

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

National Politics in the Fiction of Rohinton Mistry

Ram Autar

Research Scholar,

B.H.U., Varanasi,

U.P., India

DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2019.4.5.09

Abstract

Representation of contemporary politics and human problems is a major theme for contemporary litterateurs and social thinkers. A number of prolific and eminent novelists such as Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Khushwant Singh, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhti Roy, Kiran Desai and many more have tried to explore the hidden truth and treacherous activities carried out over Indian citizens by their elected political representative on the name of different government schemes. Rohinton Mistry, an Indian of Parsi in origin presently living in Canada, represented contemporary Indian politics in his novels by subverting the conscious or unconscious cultural categorisations associated with the forms of novels focussing on the human condition located in time and space. He tried to show us how politics is used by politicians of all parties to remain in power for fulfilling their vested interest. Present paper is an effort to describe and discuss how political upheavals have an impact on the psyche of common man. It would discuss the theme of politics in the fiction of Rohinton Mistry.

Keywords- Corruption, Subaltern, Oppressed, Oppressor, State Emergency.

Rohinton Mistry, a well known novelist, was born in 1951 in Mumbai and now settled in Canada, is deeply interested in exposing the harsh cruelties and atrocities executed by the politicians in India. Politics forms an important subtext to the main plot of the novels of Rohinton Mistry. We find him presenting each and every detail of Indian politics through his fiction. *Tales From Firozsha Baag* (1987), *Such A Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995) and *Family Matters* (2002) are influenced and controlled by Indian politics. His fiction discusses not only the corrupt political systems prevalent in Indian politics but also its far-reaching consequences on the lives of common people. In *Such A Long Journey* we find the political turmoil, the Bangladesh war with Pakistan. *A Fine Balance* narrates the story of Indira Gandhi's declaration of a 'State of Emergency' affecting the livelihood of the tailors-Om, Narayan, Ishvar and Dina Dalal. *Family Matters* talks about the impact of Hindu fundamentalists' agitation and the post Babri Masjid riots triggering a clash between Hindu and Muslim communities.

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

It is very imperative to study and discuss the meaning of politics before applying it in the fiction of Rohinton Mistry. The word 'politicos' refers to a politician or person with strong political views. In other words, politics is a process of governance to govern a territory and to provide the essential necessities to its citizens. It also tells us how to gain power through adopting various tactics and methods of ruling people. It shapes the history of any country by using the available human and natural resources. Politics is related to a government system wherein economic, political struggles, social struggles, banking systems, ideological movements, socio-political motives and tactics of gaining power are discussed and analysed.

Rohinton Mistry's first novel *Such A Long Journey* (1991), a controversial one deals with the life of common citizen and narrates the story in such a manner as political interference decides the fate of ordinary people. The title of the novel has been taken from T. S. Eliot's poem 'The Journey of Magi'. It is set against the backdrop of the Bangladesh-Pakistan war of the 1970s. The plot of *Such A Long Journey* narrates the life the ordinary citizen and explores the manner in which it is implicated with the national political scenes. The story of the central character of the novel is interlinked with events in the national scenes. From the very beginning of the novel we see Gustad suffering the consequences of India's support to Bangladesh. People are seen struggling to meet their daily needs in the novel. The suffering, poverty, worries, struggles faced by Gustad and his family members represent the problems of the average middle class Indian family battling to maintain a reasonable standard of livelihood. The war has badly affected the availability of daily use commodities in the country. As it is revealed in the following statement given by Dilnawaz-

She purchased his (Gustad) milk and remembered the days when ration cards were only for the poor or the servants, the day when she and Gustad could afford to buy the fine creamy product of Parsi Dairy Farm, before the prices started to go up, up, up, and never came down. (*Such A Long Journey* 3)

Under the chaos of war with China and Pakistan people were deprived of basic human needs. Prices of general commodities were rising by leaps and bounds. These upheavals undoubtedly unbalance the budget of every family. Gustad Nobel a low paid government employee in a bank suffers a lot due to changes occurred in politics. He has some very close friends like Major Bilimoria and Tehmul Langra. They were confidant to Gustad Nobel. One day Gustad Nobel receives a message from Bilimoria to transfer some money to a new account. Bilimoria was involved in national plot with some political ramifications. He was charged sheet of corruption and dies very soon behind the bar. Major Bilimoria is the fictional counterpart of the infamous Sohrab Nagarwala who was the main culprit in sixty lakhs rupees scam at the time of Indira Gandhi government. This scam has caused a lot of problems for the common people.

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

Such A Long Journey represents the tension caused due to Bangladesh-Pakistan wars in 1970s. The war has changed the social and political fabric of India. Indira Gandhi had decided to intervene in the internal conflict as well as in the politics of Bangladesh (East Pakistan) and Pakistan in order to emerge as an international leader. This decision taken by Indira Gandhi had influenced the psyche of the common people. When Roshan comes to Gustad with a request from her school to help the refugees, she asks Gustad why West Pakistan is killing East Pakistan. Gustad gives answer in the following word-

‘Because it is wicked and selfish, East Pakistan poor, they said to West, we are always hungry, please give us a fair share. But West said no. Then East said, in that case we don’t want to work with you. So, as punishment, West Pakistan is killing and burning East Pakistan. (*Such A Long Journey* 81)

The lives of all the characters in the novel are steeped in the realities of a war time situation. The scarcity of food supply has a bad impact on ordinary citizen. A sense of insecurity and fear of attack are steeped in the mind of common people. People had closed their windows and sirens had horrified the whole atmosphere filling among people the sense of terror and insecurity. In the novel, we find that the air raid siren sounds everyday at 10 o’ clock. It has become a routine affair for people of the city.

For several weeks the threnody siren that had been wailing every morning at exactly ten o’ clock: a full three minute warning followed by the monotonic all clear. There had been any official announcement, so the public assumed that in preparation for war with Pakistan, the government was checking to see if the air-raid sirens were in working order. (*Such A Long Journey* 143)

The money laundering of sixty lakhs in the direction of just a phone call from the Prime Minister’s office created a lot of problems for Gustad Nobel. It rocked Indira Gandhi’s government. Sohrab Nagarwala, a State Bank of India cashier was the prime accused. He was charged with embezzlement and arrested and died in the imprisonment. In the novel, we find that Bilimoria had impersonated Indira Gandhi over the telephone and ordered the chief cashier of State Bank of India to draw money and deliver it to Bangladeshi babu, who was Bilimoria himself. Politics is said to be the dirtiest game in Indian national politics and its dark effects can be traced in the life of Gustad Nobel and Bilimoria. The novel depicts blind nationalistic patriotism of common people. It shows Indira Gandhi’s misuse of power and the hollowness of government system. She has been shown favouring corruption in the highest political forms. Sohrab the son of Gustad Nobel became furious for the abuse of power at government level.

What about the leaders who do wrong? Like the car manufacturing license going to Indira Gandhi’s son? He said mummy I want to make motorcars. And right away he got the licence. He has already made a fortune from it, without producing a single Maruti. Hidden in Swiss bank accounts. (*Such A Long Journey* 68)

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

The novel shows the Parsi predicament in the post independence society and corrupt Indian society. The person belonging to Parsi community is exploited at every stage in the society. Politics has had intruded into the life of common people. Whenever common people ventured to protest against the oppressors, they found themselves behind the bars or even murdered. The life of Tehmoor Langra can be suitably discussed in this context. He is resident of Khodadad Building and was never accepted as an equal by other residents. His tale reflects the harsh attitude of the people in power towards the disabled and the marginalised people. The Parsi feels insecure because of growing political powers of Maratha party in Mumbai. It believes in dictatorship and destroys the democratic and social fabric of the society. Dinshawji tells Gustad-

“Wait till Marathas take over, then we will have Gandoo Raj, said Dinshawji. All they know is to have rallies at Shivaji Park, shout slogans, make threats and change road names. (*Such A Long Journey* 73)

A Fine Balance published in 1995 exposes the election malpractice, misappropriation of power, suffering of the poor rural migrants, brutality over oppressed class and the pangs of the urban people. It talks about the crucial years of Indian politics, declaration of a ‘State of Internal Emergency’ by the Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi and her assassination in 1984 by her Sikh bodyguard in the revenge of one of Sikh’s leader’s death. Mrs Gandhi’s assassination has triggered nationwide riots and communal violence targeting Sikh by Hindu mobs. Dukhi’s aspiration for improving his social status by changing his age-old profession of tanning is shattered. Om and Ishvar faced a lot of problems for changing age-old profession and adopting tailoring as a means of livelihood. They had to live in Jhopadpatti deprived of basic human needs. They were forced to live in slum quarter so that political parties can easily make them target forcing them to attend political rallies. They are forcibly landed into buses and brought to political rally to be addressed by the Prime Minister. Forced audience has often become the routine of the week. One of the slum dwellers ask the following question-

Tell her how happy we are! Why do need to come? Ask your men with the cameras to pull some photos of lovely hours, our healthy children! Show that to the Prime Minister. (*A Fine Balance* 318-19)

Twenty Point Programme announced by the Prime Minister has direct impact on the lives of slum dwellers. This plan was to provide houses for the poor, control population growth and eliminate poverty from cities, towns and villages. At the name of ‘City Beautification’ their jhopadpattis were destroyed. Those who were not present at the time of action to be taken, their belongings were just thrown away on the road. All these are carried out by the ubiquitous Sergeant Kesar.

City Beautification Programme was followed by the elimination of poverty. In the series of City Beautification Programme, Om, Ishvar and Narayan were again lifted from the

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

streets and forced to live in an unhygienic place. At the name of population control, Om, Ishvar and Narayan had to undergo another inhuman activity. Sterilization was exercised over them forcefully as a mode of population control. Ishvar's dreams for his nephew Om are shattered. Om is castrated; Ishvar's leg has been amputated because of infection caused by insanitary operation. Societal oppression plays very crucial part in deteriorating the lives of Dina, Ishvar, Narayan and Om. Narayan and Om were brutally beaten by Thakur Dharmsi for their attempt to defy the laws of caste. They had to earn their livelihood within the very structure of the society. They were not allowed to change their parental profession of tanning. Maneck Kohlah, a significant character in the novel had to face goons when he was returning from Dubai to attend his father's funeral. Communal riots and anarchy was at its peak at that time. Sikhs were targeted by the Hindu goons. His taxi driver had to hide his Sikh identity by covering his beard to avoid attacks over him. The novel exposes the madness of communal riots in post independence India. All these brutal activities were accelerated by the people attached to politics.

The plot of *Family Matters* consists of the story of a retired English Professor Nariman Vakeel who suffers from Parkinson disease. He lives with his step children Jal and Coomy. His old age problems are discussed in relation to people of old age in general. The novel discusses the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 and outbursts of communal violence throughout India witnessing a moment of serious crisis for non-Hindu Indians. Hussain a significant character in the novel had underwent emotional and psychological trauma of seeing his whole family burnt alive in communal violence triggered by the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Hussain, a poor and dispossessed man had seen his wife and children burning. He hardly could afford a rented house after working hard for twelve hours a day. He had been depriving of his right to existence and citizenship. The political theme of the novel is discussed through the character of Yezad and his employer Mr. Kapur. Mr Kapur wants to reform society so that ordinary man can survive. For fulfilling his dream he wants to contest Municipal Election in Mumbai in order to uproot corruption. He is a prosperous businessman who loves all the section of society irrespective of caste, creed, culture and religion which is in opposite to fundamentalists.

Conclusion

It is to be noted that our economic, social, demographic, educational, and cultural life is controlled and affected by the political decisions. These decisions shape our lives directly or indirectly. It is the political leaders who don't want common man live peacefully. They divide us on the basis of creed, caste, religion, culture and colour. If they succeed in dividing us at the name of caste and religion, they are able to rule the people of the country comfortably. Depiction of plight of common man in the fiction of Rohinton Mistry is appropriate in political context. We find him as a successful novelist for discussing and

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

touching the psyche of subalterns effectively and artistically. Misuse of political powers was discussed in detail.

Works Cited

Dewnarain, Nandini Bhautoo. *Rohinton Mistry: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Ltd. 2007.

Dodiya, Jaydipsing, ed. *The Fiction of Rohinton Mistry: Critical Studies*. Prestigues, 1998.

Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 1998.

Mistry, Rohinton. *Such A Long Journey*. Faber and Faber, 1991.

. . . . *A Fine Balance*. Faber and Faber, 1995.

. . . . *Family Matters*. Faber and Faber, 2002.