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**“Twenty-First Century: Cultural and Economic Globalization”**

## **Representation of Parsi Consciousness and Parsi Culture: A Study of Selected Fiction Writings of Rohinton Mistry**

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#### **Abstract**

This paper deals with Indian literature especially focuses on Indian Diasporic writer Rohinton Mistry who represents the realistic picture of the Parsi community as a minority in India. Rohinton Mistry is one of the greatest writers from the Third World, but now he has settled into the First World. He has taken up diverse subjects like social life, cast system, politics, Parsi culture and Parsi consciousness. Especially, he has succeeded to depict the real conditions of the Parsi community using the Parsi name, Parsi characters, Parsi linguistic values etc. Thus, this paper aims to analyze the selected fiction like *Tale from Firozsha Baag* and *Such a Long Journey* to show the Parsi consciousness and Parsi culture.

**Keywords:** Parsi community, Parsi culture, Consciousness, Diaspora and Identity.

#### **Introduction**

Indian English Literature originated as a necessary outcome of the introduction of English education in India under colonial rule. Indian English Writing means the body of literature is written by Indians in English including various forms such as poetry, prose, fiction and drama. Now, it is recognized that Indian English literature is not only part of commonwealth -literature, but also occupies great importance in world literature. Among the 20<sup>th</sup> century writers, Rohinton Mistry is one of the most important postcolonial and immigrant writers from the Third World but he has now settled in the First World. Mistry has focused on the life and travails of the Parsi community and the social issues confronting it. He has taken up diverse subjects in his fiction such as politics, community life, urbanism, inequality, caste system, communalism and minority issues. He is one of the most powerful and evocative voices talking about the real picture of Indian's socio-political and cultural scene in the post-independence era. The Parsi world and the city of Bombay (Mumbai now) are almost always the central stages in his narratives. According to J. G. Duresh:

“Consequently, his Indian perceptions are coloured by his (Mistry) community consciousness and even by prejudices which are peculiar to the Parsi race. In short, among the Parsi writers who write about India, Mistry is the one who is hypercritical about even the frivolous political occurrences that may seem to affect the life of Parsi in India.” (96) <sup>[1]</sup>

After immigrating to Canada, Mistry returns to India for the theme to his fictions like the Indian Parsi family, Indian Minority community and Indian politics. He has shown the

<sup>1</sup>Duresh, J.G. “From Partition to Babri Masjid: A Review of Political Motifs in Rohinton Mistry’s Novels”. *Studies in Literature in English*. Ed. Mohit K.Ray. Vol. XIII. New Delhi : Atlantic Publishers, 2007, 96. Print.

realistic condition of the Bombay Parsi family because he was born in a Parsi family and lived for 23 years in Bombay streets. Rohinton Mistry throws some light on the picture of post-independence India with his colour combinations realistic and depicts the real condition of the Parsi community and social issues in which he concerns diverse themes such as politics, community life, urbanism, inequality, cast system, minority, etc. He is apt and capable to observe of his contemporaries in his fiction in which he portrays the real picture of Indian's socio-political and cultural scene in the post-independence era. His main objective is to throw some light on the Paris family in Bombay (Mumbai) with a detailed analysis of the account of their culture, tradition, customs, and lifestyle. In the words of Mamta Pattarkine—

“Rohinton Mistry, the Diasporic writer has painted the picture of post-independence India in his own color combinations- realistic, Diasporic and post-colonial being a few among them-----Mistry highlights themes like politics, the overall Indian economic disparity, the alienation of the marginalized communities and cultures.” [2]

Rohinton Mistry, a great Diaspora writer, is an Indian-born Canadian author in English writings, one of the most important postcolonial immigrant writers. Mistry was born on July 3, 1952, to Parsi couple Behran Mistry (a worker in advertising) and Freny Jhaveri Mistry (a home-maker). He got primary education from Villa Theresa Primary School and then got secondary education from Xavier's High School. Mistry graduated from the St. Xavier's College in Bombay/Mumbai in 1974 with Mathematics and Economics. At the age of 23, he has immigrated to Canada. At where Mistry also took up a job in the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce from 1975 to 1985 but he was not satisfied and realized to do anything new. In this period, he and his wife took up else evening class courses at the University of Toronto and studied such writers and poets like Chekov, Malamud, Turgenev, Hawthorne, Trallop, Whiteman and Frost. After receiving his second bachelor's degree in 1982 at Wood Worth College, he was so impressed with writers and poets. The seeds of literary sense were shown in his mind and soon opportunity knocks at Mistry's door in the form of an advertisement in the fall of 1982, announcing the first Hart House Literary Contest. He was inspired by his wife Freny Elavia to participate and showed his literary skill. He wrote his first story, 'On Sunday' in 1983 and won the first prize in the Hart House Prize at the University of Toronto. In that short story, he portrays a boy who realized and shamed himself for killing a rat by his own beloved bat. Due to that accident, he broke the bat. He won second-time the same prize for 'Auspicious Occasion' in 1985. Most over it, he published his short stories collection *Tall from Firozsha Baag* in Penguin Canada publication in 1987 and sets in a Parsi housing estate in Bombay. In the USA, that collection was published under another title *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories form Firozsha Baag* and shortlisted for the Canadian Government General Award. In shortlisted in Booker prize novel *Such a Long Journey* is a debut novel in 1991 and established him as a full time writer. He showed a Parsi

family and set in 1971 against the backdrop of the Bangladesh- Pakistan war. In his second novel *A Fine Balance*, he presented the crucial year for the Indian native 1975s to 1985s and showed the declaration of a state of internal emergency by the first Indian Woman P.M Mrs. Indra-Gandhi. And once again, he has shown his community in the novel *Family Matter* in 2002. At last, he published his last novella *The Scream* in 2006.

### Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to analyzed Rohinton Mistry's selected fiction The specific objectives are established as follows:

- To analyse the selected fiction of Rohinton Mistry
- To search the elements of Parsi Community in the selected fiction of Rohinton Mistry.
- To identify Parsi consciousness in the selected fiction of Rohinton Mistry
- To introduce Indian diaspora literature

### Review of Literature

There are many themes such as from politics to Parsi community life and economic inequality to the national event such as war rigorously examine the impact of historical forces and social events on small lives. In the words of Ambika and Rajeshwari in their research paper 'The political turmoil that offset the Parsi Indian in Mistry's novel' they cover the Parsi community their importance and place in India and say about Parsi that Paris proved them as an example for the rich society of India. The next point is shown from the novel *Such a Long Journey*, the trials and tribulation of the middle-class Parsi family in the year 1971 and not only this novel but also *A Fine Balance* which shows the middle class and the anonymous, faceless working class. They find out that Rohinton Mistry portrays the miseries of the bottom of society and Mistry awakes the people about many common problems of great political, religious, economic and literary activities in day-to-day life. He also unsupported the political unrest and gives the batter solutions to those social inequalities and evil throw his work [3].

Matthew. M rightly observes ethnic conflict and the fate of Parsi in Indian in Rohinton Mistry's *Tales form Firozsha Baag*. In his research paper 'Ethnic conflict and the Fate of Parsis in India: A Study of Rohinton Mistry's Tales from Firozsha Bag', Mistry details the present condition of the Parsi and their loss of social, economic and political significance in the post-independence period. He says about characters, they catalog Parsi dress, food habits, religious ceremonies and the socio-economic life of Parsi and concerns attempt at tracing the reason for Paris's withdrawal from the mainstream Indian social, economic and political like as a response to the hostile attitude of the outside society in Bombay. Mistry discusses in his many stories the humiliation and violence suffered by the Parsi in Maharashtra as a result of the communal organization of political parties. Thus, Mistry is narrating the untold story of

<sup>2</sup>Pattarkine, Mamta. "Researching Rohinton Mistry: A Perfect Blend of Facts and Fiction" Chennai.2019

<sup>3</sup>Rajeshwari and Ambika. "The Political Turmoil Affect the Parsi Indian Life in Rohinton Mistry Novel" RJELAL. July-September.ISSN- 2395-2636(P); 2321-3108(O).Vol.5. Issue-3.

Parsi's suffering and ethnic violence which demand answers from the results of the land <sup>[4]</sup>.

### Analysis of the Text

In 1987, Mistry published his short stories collection, *Tall from Firozsha Baag* and in the USA it was published another title *Lesson and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag*. It is a collection of 11 short stories which show the real aspects of Parsi community such as Parsi tradition, social practices, nostalgic experiences differences as well as trust, the issues of the old and the young, dilemma arising out of the migration and about the residents of Firozsha Baag a Parsi dominated apartment in Bombay.

The first story 'Auspicious Occasion' is an ironic portrayal of Parsi's way of living that negotiates customs and traditions and about the protagonist Rustomji, (much younger) his wife Mehroo is preparing to go to the Fire Temple in the day Behram Roje. It is not a fine day for Rustomji because he passes his toilet. His wife, Mehroo, who would not let these things dampen her favourite special day, dutifully makes all the observances and even takes steps to get the plumbing fixed; she then goes by bus to the Fire-temple- only to find that a murder has occurred there and all prayers and ceremonies have been canceled. Rustomji insult by nearby people on the bus.

"There was a long queue at the A-1 bus stop. Rustomji disregarded the entire twisting, curving length and stationed himself at the head. He stared benignly into space, deaf to the protests of the queue's serpentine windings, and pondered the options of upper deck and lower deck. He decided on the lower – it might prove difficult to negotiate the steep flight of steps to the upper with as much poise as befitted his attire."<sup>[5]</sup>

On other hand, Mistry has succeeded to show reality of Parsi in India. He used harsh words such as *Saala, Gandoo, Bawajiko, chootia*.

"Saala gandoo! Filthy son of a whore! Shameless animal – spitting paan from the bus! Smash your face I will, you pimp ..." A small crowd gathered around Rustomji. Some were curious, a few sympathetic; but most were enjoying themselves. "What happened? Who hurt the..." "Teh tch, someone spat paan on his dugli..." "Heh heh heh! Bawaji got paan pichkari right on his white dugli..." "Bawaji bawaji, dugli looks very nice now, red and white, just like in technicolor..." The taunting and teasing added to the outrage of tobacco juice made Rustomji do something dangerously foolish. He diverted his anger from the harmlessly receding bus to the crowd, overlooking the fact that unlike the bus, it was close enough to answer his vituperation with fury of its own. "Arré you sisterfucking ghatís, what are you laughing for? Have you no shame? Saala chootia spat paan on my dugli and you think that is fun?" A ripple of tension went through the crowd."<sup>[6]</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Mathew, Moncy. "Ethnic conflict and the Fate of Parsis in India: A Study of Rohinton Mistry's Tales from Firozshah Bag". IOSR-JHSS. 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Mistry, Rohinton. *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. London: Faber and Faber, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> ibid

In the second short story, 'One Sunday' Mistry portrays the central character Najamai who lives alone in the flat because her children have settled abroad. Another character is Francis who goes into her flat without him so he is bitten badly and Kerby Boyce sees him and saves him. In the third story 'the Ghost of Firozsha Baag', Mistry shows Jaakaylee as the central character whose mistress sees a ghost at the night. The ghost tells his life and Mistry creates humour and uses the symbol to talk about the sexual urges of the central character. In the fourth story, 'Condolence Visit', Mistry portrays the character of Daulat Mirza and her husband Minocher. The loss of Minocher after his prolonged illness is unbearable for Daulat to cope with the dreadful situation. In the fifth short story, 'The Collectors', the central character is Jehangir Bulsara is a sensitive boy and he has an unpleasant childhood experience. He has a Parsi friend whose name is Dr. Mody, after a long time Jehangir becomes young and his friend died. Mistry highlights the fragility in the relationship as without trust, relations fall to pieces. Mistry brings out the changing attitude at the passage of time-based on the protagonist character Kersi and his grandmother in the sixth short story 'Of White Hairs and Cricket'. The seventh short story is about the behaviour of the characters Boman and Kashmiri and Khorshedbai and Ardesar their tenant. Boman and Kashmiri decide to share their small room with their meager income. After some time, Kashmiri needs space to relax in the pregnancy period. They decide to vacate their room but Khorshedbai refuses to go outside. Thus, Mistry highlights the helplessness which arises out of poverty ill experience of the past, the outlook of the society, etc. Mistry's characters are seen experiencing the heart-wrenching experience of the characters Nariman Hansalia and Sarash in the eighth short story 'Squatter'. The ninth story is based on the three characters such as Jamshed, Kersi and Percy. The first two characters immigrate to New York to fulfill their dreams. Percy has an idealistic approach to serving his people and sticking to his roots. In the tenth story, Mistry updates 'the Collectors' and uses once again the character of Jehangir. In the last story, Mistry has not used the Indian native character and shows the two cultures and used the protagonist of *Family Matter*.

Mistry's debut novel *Such a Long Journey* is published in 1991 and established him as a writer to look up to when the novel was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and won the Governor General's Award and the Commonwealth Writers Prize for best book. The novel was set in 1971 during the time of the India- Pakistan war. Its protagonist is no controversial hero, Gusted Noble, an ordinary bank clerk who has normal dreams of a common man for a happy present and future. The fate of Gusted's family is closely bound up with that of the subcontinent during a time of crisis and turmoil. The illness of the clerk's daughter and his son's refusal to go to college, are many events that we are encouraged to read symptomatically in this novel. Mistry's second novel, *A Fine Balance* is a tragicomedy of four chief characters Dina Dalat, Maneck Kahlah, Ishwas and Om, set in the mid-1970s and the impact of Indra- Gandhi's state of emergency on them. The novel is one of the most memorable portraits of Post-independence India ever written. Mistry's third novel *Family Matters* opens with the protagonist named Nariman Vakeel. The portrait of the Parsi community in Bombay//Mumbai and their residence is the

center point of view of the novel and set in the 1990s. Mistry's latest work of fiction is a novella with a short story, *The Scream* and set in a Bombay apartment. *The Scream* is narrated by a man of a great age living in India in the same house with several generations of his family.

Rohinton Mistry has been shown many aspects of Bombay such as minority, cast system, politics and particularly Parsi community. *Such a Long Journey*, *Tall from Firozsha Baag*, *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matter* are mostly set in Bombay and show the condition of Bombay. Rohinton Mistry's most of the fiction are set in Bombay/Mumbai because his early life about 23 years lived in the streets of Bombay/Mumbai. He shows realistic pictures of Bombay/Mumbai through his fiction such as the ubiquitous crowd the Bombay/ Mumbai monsoon, Crawford market, Bhindi Bazar, Chor Bazar, Mount Mary Church, etc. As well as Mistry depictions another aspect of Bombay/ Mumbai the lives of the pavement dwellers, the slum dwellers and the middle-class life of Bombay/ Mumbai. He has depicted the realistic picture of the Parsi community, political parties and minority of Bombay/ Mumbai in his fiction.

*Such a Long Journey* is the story of a hard-working bank clerk called Gustad Noble who lives in a Parsi compound with his wife Dilnavaz and three children. He is a respectable member of this Parsi compound and has his eccentric neighbours and his relationship with a close friend and co-worker, Dinshaeji tehmul-lungara. Along with Gustad's life, Mistry wants to show the real condition of Indian's political turmoil under the leadership of Indra Gandhi.

*Such a Long Journey* exists a thriving tradition of Parsi literature in the field of novels, drama and poetry. In the novel, Mistry sharply focused on the contradiction within the Parsi experience, Parsi consciousness, Parsi rituals, and Parsi culture in India. Jaydipsinh Dodiya highlights the role of the Parsi community in Mistry's fiction such as:

"Mistry is sensitive to the various anxieties felt by his community. He has demonstrated this by responding to the existing threats to the Parsi family and community in particular, and to the country in general. He presents his community through the different narratives of the characters who invariably express their concerns for their community and the changes that affect them." (44-45) <sup>[7]</sup>

The novel also focuses on the customs, rituals, identity of the Parsi community. Dinshawji tells Gustad about political turmoil such as Indra Gandhi's Nationalization of the bank.

"What days those were, yaar. What fun we used to have ... Parsis were the kings of banking in those days. Such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalization of Banks." (38) <sup>[8]</sup>

Nationalization of the bank was in citable in the larger interest of the downtrodden masses of India. The Parsis would have been displeased by Mrs. Indra Gandhi's decision. Due to this decision, The Parsis, who were the owners of the private bank, fall down in commercial conditions. To point out about Rohinton Mistry,

### Conclusion

Thus, Rohinton Mistry's fiction is full of the depiction of the Parsi community, Indian politics, minority and many aspects of Indian such as war, identity, cast system, etc. After immigration to Canada, he comes back or returns to India for the theme and his all works are full of Indianness which has been shown the real picture of post-independence India. Most of the themes such as rituals, religious communitarian identities, human relations, the middle class, and friendship are seen in his fiction. In his fiction, he portrays the Parsi Community and the present conditions of suffering fear and their loss of the social, economic, and political significance of the Parsi community. Rohinton Mistry's characters are catalogue on the basis such as Parsi dress, food habits, religious ceremonies, the socio-economic life of Parsi and concerns attempts at tracing the reason for Parsi withdrawal from the mainstream Indian social society in Bombay. Thus, Mistry shows the real pictures of Bombay. He declared the status of the Parsi community in India.

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