



## ROHINTON MISTRY AND HIS NOVELS - A BRIEF STUDY

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### **Introduction**

Rohinton Mistry is the only Indian writer in English who has the privilege of his all novels short listed for 'The Man Booker Prize'. He was born and brought up in India and he belongs to Parsi Community. Mistry migrated to Canada. His novels are perfect blend of love, intrigues, begrudges, politics, friendship, subatnernity, lewdness and humor. It is emphatically clear that the novels, written by him, explore socio-cultural and political realities of post-independent India. They closely examine the social, political and economic problem of people arising out of emergency, exploitation, social evils, wars and globalization.

### **Biography**

Rohinton Mistry was born into a parsi family in 1952. He grew up in Bombay where he attended university, graduating in 1974 with a degree in Mathematics. He and his wife emigrated to Canada the following year where he began a course in English and philosophy at the University of Toronto while working as a bank clerk during the day.

Rohinton Mistry embarked his journey as a writer with short story writer which brought him two Hart house literary prizes. Later on his 11 short stories were published under title *Swimming Lessons And Other Stories From Firoza Baag* (1987). His second novel, *Such A Long Journey*, was published in 1991. It won the Governor General's Award, the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best Book, and the W.H. Smith/ Books in Canada First Novel Award; it was also shortlisted for the renowned Booker Prize and for Trillium Award. His third novel, *A Fine Balance*, published in 1995, won the second Annual Giller Prize in 1995 and in 1996, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction. Selected for Oprah's Book Club it won the 1996 Commonwealth Writers Prize and was shortlisted for the 1996 Booker Prize. His Latest Novel 'Family Matters' published in 2002.

*Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* were both shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction, and *Family Matters* was shortlisted for the 2002 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. His latest work *The Scream*, a long story rather than a novel has not yet entered the public domain.

Mistry has won till date a number of prizes such as Hart House Literary Contest (first prize) for his short stories, 'One Sunday' (1983), 'Auspicious Occasion' (1984), Annual Contributors' Prize, Canadian Fiction Magazine (1985), Canadian Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction (Canada) for 'Such A Long Journey' (1991), Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best Book) for 'Such A Long Journey' (1992), Giller Prize (Canada) for 'A Fine Balance' (1995), Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best Book) for 'A Fine Balance' (1996), Los Angeles Times Book Prize for 'A Fine Balance' (1997), Kiriya Pacific Rim Book Prize for 'Family Matters' (2002) and Timothy Findley Award (Writers' Trust of Canada) in 2006.

Besides, his works have been shortlisted for several prestigious awards such as Booker Prize for 'Such A Long Journey' (1991), 'A Fine Balance' (1996), 'Family Matters' (2002) and International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award for 'A Fine Balance' (1997), Irish Time International Fiction Prize for 'A Fine Balance' (1997), James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction for 'Family Matters' (2002), Timothy Findley Award (Writers' Trust of Canada) in 2006.

### **Themes of Rohinton's Novels**

Rohinton's novels focus on themes relating to age difference between life-partners (married couples), domestic violence, women exploitation, superstitions, political influence in social life of people especially that which affect Parsi community, sex crimes, parental influence on child's love relationship and married Hie. Through his novel *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry criticizes Jawaharlal Nehru's temperament, his alleged political deceitfulness. his influence on his daughter Indira that, according to some people, spoiled her marriage life and her relationship with her husband Feroze Gandhi, who was a Parsi.

*Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), Mistry's first collection of stories, marked the arrival of a prodigious talent. Published in the US as *Swimming Lessons*, the collection contains eleven interrelated short stories. The tales detail the day-to-day lives of the residents of a decrepit apartment block in Bombay named *Firozsha Baag*.



This is a pure and simple study of the Parsi community at the neighbourhood and diasporic levels. It also studies the individual lives of Parsis who happen to lead lonely or two-some lives.

Such a Long Journey (1991), Mistry's first novel, won numerous literary awards when it was first published and has since been adapted for a film. The novel is set in 1971 during the time of the Indo-Pakistan war. Its protagonist is no conventional hero. Gustad Noble is a bank clerk and a family man, a vulnerable figure, whose world is still haunted by the war with China in 1962. The fate of Gustad's family is closely bound up with that of the subcontinent during a time of crisis and turmoil. His daughter's illness and his son's refusal to go to college are events for which the reader sympathies with him. When Gustad receives a parcel and a request to launder money for an old friend, the event's ramifications are at once personal and political. Henceforth start travails of this simple and, as the name suggests, noble-at-heart unheroic hero, who surprisingly, like the true hero of traditional classics, emerges unscathed and with his essential goodness intact.

A Fine Balance (1995), critically Mistry's most successful work to date, tells the story of four characters (Maneck, Dina, Ishvar and Omprakash) and the impact of the infamous state of emergency on them. One of the most successful aspects of this book is its carefully crafted prose: "The morning train jam packed with passengers slowed to a crawl, then lurched forward suddenly, as though to resume full speed. The train's brief deception jolted its riders. The bulge of humans hanging out of the doorway distended perilously, like a soap bubble at its limit," This intricate opening paragraph, which is typical of the precise prose of A Fine Balance throughout, helps propel the novel forward through what is one of the most memorable portraits of post-Independence India ever written. A Fine Balance is the story of impoverishment of the ordinary people. As always, in an unjust order, the powerful and the influential win the day. The message sent out in this novel is terse and clear: the deep-rooted contentment in the Indian psyche is unique. Whether one likes it or not, but things just go on in this way here. A strong indictment of the functioning of Indian leaders as this book is, it has justifiably aroused strong reactions.

Mistry's latest novel, Family Matters (2002), is based in Bombay once again. Whereas his first two novels were set in the 1970s and were essentially 'historical' fictions, Family Matters depicts contemporary Bombay and is set in the 1990s. At the centre of the book is an old man, a Parsi with Parkinson's disease. Nariman Vakeel is a retired academic whose illness places renewed strains on family relations. The professor rightly compares himself to King Lear at one point. A widower with skeletons in his closet, Nariman's memories of the past expose the reader to earlier moments in the history of the city and the nation. The novel moves across three generations of the same family. In Family Matters we have the familiar slippage between public and private worlds. Similarly the lives of the residents of 'Chateau Felicity' (Nariman's former residence) and 'Pleasant villa' (where he is forced to move by his scheming step daughter) recall the world of Firozsha Baag. Where the earlier novels tended towards a decisive closure, the epilogue of this novel leaves the reader wanting for more.

Recently, Mistry came out with a novella of around forty pages. The Scream is a single story by Rohinton Mistry and to date his shortest book. Set in a Mumbai apartment, The Scream is narrated by a man at the end of his life, who is angry at the predicament of old age, at his isolation from his family and from a world that no longer understands him. He rails and raves in ways that are both hilarious and moving, and which touch us with recognition. It reminds one of the writer's third novel Family Matters, in which Professor Nariman Vakeel conforms to this description. Naturally, this work seems steeped in Mistry's humanistic colours. The Scream also contains artwork based on the story by the celebrated Canadian artist Tony Urquhart. Since this work has not been released publicly, it has not been included in the present study.

### **Conclusion**

Rohinton Mistry is a member of the Zoroastrian Parsi community whose ancestors were exiled by the Islamic rulers from Northeastern Iran. Rohinton frequently uses Parsi cummj. Pnrss names, Parsi Characters and Parsi language in his novels.

In his novels, Rohinton Mistry depicts the Indian socio-economic and political life as well as Parsi Zoroastrian life, customs beliefs and religion. His character develops gradually from particular to general, depicting their idiosyncrasies, follies and foibles, from individual to family and gradually widening into the social, cultural and political world. His novels have a leisurely pace without ever losing the reader's interest and attention. The characters change and develop subtly and totally engrossed the reader.

Mistry's characters and background revolve round the multistory of Mumbai. His stories mostly concerned themselves with the tribulations and the idiosyncrasy of Bombay Parsis. In his book Tales from Firog Baag, a collection of short stories, he describes the daily life of Parsi residents in an apartment in Bombay. Mistry explores the relationship of Parsis in their community their cultural identity and uniqueness of their community living. Simultaneously he throws light as well as embraces the attempt to reconcile or unite differed or opposing principles, practices, or parties of dispersed Parsi experience.



Mistry performed his human spirit through characters from subaltern religion, parsi community, cultivating subalternity. His women characters in his writings paving the way for supporting feminist theory.

A common thread that runs through all his works is the relationship between individual and society. Within the boundaries set for an artist, Mistry has pointed out the inadequacies and weaknesses of our social and political order. He has lashed out against the evil influence of this order on the individual who is always at the receiving end. The treatment meted out to ordinary individuals in his novels shows Mistry's humanistic leanings. It is not for thing that some critics have likened him to Charles Dickens.

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