

Post-Colonial and Diasporic Sensibilities in Rohinton Mistry's Selected Novels

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Abstract—This paper attempts to focus on the post-colonial diasporic sensibilities in Rohinton Mistry's novels. Residing in Canada Mistry is known for representing different narratives of diaspora. Mistry as a post-colonial diasporic writer tries to liberate the dominant culture from the conventional society as well as from the western ideology. Through his creative writings Mistry concentrates the Parsi community which is now in a state of decline. He enumerates the struggle of the immigrants, their displacement from the native land, culture and tradition of their own. Thus, the paper aims to liberate the national identity from the yoke of colonialism.

Keywords—Rohinton Mistry, Post-Colonialism, Diaspora, Parsi Community, Hybridity.

1. Methodology

This article is descriptive in nature where concepts of post-colonialism and diasporic sensibilities are deeply advocated in the light of Rohinton Mistry's novels. Mistry's novels highlight the struggle of minor communities of India in the post-colonial era encapsulating with the nostalgia and the loss of homeland of the immigrants. Thus, this study focuses on the quest for identity, uprooting and re-rooting of familial relationships etc.

2. Objectives

This study aims to explore the following objectives,

- To study the dispartion of immigrants in an alien region.
- To study the socio-cultural structure of the minorities of post-colonial Indian community.
- To analyse Rohinton Mistry's novels which aims to highlights the voices of the marginalized Parsi community.

3. Introduction

Literature is the mirror of our society which reflects the social surroundings either directly or indirectly. The writers offers most innovative works towards the contribution of world literature be it fiction or non-fiction or be it poetry or drama. The writers of the contemporary Modern Indian English Literature not only limited in dealing with the modern sensibilities, moreover their writings always aids towards the development of world literature and gives an exclusive location of their respective culture and sociological background. We

find a complex admixture of hybridity in their expressions and works. The post-colonial diasporic writers often try to counter the concept of 'otherness' through their works of fiction and non-fiction. They very well observe the boundaries between memory and imagination and fact and fiction from their own experiences.

4. Post-Colonialism

The term post-colonialism is a very complex cultural process which represents a particular period of history which deals with the ideas, beliefs and spirit of the time. This term was very well defined by Bijay K Das in his most famous book *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*: "post-coloniality emphasizes a contemporary state and is currently in fashion with the literary critics. It at once operates at two levels—first, as a historical marker of the period following decolonization and second, as an embodiment of intellectual approaches." The post-colonial is basically applied to the cultures affected by the imperial agenda of the western imperialists for cultural domination. In *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literature in English* by Benson and Connolly more clearly popularized the term post-colonial as "The word 'post-colonial' encompasses 'all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is continuity of happenings throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.' Imperialism refers to the policy of extending the control of authority over foreign entities as a means of acquisition and/or maintenance of empire, either through direct territorial control or through indirect methods of exerting control on the politics and/or economy of other countries."

In the above quoted lines it is clear that the literature produced by the colonized people advocates to comprehend their identity and try to regain their past. The literature that they produced attempts to claim their own identity, ethnicity, language, religion and their cultural and traditional ethos. Hence their literature becomes a revolutionary outlook to some extent as they attempts to uphold their own sensibilities and spirits which were suppressed by the ideology and Hegemony of British Empire. The ideology which is framed by the European Empire in the psychology of the colonized people urges them to accept the Western culture. As such the post-

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colonial writers aims to decolonized the mind of the colonized people to become aware of their native identity as well as their culture while avoiding the culture of the West.

5. Diaspora

The term Diaspora is taken from the Greek meaning “to spread about” or “to disparage”. Diaspora is a forcible or voluntary movement of people or a group of people from their homelands into a new region. Hence it is a historical fact of colonization. It is a temporary movement or a permanent dispartion of millions of people across the world of which its population is approximately 25 million. Out of which Indian diaspora occupies second position in the world. The quest for identity, nostalgia, recalling of the old homeland are the primary features of diasporic wrtings of different communities such as Parsi in Bombay, Hindu in the Caribbean, Muslim in East Africa, etc.

6. Rohinton Mistry as a Post-Colonial Diasporic Writer

Rohinton Mistry is considered as one of the most celebrated writer of post-colonial diasporic writer of contemporary period. His contribution has liberated Indian English Literature from the influence of colonial ideology. In his writings he seeks to overcome the stigma of ‘marginality’, ‘migration’, ‘subaltern’ and the struggle of the Parsis. He as member of Parsi community was born in 1952 in Bombay, India is now settled in Canada. Though living in a different region he is deeply rooted to his Indian soil and its culture. His contribution towards Indian English Fiction begins with *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, a collection of short stories. Till date Mistry has written many novels out of which he is greatly known for three major novels namely- *Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters*. Along with these three celebrated novels he has also published one novella *Scream*. In all of these works he has taken great interest in Parsi community. He brilliantly presents Indian setting especially the streets of Bombay. They picturesque Indian culture, its socio-political, socio-economic background, life and customs of Indian elements.

In his first book *Tales from Firozsha Baag* portrayals the lives of the inhabitants of a fictitious apartment Firozsha Baag located in Bombay. The book unveils the life of the Parsi community who belongs to the middle class family in which the characters of the book faces the struggle between tradition and modernity. Each characters of the Prasi community represent religious upholding. The characters also convey the issues of spiritual quests, alienation and fear of death, family problems and economic hardships.

7. Such a Long Journey

Mistry’s post-colonial traits is observed in his first novel *Such a Long Journey* (1991). The concept of alienation and identity crisis of Parsi community is clearly prevalent in the novel, it gives an account of the Parsi community, their life and their customs. The novel begins with disheartened Gustad Noble performing ‘Kust’ prayer which is a ritual in Zoroastrianism (a region of Parsi community). He is presented

as a character having fantasies, worries for his son, his daughter’s ill health. Mistry also presents Gustad’s reminiscence of the past days as he had spent together with his family members happily. His encounter with Lungraa, Bilimoria and Malcom Saldanha are presented with flashback. The three epigraphs of the novels also has a great significance for Mistry’s concern-

- The first epigraph is taken from Firdausi’s *Shah Nama* which talks about the Iranian heritage of the great empire and also represents the deteriorated condition of the present Parsi community.
- The second epigraph is taken from T. S Eliot’s “Journey of the Magi” which pictures the ancient Zoroastrianism. And it is believed that the three Magi who had attended the birth of Jesus Christ were actually the Zoroastrian priests.
- The last epigraph is taken from Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali* which reveals the consistent movement of Parsi community and the difficulties that they faced in adapting themselves in the new realities.

Gustad’s life journey symbolizes the above three epigraphs. The journey of Gustad is alike the journey of three Magi, his journey is a continuous struggle for leading a valuable, ambitious and desirous life. His journey is both physical and spiritual.

8. A Fine Balance

Mistry’s second novel *A Fine Balance* (1995), vividly highlights the ideals to the declaration of Emergency by Indira Gandhi in the year 1977. Mistry through the four major characters namely- Dina, Manek, Om and Ishwar portrayed in this novel too belong to the Parsi community. The characters represent the entire microcosm of class struggle and the atrocities they face in a caste-based society. They are the individuals who are facing troubles in the present social structure. Dina, a Parsi women who tries to hold her financial independence, Manek who is Parsi student sent to city by his parents to study engineering against his will. And the two untouchable characters Ishwar and Om moves to city in order to escape the caste system that is practices in the society. To protect themselves from the corrupt government, brutal and conventional society they offer mutual love, respect, care and sympathy for each other. Through the hardship of these four central characters from different walks of life Mistry highlights the social structure which is still prevent today. Apart from the Parsi community he also took great concern to other minority communities like Muslims and other depressed Hindu communities. Each character in the novel encounters serious challenges either natural or manmade. Rigid religious practices are also highlighted in the novel for instance Manek loses his Himalayan foothill community which was sacrificed in the name of economic development on an altar. The story of the novel reflects the contemporary Indian society, the hardships of downtrodden and the sufferings of innocents who occupy no places to survive in their own soil. On the contrary the corrupt and wealthy people has enough advantages and gets to lead a

prestigious life in a hollow society. Because of this flawless in-depth narration and portrayal of realistic characterisation the novel *A Fine Balance* has been compared with Charles Dickens and Leo Tolstoy's writings.

9. Family Matters

Mistry in the last novel *Family Matters* (2002), shows a blended family wherein the entire members of the family tries to cope with the failing health of their father, who recalls his past memories. Mistry presents castism in the village and communal riots in the city as 'othering'. This is so because they isolate and discriminate the 'other' such as the Muslim, the Shikh, the Parsi communities. For instance, the character of Hussain represents working class 'otherness'. The novel reflects the sense of nostalgia, alienation and disillusionment of the Parsi community in the post-colonial India. The disillusionment of the Parsis is clearly visible among Jal, Coomy and Nariman:

"Why leave the flat at all? It's like heaven here...I will lock out the hell of the outside world and spend my days indoors"

"You couldn't said Narsiman Hell as ways..."

"Just think back to the Babri Majid riots...in the streets, not indoors."

"The goondas who assumed Muslims were hiding in Dalal Estate and set fire it?" (Mistry, *Family Matters*).

10. Conclusion

Mistry's post-colonial diasporic sensibilities can be traced in

almost all his works where each characters finds self-identity and self-worth either dealing with domestic and household convention or facing social and political restrains. The Parsi communities which he deals are far away from the conventional and rigid traditional norms. On the contrary they hold on to radical modernity which is secular and liberal. Mistry thus becomes a social reformer who contributed his work of fictions for the readers to understand their self-worth. His unconventional approach in freeing hegemonic idealism and it's influence upon rigid society made him socialist and sympathetic towards the deprived and downtrodden. This shows that Mistry does not dislocate himself from his native land though he lives far away from his native land or birth place. Nevertheless, he deeply rooted to his native land, culture, tradition and language as well

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