

Diaspora and Nationalism In The Works of Rohinton Mistry

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Such a Long Journey (1991) is Rohinton Mistry's first novel. The story clearly shows the Parsi community in India and the development of post-colonial India. This work is acclaimed and has been regarded as a landmark in the history of Indian English Fiction. It is the first novel to receive the prestigious Governor General's Award for fiction in the publication in 1991. This book was also booked for the Booker Prize in 1991. In brief, the book is widely reviewed in Canada, Britain, the United States, and India.

The story of Such a Long Journey aptly communicates the feelings and apprehensions of the minority community and exploits history to explore the broader concerns of the Parsi community. It describes the lifestyle of Parsis living in the Khodadad Building, a Parsi enclave of Bombay which is a kind of microcosm of the Parsis in India expressing all the angularities of a declining Parsi community. Rohinton Mistry in his work had drawn the picture describing the insecurities, alienation, apprehension, and the sense of displacement felt by the Parsis. This novel describes the protagonist Gustad Noble who works as a clerk in Bombay. The setting of the novel is in 1971, a period of political upheavals in the history of India. There is a reference to the infamous Nagarwala Conspiracy of 1971 in which Sohrab Nagarwala, the chief cashier of the State Bank of India was involved. The conspiracy made its way to imprisonment. This attempt represents the Indian socio-political and cultural ethos in a negative tone. Mistry's novel explores the theme of nationalism with diasporic elements in it. The plot involves Parsi, Gustad, and his family, who are interwoven with events in the national scene. The scene of war between India and Bangladesh presents Gustad's

suffering. Indian, middle-class family constantly struggles with daily expenses and corruption all over the country. Mistry denounces the picture of political upheaval at that particular time in the story. The story can explore the nationalism factors by exploring international and intra-national politics. Gustad is portrayed as a self-made man who had to shoulder the hardship and humiliation of standing on his own feet after he had been declared bankrupt. Gustad belonging to the minority community has to ensure the survival of his family. His son Sohrab adds to his misery since he rebels against him, and acts against his actions of joining the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). Gustad had suffered due to his brother otherwise he belongs to a reputed family whose grandfather was a prosperous furniture dealer and his father was a famous bookseller. Gustad's condition was reduced to a poor and helpless man. His dreams came to shatter as his son, Sohrab refused to join the IIT. Gustad also suffered from the hand of his dear friend Jimmy Bilmoria who had left him unnoticed and uninformed.

Mistry depicts the Parsis' emotional feelings of insecurity under the influence of political power. The story captures the relationships and practices at the heart of the community like death, celebrations, ceremonies and festivals, worship of God, rituals and culinary practices. Parsis are presented as preserving their identity within the dominant culture of India. The dialogue between Gustad and his friend Malcolm, who is a catholic community member, aptly describes their attitude towards the majority of the section of the society. *Such a Long Journey* explores the differences in the culture and the societies in India and at the same time also shows the bonding of different cultures giving an example of nationalism.

The representation of the journey can be applied to the life of Gustad. This journey is not only the physical changes of the character but also the journey of the character through the self-realization of the community's existence. The first is the Firdausis Iranic epic, Shah Nama, which recalls the glorious Iranian heritage of the almighty Empire, and also presents the downgraded condition of present-day Parsi. The second epigraph from T.S. Eliot provides the central metaphor of the Journey

in the novel. *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore presents a long journey in a cold and hostile world. A wall of the Khodadad building represents the separation of the outside world from the inside Parsi community of Bombay. The act of painting the wall from the outside had a purpose behind it to be promoted, "People should understand tolerance among different cultures and society". The wall became a multicultural mosaic for people of different religions and cultures. It became a symbol of unity for various cultural and religious origins. The tone of Rohinton Mistry is allegorical in presenting multiculturalism. The sense of alienation and displacement is strongly felt by the Parsi community in this work. The long-suffering, segregation, marginalisation and loneliness have been explored in this work by Rohinton Mistry. The nation of displacement is seen through the character of Dein Shah Ji.

Thus, the diasporic identity of Gustad Noble reveals that he had to struggle very hard to survive in the society where he belongs to a member of a minority Parsi community. This shows the loss of nationalism in the character of his nation. Gustad Noble being the father of two sons Sorabh and Darius and a daughter Roshan, dreams of providing them with a successful life at the same time he is afraid of the real experiences. The feelings and apprehension of the minority Parsi community have been well portrayed by Rohinton Mistry. Mistry has reflected the themes at the social, personal, and national levels.

Rohinton Mistry is a Parsi Gujarati of Indian origin, who has immigrated to Canada. The multi-spaces he inhabits are Indian, Parsi, and Canadian. He is displaced twice which gives rise to the concept of identity, sense of belonging, ethnic issues, nostalgia, alienation and nationality crisis. Rohinton Mistry has enjoyed retaining his identity in his own nation. Nostalgia and uprootedness are the prominent themes of his works. The characters of the novel struggle hard to preserve the past and prevent the disintegration of the family and the community. The history of forced exile induces him to write about the displaced identities and to construct a new identity in his nation. Mistry and other Parsi writers belong to a diasporic individual who is in search of nationalism. He tries to express a desire to locate himself in his homeland. This reserves in a

traumatic situation for his character, Gustad Noble and his family. The theme of adaptation is also prevalent throughout his novel as his characters try to adapt to the culture of the existing major community. He introduces his Parsi community in which the Parsi community always express their sympathy toward their minority community. Rohinton Mistry chooses to revisit his original home city and culture rather than detail the immigrant experience. His works are diasporic discourse asserting ethno-religious differences. He chooses to locate time and space for the Parsi community those who belong to the suburb of Bombay and ruler migrants. Mistry's father belonged to the middle-class Parsi family. His childhood was spent in the Parsi culture therefore he portrays Parsi characters in his works. His works are splendid celebrations of Indian English. Mistry is acutely realistic and sharply focused on the contradictions within the Parsi experience in India where they belong simultaneously to the community. This is the dilemma of the Parsi community that Mistry has highlighted, the conflict of interest among the people living in a nation. Therefore, the Parsi community experiences double displacement. Mistry's fiction can be read within this framework as the experiences of double displacement and the attempts of individuals to cope with the contradictions and dilemmas. Mistry's works are emotionally expressed with diasporic experiences of nostalgia, alienation from homeland and after-effects of exile. He has described the Parsi consciousness and observance of ethnoreligious customs.

To conclude, the paper explores the themes of diaspora and nationalism through the present novel and discusses such a long journey. Rohinton Mistry has aptly described the major identity crisis of the entire community in post-colonial India. Mistry works are enriched with the middle class and lower middle class as well as subalterns who are homeless urban immigrants to Canada as well as the working class and ruler immigrants. His deliberate selections have the aim to focus on the lower end of the social order people, who are the victims of marginalisation. His characters hover on the periphery of a neutralised, international bourgeoisie culture and in their root culture. Rohinton Mistry tries to understand the concept of rootlessness of the diasporic

communities. His writings represent nationalism and multiculturalism and their effects on the characters who are struggling for their identity in a foreign land. The continuous search for identity and self leads to the assimilation of the hybridized culture which is devoid of love, truth and faith.

Works Cited

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