

Comparative study of rohinton mistry's life and works

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Abstract

This study is intended to work on the social, political and cultural issues in the Fiction of Rohinton Mistry. Rohinton Mistry's works seeks to evolve a vision that involves both the group of people -centered 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 group of people and country as it has been in the post-Independence era. This reparation of history in a way depicts consciousness of anxieties and aspirations, perils and problems of existence of individual, communal and national issues. Mistry has in this sense, successfully exploited some historical points of post- Independence era and endeavored to re-think them and re-narrate about his group of people and country through the various narratives woven in the novel. His works slowly starts from a relation, proceeding gradually outwards along with the development of the characters and gradually widens into the social, cultural, and political backdrop. The ambiguous and ambivalent lives are the consequence of identity crisis and conflicts faced by the diasporic people. Many times when a person adopts a new world, (s) he is victim of that ignorance due to which (s) he becomes a secondary creature in a foreign land. The same thing comes out in the cases of the Parsis in Parsi literature, "both the Parsis who sought greener pastures in the West and those who stayed all in India have experienced identity crisis and confusion".

Keywords: Mistry's life and works

Introduction

Rohinton Mistry is an Indian born Canadian author who is well-known for his short stories and novels. Born in a Parsee group of people, his writings are heavily influenced by his spiritual, social and cultural views. Even although he is settled in Canada, it is his upbringing in Mumbai that reflects in all his writings. The distinct Mumbai civilization, particularly the Parsee way of life, the people of the city and even the politics of India are major themes in his novels. His novels, such as 'Relation Matters', 'A Fine Balance' and 'Such a Long Journey', were shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize. His novels and short stories have been widely appreciated and were also bestowed with numerous awards and recognition. For instance, he has received the Annual Contributors' Prize from the Canadian Fiction Magazine, the Common Wealth Writers Prize for his novel 'Such a Long Journey', and the Giller Prize for his work 'A Fine Balance'. Mistry is the elder brother of Cyrus, a writer and playwright.

Rohinton Mistry's small body of fiction has received high praise, numerous honors, and been favorably, if inevitably, compared to the work of the best known and most respected contemporary Indian writers. Much of his achievement derives from the seamless way in which he has fashioned a decidedly personal style from a variety of literary precursors (Euro-American as well as Indian: Joyce, Cheever, Malamud, and Bellow most notably) perfectly suited to his Indian subject matter. Although his style lacks Rushdie's postmodern brilliance, it deftly avoids Mukherjee's melodramatic excesses and Naipaul's air of critical detachment while successfully adapting Narayan's studied naivete to more modern urban as well as immigrant experience. Mistry's achievement also derives from his willingness to devote himself to those aspects of his subject that he knows best and that most of his Western readers know not at all: the small Parsi community, both in Bombay and in Toronto.

Mistry's is an art of the bittersweet about a world more sad

than tragic, where frustrations rather than defeats are the general rule. It is an art gently ironic in its depiction of the everyday lives of mainly middle-class Parsi characters either living in apartment complexes in Bombay or struggling to adapt to immigrant life in Canada. The religious strife that figures prominently in much writing about India serves as backdrop for the more pressing quotidian problems faced by Mistry's characters: straitened finances, the effect of modern ways on cultural traditions (particularly as manifested in generational conflict), ambivalence regarding immigration, and the consequences of sexual repression—all compounded by life's little inconveniences: shoddy goods, petty neighbors, government corruption.

Review of literature

Mukherjee, M: Another obstacle of her life is Dustoor Framji, the priest who ogles her and looks herewith amorous intentions. The only aim of his life is daab-chaab, i.e, to spend lustful and lewd life. Dina's mother is mentally unfit to be a protector for her. After death of Dina's husband her brother Nuswaan looks after her as per Indian tradition and custom. He, however, mistreats her, beats her, asks her to perform menial tasks at home and forces her to follow and serve his wife unconditionally. Dina was strong lady faces all the adversities of her life and decided to live alone even after her husband's death. Ishvar and Omprakash, her tenants, have to lose their slum dwelling due to city embellishment programme. They have come to Bombay in hope of finding work. Ishvar's legs are infected with gangrene and both of his limbs are amputated. He has lost his job of tailoring as he is no longer able to work on the paddles of sewing machine. Despite this, he never lost his hope Rohinton's second novel, *uch*.

Kamboureli, S: *A Long Journey* deals with the problem of India during India's second war with Pakistan. The action covers the period after 1970. It takes up the conflict between political and personal realities. The plot is drawn on the

political canvas where Gustad Noble, a citizen of Bombay, the protagonist, is striving to become a responsible husband and father amidst his rebellious son Shorab, superstitious wife Dilnawaz, friend Jimmy Bilimoria and death of good friend Dishawji. He has anguish for his family for brushing him off all the time and neglecting him. He feels all alone now and is completely misunderstood. He finds himself in the clutches of a dangerous government plot. In the novel, the lives of the characters are deeply affected by local corruption and government inadequacy.

Luscher, R. M: Mistry belongs to a much older Parsi diaspora – beyond his status as a contemporary diasporic writer situated in Canada– a diaspora in the Indian Context, both pre and post-colonial. The British colonization of India, sometimes forcibly and at others voluntarily, displaced people throughout the British Empire. This displacement, as in well-known took place in different geographies. Indians were transported to the West Indies, Fiji, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and other places to work as indentured work force on plantations, agricultural sites and so forth. Slowly, it came to be known as ‘labour diaspora’.

George, R. M: 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.

Ganguly, K: Mistry’s characters and background revolve round the multistory of Mumbai. His stories mostly concerned themselves with the tribulations and the idiosyncrasy of Bombay Parsis. In his book *Tales from Firoz 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.

Barthes, R: Mistry found the work unfulfilling. He and Freny decided to enrol at the University of Toronto. She eventually qualified as a teacher, while he studied for a BA in English and Philosophy, rekindling his early interest in literature and, no doubt, laying the groundwork for the insistent philosophical questions that were to dog his characters, and which they each, in different ways, try to square with the demands of daily life and family commitments. As Christina Nunez wrote in *Atlantic*, “[Mistry] has long been recognized as one of the best Indian writers; he ought to be considered simply one of the best writers, Indian or otherwise, now alive.” Twice short-listed for England’s prestigious Booker Prize, Rohinton Mistry was broadly introduced to American readers when *A Fine Balance* was an Oprah Book Club selection in 2001.

Sturrock, J. Rohinton Mistry has not lived in his native India for many years; but like many expatriate writers, he continues a relationship with his country in his writings and has enriched his readers’ understanding of it. After emigrating to Toronto in 1975, Rohinton Mistry got a job as a bank clerk and ascended to the supervisor of customer service after a few years

Rohinton Mistry had no ambitions to be a writer until he got to Canada and began taking classes in literature at the University of Toronto. Encouraged by his wife, he set out to win a university literary contest by writing his first short story. He called in sick from work, devoted several days to the story, entered it, and won the contest.

Study of Rohinton Mistry’s Life and Works

Rohinton Mistry, short-story writer, novelist (b at Bombay, India 3 Jul 1952). After graduating in 1973 in mathematics and economics from Bombay University, Rohinton Mistry immigrated 2 years later to Toronto, where he found employment as a clerk in the accounting department of a bank. He completed a second undergraduate degree, in English and philosophy, at the University of Toronto. While studying literature, Mistry began to write and publish his first stories, garnering two Hart House Literary Prizes and the 1985 Annual Contributor's Award from *Canadian Fiction Magazine*.

These award-winning stories appear in Mistry's first book, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), in which he combines the immediacy of daily life in a Bombay apartment building with the perspective some of his characters achieve after immigrating to their new home in Canada. The interrelated stories cover a broad range of subjects and tones: from poignant to surreal, ghostly to hilarious. Mistry returned to the short story with his publication of *The Scream*, originally produced in 2006 as a limited edition illustrated by Tony Urquhart and intended as a fundraiser for World Literacy of Canada. In fact Such a Long Journey is believed to be based on that incident of Mr. Nagarwala. Rohinton Mistry has tried to unveil the secret of corrupt system of political supremacy by portraying the fictionalized version of Mr. Nagarwala, being characterized as Major Jimmy Billimoria. Mr. Billimoria in the novel was trapped by the highest authorities of the centre who got him arrested on the charge of misappropriating sixty lakh rupees from a nationalized bank by imitating the voice of the Prime Minister. It can be noted that “Jimmy is none other than the fictional counterpart of Nagarwala who was arrested and exterminated during Indira Gandhi’s regime” (Selvam 52). This incident was a political scandal of the time and it shocked the whole Parsi Community. The story, also set in a Bombay apartment, plumbs its protagonist's struggle with aging and isolation.

Bombay is also the setting of Mistry's first novel, *Such a Long Journey* (1991). Here, however, the social conditions that provided a distant backdrop to the short stories now bear upon a particular Bombay relation. The protagonist, Gustad Noble, finds his life unraveling as his son rejects filial piety, his best friend involves him in political intrigue, and his own rationality and morality confront a world in change. The novel won the Governor General's Award, the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book, and the W.H. Smith Books in Canada First Novel Award; it was also shortlisted for Britain's prestigious Booker Prize. A film version of *Such a Long Journey* was released in 1998.

Mistry’s fiction deploys a precise writing style and sensitivity to the humour 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 relation 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.

Mistry and his wife, Freny, moved to Canada, where career opportunities were more promising. The Indian economy favored engineers, doctors, and lawyers, specialities that held little interest for Mistry. The young couple settled in a suburb of Toronto, and Mistry became a bank clerk. Even after earning a promotion, he found that the job lacked the stimulation he needed, so he began taking night classes at the University of Toronto in subjects that interested him, earning a second B.A. in English and philosophy in 1984. Rohinton Mistry won the number of prestigious awards and prizes. His novel *Such a Long Journey* was shortlisted for the 'Booker Prize', and the 'Trillium award', also won the 'Governor General's Award' and 'The Commonwealth Writer's Prize' and 'The Smith Books Novel Award' for the best book. It was made into an acclaimed feature film in 1998.

Rohinton Mistry's second novel *A Fine Balance* won the 'The General's Award' and 'The Griller Prize'. This book was shortlisted for 'The Booker Prize' as well as received the 'Los Angeles Times Award' (1996) and 'The Royal Society of Literatures Winfried Hotby Prize'.

Rohinton Mistry life works Achievement

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 colonised period, the Parsis were particular favourites 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 Parsis.

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 civilization of India.

Mistry has also experimented with linguistic hybridity and celebrates the use of the Parsi language. In the short stories Mistry tackles those elements associated with Parsi civilization:

- Zoroastrian faith,
- Common history of emigration from Iran,
- The search for asylum in India,
- The colonial elitist attitude of the Parsis, and
- Their feeling of malaise in a decolonized India.

Shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize, *Such a Long Journey* (1991), Mistry's first novel, manages brilliantly to portray Indian civilization and relation 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 relation 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 relation and of the other important characters in the novel.

The microcosmic relation 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.

(1) Near the beginning Life: - Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay or present day Mumbai, India, in 1952, in a Parsee relation. In his late teens he joined a music school to learn music theory and composition. It was here that he met Freny Elavia who would later become his wife. Mistry was quite good at folk music and would often give musical performances. At this stage he even wanted to pursue a career as a musician. Initially he was not aware of his skill in writing and so he didn't opt to study literature. But since neither pure science nor medicine and engineering interested him, he instead pursued for a degree in mathematics and economics from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. Two years later, in 1975, when he was twenty-three, Mistry migrated to Canada. Soon after going there he married his girlfriend who had moved there a year before. In Canada, he initially worked as a clerk in the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, but, after three years, he and his wife, joined studies at the University of Toronto, and earned his graduation in English and Philosophy. It was during his university days in Canada that he showed a growing interest towards writing and even started to pen several short stories, which were published in several literary magazines. Two of his stories, which were published in *Hart House Review*, received the *Hart House* literary prize. He became the first person to win two such prizes. He still worked at the bank and it was only after 1985 that he took to writing full time.

(2) Rohinton Mistry's Omniscient look: - In a story called "Squatter" in *Swimming Lessons*, a young Indian who has immigrated to Canada finds that he is able to adapt to the Western way of life in everything, except one: in the bathroom he finds himself unable to sit on the commode and has to squat, desi-style. Even after living in Toronto for ten years, this character is "depressed and miserable, perched on top of the toilet, crouching on his haunches, feet planted firmly for balance upon the white plastic oval of the toilet seat." But our hero doesn't give up trying. "Each morning he seated himself to push and grunt," Mistry writes, "grunt and push, squirming and writhing unavailingly on the white plastic oval. Exhausted, he then hopped up, expert at balancing now, and completed the movement quite effortlessly."

Mistry is a writer who's interested in telling stories... stories about the human heart and the human mind and of how we all struggle in this world, whether we are migrants or bank workers, beggars or college students, tailors or pavement artists.

(3) Awards and Achievements:- His first short story, 'One Sunday' published in 1983 won him the First Prize in the *Hart House Literary Contest*. The next year he won the same prestigious prize for another of his short story 'Auspicious Occasion'. In 1985, the *Canadian Fiction Magazine* honored

him with the Annual Contributors' Award for his contributions to the magazine as well as to English literature. His novel 'Such a Long Journey' was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and the Trillium Award. It also won the Governor General's Award, the Books in Canada First Novel Award and the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book. 'A Fine Balance', won him the Giller Prize as well as the Commonwealth Writers Prize once again. 'Relation Matters', his third novel was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize.

Rohinton Mistry won the number of prestigious awards and prizes. His novel *Such a Long Journey* was shortlisted for the 'Booker Prize', and the 'Trillium award', also won the 'Governor General's Award' and 'The Commonwealth Writer's Prize' and 'The Smith Books Novel Award' for the best book. It was made into an acclaimed feature film in 1998.

Contributions

Rohinton Mistry's work is an account of his fictional world clearly; the metropolitan, middle and lower-middle class of Parsi relation. Among the diasporic group of Indian writers there are some like Rohinton Mistry who have to grapple with not just one diasporic displacement but multiple displacements. Mistry's work is concerned with the great inequities of the world between the classes, genders, castes and official hierarchies.

Rohinton Mistry is a Parsi Zoroastrian, born in the year 1952, in Bombay, and immigrated to Canada in 1975. He is the second of four children, three boys and a girl as 'a writer from elsewhere' a term is used by Salman Rushdie to describe those who migrated outside of the nation to create their self-identity. Salman Rushdie states: It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back we must do so in the knowledge- which gives rise to profound uncertainties- that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely that thing that was lost, that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India's of the mind. (Rushdie, Salman, 1991, P. 10)

Mistry became a writer almost by accident. He was forced by his wife to participate in the first Hart House Literary Contest, so he took sick leave for a few days from the bank and tried to express himself through the literary medium, and published the short story *One Sunday* in 1983. This short story won the first prize in the Canadian Hart House Literary Contest.

Summary

His Parsee roots have had a strong influence on his growth and development as a writer and his works mostly deal with the pathos and civilization of the Parsees in India, specifically Mumbai. His writings give a glimpse into the life of the people of his group of people and their experiences as a minority in a highly diverse society. His glorious journey as a full-fledged writer started with the publication of a collection of short stories '*Tales from Firozsha Baag*', in 1987, in Canada. The book was critically acclaimed and became so popular that, in 1992, it was published in the UK. '*Tales from Firozsha Baag*' consists of eleven interrelated short stories, narrating the lives of people in an apartment complex in Mumbai. This collection includes his most well-known short

story '*Swimming Lessons*', which is also the most anthologized of all his short stories. Rohinton Mistry's first novel, '*Such a Long Journey*', was published in 1991, to critical acclaim. In 1998, the novel was made into a film by the Canadian director Sturla Gunnarson. His second novel, '*A Fine Balance*', was published in 1995. This novel too was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. '*A Fine Balance*' was adapted for the stage and performed at the Hampstead Theater in 2006 and again in 2007. In fact this novel is considered to be the best work of Mistry. In 2002, he published his third novel '*Relation Matters*' which was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

Conclusions

Mistry is a commanding chronicler of social and political life. One of the worthy 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 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.

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