

Rohington Mistry's Intrigue Of Cultural Subjugation By Dint Of Political Intervention In Such A Long Journey

Kavya Prasad S
MA English Literature II
Bharathiar University
Coimbatore

Abstract

The history of any community is the sketch of its culture and heritage. Functionalists view society as a system where all parts work together to create a society. Cultural norms function to support the fluid mechanisms of the society and values in culture are guidelines to making choices. Cultural Subjugation refers to being taken under control by governance or any other cultural group. Rohington Mistry, in his notable work, *Such A Long journey* depicts the life of the minor cultural community of the Parsis. Here the Parsis are being subdued by means of being politically intervened and one great issue of political concern was the authoritarian rule of Mrs. Gandhi by declaration of the National Emergency in the year 1975. The paper depicts the true picture of the period of emergency that has always been falsely attributed as “the summit of Indian socialism”.

Keywords: The Parsis, Cultural Subjugation, National emergency, Political drama

INTRODUCTION:

Indian heritage writing in English had found new boundaries by virtue of the works of the great Canadian born Indian writer, Rohington Mistry. Any new strategic implementation or modern taboo or events that created history when put to words, be it fiction or non-fiction every modern mind seeks the political drama that they believe to have played behind it. So be it good or bad, Man has made it a ritual to seek for the real intention

in any issue of concern. Such has become the mindset of man. Mistry too has made an attempt to attack the political intervention that he found had disturbed a religious community that usually enjoyed high price, through his novel, *Such A Long Journey*. India is a country where democracy is only in the constitution and doesn't really work well with people. The government that is said to be for the people works for the welfare of the government itself and the ones who are paid in six digits from our sweat and blood. Rohinton Mistry gives a clear picture of the 1975 Emergency under Indira Gandhi through this work. The Emergency and Indira's rule have often been falsely characterised as the "summit of Indian socialism" despite the terror they wrecked upon the Nation. There was no redistribution of wealth but true usurpation of power.

THE PARSIS:

Zoroastrianism is a minority religious group which exists mostly in Mumbai. The members of this group who follow the Persian prophet, Zoroaster are called the Parsis or Parsee. The Parsis emigrated from Persia to avoid religious persecution by Muslims. They believe in the existence of one invisible God and they represent God by fire in their temples and this is a symbolic representation of light. The Parsis consider the five elements of fire, water, air and earth as pure and holy and therefore the Parsis do not cremate or bury their dead ones but leave them on very high towers that were built specially for this purpose and were left to be eaten by hawks and crows. Talking about the Parsi culture, they have a variety cuisine that would activate one's drooling mode automatically. Though this group forms a core part of our society they are literally vanishing from our lands. The Parsis have their own choice of priorities. Their firm mindset chooses career over families. Being educated and rich becomes

more important to them than having a family and upcoming generations. Their opulent lifestyle seems to let them live in a social oblivion. No other community is so obsessed with their dignity and so hard working to be self-satisfied and lead an affluent life. From the very beginning of the text Rohinton Mistry has never failed to depict each and every detail of their culture through the depiction of the typical Parsi households and the society itself. The protagonist of the novel has his own beliefs and customs that is later found to be wounded by much political intervention.

THE THEME OF CULTURAL SUBJUGATION

The history of any community is the sketch of its culture and heritage. Functionalists view society as a system where all parts work together to create a society. Cultural norms function to support the fluid mechanisms of the society and values in culture are guidelines to making choices. Subjugation is defined as an oppression where one remains under control by the governance. Being subdued as a community is a threat to their culture and ways of life. From the whites who overrule the so-called Blacks and from the affluent to the less affluent, being powerful matter.

MRS.GANDHI AND HER GANGSTERISM

The 1975 National emergency, a violation of a sundry of human rights made the 19-month period the most controversial period in Independent Indian history. Forty-four years ago, Indira Gandhi all of a sudden just before midnight strike proclaimed the emergency across India leaving every citizen to shock. The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 had left the country in an exigent state and there had been huge influx of refugees. The First world countries even stopped granting aids. Unemployment on one side while the government on

the other hand was on a verge to freeze the employees' salaries created a total sense of distrust and dissatisfaction among the people .The delayed monsoons had increased the prices of the food grains and people all over India were into protest .On the whole, the period before Indira's Declaration was terribly pathetic. The government had their claim that the country was facing a lot of Internal disturbances and there was a grave need of the proclamation. But those 4 years had created a lot more chaos . Access to the newspapers had be denied for a couple of days after emergency and the government made censorship mandatory. This was a question of media rights and a check to the citizen's right to information. There were series of black outs during the period which had made life in India more suffocating. On the 25 th anniversary of the National Emergency, the Hindu had published an article by Ramachandra Guha where he had attacked the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on her decision of National Emergency. The veteran Gandhian Jayaprakash Narayan in his prison diary had quoted "I had always believed that Mrs. Gandhi had no faith in democracy, that she was by inclination and conviction a dictator. This belief has tragically turned out to be true." Her authoritarian rule made her no less a dictator.

MISTRY'S DEPICTION OF CULTURAL BIAS AND THE INDIAN POLITICAL DRAMA IN THE NOVEL

The Parsis are in an urge for recognition in their settled territory of India. Being immigrants, they wish to register their communal identity. The novel begins with the exact picture of a middle class Parsi family where the protagonist Gustad Noble performs his morning duas. Mistry mentions about a wall that had been constructed to alienate the Parsis from the other communities of post-colonial India. The wall is an obstruction for his prayers which blocks

the rays of the sun into the Khodadad building, the residential hub of the Parsis. As the novel progresses the Parsis accepts the great wall as it represents their own self. Noble makes efforts to clean the wall which smelled of paan and urine, found an artist and let him paint pictures of Gods and Goddesses of no religion in particular. And in no time the pious devotees began dropping coins as offerings and prayed with incense sticks and truly made it a religious spot in no time. The Parsis are again subjugated as the government destroys the wall in order to expand the roads. Many of them even lost their lives in the protest to maintain their identity as a Parsee.

Sohrab shows a thorough disinterest in joining the IIT and continues as an arts graduate creating bad terms between the father and son. Gustad Noble insists on pursuing his studies at an IIT so that he gets well placed and lead a secured and rich life. This is the primary motive of every Parsi. What they look forth is a rich life than a happy one. The upcoming generations have a different attitude towards life and Sohrab is a evident example of the same . Rohington Mistry brings in the past of the Nobles when they had been a rich and respected family. Gustad mentions about his grandfather's furniture shop which went on loss later and he had made efforts to collect some of it in secret before auctioning and still uses those furniture .This shows the lack of economy among the community that had once been wealthy and this may have been one of their reason for them literally becoming a minor cultural group

The entire novel centres around Gustad Noble, his Khodadad building, family, neighbours, office and friends. Dhinshawji is one vital character whose life and death were used by the author to portrays the Parsi lifestyle and customs. Dhinshawji's death is one painstaking moment in the entire novel. The after death rituals had been described by Mistry

in such a way that it beautifully presents familial relationships and the bond of friendship that the two friends Gustad and Dinshawji had within. The author here depicts how the workplace atmosphere created friendly relations among the Parsis that are much stronger than family. Major Bilimoria is one character whose presence brings in the political intervention of the period to the limelight. Bilimoria who leaves Khodadad all of a sudden, later leaves a message with a bag full of money to be deposited in the bank bundle by bundle. Though things seemed to be fishy Gustad never denied Major Bilimoria. Bilimoria being arrested and put to jail shook the Nobles. It is here that Mistry brings in the political drama played by our only women Prime minister, Indira Gandhi. Working as a part of RAW, a secret investigating agency Major Billiboy had been involved in a political story that lead to the laundering of such a huge bulk money. The lieutenant who served an intermediate between Gustad and the Major made it clear that Major Bilimoria's death is not natural but a murder in prison.

Such a Long Journey by a Parsi himself beautifully paints the immigrant Parsi community which tries to be the central focus always but keeps miserably failing in the same.

CONCLUSION:

Rohinton Mistry focuses on the socio-political issues that intervene the culture of the Parsis living in the city of Bombay of Postcolonial India .Culturally being subjugated by dint of the varying political ideologies and strategies that come up during the period is narrated through each and every incident both directly and indirectly in the text "Such A Long Journey". Any issue of Concern has a political background to be discussed and this can bring in various perspectives of a single work of art. When looking into the novel as a Parsi the community had lot more suffered culturally being more politically exiled into oblivion. India's political drama during the Emergency had created a far-fetched impact on every human citizen of

India and the paper has pointed out every minor but elaborate detail on how the particular community had undergone the cultural crisis of the time.

REFERENCES:

1. Such a Long Journey-Rohinton Mistry
2. Emergency and Gangsterisation of Indian Politics under Indira and Sanjay Gandhi-Kapil Komireddi (27 June 2019)
3. The Parsi way of Life/ The Daily Pioneer.com/2015