

Diasporic Cognizance in The Works Of Rohinton Mistry**Dr. P. ANANTHA LAKSHMI**Assistant Professor,
R.V.R.J.C.CE, GUNTUR.
sbsrikrishna@gmail.com,**Abstract**

The term 'Diaspora' is used to denote any people of ethnic population induced to leave their traditional indigenous homelands, backgrounds, and beliefs being scattered all over the world depicting their ensuing accomplishments in their new homeland. The behaviour of the Diasporas may be different relying on their re-located country. The evoking of reminiscences is one of the paramount means of expression in diasporic writing. The tales of diaspora envelop "the self". The theme of alienation and the austere struggle for Identity Crisis encountered by the immigrants in foreign lands is eminently articulated by the writers of the Diaspora. As an expatriate, Mistry's personal experiences, double displacement contribute at length to the creation of enchanted tales about the craving and nostalgia for the left behind in the form of the homeland, which only exists in reminiscences. This paper is an attempt to examine the theme of expatriation in the stories that constitute the pool of Tales from Firozsha Baag and the predicament for identity in the protagonists of these stories. Mistry's Tales from Firozsha Baag (1987) offer a bird's-eye view of the descriptive and narrative techniques of the writer in dealing with the eleven short stories of the collection.

Keywords: Diaspora, identity crisis, displacement, migrant, alienation, protagonists

Introduction:

Identity crisis results in uncertainty and diffidence in the lives of diasporic people. In several situations when a person immigrates to a country he becomes a target and subordinate person in that country. Kapadia aptly suggests that "both the Parsi's who sought greener pastures in the West and those who stayed all in India have experienced identity crisis and confusion" (Kapadia 16). As a consequence of this identity crisis they are confined to remain marginal shedding their goals, expectations and ambitions in India and abroad. The motive of diasporic writings is to articulate that identity is utmost quest of an individual.

Parsi's experience a sense of anxiety by being the minuscule diasporic community in India dominated by Hindus. This anxiety roots from the feeling of insecurity resulting in continuous quest for identity in the hearts of the Parsi people. All the eleven stories of the *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) address the exigencies of the Zoroastrian community with their several problems and perspectives. The present paper seeks to analyse how the tales of Mistry foreground this effect of ethnic anxiety which is inherent in the hearts of the Parsi folk. The heart throbbing life of residents in Firozsha Baag, a Parsi slum and the relationship among the residents their unique features are investigated.

With unique craftsmanship he candidly depicts the subaltern themes through his short stories and novels. Homeland in his magical tales occurs in the craving and reminiscence of the past memories. He extensively exploits his incidence as an expatriate in depicting the predicament

of alienation and struggle for identity. The progressive transformation of his characters journey from being desperate people for their native land to Strong people his short story collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) represent his struggle as an Indian Parsi emigrant in Canada from 1975 till period of time the collection was written. This paper is an endeavor to explore semblance of specific periodic themes like dejection, nostalgia, craving for identity which are an inherent part of theme of expatriation and identity crisis of the protagonists of these short stories His first collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag* comprises of eleven short stories in a milieu of amodern apartment complex inMumbai.

This short story collection won accolade and firmly positioned Mistry as a renowned writer. “*Such a Long Journey*” published in 1991 bagged many honors for him. This novel bestowed on him Canadians Governor General's award, the Common Wealth Writers' Prize for the Best-Book, and the W.H SmithBooks award besides being translated into German, Swedish, Norwegian languages.

The diverse Mumbai culture, predominantly the Parsi life style, their quest for Parsi Indian identity, and politics of India are underlying themes are common fastening factors of all stories integrated in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* and in other works. Mistry's second novel, a fine *Balance*, published in 1995 triumphed him with the Griller Prize, for his expatriate narration.

Family Matters published in 2002 after a gap of seven years depicts a relevant a befitting description of issues linked with oldpeople. Mistry's novels mirror miscellaneous aspects. The inhabitants of *Firozsha Baag* encounters numerous challenges and struggle to keep up their cultural identity and faith in their religion. Being minor community Parsi residents at the apartment complex very often experience degradation and expulsion from Indian society that questions their cultural and historical origins. Ostensibly it appears that conflict is between Hindu and Muslim or Parsi, the two dominant communities of independent India.

The novel attempts to explore the crisis of a community torn between old, deep-rooted and new practices. Intrinsically, it is the Parsi community that experience conflict within themselves resulting in crisis of racial identity. It highlights that threat to Parsi's whose racial values,faiths, beliefs and customs are endangered.

This is exposed at its height in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* Thus Parsi community experiences alienation within the race. Mistry depicts his characters exploiting different perspectives of identity crisis,the outcome of expatriation on the younger generation who have moved abroad.

Tales from Firozsha Baag published in the year 1987 display stern autobiographical features in the portrayal of characters. All his protagonists are Indians who are from Parsi background mirroring Mistry's identity crisis and displacement. *Firozsha Baag*, an apartment in Bombay is paralleled to an apartment in Toronto. By distinguishing similarities in both apartments he makes a cognizant effort to give precise descriptions about India his mother country. He constantly endeavors to give minute descriptions to show his gratitude to his place. In Mistry's words, “Honesty, truth and accuracy are the least I owe to that place. I don't want to forget anything about Bombay the life, the places and the people. “He introduces many Parsi terms in all *The Tales in Firozsha Baag*. He paints detailed information about Parsi culture,

background, rituals and their beliefs as people with dual identities. He struggles to present his diasporic identity as Parsi in India as well as in Canada

Parsi's in post-colonial India experienced much discomfort and seclusion as a diasporic community torn between Hindu and Muslim identities. Their seclusion and identity crisis is the major theme of his first story *Auspicious Occasion* that led to Parsi immigration to Canada.

Auspicious Occasion portrays regular /common life style of a Parsi couple. The story records and highlights an insecure feeling experienced by Parsi's in two occurrences in this story. One occurs when Rustumji is spat by a pan –chewer and the other is Mehroo's trauma triggered by Parsi priest Dastoorooji's death. Mistry intends to show that despite contempt for the non-Parsis the Zoroastrian community is not fully cohesive. In this story he exhibits the strenuous efforts of Parsi couple to balance traditional customs and modern values. The communal disintegration inside marginal community is mirrored.

One Sunday: The story *One Sunday* is set in Firozsha Baag with all Parsi characters, with the exception of the servant Francis. It is the relation of authority that finds manifestation as master and servant with an impression of Indians in attitude and behaviour. Francis who is in an inferior position is continuously exploited and abused. *One Sunday* exposes the insecurities of old people, exploitation, and interdependence among people living in Firozsha Baag.

The Collector: Dr. Bujer Mody, stamp collector is the protagonist of the story *The Collector*. Mistry's brilliance in characterization is clearly visible in apparently contradicting qualities of Dr. Mody and his son Peshi.

Of White Hairs and Cricket. Mistry exploits the narrative technique of tale within tale in white hairs. Stream of Consciousness is utilized to transfer a lot of past and present without any chronological sequence, thus rousing interest in readers. Its basic theme is to expose the superstitious beliefs of Indian women. It questions the rationality in many traditions and beliefs. Belief of Kersi's grandmother that hair is symbolic of evil, may be used for black magic. So very North Indian women cover their head with their saree/pallu. Some women spinning wool for kurtis is a lucid reflection of their religion. Close relationship between father and son is emblematically hinted in the title which conveys a sense of legacy transported from older generation to the younger generation.

Of White Hairs and Cricket is a story that weaves several sub themes into one big tale. It is a hymn of Mistry's thanksgiving to his childhood in Bombay. Nariman Hansotia becomes Mistry's voice. Nariman depicts Parsi's anxieties, displacements and the nature of Parsi identity, the fragmented nature of Parsi community in spite of its cohesion and its efforts to safeguard its unique features. Parsi community is presented as dying and ageing race eagerly waiting for their children who immigrated to far off lands like Canada leaving their parents behind.

The Paying Guests:

The theme of *The Paying Guests* is more autobiographical depicting the struggle and despair of Mistry leaving his parents in India. The seclusion and misery of an elder couple, Ardesar and Khorshed Bai and their forced predicament to confine their needs and live as paying guests in Kashmiri and Boman's flat is intricately woven.

The Swimming Lesson: Kersi, In *theSwimming Lesson* is depicted as atypical Indian strenuously struggling to adapt to western culture and identity. He experiences dislocation when he is not accepted by the White society. In the process of his search for new identity he leaves his ethnic identity and endeavors to adapt to Canadian identity. Kersi is a representative of Mistry and his experiences in Canada. The entire story oscillates between personal constructs of home and away. Kersi becomes nostalgic and returns to Bombay, through his writings, where he spent his childhood. The stories show his fondness for India. Kersi's life is thus characterized by silence and the absence of significant relationships. Kersi experiences agony though he accomplishes an esteemed example of rebirth in an immigrated land which provides him security and fortune.

As Geoffrey Kain has pointed out about *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, “The brief exposure we have to the experience of these characters, especially through the narrative voice of the sensitive and perceptive Kersi, provides us with poignant insight into the immigrant experience into what is seen as not just the impact of emigration on the émigré himself, not only the effects of departure on those who are left at a distance, but the complex and slowly changing web of consciousness that, taken together, defines the immigrant experience in Mistry's fiction”.

Souatter: In 'Souatter', Sarosh's efforts to change his name to Sid 'as well his 'Parsi self' is symbolic of his thrust for new Canadian life and identity. His failure to use western toilets represents his psychological and social thrust and his cultural dislocation and alienation. In all his efforts to get rid of Indian identity and to become a Canadian he stands as a representative to all Indians who yearn to transform themselves like Europeans. Thus Sarosh's transformation process is a transitional phase of turmoil and predicament experienced by every expatriate.

Jamshed in “*Lend me your Light*” dreams of great success and bright future when he decides to immigrate to America. But his past never allows him live in the present. It occurs like a comparison of his happiness in native land and his distressed situation in alien country which rejects his identity. Thus every expatriate by forsaking their native identity becomes a foreigner to both the countries. They are torn between their ambitions to achieve material success but their heart throbs for their motherland as they cannot return to it leaving all prosperity behind they look at their motherland with sad eyes. Thus Sarosh struggles to give up his own identity, ending in alienation and displacement.

Such a Long Journey: Mistry's novel *Such a Long Journey* structures around diverse themes like corruption, deceit, autocracy and immorality. He lucidly depicts how the native people's authority and insatiability convert the miniscule community into marginal. He markedly displays his loyalty to his race by portraying the Nagarwala incident criticizing the inefficiency of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. As apart of that affected community he exposes his agony and stern retort by highlighting the corrupt run-through at the top position in political environment during internal emergency. This Nagarwala incident devastated the vigor of all Parsi community. Through this novel he intensely strives to recoup and retrieve Parsi's lost self-esteem and elegance. He elevates the voice of his community and justifies the abhorrence of his community passionately demanding solutions to some of the unanswered questions.

The novel in entirety “courses through a series of political events touching on various issues such as corruption in high places, minority complexes, majority adventurism, increasing fragmentation of social order and the advent of a personality – oriented political scenario. Thus, history provides an effective backdrop for the novel” (Manvar 95).

Conclusion: Mistry brilliantly describes Parsi traditions. As a Parsi he effectively portrays the dual displacement of Parsi’s in India and abroad which is recurrent theme in his works.

The predicament of Parsi’s in India is their feeling of insecurity leading to identity crisis. Mistry’s descriptions gives readers a real experience of visiting and walking in the streets of Bombay. His short stories articulates quest for an identity and the association with the homeland. His characters are in search for individual identity against all the difficulties, dearth and cynicism.

All his works are riven into an intricate gap between two domains and cultures like a witness to dying community and humanity. Bombay is the background for all his novels and short stories. It reconstructs and vacillates the homesick expatriate. The fiction of Mistry seems to have a wistful look at the country he has left behind and to the construction once again of even newer identities in the countries to which they have immigrated

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