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Quest for Home and Memory: Rohinton Mistry's Novels: A Diasporic Study

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Rohinton Mistry is one of the eminent writers of Indian origin. He migrated to Canada in 1975. His major works are *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1996) and *Family Matters* (2002). The prominent purpose of this paper is to discuss and analyse Mistry's novels with the Diaspora perspective. Its purpose is also to bring out and analyse his quest for Home and Memory.

Diaspora is a loaded term that brings to mind various contested ideas and images. It can be positive site for the affirmation of an identity, or conversely a negative site of fears of losing that identity (1). Diaspora is also a popular term in current research as it captures various phenomenon that are prevalent in the numerous discourses devoted to current transnational globalisation: borders, migration, "illegal" immigration, repatriation, exile, refuses, assimilation, multiculturalism, hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. While in their transnational formation diasporic communities extend particular nationally confined boundaries, in their actual life they are deeply embedded in particular context. From this ambiguousness situatedness arise both the strengths and weaknesses of the theory and everyday practice of diaspora (2). International diaspora studies have developed significantly in recent times and together with the Post-Colonial theory, they have become a major new theoretical and methodological approach in the study of culture and literature. Of major interest in the field are questions pertaining to the interconnectedness of gender, class and race as well as problematization of subjectivity and identity in transnationalist frameworks (3).

Diasporic writing raises questions regarding the definitions of 'home' and 'nations'. Schizophrenia or nostalgia are often preoccupations of these writers as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures. The first imaginative work that lay the subsequent narratives of the diaspora is a collection of short stories of Seepersad Naipaul concerned with the lives and struggle of sugar diaspora. The new diaspora can be exemplified by the uneasy interaction between gender, class, ethnicity and nation states (4). For sugar diaspora 'home' signifies an end to itinerant wandering in the putting down of roots while for new diaspora it is linked to a strategical espousal of rootlessness. The history of immigration is the history of alienation and its consequences. For every freedom won, a tradition is lost. The last four decades have witnessed a growth of a new category of Indian English writing which could be called non-resident India. The works of these writers of the diaspora focuses on the 'imaginary homelands' which Salman Rushdie posits, migratory identities and hybridity. Diasporic writing, a post-colonial scenario, elaborates issues such as marginalization, cultural insularity, social disparity, racism, ethnicity etc... Oscillating between the attractions of home and those from new, the migrants wage a continue psychic battle (5).

Rohinton Mistry watches home in the past, present, and future. He participates actively through memory in the history, culture, and politics of India. Mistry advocates that Parsis who

migrated to India from Iran feel expatriate. He also says that low birth rate; late migration lessened the population of Parsi people. In an interview Mistry has said that when Parsis have disappeared from the face of the earth, his writing will “preserve a record of how they lived to some extent.” (50) (Nilufer Berucha) He delineates how the down trodden, the minorities are at the periphery in India. He challenges and resists the totalization of the dominant culture, with humanistic perspective within India itself. Rohinton Mistry also traces linguistic hybridity, cultural hybridity, and political events and celebrates the Parsi idiom in his writing. His novels are capable of showing that how in Postcolonial period the Parsis are thrown among other Indian people to struggle in order to earn their livelihood. This is very clear from his collection of short stories *Tales From Firozsha Baag*, very first story ‘*Auspicious occasion*’. In this story Rustomji and Mehroo believe themselves to be elite Parsis. They are at the verge of being banal, but Rohinton Mistry manages two incidents that make them realise their ground. The first incident takes place with Rustomji when he is spat upon by a pan beetle chewer, His elite consciousness is more thrilled when he abuses the beetle chewer and they come and nearly beat him up. He takes his dentures out of his mouth and pleads with them not to beat him. Second incident when Mehroo comes to know that the Parsi priest is killed by his own servant. This is how Mistry tries to show that how much the Parsi image is degraded in de-colonized India.

Authors make comparable distinctions between the physical space one inhabits and as the symbolic conceptualization of where one belongs. (6) (Salih 2003:70) an ‘actual place of lived experience and a metaphorical space of personal attachment and identification’ (7) (Arumbruster 2002:120). How much alienated one feels in diaspora after migration is well narrated in the story “Lend me your Light”. The protagonist of the story says “I am guilty of the sin of hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth and paying the price in burnt out eyes: I Tiresias blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the another one to come in Toronto.” (180). Mistry narrates how the Parsi community had to struggle in order in Indian society. The last story in this collection “Swimming Lessons” is the only story that is fully set in Canada. Though it is set in Canada but it is juxtaposed with Indian memory. The failure of the protagonists to master both the water of Chowpaty and swimming pool water in Canada symbolically is used to show the failure of the protagonist to acclimatize himself both in India and Canada. As the protagonist opens his eyes deep in the water it starts becoming clear to him that India and Canada are two different societies.

Clearly social factors play an important role here. Home can be ascribed or denied to individuals and groups by public opinion and significant others. Collective memories of home and dominant discourses of otherness inform and restrict their options for creating notions of (non)home. Despite their attachment to certain places or social contemplation both here and there (descendants of) sometimes feel unable to identify with these as homes because there is no place for them in collective memories or everyday interactions: ‘It is quite possible to feel at home in a place and, yet, the experience of social exclusions may inhibit public proclamations of the place as home.’ (8) (Brah 1996-193). Though he lives in Canada still if we talk about his novels all is set in Mumbai and deal with anxiety of India- Pakistan war, India-China war, Indira Gandhi regime and emergency during her regime, frustration among Indians during emergency etc... His very first novel *Such A Long Journey* has been hailed as a masterly attempt at memory based on fact in Indian fiction in English. Gustad Noble the protagonist of the novel holds on to his dignity, strength and humanity in a sweltering tide of disappointment, confusion, betrayal and corruption. (Amritji Singh 1993, 214). He has two sons and a daughter. The elder son is Sohrab who had qualified I.I.T.

exam but refuses to take admission. Throughout the whole novel the memory haunts Gustad that his son would have completed I.I.T.degree,if he would have taken admission.

Gustad's grandfather was a maker of furniture, a man who made it as "stout-hearted as his own being" Gustad's father was a "lover of books who tried to read like a book..." and possessed "the finest bookstore in the country." But due to illness his father had to lose all his possession. All the above mentioned memories are the comfort zone for Gustad, when he finds himself to be surrounded in the moments of agony. He always pines to possess a book-case as he says, "It's all family really need, A small book-case full of the right books, and you are set for life"(103). The memory of his friend Jimmy whom he regarded as his family members always knocks on his mind. Jimmy sends eighty lakh through Belmorla to Gustad to deposit in bank. He manages to deposit but he thinks that Jimmy has betrayed him. He later he comes to know by Ghulam that, "you are wrong, he did care. He made sure you did not get into trouble after he was arrested"(234). Further we can see how he remembers his memory for his bosom friend Dinshawji helped Gustad to deposit the vast sum of money in Gustad's possession for Belmorla's secret purpose. His quest for home is evident throughout his novels One incident is very evident and obvious he writes.

Names are so important. I grew up on Lamington road. But it has disappeared; in its place is Dadasaheb Bhadkhamkar Marg. My school on Carnac road . Now suddenly it is on Lokmanya Tilak Marg ... So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong name ? Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with these new names?... (74) Post colonialism is about a changing world, a world that has been changed by struggle and which its practitioners intend to change further. A lot of people don't like the term Postcolonial: now you may begin to see why. It disturbs the order of the world. It threatens privilege and power.... Its radical agenda is to demand equality and wellbeing for all human beings on this earth (9). Such is the condition of Gustad who is living in a condition of being dispossessed and is trying to improve his family condition and well-being of his friends and even of Tehmu who to some extent is mad. In *A Fine Balance* Mistry makes a home where characters like Qm Prakash his uncle Ishvar belong to Chamar caste, Dina Dalal and Manek belong to Parsi community. There is a continuous fight between the upper class Thakur Damsi, Pndit , the beggar master and (belong to upper class and down trodden people Omprakash, Ishvar, Dinadalal, Manek etc... It's not that there is a struggle between upper and down trodden classes for the balance of power but there is a struggle within their own class.

In the view of Parsis, India is a corrupt country. Rohinton Mistry exposes the condition of India in his much celebrated novel *Family Matters*. He writes, "Corruption is in the air we breathe. This nation specializes in turning honest people into crooks." (30) Through the character of Yezad Mistry shows his wish to migrate to Canada. It is crystal clear that he shows his wish to return to India. Though the story of the novel is based in Bombay but it has universal appeal. On the one hand Yezad is disturbed with the struggle of Indian society and wants to migrate to Canada; on the other hand there is Mr. Kapur who wants to embrace the whole of India. Mr. Kapur is the proprietor of the sport store. He believes in cosmopolitanism, he wants to contest election; he wants to make India free of corruption. He celebrates the festivals of all religions in his shop. Mistry shows Bombay a home underlying humanity that despite all its fanaticism and corruption, provides a heaven to all those who drift into the city, regardless of caste, ethnicity or religious alienation. (10) With the help of Kapur's character Mistry gives a glimpse of his pent up emotion to return to India and to travel in local trains like other Indians, to live without air conditioners like other Indian.

Thus to conclude we can say that home and memory are a living reality for Rohinton Mistry. Home and memory is not an analysis but an indivisible part of Diasporic science. Memory is the creative jostle between the notion of 'home is where the heart is', and home becomes the reality of multiple meaning, and Mistry is psychologically trapped between Irani Parsi memory and Indian memory.

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