

## Aspects of social issues in rohinton mistry's fiction

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### Abstract

A number of contemporary writers fictionalize these aspects of life. The Post-Colonial fictional writings often provide a revisiting to history and contest it existing interpretation. The fiction writers often mix fact and fiction to re-examine the earlier happenings, incidents, views and assumptions. Their major concern is the nature of reality that existed during the colonial period. These writers also concentrated on the political and social happenings of life. Rohinton Mistry has emerged as a significant literary figure in the twentieth century. He is a socio-political writer. He lived in Bombay. It makes him depicting the life of the Parsis in India and portraying the corruption of the city. The literature of Parsis is characterized by both the features of ethnocentric and minority discourse. They suffer from the sense of insecurity and identity crisis. There are the other disturbing ethnic features like declining population, late marriages, low birth rate, high rate of divorce, attitudes to the girl child, urbanization, alienation etc. All these issues are present in the Post- Independence Parsi writing in English. The literature of Parsi is group of people specific also.

**Keywords:** Social issue, rohinton mistry's fiction, literature of Parsis

### 1. 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 continue missing their mother land. The acute pain and feeling 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 hearts always keep on missing their motherland. Rohinton Mistry's works seeks to evolve a vision that involves both the community-centred existence of the Parsis and their involvement with the wider national framework. His novels are concerned with the experience of the Parsi in India. Mistry, re-narrates the history of his community and country as it has been in the post-Independence era.

In his novels, Rohinton Mistry depicts the Indian socio-economic and political life as well as Parsi Zoroastrian life, customs beliefs and religion. His character develops gradually from particular to general, depicting their idiosyncrasies, follies and foibles, from individual to family and gradually widening into the social, cultural and political world. His novels have a leisurely pace without ever losing the reader's interest and attention. The characters change and develop subtly and totally engrossed the reader. Mistry's characters and background revolve round the multi-storey of Mumbai. His stories mostly concerned themselves with the tribulations and the idiosyncrasy of Bombay Parsis. In his book *Tales from Firog Baag*, a collection of short stories, he describes the daily life of Parsi residents in an apartment in Bombay. Mistry explores the relationship of Parsis in their community, their cultural identity and uniqueness of their community living. Simultaneously he throws light as well as embraces the attempt to reconcile or unite different or opposing principles, practices, or parties of dispersed Parsi experience. Rohinton Mistry is a member of the Zoroastrian Parsi community whose ancestors were exiled by the Islamic rulers from North-eastern

Iran. Rohinton frequently uses Parsi culture, Parsi names, Parsi Characters and Parsi language in his novels.

### Review of Literature

**Adams, J. and Whitehead, P:** As far as Rohinton Mistry's place in Canadian literature is concerned, his migrant status renders him representative of a host of relatively new literary voices who have changed the way the notional category of a national literature is constructed. Lynette Hunter has described the search for a Canadian identity as one of the most consistent strands in Canadian literary criticism in recent years.

**Barthes, R., S/Z, trans. R. Miller, London, Jonathan Cape:** The *Shah-Namah* was composed by the gentleman scholar AbulKavim-i-Mansur, known as Firdausi (or Fardusi), circa 1000 CE. Writing at the time of Mahmud of Ghazna, Firdausi was both a Muslim and an Iranian, and his work fuses both traditions to create what has been described as the national epic of Iran. As far as Rohinton Mistry's place in Canadian literature is concerned, his migrant status renders him representative of a host of relatively new literary voices who have changed the way the notional category of a national literature is constructed. Lynette Hunter has described the search for a Canadian identity as one of the most consistent strands in Canadian literary criticism in recent years.

**Solzhenitsyn, A:** One of the most recent results of this downward spiral has been the rise to power of the regionalist and Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena in Mistry's beloved Bombay, and the creation of a monologist agenda associating Indians with Hinduism. Mistry's character Dinshawji is an early witness to their burgeoning power and Mrs Gandhi's responsibility for it Mistry's novels can indeed be described as novels of memory, and this memory centres most vividly on the Bombay of his youth. While some critics have found Mistry's version of the city to possess an anachronistic quality, shimmering through a haze of nostalgia as the

Bombay of the 1970s, when he left it, rather than as the contemporary metropolis with its contemporary problems

**Ryan, M:** Mistry's novels are truly polyphonic affairs. His tone captures both the rhythms, colloquialisms, hesitations and digressions of oral storytelling, and the social sweep and measured ironies of the novel. In this respect, he is one of those writers who complicate the sanctified critical categories which govern our language when we seek to classify literature. Words such as realism, modernism, postmodernism and so on do not adequately describe the 'feel' of a Mistry novel. The 'More Important Things' is a characteristic Mistry story in several ways. With its young narrator, Tony, it recalls the child's-eye narratives of *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, especially 'The Collectors', and anticipates aspects of *Such a Long Journey*, like family dynamics and generational conflicts, and the Indian tendency to superstition. Murray, P. and Dorsch, T. Rohinton Mistry's first volume, a collection of linked short stories, was published in the United States as *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag*, and in Canada and the United Kingdom as *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. It contained the two Hart House Prize-winning stories, 'Auspicious Occasion' and 'One Sunday', but also, in retrospect, can be seen to have introduced themes, symbols and techniques that recur in his later writings.

**Luhrmann, T. M:** Indicative of Mistry's style is a subtle, but increasingly sophisticated and insistent, temporal weaving of past and present, enabling an exploration of characters and their motivations, and of the intricate tangle of cause and effect which directs events on both personal and national levels. Likewise, symbols are never static in Mistry's writing. Places, water, music, the weather, cooking.

Kafka, F Mistry's characteristic tone is even and engaging, detached but sympathetic, finding wry humour in serious situations, even managing to trace the lineaments of the absurd in the tragic, but also drawing profound lessons from apparently trivial incidents and encounters. Yet it is at certain points also marked by almost whimsical flights of exaggeration, satire and meta fiction which carry the narrative high above the variegated, textured landscape of a prose filled with particulars and quotidian.

**Ghosh, A:** As this may suggest, a distinctive feature of Mistry's style is his deployment of irony. The gentle humour he extracts from characters' foibles and the absurdity of the situations in which they frequently find themselves at times recalls that other Indian master storyteller R. K. Narayan. In *Tales from Firoz sha Baag* irony takes the form either of a knowing relationship between characters – as when the older boys in the Baag appreciate the serious message of Nariman's stories which goes over the heads of his younger listeners – or a conscious invocation of literary heritage(s) as the narrator distances himself from his characters or from his younger, more naïve.

**Desai, B:** In fact, as Gerald Lynch makes clear, the short story cycle has proved particularly attractive for Canadian writers.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, its formal hybridity – part story collection, part novel – makes it a suitable medium for articulating what Rocio Davis calls the 'between-worlds' position of the 'ethnic' or migrant writer, and indeed of the postcolonial

condition in general.<sup>6</sup> This is a quality Mistry takes full advantage of as he crams *Tales from Firozsha Baag* with quotes and paraphrases from, and allusions to, a variety of literary traditions from India, Britain, Ireland, France, Russia and ancient Persia.

**Derrida, J:** Mistry establishes the interconnectedness of Baag life as he describes the mutual dependence of Najamai and her neighbours. She allows Tehmina from next door and the Boyces from the floor below to use her refrigerator to store their meat and much-needed supplies of ice, while they receive her morning deliveries of bread and milk and let her borrow their newspaper.

**Chakrabarty, D:** One of the most striking features of *Jakaylee's* narration is the vernacular style and her use and mixing of languages. Mistry captures the register of the half-educated, aging Goan servant as she laments in her idiosyncratic English, 'Nowadays my weight is much more than it used to be, and is getting very difficult for me to get up from floor. But I am managing' (TFB, 45). Her narrative is marked by untranslated words from Gujarati and Hindi, which puncture the stilted English, not merely adding 'local colour', but signifying 'a certain cultural experience which they cannot hope to reproduce but whose difference is validated by the new situation'.

**Social life & issues:** India became independent in 1947 but an amicable solution in electing a power toward rule was not feasible. Violence erupted among Hindus with Muslims resulting in the partition of India into India with Pakistan. Hindus with Sikhs as of Pakistan moved toward India while Muslims moved toward Pakistan. JawaharlalNehru became the primary elected Prime Minister of independent India followed by Lal Bahadur Shastri. In 1972, Mrs.IndiraGandhi became the Prime Minister of India through a landslide victory which the Socialist Party alleged as complete electoral malpractice. In 1975, the Allahabad High Court announced a landmark verdict toward ruled Mrs.IndiraGandhi of electoral malpractice which meant she would have toward leave the Prime Minister ship with also remain out of politics pro the next six years. On 25th June 1975 as per Mrs.IndiraGandhi's instruction the then President declared a State of Emergency resulting in total chaos with oppression. Mrs.IndiraGandhi became the unannounced dictator. Arresting political foes, curbing media freedom as well as introducing the sinister twenty points program toward included beautification with sterilization brought out by her so called heir apparent SanjayGandhi resulted in rootlessness with identity crisis. Political misjudgment of the people resulted in Mrs.IndiraGandhi calling pro general elections in the year 1977. She was defeated. Again in 1984, Mrs. Indira Gandhi was elected back toward Prime Minister ship with through this tenure; she was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards who revenged her pro her grotesque military attack on the Sikh Holy Shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar toward killed more than 400 Sikhs. Besides the abusive measures through the Emergency, Mrs.IndiraGandhi also increased the use of military force in the nation with she fostered a civilization of nepotism (Campu, 49). These historical facts are much needed toward understand Mistry's *A Fine Balance*. In the novel, we find the Hindu Muslim conflict taking unimaginable

proportions. "Communal slaughter at the brand new border ignited riots everywhere, with sporting a fez in a Hindu neighborhood was as fatal as possessing a foreskin in a Muslim one. In certain areas it was wiser toward go bareheaded, pro choosing incorrectly among the fez, white cap with turban could mean losing one's head." The Parsis who thrived through the colonization, suffered. Farokh Kohlah, is a Parsi who lived in the foothills of the Himalaya. He lost huge plots of land with brooded over the departure of the colonizers. "Maneck's relation had been wealthy. He (Farokh Kohlah, Maneck's father) tended it well with making it increase with multiply pro the wife he was toward marry with the son who would be born... there was a further gorier parturition, when two nations incarnated out of one. A foreigner drew a magic line on a map with called it a new border; it became a river of blood upon earth" (Mistry, 205) Dina Dalai of the upper middle class relation too felt the consequences of partition. She is forced toward obey her brother Nuswaan's strict with rather abusive rules. "But a few days later, riots started in the city, Dina was struck at home by Nusswan. When the curfew was lifted; Dina flew off toward school, happy as an uncaged bird, eager pro her eight hours of Nusswan less existence

Mistry is a commanding chronicler of social and political life. One of the noteworthy Features of his fiction is that it incarcerates the crowded throbbing life of India. The enthralling History-fiction interface that Mistry implies is undoubtedly captivating and ethnically momentous. The political concerns that have changed the lifestyle of many and are very close to the mind and spirit of the people are his main thematic concerns. He goes to the depth of relationships, tries to explore those arenas where the self is at a loss at times accepting and at times rejecting the community values and traditions. The identity that an individual tries to create for oneself is so dependent on the factors around him that he fails to understand the genuine requirements of events around and is in a dilemma while acknowledging or eliminating a situation that might affect him in both ways. Closely connected to the social and political milieu, Mistry brings forth the issues that are extremely relevant in the day to day life of the common man and they feel a part of it. Subjects like corruption, problematic political decisions, the common man's fears and traumas, caste and class problems and many more such pertinent concerns are so well portrayed that people feel intimate and associated. The cultivation of such a wonderful socio-cultural essence intermingled with the beauty and artistry of form and language gives the novels of Mistry a perceptive approach and a trendsetter in English literature.

Mistry's works typically reveals an inconsistency of circumstances or a huddle of anxieties entrenched within the customs itself as the consequence of interaction between assurances and obligations of the past and the veracity of the present. In his work, cultural prototypes find international acceptance and adaptation through the narratives of the individuals. His strategy of incorporating terror and temptation administers the contemplation and proceedings of his frustrated yet optimistic characters. And, his novels ingeniously emulate the perceptions of the Parsi community that endeavours to surmount their fright of extinction with the enticement of endurance. He also uses metaphors and symbols in his novels: 'Khodadad Building' might represent India with all its splendours and limitations, the 'collapse of the wall

'might link the past with the future through the present, etc. Myths incorporated from the Hindu, the Persian, the Greek and the Christian resources are correlated to numerous perennial facts by Mistry, in order to portray the quandary of the modern man. He even includes a pinch of salt to give his novels a tinge of satire. It is because of this sparkling wit and consistent humour, which is cautiously structured into the texture of the novel that permits the characters to register a stamp of accomplishment in spite of abnormalities.

Closely connected with socio-cultural survival of the Parsis, Mistry's novels forefront these stricted situations and establish an archetypal antagonism to community dominance and control. There is a magnificent exposition of Mistry's art of plot construction in the novels as he brilliantly intermingles the sub-plots into his main plot. In Such a Long Journey if the major events of history during the post-independent period, is the main plot, then the history of Parsi community can be considered as a sub-plot in the story. In the novel the plot is intended in such a way that the main protagonist, Gustad Nobel, is acknowledged as a spokesperson of the common public. He has entwined history to explore into the extensive concern of Parsis and also of national distinctiveness with fate and war as the two major themes of the novel and has also encroached into great struggle in order to reflect on these issues at individual, social and national levels. Some of the thoughts incorporated in the novel, like fate overriding the lives of the human beings, the hypothesis of karma, the sequence of birth and death, the uncertainty of life, the practice of black magic, etc. are speckled all through the novel giving the readers a feeling that it is very difficult to come out of such extraordinary things in life. In the novel, the storyline is shoved forward in statistical progression and is sequential rather than spatial in the expansion of the plot.

In *A Fine Balance*, with the city at the centre, Mistry intertwines a delicate and proportional narrative about four implausible characters, aspiring for different destinations but getting connected by the overpowering fate. It is indeed an appraisal of Mistry's dexterity as a raconteur that the cameo role manifestation of the trivial characters are often as mesmerizing as the anecdotes of the central characters – the Beggar master who has an weird empathy for all those who are under his supervision, in spite of his eagerness to mutilate them in order to make them more efficient mendicants; the hair-collector who transforms himself into a fortune-telling god man; the rent collector whose scruples put him in dilemma despite his keenness to transmit the landlord's orders and the Monkey man who can go to the ultimate extent of murder when he learns about the maltreatment of his nephew and niece, the children he used to play with. On the other side is varies crippled as he loses both his legs and is forced to beg for a living

*Family Matters* (2002) won the Kiriya Pacific Rim Book Prize for Fiction, the Canadian Authors Association's MOSAID Technologies Inc. Award for Fiction, and the regional Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book; it was nominated for the Booker Prize and shortlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. *Family Matters* describes the members of a blended family who are trying to cope with the failing health of their father. In the meantime, the father relives his past, a past beset by thwarted love and crushing social strictures.

Mistry's fiction deploys a precise writing style and sensitivity to the humor and horror of life to communicate deep compassion for human beings. His writing concerns people who try to find self-worth while dealing with painful family dynamics and difficult social and political constraints. His work also addresses immigration, especially immigration to Canada, and the difficulty immigrant's face in a society that recognizes their cultural differences and yet cannot embrace those differences as being part of itself.

Humanism in Rohinton Mistry's Fiction is an attempt to underline the humanistic leanings of the celebrated novelist, who has often been compared to Charles Dickens in this regard. Humanism has always been considered an important guiding philosophy of mankind. Over the past several centuries, it has branched out into several forms. The first chapter of my thesis is devoted to the study of humanism as it emerged in Europe as the Renaissance period concept, tracing its journey through different periods to contemporary times. In this, we come across a number of philosophers and thinkers who have enriched the humanist thinking. My Endeavour has been to understand the exact position that Mistry holds as a humanist since various humanists have viewed humanism differently. Based upon an in-depth study of Mistry's fiction comprising of a story-book entitled *Tales from Firozsha Baag* and three novels, viz., *Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters*, the thesis shows that Mistry believes, by and large, in the essential goodness of man an observation that lies at the core of humanism. This is amply proved by the fact that even the seemingly evil characters created by him do have a glimmer of goodness in them. We have strong characters that approximate the renaissance ideal of humanism. But we also have the disempowered and downtrodden in whose portrayal Mistry's humanist compassion is thrown in bold relief. As a humanist, he upholds scientific spirit but a deeper study convinces us that he is a religious humanist. He takes a functional view of religious practices, which means if these make one rise spiritually, these should be welcome. The thesis also examines the hurdles which the social and political power structures put in the path of humanism to which Mistry devotes a considerable part of his fiction. This is to warn the readers lest they lower their guards, for eternal vigilance is the price of humanism also.

### Summery

*A Fine Balance* depicts the struggle of the four main protagonists beyond the plethora of numerous other socio-economically challenged characters.

The fate of the marginalized with the dispossessed who find themselves at the mercy of the Brahminical with pseudo-secular elites shaping India is explored through the traumatic experience of the chamears-turned-tailors, Ishvar with Omprakash. Dukhi, the father of Ishvar with Narayan sends them toward be apprenticed as tailors in his friend, Ashraf -a Muslim tailor. Dukhi's daring toward divert his sons toward a different job becomes the talk of the town with he in turn earns the wrath of the so called chaste Hindus, "indeed was courageous, considering toward the prime of his own life has been spent in obedient compliance by the traditions of class system. Like his forefathers by him, he had accepted as of childhood.

The occupation preordained pro his present incarnation."(Mistry, 109). Through the healthy relationship

among Dukhi with Ashraf with the unhealthy bondage among the subaltern chamears represented by Dukhi with the high class chaste Hindu, Thakur Dharamsi, Mistry drives home the fact toward "ideal human relationship should be above every the concept of class, creed with colour. " (Kumar. 19) When Narayan returned toward the village toward cast his vote, Thakur Dharamsi, the Zamindar felt infuriated. Thakur's men beat Narayan with his friends toward death with in due course the entire relation was burnt alive. The subalterns succumb toward the arrogance of Thakur Dharamsi who strongly believed toward crossing the line of class was a serious offence with toward such people should be stringently punished. Even police do not file an F.I.R calling Ishvar with Om, "filthy achool class".

Ishvar with Om were quite forcibly taken toward one such work camp wherever they be forced toward undergo sterilization. In the aftermath, Ishvar develops infection with one of his legs is amputated, making it impossible pro him toward practice tailoring with earn his livelihood. Om who is a youth in his prime waiting toward be married is also sterilized in the orders of the village Zamindar, Thakur Dharamsi. The needless arrogance of the upper class toward maintains social supremacy led toward the consolidation with Emergence of the Dalit consciousness in the Indian politics. Despite the new laws regarding untouchability, exploitation of the lower classs by the upper classes continues. Through Thakur Dharamsi, Mistry reveals the silenced histories with suppressed voices in centuries of violence with domination characterized by the Indian political with class system. Mistry emphasizes the fact it is too difficult toward fight against the deep-rooted class structure in India.

After the death of her husband Rustom Dalai, Dina Dalai tried toward live a descent with independent life through her tailoring business. She hired Ishvar with Om toward work pro her with also partially rented her apartment toward Maneck Kohlah who stayed there as a paying guest. Because of Ishvar with Om's disability, Dina is forced toward close her sewing business. Bankruptcy forced Dina toward undergo the worst she feared, she lost her independence with was forced toward live by her brother, Nisswa, who treated her like a maid.

### Conclusion

Thus, Rohinton Mistry's novels are perfect blend of love, intrigues, begrudges, politics, friendship and lewdness. There is also humour with lewd jokes, intentions and pretentions. There is fledgling democracy and the hopelessness of defunct civic system. It is emphatically clear thatthe above novels of Rohinton Mistry explore socio-cultural and political realities of Indiabetween 1960 and 1990. They closely examine the social, political and economic problems ofpeople arising out of emergency, exploitation, social evils and wars.

Ultimately, Mistry's fiction offers the satisfactions of recognition toward those aware of the machinations of postcolonial Indian politics with also the position of the Parsis might apprehend very little concerning the background, however World Health Organization will determine by the characters, and their experiences with life decisions. Speaking of this quality in his work, Mistry has commented, "The Parsee characters in my stories, with their dreams, ambitions with fears area unit as accessible toward the western reader on the Indian reader ... i do not notify myself: "This story desires 3 doses of generality with 5 doses of quality." after I begin

writing it every simply happens.'<sup>12</sup> This mix of generality with literary with discourse specificity offers Mistry's texts their readability with appears possible toward make sure their longevity too.

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