

THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE SELECT NOVELS OF ROHINTON MISTRY

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Rohinton Mistry was born into a Parsi family in 1952. He grew up in Bombay where he attended university, graduating in 1974 with a degree in Mathematics. He and his wife immigrated to Canada the subsequent year where he began an itinerary in English and Philosophy at the University of Toronto while functioning as a bank clerk for the duration of the day. After winning several awards for his short stories and a Canada Council grant, Mistry began to write full-time in 1985. His first novel, *Such a Long Journey*, won both the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book and the Governor General's Award, and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. It was made into an attribute film in 1998. *A Fine Balance* won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for literature and the Giller Prize, and was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize, the International IMPAC Dublin mythical Award and the Irish Times International Fiction Prize.

Rohinton Mistry's works seeks to grow a apparition that involves mutually the community-centered subsistence of the Parsis and their taking part with the wider national framework. His novels are fretful with the practice of the Parsi in India. Mistry, re-narrates the history of his society and country as it has been in the post-Independence era. This re-narration of history in a way depicts perception of anxieties and aspirations, perils and problems of existence of individual, shared and national issues. Mistry has, in this sense, effectively exploited some historical points of post- Independence era and endeavored to re-think them and re-narrate about his community and country through the various narratives woven in the novel. Politics form an important undertone to the main action of all three novels of Rohinton Mistry.

This obsession moves progressively more closer to current times as Mistry tackles first, in *Such a Long Journey*, the Bangladeshi war with Pakistan, second, Indira Gandhi's assertion of a State of Emergency which affects the livelihood of the tailors of *A Fine Balance* and finally, in *Family Matters*, the impact Hindu fundamentalist confrontation and the post-Babri Masjid riots had on the life of the ordinary Indian. *A Fine Balance* was in print twenty years after he left Bombay, returning only to visit, but Mistry originates no obscurity in summoning up the city. *A Fine Balance* is very decisively in touch with authenticity and with the expelled, a very conscious verdict on Mistry's part.

Such a Long Journey that Mistry foregrounds aspects of national politics and integrates them into the main plot of his narrative. With *A Fine Balance*, he reproduces his concerns about the imbrications of national politics and the destiny of the personage. However, in *Family Matters*, because of the more friendly nature of his fictional topography, state politics, though present, affect the main description only towards the end.

The narratives of *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters* nurture concurrently more intimate and more closely fretful with the inner life and composite experiences of the protagonists, while inconsistently, also more concerned with existing social and political contexts. In Mistry's novels, we can easily find interconnectedness of various themes like idea of nationalism, alienation, oppression, human-relationship, fright and persuasion. The homelessness of Ishvar and Om in the city makes them victims of the essential government's plans for a city beautification-project endorsed by people of the middle class such as Nusswan Shroff and Mrs. Gupta, the manager of Au Revoir Exports—people who have enormously no proposal of the wretchedness of the complete poor, the dispossessed and the disempowered.

Unlike these two, Dina Dalal becomes prey and servant to her brother's family, and is left to fend for herself. Dina's relationship with the two tailors is at first one of be suspicious of and dictatorship as she forces them to work long hours without knowing that they go without food. She forbids Maneck, a —nice Parsi boy from socializing with them. But the barriers steadily withdraw as they all get to know each other. The bond flanked by the four becomes stronger after their horrendous experiences at the edifice plant. Dina Dalal allows the tailors to sleep on the porch of her tiny flat. But this promise of happiness is soon to be shattered.

Ishvar, who believes in the tradition of with marrying young, persuades his nephew, Om that regardless of their thorny substance circumstances, he be supposed to to marry a girl from their village. This return to the village marks the inception of their sorrows. Om's youthful confront of the ascendancy of the domineering Thakur, who had murdered his whole family leads to his castration by the politicians. Ishvar, who had earlier been untainted along with his nephew under the central government's Family Planning Program, loses his legs to gangrene. Both Om and Ishvar make their way back to the city where Dina has lost the battle aligned with the landlord and finally permissible herself to be dispossessed from her flat. Dina's acquiescence is the effect of a delusion on her part. She believes that the tailors, who are in point of fact wedged up in the caste tumult in their village, have deserted her. She also believes that Maneck, who files away to Dubai, having botched his exams, has also isolated her.

She allows Nusswan's family to take over her providence and renovate her into an amateur family servant. When Maneck returns to Bombay eight years later, the city is in the throes of a new form of madness—the killing of Sikhs in the wake of the Prime Minister's assassination. Even though this corroboration of human madness saddens him, it does not splinter him as much as discovering the destiny of Dina and the tailors does. It is, for him, the last resistant of the chaos of the world. He had earlier described God thus: I prefer to think that God is a colossal coverlet maker. With a never-ending variety of designs. And the quilt has developed so big and confusing, the pattern is impossible to see, the squares and diamonds and triangle don't fit so well together anymore, and it's all develop into meaningless. So He has abandoned it. (*A Fine Balance*. 418)

Theme of Communitarianism along with the politics in Mistry's novel is a fine certification of the human dimensions of the Emergency. Mistry could have completed the tailors inhabitants of the city who endure from such persecute. But bringing in people from the village allows him to document new areas of the varied sub - continental social reality-poverty chauvinism and caste oppression in the villages, inter-communal concord or its facade and the terrible quandary of honest hard-working villagers who befall a mass of statistics in the city. The two tailors, who signify common humanity as they endure the consequences of all the political measures determined in the higher echelons of power, are Om and Ishvar Darji, Chamaars-turned-tailors from the countryside. Once in the city, Om and Ishvar can only join the masses

looking for jobs and shelter. When they originally have to sleep under the canopy of the shop of Ashraf Chacha's suspicious friend, Nawaz, they think it is but a momentary measure. Soon, they find out that this temporary measure will last for three months, for jobs are not easy to come by. Their after that stop is the slum quarter where they encounter for the first time the dreadful occurrence of the poor city migrant.

A poor hovel is sublet to them by an agent manipulating state lands, where illegal shacks are erected and borrowed out to the distracted. This is scarcely any comfort but it ensures a roof over the head. At the *jhoadpattys*, Om and Ishvar have to intermingle with a curious group of people. It is here that they experience water shortage, the awful poverty of those even shoddier off than them, like the Monkey-man who cannot abscond his animals alone for fear they will dispose of each other out of hunger, and the poor scruffy woman with five children to feed. As the foursome break up, each to their own fate, the bend of national politics takes over. Om, Ishvar and Dina have to earn their livelihood within the very structures of communal coercion they had set out to challenge. When Maneck comes back from Dubai, he returns at the peak of anti-Sikh riots in the madness following Indira Gandhi's assassination. The driver who transports him is one who has had to camouflage himself to hide his Sikh distinctiveness.

The madness of common riots has facade again and again in post-Independence India. Beyond the causes of riots, the politics of rioting demands a reconsideration of the politics of identity within multicultural, secular India. The political theme of *Family Matters* is articulated through the figures of Yezad and his employer – the idealistic Mr. Kapur – and their lives. Mr. Kapur has dreams of reforming the city, making it safer for the ordinary citizen. From the time of his first manifestation, he talks of contesting the Municipal elections in order to deal with lawlessness, and acting as a shield against the fundamentalist Hindutva agenda of Shiv Sena apologists. *Family Matters* shows the events at the level of the local and the ancestral. Communal politics and disturbances affect the common man (in this case, Yezad) though he is in no way implicated in sectarian strife, or even local politics. Mistry shows how fundamentalism and skewed political thinking have altered the very social structure in such a way that even the common man – dissociated from politics – is scared and pretentious. Beyond the concern with the right-wing politics of the Hindu majority, *Family Matters* also deals with larger issues of religious zealotry, bigotry and fundamentalism within all communities. The Parsi community is not spared criticism – Nariman Vakeel's parents and their legion of friends who are zealously religious and exclusivist Parsis, and the final conversion of liberal Yezad into a fundamentalist religious bigot. It is the perfect canvas to explore the politics of the individual in next of kin to the community.

Dina Dalal in *A Fine Balance* emerge as stalwartly idiosyncratic people who struggle to carve a personal, individual space for themselves within the family whole. In the case of Sohrab, his insurgence is against his father's dreams for his future, to which he is ultimately acquiescent as he realizes the older man only wishes his well-being. In the case of Dina dalal, her rebellion is both that of a disempowered woman and a sister adjacent to a wealthy and manipulative brother. However, it is only in *Family Matters* that the question of the private space of individual identity is fully explored through the many instances of conflict flanked by individual desires and duties towards the family or community.

The primary of these is the tragic story of Nariman Vakeel. He is compellingly estranged from his Christian girlfriend by his parents and their well-wishers and enforced to twist to the general demand of the community. This is offered as a submission of his will to the higher good: —No happiness is more lasting than the happiness that you get from fulfilling your parents'

wishes. (FM. 13) But Nariman accepts the separation from Lucy out of exhaustion and a sagacity of the ineffectuality of the lopsided struggle: —They had been ground down by their families, exhausted by the strain of it. (FM.13) Nariman’s parents see education as the source of sorrow: —Modern ideas have filled Nari’s head. He never learned to preserve that fine balance between tradition and modernness. (FM. 15) This theme of intimidation exercised by the family is recurring in a diverse situation with Jal, Nariman’s stepson. Nostalgia is a persistent theme in Mistry’s fiction. This nostalgia is normally for a past way of life, eternally lost to the main characters. It is sporadically apparent in the admiration of religious rituals which are seen as a way to defend the past and prevent the crumbling of the family and the community.

It also takes the form of reminiscing about childhood which is seen as a more steady and reassuring world than the present. These reminiscences, accessible in the stories of various characters in both the short stories and the novels, are allied to the changed circumstances of the Parsi community following Independence. This politico-cultural nostalgia helps to create a sense of loss about the tainted circumstances of the characters in both domestic and public spheres. All of Mistry’s texts play with the boundaries of the private and the public. The public world is the world of the ordinary citizen, consisting of friends, acquaintances and the professional space of work where these adult relationships are forged. As the earlier we have indicated, the themes of politics, history and community are important to the life of Mistry’s characters. The private world is the space of the home and the family, populated typically by women and children.

Age is a vital theme in Mistry’s fiction and relationships flanked by and across generations is a major apprehension whenever Mistry discusses the private realm of the family and the household. The private world is where the family gathers. In Mistry’s fiction, it consists of the world of the old and the young. Women govern the private territory with their nurturing attention and the hard labor through which the stability of the family is ensured. Immigration is a recurring theme in Mistry’s fiction from his short stories to the newest novel *Family Matters* where Yezad narrates to his two sons his vain experiences with bureaucracy in his young adolescent days as he attempted to go to the West. Thus, expectations about the inevitability of migration are very strong. But he can neither feel his brother’s nationalist obligation nor Jamshed’s alienation. His migration is a predetermined course that he undertakes, not out of enthusiasm but because it has to be.

We can very well see the theme of estrangement, fear and enticement in the story of Dina’s struggles against the social conditions of her subsistence could easily have existed independent of the long sortie into the life of the tailors. As such they would have existed, within the absurdist frame of an irrational universe, as ever-enduring puppets. It is through these people and events that the novel tackles the immediate consequences of the —City Beautification, —*Garibi Hatao* and —Family planning schemes. Their tragic-comic fates are pertinent illustrations of the irrationality of human existence, where human will have no power over the illogical course of events. Both Om and Ishvar are presented as fully smoothed human characters. Om is impulsive, easily irritated and always has to be called back to practical reality by his uncle. Early in the story, when they learn of the massacre of the family, Om dreams of Dalit revenge. He has to be swayed of the pointlessness of this scheme by Ishvar.

Mistry recognizes the consequence of religion and rite in the construction of human identity. He, therefore, use religion, ritual and the responses to these as a central theme in his fiction. In fact, rituals and religious beliefs become the markers of ethnic, racial and communitarian identities; they highlight difference. Mistry’s fiction can be read within this framework as the quandary of an individual as he/she seeks to cope with the contradictions of the

past and the present, community and self, family and community. Each of these contexts of individual contradictions and dilemmas is an emotionally-charged event in his work. Mistry's novels are a marvelous showcase of relationships, and this can be experiential under the theme of human-relationship.

In *A Fine Balance* we can see the middle class and the unspecified, faceless working class meet commiserate with each other, and learn to overcome their prejudices and counterfeit bonds of friendship, affection and compassion. In fact, by depicting the struggles of the four main protagonists and numerous socio-economically challenged characters, during the Emergency, and how it dealt a blow to their already partial capacities and options of having a better future, the author succeeds in conveying his point of view.

This, the author does, to inform as well as warn the readers, that the horrors that follow the characters in Mumbai are not local, but a global haunt for the deprived. This brings to the reader, the unsettling thought and confirmation, that for the marginal people "Living each day is to face one emergency or another." (A Fine Balance. 571)

India does not require unintentional economic growth and sacrificing the poor-man at the altar of "Common Good". What it needs is, to bring impartiality, justice and the basic amenities to its unfortunate and rundown. "In the end, it's all a question of balance." (A Fine Balance. 227)

References:

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Nidhi Gupta. Lapis Lazuli –An International Literary Journal. Vol.II. Issue I.SPRING 2012
ISSN 2249-4529. (Pp. 1-12)