
Negotiating Parsi Identity: Cultural Memory, Communal Consciousness, and the Politics of Belonging in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance*, and *Family Matters*

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Abstract

The concept of "Identity", is primarily related to the wisdom of belongingness, is rather a new concern in the society. The perception is relatively encouraged by arguments on the ever-changing nature of the cultural and ethnic identities of the people. For example, the Parsi community, who are descendants from Iran, are key ethno-religious minority groups scattered across India. Similar to other Parsi novelists, Rohinton Mistry's novels are led by the knowledge of double displacement. Mistry as a Parsi dares and tries to evade being absorbed by the cultures of India. He wrote 3 novels which are *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1996) and *Family Matters* (2002). All his books take in hand to bring attention to sufferings faced by Indians because of communal disharmony, discrimination caused because of religious and caste, Bigotry, diversities in ethnicity and traditional aspects. He tries to present an accurate picture to the Parsi minorities, their worries, fears, feeling of uncertainty and powerlessness because of the political qualms. One of the noticeable connotations of Rohinton Mistry's works is his concern for his society and their identity, which will be elaborated in detail in this research paper. Thus, all these Parsi fictions endeavors to offer a very mighty voice to the Parsis community and fight for their identity.

Keywords: Identity, Rohinton Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance*, *Family Matters*, Parsi Community, Minority, Culture.

Introduction

Literature is considered as an influential tool for writers in modulating and changing the framework of this society. Like every writer, Rohinton Mistry has contributed to displacement theory and this specifically involves a reassessment of the rights and the status of minorities through political restructuring. He desires a domination free world, fairness and equality in everything.

He has emphasized the necessity for steaming out the animosity, misapprehensions through appropriate and suitable ways. It has been perceived that traditions or race are the major governing factors on the ideology and ethnic structure of a specific place. When a drift occurs among the culture of the majority and minority ethnic crowds, there occurs national unrest. In such a crisis, it is essential for understanding reality by accepting the differences as a significant aspect of human existence and instilling forbearance towards other cultures, ethnicity, religion, language, etc. Mistry is one of the eminent English novelists of India. All three novels *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1996) and *Family Matters* (2002) portray India in a realistic way giving out the essence of socio-political and traditional aspects. He is an immigrant author and so his novels depict the true sense of a social, political and cultural picture of India. He has offered the gloomy and disheartening view of life in India and has recorded the miseries of the minorities, the deprived and the beleaguered community of Indian society. His works deal with the background of the Post-Freedom India. He has included all key events that have taken place since Freedom.

This is an endeavor for retrieving the native Parsi culture repressed by the prevailing cultural beliefs and dogmas in the society of India. Mistry elaborates the dishonor and apprehension in the Parsi life and the society's lower strata in the hands of the prevailing dogmas in the society. This domination additionally leads towards the traditional dominance that denies the other cultures' heterogeneity. He has raised up his voice for other minorities of India especially during emergency periods, during Babri Mosque demolition, Indira Gandhi's assassination, war among Pakistan and India, etc.

Rohinton Mistry's Concern for His People

Parsis are regarded as the supreme occupied people since they are found in India, Canada, and America, Britain. Rohinton Mistry, a Parsi writer has depicted the way in which Parsis act together with other populace around them. He has expressed all worries of the contemporary day Parsi in his novels since they are the minority groups in India experiencing ethnic fears and apprehensions. They feel uncertain, go through an identity crisis and are threatened by possible submersion in the dominant culture of India. There are also other upsetting ethnic aspects like decreasing population, lowered birth rate, late marriages, increased divorce rates, hostility, and development. Every matter has its own place in Rohinton Mistry's novel. There are Parsi writers whose works are regarded as community-specific like Firdaus Kanga in *Trying to Grow*, Farrukh Dhondy in *Bombay Duck* and Bapsi Sidhwa in *The Crow Eaters* and *The Pakistani Bridge*. All these authors are profound in their community's ambitions and obstructions, prospects and uncertainties, survival struggle and the crisis of identity as A. K. Singh denotes:

“Their work exhibit consciousness of their community in such a way that the community emerges as a protagonist from their work though on the surface these work deal with their human protagonists” (Singh, 66).

Initially, Mistry's works focus on the characteristics and heterogeneity of the Parsi community. Rohinton Mistry discovers the affiliations in his community, the cultural identity, and distinctiveness to their living. Simultaneously, Mistry delivers some light and completely embraces the syncretic essence of the diasporic Parsi experience. With the help of the events and characters, Mistry concentrates on the Parsi community and the novels display Mistry's consciousness. Therefore, the Parsi rituals, their life that varies from others, the anguish caused because of the continuously shifting communal relationship and their reminiscence and desire for the missed glory of their community's past are exhibited on personal as well as more universal and broader level by Mistry.

Ethnic identity in *Such a Long Journey*

Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* is written with postcolonial components in an exceedingly sturdy manner. He offers significance to the Identity of persons in their living circumstances. A psychological state is powerfully depicted by the author in this novel. It expresses the feeling of Parsis who wish to establish their identity, especially in India. After India's independence, Parsis have started to doubt their future life. Several members of the community felt that having an acceptable position among Indian society would become tough. Thus, most of them have set to depart India for a better life. It makes them conscious of their current condition. This novel shows the Parsis' psychological state in their region, particularly in Mumbai. They have a feeling that they face displacement and oppression in their new country. In the past, they have been conquered by the colonizers and currently they're conquered by India's new political parties. The Parsi community likewise touches alienation in Indian Society. Although the Parsis reside in India, they aren't considered as the natives of India even after being in India for several centuries. It offers them the sensation of alienation within postcolonial India. They cannot alter the customs and traditions of India's native people.

Mistry described the novel with Gustad's life. The entire story emphasizes on Gustad family. The novel is mainly based on the search of the entire Parsi community for a new identity through middle-class Parsi families residing in Khodadar Bhavan. Mistry expressed the misfortune of the Parsis and their identity losses through the leading characters. The novel is about the identity of Parsis and other marginalized peoples and the longing for a better life, which was in post-colonial India in the seventies and eighties. The craving for the identity of the Parsi community comes from the words of Parsi characters like Gustad and Dinshaji. They give voice to the identity of the Parsis. They also reveal the suspicious and pathetic life of the Parsi community in North India. Thus, in *Such A Long Journey* of Mistry, the identity crisis of

the entire Parsi community and the person of Indian society is depicted. It also displays his longing for recognition at every moment in his inhabited country.

Mistry's prime objective, like each other Zoroastrian writers, is to record the concerns, restlessness, difficulties and distinct identities of a Parsi community within India's borders, and he did his finest to preserve the ethnic identity of his community. In *Such A Long Journey*, Mistry takes responsibility as the representative of the Parsi community to reveal how the status of the colonies affects the identity of the community. Apart from religion, historical awareness also shapes the collective identity of the Parsi community.

A Fine Balance between Life and Death

A Fine Balance, Mistry's most successful work so far, tells the story of four characters (Manek, Dinah, Ishwar, and Omprakash) and the impact of Indira Gandhi's emergency on them. Rohinton Mistry displays the anguish of the Parsi communities' poor characters and the two untouchable's tyranny of the village in *A Fine Balance*. He uses four main women characters, women and three men. Each of the four protagonists has its own story. The four highest characters come from Dinah's apartment as refugees by contracting race, sexual category or public roles. They remain in an insignificant position in the perspective of each India. They are moved by the community and try to focus on their personality. The apartment is seen as the mundane site of individuals in a troubled society. His life in Mumbai is in contrast with his potentials and this symbolized the suffering, apprehension, and anxiety of the people who came out from their natives. The novel is about the anguish of the poorest people. In such a way, *A Fine Balance* is a story of heroic conflict and disgusting misfortune established on physical, psychological and social miseries.

Rohinton Mistry explains the suffering of the lower part of society in *A Fine Balance*. The lower class people are humiliated by the upper-class people. No one is willing to show mercy on humanitarian grounds. Thus, Rohinton Mistry expresses his personal feelings on the suffering heroes.

Sufferings and Family Matters

Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*, an aged Parsi who is a retired university lecturer of English, revolves around the life of Nariman Weckel. He is living in Chato Felicity in a beautiful apartment with his two middle-aged stepchildren Komi and his brother Jale. When Nariman is sleepy, Komi and Jal plan to meet their daughter Roxana. She lives in an enjoyable holiday home with her spouse Yezad Chenoy, with their two children Murad and Jahangir. Already Yezad is surrounded by financial concerns and is being obligatory to take on the new responsibility of looking after her father-in-law. Rohinton Mistry has clearly depicted a person's sufferings in his old age. For example, Nariman grieves from Parkinson's and osteoporosis. Even at Roxana's house, Nariman finds no peace. There too many times, he is humiliated by Yazad. At an early age, Nariman wanted to marry Lucy, a non-Zoroastrian girl.

According to Parsi culture, a Parsi boy should marry a Parsi girl. So the same tragedy happened to Nariman and his parents did not allow him to marry her. So, under compulsion, he had to marry the Parsi widow Yasmin. "Congratulations, Marji called his father Mr. Kotwal." "You won after eleven years of battle!" "Better late than ever", Mr. Birdy said, but luck always favors the adventurer. Remember that patience is sweet and ends well. "(Mistry, 11) He could not forget Lucy even in his old age. He leads an unsatisfactory life until his demise. Migration is an important subject in *Family Matters*. Parsis in India go abroad in search of money. Narendra Kumar states:

"Parsis are the best choice since providing unlimited possibility for growth and prosperity. Disorganization is part of the Parsi psyche. Exiled twelve hundred years ago, he came to India. Now they are migrating west in search of greener pastures. Thus in Parse's case there is a "double migration" (Mistry, 14)

Being an immigrant, Rohinton Mistry clearly highlights Yazid's dream for Canada. Mistry gives an autobiographical touch to his portrayal of Yezad. The striking comparison among himself and Yazid is clearly felt in the novel. To make sure materialistic security.

Zoroastrians always feel that their community is slowly shrinking. Zoroastrian writers express their fears through their writings to alert their community to their dwindling population. In *Family Matters*, Mistry also expresses his concern about the decline of the community. Inspector Masalwala Jal, and Drs. Fitters discuss the Parsi communities' future. They decide that the factors contributing to the collapse are "declining birth dates, or male and female marrying non-Parsis, and heavy migration to the West" (Mistry, 400). *Family Matters* has a hard-pressed desire of the author to be ready to return home and re-organize the Parsi community in India. His autobiographical feeling is more in this novel. *Family Matters* vividly portrays the insecurity, isolation, and emotions of modern-day Zoroastrians and Mistry's past and present concerns.

Conclusion

Mistry's novels challenge the creation of a unitary national narrative for India. There are political complexities of double displacement in his writings. He has given attention to issues such as multiculturalism and identity. Mistry recorded the atrophy, anxiety, uneasiness, insecurity, ethnicity, and sense of danger in his community during his novel's long journey through his novel. There is a message that race, ethnicity or majority ideology are governing cultural factors and cultural diversity occupies a particular place where cultural diversity exists. The drift between ethnic culture and majority culture often leads to unrest in national life along with social structure. It is necessary to eliminate hatred, religious parochialism and misconceptions through proper channels. Mistry provides a world like other Zoroastrian writers

that are free from domination and hierarchy, a world that rests on the principles of justice and equality.

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