



Fear and Insecurity in ‘Such a Long Journey’



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Abstract :

Rohinton Mistry is an important Indian diasporic writer, living in Canada. Despite his status as one of Canada’s most successful writers over the past 15 years, Rohinton Mistry writes very little about Canada itself. Instead he focuses on India, and on the state of the Parsi community within that country. Even when he does writes about Canada in his short stories or novels, he often represents his adopted country as the site of a Parsi Diaspora, a place where immigrant Parsis renegotiate their identities and their relationships with one of India’s most endangered communities.

Keywords : Parsi Diaspora, identity, fear, insecurity, political corruption

Research Paper :

The primary concern of Mistry is to record the anxieties, problems, uneasiness and the distinct identity of a Parsi community within the boundary of India like all other Parsi writers, he is concerned with the preservation of the ethnic identity of his community. His novel explores the relationships among self, community place and identity validating the local and embracing the synergetic nature of postcolonial experience be it in North America or India. His novels are also closely linked with social and political background of India.

The present paper deals with the theme of fear and sense of insecurity which Gustad feels throughout the novel and Mistry's depiction of his community relation to political fundamentalist activities and its effects on minority's community as Parsi. Such a long journey is a fine novel written by Rohinton Mistry in 1991. The novel is set against the backdrop of war in the Indian subcontinent and the birth of Bangladesh. The theme of such a long journey revolves around history, politics and the common anxieties of a middle class man Gustad Noble.

Gustad Noble is a central character in the novel that represents common middle-class man in general and Parsi community in particular. Right from the beginning we find that Gustad, a caring husband, father and friend always thinks about the future of his relation. But on contrary, life is not easy for him. Gustad is worried about his son who takes rebellious stance against his father and denies his wishes. He feels very sorry for her daughter Roshan's illness and sudden disappearance of his intimate friend Major Bilimoria and at last death of his friend Dinshawji.

Gustad Noble is a hopeful man who looks for prosperity and good life to his family. His dreams and aspirations are quite modest. He thinks about his son's future. He thinks that his son should join IIT because IIT will provide him good life. But his son bluntly refuses that he does not want to join IIT because he is not interested in it. He reacts:

“I am sick and tired of IIT, IIT, and IIT all the time. I' am not interested in it, I' am not a jolly good fellow about it, and I' am not going there.”

The reaction of Sohrab makes Gustad irritate and he kicked him. He thinks that he is not enough mature to think about his own future and so he is unable to judge coming life. He wonders over the careless reaction of Sohrab. He says:

“What kind of life was Sohrab going to look forward to? No future for minorities, with all these fascist Shivsena 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.”

This statement reveals Gustads’ psychological fear about his son’s future and life. He thinks that there is no future for minorities in this country because of fascist activities like Shivsena who fights only for Marathi people and Marathi language. Such fascist ideology reduced them as a black people in America.

Dinshawji, a friend of Gustad also expresses his fear and grief over the matter of changing names under the pressure of Shivsena. For him, names are not only names but an identity. Changing names mean changing identity. To Gustad’s question ‘What in a name?’, he counter asserts that renaming is an infliction of linguistic violence on racial identity, the erasure of family names connected with the colonial past is seen as an erasure of a personal historical connectedness. According to him, names play an important role both in city and a nation as a whole. Hence, he reveals his anguish thus:

“You are wrong. Names are so important. My whole life I have come to work at Flora Fountain. And one day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all wrong names? Will I get to second chance to live it all again, with these new names? Tell me what happen to my life. Rubbed out, just like that? Tell me.”

Mistry portrays anger and sense of insecurity towards Indian politics and Indian politicians as Nehru, Indira Gandhi and politics of Shivsena. They feel that Nehru never liked Feroz Gandhi from the beginning. They do not believe in natural death of Feroz Gandhi. They think, his heart attack was not heart attack. This is how, they suspect about natural death of Feroz Gandhi and cherished a sense of insecurity.

Like Nehru, they are also reluctant with Mrs Indira Gandhi who made nationalization of banks throughout the country. This action of Indira goes against Parsi community who were private bank holder. Because of Indira’s decision they lost their banking business. They are not happy with the decision of Indira Gandhi. Dinshawji says to Gustad in connections with this bold decision of Indira Gandhi:

“What those days 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 banks.”

This reveals a kind of restless feelings of a community. This decision disowned them from their old business. Gustad is of the view that nationalization of the banks has not worked anywhere. But it has seen done so as a part of Mrs Gandhi to get political mileage at the cost

of the interests of the Parsi bankers. Gustad again charged that because of Indira's action racist buggers got support and Shivsena is a consequence of her action who demanding separate Maharashtra and he regrets that they remained as a second-class citizen in the country.

Political corruption and victimization is also one of the concerns of the novel. Mistry depicts how politicians use common man as a scapegoat. Mistry presents Major Bilimoria as a scapegoat in the novel that falls prey to the politics of Prime Minister Office. Gustad gets upset with Major Bilimoria, he comes to know that he has been used as a scapegoat and victimized by Prime Minister Office. Gustad feels very restless because of Bilimoria involvement as a member of Parsi community. Parsi people cherished their community ethics. They do not like any such action which will bring humiliation to their community. They fear that such action will take them towards trouble for their community. In the words of Vennugopalan:

“The implication of a member of Parsi community in this crime not only brought ignominy to the community but also a sense of fear about attempted wiping about the Parsis from this hemisphere.”

To conclude, though Mistry as a member of Parsi community portrays their anguish, fear, sense of insecurity but he is not pessimistic. He is hopeful as his character Gustad Noble. Despite suffering from hard times, Gustad learnt that everyday life is bounded up with some uncontrolled forces over which man has to control.

Reference:

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2. Ibid. p. 55.
3. Ibid. p. 74.
4. Ibid. p. 38.
5. V. Vennugopalan, “*Fear and Temptation: A Study of Rohintos Mistry Novels*.” The novels of Rohintos Mistry: critical studies, ed. Jagdisinh Dodiya. (New Delhi: Sarup Publication, 2004), p.94.