

Rohinton Mistry's Literary Skill in Portraying an Optimistic and Realistic Image of India in his Fiction: A Brief Analysis

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ABSTRACT: This paper attempts to draw an effectively picture of Indian family life, culture, rich in subject matter, characterization and symbolism with reference to Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and *Fine Balance* with an emphasis in the political context for unfortunate events disrupting the personal lives of characters.

Key Words: Subject matter, characterization, symbolism, optimistic view, Indian image

Rohinton Mistry's first novel *Such a Long Journey* (1991) draws effectively a vivid picture of Indian family life, culture, rich in subject matter, characterization and symbolism. In the political context for the unfortunate events that disrupt the personal lives of characters. His *A Fine Balance* (1995) set in India in the mid 1970s at a time when the Government declared a state of internal Emergency, the story laying focus on the lives of four unlikely people who find themselves living in the same humble flat in the city: a widow whose refusal to remarry has left her struggling to earn a living, two tailors who came to city searching for employment and a student from a small hamlet Himalayan foothills, whose father has sent him to attend college. Mistry's descriptive, layered account of the personal lives of turmoil, makes for an engrossing novel of epic stature.

Mistry's novel *Family Matters* (2002) centers on a Bombay based modern day Parsi family, when their father 79 year old man suffering from Parkinson's disease, breaks his ankle and bed-ridden, forcing them to face the reality of his illness and their attitude towards it. Through the novel, Mistry deals with a dilemma which is too familiar, a universal morality of tale filtering through the colours and smells of an overcrowded Indian apartment block.

Whenever a literature is produced, the author expresses their own culture and tradition of a particular country. Truly speaking, the writers who write about their motherland would portray their happy moments and bitter experiences in both the ways of positive and negative sides. In the novels of Mistry are found profusely in portrayal of the Indian Parsi tradition and has vehemently attacked the political corruption and misuse of power in India. In both the novels *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*, one can find suffering narrated with humour, almost seeing a realistic side of India.

Both *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* have a circular narrative technique. Gustad in *Such a Long Journey* starts his life peacefully, but meets turbulent events in between. Similarly, in *A Fine Balance* the characters move towards peace in their own way. Dina goes and lives with her brother, Om and Ishvar are reduced to the level of begging, but Maneck kills himself. Gustad Nobel belongs to middle class family, Sohrab and Maneck are youths of India who rebel against their parents' will, Dina is a widow, Om and Ishvar belong to a sect of people living below poverty line. In each character, India may be found and Mistry has created characters from minority community and suppressed people. But the uniqueness in all these characters is that they show how people in India live a crucial and insecure life.

In *Such a Long Journey*, Gustad Noble the character suffers throughout the novel. Gustad's son refuses to get admitted in IIT, he receives a letter and a parcel from his old friend Jimmy, that ultimately leads to a lot of complication and some mysterious disease affects his beloved daughter Roshan, at last he loses his friend Dinshawji. The protagonist in the novel visits places like Mount St. Mary's Christian Church, Haji Baba Mosque, a Muslim pilgrim place. In India, it is found that whenever a person suffers, he assumes religious tolerance in order to get rid of the problem, so he visits holy places of other religions:

'Malcolm picked out, a female child's torso and gave it to Gustad. For Roshon. Next your friend is in hospital. If the cancer has spread, may be best thing is to buy the fully body'. He indicated the male figure in the last row. The woman in black grudgingly got off her stool.

‘Who else?’ Gustad hesitated. ‘Can Mother Many help with the head? I mean the mind? For someone not thinking straight?’

Oh. Yes I think Sohrab will definitely benefit (SLJ 269).

Here, the novelist portrays an optimistic aspect of India, the novelist gives a clear account of how people in India follow many superstitions. The fine example may be cited as evidence from the character of Miss. Kutpitica who gives various ideas to Dilnavaz:

Kutpitica was irritated. ‘Then why are you nodding? Listen. Take you [Dilnavaz] needle and thread, a nice strong thread with a big knot at the end. Select a yellow lime, and seven chillies. Chillies must be green, not turning red. Never red. String them all together with the needle. Lime goes at the bottom. Then hang the whole thing over your door, inside the house

‘What will it do?’

It is like a taveej, a protection. Each time Roshan walks under it, the evil eye becomes less and less powerful.

Actually, once you hang it, everyone in your family will benefit” (178).

In *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry makes a conscious use of the celebrated Sohrab-Rustom myth. Gustad views Sohrab’s rebellious gesture as a symptom of the loss of respect for tradition and values. Gustad is always guided by altruistic motives in his life. At the Church of Mt. Mary, he does not pray for Dinshawji and Sohrab. Above all Mistry has chosen characters belonging to minority community such as Gustad, Jimmy, Ghulam Mohammed, Malcom etc as the major characters in the novel. Mistry should be appreciated for his narrative technique especially when he narrates the fight between Gustad and his neighbor Mr. Rabadi, only an Indian author can produce such situation out of his experience. It is one of the funniest parts of the novel:

Gustad’s early arrival coincide with dimple’s walk, and he came face to face with Mr. Rabadi...but Gustad burst out, if you must keep an animal, atleast train your bloody bitch!...’ The prayers made Mr. Rabadi feel invincible ‘You are talking to training an animal? First teach manners and discipline to your own son! Walking away with somebody else’s news papers!

‘Go, go! Ask your daughter about it! And take your bitch with you, before I lose my temper!’ Gustad went inside leaving him to mutter among the bushes. (179-180)

Gustad’s attitude towards Rabadi can be seen when Sohrab speaks about Bilimoria’s money, he calls him as “crazy rabid dog! My own son” (P145). Mistry as an Indian has brought out the silly fight between neighbours. Mistry produced Gustad’s character as a typical Indian father, for every Indian father would have dreams about his children but when they fail to fulfill their dream, they feel frustrated. In this novel, Gustad’s dream is to admit Sohrab in IIT but when Sohrab refuses to get admitted Gustad thinks that the whole world has turned against him. This is the first trouble that Gustad faces in the novel. Mistry has brought out the conflict between father and son, which one can find in most of the Indian families.

In *A Fine Balance*, the portrayal of India is done from different aspect. Dina Dalal, a Parsi widow, Om and Ishvar two untouchables and Maneck a youth from border of India are the major characters. This novel is set against the background of 1975 but the novel also speaks about the history of India. While narrating the life of these characters, the novelist has taken events before the Independence of India. The suffering of the untouchables, Mahatma’s ideas about untouchability, and the upper class atrocities are depicted in the novel. Mistry says that atrocities towards the untouchables continued even after Independence, but it was in its peak during Emergency. This can be seen through the character of Thakur Dharams, who exploits the untouchables. Mistry paints before us the sorry plight of the slum dwellers, lack of space, need for privacy, and want of basic amenities which are all part and parcel of the lifestyle of Indian slum dwellers. Ishvar visits the hut of Rajaram who not only teaches them how to assuage their hunger with meager portion but also how to use the railway tracks as their toilet. He becomes their “Good Guru”. Mistry might have had in mind Dharavi and Kurla slums when he describes the life of slum dwellers.

Rohinton Mistry has brought out the fact that people in India manage to live in such a crucial condition. Of all the characters in the novel, Om and Ishvar are the most affected due to Emergency. Maneck who is presented as a representative youth of India shows how the youth in India were suppressed during Emergency. Avinash, a student leader and friend of Maneck, is killed in a suspicious way. The death of Avinash disturbs Maneck’s, he carries the India chessboard of Avinash even while he commits suicide. But in

spite of all these sufferings the novelist shows that Indians can stoically carry on with their lives. Narayan and Ishvar save Ashraf's family from rioting Hindus though here and there, clashes are found between Hindus and Muslims, they are linked with the bond of brotherhood. The main problem discussed in this novel ***A Fine Balance*** is the misuse of power. Whatever happened during 1970 is because of corruption and misuse of power.

In ***Such a Long Journey*** and ***A Fine Balance*** also reveals Indian family affinity and hospitality. Maneck comes to Dina's house as a paying guest and behaves as if he is her son. At first Om thinks of Dina as an arrogant woman but later regrets and changes his attitude. Maneck is rebellious against his father because he does not want to help his father in business. In the same way Ishvar wants Om to get married but Om refuses. But at last he agrees to marry. Dina first refuses to live with her brother Nusswan but later, she is reconciled to him. While portraying Shankar as a beggar, Mistry has brought into light the horrible life of beggars though Shankar's profession is begging, he is happy with his job. He never thinks of begging as degrading employment. As a realist, the novelist has brought out the realistic side of India. In ***Such a Long Journey***, it may be said, the portrayal is about a single community but in the second novel ***A Fine Balance***, the portrayal is about the whole India.

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