

**STEREOTYPICAL CHARACTER DESIGN IN
INDIAN CONTEXT:
THE PARSIS OF BOMBAY**

DESIGN RESEARCH SEMINAR

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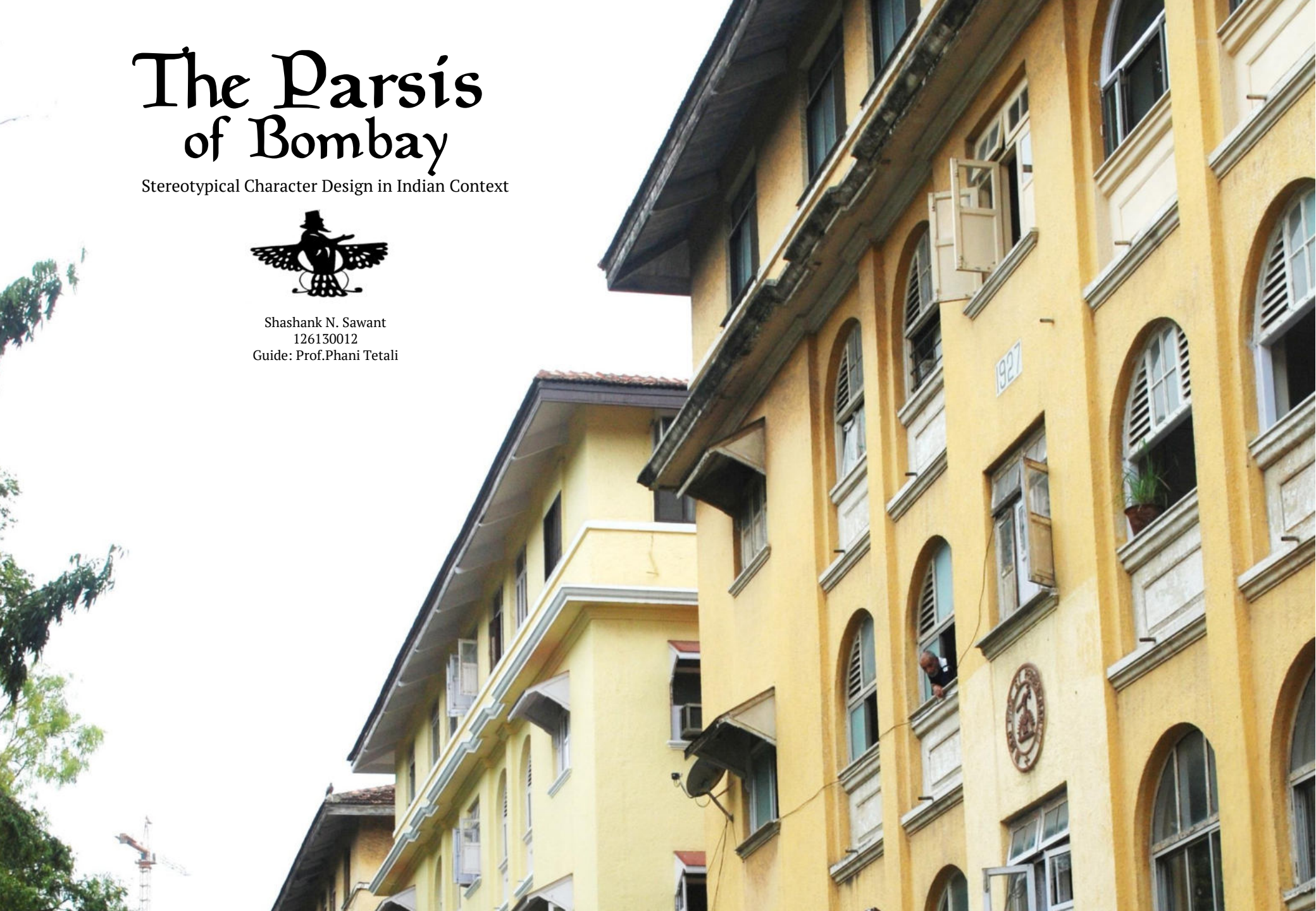
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The Parsis of Bombay

Stereotypical Character Design in Indian Context



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Approval

Industrial Design Special Project

‘Stereotypical Character Design in Indian Context’

By Shashank N. Sawant

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has been approved as partial fulfillment of
requirement of post-graduate degree in Industrial
Design

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Phani'.

Prof. Phani Tetali

[Project Guide]

Declaration

I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all the principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/ data/ fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

Signature: 

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Roll No.: 126130012

Date:

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A special thanks to all my batch-mates and friends for their wise words and unconditional support all through.

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Stereotyping

Stereotyping is defined as an "oversimplified attitude people hold toward those outside one's own experience who are different."

Stereotypes arise as a result of incomplete or distorted information accepted as fact without question. A stereotype is simply a widely held belief that an individual is a member of a certain group based on characteristics. Due to the process of over-generalization within social perception, stereotyping leads to a great deal of inaccuracy in social perception.

Sex, race, age, sexual orientation, religion and physical ability are various categories which exist in stereotyping. The most prevalent and controversial forms are sex and race.

Racial studies have found that descriptions such as Jews are shrewd and ambitious, African-Americans have special musical and athletic ability and Germans are methodical and efficient, are commonly used to label these ethnic groups.

Slowly, society has been making a slight transition away from stereotyping. Unfortunately it is a difficult process, especially since we rely on second-hand sources for our information for the majority of our knowledge. The main outlet of second-hand information is the mass media. As a result of depending largely on the second-hand source of mass media, mass media in turn plays a major role in determining the content of our culture. Stereotyping is a product of culture, therefore, mass media have a strong influence in supporting and tearing down stereotypical characteristics.

Stereotypes exist because of three key factors.

1. Stereotypes are functional:

As audience members we are bombarded with much more information than we can process. Our tendency is to reduce complexity to simplicity.

We trade-off for simplification, which can lead to inaccuracy and we are often unaware of this deduction.

2. Stereotypes are results of selectivity in social perception:

We tend to see what we expect to see, and we have a tendency to twist and distort the characteristics of others until it fits our stereotype of that particular group.

3. Prejudice:

This is the most influential factor in stereotyping. Our perceptions are highly subjective, and many people subscribe to derogatory descriptions of ethnic groups. Unfortunately the selectivity of a person's perception result in people seeing what they expect to see when they come in contact with members of an ethnic group they view with prejudice.

[1]

“Whether right or wrong...imagination is shaped by the pictures seen...consequently, they lead to stereotypes that are hard to shake.”

-Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion



1. Pran as Sher Khan, the helpful Pathan in Zanjeer



2. Boisterous Punjabis



2. Dada Kondke as Pandu Havaladar



5. Dara Singh as Hanuman



5. My Friend Ganesha

Stereotyping in India

India is a country of pluralistic cultures. There's a lot of diversity in people, their routines across the country. Geographical and ethnic boundaries have given rise to certain traits amongst people. These are often depicted, parodied in various media viz. cinema, literature, etc. The fact that such stereotyping was successful and clicked with audience, getting widespread acceptance led to more caricature and over-simplified depictions of characters belonging to a certain religion, caste, area, etc.

For e.g. Punjabis are shown as loud and boisterous. Sindhis money-minded, Biharis wear loud clothes and chew paan, and Bengalis perish without their fish. The Marathi traffic constable, Pandu Havaladar clicked to such an extent, that traffic cops are often referred to by that name in Mumbai parlance.

The Hindi film industry helped in enforcing such stereotypes. The central character, either a Vijay or a Rahul was kept pan-Indian, while the supporting cast had a lot of stereotyped side characters: the altruistic, always-ready-to-sacrifice-his-life Muslim friend, the bumbling South Indian, a simpleton Parsi and so on.

Even Gods were not spared. People got so used to seeing Dara Singh, that he could never shrug off that character. Ganesha, with a pot belly and hungry attitude is an over-simplified version of the multi-faceted God. Krishna's blue-toned skin, Rama's do-good nature all too stretched for effect. But it has ensured the success of media depicting them and helped in getting the message across.



The Parsis of Bombay

Mumbai.

A city that is the heartbeat of an entire nation. A city that is constantly on the go, a city that is constantly changing and still the same. They say that a city is defined by its people. In a country like India, where people belong to hundreds of different ethnic backgrounds, speak hundreds of dialects, cities become melting pots of cultures.

And yet Mumbai was not always like this. Yes, the harbour was always buzzing with activity, but it took some enterprising communities to come forward and lay the founding stone of economic activity in these waters. At forefront among them were the Gujaratis, Marwaris, The British. And yes, the Parsis!

Much of the following data has been sourced from Sooni Taraporewala's exhaustive studies on the Parsis.

The Zoroastrian religion arose in the eastern reaches of the Persian Empire. It was founded by Zoroaster, a philosopher trying to simplify the Pantheon of gods. Zoroastrianism believes in Ahura Mazda, the creator, from whom no evil can emanate. The Ahura Mazda is the wisdom, the light. The symbol of this creator appears on Zoroastrian ruins, scriptures all over the world. Some of these inscriptions date back to 6th century B.C. The religion flourished in this area under the patronage of Achaemenid emperors Cyrus and Darius and other empires like the Sassanid empire, etc.

The Muslim conquest of Persia led to a massive exodus of Zoroastrian people from the region. According to the 'Quissa-i-Sanjaan', the people who had fled arrived in Diu spending 19 years there before settling down at Sanjaan on the mainland. The Hindu rulers were kind enough to these refugees, especially a certain Jadhav Rana. The legend goes that the ruler asked them how they would fit into this myriad land. To this, the leader of these early settlers took a glass of milk and dissolved some sugar in it, saying that just like the sugar increased the sweetness of the milk, so would the Parsis bring all good things with them.

As a fifth generation Mumbaikar, I grew up listening to such stories about the Parsis. But staying in the suburbs, I have not had the fortune of having a Parsi friend. I was always told that the Parsis stay in pockets (colonies referred to 'baugs'). Lovingly, they have been referred to as bawas/bawis. As a part of the project I got to explore these areas and trace their origins in this city.

Vatcha Agiary,
Fort,
Mumbai



The story of Parsis is intricately woven into the rise of Mumbai as India's 'urbs prima indis', the First city of India. Though the Parsis as a community have been highly enterprising, there are some families that rose to prominence. They spear-headed not only the industrial revolution in the city, and the country consecutively, they also shaped much of Bombay's contours and contributed generously through philanthropic acts. At the forefront were the families like Wadia, Jeejebhoy, Mistry, Readymoney, Tata, Allbless, Modi, Sorabji, Modi, Dadysset, Cama, Petit, Patel, Mehta, etc. Many families took names to reflect what they did, these names were also easier for the British to pronounce viz. Lawyer, Doctor, Paymaster, Engineer, Confectioner.

The first recorded Parsi to arrive in Bombay was Dorabji Nanabhai dating back to 1640. When Mumbai was passed over to British in 1661, the British decided to convert this excellent harbour into a self-contained settlement. For this they brought in people of various trades from their established presidencies. A large number of Parsis migrated to the city as weavers and artisans. In 1673, the British handed over a part of land to the community for their Towers of silence (the Dakhma) in the area what is today known as Malabar Hill.

In all this influx of migrants, some brought exceptional skills and an entrepreneurial flair. A certain famous shipwright from Surat called Lowji Nusserwanji Wadia.



Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy

The most famous Parsi of all time would undoubtedly be Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy (1783-1859). Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy's is a rags-to riches story. Born into a poor priestly family in Navsari in Gujarat, orphaned at a young age, he started his career as a seller of old bottles. He made his maiden voyage to China when he was sixteen and it was in trade that he made his fortune. He was to make several more trips-some of them uneventful, others arduous and dangerous. He was to lose most of his money in the great Bombay fire and start from scratch again. With Bombay as his centre, he traded with China, sent them opium, brought back tea and silks and traded with Europe, bringing back the English goods needed to sustain the empire in India. He made a vast amount of money and gave back an equally massive amount to the city. Hospitals, colleges, roads, housing for the poor, all still bear his name. In 1842 he was the first Indian to be knighted. In today's times his charities would add up to millions of rupees. He died in 1859.



Dadabhai Naoroji

The grand old man of India, Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) was another eminent Bombay Parsi. Born to a Parsi priest's family in Bombay, he studied in Elphinstone College, Bombay, and became a professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy there at the age of 27. He was the first Indian to become a professor of the college. At age thirty, he left for England, where he was to spend most of his life. In 1895 he was appointed to the royal commission on Indian expenditure. He returned to India and was thrice elected to the post of the president of The Indian National Congress - in 1886, 1893 and again in 1906.

In 1893, Dadabhai Naoroji expressed the spirit of an emerging national identity when he stated: "Whether I am a Hindu, a Mohamaden, a Parsi, a Christian, or of any other creed, I am above all an Indian. Our country is India; our nationality is Indian."

The Congress' demand for Swaraj (independence) was first expressed publicly by him in his presidential address in 1906.



Pheroza Mehta

Another true blue Mumbai Parsi was Pheroza Mehta(1845-1915). Known as the "Father of Municipal Government in Bombay", he drafted the Bombay Municipal Act of 1872. He was the Municipal commissioner in 1873 and the Chairman in 1884-5 and again in 1905. A lawyer by profession, Mehta was elected the president of the Indian National Congress in 1890. He founded the newspaper Bombay Chronicle in 1910 and in the same year he was made the Vice Chancellor of the Bombay University. Studied at Elphinstone College, Bombay, and later went to England to study law.. He was called to the bar in 1868.



Homi Bhabha

Coming to modern India, the list of Parsis as nation builders is also exhaustive. Homi Bhabha (1909-1966) served as the President of the UN conference on peaceful uses of atomic energy in 1955 and later as President of the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics from 1960 to 63. Bhabha joined the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, in 1940 as a reader in physics. He then established, with funds from JRD Tata, the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Bombay in 1945. Son of a barrister, Homi Bhabha studied engineering at Cambridge. He died in a plane crash on Mont Blanc on January 24, 1966.

Other prominent Parsis from Mumbai include Zubin Mehta, the celebrated orchestra conductor. He has been the conductor of the Israel Philharmonic since 1981; he led the New York Philharmonic (1978-91) , the Los Angeles Philharmonic (1962-78) and the Montreal Symphony (1961-67) - the first conductor to head two major North American orchestras at the same time.

A mention of the prolific writer, Rohinton Mistry who wrote 'Tales from Ferozeshah Baug' and 'Such a long journey'.

The master painter Jehangir Sabawala (1922-2011), who along with his contemporaries left an indelible impression upon the Indian art scene.

Persis Khambata appeared in the early Star Trek series.

The early history of Indian cricket is the history of Bombay Parsi cricket. Parsis formed the Oriental Cricket Club in 1848, and later the Zoroastrian and the Mars Clubs. Russy Mody, Polly Umrigar, Nari Contractor, Farokh Engineer, Russy Surti played for the National team.

Freddie Mercury of the popular band Queen was a Parsi.

[2]

Parsi rituals

The navjote, or initiation into the religion, takes place before puberty between the ages of seven and nine for both boys and girls. It is the first time that the child wears the "armour of the religion": the sudrah (shirt), kusti, which should then be worn every day for the rest of his/her life. Zoroastrianism believes that children cannot tell the difference between right and wrong, and therefore cannot sin. Once children freely choose to be initiated, they become adults responsible for their own thoughts, words, deeds, which will determine the fate of their souls on judgment day.

The sudrah (shirt), to be worn next to the skin, is made of white cotton, usually thin muslin, (white being a symbol of stainlessness and purity) to remind the wearer that his/her deeds must be as pure and spotless as the sacred shirt they are wearing. The sudrah is made up of two pieces of cloth sewn together on the sides; the two parts, the back and the front symbolic of the past and future, both related to each other through the present. In the front, over the chest is a small pocket (girehban). Called the pocket of righteousness, it is the symbolic collection place for the wearer's good words, good thoughts, good deeds.

The kusti, the sacred cord, made of seventy-two threads of lambswool, is entwined thrice around the waist, again symbolically reminding the wearer of the holy triad of good words, thoughts and deeds. The untying and retying of the kusti, accompanied by the kusti prayers, is always done facing the direction of a source of light: the sun, the moon or a lamp. Along with the sudrah, the kusti is the 'badge' of all believers, male or female, rich or poor, priest or layman.

Parsis ritually do not leave the head uncovered and do not smoke. But there are no caste divisions, no religious restrictions about food. Their worship of fire is the highest and purest symbol of the Divinity.

The Parsis worship in fire temples. Fire is of very special significance to the Zoroastrians. It gives light, warmth and energy to the other six creations, and so creates life. The Atash Behram or the Holy Fire is the most important and the most sacred fire. There are around fifty fire temples in Mumbai.

They do not cremate or bury the dead and instead leave their dead in Dakhma or the 'Towers of Silence' where they are devoured by vultures. This is done to ensure purity of the elements. In Mumbai, these towers of silence are located at Gibbs road, Malabar Hill. This area is also known as Doongerwadi. The lands contain dokhma including a chotra. The first dokhma was built about 300 years ago at a time when nothing but a thick wood existed and hyenas and jackals ruled the land.

Dokhma is not merely a 'Tower' as is generally supposed nor a 'well' for resting place of the bones of the dead. It is a structure, well and scientifically designed to drain off putrefying matter and preserve the bones in the central receptacle which in ordinary parlance is a 'well'. The custom is over 3000 years old.

The term 'Doongerwadi' is not a coinage of the Parsis. The land today collectively known as Doongerwadi was donated to the Trustees by philanthropic Parsis but some portions were even bought. One such plot known as Pandu Sett's 'Doongerwadi' (lit. Garden on Hill) was bought by the then Trustees. Hence the generic name Doongerwadi.

Parsi way of life

Humor:

In Mumbai it is said that the only Parsi without a sense of humor is a dead one. Wiity Parsis include Adi Marzban, Adi Pocha, Bomi and Dolly Dotiwala, or on column writers great wits such as Behram Contractor and Bachchi Karkaria, or on the TV with comedian Cyrus Broacha. As a Parsi blogger once wrote, "Our madness is a gentle, harmless, twittering kind of madness. The kind that makes other people smile."

Wellness:

Parsis are extensively into alternate healing and wellness methods. Ever since the late naturopath Jehangir Jussawalla put Indians into sitz baths, Parsis have distinguished themselves in the field of alternative healing. Be it the mother-son duo of yoga exponents Dhun and Jahangir Palkhiwala, psychic healer Nan Umrigar or Firooza Moos and Meher Davis with alternative remedies for curing Mumbai's allergies, the list of Parsi healers is long.

Foodiness:

Parsi gourmets include distinguished chefs such as Muncherjee Cama and Adi Dubash. The city is similarly dotted with Parsi ladies like Aban Mobedjina, Shirin Adenwala and Kainaz Messman of Theobroma patisserie, who service its sweet tooth, and caterers such as Faroukh Khambatta, Vera Lam and Tanaz Godiwala. For a community that gave us patra ni machhi (steamed fish wrapped in banana leaf), dhansak (mutton or chicken in lentils) and sali murghi (spicy chicken with fine potato crisps), Parsis are recognised as foodies.

Performing arts:

Whether it's the father son-duo of Mehli and Zubin Mehta, Coomi Wadia of the Paranjoti choir, Tushan Dallas who ran a ballet school, dancers like Shiamak Davar and Faredoon Bhujwala or great thespians of English theater such as Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal, Ronnie Screvwalla, Burjor Ruby and Shernaz Patel, it is to the Parsis that Mumbai looks for sustaining and patronizing Western performing arts.

Rectitude and activism:

From the fiery old Nani Pallkhiwala, who championed untold good causes, to ace lawyers Frenny Ponda and Aspi Chinoy, Parsis have taken the lead in good deeds. Also on the roll call of distinguished do-gooders: child rights activists Mahrukh Adenwala, Jeroo Billimoria, Dinaz Stafford and Shaheen Mistry of Teach for India; and Gool Bhujwala and Shirin Bharucha, who adopt and save Mumbai's green spaces.

Horse racing:

The Mumbai racecourse is overrun with Parsis in the mornings. A majority of the Royal Western India Turf Club managing committee members are Parsis. Parsis such as Cyrus Poonawalla and C.N. Wadia have served as its chairmen. And we can't forget to mention some of India's most successful jockeys and trainers, such as Pesi Shroff, Karl Umrigar, Bezun Chenoy and Dallas Toddywalla.

Mumbai would be a less amazing city without its gentle, funny and philanthropic community of Parsi people.

Aesthetics and architecture:

Path-breaking fashion models like Persis Khambatta and Meher Jessica, makeup artists like Micky Contractor, fashionistas like Meher Castellino and Xerxes Bhathena have had an impact on the world of glamour in Mumbai. Hafeez Contractor, Noshir Talati and Nowzer Wadia are still the last word in architecture.

Philanthropy:

It's safe to say that the contribution of Parsis's in the field of philanthropy is immense. Mumbai continues to profit from the benevolence of great Parsi philanthropic families such as the Jeejeebhoyes, the Readymoneys, the Camas, the Petits, the Tatas, the Godrejs and the Wadias.

Professional excellence:

Parsis have demonstrated excellence in every profession they have held, without a strain of mediocracy. Medical families like the Soonawalas, the Udwadias and the Banajis, or leading physicists like Homi Bhabha and Homi Sethna, fertility expert Dr Firuza Parikh, legal eagles Fali Nariman and Soli Sorabjee, filmmaker Sooni Taraporewala, cricketers Polly Umrigar and Faroukh Engineer and novelist Rohinton Mistry, Parsis have exemplified high performance.

[3]

Meeting the Parsis

To complete the project, it was necessary to meet up, talk to and observe Parsis up and close. I had to trace Parsi contacts, friends of friends and so on.

The Parsis of Mumbai reside in colonies referred to as 'Baug'. Safe havens, secluded and peaceful, they remain beyond the vision of most Mumbaikars. There are a number of Parsi Baugs in Mumbai.

Rustom Baug, Cusrow Baug, Godrej Baug, Nowroz Baug, Jer Baug, Ness Baug, and the only non-walled space of Dadar Parsi colony.

After much searching around, I found one Parsi gentleman who was willing to speak, Mr.P.P.Vajifdar. He resides in the Rustom Baug in Byculla.

The Rustom Baug colony is surrounded by high walls and grills. The entry is heavily guarded. Upon entering, one is immediately enveloped on both sides by blockish buildings, built in a certain fore-boding manner. The noise of the outside road is totally silenced. You realise that you have to maintain the sanctity of the place, you are submissive to the Parsi will here, almost. Mr.Vajifdar's house was on the third floor, and as I climbed up I noticed Rangoli-like patterns outside every household. Names like Doomasia, Cooper, Taraporewala, Sopariwala adorned the houses. When Mr.Vajifdar opened the door, I removed my shoes, but he urged me to keep them on. His wife graciously offered me tea and a delicious cake (that I ate sparingly through my time there).



Mr.P.P. Vajifdar



Mr.Vajifdar's house was adorned with all sorts of artefacts and show-pieces acquired from as far as China. The sacred symbol of the winged spirit guide, Farohar adorned the walls. The prophet's photos were also present throughout, engraved on lamps, on ceramic plates, knits and so on.

Mr.Vajifdar explained that his grandfather was in the silk trade, and had two factories in Yokohama and Shanghai. The factory in Yokohama was destroyed by a Tsunami, and he sold his other factory to repay back debts he had taken from people. Mr.Vajifdar explains that his grandpa could have easily applied for insolvency and washed his hands off this matter, but he chose to the higher way to settle all accounts, thus harming none.

This sense of noble virtues runs through all Parsis. The prophet, Zoroaster wanted nothing from his followers, but just three simple ways of life: good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. These three things form the basic tenets of the good life that the Parsis lead.

“The best prayers that please Ahura Mazda are good deeds.”

As Mr.Vajifdar explained, Zoroaster or Zarathushtra, was the world's first prophet, trying to simplify religion and urge his followers to, above all, lead a good life.

Mr.Vajifdar is a well read man. He not only knows his religion well, he knows others too. He explained that before any of the religions existed, there was an Indo-Iranian religion which existed throughout. They worshipped the five basic elements of Earth, much like the Hindus' Panchatattva and the Parsi's holy fire the fire is an al purifying element and the Parsis 'revere' it. Every evening a 'divo' is lit, 18 days before the Navroze, the new year, the lamp is lit throughout in memory of passed souls. But for every religion to survive, it needs a framework, and thus arose the class of Parsi priests, who studied Zoroaster's teachings and carried out the rituals. Hinduism is all pervasive in their religion. Just like the Hindus, the Parsis tie a sacred thread around their body called the kushti. They follow the male genealogy. In effect that if a male marries a non-Parsi girl, his kids are accepted into the Parsi faith after the Navjote ceremony. The debate over conversions has emerged over the past few years, due to dwindling numbers and increased inter-caste marriages. Also the number of births are very low compared to the number of deaths per year.

The Parsi community debates healthily though its newspapers, most of which are run by the Parsis themselves. Bilingual in nature(English and Gujarati), these are read by others too, the most popular of which is the Mumbai Samachar run by the Camas. The debates openly criticise the Bombay Parsi Punchayet, the administering body for the Parsis on issues related to tenancy, priests, conversions, etc.

“Every man goes down to his death bearing in his hands only that which has given away.”

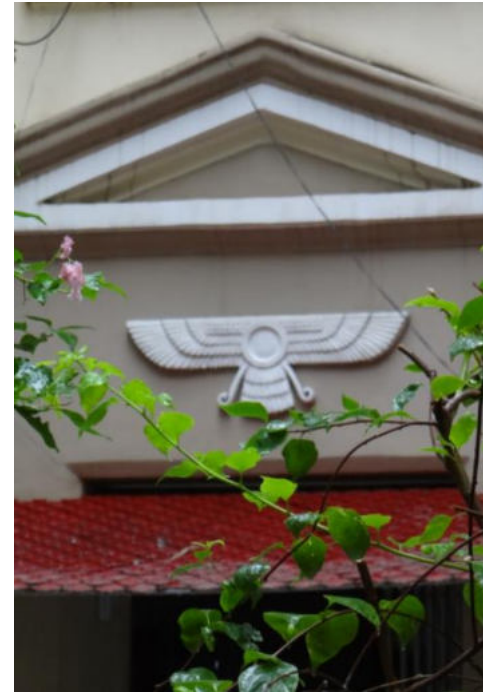
Mr.Vajifdar also spoke lovingly about the stories of the first Parsis to arrive in India, of the king, the glass of milk and the spoon of sugar. Since they arrived on the coast of Gujarat, the Parsis chose to adopt Gujarati as their mother tongue. The king put down some conditions, some of which were very strange. One such request was that the Parsi marriage processions would happen only after dark, a custom that is followed even today. The Parsis on the other hand decided to preserve their faith by deciding that one can be a Parsi only by birth. No conversions were allowed. This was very helpful in preserving their way of life. The isolation from outside world gave rise to the quirks unique to the community.

Mr.Vajifdar said that much like the Baugs, the Parsi minds are walled fortresses. They have their ideas about the world and other concepts strongly set in their mind. It has helped prevent dilution of their beliefs.

When asked about the stereotyping Parsis, Mr.Vajifdar replied that it was ok until it was wrongly depicted or derogatory. But the modern Parsi hardly dresses everyday in white overalls and the tall black cap. They dress in those traditional costumes only on weddings, navjote ceremonies and funerals. The stereotype of a Parsi loving his car can be traced to a Parsi loving all his possessions. Mr.Vajifdar said that theirs is one of the oldest religions, since it has survived so much it has built an attitude that anything worth preserving is loved for and cared for.

The Parsis are proud to have shaped the city and they love it. They long to own a flat in the new skyscrapers but the allure of baugs keeps them put. The baugs are their lives. The new trends arising in this closed knit community are disturbing them, but they are today closer and more special than they ever were.

Glimpses of Dadar Parsi Colony



Glimpses of Dadar Parsi Colony



Yazdani Bakery, Horniman Circle



Glimpses of Rustom Baug





Glimpses of
Rustom Baug



Parsi portrayals in media

The unique traits and quirks of Parsis has been depicted in various media, often to incite humor along with a tinge of pathos and to evoke an old-world nostalgia.

Rohinton Mistry's books have held Parsis as central characters and offer unique insights into daily lives of Bombay's Parsis. In the book 'Vyakti ani Valli' by Marathi author P.L. Deshpande, an entire chapter is dedicated to sketching a Parsi character named Pestonjee, who is clearly an amalgamation of all the Parsi people the author might have come across.

But the Hindi cinema has picked three or four of Parsi traits and endlessly parodied it. It is perhaps the medium with the greatest visual impact in India. It has shown us the simpleton Parsi. The quarelling Parsi. The white wearing Parsi. The fat Parsi. The lean Parsi. The old Parsi Aunty. The car-loving old Parsi Uncle.

And yet, there have been some movies that have actually delved into the Parsi mind and tried to depict them as humans coming to terms with life's predicaments in their own quirky ways!

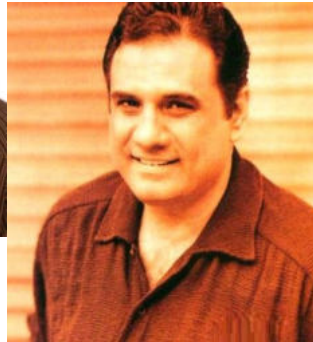
Famous Parsi Actors



1. Sohrab Modi



2. Dinyar Contractor



3. Boman Irani



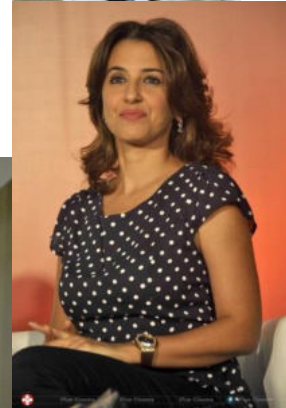
4. Cyrus Broacha



5. Kurush Deboo



6. Daisy Irani

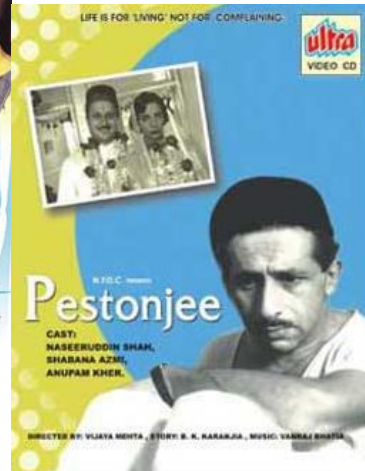


7. Perizaad Zorabian

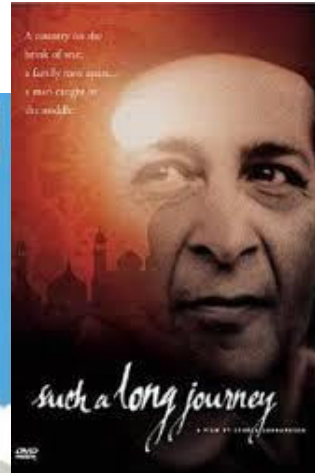
Notable Movies on Parsis



1. Khatta Meetha



2. Pestonjee



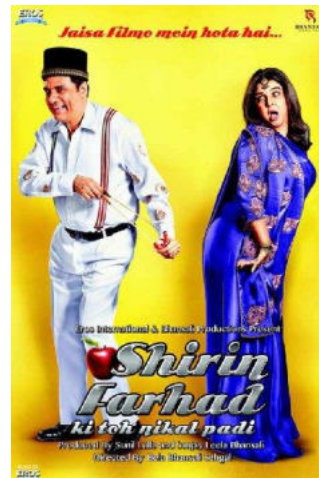
3. Such A Long Journey



4. 1947 Earth



5. Little Zizou



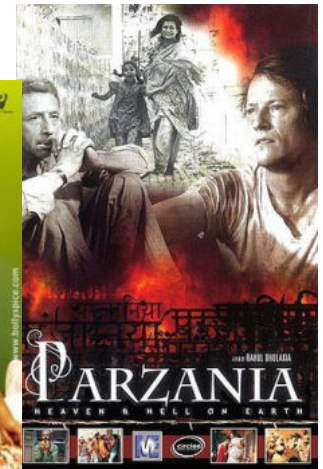
6. Shirin Farhad Ki Toh Nikal Padi



7. Being Cyrus

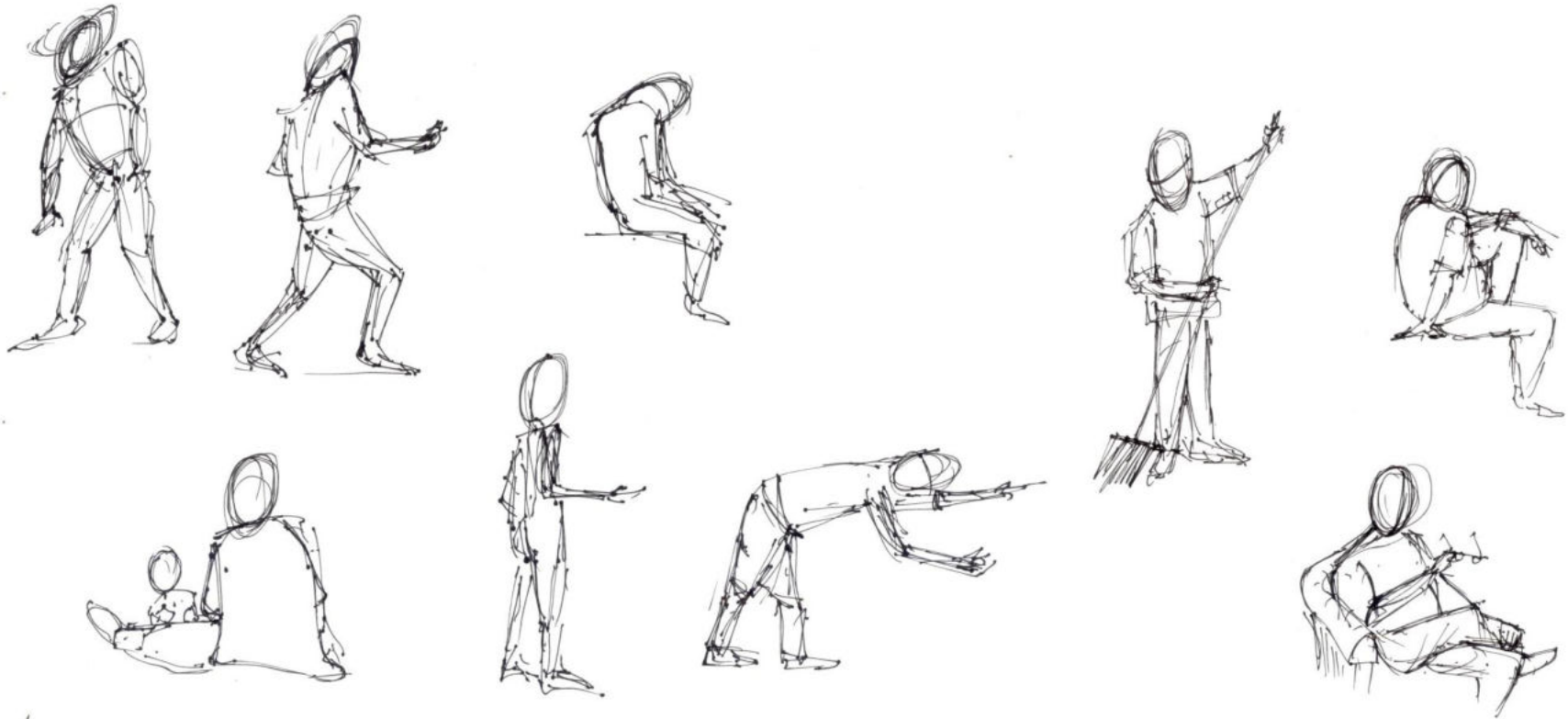


8. Ferrari Ki Sawaari



8. Parzania

Character development



Gesture Drawings



“What?”



“Wait”



“Don’t make me mad.”



“Let me remove
my glasses.”



“No, no.. You are
mistaken.”



“yaaaawn!”

Character expressions



Character practice:
Singham

Parsi characters



Parsi characters



The character development evolved by amalgamating features of Parsis observed.

I decided to develop characters from one family giving each member a distinct trait, particular to the Parsis, thus developing a holistic Parsi character.

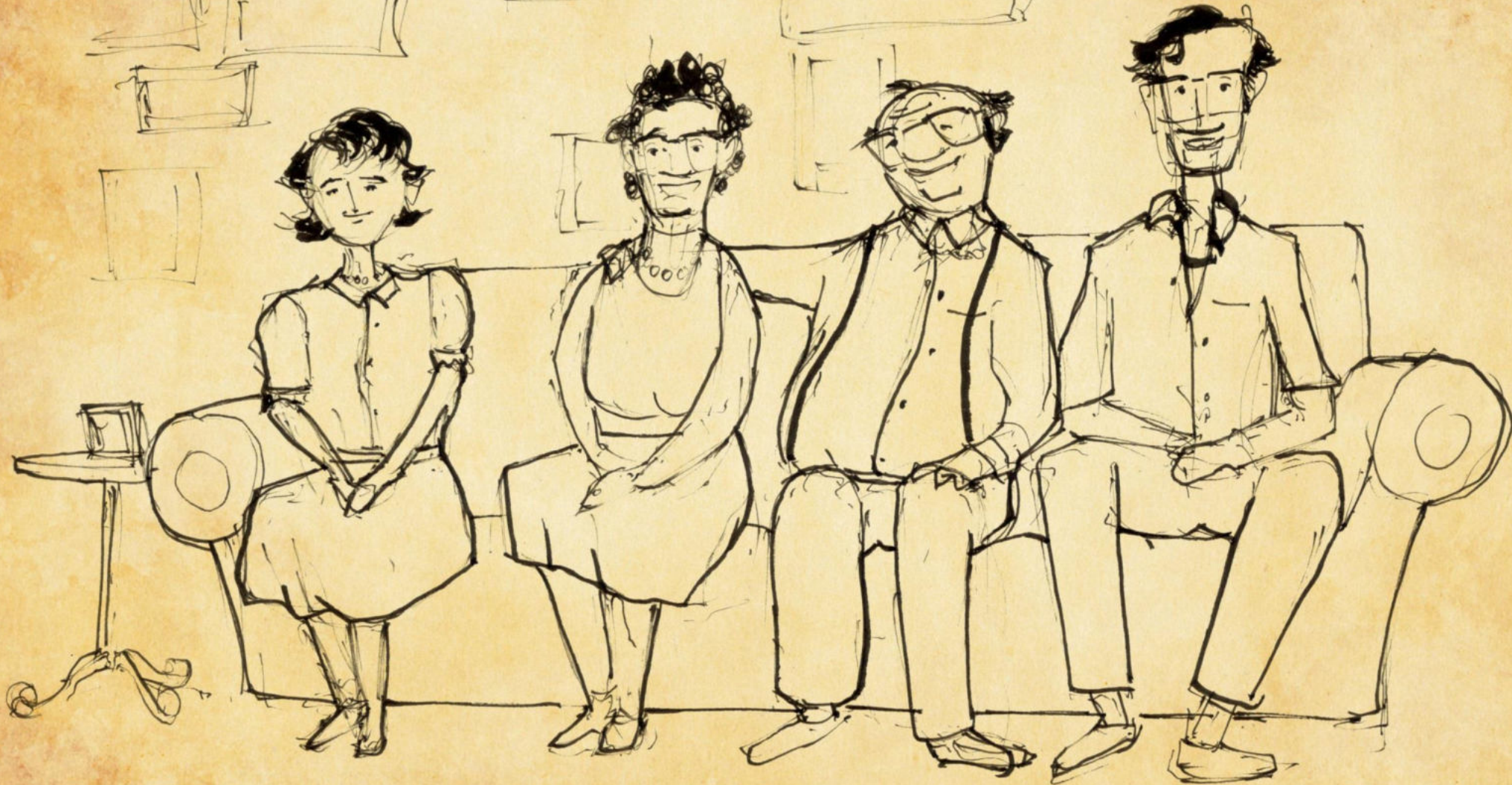
The four characters that are shown in the following pages are from a neo-liberal Parsi family. I have also shown some secondary characters that are a part of the Parsi paraphernalia.

The Sethna Family:

The Sethna family is a respectable Parsi family staying in Rustom Baug, a quiet, peaceful haven in Byculla. The family has four members: Mr. Pestonjee Sethna, his wife Mrs. Jeroo Sethna, their son Rustom Sethna and their daughter, Jojo Sethna.

The Sethna family has been living here since Pestonjee's father leased this house from the Bombay Parsi Punchayet in the early 1900s.

The house is adorned with antiques acquired from world over. The walls are full of frames of their family and ancestors.



Jojo Sethna

Jeroo Sethna

Pesi Sethna

Rusi Sethna



Pestonjee Sethna

Pestonjee Sethna or Pesi Uncle as he is fondly known, is a respectable Parsi gentleman in his mid 60s staying in Rustom Baug, Byculla. A former banker, Pesi Uncle owns shares in almost all companies of the Tata group, for whom there is a special place in his heart. Soft spoken and gentle, Pesi uncle is liked by one and all.

While at home, he normally wears loose-fitting sudrah. He reads the Bombay Samachar, the bilingual daily and often writes letters to them.

He has taken good care of the belongings and heirlooms of his ancestors. He often says that the chair was handcrafted by his grandfather.

He often spends his evening at the local Parsi café, he loves his daughter Jojo very much. He also loves his son Rusi equally, but wishes that the young guy would do something in his life.

Pesi Uncle is overall a lovable guy.

Jeroo Sethna

Jeroo Sethna or Jeroo Aunty is Pestonjee's wife. She is now sixty. Jeroo was married early into the Sethna family. She grew up in the neighbouring Jer Baug at Byculla. She and Pestonjee were childhood sweethearts.

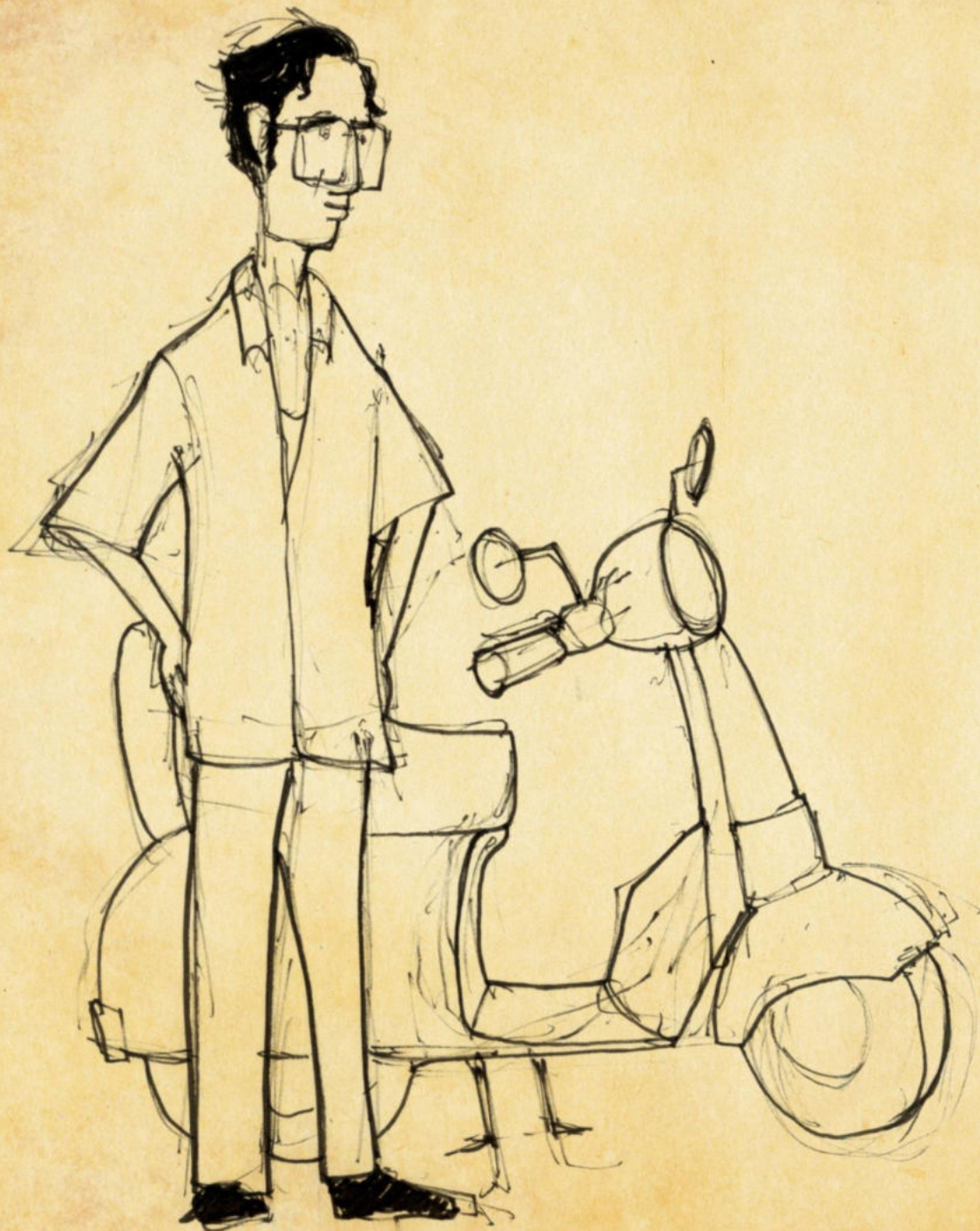
Jeroo Aunty is known throughout the Baug for her culinary skills. Her 'dhansak' and 'patri ni machli' are especially loved by her son's friends.

Her other hobbies include gardening. In their small balcony, she spends entire afternoon tending to her plants.

Now that Pesi Uncle too has retired, Jeroo asks him to pray with her. She is a fair bit religious and a mildly authoritarian mother.

She usually wears sleeveless gowns and beautiful pearl necklace that was her mother's heirloom. When she visits the agiary, she wears pristine white sarees with intricate borders.





Rustom Sethna

Rustom Sethna or Rusi is the colony's do-gooder. He is a lovable simpleton in his mid 20s. Nobody knows what Rusi has studied but he's the handyman for everything that breaks down in the colony. From scooters to fridges to televisions, Rusi knows to repair all of them.

Rusi is usually seen wearing loose fitting shirts, he doesn't pay much attention to his dressing. The huge square glasses give him a knowledgeable look.

Now that father has retired, Jeroo is constantly urging Rusi to take up a job, but the colony is where Rusi is at his best. From small children to the old Aunties, Rusi is everyone's favorite. Rusi knows he will eventually have to take up a job that his father has brought through influence, but he vows to be available for the colony, after whom he was named.

Jojo Sethna

Jojo Sethna is Jeroo and Pesi's daughter, the younger of the Sethna siblings. Jeroo has been moulded into a fairly religious girl by her mother, who wishes that she be married into a respectable Parsi family. She shares a special bond with her brother, Rusi, and often defends him when people try to take advantage of him. She has the same fiery spirit as her mother.

But Jojo has her own dreams, and unlike Rusi, she wants to fly beyond from the colony's walls.

Like her mother, Jojo also wears a pearl necklace. Her wardrobe is full of free flowing silk dresses, shirts and scarves.

Even so, she is a proud Parsi and adheres to the Prophet's tenets of good deeds, good thoughts and good words.





The Sethna family is now worried about Jojo's marriage. Jeroo knows her daughter is a free-wheeling spirit and she can't be bound within the Baug.

Even as the couple would like to talk to her, Pesi Uncle is very clear that he would not stop his daughter from choosing her life partner. Even if that meant standing up to 'maari Jeroo'.



Farookh Taraporewala

No one knows how old Farookh uncle is. He knows everyone and has been around forever, the self proclaimed messiah of Rustom Baug. He not only upholds the faith, but also keeps vigil in the colony on the little kids who damage cars while playing, ring doorbells errantly and so on. Farookh uncle is every kid's nightmare.

Even so, the kids continue pestering him. Very little is known of his family, he stays in the uppermost flat of the farthest building in Rustom Baug and it is rumoured that his son married a girl from the other religion and migrated to USA.

Well wishers like Pesi Sethna and others still try to include him in social events and gatherings where everyone is unconditionally gracious to the 'Messiah of Rustom Baug'





Meherwan Zend

The owner of the quaint Irani Bakery around the corner, Meherwan Zend has seen three generations grown in front of him. His mawa cakes are especially famous, he proclaims to have a secret ingredient that his mother invented. Whatever, the bakery has been around for a long time now. After his father, Mehr Uncle has been on the counter ever since. He is now old and tired, but he has still lost none of his business acumen.

He is a close friend of Pesi Sethna and his son Rusi. Pesi, though a generation younger than him, once helped the bakery out of a thick spot and has been a regular at the eatery. But what brightens up Mehr Uncle's day is when kids like Rusi walk into his café and call out loud, "Kem cho Uncle?"



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