

REVIEW ARTICLE



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ALIENATION IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S NOVELS "SUCH A LONG JOURNEY" AND "FAMILY MATTERS"

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ABSTRACT

In literature, alienation is often characterized as the process of social or class tensions among different social groups where humans' awareness of their difference may distance or isolate others from being united or involved with them. Alienation is relevant to many areas of human existence. Alienation is a common theme in the major works of Rohinton Mistry. Alienation may make man indifference to social values or morale, thus it creates social discrepancies. It also leads to estrangement and loss or lack of sympathy towards others. This research article explore the the of alienation in the selected novels of Rohinton Mistry' select novels. The issue of alienation in immigration stories in Mistry's novels "Such a Long Journey" and "Family Matters" not only appeals to the immigrants of Prasi community, but also to other immigrants from different communities all over the world. The works of Rohinton Mistry are characterized by the salient features of the diasporic literature such as the personal and psychic trauma, a sense of loss and nostalgia, despair, dislocation, exile, alienation and memory of the past. Mistry's primary novel, *Such a Long Journey* (1991), creates a vibrant picture of Indian family life and culture and tells a story rich in subject matter, characterization and symbolism. Mistry's depiction of the novel "Such a Long Journey" exemplifies the tenuous nature of individual narrative agency over personal and urban identity as well as both the alienating and the restorative consequences of communal politics. "Family Matters" is Rohinton Mistry's third novel, which owns several prestigious literary awards internationally. The novel has been selected for Man Booker Prize for fiction in 2002 and International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award in 2004. "Family Matters" associates with Mistry to exemplify his own suppressed yearnings into reality through Nariman Vakeel, sense of alienation, marginalization, pain, and sickness of the character provides focus in the novel. Rohinton Mistry tries to focus perspectives of multiculturalism through Yezad's life sufferings, anxieties, alienation, and insecurity in the novel. He also points out that human loneliness, alienation and personal pain that arises out of male-female relationship and person conflicts with social organizations in this award winning novel. Key Words: Alienation, *Such a Long Journey*, *Family Matters*, Thematic analysis

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, diasporic literature is concerned with two relationships: one with the motherland which gives rise to nostalgia, memories

and reminiscences, and the other, the new relationship with the adopted country and its people which gives rise to conflicts and split personalities. That is why such writers speak of alienation,

loneliness, rootlessness, exile, cultural conflicts and at times of a sense of rejection by the host country. When their efforts at assimilation prove difficult and at variance with their own cultural beliefs, their writings contain descriptions of 'back home' which, in turn, may become romantic outpourings of nostalgia and longing. In literature, alienation is regularly portrayed as the process of social or class pressures among various social groups where people's familiarity with their difference may separate or isolate others from being joined together or included with them. In different words, alienation is removing of individuals from each other. Alienation is significant to many areas of human existence. Alienation is social issue in the works of Rohinton Mistry.

Rohinton Mistry, an Indo-Canadian novelist has received acclaim worldwide and depicts the Indian socioeconomic and political life as well as Parsi Zoroastrian life, customs beliefs and religion in his writings. He does not attempt to follow fads and fashion. His writing suggests sensitivity to the beauty and the fragmentation, the failings and the cruelties of his world. His character develops gradually from particular to general, depicting their idiosyncrasies, follies and foibles, from individual to family and gradually widening into the social, cultural and political world. He is a socio-political writer He lived in Bombay. It makes him portraying the life of the Parsis in India and delineating the corruption of the city. The literature of Parsis is depicted by both the features of ethnocentric and minority talk. They experience the ill effects of the feeling of frailty and identity emergency. There are the other exasperating ethnic highlights like declining populace, late relational unions, low birth rate, high rate of divorce, attitudes to the girl child, urbanization, alienation etc¹. To the extent Rohinton Mistry's place in Canadian literature is concerned, his transient status renders him illustrative of a host of relatively new literary voices who have changed the way the notional classification of a national literature is developed. Lynette Hunter has depicted the scan for a Canadian identity as a standout amongst the most predictable strands in Canadian literary criticism in later a long time. Another quality that characterizes the Indian diasporic writer is the way in which he copes with the new community or country. If the person is a first generation migrant,

s/he is obsessed with the home left behind and haunted by a feeling of rootlessness and alienation². Rohinton's historical circumstance includes development of new identity in the country to which he has moved and a complex relationship with the cultural history of the country, he has deserted. He performs the pangs of alienation. However; finally these prompt the products of adaption, in India and abroad for the Parsis. Rohinton's works are intact with the major themes like religion, community, politics, human relationship, diaspora, alienation, nostalgia, and homelessness.

2. Aim of the Study

The present paper is an attempt at a critical analysis of two select novels *Such a Long Journey (1991)* & *Family Matters (2002)* by Canadian writer of the Indian Diaspora Rohinton Mistry. Identity is the core issue in any exploration of diaspora, especially diasporic identity which is composed of hybridism and cross-cultural social regimes.

3. Discussion

3.1 *Such a Long Journey*

Such a Long Journey is a fascinating book with the ability to hold the reader spellbound. The first Novel of Rohinton Mistry *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.

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey's* title is taken from T.S. Eliot's poem *Journey of the Magi* which provides one of the three epigraphs to the novel (Chelliah,S, 2017):

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
for a journey and such a Long journey

Such a Long Journey is written in the third person as a story of current events. The narrator is conscious of the characters' minds. Flashbacks to the protagonist's youth are visit. The characters' discussions are utilized to discuss events then current in the Indian subcontinent. The freedom of Bangladesh, the short war amongst India and Pakistan, slaughters of innocents, a go head to head between the U.S. furthermore, Soviet armadas, and, most importantly, boundless suspicions that the legislature of Indira Gandhi is completely degenerate and relentless are altogether tended to. But as a gathering for these political articles,

exchange assumes a minor part in propelling the story.

The novel of Rohinton Mistry portrays the spirit of the cultural identity in the feeling of rootlessness, helplessness and alienation felt by the Parsi community. The Parsis had to face economic losses, lowered social status and personal suffering. This is evident in his all novels. In *Such a Long Journey* the protagonist Gustad Noble, a teller in the bank, had to face many trials in his life. His dreams regarding Sohrab, his eldest son are shattered when he declines to join the prestigious IIT despite clearing the entrance examination. Not only this he also rebels against his father and leaves his home to try his luck in music. In utter desperation he states:

“Throwing away his fortune without reason. What have I not done for him, tell me? I even threw myself in front a car. Kicked him aside, saved his life, and got to suffer all my life (slapping his hip).” (*Such a Long Journey* 52)

Such a Long Journey is set against the backdrop of the Bangladesh—Pakistan wars of the 1970s. In this novel, public events have direct repercussions on the life of the ordinary citizen. Since the wars are a narrative excuse for the exploration of both political ethics and the problems of individual ethical-moral responsibility, an explanatory note on the historical events is in order.

Politics form an important subtext to the main action of all three novels of Rohinton Mistry. This preoccupation moves increasingly closer to contemporary times as Mistry tackles first, in *Such a Long Journey*, the Bangladeshi war with Pakistan, second, Indira Gandhi’s declaration 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 agitation and the post-Babri Masjid riots had on the life of the ordinary Indian.

One of the core themes of Rohinton Mistry’s novel is loss. *Such a Long Journey* explores the loss of material belongings as well as the loss of death or separation. First material loss in Gustad’s life is his family’s misery during his father’s bankruptcy. He also endures with the loss of deaths of his friends Jimmy, Dinshawj, and Tehmul. However, Gustad suffered from feeling of alienation, isolation, confusion, poverty and many more.

Gustad Noble is the protagonist of the novel who is quite content with his situation. Gustad Noble is faced with his family’s impoverishment in the course of his father’s bankruptcy. However he also has to cope with the death of his friends Jimmy, Dinshawji and Tehmul. Moreover loss of Gustad also entails a feeling, of alienation and dissatisfaction with the present. The semantics of loss imply a dispossession against the subjects will the result of which can be poverty, isolation, confusion, disillusionment, disillusionment. It is clear through the following detail the causes and effects of loss making its impact on the protagonist of the novel. The past is of special relevance to Gustad in the novel. Two events are significant in this Context: his father’s bankruptcy and a childhood experience at Matheran involving a broken bowel. Gustad associates,

“sensual qualities with the memory of his father’s bankruptcy. The destructive character of this event is not merely conveyed by sound and touch however.” (182)

On the other hand, there is great love and compassion in Gustad too, who shows this at different other parts in the novel. There is a great morcha underway and Dr. Paymaster is at the helm of affairs.

In brief, Mistry’s novels show social realism. *Such a Long Journey* also presents truly exemplary characters who provoke our laughter and sympathy, but who like the protagonist will remain in the minds and hearts of readers for a long time to come because the writer succeeds in making us ‘see’ and having done so, makes us respond accordingly.

Thus, at the end, we find Gustad, a man with principles and dreams and aspirations, realizing that some compromise has to be reached in life. He emerges out of his problems, a survivor with tremendous resilience. As a realist novel, Mistry brings out the reality of life – the novel becomes a telling commentary on social life, political life and morality. His focus is on the Parsi community and their problems in life. There is a focus on life in Bombay in the early 1970s – a city in transition with the backdrop of the war. He captures the essence of Bombay – the good, the bad and the worse, dwelling upon the cosmopolitanness, certain landmarks whether of universal interest or religious interest –

Craford Market, the Irani restaurants, the dudhwalla 'bhaiya,' the water problems of people in the city, the redlight areas etc. He uses typical terms – native of the language adopted by the Parsis - which is Gujarati and refers to the Parsi customs, food, religious ceremonies all of which contribute to Mistry's realism.

Finally, we can say, through his myriad characters, Mistry also shows the awareness of differences among human beings. He locates innate goodness, which is, at times, gets diluted or distorted by compelling circumstances, because human beings are not mythical gods. They do err, so Gustad forgives Bilimoria. When pitted against his son, Gustad recognizes his own mistake and so forgives his son Sohrab

3.2 *Family Matters*

In his third novel *Family Matters*, Rohinton Mistry portrays the life of Nariman Vakeel, an old Parsi who retired as professor of English literature. By taking up an old person as a protagonist of the novel, Mistry makes a humanist statement. Ageism is paradoxical in that it is a dehumanizing humanist ideology in so far as it rests on the unacknowledged essentialisation of the human as young, powerful, attractive and rational, particularly where the human character as a protagonist is considered. Viewed from this angle, the old people are driven to the outer margins of the properly human

The novel *Family Matters* deals with questions of religious intermarriage, problems arising in a "blended" family between parent (Yasmin), stepparent (Nariman), children (Roxana) and step children (Coomy and Jal) and the difficulties of caring for aged and ailing parents. The novel is an attempt at preserving Parsi culture as no individual stands in alienation; he exists with the specificity of gender, race and religion, community and nationality.

The *Family Matters* is an exemplary work. It completely talks about Nariman and his family. It reflects family and society in large. Since it is a family novel it asserts small walled events and supports family in length. The proposed epigraph of Mistry is,

'Each happy family is happy in its own way but all unhappy families resemble one another'

Immigration and Alienation are recurring themes in Mistry's fiction from his short stories to the latest novel *Family Matters* where Yezad narrates to his two sons his unsuccessful 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 commitment nor Jamshed's alienation. His migration is a pre-ordained trajectory that he undertakes, not out of enthusiasm but because it has to be.

We can very well see the theme of alienation, fear and temptation in the story of Dina's struggles against the social conditions of her existence could easily have existed independent of the long incursion into the life of the tailors. As such they would have existed, within the absurdist frame of an illogical 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 apt illustrations of the absurdity of human existence, where human will have no power over the illogical course of events. Both Om and Ishvar are presented as fully rounded 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 persuaded of the impracticality of this scheme by Ishvar.

In *Family Matters*, we witness similar feelings of alienation and disgruntledness by Yezad, the protagonist of the novel and his employer Mr. Kapur who always mourns his displacement from Punjab after the Independence in 1947. Here Mistry has based the central action on the situation arising out of Shiv Sena's agitation for the so-called 'sons of the soil' movement 'in Bombay. According to Yezad (Mistry), such type of political bungling presents the stumbling block in the way of the Parsis' healthy adjustment in Indian society thus pushing them to a grim condition of pain and penury. Shiv Sena has created a damning atmosphere in Bombay and even takes the life of Mr. Kapur, for whom Yezad has high regards. Yezad is shaken by the murder of Mr. Kapur by Shiv Sainiks. In the novel Mistry symbolizes the fanaticism of Shiv Sena to increasing sense of

insecurity among the Parsis. It is thus stated in the concern of Mr. Rangrajan, a character in the novel:

“These days you never can tell who might be a Shiv Sena fanatic, or a member of their Name Police. It is my understanding that some Shiv Sainiks have infiltrated the GPO, subjecting innocent letters and postcards to incineration if the address reads Bombay instead of Mumbai.” (*Family Matters* 53)

These feelings are further evoked in *Family Matters* where a character Inspector Masalavala voices concerned regarding the future of the Parsis: “We were chatting about the future of the Parsi community ... Vultures and crematoriums both will be redundant, if there no Parsis to feed them ... We have been small community right from the beginning. But we have survived and prospered Those were different times, different world, said Inspector Masalavala, not in a mood to tolerate the optimism. The experts are confident those fifty years hence, there will be no Parsis left.” (*Family Matters* 412) Commenting on the theme of alienation and their depleting numbers in the world veteran jurist Nani Palkhivala says:

“They will become a decadent community with a glorious past, a perilous present, and a dim future.” (*We, the Nation: The Lost Decades* 320)³

In the novel *Family Matters*, we come across Mr. Kapur, who is a true humanist at heart. He is in love with not only the buildings and roads of Bombay but also with its cosmopolitan spirit. He thinks Bombay is as much his as it is of a Maharashtrian. Though a Hindu, he has Muslim and Parsi employees. He celebrates Christmas. He wishes to merge his identity with 158 that of the common Bombayite. To achieve this end, he tries boarding the train but does not get the cooperation of the crowd of daily passengers. He does not blame the people, rather he thinks his clothes show affluence which might have set the people off! This is nothing but liberal humanism

4.0 Conclusion

The pain of alienation and the severe Identity Crisis one faces due to immigration to distant lands is expressed best by the writers of the Diaspora. Amongst all the writers who can be categorized as Diaspora writers, Rohinton Mistry is one writer who has created a distinct name for

himself because of his brilliance as a writer and also because of his unique craftsmanship of honest portrayal of the subaltern through his short stories and novels. *Such a Long Journey* portrays geographical location where regionalism and parochial sentiments run very high, due to the manipulation of political and administrative institutions and the public opinion for narrow selfish political ambitions by certain individuals, symbolised by Indira Gandhi at the national level and Shiv Sena at the local level. Being a Parsi and then an immigrant in Canada, Rohinton Mistry sees himself as symbol of double displacement. Consequently, he represented such kind of displacement through his protagonists of the novel *A Fine Balance*. Traditionally Om and Ishvar are belongs to lower caste which is known as Chamaar in the Indian society. The dominance and suppression of the society and forces of their ancestor move them into the trade of tailoring. It illustrates that these men continuously aware about their roots in the social structure. Because of economic compulsions, they go away from their native place and environment. They are struggling for the secure place in the crowd of the urban place. The emotional displacement of accepting new profession of tailoring and physical displacement of moving to the new city for earning, and the feelings of alienation, dislocation and isolation force them to become beggars on the roads of metropolis.

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