

Themes of Immigration in the Novels of Rohinton Mistry

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INTRODUCTION

Rohinton Mistry was born and brought up in Mumbai in the mid fifty's, migrated to Canada at the age of 23. Mistry belongs to that class of the Indian authors who shifted their base from India to somewhere else but throughout their lives they continue missing their mother land. We can easily recall a beautiful song of movie "Namste London" which says "Main Jahan rahoon main kahin bhi rahoon Teri yaad saath he" means "where ever I am but your memories are always there with me."

The pain and suffering of not being with the people who are like you, who speaks your language can be better, felt and expressed by exiled or immigrant writers. Such people might be physically away from their own motherland but deep in their heart always keep on missing their motherland. The impact and influence of the age, psyche, cultural heritage and political up down on the Author's mind is due to the fact that later is constantly influenced by the spirit of all above fastness and reacts to it vividly and vigorously.

Rohinton Mistry is a master story teller who sketches India in all his novels. As an immigrant writer, he very well knows the socio – political events taking place in India and also know changing trends and patterns of culture and politics. There are only few Indian novelists who have effectively portrayed the burning topics of Indian political scenario, these includes the era of emergency period in 70s, demolition of Babri mosque and its aftermath during 90s and the corrupt existing political system and a strong urge to revive the old cultural heritage of India Rohinton Mistry presents a picture of various characters with an impression of Indianness in their mind set, behavior and psychology. Each and Every character is being influenced by some or the other factor may it be their surroundings or social arena, their family background or educational background. In "Family Matters" we can strongly observe the shadow of Indianness in his various characters, through his characters Mistry has shown his own attachment with his motherland, Indians are usually so close to their motherland that they feel a strong bond between them and their birthplace, and this is a unique beautiful feeling which is being possessed by nobody else in this world. . In all his books Mistry has quoted beautifully the moments, filled with emotions and respect for his motherland.

Being a Parsi not only by birth by culture also he shows his responsibilities towards the development of Parsi culture as well, because of his deep rootedness in his culture he knows it very well that other cultures also need to be taken care of along with it he has also discussed the treatment given to the minorities and to the Schedule caste and Schedule tribes in India, thus he believes in the wide canvas of different Indian culture and community. The novels of Rohinton Mistry represents various Cultures, Religions and Languages and he blends all these in a holistic manner, his viewpoint is represented in his novels and the characters he has chooses also bear to this. In almost all his novels we find an Indian setting which includes Cultures, Families,

Characters and language pattern. The main theme of all his novels is the struggle of a common man for a happy and peaceful life.

Although he left India in 1975 and does not often go back, the beauty and delicacy with which Mistry has portrayed the experience of immigration, the immense pain of not being with your own people, no other author has done it so far.

“Although Mistry confesses in the *Literary Journal Rung* (1993) that his departure from India was partly encouraged by the expectations of his peers, especially of his generations. “After finishing college in Bombay or elsewhere in India, one had to go abroad for higher studies. If possible one had to find a job after finishing a Masters or a PhD in the states or in England, find a job and settle in the country. That’s how success is defined by Indians, so that is why I say that coming to Canada was in some ways decided for me”. Rohinton Mistry is a writer who makes up a part of the Indian Diaspora. Moreover, he is also a Zoroastrian Parsi whose ancestors were exiled by the Islamic conquest of Iran, putting him and his kind in Diaspora in the Indian subcontinent. During India's colonized period, the Parsis were particular favorites of the British rulers. Both parties co-operated well together, and this entente has often been dubbed "the psychological Diaspora" of the Parsis. After the partition of India in 1947, some Parsis found themselves (literally) toeing "the line of discontent" between two warring regions. This situation provoked many departures to England and to America, marking the western Diaspora of the Parsi. Like other Parsi writers, Mistry's work is guided by this experience of double displacement. As a Parsi, Mistry finds himself at the margins of Indian society, and hence his writing challenges and resists absorption by the dominating and Hindu-glorifying culture of India.

Mistry has also experimented with linguistic hybridity and celebrates the use of the Parsi language.

Shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize, **Such a Long Journey** (1991), Mistry's first novel, manages brilliantly to portray Indian culture and family life setting it against the backdrop of the subcontinent's volatile postcolonial politics. The action takes place in 1971 in Bombay at the moment when war breaks out between India and Pakistan, over what is to become Bangladesh. This political backdrop is the canvas upon which the troubled life of Gustad Noble (note the patronym) and family is played out. He is the undisputed protagonist of the novel. Mistry expertly marries the major events in India with those in the private sphere of the Noble family and of the other important characters in the novel.

The microcosmic family dimension of the storyline is not only played upon a political background: quite the contrary, the story shows to which degree political and personal realities are intertwined and how much the microcosm echoes the macrocosm, since the lives of the characters are deeply affected by local corruption and the government's inadequacy. When it was published, this first novel earned itself the Governor General's Award and the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the best book of the year.”(143-150)

Some of the lines from the recent novel of Rohinton Mistry’s **“Family Matters”** say about the aspect of immigration as a wrong and painful decision, the protagonist Nariman Vakeel during a conversation with his son in law Yezad, expresses his happiness on Yezad’s decision of not going to Canada. He says:

“I am glad you did not” repeated Nariman” because I think immigration is an enormous mistake, the biggest any one can make in their life. The loss of house leaves a hole that never fills.” This father in law’s words brought a lump on his throat, reminding him to Mr. Kapoor’s

photographs of Jehanger Mansion and Hughes road his lost house. That feeling returned of grief and emotions and a strange calm". (220)

Mistry is a writer with a great and strong power of imagination and deep insight into human psyche, even all the political up down and social scenario is painted with all realism. He is such an artist with pen that he has poured all his emotions on paper with all the reality in to it, be it the political affairs of India, or the religious issues. A scene from "Family Matters" where the conversation between a middle class family in India about the corruption in the Government shows Mistry's grip over Indian political affairs.

"Corruption is in the air we breathe .this nation specializes in turning honest people in to crooks" Right chief. "The answer unfortunately is yes". "The country has gone to the dogs and not well bred dogs either but pariahs" "May be the BJP and Shivsena coalition will improve the things "said Jal 'we should give them a chance" Yezad laughed "If a poisonous snake was in front of you, would you give it a chance ?These two parties encouraged the Hindutva extremists to destroy the Babri Mosque."(28-29)

In the above lines the patrogonist of the novel Nariman Vakeel discusses with his son in law Yezad and son Jal about the corruption and irregularities in the government.

Mistry has mastered not only the art of weaving and knitting nostalgic memories like many of exiled authors of his time and genre are having but at the same time he has a smart sense, he is sharp enough to capture all the social, political events and incidents taking place in India even if he was not present here at that time. All the characters of Mistry speak about his heart. The few of the examples we can quote for displaying the feeling of dissatisfaction of Mistry and at the same time the true picture of Indian psyche fighting for the sake of religion but not for the country:-

"Just think back to the Babri Mosque riots." "You're right", conceded Jal sometimes hell does seep through." You're agreeing with his silly examples? Said Coomy indignantly.

"The riots were in the streets, not indoors." "I think Pappa is referring to the old Parsi couple who died in their bedroom," said Jal.

"You remember that, don't you, Coomy?" said Nariman. The goondas who assumed Muslims were hiding in Dalal Estate and set fire to it?"(6)

Rohinton Mistry is a Canada based Indian writer who continues to write about India his home land even when he is thousands of kilometer away from it. In his latest, most recent Novel "Family Matters" he again tries to revise the memories of his home country, his community (Parsi) his family, his people. The present paper deals with this nostalgic perspective of socio-political scene of India.

It is a well crafted and drafted story where Rohinton Mistry chronicles the troubles of the Parsi community which I say proud community struggling to meet the demands imposed on them by the suburban jungles of Bombay. The central character in the story is Nariman Vakeel; 79 years old retired English Professor, who lives in a depilated seven room's house with Jal and Coomey, his middle-aged unmarried step children. Roxana, his daughter lives with her husband Yezad and kids Jahangir and Murad some distance away. The basic theme of novel revolves around a middle class Parsi family of Bombay ,this family is no way different from typical Indian middle class family, the story is all about a seventy years old Nariman Vakeel suffering from Parkinson's Disease, he is the Head of the Family and is a retired professor of English Literature, he is bound to stay with his step children Coomy and Jal ,he lives with them in Chateau Felicity a 7 room Apartment ,but it is so unfortunate that in that big house ,he feels very

lonely, his step children's are least bothered about his loneliness. The following lines show that how a Father is being treated as a burden in his old days.

"I agree with you papa, the sources of pleasure are many our mind contains worlds enough to amuse us for an eternity plus you have your books and record player and radio why leave the flat at all? It's like heaven in here. This building isn't called Chateau Felicity for nothing. I would lock out the hell of the outside world and spend all my days indoors." "You couldn't," said Nariman, "Hell has ways of permeating heaven's membrane." He began softly, "'Heaven, I'm in heaven,' " which irritates Coomy even more, and he stopped humming.(6).

In these novel Nariman's memories of the past expose the reader to earlier moments in the city's, and the nation's history in a novel that moves across three generations of the same family.

Mistry has concentrated on the pessimistic image of his lost motherland gives an insight into urban India and mentions the vexation faced by the middle class people in India. The writer presents a cross section of Bombay - In "Family Matters" the protagonist Nariman Vakeel, who is fond of taking evening walks, always, has to face the resistance by his step children Jal and Coomey.

"Even with my healthy legs, Pappa walking is a hazard" said Jal continuing the daily fuss over his stepfather's outing. "Shoes without socks? Like a Pathan said Coomey "And see, how your hands are shaking" you can't even tie laces." "Yes, you could help me." "Happily - if you were going somewhere important like the doctor, or fire temple for Mamma's prayer. But I won't encourage foolishness. How many people with Parkinson's do what you do? I am not trekking in Nepal. A little stroll down the lane that's all. (5)

Through the walks of Nariman Vakeel, the central character of this novel, Mistry wants to portray the whole scene of a busy road in Bombay. Some of the pieces in Family Matters which describes the road side picture.

"With his umbrella, which he used as walking stick, Nariman Vakeel emerged from Chateau felicity. The bustling life was like air for starving lungs after the stale emptiness of the flat. He went to the lane where the vegetable vendors congregated their baskets and boxes, overflowing with greens and legumes and fruits and tubers, transformed the corner into a garden. French beans, sweet potatoes coriander, green chilies, cabbages, cauliflowers bloomed under the street lights, hallowing the dusk with their color and fragrance. From time to time, he bent down to touch. Voluptuous onions and glistening tomatoes enticed his fingers the purple brinjal and earthy carrots were irresistible. The subjivalas know, he wasn't going to buy anything but they did not mind and he liked to think they understood why he came.

In the flower stall two men sat like musicians, weakling strands of marigold, garlands of jasmine and lily and rose their fingers picking, plucking, knotting, playing a floral melody. The bhel-puri stall was a sculptured landscape with its golden pyramid of sev the snow mountains of murmura hillocks of puris an, in among their valleys, in aluminum containers, pools of green and brown and red chutneys. A man selling bananas strolled up and down the street. The bunches were stacked high and heavy up on his outstretched arm, a balancing and strong man act rolled into one. It was all magical as a circus. Felt Nariman, and reassuring, like a magical show."(7)

Mistry's description of sabjivallas and phool walls secures to be so realistic as if he has just passed away from those streets and the smell of those vegetables, fruits, flowers and Bhel puris is still with him.

It seems that the expatriate writer has to work harder than the native writer to create authenticity. The simple reason for this is the fact that for an emigrant writer everything is based on his memories, and to create originality on the basis of memories only is a little difficult task.

“As both Canadian and Indian, Mistry’s work is a paradoxical chronicling of the similarities in the experience of colonialism in two of Britain’s former colonies while unraveling the grave dissimilarities in the multicultural mosaic of the two countries. The vitality of his writing springs from posing this stark contrast in the histories, culture, languages and politics of the two countries that Mistry inhabits. It is the politics of constructing this contrast as a difference demanding ‘deference’ and self location, as an effort to topple imperial hierarchies, and as an attempt to give identity and voice to such ‘non-normative’ differences, that give Mistry a refreshing ambiguity and complexity”.(20)

But, as far as Mistry is concerned, for him these fragments of memory were great enough to recapture the time he has spent on the streets of Bombay. The moments, lived by him are being re lived by him during this depiction of his homeland. Even at one phase, the fiction of Rohinton Mistry seems to have a nostalgic look at the community he has left behind. His novels are concerned with the experience of the Parsi in India so along with cherishing the part memories of his own country (India). Mistry keeps on smoothen his inner self by writing about his own community (Parsi). Mistry has a vision that involves both the community centered existence of the Parsi’s and their involvement with the wider National framework.

As we can see in his another piece of fiction “Such a Long Journey”, the main action of the story revolves around the Parsi community of Khodadad Building along with pure Indian Background. During the journey of reading “Such a Long Journey” the reader strongly feels that Mistry has started recognizing the importance of religion and rituals and ritual ceremonies in the construction of human identity. Similar projection of human emotions, psyche, religious rituals and struggle is also depicted in his next venture “A Fine Balance”. It is all about the sufferings and difficulties faced by common man in India, the atrocities done on the people of higher caste on lower caste people.

“A Fine Balance” is the story that tells; how four characters – Dina Dalal, Om, Ishvar Darji and Maneck Kolah – come together to live in the madness of Bombay. The narrative describes their backgrounds with their loads of woes and miseries. The comic lightness of their present-day interactions is offset by the tragic depth of their past experiences. This is one novel that allows Mistry to present as a painter, paints beautifully with all the dark colors the tragic beauty of the tragic beauty of the city of Bombay and venture out in to the rural horrors of India’s oppressive caste-system.

Mistry uses realism to present the human story in a documentary narrative, alleviated by immense compassion for his characters.

Through his every character, Mistry re lives his own time that he has spent on the streets of Bombay (INDIA), his mother land.

In first novel “Such a Long Journey”, Gustad is nostalgic about the past, the happy carefree days of his childhood, the rich family background, the holidays and the smell of his father’s carpentry business. Mistry somewhere relates himself with his characters so that the personal grief and nostalgia helps Mistry to deeper and sharper his vision and giving the layers of intensity to every character Mistry is shaping up or framing in his novels. The chronological journey of Mistry’s various work of fiction shows an interesting gradual movement towards the contemporary.

Rohinton Mistry has shown Indianness in every aspect of his novels. His first novel "Such a long Journey" has a background set up of early 70s during the war against Pakistan. In "A fine Balance" the figure of Indira Gandhi and political rhetoric has a direct impact on the lives of the four main characters of the novel. "Family Matters" depicts and deals with India of 90s where Hindutva ideologies and its repercussions on the life of common ordinary citizen of India can be seen. Mistry is simultaneously a writer of the Diaspora. Through his writings on Indian background he does not work only with the traditional Diaspora themes of nostalgia for motherland but he also has a sense of exile.

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