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ROHINTON MISTRY AND HIS WRITING: A PARSI PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Rohinton Mistry is a major writer in English literature. He is considered as a milestone in pushing literature ahead. As a creative writer Rohinton Mistry has enhanced the prestige of Indian writing in English by his creative writing. Rohinton Mistry is such a writer who began to write short stories and novels in English. Rohinton Mistry is considered a writer of literary prominence and has acquired great status in modern literary scenario. He belongs to Parsi community, the community is microscopic and yet it is very dynamic in all aspects of human experiences. Since the many centuries this community is stood as a model community distributing distinct to the rich social, cultural, academic, commercial, and religious diversity of India. Therefore it is compelling and fascinating to see that such a rich Parsi experience of a minority community must be if not thoroughly at least in brief be studied and focused.

Keywords: *Zoroastrianism, Community, Religious, Honest, Marriage, Cultural Difference, Orthodox, Ethnic, Minority, etc.*

The Parsi writers including Rohinton Mistry, Bapsi Sidhwa, Perin Bharucha, Boman Desai, Dina Mehta, Firdaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy and many others are fully conscious of the fact that their community is under decline. Their writings attempt to preserve their ethnicity for ages to come. The Parsis have in the prevailing circumstances in the past had adopted Gujarati as their mother tongue and as a result contributed greatly to Gujarati literature. Rohinton Mistry is at the pinnacle of literary achievement as an Indian/Canadian writer of fiction in Indian English. He is a writer of extraordinary abilities, capacities and literary potentials. He has created a new world of grand achievements in literary creations.

Rohinton Mistry belongs to a Parsi community which is a community of unique features in respect of human talents, human dignity and extraordinary achievement in various fields. This community is marked by distinct and recognizable human virtues. Parsi writers particularly novelists wrote about the existence of their community and their Parsi world. It is a serious matter for all the great writers of Parsi community to see that their population is dwindling on the verge of extinction. This is a great threat to them. Its basic reason is their narrow outlook to extremely rigid in religious matter. The late marriages and outcast marriages they don't prefer nons.

Rohinton Mistry is a very significant and most recognized post-independence Parsi writer in English. He shares both ethnocentric and minority discourse which characterized Parsi

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literature. All the features of Parsi community as a minority are recreated in Mistry's literary work like identity crisis, low birth rate, declining population, gender discrimination and late marriages. Moreover the constant threats of fear due to political upheavals in the country are most distinctly but very naturally and realistically, though only imaginatively are presented in his novels and short stories. Rohinton Mistry is such a writer who write with an honest perception and as a result the authentically of his writing are incredibly great. He has caught up the throbbing pulse of the most common men and women. It shows that as a writer he feels great sympathy for the infinite suffering of common people in every novel we get such characters who are the victims of human suffering due to man-made social construct and also due to blind power of fate.

Rohinton Mistry's capacity for story telling is another most significant aspect of his novels which attracts readers without any hesitation. Simultaneously Mistry describes the echoes of inner pangs of Parsi community. At the same time Mistry is well aware of the puzzles and problems of family life and family politics. This is focused in his third novel *Family Matters*, but here also he describes inevitability of corruption and immovability but at the same time he describe in this novel the sensitive problem of family responsibility and the problem of ignorance, negligence and trend of exploiting other member of family for selfish personal gains.

Rohinton Mistry's novels focus on the communal features and social behavior of Parsi community. He highlights in all his novels the real life conditions of Parsis and a great jolt which this community received after the british Raj ended. Mistry's novels focus his attention on the changed condition of Parsi Community. After Britishers have left India the condition of Parsi community was negatively changed. The Parsis enjoyed an elite status in the pluralistic Indian social scenario. Right from the beginning, they have been shown as lovers of education. They have given maximum importance to education in their lives. Being highly educated they have realized themselves to social prestige.

Rohinton Mistry's novel *Family Matters* in which the characters in the novel are described as lovers of education. This novel also partially deals with the Parsis' quests for knowledge and how the Parsi boys and girls outshine other students and are successful in performing their duties by displaying their talents in the best educational institution of the country. Parsi community is distinctively marked by certain features which readers cannot ignore. In spite of their cultural developments and Westernization, their living standards and life style they stand aloof-from other Indian communities. Their sense of superiority is very evident. This sense of superiority prevents them from mingling freely with others. They never like others visiting their houses, and establishing any relationship with others will not tolerated by Parsis. For example in *Family Matters* Murad is reproached by his father when he invites his college mate Angali to his birthday party. It is another matter that Murad is adamant and very emphatic in inviting her to the party. And with some special arrangements she is invited.

According to Rohinton Mistry, the remarkable feature of the Parsi community is their exclusivity. Racial purity is only myth. In the novel *Family Matters* the protégée Nariman Vakeel reminiscences his love affair with Lucy Breganza, a Goan. But his parents grew over a non Parsi girl and exert Pressure on him and give up. As a result he becomes a victim of traditional way of marriage types. And he marries a forty two years' Parsi widow with two children. Rigidity, besides marriage system in Parsis is a very serious social cultural issue because no community on earth can take marriage with casual attitude. This rigidity has proved to be a Himalayan blunder which resulting into many physiological, Social, Cultural and sexual abnormalities. It is so delicate a matter that serious attention must be paid in the matters of made choice and establishing

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origin of family as an institution. Parsis have ignored the shortcomings of postponing marriage and not marrying at all if possible. Along with Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga also very thoroughly discusses this problem in his fiction. Both Mistry and Kanga have been very generous, rational and liberal in discussing obscenities with reservations.

Parsis have attempted their best to be one with Indian conditions of life. But since this community is too refined to sophisticated and highly cultured to mix up with the down-to-earth Indian masses. Parsi Community emerges as an exceptionally gifted community. Their active participation in all activities of Indian life in the social, cultural, political and economic life, particularly during the colonial period is of great significance. With this background of the Parsis in the Indian sub-continent, the post-colonial writers in English belonging to the Parsi community have created big corpus of English fiction which reflects and establishes their distinctness along with their psychological and mental make-up. These are their religious ritual and functions which are brought under focus. Their sense of honour as well as insult is shown in proper proportion. Their hopes and aspirations along with frustration pain and sorrow and yet their readiness to retain the glory which once they enjoyed. Rohinton Mistry's novels have all these qualities.

In fact all the contemporary writers of post-colonial period present literary discourse through character presentation in their novels in general. But Parsi writers in particular focus on the Parsi community. With this background of the Parsis in the sub-continent, the post-colonial writers of English belonging to the Parsi community are involved in writing fiction which reflects their identity, culture, religious background and their distinctness. These novelists throughout their works highlight Parsis' religious practices and rituals and their consciousness that they have retained all factors in spite of all odds their sense of dignity honours as well as insult, for being treated as the 'other'. Also these novels reflect psychic anxieties and the memories of their past for example how they have retained the glory and prosperities and dignified status that they once received. It's true that Rohinton Mistry's novels have all these qualities.

The novel *Such a Long Journey* Rohinton Mistry focuses the life style and problems of Parsi family living in a Parsi colony. Gustad Noble is shown usually worried and under the burden of anxiety. He remembers how things in the past were treated and he became nostalgic. He remembers not only, the prosperity of Parsi community but also of the noble family in the past days. He also remembers how the golden days of his father vanished in composition and with his father he thought himself very poor with his meager income which never allowed him to raise the status of the family with a low social status. He became more conscious of his position as culturally 'other'.

The Parsi community is well known for its reverence to their religion. Though they are the people to have shown progressive attitudes in many matters and yet their attachment to religion remains one of the ruling truths in every novel. This aspect is brought to light by Mistry, like their meticulous observance of prayer, their respect to silence of tower, including detailed description of the death of a Parsi shown in the novels, for example the death of Dinshawji and Billy Billimoria. They are known as the fire worshipers. In fact they do not worship fire but fire for them is a symbol of purity, truth, eternity and the symbol of God. It has been believed by them that the fire which they kept in their temple is brought from the original place in Iran. Till now it is continuous to burn. One is surprised to note the tenacity in religious matters.

Parsi people are the followers of Zoroastrianism which sees no difference between man and nature. It shows harmony between man and nature. It also teaches man lessons of adoptability and broadness of mind. As a result this deep philosophy is workable in the theory and practice of the

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process of keeping dead body in the well exposed to be eaten by vultures. It's a simple philosophy that after death the human body should directly merge into nature through the process of being eaten by the vultures.

Rohinton Mistry is deeply involved not only in philosophizing the religious rituals, practices and process but he is correctly involved in presenting clear picture of actual happening in the matter of death. In this respect he makes an elaborate discussion at all levels, intellectual and otherwise on the topic in the form of debate between the reformist and the orthodox Parsis while describing the funeral of Major Bilimoria. Its reason is that there are complaints against the Parsi practice of using vultures for eating dead bodies. This problem arose because in so busy a city like Bombay it was reported that the pieces of human flesh left by the vulture far on the roofs of the building nearby create great nuisance. This is the most delicate, sensitive and very urgent issue, Mistry so delicately handles in his novels.

The novel *Such a Long Journey* centers on the Parsi community as a whole. The novel focuses on how the social events in the country are determined by political policies and the changing interest of the politicians. The burning topic which is highlighted alongside the story of Gustad Noble has been made the focal point of discussion in this novel. For example, Gustad Noble though knew many complexities yet he did not frankly express them, but his anxiety was always there. He kept himself away from fanatics and keeps it at arm's length. One such event he remember how a peaceful rally is turned to be violent. Simultaneously it also shows that how politicians are trickily expert in making use of religion to instigate millions of common men who are not aware of the fact that they are being used by the mischief mangers of politicians. In fact politicians of low status do not have any religion. Their motto is winning elections only.

In short, Rohinton Mistry is acutely aware of the fact of loss of prestige and dignity of Parsi community in the post-colonial period. As a result, he doesn't fail to depict very realistically the present miserable condition of the Parsi race. In post-colonial period in free India they are gradually losing the lofty and extremely honorable and prestigious position they once enjoyed. At present there are various other factors too which make them feel that their very existence is under threat. This feeling has inculcated in them, because of the constant fear by the successive governments of India which possessed biased attitude towards them. Also the changing social systems, communal clashes and arbitrary violence most frequently caused by the negative forces of fundamentalism. Thus, Parsis have proud of their honesty, faith on Parsi Zoroastrianism, charity and ethnicity as a result they ever remains as the most dominating community of world. Rohinton Mistry takes minute care to bring to light honesty as a distinguishing feature of the Parsis. It has been believed that no Parsi will be ever lulled to violate honesty. Not only Parsis but those who are not Parsis are greatly impressed upon by honest behavior.

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