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## **Imagining Home in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters***

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### **Abstract:**

In the post-modern world, most of the writers are living outside their homeland and from there they share their own experiences of the host and their attachment to the country of origin. They have critically discussed many issues about their home and the harsh realities of the destination countries. Among them, Rohinton Mistry is the most famous writer of Indian diaspora who has a setting of Mumbai in all his novels. He has focused on many issues of his homeland and provided his views to challenge such issues. The present study will critically analyse the two selected texts of Rohinton Mistry, namely *A Fine Balance*, in which he has focused on Indian history from partition to state of emergency and *Family Matter*, in which the central focus of Mistry is on political evacuation. The selected texts of Mistry will be critically discussed to reach the depth of subject and home issues in his writings.

**Keywords:** Indian Diaspora, Identity Rohinton Mistry, Home, Longing, Belonging.

### **Introduction:**

Indian diaspora is one of the significant diaspora in the world. Most Indians migrated to different parts of the world for better opportunities and economic well being. They have also share their stories about their country of origin and their experiences of host countries. Many writers earn popularity with their literary writings. Among them is Rohinton Mistry who mainly wrote about his city Mumbai, his place of birth. So, the central focus of his writing is home and concern issues of his homeland. The word home signifies the sense of attachment to most desire land or place in which they are not use to live but their memory of past and nostalgia never ignore it. Robin Cohen states, "a notion of 'homeland' or a looser idea of 'home' in their collective myths or aspirations. Indeed, a homeland is imbued with an expressive charge and sentimental pathos that

seem to be almost universal" (Cohen, 2008:103). The writers of Indian diaspora always look behind, where their memories are deep-rooted. They have explored various issues of place of origin in their writings from the diasporic scenario. Diasporic consciousness is significant phenomenon in literature of Indian diaspora. It enables them to have constant feelings about their country of origin, which lost to them in new space. Indeed, it is a reason that diasporic literature emerged to provide cross-cultural experiences of writers through their writings. Many writers migrated to abroad from the Mumbai city and settled there. However, they could not forget their memories of past and topophilia about the city, which they left behind. This paper focuses on various issues of Indian society reflected in the writings of Indian diasporic writers.

Many writers have an attachment about their homeland among them Rohinton Mistry who born in Mumbai and have experienced of this milieu which seen as major theme in his writings. He has setting of Mumbai in his novels in which we can see his attachment to his homeland. It is very crucial to note that, Indian diasporic writers wrote constantly about their homeland. After experiencing of diasporic dislocation writers eagerly want to involve in home where they belongs. Most of the novels of Mistry are about his experiences and various issues of the city of Mumbai (India).

Indian diasporic writers have always portrayed characters from their home countries and their experienced milieu. They always share common theme like memory of past, longing and belonging in their writings. As Femke Stock pointed out that, the "memories of home are no factual reproductions of a fixed past. Rather they are fluid reconstructions set against the backdrop of the remembering subject's current positioning and conceptualisation of home" (Stock, 2010: 24). The writers like Rohinton Mistry, born and brought up in Mumbai and settle in different parts of the world as part of Indian diaspora. However, his writing one way of other focused on Mumbai rather than India. It is kind of topophilic sense developed by writers like Mistry focused on the issues of his home country with special focus of his birthplace or city like Mumbai.

### **A Reflection of Mumbai in Fictions of Rohinton Mistry:**

Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1996), and "*Family Matters*" (2002). These two fictions are very significant to understand the issues of identity in both homeland and hostland. He is the writer of Indian diaspora has seen the predicament of migrants who settled in diasporic space and their awareness about cultural identity of homeland. He has captured real pictures of the

country of origin and country of destination in his work. His both novels are set in Mumbai and partly in Diaspora. The central focus of his works on historical events contemporary issues in India and especially in Mumbai that responsible for making awful lives of residential population of the city. Moreover, he has also shared his immigrant's experiences in diaspora through his writing. Rohinton Mistry belongs to Parsi community (a tiny community in Mumbai) whose ancestor came from Iran. As Bharucha wrote, "The Zoroastrians did have 'such a long journey' from Iran to the Western coast of India. This journey began in the twilight years of the Persian Empire when it was under threat from the fledging Islamic civilisation...the Persian Empire was repeatedly attacked by the Arabs bearing the standard of their new religion...when the Arabs consolidated their hold over their newly conquered territories; Islam became the religion of Persia" (Bharucha, 2003: 24). The Zoroastrians (Parsi community) suppressed under the unjust rule and exiled from there to India. In India, they first reach at Gujarat and after spread all over the India. In Mumbai, they are minority but shown their existence at large due to their intelligence and other skills but always lives under thread of local population. Now in twenty first century Parsi community migrated to all over the world as part of Indian diaspora and face issues of cultural identity.

Rohinton Mistry's works also have some sort of experience of double diaspora as Parsi writer in Canada who mostly wrote about Indian history and his experiences in Mumbai. So, his novels have characters from all backgrounds but major focus is on his community. *A Fine Balance* is a second novel of Mistry largely set in Mumbai. He has chosen significant historical events of Indian history. As Nila Shah wrote, "the novel spans a period of about 40 years of free India...between its opening chapter, Prologue: 1975' and the concluding one, Epilogue: 1995', its 614 pages reveals social as well as historical developments of country" (Shah, 2004: 78). The States of Emergency (1975) and assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (1984) are significant events in the novel *A Fine Balance*. He has also portrayed the partition-affected lives in his novel. There are four central characters in the novel, Dina Dalal a beautiful Parsi widow, Maneck Kohlah from northern part of India also belong to Parsi community and two tailors Ishvar and Omprakash from untouchable (Chamar) community. All comes together in Mumbai; Mistry did not mention the name of city in the novel but, his city by the sea is easy to recognise because of several events.

The student Maneck who came to finish his air-conditioning course in Mumbai and tailors migrated from their 'village by the river' (as Mistry mention in the novel) due to rigid caste system

and atrocities on marginalised section of Indian society. Rohinton Mistry very beautifully depicted his characters during the States of Emergency and shown how it affected the lives of common people of India. As Peter Morey opines, "This is certainly the case in Mistry's treatment of the States of Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi's beleaguered and deeply unpopular government on 27 June 1975, which resulted in the mass arrest of opposition leaders, the cancellation of elections, a ban on strikes and the suspension of press freedom. It culminated in the infamous policies of indiscriminate slum clearance and enforced serialization: the latter claiming almost as many victims as partition itself" (Morey, 2000: 180). Dina Dalal a widow has started her own business of tailoring and hire to untouchables as her employee rather depend on her oppressive brother. Omprakash is an unmarried forcefully sterilised by the Thakurs in the village under the Sterilisation programme during States of Emergency. Maneck Kohlah lost his family and committed suicide in Mumbai. Rohinton Mistry has depicted in his novel through characters that most of the people affected by the States of Emergency and the riots of 1984 after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Mumbai is economic capital of India, which contain diversified communities all the central focus for such events. All Mistry's characters are one-way or other physically or emotionally scarred because of the outside world.

Mistry's third novel *Family Matters* also set in Mumbai and focuses on contemporary issues of the city and India. His Topophilia about the land of origin in diaspora plays significant role in formation of cultural identity. In her essay "Home is where your feet are, and may your heart be there too!" Uma Parameswaran argued that, when one arrives in a new land, one has a sense of wonder and adventure at the sight and feel of a landscape so different from what one has been accustomed to; there is also a sense of isolation and fear; and intense nostalgia is a buffer to which many retreat" (Parameswaran, 2011:31-32). The situation of Rohinton Mistry as Indian diasporic writer in Canada same as other immigrants in new land. However, he made very strong Topophilic sense about his birthplace a dream city for all called Mumbai where he set his all novels. In the novel *Family Matters*, Mistry once again revolves around Parsi characters and their predicament in Mumbai. The novel also focuses on the social and political events that directly or indirectly affected minorities of the society.

The central character of the novel is 79 years old retired English Professor Nariman Vakeel from the Parsi community who living with two stepson, Jal and daughter, Coomy in cosmopolitan Mumbai. The whole story revolves around domestic conflict in modern day. Mistry brought

together different family and their matters in the novel. The impact of globalisation is clearly reflected in the behaviour of these families that everyone confronted with different experiences. As Leo Tolstoy said, “happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (Tolstoy Year and Page No.) that is what exactly the message Mistry tried to convey in his novel.

Mumbai is a metropolitan city, which contained diverse population of the country due to economic opportunities. The city is also a hub for various businesses that contributed a lot to development of the country. Most of the people settled here from across the country and even immigrants of the other countries attraction to the city. The affection about the city for people can be seen in Mistry’s character Mr. Kapur’s words. He says, “Bombay endures because it gives and it receives. Within this wrap and weft is woven the special texture of its social fabric, the spirit of tolerance, acceptance, generosity. Anywhere else in the world, in those so-called civilized places like England and America, such terrible conditions would lead to revolution” (Mistry, 2001:159). The novel has also other significant characters who strongly attached to the city and represents quotidian activities of fast life of Bombayite (Mumbaikar). The another significant sign of Mumbai life is train travel and especially local train where speed of local train represents life of Mumbai that is what local train called lifeline of Mumbai. Here, Mistry, try to provide social secular ideas of through the local train. Many people catch running at the platform, if anybody is not able to catch it, other people without his/or identification help them, that make Mistry nervous because outside the train world people kills each other on the name of religion, caste etc. As his character Kapur observes from platform one such incident where all people catches train expect one who raise his hand other travellers pulling him safely inside the compartment. This is not for one train but it happens continuously in the train life. “Whose hands were they, and whose and were they grasping? Hindu, Muslim, Dalit, Parsi, Christian? No one knew and no one cared. Fellow passengers, that’s all they were” (Mistry, 2001:160). Mistry made it clear that, people have helping nature and they never care about whom to help but the politician spread anarchy about the religion and caste and make lives of common people awful.

As a Mumbaikar Mistry has awareness of all these things and familiar with fact that who is spreading wrong message in society. He has criticised political parties and especially Shiv Sena of Bal Thackeray in his early novels and in short stories. Mistry in his collection of short stories mentioned the Marathi politics of Thackeray, “all this Shiv Sena agitation about Maharashtra for

Maharashtrian, threatening strikes and Bombay bundh all the time, with no respect for public” (Mistry, 1987). In this novel too his character discussed about the Shiv Sena and their work for Marathi People. Mistry is familiar with such sort of activities threat to the constitution of India because constitution granted people to settle everywhere in India but they against it. In the current scenario, BJP and Shiv Sena have political coalition in Maharashtra and likewise, it was in 1990s too. Most of the minorities and dalit communities feared them due to their extremist Hindutva ideology. Mistry explores his ideas about these political parties in his novel *Family Matters* through his characters who discussed about corruption and violence spread by these parties. “Corruption is in the year we breathe. This nation specializes in turning honest people into crooks...The country has gone to the dogs. And not well-bred dogs either, but pariahs. “Maybe the BJP and Shiv Sena coalition will improve things,” said Jal. “We should give them a chance.” Yezad laughed. “If a poisonous snake was in front of you, would you give it a chance? Those two parties encouraged the Hindutva extremists to destroy the Babri Masque.” “Yes, but that was—” “And what about all the hatred of minorities that Shiv Sena has spread for the last thirty years” (Mistry, 2001:31-32). The present coalition of these parties is also against minorities and dalits of the country. They are also considering people anti-nationals who dare to speak against their will in this BJP and Shiv Sena coalition. But, if they are comment or do anything against the nation (it is better to mention The constitution of India) not included in anti-national agenda. Mistry very wisely and in a comic way depicted such issues in his novel. To the continuation of early discussion about Shiv Sena, “Daddy, did you know, Shiv Sena is going to have a Michael Jackson concert,” said Murad. “That’s right,” said Jal. “I saw it in the newspaper. And Shiv Sena will pocket millions-They have obtained tax-free status by classifying it as a cultural event of national significance.” “Well,” said Yezad. “Michael Jackson’s crotch-clutching and his shiny sidepiece must be vital to the nation. I’m surprised the Senapati doesn’t find him anti-anything, not even anti-good taste otherwise, the crackpot accuses people left and right of being anti-this or anti-that. South Indians are anti-Bombay, Valentine’s Day is anti-Hindustan, films stars born before 1947 in the Pakistani part of Punjab are traitors to the country” (Mistry, 2001:32). In this way, Mistry has shown his topophilic attachment to the city through various issues faced by Mumbaikar in the novel *Family Matters*. As Anita Myles opines, “the identify crisis among the Parsis in the post-colonial Indian set up finds expression here and there in the novel” (Myles, 2004) along with other minorities of the city.

**Conclusion: (The first quote is double please find out)**

In a nutshell way, “Though the writers individual talent should be rooted in the tradition of a particular society and culture, the real strength of the modern literary imagination lies in its evocation of the individual’s predicament in terms of alienation, immigration, expatriation, exile and his quest for identity(Asnani 2011). Indian diasporic literature is important part of literary culture of India in post-colonial discourse that flourished worldwide. Most of the writing of diasporic writers is about their experiences in hostland and homeland. Moreover, the notion of home for writers like Rohinton Mistry is in centre due to his love about home where he has spend his childhood. The writing of Mistry focused on Mumbai and various issues related to the city. He has touched every aspect of Indian society through their writings.

Rohinton Mistry’s novels have provided very significant insights to understand the concept of Home and diaspora. Mistry has lived more than half of his life in Canada and still living there but he cannot forget his upbringing in Mumbai, India and continuously writing for home and immigrants particularly Parsi immigrants to the western countries and experienced as double diaspora because in India too Parsi is diasporic community. Mistry shows the diasporic experience and consciousness of Indian (Parsi) immigrant. His immigrant characters are enough to provide predicaments of Indian immigrant in the host society. He has captured between two places, country of destination (host) and country of origin (home). They have to choose a better way to preserve their identity. So, the writing of the Indian diasporic writers is about their attachment which grown up in country of destination

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