

Quest for Identity in Rohinton Mistry's Novels

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Abstract

As a social humanist, Rohinton Mistry is outraged by the ongoing atrocities against the poor and oppressed. In his novel *A Fine Balance*, Mistry makes a concerted effort to alter society by revealing numerous issues. Mistry wants peace to reign in society through recognising and understanding the numerous challenges that people face. The topic of condemnation of fight for identity and survival is an unmistakable characteristic of Mistry's humanism. His protagonists' ambitions and goals are intertwined with hope and sadness over the current world's life. Through his works, Mistry portrays the basic ambivalence of ordinary people as both a realist and a humanist. His revolutionary thoughts can be seen in his humanistic values and arts concept. All types of feudal exploitation and oppression, particularly the wicked social practises of casteism and untouchability, benefit the oppressed and suffering. As a result, Mistry has emerged as a spokesperson for the revolution. The major goal of this paper is to depict the problems that the characters encounter in today's world.

Keywords: Identity, Loneliness, Parsi, Rootlessness, Struggle for survival, Marginalization.

Introduction

Mistry, like many Diasporic writers, feels a sense of loss and uprooting, as well as a strong sense of melancholy and despair as a result of being taken away from his homeland. The Diasporic writer exists on the edge of two cultures, then there is an endeavour to construct bridges and reconcile the divergent components of both cultures-one inherent, the other required-through the aesthetic. Because he is unable to return to his homeland, the author creates fictional territories. The struggle of the common man for a happy and peaceful life is the central theme of all of his novels. Rohinton Mistry is a Parsi writer who lives in the United States. He has made a significant contribution to the literature of the Diaspora. In this study, an attempt is made to explore Rohinton Mistry's proposed crisis of immigrant identity.

Mistry has delved into the daily lives of Indian Parsis, whose name means "Persians" and who are thought to be descended from Persian Zoroastrians. The Parsis, also known as Parsees, are devout followers of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster. They fled their motherland and arrived in India to escape Muslim religious persecution. They first settled in Diu, Kathiawar, but soon moved to Gujarat, where they remained as a limited farming community for about 800 years. The

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conditions of the Parsis evolved into a greater upheaval with the creation of British trading offices at Surat. They were increasingly inspired by European systems, and they developed a keen interest in trade and honed their skills. When the East India Company took possession of Bombay, Gujarati Parsis moved there. They achieved success and growth in heavy industries, particularly railways and shipbuilding, due to the expansion of the industry and their ability as merchants. They had grown into a prosperous town by the nineteenth century.

Mistry's protagonists fight and struggle for their place in both family and society, yet both disappoint and corner them. In the lives of his characters, the unwavering spirit in the face of adversity is evident. Readers will be intrigued by the trials that the protagonists must overcome in order to survive. One may believe that Mistry has exaggerated events, but the author says that they are absolutely real and that he has revealed the true information in his works. All of his novels illustrate the seemingly inescapable pressures of daily living. His characters are noteworthy because they may be seen in everyday life.

Despite the characters' common and limited ambitions and expectations, they are subjected to unneeded tortures as a result of the terrible circumstances of their society. Their hopes are dashed when they are unable to confront far more powerful forces in the name of government. The characters' beauty comes in their ability to bend like grass in the face of the greatest wind, adjust their direction of life according to circumstances, and continue to live life as a stoic. They win every struggle in life because of their tolerance and endurance. The work vividly depicts the poor people's desire to live a decent life and their frustrations. One might easily read or hear about caste, communal, and cultural issues that develop in society in one's daily life. The insults, humiliation, and embarrassment that the characters face is not made up; they happen to one of our fellow humans. Mistry looks at society's conventional structures and considers how to live in the face of discrimination, injustice, poverty, and loss of opportunity.

He consistently portrays the identity struggle as a Diaspora writer. He has written about the Parsis' similar battle. He portrays the Parsi culture, traditions, and rituals in a unique way. Mistry sees himself as a symbol of twofold displacement as a Parsi and later as an immigrant in Canada, which is why his novels express the search for identity and the link with the homeland. In the face of poverty and despair, Mistry's protagonists seek personal identity.

Mistry's concept of self-identification or identity appears frequently throughout *Such a Long Journey*. To begin with, the renaming of particular streets appears to be a loss of identity. Gustad's close friend Dinshawji disputes the renaming of Indian streets, particularly in Bombay. Lamington Road, for example, has been renamed Dadasaheb Bhadkamkar Marg, and Carnac Road has been renamed Lokmanya Tilak Marg. Dinshawji believes that losing old names means losing traditional names, as well as societal and even self-identity. These developments have the potential to obliterate what should remain in this planet. Life cannot be lived in any other name for Dinshawaji.

When Gustad asked "Why worry about it? If it keeps the Marathas happy, give them a few roads to rename. Keep them occupied. What's in a name?" (74). He was very serious. He called Gustad wrong. Names are very important for him. At one place he said, "I grew up on the Lamington Road. But it has disappeared in its place is Dadashaeb Bhadkhamkar Marg. My school was on Carnac Road now suddenly it's on Lokmanya Tilak Marg. I will also disappear. My whole life I have come to work at flora fountain. And one fine day the name changes. So, what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names?"

Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with these new names? Tell me what happens to my life, Rubbed out just like that? Tell me!” (74).

Gustad's loss of childhood appears to be more significant. Gustad's youth was described by Mistry as "heaven." Even as an adult, Gustad yearns for his mother's love and is uncomfortable with anyone else's. He is kind of a man who longs for the past comfort and in this process, he loses his present identity. Even when his fingers hurt, he begins to recall his school days. To begin with, Gustad's traditional values are shattered when his son Sohrab rejects everything he says. Sohrab refuses to enroll as an IIT student, then misbehaves at his sister's birthday party.

“It’s not suddenly. I’m sick and tired of IIT, IIT, IIT all the time. I’m not interested in it, why can’t you just accept it? IIT does not interest me. It was never my idea; you made all the plans” (48).

Gustad believes he has lost his parental identity as a result of these events. Sohrab, he claims, is not his kid until he learns to respect others. There are numerous images that remind us of Gustad's loss of childhood and his yearnings. Gustad goes on to suggest that one day, his son will remember his childhood as well as he does.

“You must be blind if you cannot see my own example and learn from it” (49).

Gustad's search for identity is a never-ending process, according to Mistry, who describes Gustad's long path of reclaiming things as "non-stoppage."

Mistry has a hard time separating himself from his Parsi identity. Many of the protagonists in his stories are members of the minority, and they confront numerous obstacles as a result of his Parsi background.

A Fine Balance is an evocative novel that has been compared to Tolstoy and Dickens' writings. It's an in-depth examination of a tough period in India's history, with complicated and flawed characters. *A Fine Balance* is about man's inhumanity to man and the human spirit's indestructibility. Indeed, Mistry's tribute to bravery, kindness, self-sacrifice, and hope in the face of adversity is inspiring. It mixes Dickens' visceral sympathy for the impoverished with Solzhenitsyn's controlled fury, celebrating both the human spirit's endurance and the searing agony of lost dreams, set against an entirely Indian backdrop.

The novel is about the significance of hitting the correct chord in our lives to preserve a fine balance. There is a perpetual need to keep working at the wheels of existence. Every character in this story experiences a variety of challenges during their lives. They have never had an easy life. Some obstacles are natural, while others are man-made. They're all putting in a lot of effort. Some manage to maintain a delicate equilibrium, while others, unable to do so, submit to the forces of fate. Fate appears in many forms, and man is helpless in the face of it. The subject of criticism of peace struggle is an unmistakable characteristic of Mistry's humanism in *A Fine Balance*. His protagonists' ambitions and goals are intertwined with hope and sadness about modern existence.

The hunt for identification is handled by a group of four prominent characters from various backgrounds who work together as a team in order to prove their self-identity in society. Dina Dalal, the novel's protagonist, is bereaved by the deaths of both of her parents while she is

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young. She is guarded by her brother, who wants to safeguard her like a caged bird. Dina is a fan of humor and a self-sufficient existence by nature. She is unable to find solace in her brother's care. She is compelled to marry a wealthy gentleman, but she prefers to marry Rustom Dalal, a compounder. Dina's spouse is killed in an accident before she can settle into her married life. All of her ambitions are dashed by the 1975 Emergency, and she is once again thrust into her brother's care. As a result, Dina's identity as a self-sufficient woman goes away in society.

Dina refuses to give in to peer pressure and vows to rebuild her life without relying on a guy for financial support. Dina Dalal, whose story is told in the first part of the novel, aspires to be an independent woman after her husband's premature death, running a modest tailoring business and living in her own apartment. She summons Ishvar and Om, two tailors, and begins working for Alu Revoir Exports. Dina struggles to regain her footing in life after her husband's early death, but the road to independence and self-reliance is rocky and full of obstacles.

Mistry's novels depict a sensation of displacement, which is a recurring topic in his creative works. He lives in Canada as an exiled Indian Parsi writer. In his writings, he attempts to depict the history of his motherland; Om and Ishvar represent underprivileged Indians who have abandoned their hometown and are caught between two worlds: their native land and the alien world in which they find themselves. They appear to have been uprooted from their familiar surroundings, but they are unable to find serenity in the new environment. In an unfamiliar world, they battle for a new identity by making compromises. "We don't have to be concerned about cancer," Omprakash stated.

"This expensive city will first eat us alive for sure" (Mistry, Rohinton, 1995, pg.85).

Through the figure of DukhiMukhi, a tanner who did not want his children Ishvar and Narayan to follow in the family profession and remain at the bottom of the social ladder, Mistry brings the issue of "Diaspora" into the spotlight in his work. He sent his children to a nearby town to work as tailors and receive training in order for them to escape the clutches of caste hierarchy. This illustrates the state of India in terms of social hierarchies at the time, as well as the first displacement of Ishvar and Narayan in the novel after learning they decided to leave the town to make money. They also ran into a lot of issues in Mumbai. They attempted to forget about their past, but in the end, they became beggars. As a result, they were not only displaced twice, but they also lost their identities during the narrative.

Maneck, the fourth main character, loses his beloved Himalayan foothill community, which has been sacrificed on the altar of economic development. Roads were created in the name of modernization, polluting the village and destroying the peaceful and beautiful nature. The arrival of global corporations meant that profitable but modest businesses like Maneck's father's Cola Company had to close their doors. Every setback for Maneck is a setback for the Indian middle class, whose morality, hopes, and desires he represents. His death at the conclusion of the novel is terrible, but it provides insight into the losses that the Indian middle class has endured and continues to endure.

Maneck receives a tranquil schooling in a hill-station before his parents send him to the brutal city for further education. In college, he is constantly humiliated by his peers. In various ways and levels, he learns and suffers more from society. It has a profound effect on his thoughts, forcing him to commit himself on the train tracks. Dina and Maneck both failed in their endeavors to save their lives due to the emergency.

A Fine Balance is an engrossing and poignant story about the lives of ordinary, vulnerable people who scurry over the world, trapped in a cruel cycle of poverty. The story explores contemporary India, highlighting the hardships of outcasts and innocents attempting to survive in a cruel and unfriendly society, and grappling with the dilemma of how to live in the face of death. The poor, who are the novel's central protagonists, are also injured, mutilated, poisoned, homeless, and forlorn. He envisions a society where nothing can truly change or improve the plight of the poor and disadvantaged. Only the wealthy, corrupt, tyrannical, and unscrupulous have a place in society. They continue to flourish. Mistry ends the work with the intriguing observation that no matter how hard the lower and underprivileged class tries, it will always find it difficult, if not impossible, to break free from poverty's constraints. The dishonest and evil system will repress it, forcing it into a desperate survival struggle.

The title *A Fine Balance* is suitable because it depicts a delicate balance between hope and despair, or perhaps their very survival is a constant effort to maintain. The work maintains or mentions numerous balances, such as those between individualism and societal norms, and between tradition and modernity. One of the reasons why the book is so depressing or sad is because each character is pummeling while trying to find their identity or assert their individuality. How they broke free from their traditional conventions, such as Dina breaking free from her family's orthodox ideals and maintaining her new independent personality.

In *A Fine Balance*, Rohinton Mistry pasteurizes the sorrows of society's bottom rung. Upper-class people make low-class people feel embarrassed. On humanitarian grounds, no one is willing to extend mercy. As a result, Rohinton Mistry reveals their genuine sentiments for the heroes who are suffering. The government's proposal to link the hills and the city is a major setback for the Kohlah family, but the other villagers are not too concerned because they foresee more work prospects on the city side. Farokh sends Maneck to Bombay for further study, providing him Dina's address. Maneck, like the tailors, is dissatisfied with city life. At addition, the seniors in the college hostel torture him. Then he arrives to Dina's house to remain as a paying guest. He makes pals with the tailors there. Dina opposes Maneck's friendship with the tailors. As a result, *A Fine Balance* is a story that explores identity in a variety of ways.

As a parsi author, Mistry has never felt a spiritual or physical separation from his motherland. He wrote about double displacement in his novels as an immigrant parsi writer, and he understands the sorrow that comes with it. However, he claims that a 23-year link with someone or something would always remain the same and embedded in you, as if you are constantly present there.

To conclude, we may say that Mistry through his persona represents the complicated identity of himself. As a Parsi minority, he is forced to migrate from India to Canada, where he is caught between Indian and Canadian cultures, creating an identity crisis.

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