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## Major aspect of Rohinton MISTRY works in English Literature

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### Abstract

Novel is a realistic form of literature in which life is created and depicted on the basis of reality, with a focus on significant, social, historical, and economic issues, commenting on the characters and the situations in an indirect manner. In a way, fiction acts as a mirror and reflects the life of society, its practices, oddities, idiosyncrasies, and thereby makes people think, act, and behave accordingly. In this research paper, we will try to find out the major aspect of Rohinton Mistry works in English literature.

**Keywords:** English literature, society, historical, Indian literature.

### Introduction

The seeds of Indian Writing in English sprouted with the colonization of India by the Britishers. Keeping their own interests in mind, the Britishers forced Indians to learn English and use that as far as possible. That compulsion in turn proved a favorable factor in the growth of Indian English fiction. The English fiction available in the beginning was penned by the British writers, and the public they wrote for, was also British. The Britishers wrote with an aim to educate and entertain people. But Indian writers also joined the fray after Independence. While Britishers wrote as they saw India from the eye of an outsider, an observer, the Indian writers had an edge over them. They had the view point, the privilege of an insider having first-hand knowledge and experience of the material they intended to spin into literary yarn.

Thus, the English writers provided impetus for the Indo-English novel. The Indo-English novel had its birth in Nineteenth century and “made a real beginning only after 1920” (Rama Murti XIII). The focus in writings of the first generation of writers was on philosophy. After independence, many literary works were published based on this concept, which gave rise to the Indian revival. Nehru termed Indian renaissance as “the awakening of India as two-fold: she looked to the west and at the same time; she looked at herself and her own past” (Jha 151) [1].

The momentum gained by Indian English Fiction during Gandhian Age has been retained during post-Independence period as well. Novelists like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Mulkraj Anand and Khushwant Singh still maintain and nourish the tradition of social realism which was established by earlier writers

Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterji, Salman Rushdie, Bapsi Sidhwa, Boman Desai and Rohinton Mistry have widened the scope of Indian Novel in English thematically as well as technically. Rohinton Mistry enjoys a prestigious position among the potpourri of authors trying their hand in Indian English writing at present. Right from his first offering, a story collection named *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, it has become clear that another luminous star has arisen in the literary firmament who will hog the limelight with literary stalwarts like V.S Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth. Mistry occupies a significant place among the writers belonging to Indian diaspora. Writers like Bharti Mukherji, Nazneen Sadiq and Neil Bissoondath who, like Rohinton Mistry, are of Indian origin settled in Canada. But the similarity ends here itself. Unlike them, Mistry is unique so far as the selection of themes is concerned. His selection is extremely rich and varied. Not only the postcolonial customs and ways of life, the diverse sides of socio-political life of India also gets efficiently portrayed in his work.

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He vehemently raises his voice against all types of social inequalities, be it social inequality, political inequality, or any other sort of inequality for that matter and wrote extensively on all sorts of injustice done particularly in the upper strata of society. He often writes with a Marxist consciousness with an accurate realization of suppression and exploitation of the oppressed, downtrodden, deprived groups of society, sometimes called 'the underdogs of society'.

Like Rushdie and Ghosh, Mistry has realized that truth can be stranger than fiction. Truth be treated as synonymous with history here. Walter Scott, using truth interchangeably with history, opined that "truths served in fairy fiction dressed" make fine reading. In recent times, Mistry as an emigre Indian writer, fictionally presented a particular period of Indian History, the period that started after independence.

If we browse through his narratives, we see that he establishes a deep concern for Indian society when he vividly portrays day to day human survival in the face of debilitating and devastating social-political upheavals, discriminations at all fronts and roadblocks. Maya Pavithralal Vinai rightly observed:

Rohinton Mistry can be regarded as one of the foremost names amongst the Indian writing in English. His three novels, *Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance*, and *Family Matters*, reflect the deep-rooted angst, trauma and struggles of post-independence middle class India. The bustling city of Mumbai, the place that was an integral part of Mistry's formative years and its fascinating people, with their varied idiosyncrasies, comes active in all the three novels and his collection of short stories. (2013:63).

Birth, parentage and upbringing in a certain environ do play a vital role in shaping the imagination of a writer. Sujata Chakravorty in her book '*Critical Insights into the novels of Rohinton Mistry*' writes, "The position the family enjoys in society, the mindset it has, the value it inculcates in the children, the religion it follows-all contribute towards making the individual into what he/she is" (10). Hence, an honest understanding of the factors that went into the making of a writer is necessary if one endeavors to evaluate and analyse the works of a writer in a better way. So, a close and thorough examination of socio-political aspects, culture, mores, milieu which helped Mistry gain such a high stature as a writer, is a must.

Mistry started thinking seriously to start a career in writing and when you dream sincerely, they say, gods definitely help. It so happened that in the fall of 1982, the first Hart House Literary Contest was advertised. Freny motivated him to take part and try his literary acumen. Mistry seriously entered the competition and won first prize. Then Mistry wrote his first short story, 'One Sunday', in 1983, which won the first prize in the Canadian Hart House Literary Contest. That short story set the ball of Mistry's literary career rolling. The success story of Mistry and his dream run of awards that started with "One Sunday" continued even afterwards. In the following year he won the same award for his short story "Auspicious Occasion" and he became the first writer to win it two times. In 1985 he got the Annual Contributors' Award from the Canadian Fiction Magazine. Mistry took writing seriously and he left his job to become a full-time writer with the help of a Canada Council grant. He published a collection of short stories, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) followed by novels '*Such a Long Journey*'

(1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995) and *Family Matters* (2002) and a short novella '*The Scream*'.

He writes mostly about India, the country of his birth and has set only two stories in Canada. Mistry gives the reason, "I prefer to write about that which engages my imagination. At present it is India. It's very naïve to assume that you leave a place and go to a new country and you start a new life and it's a new chapter- it's not. Canada is the middle of the book. At some point, you have to write the beginning. (Gokhale). In an interview with Anil Lakhani, Mistry admitted that "India and Bombay in particular continue to engage his attention and imagination. Therefore, he writes about the things he knows best-reconstructs from memory and paints with imagination." They say that coming events cast their shadows before. This seems true at least in the case of Rohinton Mistry. He possessed an extraordinary talent for writing even during early childhood. When he was a student of just 5<sup>th</sup> standard, he wrote about a cricket bat in his story, "The Autobiography of a Cricket Bat".

Mistry's works have been translated into a number of other languages Japanese, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian being a few of them. He has been a proud recipient of many prestigious awards which include the Annual Contributors Award from the Canadian Fiction Magazine, Booker Prize for Fiction in 1992 and 1996. *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) was published in Canada and also in the UK in 1992. His novella named *The Scream* (2008), illustrated by Tony Urquhart is an evocative work. In 2012, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature fell in his lap.

This one of the most read novelists in the post-colonial canon made his first sortie in literature through *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. The collection brings together the stories he wrote at the beginning of his literary career. Some of them might have been written without any thought of eking out a career in literature. But no one, not even a conservative critic can find any lacuna regarding his art of storytelling. This story collection, containing 11 stories in all, was also published as *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag* (1987). Firozsha Baag is a fictitious decrepit residential apartment and the stories that predominantly concern the lives of residents of Firozsha Baag. In his book *Rohinton Mistry: Identity Values and other Sociological Concerns* Jagdish Batra writes.

Mistry brings together assorted characters-the elderly Rustomji, dubbed 'curmudgeon' for his penny-wise proclivities, the expert storyteller Nariman Hansotia, the old and eccentric maidservant Jaakaaylee, the wayward and voyeuristic lad Pesi, the contrasting siblings Kersi and Persi, the sadistic-though pitiable Khorshedbai and others. (Batra 9)<sup>[3]</sup>.

The novelist successfully brings out the strengths and weaknesses of relationships among the people who resided in the apartment block. Moreover, some of the characters are common to many stories. This enables the reader to have multiple views of the same character and these repetitive appearances keep the reader bound within the precincts of Firozabad and provide him the opportunity to meet different characters as one actually does while living in such a locality. This is the method Mistry adopts to fortify realism. Aristotle says all art is mimetic. Rohinton Mistry's oeuvre is representational in the true sense of the word. The stress in *TFB* is not on action rather on the slow but real pace of life that goes on in this ethnic island. This anthology presents a perfect example of realistic portrayal of life. The Parsi

neighborhood of Firozsha Baag lives in a triple story complex comprising of A, B and C block. The tales told relate to families living in different blocks of this complex. Overall, this residential apartment had “a surfeit of low-paid bank clerks and bookkeepers.” In nature, the narrative is concentric. If a neighbor has side role in a story in another story, he becomes the central character. This anthology is primarily a study in human relationships. Although most of the tales relate to the life of Parsis, the stories are not devoid of their universal appeal.

Some common characteristics, customs, and traditions of Middle class Parsi life have been described in detail. These stories show the characters struggling desperately between modernity and tradition. Peter Morey says about the themes of the tales told in *TFB*.

Themes of these tales include topics such as families and their often-spiky internal politics, a sense of entrapment and the desire for escape, memory, and the pull of the past, the body its functions and inevitable decay, connections between individuals and often abortive attempts at communication, the search, the balance amidst life's turbulent elements, the use of parrel characters, the slipperiness of language and the redemptive power of storytelling. (2004, 27)<sup>[6]</sup>.

Ten stories out of eleven are narrated by Kersi Boyce, a child whose childhood was spent in Firozsha Baag and who migrated to Canada. The tales are actually reminiscing of Kersi and the eleventh story is the reaction of both of his parents on reading the stories involving the people of their neighborhoods, the characters they are familiar with, the characters with whom they have spent most of their lives, people with whose idiosyncrasies they are familiar.

Mistry's very first novel, *Such a Long Journey* (1991), won a lot of awards for him. The novel is based on the story of a bank clerk who becomes a victim of the nefarious scheming carried out by the high and mighty of the land. The setting of the novel is the tumultuous times of war between India and Pakistan 1971. In *SLJ*, public events have direct repercussions on the lives of ordinary citizens. At that time the socio-political corridors of the country were plagued by the demons like hatred, corruption, hypocrisy, communalism, nepotism, knavery, rationing and shortage of commodities, moral degradation of human beings in general and the politicians in particular.

### Conclusion

Rohinton Mistry is one of those writers of fiction whose works and ideas do not recognize the boundaries of time and space. His stories woven around the everyday routine of his ordinary characters are timeless, space less, and boundless. His works are rather the free flow of cosmic energy without keeping an account of how much of this energy is absorbed and how much is dissipated. Mistry, like a clever artist, uses his characters to reveal that boundaries within characters, within classes, political situations and races can never remain static and immovable. Life is fluid and in a continuous state of flux resulting in a constant blurring of these margins. Mistry's fiction can thus be read within the framework of merging, hybridized individual caught in the predicament of desperately trying to attain a balance between the “contradictions of the past and present, community and self, family, and community.

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