

## Plight of Parsi Community and Indian Nationalism in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*

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### Abstract

*The concept of Indian Nationalism is the product of the stimulus provided by the British due to British Raj in India. The concept of Nationalism is an important term as it is related to politics of human relations. Mistry talks about the fear experienced by him and his community while living in India. Though he left India in 1975, he has depicted the Parsi community in the post-independent India and its issues. Mistry's characters feel that they are marginalized or subalterns with the sense of the loss of identity and status. Through the novel, Mistry presented the national consciousness and concerns for his community.*

**Keywords:** National Consciousness, loneliness, community, fear, loss of identity

The notion of Indian Nationalism is the invention of the stimulus given by the British due to British Raj in India. It is also true that Indian English literature is a way of expression of India's Political, Historical, Emotional and Cultural aspects. It has also provided the voice to the voiceless publics in India. Through the medium of literary genres, Indian English writers tried to exemplify the social reality with the help of imaginative works. In this way, it has also gained a universal importance too. Oxford English dictionary has defined Nationalist as "Identification with one's own nation and support for its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations."

The concept of Nationalism is an important term. It is related to politics of human relations. It is a very broad term in the formation of the nation. The term is related with sentiments. The concept of nationalism can be seen in the writings of Rohinton Mistry though he left India in 1975 and settled in Canada, still he writes about India from the far country, Canada. All novels of Rohinton Mistry set in the city of Bombay where his ancestors lived. In his writings, he talks about the India's history, politics, economy, social reality and his emotional attachment to the same. He also talks about the fear felt by him and his community while living in India. Being a member of minority how he was forced to leave India in 1975 due to the political turmoil, all these things have been clearly depicted through his writings.

Rohinton Mistry through his protagonists talks about the communal issues and personal issues experienced by himself as a member of minority community in India. Though he left India, he has depicted the Parsi community in the post-independent India. His characters feel that they are marginalized or subalterns with the sense of the loss of identity and status. His *Such a Long Journey* (1991) depicts the reality when the war was broken between Bangladesh and India in 1970s. So the novel is a historical record of the actual things occurred in India. When we go through the novel, we come to know that he has exemplified his concerns for India as well as for his community. His nationalistic perspective is clearly seen in the novel.

Nationalism is the product of colonialism. Due to the colonialism, Parsis were influenced as they became associated with the British Raj and the British Language. They also played an important role in British Govt. Along with that Many Parsi people get them involved in the Independence Movement as Dadabhai Nauroji and Pherozshah Mehta. Diasporic writers have also contributed and exemplified the reality of India through their writings as they experienced in India. Through their writings, they talk about the frustrations, displacement, isolation and alienation.

Identity of the Nation is a larger concept than the personal identity. Today the concept of identity is not concerned with individual as it has become the larger concept. In these days identity is concerned with the group, an institution, class, society and the nation too. Sudhir Kakar (1991:16) says, "An individual's although, at times, it appears to be exclusively the one or the other. At some places, identity is referred to as a conscious sense of individual uniqueness, at others, to an unconscious, striving for continuity of experience and at yet either places as a sense of solidarity with a group's ideal."<sup>2</sup>

In the present scenario, it is important that the writers should promote the values of human life and the good possibilities can be put forward by the writings of literary genres. In this regard, R.S. Pathak (1999:55) remarks, "The quest for identity in a country like India is, unlike that in

the West, more socially oriented and less personal. Here the sense of individual coalesces with that of the nation and the individual quest becomes a microcosm for the national identity crisis.<sup>3</sup> It is the responsibility of the writers towards themselves and the nation that they should fulfill the vacuum of responsible writings which should be beneficial to the society as well as for the nation.

Historicists think that literary books are expressions of sublime. The post-structuralist writers like Hayden White, Michel Foucault and Louis O. Mink viewed "history as a construction ... having been made by the historian<sup>4</sup>. They talk about the inter-textuality and challenged the outmoded nature of history. They talk about the 'background' or 'foreground' as the text has relationship with other texts and also talk about the writers view.

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* is a major novel which is based on the fact as it talks about the Nagarwala Conspiracy Case of 1971. It was the case of Sohrab Nagrwala who was working as the chief cashier of the State Bank of India. He was imprisoned and later died in the imprisonment. So the grief of the community has been presented in the novel through the character Gustad and his family members.

The novel depicts the life of Gustad who lives along with his wife, two sons and a daughter. His struggle of life is clearly depicted in the novel. He lives in the Khodadad building with his family in fear as the member of minority community in India. Major Bilimoria, friend of Gustad, leaves it and, after a happy covering of his growth as some officer in RAW, takes him in the Tihar Jail. Gustad, the protagonist of the novel, goes to meet his friend in Delhi as his friend was sick. These accounts want to be deconstructed, cautiously keeping time, place and view of the narrator in mind.

Rohinton Mistry's novel *Such a Long Journey* talks about the Parsi community, culture and its identity crises along with national consciousness. So the novel of Mistry should be analyzed in this context to acknowledge the knowledge of his community and its culture as has been presented by Mistry in his novels. It talks about the History of Parsi Community in India. So his novel is nothing but the historical presentation of his community and its culture. It can be seen in the novel.:

"This may be but our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before your Son of God was even born; a thousand years before the Buddha; two hundred years before Moses. And do you know how much Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam?"<sup>5</sup>

Parsi is a minority community in India and its members are peacefully living in India. They have also contributed a lot to the development of the nation still they are living in nostalgia, fear and isolation. All these aspects of diaspora have been clearly seen in his novels of Mistry. But with the changing of time, the nationalization of the Banks was taken place in 1969 and it demolished their logos in the banking system, as Dinshaw reflects as,

What days those were, Yaar. What fun we used to have.... Parsis were the kings of banking in those days. Such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled, Ever since that Indira nationalized the banks (38).

Gustad, the protagonist of the novel also thinks regarding the life of Parsi in India as presented in the novel:

No future for minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America- twice as good as the white men to get half as much. How could he make Sohrab understand this? (55).

The novel also talks about the anguish felt by the Parsi community in India through the different characters with changing status of community in Indian society. Mistry also presents agitations and violence through the novel. Parsi community was living in threat as the slogan was "Maharashtra for Maharashtrians" as it was given by Shiv Sena. So the feeling of insecurity was constant in their life as they were feeling that the Parsi community had no existence in this country. Parsi community as highlighted in the novel is aware of its distinguishing identity, still they were conscious of Indian identity which is clearly seen in the novel as their involvement in national issues in the time of national crises.

The novel *Such a Long Journey* is set beside the background of 1971 Indo-Pak War as Indian had to combat with its neighbour. The War which is shown in the novel is also similar to the war within the country at personal, domestic and social levels. The novel also turns around the partition of India and Pakistan and 1971 India-Pakistan war and also talks about the birth of Bangladesh. So the wars influenced the characters in the novel as they think that war was the unfortunate event in their lives. Our national heroes Pandit Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri are also presented in the novel as humanist and secular. They played a vital role in the transformation of India as well as they did work for all the strata of Indian society, it is clearly given in the novel. Mistry tried to depict the minute picture of India though he was living in Toronto, Canada. It is the India and his Parsi community are important

aspects of his novel. Mistry believes that the fate of community depends upon country's fate. His characters Dinshawji, Gustad, Dinshawji and Peerbhoy convey the national consciousness. Mistry has depicted his community and his country to reconstruct and rethink historical events which are clearly woven in the novel.

Mistry tries to exemplify the issues related to amalgamation of culture, nostalgia, fear, issues of adjustment, issues of immigration due to displacement, quest of identity, feeling of motherland, search for their roots, sense of loneliness, discrimination on the basis of community all these issues are core part of his writings. He also talks about how he was torn between two cultures. In his view, the existence of the minority communities should be identified as they are also the part of this nation i.e. India. The concept of unbelonging is also seen in his writings as we see in the novel slogan " Maharashtra is for Maharashtrians" which was given by The Shiv Sena Party. It shows that how minority community was rejected

socially and psychologically. Though he has depicted the dark side of the nation still he does not deny bright side of India and the role of Indian politicians who did well for the development of the nation as well as for the society.

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