



PARSI SOCIETY'S SENSIBILITY IN 'FAMILY MATTERS' (2002)

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Introduction:

Postcolonial Literature represents understated racial and ethnic groups civilizations that are distinct from the mainstream culture based on traditional society. Many of these writers sincerely try to uphold the values of their culture, bring back ideas that have been abandoned, and offer their own perspectives on the social history of their community. There is a strong affirmation of community, with its terrible past and wonderful present. All these things have been seen in the writings of minority Parsi authors.

Key words: *Post-colonialism, Sensibility, Marginalization, Superiority Complex*

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“Art derives from the community for the community”¹(86) notes Vincent B. Leitch. By the same way Florence Howe remarks that “Art is neither anonymous nor universal, it springs from the particular of gender as well as class, race, and cultural experience”²(93). While accrediting this thought in literature, C. R. Reddy in his Foreword to Indo-Anglican Literature says that true literature is, “the expression of one’s own’s individual or racial personality.”³

The Parsis have their origin from Iran. After the Arab conquest in the Seventh century, they were forced to leave Iran in order to avoid forced conversion to Islam. After coming in India, many Parsi migrants settled in Gujarat. King Jadhav Rana of Gujarat gave the Parsis asylum in return for their giving up weapons, abstaining from evangelizing, and adopting local dress and language. The Parsis put a lot of effort into preserving their specific religious purity and cultural

distinctiveness, and they have preserved this devotion to this day. Additionally, they have an inferiority mindset that makes them reject most of Indian society. The Parsis are well educated and affluent. They had gone through a very difficult time for integrating themselves into Indian society. The Partition of India and the significant threats to the nation's valued secularism posed by political maneuvering and fundamentalist organizations made many Parsis lose hope for India's future. This fundamental change in the Parsi way of thinking is exemplified by the writers who came of age in the Parsi community after the 1980s. To analyze the Parsi community’s consciousness of the modern Parsi writers, Avadhesh Kumar Sing comments that their, “works exhibit consciousness of their community in such a way that the community emerges as a protagonist”⁴(28). Dhahran remarks: “Post independent Parsi writing in English is ethnocentric, culture specific and community

oriented”⁵(7).

Among the best-known Parsi authors, Rohinton Mistry—who is currently living in Canada—gives greater thought to how his community is portrayed in the Indian English literature. His fictional works are jam-packed with a lot of information about Parsi life, culture, and religion. In the view of Mistry, there is an urgent need to write about his community in addition to Postcolonial concerns about narrating country and community. He wants to leave a record of it for future generations since it is on the verge of extinction. In an interview, Mistry confessed: “[...] when the Parsis have disappeared from the face of the earth, his writings will preserve a record of how they lived, to some extent”⁶ (Bharucha 59)

Alongside, Mistry concentrates on a specific era in the history of Postcolonial India in his literary works, briskly presenting both the status of the group he represents and the state of the country. Gustad Noble, a Parsi bank clerk, and his family and friends are portrayed in his first book, *Such a Long Journey*, as they make their way throughout life against the backdrop of the Indo-Pak War of 1972. In his second book, *A Fine Balance*, he explains how Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi's Emergency affected the lives of two Parsis and two Dalits. Mistry's amoral ambition strongly portrays his peoples' misery in his most recent work, *Family Matters*. The novel's narrative, which spans three generations of Parsis living in a rapidly changing socio-political climate in India, is centered on the protagonist and his family.

Family Issues by Mistry might be seen as a sermon on the Parsi religious community. In it, the Mistry focuses on the Parsis' attempts to preserve their racial purity, religious traditions, superiority complex, and attitude towards Indians, eating habits, privileged status, and the current unhappy state of the community.

In the book, Mistry defends the Parsi community's outstanding traits of exclusivity, racial purity, and

cultural supremacy. The Parsis dislike any kind of interaction with outsiders. In the book, the mentor Nariman Vakeel recalls his relationship with Goan girl Lucy Bragansa. His involvement with a non-Parsi female upsets his parents, who pressure him to end the relationship. He marries a 42-year-old Parsi widow with two children as a consequence, acknowledging that "traditional methods were the finest" (Mistry 16) and understanding his obligations to uphold the principles and purity of his society.

Even though being well educated and a professor, Nariman had to abandon his own inclinations in favour of his sense of community. Mistry uses a similar scenario to display the Parsis' attempts to maintain racial innocence. Murad, the grandson of Nariman, starts coming close to Anjali, a non-Parsi girl, at the end of the procedure when Yezad discovers that Murad kissing the non-Parsi daughter in the stairs, he is quite stormy and makes it clear to him that their connection is entirely prohibited. He shouts with anger, He shouts in anger,

“I’ m warning you, in this there can be no compromise. The rule, the laws of your religion are absolute; this Maharashtrian cannot be your girlfriend”(469).

Yezad advises and warns his son, “you can have any friends you like, any race or religion, but for a serious relationship, for marriage, the rules are different” (469).

Yezad, a representative of the Parsi community declares that he would do whatever it takes to maintain the integrity of his race. “Because we are a pure Persian race, a unique contribution to this planet and mixed marriages will destroy that”(469).

To emphasize that the Parsis can never change their views, regardless of the whims and fancies of the individual, Mistry purposefully incorporated the grandpa and grandson's romantic encounters with non-Parsi girls into the story.

Their honesty is another distinctive quality of the Parsis that Mistry highlights in the book. There are a few instances in the book where it is stated that a Parsi will never engage in dishonest behaviour.

Yezad's employer, Mr. Kapur, praises him and says that it is a "blessing to have a Parsi employee: I don't need to worry about cash sticking to the lining of your trousers. If only there were more communities like yours' (150). Yezad is overwhelmed by the remark and he humbly answers, "We have our share of crooks and good-for-nothing loafers"(150). Again Mr. Kapur, a non-Parsi remarks, "Oh, don't be modest, the Parsi reputation for honesty is well known. And even if it's a myth-there is no myth without truth, no smoke without fire"(150). The public's perception of the Parsi community in India's integrity and honesty is revealed by Mr. Kapur's statement.

By relating a story from the life of Yezad's father, Mistry emphasizes the value of honesty among Parsis. His father worked as a bank teller during World War II. He used to transport cash from his branch to the Head Office once a week. He was riding in a cab that fateful day with his security, Duleep Singh. They abruptly heard the sound of an explosion. Because of terror, Duleep Singh fled while leaving the weapon in the vehicle. Moreover, the driver sped off and fled to safety.

Even in a difficult position, Yezad's father, who was more mindful of his obligations, showed little concern for his life. He proceeded bravely to the bank while saying the Zoroastrian prayer "Yatha Ahu Varya," well aware of his obligations. Yezad tells his kids this tale in an effort to impart in them the values of integrity and honesty.

In the diverse Indian Society, the Parsis have an exceptional standing. Being well educated, they place the most value on education. They hold a distinguished position in the field of English teaching. The Parsis were the first to learn and utilize English when Lord

Macaulay brought it to schooling. James Bissett Pratt rightly comments "Illiteracy with them is at a minimum and the higher education of women as well as of men is very common"⁷(325).

The pursuit of knowledge by Parsis is extensively discussed by Mistry including how Parsi boys and girls outperform other pupils and carry out their responsibilities successfully by showcasing their abilities at the top educational institutions in the nation. Nariman tells his grandkids literary tales, and they pay close attention to what he says. The intelligent boys of Yezad are top students at the renowned St. Xavier's school, which is supervised by Catholic nuns. They have a strong reading preference, and it is clear that they value education.

The current deplorable state of the Parsi race is another true depiction in Mistry's book. They are progressively losing the lofty and elevated status they previously held in a free India. They currently feel that their existence is under danger due to a number of issues. They have fostered a perception that India's successive administrations are prejudiced against them. They are greatly depressed by the shifting social structures, the rising intergroup conflict, and the violent outbursts caused by fundamentalism. To top it all off, the Parsi race is on the verge of extinction, which raises concerns about the race's future.

A clever and pragmatic author like Mistry must now reveal the hard facts that threaten to wipe off his race. In the book, Dr. Fitter, who laments the appalling conditions in his neighbourhood, acts as a channel for him to express his dread.

[...] Parsi men of today were useless, dithering idiots, the race had deteriorated. When you think of our forefathers, the industrialists and shipbuilders who established the foundation of modern India, the philanthropists who gave us our hospitals and schools and libraries and baags, what



lustre they brought to our community and the nation. (Mistry 49)

Actually, Mistry thinks the Parsis are unable to recollect and keep the highly regarded standing that formerly belonged to his descents in India.

While Dr. Fitter and Inspector Masalavala are conversing in depth on another occasion, they both express their sorrow and worry for the future of their society. The Parsis will be like "dinosaurs," according to Dr. Fitter (400).

Dr. Fitter's claim is supported by Inspector Masalavala's assertion as "The experts in demographics are confident that fifty years hence, there will be no Parsis left"(400). Dr. Fitter's goes on to compare the Parsi community to the other Indian communities in a comical way.

"There are lots of wealthy couples living alone in new flats who produced just one child. Two, if we're lucky. Parsis seem to be the only people in India who follow the family planning message. Rest of the country is breeding like rabbits." (401).

Masalavala sarcastically makes the following advice to quickly increase the Parsi community as he continues:

Then we need to fix that. I have two suggestions. First, our youth must be prohibited from going beyond a bachelor's degree. Give them cash incentives to study less. And those who want to do post-graduate studies tell them they will get no funding from Panchayat unless they sign a contract to have as many children as the number of people over age fifty in their family. Maximum of seven- we don't want to spoil the health of our young women.(402)

Despite being humorous, this comment highlights both the inferiority of the Parsi race and their superior culture.

Conclusion:

It is true that Mistry's works has employed the meritorious theory. The people of Parsi community keep distance from the other communities of the Indian Society though are known for their cultural advancements and Westernization. They do not mix with the others due to their superiority complex. They only interact with others, if at all, through their servants. They do not go to visit at others community members home. For example, when Murad attempts to bring Anjal for his birthday celebration his father warns him as she was a non- Parsi girl. So, Murad feels very conscious about his invitation to the Birthday Party. At last Yezad and Murad come up with the strategy that states the Parsi Community's feeling of superiority.

Mistry has highlighted the yearning of Parsis to leave India and go to the West due to their dissatisfaction with their way of life. Many Parsis wish to escape India at any costs and go to Western nations. Yezad and his family long to settle in Canada in Family Matters Yezad's wish is regrettably. Yezad is given an interview invitation six months after submitting an immigration application to Canada. In order to humiliate and intimidate him, the officer uses a number of vicious interrogation questions. Yezad later regrets his lot and weeps when he is faced with home issues.

The book describes the Parsis' liking for and negative disconfirmation towards various animals and birds. They even hold views that are justified by religious myths. There are several legends involving Zarathustra. According to one of the tales, the Parsi prophet Zarathustra healed the lameness of King Gasp's favourite horse by placing his hands on its hocks and fetlocks. Nariman recounts the narrative of Zuhaak.

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