Dolly, then, threatens to "fast unto death", and that such blackmail had "worked on the British Empire", Sera retorts "I'm no gentle, fair-minded Britisher; I am Persian, pure Persian ... (pp.140-141).
- *29 Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988), Penguin Books India, 1989. A sharp and ironical description of the Parsis' situation before the Partition (1947) is that of a meeting of their community in Lahore in the Fire Temple on occasion of the British victory in 1945. When the possible end of British rule in India is discussed, again, the legend of the "glass of milk filled to the brim" into which the Parsis added a "teaspoon of sugar" is recalled. Wisely it is suggested by some to accommodate to whoever's rule: "Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land!"(p.39). The possibility to move, this time not "Again" to Bombay but to London, is sceptically pushed back by another: "And what do we do", he asks, 'when the English king's Vazir stands before us with a glass full of milk? Tell him we are brown Englishmen , come to sweeten their lives with a dash of colour?" (p.38-40)
- *30 Jhumpa Lahiri, "Mrs Sen's", in: J.L., *Interpreter of Maladies*. op.cit, pp.111-135, cf-especially pp.111, 119-120.